



## Birthday – ‘Swump’

Matt Maupins Birthday Party July 13, was just plain nice. Held at the recently dedicated Pavilion at East Fork Lake, folks were still talking about the site of the Rolling Thunder Tribute ride that could be easily seen by all that attended the dedication of his pavilion on May 12 with the ride across the dam loop.

The Chained Eagles were there, super folks, totally dedicated to the POW from all wars issues. They are the ones that do the thing with a young trooper stuck in a bamboo cage, and after a bit of talk about the Wall, Women's VN Memorial, etc, a trooper emerges from the cage, very aged, very bearded. A profound look at the POW situation.

On the lighter side, they did not laugh at my metric bike.

Prayers were said for Matt, balloons released. There was some really great food and even the Elvis impersonator was decent. It was a nice time at the lake on a beautiful evening.

I was also able to meet ‘The General’ (damn they make those Generals young now days) in charge of Matt's unit. I told him to get the troops out to Kuwait, set up a big beer tent, and go back in 6 months to see if there was anything worthwhile. Politically correct smiles.

Ok enough rambling, it was a good day, and great folks glad I was there.

Apparently nearly \$60,000 was donated to scholarship funds in Matt's name, and RT 9 played a part in it.

As long as I am one my soap box, please look at a web page, <http://www.vawatchdog.org/07/nf07/nfJUN07/nf062807-3.htm>

## Another Mission – ‘Spy’

Well another man gave his life for us. Some who care recognized his homecoming and funeral. July 12 the body of Sergeant Anthony Michael Kress Vinnedge was escorted from the airport to the Hamilton Christian Center upon his return from Iraq. After laying in repose until

2300 his body was escorted to the funeral home where an evening vigil was held the next day July 13.

At 0800 on Saturday Sgt Vinnedge was escorted back to the Center for a service, which started promptly at 1100. I had the privilege of standing with about 60 flags outside the center to great all his relatives and friends.

There were more than 60 people paying their respects but not all had flags. After the ceremony many of the riders escorted the family to the cemetery for interment.

## Early thank you – ‘Spy’

Don't wait to say thank you. It's hard to hear through the closed casket.

Ever thought about how you might react knowing you were going to die very soon? Well I found out how one former Marine reacted on Sunday. Sergeant Stutz learned he had few days left in his life and as a final request he decided that he would like to ask those who might attend his funeral to come to his house so he could thank them.

Wow! That's an amazing thing to do. So about 70 people mustered about ½ mile from his house and with news crews leading the way we all rode to his house. Turns out he thought it was only going to be a couple of people he'd be seeing. He expected that he would be asking a delegation of riders to pass along his thanks at his funeral. When he saw all those bikes and flags riding up his block he rose from his chair and stood at attention (the best he could) to salute the flags driving by his home.

After we parked and we lined up then one by one each of us went up to him and said our thank you to a Vietnam combat veteran fighting his last battle.

Here is what Dale Huffman of the Dayton Daily News wrote in his commentary titled “*Vet gets a late homecoming celebration*” and published Tuesday, July 17, 2007

Patriot Guard Riders surprise Paul Stutz, a vet in Hospice care, with a special tribute. Paul Stutz was having difficulty getting the words to come out, but after a few moments he



said, "Thank you, all of you, for this welcome home."

Stutz, 60, had just been released from the hospital at the Veteran's Administration Saturday and had a supply of oxygen nearby as he sat in a lawn chair in the front yard of his West Carrollton home Sunday afternoon.

According to his wife Darlene, Stutz has congestive heart failure and "a lot of other medical complications" and is now being cared for by Hospice caregivers at his home. Stutz served as a sergeant in the 7th Communications Battalion, First Marine Division in Vietnam from 1965 to 1969.

"We were making arrangements for his funeral, and Paul mentioned to me that he really would appreciate it if the Patriot Guard Riders would consider honoring him by escorting his funeral procession when he is gone," Darlene said. "I was in touch with some friends who knew how to get in touch with the Patriot Guard organization, and a miracle happened."

The Patriot Guard Riders is a national organization of motorcycle riders, with more than 100,000 members, who support those in the military by escorting military funerals at the invitation of the family of the fallen hero.

"We got a call from friends of Sgt. Stutz and his wife Darlene," said Bob Woods, leading a contingency of about 40 Patriot Guard Riders who rode to the Stutz home on Sunday. "We have done many missions, but I must admit this was the most unusual home front mission we have ever done. We are pleased to do this."

Woods said when he was getting information for the riders, a touching thing happened. "I heard the words that Sgt. Stutz gave his all for his country during the Vietnam War, and that when he came home from the war he was ignored. He never had a homecoming," Woods said.

"My husband said something else," Darlene said. "He mentioned he was so pleased that the riders would come and escort him when he is gone. He said he wondered if it would be possible to meet the members of the escort party right now, while he is still able, and to thank them for the good things that they do."

The members of the Patriot Guard Riders decided to gather at the parking lot of the Yellow Rose Saloon off of Ohio 725 on Sunday and to drive the few blocks to the Stutz's home carrying American flags — to meet Sgt. Stutz and finally welcome him home from the war. Darlene helped move her husband to the front lawn where he posed for a photo with the group, some of whom had also served in the Marines.

Before they rode away each member of the honor group walked up to Stutz, shook his hand, saluted him, and said, "Welcome Home."

**Vietnam veteran Paul Stutz, center with suspenders, posed with fellow Marines who are part of the Patriot Guard Riders. Stutz is in Hospice care.**



Picture courtesy of the Dayton Daily News, Staff photo by Dale Huffman

Courtesy of **The American Legion Magazine**  
April, 2007 - SSG Matt Maupin Missing in Iraq ,  
BY MATT GRILLS

Keith and Carolyn Maupin are tired of waiting.  
They want their son back.

Three years ago this month, he went missing in Iraq when insurgents ambushed a convoy of fuel trucks guarded by the 724th Transportation Company. A week later, he appeared in a video aired on Al Jazeera, surrounded by masked gunmen who wanted to swap the U.S. soldier for some of their own. Since then, precious little information has surfaced about Staff Sgt. Keith "Matt" Maupin's whereabouts, other than a dark and grainy videotape purporting to show his execution. But Army officials ruled that inconclusive, and his status remains



“missing/captured.”

So it's not inconceivable that sometime soon, even at this very moment, U.S. forces could be rescuing Maupin from wherever he's been held captive all this time. Finally, he'll come home. That's his family's hope, anyway.

“People say, ‘Carolyn, have you heard any good news about Matt?’ I say, ‘No, but I haven't heard any bad news either.’ So we'll stay on the high road,” she says. “Forget the low road, until they can prove something.”

One of two U.S. soldiers missing in Iraq, Maupin was a 20-year-old private first class in the Army Reserve on the day he disappeared – April 9, 2004. He's been promoted three times during his absence and, judging by the yellow ribbons and posters blanketing Batavia, Ohio, he is anything but forgotten back home. Area businesses display his picture. “Joining you in all our prayers for Matt Maupin,” the local oldies station, WGRR, tells listeners at the top of every hour. Sam's Club is holding his job. Everyone's ready for his return.

When that happens, Keith says, his son will find his home just as it was when he left, save his red Mustang. New plates say, “SSG Matt.”

Yeah, that'll be a nice surprise for him, he says.

Captured. Shy and quiet, Matt Maupin joined the Army Reserve to pay for college. When his mother heard about the idea, she reminded him that a war was going on. The family could have managed college payments, she said.

“I don't want to manage, Mom,” he replied. “I want to get it done.”

A tour in Iraq was inevitable. When the time came, Maupin didn't second-guess his decision. Assigned to the 724th Transportation Company out of Bartonville, Ill., and based near Baghdad, he helped protect civilian contractors delivering supplies. He shared most soldiers' feelings about Iraq. “This place sucks,” he wrote to Carolyn. Still, he made the most of life at Camp Anaconda. Guys who served with him remember seeing the muscular Maupin at the gym nearly every night. “Whatever free time he got he was usually working out, swimming, playing basketball,” says Staff Sgt. Mike Bailey, 50, who lived a couple of trailers down from him. Bailey's

place was a hangout of sorts for the younger soldiers, a place to swap stories or get a cup of coffee.

Everyone in the unit knew Maupin, and knew he was tough. In Kuwait, he dominated a push-up contest in which soldiers exercised in full “battle rattle” – vest, bulletproof gear, pack, the whole outfit. “It weighed a lot,” Bailey says. After most others had quit, Maupin was still going. “He knocked out over 100 push-ups, and good push-ups too.”

Even before the attack, a lot of soldiers sensed something was wrong, including Bailey. “I was up most of the night before,” he recalls. “If I slept an hour, it was a miracle. I just had a bad, bad feeling.” About 30 insurgents had ambushed Maupin's platoon a few days before, and though his men successfully fought them off, “we knew the worst was yet to come.”

It happened on Good Friday, only six weeks after they arrived in country. Maupin was riding shotgun in a fuel tanker, as part of a 26-vehicle convoy traveling 60 miles from Camp Anaconda in Balad to Baghdad International Airport. Told to expect little enemy activity, the 724th rode into an ambush on Route Sword, which runs through the Abu Ghraib district. Just before the convoy left base, the highway-safety office sent an e-mail notifying the unit that Sword was closed until further notice. Maupin's group never knew; the soldier had e-mailed himself by mistake.

That morning, Shiite Mahdi Army militiamen – just as eager to kill Americans as local Sunni fighters, who had stepped up their own attacks on U.S. troops – took positions near Route Sword. As the convoy approached, the road was strangely empty except for carefully arranged debris – always an indication of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. Suddenly, insurgents hiding in houses and ditches opened fire on all sides, and the area descended into chaos: bullets flying, mortar rounds exploding, fuel pouring from ruptured tankers.

Of the roughly 50 Americans in the convoy, one civilian driver and one soldier, Spc. Gregory Goodrich, were quickly identified as killed during the ambush. Nine Americans were missing – seven civilians and two soldiers, including



Maupin. Within days, U.S. forces found the bodies of Sgt. Elmer Krause and four civilian drivers in shallow graves near the attack site. Civilian convoy commander Thomas Hamill, drivers Timothy Bell and William Bradley, and Maupin were unaccounted for. Hamill escaped captivity May 2, and Bradley's remains were found in January 2005. Bell's fate remains a mystery.

Maupin survived. A week after the ambush, a video aired on the Arabic network Al Jazeera confirmed he had been captured by the enemy. Seated in front of five men holding rifles, their faces obscured by scarves, Maupin looked pale and anxious. He stated his name and rank according to Geneva Convention procedure. After three years, the image is still haunting: the unshaven soldier in uniform, floppy hat with brim rolled back, sitting against a stark white wall. A group calling itself the Sharp Sword Against the Enemies of God and His Prophet said Maupin might be traded for prisoners held by the United States. But U.S. policy doesn't allow for negotiation with terrorists, and two months passed without further word.

On June 28, 2004, Al Jazeera aired a second video, this one much different from the first. Apparently shot at night, it shows a blindfolded figure, dressed in camouflage, sitting in front of a hole in the ground. Seen only from the back, the person is identified as Maupin before he is shot in the head – a scene Al Jazeera didn't broadcast. A statement accompanying the video claimed Maupin was killed because the United States had not changed its Iraq policy.

But is that what happened?

Questions. The Maupins believe their son is still alive. And so does the Army, at least until hard evidence proves otherwise. A year after his disappearance, a panel convened to decide whether Keith "Matt" Maupin should continue to be classified as a captive or presumed dead. Unable to enhance the video of his alleged execution, and without positive identification of its subject, the Army ruled that Maupin is considered "missing/captured" unless or until significant information warrants a change in status.

Carolyn and Keith declined to view the tape. "You gotta be kidding, right?" he told Army officials. "You want me to watch a video and, if

that was Matt, you want me to watch Matt get shot? Kiss my ass. I ain't watchin' no video."

Still photos were all they needed to see to know the figure in the video wasn't their boy. One at a time, family members – including Micah, the Maupins' younger son and a Marine – examined the images. They compared conclusions and each had determined it was not Matt. Even allowing for poor video quality, the figure's jawline and body contour don't match, they observed. After months of studying the tape, Army analysts would only call the recording "inconclusive."

In the absence of a body or remains, other scenarios must be considered. Did the terrorists shoot a dummy? Is the video a fake? Could Maupin still be a captive somewhere in Iraq, held by insurgents for some future demand?

Miraculous as that would be, lengthy captivity isn't unheard of. Roy Hallums, an American who worked for a Saudi company supplying food to the Iraqi army, was kidnapped by insurgents Nov. 1, 2004. Ten months later, acting on information provided by an Iraqi detainee, U.S. troops raided a farmhouse south of Baghdad and freed Hallums. Total time in captivity: 311 days.

If Matt Maupin is dead, why didn't his abductors display his body? By this time, shouldn't he have been discovered in a shallow grave like so many others? Why hasn't the Army, in three years and acting on hundreds of tips related to his disappearance, found anything, anything at all? It's a puzzle not helped by the unusual and often erratic propaganda employed by multiple enemy groups, each with its own agenda. Remember the militants who posted a photo online of a toy action figure, claiming they'd captured an American GI?

Carolyn believes, along with Keith and many others, that Matt is above ground, perhaps being quietly cared for in the home of an Iraqi civilian. Or maybe he's been moved to another country. Stranger things have happened, right? Wherever he is, they acknowledge that their son must stay strong to survive. "I don't expect them to take him to McDonald's or out to the Ritz, but he's got to have food, and he's got to have water," Keith says. "I believe somebody's



helping him.”

Meanwhile, the Army assures Keith and Carolyn that the search for their son will continue, no matter where the trail leads. In July 2004, the U.S. State Department formed a “hostage working group” that includes an Army representative whose sole mission is to locate Maupin. In addition, the Army is offering a \$200,000 reward for information leading to his return or the recovery of remains.

Last October, the Army paid for an Arabic-language commercial to air on Iraqi TV. Featuring Keith and Carolyn, the ad urged viewers to call a hotline if they could help families of missing people find their relatives. It aired more than 100 times in August but has yet to produce a lead.

“They understand it’s a process, a long process, but the Army’s staying on top of it and continuing to search on a daily basis,” says Maj. Jim Champ of the Army Casualty & Mortuary Affairs Operations Office, Human Resources Command.

As liaison between the war theater and the Army casualty assistance officers working with families of missing personnel, Champ emphasizes that Maupin is not missing in action. Neither is he considered a prisoner of war, because his captors are an unknown group and not the recognized military of a recognized government. He officially is “missing/captured.”

For Bailey, one of the last people to see Maupin before he vanished, the search is personal. Bailey’s on his second tour in Iraq, and as far as he’s concerned, his buddy is still out there. “There’s a strong possibility someone has got him and is just afraid to come out right now,” he says. “We’re not going to give up on finding Matt.”

Support. Since Matt’s capture, the Maupins have filled long days of waiting and wondering by supporting other Americans in uniform. In a Batavia strip mall just outside Cincinnati, their Yellow Ribbon Support Center assembles and ships thousands of care packages to U.S. servicemembers in Iraq. The back room of their suite is full of donated items just waiting to be boxed, everything from candy and crackers to stuffed animals and aftershave. Give them a soldier’s name and address, and they’ll put him

or her on the mailing list.

Matt Maupin, though, is the heart of the Yellow Ribbon Support Center. Ten or so pictures of him go in every package. “Please place me in your Bible and say a prayer for me,” says a sticker on the back of each one. “I’m captured in Iraq, and prayers can set me free.” Carolyn describes a visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, where a wounded soldier motioned for her to come near and whispered, “I just want to let you know that Matt’s pictures are everywhere over there.”

“That made us feel good,” she says with a tired smile. “It’s working.”

They say they will not allow Matt to be forgotten, even as the Iraq war enters its fifth year and Congress presses the administration to bring U.S. troops home. Carolyn hopes that in the middle of the great debate Americans will not give up on her son, or any other missing servicemember. “He is someone’s child,” she says quietly. “He isn’t just a soldier. He belongs to someone, and they want him back.”

The Maupins are encouraged by the thousands of letters of support they have received, some addressed simply, “To the family of the soldier captured in Iraq.” And though they never asked to see him, President Bush has met with them privately on seven occasions. “He told us he prays for Matt every day,” says Keith, whose untrimmed beard caught Bush’s attention at their first meeting. “When you gonna cut that off?” he asked. “When you bring Matt home,” Keith replied.

The next time they met, Bush asked again. “I done told you once, buddy,” Keith answered.

He’s since realized that Bush isn’t the one who’s going to get his son back; that’s the Army’s mission, he says. A former Marine, Keith doesn’t sugarcoat his words. He doesn’t like the Iraq war or any war, he says, because in war, “people die.” On the other hand, the decision to go to war wasn’t his to make, just like Matt’s decision to volunteer wasn’t his. “It’s our job to support the troops, wherever they are,” Keith says.

The Yellow Ribbon Support Center has become his outlet, and Carolyn’s. Though they divorced



15 years ago, they rely on each other now as day after heartbreaking day passes without news. "If Matt ever sees anything about what's going on back here, he will see his mom and I together, doing whatever we can do to get him back," Keith says. "He has to know how much we love him."

When Matt first disappeared and the Maupins founded the Yellow Ribbon Support Center, Carolyn fell into the habit of going to bed at midnight and getting up at 4:30 a.m. She's scaled back on her hours but still spends a lot of time there. "With us so busy we don't really have time to sit and dwell on it," she says. "If we did, we'd probably be depressed. And I want to be well when Matt gets home." They have help. Locals come by to drop off donations or prepare packages for shipping, and to tell Keith and Carolyn that Matt is in their prayers. Fred and Doris Hessdoerfer, a retired couple, began volunteering a few months after Maupin's capture. "We kept going back, helping out with different things, and now we're there every day," says Doris, who took over the Maupins' appointment book when requests for interviews and appearances began piling up. She and Fred also accompany the Maupins when they travel, all because they share the belief that Matt will come home. "If we didn't," Doris says, "we wouldn't be there like we are."

Believe. On a chain-link fence outside the Glen Este High School bus garage, where Carolyn works as a dispatcher, hundreds of red, white and blue plastic cups spell out messages of support. A short walk away is the football field where Maupin once played. His memory is strong here.

If anyone in Batavia thinks the missing soldier is dead, he's likely to keep it to himself. Hope permeates this town – good, old-fashioned American optimism. "The mood's upbeat," says Kevin Estes, son of a World War II veteran and a local Red Bull distributor. He knows Maupin from his delivery stops at Sam's Club and running into him at Gold's Gym, where they both worked out. "There's hope with anything. The churches in town are praying. It's just a matter of what God's will is."

Standing near the door of the Yellow Ribbon Support Center, wearing a denim shirt with Matt's name stitched in yellow over a T-shirt with his picture, Keith tells Estes amusing stories

about Matt – how he'd park his Mustang at the edge of a parking lot to avoid scratches, how he'd call home from Iraq and ask about the cat and dog before anyone else, how he thought having a girlfriend might be too expensive.

Before he deployed to Iraq, Maupin finished a year of school at the University of Cincinnati, where he had planned to study aerospace engineering before switching to nutritional science at UC Clermont. He made the dean's list with four A's and a B. And he was proud to be an American soldier. Carolyn remembers the day he returned from basic training. He got off the plane in pouring rain and walked toward her, carrying heavy bags and wearing his uniform, flashing that familiar smile. "Oh, did he look handsome," she says.

Some days the wait gets to them, and the Maupins teeter on the edge of frustration, sometimes even anger. What's taking so long? Why can't the Army just find him? Then they ask God, one more time, to protect their son and bring him home safely.

As Matt's absence enters a fourth year, his parents are prepared for others to lose heart. But they can't. They won't. They imagine Matt's disappointment and hurt if he were to come back and see that they've moved on.

With no clear answers about his fate, Carolyn believes she must trust her instincts.

"Doesn't a mother always know?" she asks. "Sometimes I think I hear him say, 'I'm OK, Mom. I'm OK.' I'll be praying or I'll be talking to him, and I can feel him. And I wonder, is that my subconscious or am I really hearing this? I must be, because if it were my subconscious it would be every day. But it's not every day that I hear him. So I hold on to that."

For Keith, it's simple. Hard as it is, he must give the Army more time to find its missing man.

"It's not my job to prove he's alive," he says. "It's their job to prove he's been killed, and they can't do that. So we're going to have faith."

Matt Grills is an assistant editor at The American Legion Magazine.



## **Man who posed as Marine hero sentenced to tend military graves By MIKE BARBER P-I REPORTER**

For pretending that he was a decorated U.S. military veteran, 59-year-old Reggie L. Buddle of Puyallup must tend to the graves of those who really were. U.S. Magistrate Kelly Arnold in U.S. District Court in Tacoma on Monday sentenced the counterfeit Vietnam vet to two years' probation and 500 hours laboring at Tahoma National Cemetery for posing as a decorated U.S. Marine captain and military chaplain in 2005 and 2006. Buddle, who never was in the Marine Corps, pleaded guilty in April to unlawful wearing of U.S. military medals and decorations. That followed an investigation by the inspector general of the Department of Veterans Affairs. After the hearing, Buddle, who served two years as an Army enlisted man but never in combat and never earning any of the medals he wore, apologized in court Monday and said he was ashamed, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Seattle.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ron Friedman said such cases, which have been growing nationwide since Congress passed stiffer measures 18 months ago against pretending to be a member of the armed forces, were researched to recommend an appropriate sentence.

"In this case, we thought it was a good idea to teach him what true service is like," Friedman said.

When Buddle begins serving those who rest at the national military cemetery in Kent, he must avoid any interaction with families of veterans.

"The court expressed concern that he not be allowed to participate in any funerals or counseling sessions or any other type of matters at the cemetery. That was part of his underlying crime; it was clear he will be there to supply labor," Friedman said.

Though Buddle was never an ordained chaplain or reverend, nor authorized by state law to act in any such capacity, he officiated at servicemen's funerals, weddings and baptisms. Friedman said state statutes were researched and found to protect the legitimacy of marriages in such instances. Buddle even hoodwinked the state Senate.

On Feb. 27, 2006, dressed in a Marine Corps uniform replete with the rank and medals he awarded himself, Buddle stood before the Senate and gave the prayer at the opening ceremony. Not everyone was so certain that Buddle was the real item. Doubters called authorities, who began investigating.

Among the unearned medals and service decorations with which Buddle festooned his uniform were those for valor and service in Vietnam; a Combat Action Ribbon authorized for wear by those who have fought enemy forces; a Presidential Unit Citation ribbon, issued to members of units that displayed extraordinary heroism under fire; and the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, a high-ranking medal authorized for "extraordinary" contribution to national defense.

Real Marines and their families seemed satisfied with the sentence. Bert Rutan, 84, retired pastor at University Congregational Church in Seattle and a Marine who in 1945 received the Silver Star for his actions on Iwo Jima, called the sentence "a fair thing. It has to be publicly known that (posing as a member of the armed forces) is not something you can do." In Snohomish, Brian and Shellie Starr, whose son, Marine Cpl. Jeff Starr, was killed in combat in Iraq on Memorial Day 2005, said the sentence is appropriate.

"I'm glad they nailed him," Brian Starr said.

"I think for someone to impersonate somebody who has done this voluntarily, with the potential for risk of life, is terrible."

**Anyone wishing to take over the newsletter, let me know**

**Write or find an article for the next edition, send it to [jpmreilly@yahoo.com](mailto:jpmreilly@yahoo.com)**