

04-03-04 “Operation – Missing Hat”

On April 3rd, 2004, the American Legion Riders of Gold Star Post 820, Monroeville, Pa. gathered for their monthly business meeting. An air of jovial camaraderie filled the Post as Riders reminisced of past rides and shared visions of the thrill of those yet to be enjoyed. Riding season was just around the corner!

Business agenda items were thoroughly covered one by one. However, the last call for new business brought forth an unexpected twist and somewhat of an emotional storm!

The Riders of Post 820 had received a request from Headquarters, simply stated, “Can you help?” The group was then directed to read an attached, handwritten note from Mrs. Barbara Roberto. The note had originally been attached to the Legion membership renewal Mrs. Roberto sent to Headquarters on behalf of her father.

As Mrs. Roberto’s note was read aloud, the Riders’ tone instantly went from jovial to somber. You could have heard a pin drop, let alone sense the swell of emotions within the bikers. We believe there might have been a few tears dropped!

Mrs. Roberto told of her father, Mr. John Colaric, a WWII, combat wounded Veteran, hospitalized in Aspinwall’s VA Medical Center since February 2003. Mrs. Roberto went on to describe that her father, John, unbeknownst to the Riders, was one of a few men who’s condition prevented attendance at the Riders and Auxiliary’s November 19th, Aspinwall VA Medical Center, Christmas celebration for hospitalized Veterans. Mrs. Roberto told of her father’s notice of the ambulatory Veteran’s receipt and wearing of the red, white and blue, Post 820 hats distributed by the Riders and Auxiliary. She mentioned that her father really, and ever so longingly, wanted one of those red, white and blue hats, and was quite bothered his condition prevented attending the celebration to receive one.

The Riders believed there must have been a higher meaning in the hat’s red, white and blue colors. Why else would such a request be made, and through such a circuitous path? The Riders’ meeting went from somber, cold silence to buzzing with discussion. What could be done to support this oh so deserving Veteran? Amidst the buzz, one Legion Rider rose to his feet and took the floor. In a strong and authoritative voice, US Air Force Veteran, Bob Carson stated, “This man is getting a hat, no matter what! Who’s willing to help me?”

A thirty second, impromptu huddle took place in the middle of the meeting floor. How could the Riders find Mrs. Roberto? Suddenly, one half dozen cell phones snapped from their holsters, all attempting to locate Mrs. Roberto so a hat could be delivered!



ALR-(04-04-04)-DSCF0001

Within an hour, contact had been made. Unfortunately, Mr. Colaric’s condition disallowed the Riders from delivering the hat as a group. Arrangements were then made for Bob

Carson to personally deliver the Post 820 hat to Mrs. Roberto the very next day!

And thusly, combat wounded, WWII Veteran, John Colaric's request was satisfied. John got his hat. But there's a bit more to this story. Why make such a big deal about a red, white and blue hat? And why should a group of bikers' even care?

In the opinion of the Riders of Gold Star Post 820, the remainder of this story originates from the bond shared by military Veterans and family, and of their sacrifices, all coming together under the cohesive support of the American Legion family.

First we have a hospitalized Veteran, Mr. John Colaric, continuing his membership in the Legion, and more importantly, still finding value and meaning in God, Country and those red, white and blue colors; an example of a true American hero. Mr. Colaric, we honor and thank you for your sacrifice and wish you God speed with your recovery. The Riders are pleased to have made your acquaintance and remain proud to have supported you, even in such a small way.

We also have a family member, a daughter, Mrs. Barbara Roberto, still assisting her father in his continuance of American values. Without you on the team, the Riders would have never known. Thank you for taking the time and initiative to write your note.

And Headquarters filled a pivotal role on the billet. Without their detective work to trace and correlate events, timing and handouts back to Post 820, the Riders would never have had this opportunity to support a very deserving Veteran. Thanks HQ!

Then, there are men like Bob Carson, Air Force Veteran, Legion member and Rider. The kind of men who are capable of recognizing a deeper meaning than just a hat, then going beyond to gather support and take action! Bob Carson, your personal commitment in assisting one of our Veterans represents role model behavior as an American, a member of the Legion family, and that of a Rider. Bob Carson, thank you, you make us proud!

It's quite evident to the Riders that the American Legion family continues to work, regardless of the task.

And as for "Operation –Missing Hat," consider it accomplished; the Riders deliver!

ALR-(04-04-04)-DSCF0001: Legion Rider, Bob Carson, hands over that oh so special hat to John Colaric's daughter, Mrs. Barbara Roberto.