

# U.S. Soldiers Restore Honor to Old Glory

Forward Operating Base Delta, Iraq, Saturday, 29 March 2008  
By Sgt. 1st Class Stacy Niles

More than 150 U.S. Soldiers and civilians restored honor to a U.S. flag that lay lonely and forgotten on the grounds of a Georgia apartment complex for almost a week in February.

The flag was retrieved by a passerby who could not stand seeing the flag treated in such a manner.

Having passed the discarded flag twice, Dan Turner took the flag the third time he saw it lying on the ground and sent it to his friend Chief Warrant Officer 4 Thomas Golden of the Joint Forces Headquarters Forward, Georgia National Guard.

“This flag was being used as landscape art and a business flagging without the daily outdoor ceremony it deserved. In the end it simply was allowed to lie in the mud of the Irwin Bridge right-of-way for a week while managers, landscape personnel and employees, residents and neighbors simply ignored it lying on the ground,” wrote Turner in a letter to the apartment complex, sheriff’s department, judges and the editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

After taking the flag, Turner e-mailed Golden and asked if he would fly the flag at Forward Operating Base Delta, Iraq. Turner cleaned the flag and shipped it to Golden who was more than happy to restore the flag’s honor before returning it to Turner.

“The U.S. flag for me is more than just a piece of cloth to be flown or displayed as a matter of convenient patriotism or decoration. It is the one true symbolic representation of what our nation and her principles stand for,” Golden said. “Also, many great men and women have served in uniform, and in many cases, died for advancing freedom and democracy as well as the preservation and perpetuation of our freedom, liberty and way of life we enjoy every day which our flag symbolizes.

“It’s our flag, and people don’t always pay it the respect it’s due,” he said.

Turner and Golden, who have been friends for more than 16 years, share a strong sense of patriotism which is shown annually on Memorial Day weekend when they drive to Marietta National Cemetery to place wreaths on the graves of Turner’s father and brother. Turner’s father fought in World War II and his brother died in Vietnam at the Battle of Hue. Turner’s mother served in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II.

After placing the wreaths on the graves, Golden and Turner walk the entire cemetery to pick up and replace any flags that may have fallen after being placed by Boy Scouts.

“Dan and I feel as though no flag, no matter how small or great, can be left upon the ground if we have the ability to take action and correct the situation,” Golden said, “which is exactly what Dan did by ‘rescuing’ the current flag.

“Unfortunately, our society has come to take for granted the sacrifices that have been made throughout our history to ensure our way of life will survive and endure no matter the source or location of the threat. It is for these and many other reasons I feel so strongly that our flag should never be allowed to be desecrated in any form or fashion,” he said.

Title 4, Section 8 of the U.S. Code says the flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water or merchandise. The section goes on to say that the flag should never be fastened, displayed, used or stored in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled or damaged.

To restore the flag’s honor, Golden and Soldiers from 214th Fires Brigade organized a flag-raising ceremony March 22 attended by Soldiers and civilians.

“I’m really thankful that a lot of folks came out,” Golden said. “What made it even better was its simplicity. People came because they wanted to and they came out of respect.”

The ceremony offered a way for those who believe in the flag to be united, said Chap. (Maj.) Michael Hoffman, the 214th FB chaplain.

“I appreciated this citizen taking the time to remember and act on what the flag stands for,” Hoffman said. “Being a part of the ceremony and restoring honor is just a way for us to be included with him in honoring both the flag and our nation.

“I wonder what people were thinking, but I am grateful for this man taking the time to do something. I am inspired by him taking the initiative to do something,” said Hoffman of those who allowed the flag to remain on the ground. “You can say how you feel about this country, but this guy proved it by what he did.”

Turner was charged with theft for taking the flag, but he expresses no regrets in doing what he did.

“I wanted to make this issue a statement and I’m willing to bear the consequence of my actions to the sheriff as directed by the judge or the property owner,” said Turner in his letter. “There is no excuse for common theft, yet I felt compelled to take action now and worry about the consequences later.

“I find no pride in breaking the law, but there are mitigating circumstances that put me over the line,” Turner said. “Allowing this flag to lie in the mud was a disgrace; however, my lack of action would have been even more disgraceful. I acted on the behalf of all those that did not, could not or would not take action.”