

MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART

JAMES D. RANGLES, NATIONAL COMMANDER

2006 ANNUAL TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

FEBRUARY 15, 2006

Chairman Buyer, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen,

I am James D. Randles, National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH). It is an honor to appear before this distinguished body on behalf of the members of MOPH. MOPH is unique among veteran service organizations because our entire membership is comprised entirely of combat wounded veterans who shed their blood on the battlefields of the world while serving America in uniform. For their sacrifices they were awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

I am accompanied today by Senior Vice Commander Tom Poulter, Junior Vice Commander Henry Cook, National Adjutant Bill Bacon, National Service Director Jack Leonard and National Legislative Director Hershel Gober. The National President of the MOPH Ladies Auxiliary, Ms. Judith Spaulding is also present.

This committee is extremely important to MOPH and its members. We look to you to represent the veterans of our country and to ensure that all members of Congress understand that America must keep its promises to those men and women who have served and are now serving in uniform if we are to maintain a viable military and continue to enjoy the freedoms that we have. Veterans have earned their entitlements and benefits.

I would like to begin by thanking Congress for doing the right thing by increasing the death and other benefits for the service men and women who are serving our country in uniform. This was one of our legislative goals last year. We cannot ask military personnel to put themselves in harms way without committing to the welfare of their survivors.

ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE VA HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

The Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) is on record as supporting the Independent Budget, which is developed and submitted to Congress by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and American Veterans (AMVETS).

I am the third MOPH National Commander in a row to present as our number one priority Adequate / Assured Funding for the VA Health Administration. MOPH joins our fellow VSOs in urging Congress to find a long-term solution to the annual funding crisis at the VA. VA deserves a system that delivers funds on time to allow for long-term planning. With the on-going War on Terror and our service members returning home from war with medical conditions requiring treatment at VA hospitals, the VA needs the capability to meet their needs. The funding problem was demonstrated last year when the need to provide \$1.5 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations for FY 2005 surfaced, and the need to amend the FY 2006 budget with an additional \$1.977 billion.

THE AWARD OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL TO THOSE POWS WHO DIED IN CAPTIVITY

The MOPH believes that those military personnel who suffered hardships and wounds or illnesses while held in POW camps and died as a result of their interment should be considered as combat casualties and eligible for the award of the Purple Heart Medal. MOPH supports legislation that has been introduced in both houses of Congress (H.R. 2369 and S. 2157) that would authorize the award of the medal.

THE MEDAL HONOR FOR CHAPLAIN EMIL J. KAPAUN

Chaplain Kapaun was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for his service as a field Chaplain in Korea and for his unselfish sacrifices for the good of his fellow soldiers while he was a POW. He was universally known as a “soldier’s soldier” by those who served with him during his military service and especially by those who were his fellow POWs in the brutal North Korean prisoner of war camp. MOPH supports upgrading the DSC to the Medal of Honor for Chaplain Kapaun.

**FAMILY RELIEF FUND FOR MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD
AND RESERVES**

MOPH strongly supports the creation of a **Military Family Relief Fund**, at the federal level, for all National Guard and Reserve members who are mobilized and suffer a loss of pay due to this mobilization. We encourage the Congress to create these funds to help the families of all activated and deployed Guard and Reserve members at all levels

RETIRED PAY RESTORATION

MOPH is pleased that Congress has enacted legislation that authorizes some military retirees to concurrently receive both full military retired pay and any VA compensation to which they are entitled. MOPH's position is that ALL those eligible for concurrent receipt should receive it.

COMBAT MILITARY RETIRED VETERANS

MOPH supports legislation to provide for the payment of Combat-Related Special Compensation to members of the Armed Forces retired for disability with less than 20 years of active military service and who were awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

**SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN (SBP) AND DEPENDENCY AND
INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC)**

MOPH supports legislation that will repeal the requirement for the reduction of SBP annuities by the amount of DIC compensation. Survivors of retirees who die of service connected causes and paid into SBP, and survivors of members killed on active duty, should receive both SBP and DIC without the current dollar for dollar offset.

STOLEN VALOR ACT OF 2005

MOPH supports H. R.3352 and S. 1998. It is unfortunate, especially with our country engaged in on-going conflicts, that there are citizens in this country that lie about the medals that they received while serving in the military, or in some cases that never actually served in the military. This is not just an occurrence now and then but regrettably it is a huge problem. This legislation would provide for fines and imprisonment for those "wannabees" that dishonor the medals for valor and

the Purple Heart Medal and those brave men and women who have legitimately received these medals. MOPH urges passage of this legislation.

ASBESTOS TRUST FUND

MOPH supports the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution (FAIR Act) (S. 852) that will establish a Trust Fund for victims, including veterans, who were exposed to asbestos during their military service.

The FAIR Act offers sick veterans a way to receive the compensation they deserve. Presently, it is difficult for veterans to turn to the courts for help with their asbestos related medical costs. Veterans are barred by law from suing their employer (the federal government) for compensation. By taking asbestos claims out of the court system, the FAIR Act will ensure veterans will have a speedy and just avenue for receiving compensation.

PROTECTING THE FEDERAL SUPPLY SCHEDULE (FSS)

Due to the fact that VA makes up a small portion of the pharmaceutical market, the VA currently receives greatly reduced pricing on pharmaceutical drugs because of contracts with vendors. The VA currently purchases approximately 24,000 pharmaceutical products at discounts ranging from 24 to 60 percent below drug manufacturers' most favored non-federal, non-retail customer pricing. Efforts have been made to open the FSS to other entities which would/could have the effect of VA losing the favorable pricing and cost the VA hundreds of millions of dollars in unbudgeted funds, funds which they do not have and would have to divert from medical services that could deny veterans treatment. MOPH supports lower priced pharmaceuticals for all Americans but not at the expense of veterans.

MILITARY EXCHANGE AND COMMISSARY PRIVILEGES FOR RECIPIENTS OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL

MOPH will support legislation that would provide this benefit to all recipients of the Purple Heart Medal. This would recognize the sacrifices of those service members who shed their blood on the battlefields for America.

Mr. Chairman this concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The Military Order of the Purple Heart does not receive and has not received any Federal Grants nor have any Federal Contract.

James D. Randles
National Commander
2005-2006
Military Order of the Purple Heart of the USA, Inc.

James "Jim" Randles, 62, is the 2005-2006 National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, a veterans' organization comprised exclusively of 38,000 combat wounded veterans.

His upward movement in the Military Order of the Purple Heart included stints as a Chapter Commander, Department Commander, Region IV Commander, National Junior Vice Commander, and finally National Senior Vice Commander. By holding command-level offices at all levels of the Order, Randles is uniquely qualified to become National Commander.

Randles spent his Army career as a tanker, serving in various positions in armored and cavalry units. He was the troop commander of G Troop, 2d Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Vietnam. It was during this command that he was wounded and eventually evacuated to Madigan Army Hospital in Fort Lewis, Washington. Serving in various posts around the world, Randles eventually ended up assigned to the Readiness Group Atlanta where he decided to retire.

His awards and decorations include a Bronze Star for Valor earned in Vietnam, along with the Purple Heart and two more Bronze Stars. Randles was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal. He also has been recognized numerous times for his leadership and organizational abilities by having three Meritorious Service Medals awarded along with three Army Commendation Medals. His decorations also include the Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnamese Armor Badge

Randles and his wife of 32 years, Jerolyn, live in Atlanta, GA. They have one daughter, Jerolyn Nicole Redstrom, who also resides in Atlanta. He currently is employed as the Veterans Affairs Operations Officer for the State of Georgia.

