



C



SSGT. JESSE WLLIAMS COMES HOME | JANUARY 2014

STANDING *Guard* ...

Respect for Fallen Heroes ◀...

by Meagan Church



On a cold, January afternoon, the path to Granger Community Church was lined with American flags being held by nearly 100 Indiana Patriot Guard Riders. They stood in solidarity and peaceful support for our fallen local hero, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jesse Williams.

“Jesse’s funeral can pull me close to home,” said Russ Bauer, Patriot Guard senior ride captain and Vietnam-era veteran. “His parents have been Patriot Guard Riders for several years and are friends of mine. And just like them, my son is in the military. But just like at any funeral we serve, we are there to let the family know they are not alone. We are there to help them feel secure just in case something goes wrong.”

The Indiana Patriot Guard Riders are a diverse group of volunteers from all over the state with different political views, backgrounds, careers and military experience. They don’t all ride motorcycles and they aren’t all veterans, but these Hoosiers all share the same respect and attend the funeral services of fallen American heroes as invited guests of the family. They travel from near and far, cash in vacation days and brave the weather with no payment or reimbursement for their time, effort or expenses. But for Russ, compensation is not the reason he devotes so much to the organization.

“A lot of us in my generation who were in the service in the 60s and 70s didn’t get a lot of support,” said Russ, who comes from a long line of military family members, including his father, wife, sons and grandson. “We want to make it different for those serving now. We want to make sure these folks feel better than we did. We can’t change what happened to us then, but we can change what happens now.”

The Patriot Guard participates in funerals, not only to offer support, but also to provide protection in case of protestors. “We try not to pay the protestors any attention,” Russ said. “We think it’s wrong what they do. We stand with a presence, but our main goal is to offer honor and respect for the family.”

As a ride captain, Russ works with local law enforcement, airport personnel, the funeral home, cemetery and more to make sure everything is in place to care for the family (including recon efforts to escort the casket to its resting place). “This is my way of thanking them for what they put themselves and their families through. I’m not big on being thanked for volunteering. I just want these families to feel appreciated. And, as long as we have people serving in the military, I am going to be doing it.”



Russ Bauer, Patriot Guard senior ride captain