



# Kansas Patriot Guard



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ALL PHOTOS IN THIS FEATURE BY DEBRA BATES-LAMBOURN

**T**hey call themselves the Kansas Patriot Guard. Others call them angels, heroes, champions and a blessing. This noble group is comprised of motorcycle club members — veterans and supporters — who ride on missions to protect the most vulnerable — families who have lost loved ones in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It seems unconscionable that bereaved family and friends should need protection at a funeral. As patriotic citizens, we rally around and offer support to those suffering because we, too, grieve the loss of their loved ones who made the supreme sacrifice. Compassion is part of our humanity.

Yet we are acutely aware of a handful of protesters who disrupt military funerals

## The Kansas Patriot Guard protects when tragedy strikes U.S. servicemembers.

with their jeers and signs. We watch tearfully, in disbelief, as their many protests — defaming our country, our flag and our fallen heroes — extend across the nation. Paradoxically, the fallen hero helped ensure these protesters' constitutional rights to free speech and assembly — in effect, the right to protest at his funeral. Legally, there is no way to stop the protests.

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# “Soldier down...kickstands up.”



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## In The Beginning

A shimmering light appeared on the horizon of Mulvane, Kansas, in July 2005 when American Legion Rider Terry Houck's wife, Carol, heard about an Oklahoma soldier's funeral being disrupted by protesters. Determined to find a way to shield families from harassment, Houck and other riders soon conceived a plan. It was ingenious and compassionate.

## Close To Home

According to Kansas Patriot Guard, the following heroes were honored by the Leavenworth community. The people rallied and the Patriot Guard stood in respect for their brothers:

Specialist Lucas Frantz  
Private First Class Brian J. Bradbury  
Specialist Jeremiah Scott Cole  
PO2C Christopher Walsh  
Private First Class Shane R. Austin  
Corporal David M. Unger  
Colonel James W. Harrison, Jr.

The plan was to ride their motorcycles to funerals and show respect to fallen heroes, their families and their communities. It was not a counter protest; they would stand together as a human shield. The plan included the permission of the family and coordinating with local law enforcement in escorting the body from the airport to the funeral home, and standing watch at visitations and at the cemetery. Beginning with the Kansas American Legion Riders from Legion Post 136 in Mulvane, the grassroots effort had the momentum of a Kansas grassfire, spreading throughout Kansas and to other states.

"American Legion Riders had the idea, but it wasn't just one motorcycle organization. There were many other veteran and motorcycle groups involved," said Kelly Brown, a Kansas Patriot Guard and American Legion Riders assistant director from Leavenworth's American Legion Post 23.

## The Mission

October 11, 2005 marked the first mission at the funeral of Sergeant John Doles in Chelsea, Oklahoma. It was a successful mission. Motorcycles with American flags on the back lined up along the avenue providing a

buffer so the family could not hear or witness any protesters. In essence, they gave the funeral back to the family.

A second mission, for fallen Specialist Lucas Frantz, was held in Tonganoxie with more than 100 volunteer riders in attendance. The American Legion Riders wanted all volunteers to be recognized, so on October 27 in Tonganoxie the group became known as the Patriot Guard. Gold embroidered lettering of that name appears on patches to identify members.

"In addition to Kansas missions, riders have traveled to Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma and Missouri to stand for our family," Brown said.

## It's Not About Us

From a dozen veterans to thousands of volunteers from all walks of life, the ranks swelled in just a matter of weeks. The Patriot Guard drew national attention as CNN and major newspapers picked up their story.

However, the Patriot Guard makes it clear that it's not about them.

"It's an outpouring of support for our nation's military," said Jim Timmons, Kansas Patriot Guard and first district vice commander of American Legion Post 23. "We want everyone from every branch of service to know everyone in this country is behind them and we are thankful for what they are doing."

Another Kansas Patriot Guard rider from Leavenworth, John Boyer, agrees. He said being in the guard is the most rewarding thing he's ever done outside of being a father. Boyer served in the Navy during Vietnam.

"Colonel Harrison's funeral was my 25th mission, I don't think I will ever be done with my military duty to my country or saying 'thank you' to those who served," Boyer said. "When my son graduated from boot camp, he said he finally understood why I cry when I see the American flag."

## Other Missions

The Kansas Patriot Guard also attends funerals for veterans of any war. On the last Thursday of each month at 3 p.m., a memorial service is held at the VA Medical Center for any veterans or their spouse, whose body was received during the month.



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vice commander of American Legion Post 23.*

The Patriot Guard collaborates with other veteran groups and ROTC at this event. This service has an honor guard, rifle squad with a 21-gun salute and ends with taps.

"Welcome home" events may be for a single service member or an entire unit. Deems "Doc" Peterson, ride captain for the Kansas Patriot Guard, recently coordinated with law enforcement to escort an entire unit from Kansas City International Airport to Richards-Gebauer Air Force Base in Belton, Missouri, for their homecoming celebration. A dozen police cars led 200 bikes on a deserted interstate.

These and other missions are sponsored by the American Legion and the Kansas Patriot Guard is not exclusive to the American Legion Riders.

However, they started it, maintain it, and continue to keep it open to anyone who wants to participate in honoring our past and present servicemembers.

The Kansas Patriot Guard exemplifies the best in America. God Bless You All. ■

*For a complete listing of all current missions for the fallen in Kansas go to [www.kspatriotguard.org/curentmissions.htm](http://www.kspatriotguard.org/curentmissions.htm) or visit [www.kspatriotguard.org/missions.htm](http://www.kspatriotguard.org/missions.htm) for past missions. Everyone is welcome to join this group. The only requirement is to show respect. If you'd like to join or learn more about the KPG go to [www.kspatriotguard.org](http://www.kspatriotguard.org).*