

LST534 Newsletter

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The Heroes Tour

Captain Peter Hegseth, a National Guard officer who earned a Bronze Star for bravery under fire while a Platoon Leader in Iraq, is the Executive Director of Vets for Freedom, an organization devoted to telling the story of what is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan from veterans who have been there. Pete went to Baghdad the first of the year. Here is his report:

“On Sunday I returned from Baghdad, where I reported on the situation on the ground. I had the honor of walking the streets with our brave troops, and without hesitation can report: Baghdad has been transformed. The progress we have talked about for months is real and dramatic.

I was on the ground in Baghdad for 5 days, and did not hear a hostile shot fired or hear one single explosion. It was completely different from when I was there in 2005, when gunshots and explosion were background noise.

I invite you to read my dispatches from the front, all of which can be found at [National](#)

Review Online (www.nationalreview.com). I wrote about the lack of media attention, the need for anti-war leaders to face the reality of Iraq, my first hand observations on patrol in ‘A Neighborhood Reborn,’ and the grassroots Iraqi surge that has taken place with the ‘Sons of Iraq.’

More than anything else, the trip underscored the need for veterans of this generation to communicate the need to succeed in Iraq. Thankfully, we have planned an excellent way to do it - our National Heroes Tour and Vets on the Hill.”

The National Heroes tour kicked off from the deck of the USS Midway in San Diego, California. The heroes toured the United States, thanking veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice. Their non-partisan message highlighted the military’s commitment to success in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as communicating the incredible progress being made under General David Petraeus.

The Heroes Tour aimed to get to a grassroots level, a local

level in these communities. Vets For Freedom feel the national media is not telling the whole story. The Heroes Tour went into communities across the nation, honoring local veterans, talking with local media and local lawmakers about the incredible bravery of our troops and the progress our military is making. The Heroes Tour reports that sectarian killings are down by 90%, suicide bombings are down nearly 70%, and Iraqis are passing key national legislation to keep Iraq free. A safe, secure and free Iraq is critical to America’s long-term security.

The Arizona Republic printed this on March 21, 2008:

“Almost the entire, years-long debate over the American military’s presence in Iraq has been waged as though the soldiers themselves were not in the room.

And, usually, for good reason... they weren’t in the room. By and large, policy makers on both left and right rarely have thought to ask the very people who have served on the front lines for their opinion.

LST534 Newsletter

That has changed. Maybe nobody's asking, but the soldiers are telling, like it or not.

An organization of Iraq war veterans known as Vets for Freedom—claiming 44 chapters nationwide and some 20,000 members—has launched a national tour, speaking out on what they believe is a near universal principle among Iraq war vets: Finish the job.

Two of the organization's leaders—Steven Russell, a now-retired Army lieutenant colonel and a recipient of the Silver Star for bravery under fire, and Capt. Peter Hegseth, a National Guard officer who earned a Bronze Star in Iraq as a platoon leader—visited The Republic's editorial board earlier this week.

They call their effort the "National Heroes Tour," and it is featuring some of the bravest of the brave, including Silver Star recipient Marco Martinez and Marcus Luttrell, sole survivor of a Navy SEAL mission on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

'All the second-guessing is moot, at this point,' said Russell, who led the battalion that captured Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein. 'We are where we are now. A destabilized Iraq is going to have implications for all of us.'

A part of the tour mission is to express thanks to the men and women who have risked their lives in a war zone. But there is no denying the underlying mission, which is that the efforts of those thousands must not be

wasted by leaving Iraq too soon.

'Overall, we're very positive about the trajectory in Iraq now, as long as we don't leave precipitously,' said Hegseth, the Executive Director of Vets for Freedom.

Obviously, the debate over the future conduct of the war in Iraq will go on.

But, thanks to organizations like Vets for Freedom, it will not continue without a word from the people who have been there with their lives on the line."

The National Heroes Tour engaged crowds large and small, from San Diego to San Antonio to Saint Paul to South Carolina. They spoke with over 200 media outlets, reaching over 20 million people through local television, radio and lectures.

The Heroes Tour ended on Capital Hill for a "Vets on the Hill" momentum. They held a bi-partisan press conference with two dozen members of Congress, including Senators John McCain, Joe Lieberman and Lindsay Graham.

"Many of America's most decorated war heroes from Iraq and Afghanistan hit our nations'

highways with the non-partisan message of progress and freedom from coast to coast.

The Vets for Freedom National Heroes Tour covered 21 stops in 14 states, spreading the message of support for our troops by honoring their commitment, and rallying the country to complete the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although the tour has ended, the battle to allow our men and women in uniform to succeed in the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan has not. This is a critical time for our country. We need to continue to let Americans, lawmakers, and the media know that the sacrifices of our brave military and the dramatic success they have achieved cannot continue to go unnoticed or unrecognized. Even after the testimony of the progress occurring in Iraq, there are still those that refuse to acknowledge that a safe and stable Iraq is attainable and vital to the security of the world.

As we continue to spread this message, Vets for Freedom would like to thank all those that joined us on the tour to show their support. We especially want to thank Jim Hansen, Jeremiah Workman,



LST534 Newsletter

Steve Russell, Tom Parks, Kate Norley, Marcus Luttrell and David Bellavia for taking the time out of their schedules to share their stories with people across the country.”

I was fascinated by the commitment and passion of this group of Heroes. How many of you saw these folks when they visited your city?

For more information and to read some of their inspiring stories, log onto www.vetsforfreedom.org. There is a button on their homepage that takes you to The Heroes Tour.

(Reprinted and summarized from www.vetsforfreedom.org)

NEWS



US LST Association Reunion

The 23rd reunion of the US LST Association will meet in Washington, DC, August 29 to September 2, 2008. You must register for the meeting if you want to attend. Hotel reservations are separate. Contact Linda Gunjak at 800-228-5870. The deadline for registration is July 25, 2008.

HOLIDAYS

April

- 1 April Fools Day
- 20 Passover Begins
- 22 Earth Day
- 25 Arbor Day

May

- 1 May Day
- 11 Mother's Day
- 17 Armed Forces Day
- 26 Memorial Day

June

- 14 Flag Day
- 15 Father's Day
- 20 First Day of Summer

In honor of Flag Day

New Guidance on how to Salute the US Flag

“The salute is a form of honor and respect, representing pride in one's military service,” Senator Inhofe said. “Veterans and service members continue representing the military services even when not in uniform. Unfortunately, current US law leaves confusion as to whether veterans and service members out of uniform can or should salute the flag.

My legislation will clarify this regulation, allowing veterans and servicemen alike to salute the flag, whether they are in uniform or not.

I look forward to seeing those who have served saluting proudly at baseball games, parades, and formal events.

I believe this is an appropriate way to honor and recognize the 25 million veterans in the United States who have served in the military and remain as role models to other citizens. Those who are currently serving or

have served in the military have earned this right, and their recognition will be an inspiration to others.”

This Bill was passed July 25, 2007.

Please let your veteran friends know about the Passage of this Bill.

BIRTHDAYS



April 1

Andy Cumella
11 Freeport Court
Toms River, NJ 08757

April 14

Alex Fielder
5950 Ambassador Drive
Fairfield, OH 45014

May 17

Duncan Robey
8301 Tieton Drive, #87
Yakima, WA 98908

May 17

Jim Miller
1452 S. Ellsworth Rd., # 2211
Mesa, AZ 85208

July 8

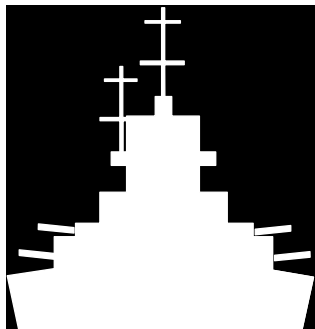
Lyle Kingsbury
3878 Claremont Rd.
Charlestown, NH 03603

July 11

Bill McAndrew
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Wichita, KS 67278-1546



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LST534 Newsletter

Just for Fun

Just for Fun is a column meaning just that – FUN!

How do you know when you're staying in a Kentucky hotel?

When you call the front desk and say, "I've gotta leak in my sink" and the person at the front desk says, "Go ahead."

A beggar walked up to a well-dressed woman shopping on Rodeo Drive and said, "I haven't eaten anything in four days."

She looked at him and said, "God, I wish I had your will power."

The last fight with my wife was my fault. My wife asked, "What's on the TV?" I said, "Dust!"

Nautical Terms:

*In memory of James Richard Drew who contributed to this column until his passing.
Contributed by Willie Gunn.*

Seadog: An older sailor with many years at sea.

Shellback: Sailor who has crossed the equator.

Editor and Comments:

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