

A March to Remember

VFW Posts in Illinois honor all impacted by 9/11

Oct 13, 2022

Members of VFW Posts 4763 and 755 in Illinois combined forces for the 21st anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to honor all lives lost during the attacks, as well as fellow service members killed defending the nation from such terrorism.

On Saturday, Sept. 10, members of Posts 4763 in Chatham and 755 in Springfield, about 11 miles from each other, orchestrated the “Patriots’ Day Ruck,” a joint effort with another veterans’ service organization, Team Red, White and Blue.

The 11-mile route from one Post to the other welcomed 20 participants, an effort to promote the wellbeing and mental health of veterans, but most importantly to remind past and present generations of all the sacrifices that paved such a walk.

“This is a way to support all of our veterans,” said Anthony Bellin, commander of the 10th District of the VFW Department of Illinois. “We lose 22 veterans a day [to suicide]. I do not know how many first responders from 9/11 have [since] joined the 22, but this is a way to remember their sacrifices, what we lost that day, and all the people we have lost for the 20 years we were at war in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The rucking trek, a common exercise among troops that requires marching at a steady pace with at least 45 pounds in a rucksack, started at Post 755 in Springfield and headed south toward Chatham. At the halfway point, about five miles down, a route of bike trails led the participants straight to Post 4763 in Chatham, where a lunch was provided by The Fallen Outdoors, a veteran-based non-profit started in Minnesota that provides outdoor opportunities for veterans.

Among those participating in the rucking event was Alfredo Rocha, a service officer at Post 4763, whose back carried more than the weight of the rucksack.

“There's a lot of baggage that comes from 9/11,” Rocha said. “This was my generation's Kennedy assassination. I know exactly where I was. 9/11 represents, to me, the beginning of my war phase, and that is when you start losing people you know.”

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Like Rocha, many veterans of the Global War on Terror began their descend into combat and its aftermath on that fateful day in 2001. Though many have returned from war-torn regions in Iraq and Afghanistan, their fight continues within.

For Post 755 Commander Josh Seed, that is why it is important to conduct events like the "Patriots' Day Ruck" to showcase what VFW can do for veterans and their families.

“This is a place where you can come, get support and feel like you are part of a team [again],” Seed said. “The VFW is for everyone — friends, family, and veterans. You do not have to be a member of the VFW to be part of the greater good, but that is what we are here for. We are showing we have not forgotten 9/11, and we do not want others to forget.”