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Veterans and bikers shield family from protests It's Not Over Until They Are All Home

Kansas - While a small group waved signs and took joy in the death of a U. S. Soldier Wednesday in South Haven, an assortment of veterans and motorcycle groups made sure at least, that the family of the deceased would not be bothered.

The protestors, who numbered less than 10, held signs, tore American flags and made hateful remarks aimed at families of soldiers who have died in the line of duty. There were over 125 motorcycles at the funeral Wednesday, representing veterans and cyclists from all over Kansas and Oklahoma. They surrounded the small group of protestors and whenever they would try to speak, dozens of motorcyclists revved their engines to drown them out.

The cyclists also provided a human shield between the protestors and the family of the dead soldier. By the time the funeral ended at South Haven High School, the small band of protestors had left, but the cyclists remained to honor a fellow soldier who had been killed in battle. They provided a color guard of several motorcycles, decked out with flags, from the school to the cemetery.

Kenton Van, a veteran and Methodist minister from Cheney, said he wanted to honor the soldiers who have died and to support the families left behind.

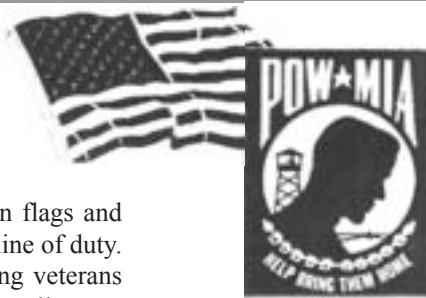
"They message those people have is a message of hate," he said. "They are hate mongers. They claim to be Christian, but they have nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

He added that what the group has done to the American flag is "atrocious, despicable ... undescrivable."

This was the third funeral that the group, called Patriot Riders, have attended. Van said the gathering at South Haven was the largest so far. Steve McDonald of Mulvane said his club also wanted to support the family and to honor a fallen soldier.

John Simard of Wichita, said about 20 members of his club made the trip to South Haven. Simard is an Air Force veteran and is offended when the American flag is desecrated by having it torn, soiled or stomped upon.

Another veteran, Terry Houck of Derby, came up with the idea of the cycle clubs attending soldier's funerals to stop the small group of protestors from causing additional pain and grief to families of fallen soldiers. His wife, Carol, pointed out the protests of funerals on the television news.



"That just made my blood boil," Houck said.

He brought up the matter at the next American Legion meeting he attended. He and Craig Hanson were appointed co-chairmen. They have continued to organize and grow the group.

There are 15 motorcycle clubs involved, and they plan on going where the protestors go, making sure families are not hurt by them. This usually means surrounding them, providing a human shield, and drowning out the protestors' voices with their motorcycle engines.

"Anytime they go to a soldier's funeral to cause problems, we will be there," Houck said.

Houck said the group gets permission of families and local law enforcement officers before attending.

"We are not here to stop their free speech," Houck said. "We object to them disrupting military funerals and waving vicious signs. We want them to respect soldiers and their families."

Until that happens, the cyclists will also be exercising their freedoms.

Explanation of a recent low-level formation fly-by near Phoenix, AZ

(From the Arizona Republic, Phoenix newspaper)

A smart-ass complaint and the reply:

The complaint: A wake-up call from Luke's jets June. 23, 2005

"Question of the day for Luke Air Force Base: Whom do we thank for the morning air show?"

Last Wednesday, at precisely 9:11 a.m., a tight formation of four F-16 jets made a low pass over Arrowhead Mall, continuing west over Bell Road at approximately 500 feet. Imagine our good fortune!

Do the Tom Cruise-wannabes feel we need this wake-up call, or were they trying to impress the cashiers at Mervyn's early-bird special?

Any response would be appreciated." The reply is classic, and a testament to the professionalism and heroism of the folks in the armed services.

The response: Regarding "A wake-up call from Luke's jets" (Letters, Thursday): On June 15, at precisely 9:12 a.m., a perfectly timed four-ship of F-16s from the 63rd Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base flew over the grave of Captain Jeremy Fresques.

Capt. Fresques was an Air Force officer who was previously stationed at Luke Air Force Base and was killed in Iraq on May 30, Memorial Day. At 9 a.m. on June 15, his family and friends gathered at Sunland Memorial Park in Sun City to mourn the loss of a husband, son and friend.

Based on the letter writer's recount of the flyby, and because of the jet noise, I'm sure you didn't hear the 21-gun salute, the playing of taps, or my words to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques as I gave them their son's flag on behalf of the president of the United States and all those veterans and servicemen and women who understand the sacrifices they have endured. A four-ship flyby is a display of respect the Air Force pays to those who give their lives in defense of freedom. We are professional aviators and take our jobs seriously, and on June 15 what the letter writer witnessed was four officers lining up to pay their ultimate respects.

The letter writer asks, "Whom do we thank for the morning air show?"

The 56th Fighter Wing will call for you, and forward your thanks to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques, and thank them for you, for it was in their honor that my pilots flew the most honorable formation of their lives.

Lt. Col. Scott Pleus

Commander, 63rd Fighter Squadron

Luke Air Force Base

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