

**MILITARY ORDER
OF THE PURPLE HEART**

**TOM POULTER,
NATIONAL COMMANDER**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS
AFFAIRS**

SEPTEMBER 20, 2006

Chairman Buyer, members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen:

I am Tom Poulter, National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH). It is an honor to appear before this distinguished body on behalf of the members of MOPH. As you are aware, MOPH is unique among veteran service organizations because our membership is comprised entirely of combat-wounded veterans who shed their blood on the battlefields of the world while serving in the armed forces of our country.

I am accompanied by Senior Vice Commander Henry Cook, National Adjutant Bill Bacon, National Service Director Jack Leonard and National Legislative Director Hershel Gober.

Mr. Chairman, I will make my comments brief, but request that the written testimony be entered into the record.

This committee is extremely important to MOPH and our members. We look to you to represent the veterans of our country and to ensure that all members of Congress understand that America must keep its promises to those men and women who have served and are now serving in uniform if we are to maintain a viable military and continue to enjoy the freedoms that we have. Veterans have earned their entitlements and benefits, often as part and parcel of the contract that each had with this government.

ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE VA HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

MOPH is on record as supporting the Independent Budget, which is developed and submitted to Congress by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and American Veterans (AMVETS).

I am the fourth MOPH National Commander in a row to again stress that our number one priority remains the adequate or assured funding for the VA Health Administration. MOPH joins our fellow VSOs in urging Congress to find a long-term solution to the annual funding crisis at the VA. VA deserves a budget system that delivers funds on time to allow for long-term planning. With the on-going War on Terror and our service members returning home from war with medical conditions requiring treatment at VA hospitals, the VA must have the capability to meet their medical and emotional needs. The funding problem was demonstrated last year when the need to provide a supplemental appropriation for FY 2005 surfaced along with the need to amend the FY 2006 budget.

THE AWARD OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL TO THOSE POWS WHO DIED IN CAPTIVITY

While the award of the Purple Heart medal to those POWs who died in captivity is not under the purview of this committee, MOPH believes that those military personnel who suffered hardships, wounds or illnesses while held in POW camps and then died in those camps as a result of their interment should be considered as combat casualties and eligible for the award of the Purple Heart Medal. MOPH supported legislation that was introduced in both houses of Congress that would authorize the posthumous awarding of the Purple Heart Medal. Language in the House version of the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act is currently in the Conference Committee. MOPH requests that members of this committee urge the conferees to retain this provision in the final Act.

RETIRED PAY RESTORATION

MOPH is pleased that Congress enacted legislation that authorizes some military retirees with 20 or more years of military service to concurrently

receive, without penalty or off-set, both full military retired pay and any VA compensation to which they are entitled. Our position is that all those eligible for concurrent receipt should receive it.

COMBAT-RELATED SPECIAL COMPENSATION (CRSC)

MOPH supports legislation to provide for the additional payment of CRSC to former members of the military who were retired for medical disability with less than 20 years of active military service and who were awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN (SBP) AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC)

MOPH supports language in Senate Bill 2766, the 2007 Defense Authorization Act, which if enacted will repeal the reduction of Survivor Benefit Plan annuities by the amount of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and change the effective date of paid-up coverage for SBP from October 1, 2008 to October 1, 2006. Survivors of retirees who died but elected to pay into SBP and survivors of members who died on active duty should receive both SBP and DIC without the current dollar for dollar offset. This Bill is now in the Conference Committee. We request that you urge your colleagues who are serving on the Committee to adopt the Senate language of S. 2766.

STOLEN VALOR ACT

MOPH supported HR 3352 and S 1998 addressing stolen valor. It is unfortunate, especially with our country engaged in on-going conflicts, that there are “pretenders” who fully and knowingly misrepresent their service experience, if any, and the military awards they received. This is not just an occurrence now and then but regrettably is a huge problem. This legislation would provide for fines and imprisonment for those “wannabees” who dishonor the medals for valor and the Purple Heart Medal and those brave men and women who have legitimately received these medals. The Senate passed S. 1998 on September 7th, 2006. We urge the House to do the same.

MILITARY EXCHANGE AND COMMISSARY PRIVILEGES FOR RECIPIENTS OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL

MOPH will continue to seek legislation that would authorize the military exchange and commissary privileges for all recipients of the Purple Heart Medal. This would recognize the sacrifices of those service members who have given so much for our country.

NATIONAL PURPLE HEART RECOGNITION DAY

As most of you are aware, the Badge of Military Merit, the predecessor of the Purple Heart Medal, was established by General George Washington on August 7, 1782. On August 7, 2007 MOPH will celebrate the 225th Anniversary of the establishment at our 75th National Convention in New Windsor, NY. We will be seeking sponsors, co-sponsors and support of legislation to establish a National Purple Heart Recognition Day which will honor this anniversary and those members, past and present, who have been awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to answer any questions members of the Committee might have.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The Military Order of the Purple Heart does not receive and has not received any Federal Grants nor has any Federal Contract.

TOM POULTER
National Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A.

Tom Poulter is the National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), the only congressionally chartered veterans' service organization for combat wounded veterans. The MOPH with over 40,000 Patriot members exists to offer support and assistance to the combat wounded and their families.

Poulter enlisted in the US Army in February 1967 as a Private E-1 and was commissioned at Fort Knox, KY as a 2nd LT, Armor in 1968, after graduation from Officer Candidate School. His Army assignments included both Infantry and Armor as a Platoon Leader and Tank Company Commander. He has also served as Intelligence Officer and Operations Officer at both battalion and brigade levels.

In Vietnam, Tom served as a tank platoon leader with 1st Battalion, 69th Armor, and the most highly decorated tank battalion in the history of the U.S. Army, which was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. He was wounded in action on November 17th, 1969. After a fire-fight with a company size enemy force from the 24th NVA Regiment near the Cambodian border, Tom received his wound from an AK-47 round fired by an enemy soldier during a counterattack by the NVA force while he was dismounted and consolidating his platoon's objective.

He is a graduate of the US Army Airborne School, Jungle Warfare School in Panama, and the Armor Officer Advanced Course. His military decorations include the Bronze Star for Valor, the Purple Heart, three awards of the Bronze Star for Meritorious Achievement, the Air Medal, two awards of the Army Commendation Medal, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry. He is a graduate of the University of Tampa with a BS Degree in Industrial Management.

Tom is a member of several veterans' organizations and is an active member of Sonoma County Chapter #78 of the Military Order of the Purple Heart located in Santa Rosa, CA, where he became a member in 1994. He is a Past Commander of his local Chapter, the Department of California, and Commander of Region VI that includes Guam, Hawaii, California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. Prior to becoming National Commander, Poulter served one-year terms as the Order's National Junior and Senior Vice Commander.

Tom owns a tourism business in the Wine Country of California. He and his wife, Donna, have been married for 36 years. His son, Scott, daughter-in-law, Alix, three year old grandson, Andrew, and another grandchild expected in November reside in Surprise, AZ.