Texas Guardsman March for Fallen Comrades

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Daniel Griego

100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AUSTIN, Texas- Uniformed and unarmed, the group of Soldiers marched together through the humid Texas morning. Led by the American flag held high by a non-commissioned officer, the group strode over three miles of hills, rocks and streets. This band of dedicated Soldiers did not march for fitness or for training; they marched for the memories of their fallen comrades.

The third annual "March for Fallen Heroes," held March 21, 2009, recognizes the ultimate sacrifice of American heroes who have died in the Global War on Terror, with special emphasis on Soldiers who served in the Texas Army National Guard. Army Staff Sgt. David J. Mendiola, who organized and led the event, first got the idea from a fellow Guardsman.

"While flipping through the [GX Magazine], my attention was drawn to a picture of a Soldier carrying our nation's colors while walking down the road," said Sergeant Mendiola.

"The article was about a Tennessee Soldier by the name of 1st Sgt. James P. Williams, who marched nine miles in remembrance of the Soldiers that died in his unit due to the Global War on Terror. The article moved me in such a way that I immediately went to my first line supervisor and insisted that we do something like this as well."

More than three dozen Soldiers participated in the march, which began under the MOPAC overpass by the Town Lake track, reached to the 36th Infantry Division monument on the northwest side of the state capitol building, and ended with the return trip back.

"I lost eight buddies in the last tour," said Spc. James C. Gaspar, a Guardsman with the 36th Infantry Division. "I had to be here, it's important for the brothers I lost over there. Every step I take, it's just one more step to remembering them, keeping them alive."

Joining the troops on this early morning excursion was the new commander of the Texas Army National Guard, Brig. Gen. Joyce L. Stevens.

Above- Staff Sgt. David J. Mendiola marches along Austin streets during the March for the Fallen.

Below left- Members of the Texas Military Forces at the 36th Infantry Div. memorial on the state capitol grounds.

"It really means a lot to me to have Soldiers that want to support each other," said General Stevens. "We can come and just remember those who came before us and feel part of a good organization."

Sergeant Mendiola chose to hold the event in May, in conjunction with the Memorial Day weekend, to further recognize the sacrifices of past veterans.

"Whether it was during Pearl Harbor, World War I and II, Oklahoma City bombing, or Vietnam," Mendiola said, "we have lost an ample amount of Americans due to the Global War on Terror and this march is in their honor."

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