

in helping their students understand and appreciate history.

I commend Ryan, Ashley, and Shannon for their hard work and commitment to sharing our national history. They are models of student excellence not only for their peers in New Mexico, but for students nationwide.●

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAREL LEETUN

● Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, on Saturday July 7, Hettinger, ND, population 1,574, a town near where I grew up, will celebrate its centenary. In honor of that historic date, the entire community is hosting a week of parades, speeches, dances, picnics, concerts and all kinds of entertainment.

Along with all the other centenary events, Hettinger has set aside time with a choir and a band to honor America's veterans. During the program the community will recognize the service of LTC Darel Leetun, a local son who earned the Air Force Cross and lost his life in Vietnam.

Darel Leetun's service is typical of the dedication and sacrifice that American veterans have exhibited throughout our history. But his individual story is remarkable. And I would like to spend a few minutes to tell you some of it.

Darel Leetun was born in Hettinger on December 24, 1932. He was raised in North Dakota and graduated from Steele High School and North Dakota State University. He served as a county agent, spent a year in India and then joined the Air Force and became a fighter pilot. He was sent to Vietnam.

On September 17, 1966, then-Captain Leetun took off on his 96th mission, leading a flight of F-105 Thunderchiefs against a high priority target near Hanoi. It was heavily defended and Captain Leetun had to lead his flight through intense and accurate flak, surface-to-air missiles, and MiG fighters.

On the bomb run, Leetun's Thunderchief was hit by ground fire. According to witnesses, his F-105 became a flaming torch and nearly uncontrollable. But Leetun remained in formation and delivered his high-explosive ordnance directly on target.

After releasing his bombs, Captain Leetun's plane went out of control and was seen to crash approximately 10 miles from the target area.

Other pilots in the flight saw the jet crash, but did not receive emergency beeper signals or see a parachute.

For a long time, his family did not know what had happened to him. They didn't know if he was killed in the crash or if he was a prisoner of war.

The Air Force declared Darel Leetun missing in action and promoted him twice. But finally, in 1975, the U.S. Government declared Lieutenant Colonel Leetun dead.

In 1995, remains that were believed to be Leetun's were found on a hillside by a joint U.S.-Vietnamese search team. It wasn't until 2005 that they were posi-

tively identified by American forensic experts in Hawaii.

Darel Leetun was buried with full military honors on July 8, 2005, at Arlington National Cemetery. I attended his funeral.

Darel's grandchildren Joni, Jack, and Jane sang "America the Beautiful" at the memorial ceremony in the Arlington chapel. Then eight Army horses drew his caisson down a twisting road to the grave site, where MG Charles Baldwin presented Darel's son Keith with the American flag that covered the casket.

The service ended with a 21-gun salute, followed by the playing of "Taps."

Darel Leetun was awarded 14 medals for his military service, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. He is the only North Dakotan from the Vietnam war who received the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism, which is the second highest medal for valor in combat.

Keith Leetun was only six when his father was shot down. He barely knew his father and he didn't know much about how he died.

But one day in 1992, Keith met his father's wingman on the golf course, completely by accident. They happened to be the only golfers on the first tee at 7 a.m. No one was around except the greens keeper. They started chatting and learned of their mutual connection to Darel Leetun.

When he found out that Keith was Darel's son, the wingman said, "Your father was my mentor, best friend and the 'heart and soul' of the squadron. He was the life of the party and we called him 'Gravel'. He was a substitute pilot the day he got shot down. He went the extra mile and hit his target as his jet was on fire!"

Since then, Keith Leetun has been driven to share his father's story with other Vietnam veterans and to get them to share their own stories.

After the main veterans program in Hettinger, Keith and the rest of Darel Leetun's family will host a smaller program about Darel's life and military service called "My Way Back." They are doing that not just to commemorate Darel, but to honor all Vietnam veterans and to encourage them to share their stories and experiences with each other and with the public.

Most Vietnam veterans were drafted into service. But they served honorably. Nearly 60,000 of them didn't come home.

By the time the Vietnam conflict ended in the 1970s, the war had split the Nation. In the ugliness of it, the returning veterans were often derided for their part in it.

Many of them were treated horribly. Much of the general public spurned them, and their government ignored them.

Fortunately, times have changed.

In 1982 the Vietnam Memorial Wall was dedicated with the names of the

fallen etched into black granite. That has gone a long way toward healing the wounds of Vietnam.

And with today's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our country is beginning to pay more attention to the needs of all veterans. It is ironic that the Vietnam veterans who were cheated of their welcome home parades have been loud advocates of seeing that today's veterans get theirs.

LTC Darel Leetun is an example of the courage and sacrifice of all those who have followed orders and gone into harm's way in defense of our country. This Nation's survival depends on present and future generations of Darel Leetun's kind of soldier.

I wish to join the citizens of Hettinger, ND, in thanking Darel Leetun and all of America's veterans for their service to our country.●

TRIBUTE TO BOB BARKER

● Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, Bob Barker has graced millions of living rooms with his warm presence and genuine manner. Sadly today airs his final episode hosting America's beloved "The Price is Right" on CBS, but today is appropriate to remember the impact this wonderful man had on all of us, as he became a piece of our history and a small part of our lives each day.

Bob Barker's name is synonymous with CBS's "The Price is Right," which he began hosting on September 4, 1972. It ends today as the longest running daytime game show in television history. He holds a plethora of longevity records, including a record for holding a weekday TV job continuously for 50 years as of 2006, the oldest person to receive an MTV movie award for his role in the comedy "Billy Madison," and he has hosted or appeared on a 5-day-a-week television program longer than anyone else in the history of television. Also on December 31, 2006, Bob Barker celebrated the anniversary of his 50th year on national television. He is truly a fixture in American culture and television legend. His grace and humor have truly contributed to his success, and will be missed greatly by his millions of loyal fans ranging from the young to the young at heart.

Bob Barker is also a strong advocate for animal rights, and brings that passion into his role as host of "The Price is Right." He credits his love of animals and awareness to animal rights activism to his late wife Dorothy Jo. He continued the work in her memory. Bob insisted the show stop giving away fur coats as prizes, and formed the DJ&T Foundation that contributes millions of dollars to fund animal rescue and park facilities across the country. His passion for the cause has even brought him here to Washington, DC, where he spoke on Capitol Hill on the issue of animal rights.

Barker has been recognized for his success and talent by receiving 17 Emmy Awards and the Lifetime Achievement Award for Daytime Television in 1999. Barker has also had the