

Melvin rides in honor of fallen soldiers



Dan Melvin said that while he's too old to fight for the country's freedom, there is plenty of spunk left in him to fight for the dignity of those who have perished in the Iraq war.

Melvin is one of 56,000 motorcycle riders nationwide, most of whom are veterans, who comprise the Patriot Guard Riders. When mobilized, their mission is to shield the families of those who perished in Iraq from anti-war protestors and provide a show of respect for their fallen comrades. They also provide funeral escorts to non-Iraq veterans who've died but the impetus behind the organization was to counteract protestors.

"I'm too old to fight," the former member of the Army National Guard said. "This is a way for us to show respect for people who have fought for our freedom."

Using the funerals of soldiers killed in action in Iraq as the venue to show disdain for the war became a tactic of a Kansas-based church several years ago. That spurred the formation of Patriot Guard Riders. It also compelled some states, including Illinois, to enact legislation that keeps war protestors at least 200 feet away and bars them from disrupting the proceedings.

"Our goal is not to confront the protestors," Melvin said. "We are told to turn our backs on them and shield the family."

The group has captains in each state and road captains within regions of the state. Missions are posted on its Web site, patriotguard.org, and members can

hook up with any them. Melvin went on one mission in Missouri.

Standard procedure is to first get approval by the family to participate in the funeral. If granted, a contingent of riders will greet the body at the airport and escort it to the funeral home. At least one Patriot Guard Rider remains at the funeral home 24/7 until the day of the funeral. When the day arrives, riders, which can number in the hundreds, assemble. Some form a flag line flanking the casket and family on both sides as the body is carried from the funeral home. Once it is in the hearse, four cyclists ride in front with the remainder riding two abreast to the rear. At the cemetery, the flag line is formed again. Others stand at a distance using flags as screens to shield onlookers or protestors.

Melvin said the presence of the group is well received by families, the police, funeral home directors and most in the community.

“We are very well organized. They want us there,” he said. “It will bring tears to your eyes to see the body come out of the corridor of flags.”

Melvin started riding motorcycles 25 years ago; his is a Harley-Davidson Electraglide Classic, but took a break. He got back into it six years. Melvin’s brother Richard urged him to join the group a year ago and since then has been on a handful of missions; none of which involved protestors.

“Even without protestors, I’d do it,” he said. “We had a boy who had spent two years in Iraq go down the flag line shaking everybody’s hands. It was an awesome sight. It brought chills down my spine.”

Mine through old works poses new challenges



Like a treasure hunter Barry Sargeant pours over faint aged maps but he's not looking for clues as to where valuable minerals might be buried. Instead, Sargeant wants to find where they've already been extracted.

It's Sargeant's job to lay the course of Knight Hawk's mines. Since mining has occurred in this region for more than 200 years, he must do his best to identify where surprises like old works may lie.

He is fortunate to some extent. The Illinois Geological Survey maintains an extensive library of old maps and data. On the other hand, the accuracy of some of these maps is, at best, questionable.

"We trust the maps to tell us what went on years ago on a rough scale," he said. "But back in those days, what was the reason to keep a map? Nine times out of 10 the mine is bigger than the map shows."

Sargeant cites what happened at the Creek Paum mine as an example. A copy of a vintage 1917 map showed the long-abandoned Campbell Mine lay right in the path of the Chicken Lake pit's progression. Based on the information gleaned from the map, a decision was made that the most efficient and cost effective thing to do was to plow through it. Once they reached the old works, however, Sargeant realized the map had failed him.

"We knew it was there but we didn't think it was very big and, secondly, we were coming through with a major pit. It would have been too costly to go around

it," he said. "It turns out the old mine was located in the wrong place, is at a different angle and is twice as big."

Safety and cost are the factors that drive whether to mine through or circumvent old works. Certainly all of them contain water and the downtime and cost of removing is considered. What they don't contain very much of is coal thus creating a void in the progression of a pit. But would mining around it be more or less expensive than going through it and losing some production time? These are decisions Sargeant and others must make.

When it comes to an underground mine nearing old works, there is nothing to consider.

"Surface mining into an old underground mine wouldn't be the end of the world," Ron Balch of Midwest Reclamation Resources said. "But it could be if an underground mine meets an old underground mine."

Art Rice of the Illinois Department of Mines and Minerals recalls how bad mapping nearly led to disaster at Arch of Illinois' Conant Mine years ago.

"They were going to mine within 200 feet of old works but at 500 feet they broke through," Rice said.

Miners were able to reseal the hole swiftly but it demonstrates that no matter sophisticated operations are today, there is still a little "poke and hope" that goes along with working in a region that has been mined for centuries.

"Of the 4,000 underground mines in the state over time, we have maps for 1,800 of them. That is less than 50 percent of the mines known to have existed," Rice said. "The vast majority of these were 'dog hole' mines; small, shallow mines made at the turn of the century."

Originally, coal was discovered because it was outcropped along embankments near river bottoms, Rice said.

"It came to the surface. That is why in Jackson County the earliest seams mined where exposed off of the rivers," he said. "Later, they did some drilling using water well technology to find coal. They did a lot on the blind. If they thought coal was there, they sunk a shaft and went after it."

Dog hole mines were basically created serve the needs of a local community, Rice said. He calls up on his computer an overlay of Du Quoin which is dotted with known and suspected undergrounds throughout the city as an example.

It is believed the first coal in this region to be sold commercially came in 1810. Wharf records in New Orleans show an Andrew Boone shipped coal from Jackson County there by keel boat.

Coal began coming of age by the mid-1800s as America began to industrialize and railroads began to expand. More rail meant coal could be shipped greater distances. That brought a lot of activity to the southern part of the Illinois coal basin where seams were three and four times thicker than the central and northern part of the state.

With coal's commercial value on the rise, it seemed everyone was operating a mine by the turn of the century. How much attention they paid to mapping their dog holes was suspect.

"A map is only as good as the person who drew it up," Rice said. "A small

mine not have had an engineer on staff. What he probably did was pace it off or used a tape measure.”

By 1917, the law required mapping of mine works, but that didn’t mean they would become accurate.

“It’s likely some of these operations stole a little coal from their neighbors from time to time,” Rice said.

Surprisingly, dog hole mining was still practiced into the 1970s, Rice said. What did away with them were changes to the law.

“What took these mines out of the equation were reclamation laws. It became too much a burden on a small producer,” he said.