

# Highground Legacy Stone Ceremony

by Mark "Road Kill" Tilkens

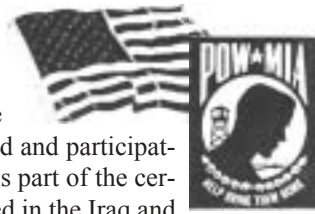
October 8th 2005

It was a bright, cool, breezy Saturday at the October 8th Legacy Stone Ceremony at the Highground Veterans Memorial Park in Nielsville, WI. Several hundred people witnessed and participated in the laying of 49 legacy stones on the walking perimeter path at the High Ground. As part of the ceremony, the Freedom Bell was rung and names announced to remember each veteran killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The ceremony starts with the toll of the Freedom Bell and a welcome by Volunteer General Manager, Kirk Rodman. The presentation of colors are followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the Stars Spangled Banner. Cindy Boom, another High Ground volunteer, mixes earth taken from the previous Legacy Stone Program with the earth of today's program, thus creating a continuous connection between all Legacy Stones. Then one by one, participants begin laying their Legacy Stones in their particular position on the walking path.

Included in this day's ceremony were participants from the three Wisconsin Chapters of Rolling Thunder® that came from around the state to attend the ceremony and to pay tribute to two of their own members that passed away during the past year. Chapter 1 President, Richard Leistikow and Vice President, State Senator Dave Zien, and Chapter 3 President, Mark Tilkens, along with about a dozen other members were the first to place their Legacy Stones at the 1:00 pm ceremony. The first stone placed was for Sp4 John L. Norman, Viet Nam Ex POW, US Army and the second stone placed was for Ex POW John G. Maher, Cpl US Army 1942-45.

Once all the stones are placed, a circle is formed and color guards are asked to form in the center of the circle. Names of all Wisconsin soldier killed in Iraq are read, taps is played and a rifle squad performs a salute after which the colors are retired and the circle dissolved. If you haven't been there yet for this solemn ceremony, I urge you to go at least once, and if you do ...you will be back.



**Representatives from the three Rolling Thunder® Chapters in WI at the Ceremony.**



**Mark Tilkens (left), Rolling Thunder® Inc. Chapter 3 President And Richard Leistikow, Chapter 1 President, with the Legacy Stone of Ex POW, SP4 John L. Norman USA.**

We have done stories on the HighGround on many occasions in the past. I cannot tell you strongly enough the power of this place. I have never been to The Wall in Washington, DC but everything I read on it conveys the Magical feeling that people get while there. I have been to the Highground and yes, there is a spiritual sense that surrounds the grounds. The beautiful scenery, the monuments to all the different Veteran's seem to talk to you. If you have the time Nov 11 head out to the Highgrounds for their Veteran's Day Candlelight Ceremony Planned for 6pm. The High Ground is located just 4 miles west of Neillsville, WI, and 30 miles east of Osseo from the junction of I-94 and US Highway 10.

### Pictures by Mike Sampson

