

When I was on active duty, Memorial Day was a holiday for civilians. I usually was too busy to think about what it meant. I treated the day as nothing more than a day off. You know, you don't want to think too much about consequences of your service should things go "as planned" and you have to get in harm's way.

Then I retired. How things changed – I was no longer "there but by the grace of God go I" Now I was the one who was watching others do what I still thought I could do (for a few years anyway – now I know better).

Now I wonder what makes young people serve in the military. Why would a young person do such a thing as volunteer? Why did I?

We like to say patriotism. We like to say love of country. We like to say something about protecting our way of life. The truth from 1970 was more practical. David Earles and I joined 2 days apart. We were not officially "buddies" in the program that was available at the time where 2 people could join and go to basic together. We were in separate battalions and I only saw him a couple of times over the next few months. I think we came home to Lefors together once.

David and I went our separate ways and our lives went in different directions. He stayed in the Army a few years, I made a career of it. I spent 20 years in the Army and never saw a combat zone. Closest I ever got was Wildflecken and Hohenfels in Germany and then only in the sense that I saw the ranges. David went to Engineer AIT, I eventually went to EOD School (dropped out) and became a clerk-typist. David died in a car wreck.

Today the profession of arms is largely a family business. Today I was reminded that David's dad had served in the Pacific – I knew that a long time ago but it didn't really MATTER until I started thinking about Memorial Day and what it means.

I can't post this without also remembering Billy Mulvihill.

Mission Report

13 August 2008, Spc. William J. Mulvihill, US Army, Fort Leavenworth, KS

Beneath the colors of our Nation's Flag, in the hot August sun, stood a woman in a floral dress and a sun bonnet. Across and down the street under the same proud Stars and Stripes was a bearded man in a well-worn leather vest and oxygen. This flag line dotted with people who appeared to have little in common stretched along the curbs around a funeral home in the small Kansas town. There were store owners, bikers, families pinned with gold stars, uniform-clad soldiers, and a child. A closer look revealed one true commonality: we were all one family, with one purpose that day.

This town of Leavenworth, KS is the home to the parents of US Army Spc. William J. Mulvihill, who had requested that we honor him on the day of his funeral. To answer this call, at least 130 vehicles, including over 110 motorcycles at 1st count arrived in this Midwestern town throughout

the morning. Of the number of Patriot Guards who presented for duty, almost half became new members of the family that day and earned their Kansas Patriot Guard patches.

As the length of the line grew, the temperature rose and the sun beat down hotter. Our experience and resolve kept everyone from heat related health problems, as each took turns on the line and relieved those in the sun for a break of water in the shade with the Soldier's Angels.

An ROTC instructor came to pay tribute to a young man whom he had once taught, a young man who even at that time had aspirations to become a soldier.

And so an ROTC instructor, and Vietnam Veteran, joined our flag line and our family.

What started as a search for a replacement bagpipe player turned into a realization by an entire Pipe and Drum band that there was about to be a soldier buried and that his sacrifice should not go without a Patriotic tribute. A carpool was quickly created and they graciously became the Patriot Guard Pipers. As this bagpipe and drum group delivered the gentle notes of our favorite patriotic songs and Amazing Grace into the air around our flags and into the funeral home, we wept behind our sunglasses with the family of the fallen.

Half of our group assembled early and escorted our flags to the Ft Leavenworth National Cemetery so a Patriot Guard flag line would be in place for the arrival of the funeral escort. The flags were not allowed to be planted in the ground, so this group would have to hold them, as we had done earlier that day.

Leavenworth Police Department closed the streets and as we led the escort with a mission man formation, the people stopped and quietly paid respects along the route. The Leavenworth Fire Department grandly displayed Old Glory majestically over the procession and came to attention as we passed.

William was escorted to his final resting place by many generations of proud American warriors including those representing the War on Terror, Desert Storm, Vietnam and Korea. Representing WWII, a 1942 Harley-Davidson WLA that went ashore at Normandy on D-Day was ridden towards the front, following a mission man formation of active soldiers.

The streets of the Army's Fort Leavenworth were lined, shoulder to shoulder, with soldiers and their families who understand the meaning of sacrifice. Some uniforms may differ, some from foreign soil, but all came to a synchronized salute as our first two flags passed.

The Patriot Guard flag line was stunning above the rows of perfectly aligned headstones in the green grass as we headed over the hill towards the internment house. The curve of black vehicles and flagged bikes in the mirror was equally magnificent and the end was not visible as we continued towards our flag line.

To a mom and a dad of a fallen soldier,

A Service Flag signed by the members who supported this mission,

A Patriot Guard plaque in memory of their son's service,

A Gold Star pin,

And a private exchange with a few words.

Thank You. To those who have worked so graciously with and within the Patriot Guard to make the complexity of this mission possible and successful, I say to you Thank You from the bottom of my heart. To Davis Funeral Home; Ft. Leavenworth Casualty Assistance and MP departments; Police, Fire and City of Leavenworth; VFW of Leavenworth; NuWay Drive Thru; Dental Office and other businesses surrounding Davis; area ALR chapters; Soldier's Angels and to a reporter who told the beautiful story of the soldier who sacrificed, the only story that mattered. Thank You All!

All Gave Some, Some Gave All

Patriot Guard, thank you for what you do!

Liz (Lizard) Wheelihan

Patriot Guard Riders Ride Captain