

As seen in the Times Union, Albany, N.Y.

VALLEY FALLS, N.Y. -- This is a red, white and blue village that is still seeing red after a flag that flew over Iraq was burned by a 21-year-old.

The payback? He was publicly humiliated last Sunday by being duct-taped to the flagpole of Veterans of Foreign War 1938 that they say he desecrated Sept. 18.

Nick Normile, post commander and Vietnam War veteran, said he's been flooded with calls from media outlets since the events of last week received attention from local TV stations and newspapers. He's been asked to go live on a veterans radio show program from Tennessee, another radio show from Chicago and even received a call from NBC studios in New York City.

But Normile said he's not planning to let the story get any more attention and has declined appearances. "I'm not trying to be some martyr or hero," Normile said. "I just did what I thought was right."

The 21-year-old appeared intoxicated when he entered the VFW post on the day of the alleged act, Normile said. When the man was refused service for not having a proper ID, he ran out in a fit of anger. He cut the rope of the flag, which had once flown over troops in Iraq, and ignited it with a cigarette lighter.

Two days later, Normile said the man was forced to sit in the sun pilloried for six hours as townspeople gathered across the street for a youth soccer picnic. A sign was hung around his neck detailing what he had done. It recalled the Middle Ages punishment, subjecting him to public humiliation and scorn.

"He'll never disrespect the flag again, I can tell you that," Normile said on Friday.

A week later villagers were hush-hush about the event, but patrons of the post bar gave a nod of agreement to the punishment, pointing proudly to a newspaper clipping of the event on a bulletin board.

Patriotism is on open display in this village of about 500, the walls of a defunct railroad bridge near it's entrance now brightly colored red, white and blue. Most of the historical homes have American flags of their own hanging from porches, some also adorned with the Don't Tread on Me flag, popular with Tea Party activists.

Normile said once he found out what the man had done, he knew he had to be taught a lesson. Normile said he went out hunting for him, but when he couldn't find him at his apartment, he sought the help of the man's uncle to bring him out.

"He manned up, he knew he had punishment coming," said Normile, who described the young man he refused to identify as guilty and ashamed.

"I told him to think about those kids in the foxhole, and how they had no one to set them free," Normile said. "It got to him, so I was satisfied. He showed a lot of remorse, no attitude."

Normile said the flag, whose pieces will be retired in a formal ceremony, had significant meaning. The villages auxiliary had been sending toiletries and other goods to Soldiers in Iraq, who then sent back the flag that had flown over their bunker. It was received with great attention and a ceremony.

State troopers and Rensselaer County sheriffs deputies said no charges had been filed by either the VFW post or the man.

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