

VALLEY PATRIOT OF THE MONTH:

DON PEARCE

Lonnie Brennan

VALLEY PATRIOT HERO REPORTER

METHUEN - An e-mail alert is sent out, and Methuen resident Don Pearce, former Air Force member, answers the call: another mission for the Patriot Guard Riders, who have been requested by the family of a local fallen soldier, to provide escort duty.

Don and his family cut a solid, committed, respectful path for our nation's military. Flanked by his father before him, Sgt Warren R Pearce Sr. (1942-1945 Normandy to Germany), and his son Donald Eric Pearce Jr., who recently completed his third tour in Iraq, Don stands with a deep family, personal, and

national pride for military service. Today, he answers the call to service as he terms: "one of many, we try to help by showing our respect."

Don Pearce is a local ride captain for the Massachusetts Patriot Guard Riders; part of a national group born out of the desire to provide comfort, support, protection, and respect for soldiers and their families. The group has been very active these past few months, with funeral services from the Merrimack Valley to the Cape. Don lives in Methuen, and clears his schedule whenever a call to serve is requested. I asked Don about the group, who serves, and why he serves. He

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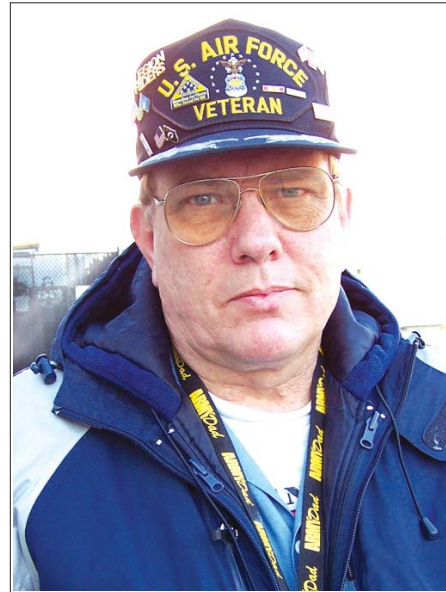


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Methuen Veteran Don Pearce

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DON PEARCE, HERO IN OUR MIDST : From Page 1

turned silent, then, in measured breaths explained: "When I served with my two brothers during the Vietnam period I can't begin to tell you. I got spat on and called baby killer, in Logan Airport, in Boston. When my son joined (the Army), I vowed that he would never, never, be subjected to that—Ever."

"You try to get over it, and you do in a way, by doing things like what I've done, making sure it doesn't ever happen again. And making sure that people know that these kids deserve the best," he explained, "My son has served five tours in active combat areas, including just finishing his third tour in Iraq; special forces. That's something to be proud of."

How did he join the Patriot Guard? "I had heard about the Westborough Baptist Church out in Kansas, how they were protesting at funerals a few years ago, and how this new group called the Patriot Guard Riders were standing up for our troops, against these protesters, and showing respect. I researched and I joined the Guard."

"It was funny that my first mission was for the husband of a friend of mine that I grew up with. She's still a good friend, and she's now the flag manager for this area. We typically have 25 to a hundred flags flying. Every state has a state captain, and district captain, and ride captains. The ride captain is responsible for all mission planning."

Mr. Pearce has participated in many missions, and credits everyone in the Guard for working together and showing respect. "We're all volunteers. We're 100% volunteer. It's tough. There's a lot

involved. You could have picked anyone (for an article)," he suggested.

And, he was quick to point out, the Guard does other things too: "We did a short escort of the moving (Vietnam Memorial) wall, when it came to Wilmington. We escorted it in and helped to set it up. Then a number of us then volunteered, guard duty," he explained. He posted "a couple of nights into 2 a.m. and beyond. That particular wall, it has one section, where if you have the light just right, it looks like the outline of a soldier. It's incredible."

"Part of the reason that I do it was spoken by our state captain Jim Boland, about a year ago. And pretty much what he said was 'never again.' Never again will any one of our service people receive negative treatment when they come home."

"These kids deserve whatever honor we can give them," Don said. "They're out there putting it on the line for our freedom."

Don was quick to praise the Patriot Guard and its many members, explaining how he feels honored to be a member. When asked about himself, he quickly turns the conversation to other members, to the group, to his state captain Mr. Boland, to his regional captain Richard Keniston and others. "We have people from all walks of life. We have retired police officers, we have doctors, teachers, male and female. Again, we don't care if you ride a motorcycle or not. We don't care if you're a veteran. The only prerequisite is respect."



PHOTO: COURTESY

Patriot Guard Riders at a soldier's funeral displaying American flags.

"Last week was tough," he said and paused. "We had three (funeral) missions in one week. Yeah, we had three."

He named each, from Leominster, Bridgewater, and locally, "for IT3 Caitlin Trask, just 21, of North Andover. I was ride captain for that one," he said as this big frame of a man appeared to tear up. "It's been a tough week, a tough winter, for Massachusetts. Since January we've had 11 missions. These are all at the invitation of the family. We do not show up unless the family asks us to. We are there as invited guests."

The Patriot Guard does 'Welcome Home' events for soldiers, runs 'Help on the Home Front' events for wounded soldiers, and supports other veterans groups and other charitable organizations.

Last December, Don joined other Guard members who participated in the Wreaths Across America event in Bourne National Cemetery.

The event in Bourne was timed to coincide exactly with the event in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia and across the country. Don an uncle and "my favorite aunt" are buried in Bourne. His aunt was a 1st lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corp in the South Pacific in WWII and a decorated veteran in her own right.

The Patriot Guard has swelled to more than 1,500 members in Massachusetts, and has been featured in newspapers, and district captain Keniston has spread the word also, being interviewed on WBUR radio in Boston. The Patriot Guard Riders is a 501C3 charitable organization. All of the gear that they sell on their website store helps to buy the flags and support what is done by so many members. You can learn more about the Guard via their website at www.PatriotGuard.org.

Patriot Guard Riders Mission Statement
The Patriot Guard Riders is a diverse amalgamation of riders from across the nation. We have one thing in common besides motorcycles. We have an unwavering respect for those who risk their very lives for America's freedom and security. If you share this respect, please join us.

We don't care what you ride or if you ride, what your political views are, or whether you're a hawk or a dove. It is not a requirement that you be a veteran. It doesn't matter where you're from or what your income is; you don't even have to ride. The only prerequisite is Respect.

Our main mission is to attend the funeral services of fallen American heroes *as invited guests of the family*. Each mission we undertake has two basic objectives:

1. Show our sincere respect for our fallen heroes, their families, and their communities.

2. Shield the mourning family and their friends from interruptions created by any protestor or group of protestors.

We accomplish the latter through strictly legal and non-violent means.

To those of you who are currently serving and fighting for the freedoms of others, at home and abroad, please know that we are backing you. We honor and support you with every mission we carry out, and we are praying for a safe return home for all.



Lonnie Brennan is a former selectman in Georgetown, and was the Republican candidate for state representative in 2008. You can email him at lonnie@thechocolatecellar.com.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Left to right back row: Paul, Albert, and Timothy. Front row, are: John, Rachel, Tremain, and Eric (Don's son). Last names were omitted per security reasons.

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