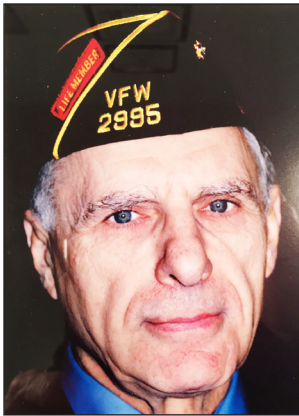


Fallen Heroes Project to honor Polish soldiers

By Theresa Poalucci



Robert Michalak

Robert Michalak of Redmond, Washington is American born and raised. His grandparents immigrated from Poland in 1914 and his family has kept ties with Polish relatives ever since. Michalak has visited Poland more than a dozen times during his lifetime, and although he loves the country of his ancestors he never expected to be helping Polish

war heroes.

It was Michalak's service in the U.S. Army that ultimately led him down an unexpected path, one in which he would meet artist Michael Reagan of the Fallen Heroes Project.

The Fallen Heroes project provides, free to the family, a portrait of those who have given their life in the fight on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Reagan draws each portrait from a photograph provided by the family. He then ships it to them, again at no charge. To date he has completed 4,200 portraits.

"I asked Mike to come and speak at a Trilogy Veterans

Club meeting explained Michalak, who first met Reagan at the Redmond VFW Post 2995. We were packing 100 care packages for our troops in Iraq when the artist delivered drawings to two mothers whose son's had died in the war on terrorism. The VFW had planted a tree along with a granite marker for each of the men who had given the ultimate sacrifice and Mike wanted to be there to support their families.

"I saw first hand how Mike's drawings of the fallen heroes affects those who are left behind," he continued. "So when Reagan agreed to come and speak we turned the event into a fundraiser to help with the costs for shipping these portraits all over the country and even the world."

Michalak and Reagan became friends and at a lunch that was attended by a number of veterans, Michalak asked Reagan if he had ever considered drawing portraits of the Polish soldiers who died as part of the allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Two articles in the VFW magazine indicated that he had completed drawings of both Canadian and British soldiers," said Michalak. Reagan's response was yes, providing that Michalak did the footwork on finding the families. With the support of the Polish Home Assn. of Seattle it

took Michalak several months to get through to the right person at the Polish Embassy in Washington D.C., but eventually, with time and persistence, he prevailed.

"The Polish Embassy sent the request to the Polish Military and they approved the project," he said. "Now we are waiting to hear from the families of the men who gave their lives. I believe there are 42." An original portrait will be presented to each family and a digital copy will be made for the military museum in Warsaw.

About the Fallen Heroes Project

I met Reagan years ago when his project first started. He had a great job at the University of Washington in branding. He was known in the community for his generous donations of his sketches to charities to be sold at auction. His portraits hung in the homes of movie stars and famous politicians.

Reagan had served in the Marines during Vietnam and had been witness to some very tough sights. His homecoming, like many from that war was not welcoming. Confused, he lost his wife and child in a divorce because of his depression and anger. He eventually found his way with his art, remarried, and was living a comfortable life in Edmonds, Washington.

Then one day the phone rang. A woman he had never



The Congressional Medal of Honor Society and Foundation honored Mike Reagan this week. Above Reagan visits some of the graves of soldiers he has drawn at Arlington Cemetery.

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(Continued from front)

met wanted to commission him to do a portrait. When he learned that the woman was a recent widow of a Marine killed in Iraq he told her he could not charge her.

When she received the drawing of her deceased husband it was life changing for her. It was as if he had come home, she said.

Word spread within the military community and soon Reagan was drawing more and more portraits. Each family reaching out to him, once they received their portrait, sharing how cathartic it was for them.

It wasn't long before Reagan felt compelled to take early retirement and devote himself to helping the families of the "Fallen Heros."

"This project has never been about the politics of the war," said Reagan. "It has only been about one thing, thanking the families for their sacrifice and letting them know that we all care."

Reagan has given away 4,200 portraits. His 501c3, Fallen Heros Project, exists to help pay for the framing and shipping charges that have to be covered. He has made no money from his drawings, but he has made a lot

of friends.

"When I am drawing these service men and women I often feel they are in my studio with me," explained Reagan.

According to the official casualty list there have been 6,739 Fallen Heroes in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. These figures do not include PTSD victims and those who come home physically broken in some way.

On Wednesday, March 25, Reagan was presented with the Congressional Medal Honor for his service in founding the non-profit Fallen Heroes Project. He made the trip to Washington DC for the ceremony which is held at Arlington National Cemetery.

If the Polish government decides on a ceremony for the presentation of the portraits Michalak will make the trip to Poland on Reagan's behalf so the artist can continue to work in his studio. Michalak has already promised to escort the portraits to Poland to guarantee a safe delivery.

I recently asked Reagan if he will ever finish drawing the Fallen Heros?

"Never and the war isn't over. I get requests almost every day," said Reagan. Soon he will have 42 Polish soldiers to draw. "Terrorism will be here a long time, so will I."



To make a donation online, please visit
www.fallenheroesproject.org

or mail a check to
**The Michael G. Reagan
Portrait Foundation
7106 175th Place SW
Edmonds, WA 98026**

**Please indicate on the check that you
would like your funds to go to the
Polish Fallen Heroes Project**

**Pictured to the left is one of the Fallen Heroes
poster highlighting some of the more than 4,200
portraits Reagan has drawn. This poster hangs in
the Capital in Washington DC.**