SDDVA Secretary Whitlock’s June Column – They Made the Ultimate Sacrifice, Now South Dakota is Honoring Them

South Dakota’s Fallen Hero Bridge program dedicates state bridges to South Dakotans who were killed in action while serving their country or classified as missing in action.

These young men and women, so young and in such a short time, met their destiny on far off battlefields. In return for their great gift, there is nothing more complex or important that we can do but to ensure the memories of their shortened lives go on.

They need to be remembered, not as victims ambushed by some cruel twist of fate, but as idealists who chose to serve and risk their lives. Idealists who were struck down in the pursuit of something bigger than themselves and are forever deserving of our respect, admiration, and remembrance.

These brave warriors who fell in battle were, more often than not, young and in the prime of their life. They were brimming with promise and optimism, and possessing of energy, enthusiasm, idealism, and hope. They were and are truly the strength of our country.

For the greater good of our nation and our citizens they knowingly marched into harm’s way. They put everything on the line to ensure our future, even though it meant endangering their own. The veterans we dedicate these bridges to did not just give us their lives, they gave us our futures. Most had more life ahead of them then behind them and did not experience their college graduation, their wedding, or the birth of their first child.

The men and women we honor on these bridges were American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen who sought service when times were troubled, and our values were challenged.

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We are committed to preserving their memories and in demonstration of our will to remember. I ask everyone to participate in one of the 12 bridge dedications scheduled in 2022.

PFC Frederick Farlee and SGT Richard Maynard—June 25 at 10:30 am (MT) at the Pioneer Hall in Dupree.
Cpl John Hutchison—July 1 at 10:30 am (CT) at the Casey Tibbs Rodeo Center in Fort Pierre.
SSG Robert Prue—July 5 at 11:00 am (CT) at the Bishop Jones Auditorium in Mission.
PFC David Gatton—July 16 at 1:00 pm (CT) at the Capitol Lake Visitors Center in Pierre.
SGT James Haider—August 13 at 10:30 am (CT) at the BG Ernie Edwards Readiness Center in Watertown.
PVT August Otto—August 20 at 11:00 am (CT) at the Claire City Community Hall.
CPL Martin Fluegel—September 17 at 1:00 pm (CT) at McCook Central High School in Salem.
PVT Frederic Schroeder—October 1 at 1:00 pm (CT) at the VFW in Madison.
Capt Tommy Callies—November 11 at 9:30 am (CT) at the Howard High School.
S2 Wayne Bridge—November 11 at 2:00 pm (CT) at the Wagner High School.
SSG Daniel Cuka—date and location TBD.

To learn more about South Dakota’s fallen heroes bridge dedication program, visit vetaffairs.sd.gov.

Let us never stop educating our youngsters about the price that has been paid for their freedom.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

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