

Mayor Stephen R. Reed's Speech on Dustoff and the Vietnam Veteran

"Because They Earned It"

REMARKS BY THE HONORABLE STEPHEN R. REED, MAYOR OF HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA, AT THE MAYOR'S RECEPTION, PENNSYLVANIA PREMIERE OF "IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLADE", AT THE WHITAKER CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND THE ARTS IN HARRISBURG, PA, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2004 AT 10:00 P.M.

We are honored to be the host community for the Pennsylvania Premiere of "In the Shadow of the Blade".

This was a four-year project of Patrick and Cheryle Fries and we thank them for it.

It is an award-winning documentary that chronicles the 10,000 mile odyssey of

UH-1 – Huey One – as it went from that mystic place called Angel Fire to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Huey One is a mobile and aerial commemoration. Where it lands becomes an informal Veterans Day site where those who served and those who died in Vietnam are fully and finally remembered --- not as units or armies but individually recalled in personal and individual ways.

We have not done this as a nation before this movie. "The Wall" in Washington , stoic and silent, recessed into the earth, lists those who gave the ultimate sacrifice but the rest of the war's story has not been fully nor accurately told.

We have allowed others to define Vietnam . Some of their depictions have been riddled with misconception and falsehood and a serious disservice was done to veterans as a result.

No more! No more will we allow honorable service to this nation to be denied or defamed. No more shall we allow courage and valor and sacrifice to be ignored or forgotten. And, no more will we allow the political outcome of that conflict to be an excuse by some for pretending our Veterans' service did not matter.

Regardless of individual views as to the wisdom of the war, the truth remains that millions of young men and women --- most of them enlistees --- some of them drafted --- wore the uniform of this nation during conflict overseas. They are owed our respect and honor.

American forces won every major military engagement. The enemy could not defeat America in open combat.

As most returned to America , they were met with indifference and sometimes hostility. There

were few parades. They were neither thanked nor recognized. That was wrong then and it would be wrong today.

Silence became the response. Veterans did not speak of their service or experience and some did not even list it on their resumes.

It is more than 30 years later. It is overdue that the voice of Vietnam Veterans be heard. It is overdue that experiences be shared – that the truth of history be told – that the service of every Vietnam Veteran be accorded its full and public place on the Honor Roll of America for all to see and for all to salute.

No less has been earned and no less is owed.

America has some unfinished business from that era, along with some lessons that need to be recalled.

From historical record, we know that some in political posts made various strategic and tactical military decisions. If troops are sent into harm's way, politics should neither constrain nor inhibit the ability for a full and final victory to be achieved.

If young men and women answer the call to the nation's service, they must be accorded their proper recognition when returning home.

And, for Vietnam Veterans and all Veterans, we must maintain the commitment and the promise that Veterans benefits shall be both preserved and improved as changing medical and other needs evolve.

We must also know that from the time of our founding to this present day, a strong military defense must always be maintained. That the nation remains endowed by freedom --- that Americans have created the largest economy in the world --- are neither accident nor the result of harmony amongst all nations. It is because we have had men and women willing to defend this country – including the Veterans of Vietnam .

There is another piece of unfinished business and it is to this cause that the net proceeds of tonight's reception will go.

The Combat Medic Badge created by the Army at the end of World War II recognizes those who rendered aid to the troops. Only those who served on the ground can get it.

From Korea to today, medical operations have included extensive use of helicopters to retrieve, aid and transport. In combat, their medics are subject to enemy fire, just as medics on the ground. In combat, they have been wounded and killed, just like the medics on the ground. And in combat, they have placed themselves in harm's way and saved lives, just as the medics on the ground.

But they are not recognized because a 59-year-old regulation does not include them.

From Harrisburg , Pennsylvania this night, we sound the call that this exclusion is unjust --- that this oversight is outdated --- and that it is overdue for making it right. Extending the Combat Medical Badge to include the aeromedics or create a separate Combat Air Medic Badge is the goal and these efforts, this operation, shall not cease until this victory has been won.

The movie you saw this evening was moving and memorable. Huey One has become the connection between the past and the present, between Veterans and survivors. It gives rise to a new spirit.

In the lyrics of Stan Denman heard on the movie's track, he asked: "On you hear the sound of freedom, as she passes overhead."

We hear it. We shall remember it. The sights and sounds of that craft now serve to unite, to hear, to honor, to evoke all manner of memory.

The individual stories you heard on the movie were truly told in the shadow of its blades. But as those stories are told, we say with a full heart that Vietnam Veterans and their service to this nation shall not be in the shadows any more.

Our heroes are not only those whose many names were read here earlier today. Our heroes include all who served in Vietnam .

We have said it many times before but never more clearly than now: Welcome Home – Well Done – a grateful nation salutes you.

May God bless our Vietnam Veterans and those who serve us now in Iraq , Afghanistan , Kosovo and other places of duty and may God bless the United States of America .