

# Honoring America's Veterans

## **Bi-Weekly Column from U.S. Senator Rob Portman**

America's veterans have made uncountable sacrifices on behalf of all of us. They have given their time, health and even their lives to preserve our way of life. Veterans Day is an appointed time – but not the only time – to honor our nation's men and women who have worn the uniform. This includes the almost 1 million Ohioans who have served.

On Tuesday I had the privilege of awarding the Silver Star to former Army Sergeant Thomas R. Gdovin of Westlake. Gdovin received the medal, our nation's third highest combat decoration, for gallantry in action against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. After nearly 44 years, he finally got the official recognition he deserved.

This was the culmination of many months of hard work by Gdovin's family, especially his beaming daughter Kim, who worked closely with our Ohio casework team. As the proud son and grandson of Army infantry lieutenants, I take seriously our nation's promises and commitments to our vets, and am honored that we were able to facilitate this righting of history.

In 1968, while serving as a squad leader with the Second Brigade, 101st Airborne, Tom Gdovin's squad came under heavy fire during an attack on the enemy. His lead soldier fell wounded. Gdovin organized the squad into a defensive formation, and then, braving intense enemy fire, and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, ran out to rescue the wounded soldier. Under further intense fire, he brought that soldier back to the squad. That soldier was subsequently evacuated and lived.

That soldier, Dan Phillips of Buckeye Lake, Ohio, was in attendance when the Silver Star was awarded on Tuesday.

When he came to the podium to speak, Tom Gdovin did not mention his own valor, only that of his brothers in arms who did not return home alive. These men “gave *everything* for their country and each other.” Continued Gdovin, “Every day that goes by, I think of these men and their sacrifices and how blessed my life has been because of them. It has been my most precious honor to have known them.”

It was a precious honor for me to meet a man like Tom Gdovin. As I listened to his self-effacing remarks, I thought of what Cincinnati and former President William Howard Taft said almost 100 years ago at Put-in-Bay at the dedication of the memorial to Oliver Hazard Perry and his victory a century before in the Battle of Lake Erie. Perry, though “exalted to the position of a national hero,” Taft said, “bore his honors with a modesty that adds to one's love of his memory.” Gdovin's humility matches the modesty Taft described in Perry. This is the character of Ohio's and America's veterans.

When they take off the uniform, we owe it to them to make their transition back into society as seamless as possible. For this reason, I voted Thursday in favor of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act

of 2011. The major component of this legislation is a new retraining program. It will provide vets with incentives to study high-demand fields at a community college or technical school. Other provisions of the legislation will reduce obstacles to veterans bringing their leadership skills to bear as civilian employees in both the private and public sectors.

Along similar lines, I co-sponsored legislation in the Senate that awards the Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines. These were the first African-American Marines, who trained during World War II at the segregated camp by the same name in Jacksonville, North Carolina. They fought at Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa – for a country that treated them as second-class citizens. Despite the fact that they entered service before the Marine Corps was integrated, some in their ranks stayed in the Corps and later saw action in Korea and Vietnam. The striking of the medal will recognize – and help ameliorate – this historical injustice. Fittingly, the Senate passed the legislation this week ahead of the 236th birthday of the Corps.

This Veterans Day, let's honor all the American heroes who have kept us safe while wearing the uniform. Tom Gdovin and Ohio's other veterans certainly are among them.

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