

What's in a Name?

How one small-town bridge inspired a two-state movement



© 2020 Tim Alms. Used with permission by Tim Alms Photo. New and old Hwy 63 bridge

A special report for Veterans, Law Enforcement, Firefighters,
bridge enthusiasts, those who exemplify the word "valor" in their
everyday actions, and for Red Wing, MN

from

The Eisenhower Bridge of Valor Committee
Jane Drazkowski and Ernie Stone, Co-Chairs

by

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The Genesis of a Bridge

Bridges open up possibilities. Instead of being confined by physical barriers like rivers, lakes, railroad tracks, valleys, or ravines, people can travel safely over bridges to go to work or school, to get medical help, or in times of war, to move fluidly.

In fact, as Ernie Stone says, "During times of war, bridges become critical targets to disrupt transportation of troops and supplies. Protecting bridges is as important as protecting fuel refineries."

In peace time, you don't think of them collapsing. But, on 8/1/2007, that's what happened. The Interstate 35W bridge collapsed into the Mississippi River. It was Minnesota's third most traveled bridge.¹ Its construction had begun in 1964.²

After this collapse, the MN legislature passed laws to provide funding to either renovate or replace certain types of bridges.³

Bridges built at a certain time were "fracture critical." That is, if anything went wrong, the whole bridge would collapse, like the I-35 bridge.⁴

Built in 1960, the Eisenhower Bridge was also "fracture critical." It was also at the end of its lifespan. Therefore, it was eligible for this Chapter 152 bonding money.

The Eisenhower Bridge was a two-lane, steel through-truss bridge. It was 1,631' long, 35' wide, and 65' above the Mississippi River.⁵ This U. S. Highway 63 bridge connected Red Wing, MN, with Hager City, WI.

No other bridges cross the Mississippi River for 30 miles in either direction.⁶

Therefore, MnDOT, WisDOT, the FHWA, and the City of Red Wing worked together to build the current Eisenhower Bridge of Valor. Construction of the new steel box girder bridge began in 2017.⁷

It has a 52'4" width, two overlooks on the upstream side, and seven spans with six piers. It is expected to last 100 years.⁸

Bridges, like the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor, were built so only affected sections could collapse, not the whole bridge.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was on Thursday, 11/21/2019, an overcast, blustery, fall day. A small crowd of people gathered to watch many veterans, law enforcement, and firefighters cross the bridge toward Red Wing. Several officials spoke. Cameras clicked.

The bridge officially opened to traffic on 11/22/2019.

While it is not unusual to commemorate a bridge to a specific person, the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor is unique. It recognizes all people of valor: veterans from all wars—past, present, and future; law enforcement, firefighters, heroic citizens, and the families of the brave.

In the beginning, no one knew what the final name would be. Everyone looked at the possibilities.

Here's how the story unfolded...

The Eisenhower Bridge of Valor Committee defined their purpose as follows:

Mission Statement

To put forth and legislate a name for the new bridge that will have a far-reaching impact for a greater good. The purpose will be one of honor, healing, remembrance, and inspiration. The timeless message will be supported and defined by art and inscription.

Daniel Ludwig, former American Legion National Commander, wrote his thoughts about the bridge in a poem. He is a U. S. Navy Vet with the rank MM1(SS)(DV). MM1 for Machinist Mate First Class. SS for Submarine qualified. DV for Qualified scuba diver.

What's in a Name?

Eisenhower Bridge of Valor—it is a simple name.
However, it speaks volumes.
It speaks to us to seek truth.
It speaks to us to defend freedom.

Eisenhower Bridge of Valor can inspire us to remember and honor all those acts of valor by our warriors in our military, by our law enforcement, firefighters, and by everyday citizens.

It can inspire us to be better citizens,
To cherish the privileges of freedom, and to understand the responsibilities that freedom requires.

It can aid us in teaching freedom's privileges and responsibilities to our youth.

It can inspire us to be kind to each other.
It can be a bridge of hope and healing to all who struggle with inner demons.

It is a simple name, but it speaks volumes.

Many people like the name.
We like the name.
We hope you do, too!

Preface

Bridges allow safe passage from one shoreline to another. We may marvel at the structure, the materials, or the workmanship...at first. As the days pass, our thoughts drift inward whenever we cross the same bridge. The bridge then blurs into the background.

But every bridge has a story. The Eisenhower Bridge of Valor in Red Wing, Minnesota, is no exception. This bridge doesn't just connect Minnesota with Wisconsin on Highway 63. It connects people from the past to the present, with a promise for the future...all because of a ***name***.

The key word in The Eisenhower Bridge of Valor is **valor**. Valor equals extreme courage in the face of great danger with little regard for oneself. It defines those who put themselves in harm's way physically and knowingly on a daily basis for the rest of us, for a greater good.

Military veterans, police officers, and firefighters surely are people of valor. Veterans risk their lives to defend our freedoms. Police officers risk their lives to ensure our safety. Firefighters risk their lives to keep us out of harm's way.

Still, valor also describes the everyday citizen who pulls someone out of a burning car or pulls a child to safety, as a car speeds toward her.

Valor then refers to personal bravery. In other words, The Eisenhower Bridge of Valor means something special for people who serve valiantly and for the families of the brave.

This bridge's story includes a past President of the United States, but revolves around military veterans, law enforcement, firefighters, one city, countless citizens, two states, one national organization, five boys and their families, three governors, two senators, and the determination of one woman, two men, and one representative who believed valor was worth fighting for...

It is 1960. Red Wing, Minnesota, the seat of Goodhue County, has a population of 10,528.⁹

On a cold November day, at the opening of the Eisenhower Bridge, thousands flocked to Red Wing for the parade. A little girl observed her father asking the 34th President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Hey, Ike, how about a round of golf?" Ike replied, "I would if I had time."

In 1942, when President Eisenhower was a General, he had commanded the Allied Forces when they landed in North Africa. On D-Day, 1944, he commanded the troops when they invaded France.¹⁰

In 1951, he commanded the new NATO forces.¹¹

On 6/29/1956, President Eisenhower signed legislation for the construction of the U. S. Interstate Highway System.¹² Therefore, it was fitting that the previous Hwy 63 bridge was named after him.

Despite President Eisenhower's achievements, some would say the true honor goes to those military heroes who engaged in combat with the enemy. For without them, we might not have our freedom today.

Although she didn't know it on that November day, that little girl, Jane Van Deusen (Drazkowski), a native of Red Wing, would make sure those sacrifices would be remembered and honored. She just didn't realize it would involve the same bridge. Nor could she have known how five Red Wing men who fought in the war and their families would inspire her.

After you read a short version of these men's stories, perhaps, you, too, will be inspired...

Cultural Highlights

Check these prices from **1960**:

gallon of gas = 31 cents³⁸

½ gallon of milk = 52 cents³⁹

loaf of bread = 20 cents⁴⁰

The average income per year was \$5,600.⁴¹

Wilson Greatbatch invented the first implantable heart pacemaker.⁴²

Dr. Theodore Maiman invented the laser.⁴³

Vince Lombardi was the coach of the Green Bay Packers.

The U. S. launched the first Weather Satellite TIROS-1.⁴⁴



Thomas Edward Reitmann

According to Ed Reitmann, his older brother, Thomas Edward Reitmann, always had a leading role in high school plays and musicals. In fact, the caption in his high school yearbook read “not the original leading man, just one of them.”

© The Virtual Wall⁶¹

After his high school graduation in 1948, he served in the Navy for four years and then got out.

Tom went to college on the GI Bill. He studied radio, because his brother, Bill, was in radio. After college, Tom headed to California to work at a radio station for one or two years.

Yet, he kept fantasizing about being a pilot. What if?

So, around 1962 or '63, Tom decided to join the Air Force for reasons unknown, other than he had an interest in flying.

He met his wife, a flight attendant, while he was a passenger on a flight. They married while he was in flight training at Nellis Air Force Base (AFB) in Las Vegas, NV.

Tom flew a missile-with-a-man-in-it, otherwise known as an F-104 at 1,300 mph.

He went to Vietnam in 1964. In either 1964 or '65, he flew an F-105 squadron in a formation of four planes.

It was his 51st mission. “He was conducting a strike against the Cao Nung railroad bridge on the main rail-line connecting Hanoi and the People’s Republic of China. Then-Captain Thomas E. Reitmann was flying an F-105D tail #61-0182.”¹³

Cultural Highlights

In 1962:

Sam Walton opened the first Walmart in Rogers, Arkansas.⁴⁵

In the United Kingdom, the Beatles released “Love Me Do,” their first single.⁴⁶

It was the first time LEDs were used for displays.⁴⁷

In 1963:

Harvey Ross Ball, a graphic artist in Worcester, Massachusetts, invented the Smiley Face.⁴⁸

The U. S. used zip codes for the first time.⁴⁹

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald.⁵⁰

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his “I Have A Dream” speech.⁵¹

An enemy's missile shot the tail off his plane on 12/1/1965, about 20 miles north of Hanoi. The other three planes tried to follow him, but his plane went too low, and he was killed at age 34. Initially, his body was not recovered. While MIA, he was promoted to Major.¹⁴

At that time, Tom and his wife had four children. The youngest, a 6-month old, had never met him.

As of 2009, his remains had not been found. The POW-MIA Accounting Command of the Department of Defense contacted Ed to get a DNA sample.

At the time, it wasn't uncommon for remains to be misidentified. If just one mortician said an identity didn't match, the remains were thought to be someone else's.

Ed went to the Veterans' Administration (VA) in Minneapolis to give a DNA sample. The military finally found Tom's remains and identified them on 5/2/2011. It was good for the family to finally have closure.

Tom was buried with a full military ceremony in Arlington Cemetery in Washington, DC.

Ed said Tom was a wonderful brother. Tom respected women and his elders. He was a Boy Scout and was a server in a Roman Catholic church.

In fact, Tom had gone to Mass and taken communion the morning of the day he was shot down. So, Ed knows for sure that Tom is in heaven.

In 1967, three more of these five Red Wing men enlisted in the military. Their stories are in the order of enlistment.



Lee Charles Kinney

The way Chuck Kinney, one of Lee Charles Kinney's brothers, tells it, they grew up in the country and owned a bar in Prairie Island in Welch, MN.

Lee was the oldest in the family. He was a leader, a decision maker.

© The Virtual Wall⁶²

He loved horses and thought of being a bull rider and a cattle rancher after his military service. He also dreamed of riding in rodeos.

Lee was passionate about his family and friends. He wanted to keep the family together. Lee would be the first to defend and take care of any situations involving them.

They heard many war stories and stories of bravery from the patrons who stopped at the bar. Lee wanted to be part of that story. He enlisted in the U. S. Marine Corps (USMC) within a month of two of his high school graduation. His mother had to sign in order for him to enlist, because his brother Cal was also serving active duty at the same time.

Lee was bummed that he was too short to be in the special forces.

He served in the military for 13 months during his first tour of duty. The military felt his good typing skills should be used in the capacity of a supply officer.

But Lee signed up for a second tour to get into the action. He went on several missions. On his last mission, Lee's unit went in to help another platoon. They got ambushed, then overtaken by the enemy. His small unit of 13 Marines was met by 350 of the enemy.

Corporal Lee Charles Kinney was killed on 2/8/1968 in Quang Nam Province in South Vietnam. He was 21.¹⁵

Cultural Highlights

1967:

Bud Grant became head coach for the MN Vikings.

The Green Bay Packers played the Kansas City Chiefs in the first Super Bowl. The Packers won 35-10.⁵²

By this time, the Hippie counterculture movement was in full swing. This movement began by protesting the Vietnam War, its only purpose.⁵³

Hippies were against authority figures and traditional values.

Bright-colored clothing became popular.

1969:

The ARPANET, the predecessor to the Internet, established its first computer-to-computer link.⁵⁴

The lone survivor was in a fox hole. That survivor slipped a dead Vietnamese over him to escape detection. It worked. He laid there for several hours before making his escape.

The Kinney family was devastated by the news. They tried to honor Lee by keeping the horses and cattle for several years before selling them after everyone went their own separate ways.

One of his brothers even named his son, Lee Charles Kinney, in Lee's memory.



Charles Lee Hauschildt

According to the family's comments on The Virtual Wall, Chuck loved the outdoors and animals. One of his many pets was a squirrel named Buddy.¹⁶

He received many awards as a Boy Scout and loved to tinker with cars. In fact, he dreamed of becoming an auto

© The Virtual Wall⁶³ mechanic.¹⁷

One of his thrills was driving his stock car in competition.¹⁸

On 10/27/1966, Chuck was inducted into the Army. He trained at Fort Riley, Kansas. He was assigned to be a tank driver.¹⁹

On 12/8/1967, Army Private First-Class Charles Lee Hauschildt was killed in Binh Duong Province in South Vietnam. He was 20 years old.²⁰



Fredrick H. Hemphill

Bob Hemphill, Fred's brother, says Fred was the youngest of six children.

When Fred was 19-years old, he was engaged to be married. He also wanted to do something in the medical field.

© The Virtual Wall⁶⁴ Since his brothers had already served in the military, the family felt they had paid their dues. They didn't want Fred to enlist. But he was drafted in the Army and became a medic.

Once, when Fred was riding in a jeep, a land mine went off. Shrapnel went in behind his ear and lodged in his brain. Fredrick H. Hemphill was killed on 1/14/1968 in Kontum Province, in South Vietnam. He was 20.²¹

Shortly thereafter, on 1/31/1968, the Tet Offensive began.²²

Tet Offensive

The North Vietnamese government used at least 85,000 troops to attack cities, towns, villages, and military installations in South Vietnam. The Tet Offensive got its name from the Vietnamese New Year, when the attacks took place.²³

This was North Vietnam's last-ditch effort to advance against the U. S.-backed South Vietnam. North Vietnamese wanted to give the impression they were more powerful than they actually were.²⁴

Casualties mounted on both sides. Some in the U. S. media supported the theory that the North Vietnamese would never quit. American citizens, therefore, became increasingly disenchanted with the Vietnam War.²⁵

U. S. military leaders had a strategy for success; however, President Lyndon B. Johnson would not authorize additional troops.²⁶

About a year and a half later, the fifth Red Wing man would enlist...



Michael John Lally

Joan Kovacs and Jim Lally recounted several memories of their brother, Mike.

A lot of people liked Mike. He had a genial personality and a sense of fun. He regularly played drums and

© The Virtual Wall⁶⁵ the guitar in several bands in the Red Wing area.

Mike had gone to UW-River Falls for one year. He knew he would be drafted and didn't like the uncertainty of waiting for that day. After his service, he planned to marry his girlfriend.

Jim had gotten out of the service in 1965 and told Mike he would help him get to Canada to avoid the draft, due to all the turmoil in the U. S. at that time.

But Mike felt he had to get up in the morning and look at himself in the mirror every day. So, Mike joined the U. S. Army right away in the fall of 1969. He hoped he could later use the GI Bill to go back to school.

On 5/8/1970, the Friday before Mother's Day, Private First-Class Michael John Lally was killed from shrapnel wounds received from a B40 rocket. He had been on night patrol in Quang Ngai Province in South Vietnam. He was 20 years old.²⁷

Jim and Joan felt numb after hearing the news.

Mike's funeral was one of the largest the Red Wing Catholic Church had ever had at that time. Friends even came from the East Coast.

U. S. military leaders had a strategy for success; however, President Lyndon B. Johnson would not authorize additional troops. (See endnote 26.)

1970:

President Richard Nixon ordered an invasion of Cambodia, which increased the scope of the Vietnam War.⁵⁵

Bell-bottomed pants were popular.⁵⁶

On Sunday, 8/23/1970, at the Red Wing Athletic Field, the bands Mike had played music with, plus other local bands, held a concert to raise funds to buy musical instruments for the children at the Vasa Children's Home in Red Wing.

The money raised also covered the purchase of a special marker for Mike at the cemetery. That marker commemorates the concert and Mike's musical involvement.

Mike is buried in the Lally family plot at Calvary Cemetery in Red Wing.

All five of these men gave the ultimate sacrifice. May they rest in peace.

Their stories remind us that heroic individuals are people, too. They are passionate about their interests. They have hopes and dreams for the future.

And, along the way, they may deal with extreme adversity.

A person doesn't necessarily have to pay the ultimate price to be considered heroic. He or she simply has to have the courage to do what is right, even in a time of danger.

Some day that heroic person could be YOU.

Let's now fast forward to the year 2018.

The Initial Journey

It is 2018. Red Wing has an estimated population of 16,414.²⁸

The media covered the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive extensively. A large number of people in Red Wing gathered to remember. It was a long-overdue, welcome home for the Vietnam Vets.

Now an adult, Jane Drazkowski was curious as to who in Red Wing may have fallen during the Vietnam War. She discovered five local boys who had families here. Their stories appeared earlier in this report. Jane had also heard of Bridges for the Fallen, a national organization that honored fallen military by dedicating bridges to them.

In Minnesota, the first bridge named after a fallen soldier was the Corporal Benjamin S. Kopp Memorial Bridge at the junction of County Road 46 and Highway 52. It was dedicated on 8/9/2017 in Rosemount. Corporal Benjamin Kopp had been a U. S. Army Ranger.²⁹

Jane got to know Ben's mother, Jill Stephenson, and the Gold Star Mom organization. A Gold Star meant that mother had lost a child in combat. Jane was impressed with the movement to recognize the Fallen.

Around this time, Jane drove to Walmart via a route she had never taken before. She went by the Goodhue County Historical Society. A sign there advertised a talk that night about "Reflections on Vietnam" by Red Wing journalist Arlin Albrecht. He had gone to Vietnam to report on stories of hometown boys serving there.

With so many unexpected circumstances that knit together, Jane felt called to attend. Arlin said he was often the last person from home to see the boys before they died. Arlin had had unlimited access in MASH units, on aircraft carriers, and on fighter jets. He believed these brave soldiers were terribly underappreciated.

2018 Prices:

A gallon of gas = \$2.72⁵⁷

Gallon of milk = \$3.27⁵⁸

A loaf of bread = \$2.50⁵⁹

Avg. annual income = \$63,179⁶⁰

Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) refers to a U. S. Army medical unit serving in a combat area.

Arlin closed by stating, "Regardless of how you feel about the Vietnam War, we owe these boys and their families a huge debt of gratitude."

These words made a profound impact on Jane. She sensed the deep emotions in the room and believed Arlin's first-hand accounts of what happened. Jane felt a sense of responsibility to take it forward.

She recalled Michael John Lally's sister, Joan Kovacs, standing up and asking if anyone had more information about her brother. Joan was afraid he might be forgotten.

Jane was stunned...50 years later...in a packed room...someone still visibly cared!

Jane thought of her grandmother. She had five kids who served in the military, six if you counted one of the spouses. But all of them came home.

She couldn't imagine the loss Joan must have felt.

Back then, if you had someone actively serving in World War II, you displayed a blue star in the window.³⁰ Jane's grandmother had five stars, which was unusual.

Since her family has so many veterans, Jane has always had a sense of patriotism. The flag meant something profound.

It was this deep sense of honor that urged her to keep checking into what was unfolding before her eyes.

About ten days later, Jane wore a military name tag when she went to the grocery store.

Seeing the name tag, one grocery store clerk recounted a story about her brother, Marine Lee Charles Kinney.

The clerk cried and said it felt like yesterday.

A few days later, Jane had coffee with a friend, who mentioned her Dad's cousin was Thomas Reitmann

If you had someone actively serving in WWII, you displayed a blue star in the window. (See endnote 30.)

(another of the five boys). Her friend had just moved him to Arlington Cemetery two years before. That came to be known as one of the most moving experiences in her friend's life.

Jane told her husband it was like she had met a third member of the five families she didn't know were killed in Vietnam. Tom told her she had better do something about that.

At this point, everything seemed to fall into place:

- On 5/26/2017, there had been a groundbreaking ceremony for the new, as-yet-to-be-named U. S. Highway 63 bridge.³¹
- As a deeply patriotic person, Jane noticed the Vietnam War media coverage.
- She met family members of the Fallen.
- She learned about Bridges for the Fallen.

Jane and her husband, Tom, then looked to see what other patriotic displays were in Red Wing:

- John Rich Park had a Purple Heart Memorial.
- There was a Memorial Park.
- Levee Park had a soldier and a statue.

An Idea Is Born

Jane relayed her information at a Tea Party meeting, facilitated by Ernie Stone. There, the idea blossomed to re-name the bridge.

Jane thought of honoring a fallen soldier from the Vietnam War. Ernie wanted to name it "Vietnam Memorial Bridge" for all service members from the Vietnam War.

Jane relayed her information at a Tea Party meeting, facilitated by Ernie Stone. There, the idea blossomed to re-name the bridge.

Malon Heath brought a U. S. Marine Corps Veteran named Dave Zien to one of the meetings. Dave wrote Jane a note with these words: "We, the undersigned, respectfully request the Eisenhower Bridge, dedicated in November of 1960, be formally, legislatively named to reflect the integrity of the Bridge of Valor."

Dave had also served as a Wisconsin state senator for 14 years. He is known as the Million-Mile Harley Guy. He has talked many times about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and says all veterans have PTSD to some degree. Dave still has nightmares.

Some Vietnam Vets have a saying between them when they meet. One Vet asks, "When were you in Vietnam?" The other replies, "Last night."

Dave said law enforcement, firefighters, and the military serve to protect every single person. Military serves for love of country. We should honor these people because they're still suffering.

Jane felt even more driven. In her mind, forward was the only direction. It was the right thing to do.

On the Road

Next, Jane met with veterans' groups up and down on both sides of the Mississippi River. Vets emphasized that the bridge's name should NOT recognize any specific person or war.

One Vet insisted the bridge should recognize veterans, law enforcement, firefighters, and heroic citizens of the past, present, and future. Because all of these people exemplify valor.

Everyone loved the name "Bridge of Valor." Jane collected written endorsements from local, state, and national groups.

Even a Navy Seal who swam the length of the Mississippi River from the north to the Gulf endorsed the project because he had passed through Red Wing.

One Vet insisted the bridge should recognize veterans, law enforcement, firefighters, and heroic citizens of the past, present, and future. Because all of these people exemplify valor.

Some people in the community thought there were enough tributes to veterans. They wanted the bridge to recognize some other group.

Yet, veterans will all tell you that when they signed up to serve, they did it for love of country and for our way of life. Not for any specific person, but rather for all U. S. citizens.

Their service and sacrifice enable the rest of us to enjoy freedom.

For that, the Bridge of Valor was appropriate. Its meaning transcended time for so many people. It spoke to the core of greatness.

Making It Official

During this time, Malon Heath approached legislators about the bridge name. Dave Zien had also contacted the offices of then Governor Mark Dayton (MN) and Governor Scott Walker (WI).

After collecting the endorsements, Jane told Representative Barb Haley of HD21A about the idea for naming the bridge as well.

Shortly thereafter, Rep. Haley crafted a bill to make the "Bridge of Valor" name official.³²

Rep. Haley and MN Senator Mike Goggin took the goals and signed endorsements to the MN legislature. Senator Mike Goggin crafted a companion bill in the Senate.³³

Jane spoke at both the House and Senate Transportation Committees.

Ernie testified three times. In fact, he would go to work as early as 4 a.m. in Cannon Falls, so he could testify and then return to finish his workday.

Yet, veterans will all tell you that when they signed up to serve, they did it for love of country and for our way of life. Not for any specific person, but rather for all U. S. citizens.

Another Vet, Merle Larson, spoke about the importance of bridges.

A Marine Mom took time off work to read the "What's in a Name?" poem by Dan Ludwig at the MN Senate Transportation Committee. A Wisconsin Gold-Star wife also spoke about honoring our Fallen.

Afterward, Rep. Haley and Jane proceeded to the Ways & Means Committee, the last stop for the bill. (The Ways & Means Committee is made up of the Chairs from all the different committees.)

The Chairs were vehement on keeping "Eisenhower" in the name.

Jane's husband, Tom, tried to contact a member of the Eisenhower family for their input. No one responded.

Ernie, Dan, and Jane talked with legislators later. There was NO budging on the name "Eisenhower." It had to be incorporated into the new name or the bill wouldn't be passed. Therefore, it became the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor.

Some people who supported the effort originally were disappointed. They withdrew because of the addition of "Eisenhower." Others stayed firm in their commitment to it, regardless.

The Bill Passes the House

On 5/24/2019, the MN House passed the HF6 Transportation Omnibus Bill, which named the new bridge the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor.³⁴

The Bill then advanced to the MN Senate floor, where it passed as well.³⁵

Afterward, Rep. Haley created "I like Ike" buttons to lighten the mood.

There was NO budging on the name "Eisenhower." It had to be incorporated into the new name or the bill wouldn't be passed.

The Bill Becomes Official

On 6/11/2019, MN Governor Tim Walz signed the bill. The Highway 63 bridge was now officially the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor.³⁶

30-40 people from both Wisconsin and Minnesota attended the signing. Jane, Ernie, and Joan Kovacs were among them.

Jane had no regrets. She felt blessed to have met so many decent, incredible human beings along the way.

The Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was on Thursday, 11/21/2019, an overcast, blustery, fall day. A small crowd of people gathered to watch many veterans, law enforcement, and firefighters cross the bridge toward Red Wing. Several officials spoke. Cameras clicked.

The bridge officially opened to traffic on 11/22/2019.

Immediately thereafter, demolition began on the old Highway 63 Eisenhower Bridge.

The Next Phase

Now that the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor is official, the next phase will produce art and inscription describing the meaning of the bridge.

The new bridge has two overlooks: one on the Minnesota side and one on the Wisconsin side. There are 33 artistic opportunities on the walkway to describe the what and who of the bridge's meaning and history.

The main celebration for the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor will take place in August, 2020.

The bridge officially opened to traffic on 11/22/2019.

A Tribute

Vince Lombardi, Head Coach of the Green Bay Packers from 1959-1967, once said, "It is hard to have patience with a society that has sympathy only for the underprivileged. We must have sympathy for the doer, too. We speak of freedom. Sometimes I think we confuse it with license.

"We must help the underprivileged, certainly. But let us also respect success."

Lombardi continued, "...I think it's also a time for us to stand up and cheer for the doer, the achiever, one who recognizes a problem and does something about it, one who looks for something extra to do for his country—the winner, the leader."³⁷

Whichever war or crisis situation we encounter, we need someone with a winning mindset, a drive to serve, and the ability to excel.

A winning mindset could be to survive, win a war, protect a colleague, avert a crisis, de-escalate tension, protect a citizen, to name a few.

A drive to serve and the ability to excel make the goals of a winning mindset a reality.

To the doers, achievers, and problem solvers among us, success is not a dirty word. It can actually mean the difference between life and death.

Whether referring to the five men from Red Wing or the many others who lost their lives in a war or while serving citizens in a community, these people sacrificed their own lives, either to protect others or for love of the USA.

"...I think it's also a time for us to stand up and cheer for the doer, the achiever, one who recognizes a problem and does something about it, one who looks for something extra to do for his country—the winner, the leader." by Vince Lombardi (See endnote 37.)

The doers, achievers, and problem solvers among us defend our freedoms, secure our safety, and free us from dangerous situations.

These doers, achievers, and problem solvers are also known as veterans, law enforcement, firefighters, and citizens of valor.

Valor defines a higher purpose that the actor isn't even aware of until the crisis has passed.

This valor becomes instinctual, resides in the core, and shows its humble self only when needed.

No one asks for it specifically; yet, it is given.

No one looks for it specifically. It just shows itself unexpectedly.

No one says valor resides within himself. Instead, others recognize him for valor he displays.

This tribute recognizes all veterans of all wars—past, present, and future, law enforcement, firefighters, and all heroic citizens. It acknowledges their service and their valor. It also serves as a model we can all aspire to.

Final Thoughts

If you really want to pay tribute whenever you drive, walk, or bike across the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor, think of the sacrifices of those who defend your freedom and secure your safety.

Reflect on what it must feel like to serve selflessly, humbly, and courageously. Think of the families of the Fallen.

Take time to read the inscriptions and to look at the art.

Remember "What's in a Name?" by Daniel Ludwig, former American Legion National Commander:

Valor defines a higher purpose that the actor isn't even aware of until the crisis has passed.

What's in a Name?

Eisenhower Bridge of Valor—it is a simple name.
However, it speaks volumes.
It speaks to us to seek truth.
It speaks to us to defend freedom.

Eisenhower Bridge of Valor can inspire us to remember and honor all those acts of valor by our warriors in our military, by our law enforcement, firefighters, and by everyday citizens.

It can inspire us to be better citizens,
To cherish the privileges of freedom, and to understand the responsibilities that freedom requires.

It can aid us in teaching freedom's privileges and responsibilities to our youth.

It can inspire us to be kind to each other.
It can be a bridge of hope and healing to all who struggle with inner demons.

It is a simple name, but it speaks volumes.

Many people like the name.
We like the name.
We hope you do, too!

There is always a higher purpose, if only we will reach for it.

There will always be a brighter tomorrow, if only we will create it.

There will always be people of valor, if only we will recognize them, respect them, and honor them.

And that's how one small-town bridge inspired a two-state movement!



Ribbon-cutting ceremony on 11/21/2019 by Jane Drazkowski

Acknowledgments



The families of the five Fallen Red Wing young men in Vietnam...Lee Charles Kinney, Thomas Edward Reitmann, Michael John Lally, Fredrick H. Hemphill, and Charles Lee Hauschildt. Their sacrifice has enabled us to timelessly honor so many.

In no specific order, the following offered support, wisdom, and encouragement for the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor. They may or may not support retaining the name Eisenhower, but their contributions made a difference, nonetheless:

Retired USMC Colonel Richard Johnson for all his wisdom, a lifetime of service, and making the project fun. Richard was also instrumental in making sure Red Wing became a Purple Heart City.

Navy Vietnam Veteran and former National Commander of the American Legion Daniel Ludwig for his wisdom

Veteran Andru Peters. US 7th Army 1963-1965. Currently American Legion Commander, Wabasha County. Was SP4, E-4.

Veteran Devin Feuerhelm. Army 100th Battalion 442nd Infantry our of Hawaii. Rank E-5 Deployed 2005 to Balad Iraq. Commander of the Bay City American Legion Post 357 from 2014 to 2019. Currently the Post Adjutant.

USMC Vietnam Veteran and former Wisconsin Senator David Zien whose generosity and creativity enabled us to legislate a new name for the bridge

Proud American Patriots Malon and Pat Heath

Red Wing Tea Party members

US Marine Corps mother Karen Bahmer Leum and Wisconsin Gold Star wife Jessica Schmitt of Fallen Master Sgt. Derrick Schmitt. Jessica and Karen generously stepped up on short notice to testify at the Senate Transportation Committee on a stormy winter day.

Jan and Merle Larson for driving from Cannon Falls to testify at the MN Capitol and for all the encouragement for two years

Dr. Jonathan Lombardo for his support of veterans and his deuce and a half to honor them

American Legion Post # 54 Commander and Vietnam veteran Darwin Christofferson, Dave Birkenmayer, Gene Leifeld, Lance Gerrick, and all who served

Minnesota Gold Star moms Lisa DeLaCruz (Fallen USMC Sgt. Dillon Semolina) and Jill Stephenson (Fallen US Army Ranger Cpl Benjamin Kopp) who remind us why we remember and honor our fallen...no matter what!

Vietnam veteran Butch Berlin who had the best idea!

The ladies at Hosanna who cheered and prayed

Lottie Aslakson for her tireless support of our veterans

Representative Barb Haley and Senator Mike Goggin who worked so very hard and made sure it became a law

Michael Dougherty, District 6 Director of communications and public engagement at MnDOT, and Jay Owens, Red Wing City Engineer who answered so many questions

Rob Mador with Bridges For The Fallen who always had time for a question and has helped countless families in every state of the USA honor a lost hero

Becky Winckler is Gold Star Wife of Fallen 1SG Minnesota Red Bull Greg L. Winckler.

Shelley Koester Pohlmann. DAR. Jane thanks her for also trying to do the right thing.

Marcia Van Gordon. Minnesota Marine Mom; Anne, Vicki, Judy, Elaine, Nora

Wisconsin Representative Warren Petryk

Patriot Guard guys and Sergeant Charles M. Ogden. USMC 69-74, Da Nang, Bien Hoa, and Nam Phong, Thailand

Cpl King R. Cole. 3rd 155 Guns, Nam 68/69, Da Nang at The Northern Artillery Cantonment, An Hoa Combat Base, LZ Ross in The Que Son Valley

Written endorsements for the "Bridge of Valor":

American Legion Post 54. Darwin Christofferson
Republican Party, Pierce County. Stephanie Brown
VFW Post 305, Eau Claire, WI. Kevin Johnson

Bay City American Legion Post 357. Devin Feuerhelm
Victory and Valor for Veterans. Jessica Schmitt
Legacies Alive. Mark Faldowski and Chris Ring
America's Mighty Warriors. Debbie Lee
Serenity Hope Respite Home. Lisa De La Cruz
Flags for Veterans. James Popwell
America's Gold Star Families. Patti Smith
Flags for Fallen Military. David Larson
Army Survivor Outreach Services with numerous Gold Star Families. Gail
Springborg
VFW Post 1218. Joyce Maldonado
AMVET Post 19. Janice Hinz
Pierce County VFW Post 9060. Roger Klegan
Military Order of Purple Heart, Chapter 1977. James Noll
Marine Corps League Detachment 510. Retired USMC Colonel Richard Johnson, Red
Wing
Former WI Senator and Vietnam Veteran Dave Zien
Red Wing Elks Lodge #845. Justin Key
Andru Peters. US 7th Army 1963-1965. Currently American Legion Commander,
Wabasha County. Was SP4, E-4.
Pierce County Voiture of the 40^{et} 8. Donna Swenson
American Legion Post 204. Kinne-Engelhart-Ellsworth-Donna Swenson

MN attendees at Governor Walz's formal signing of the bill:

Roger Pohlmann. Red Wing Chief of Police and Veteran, Desert Storm—Air Force
Security Police Staff Sergeant; Operation Iraqi Freedom—Army National Guard 1st
Lieutenant
Kathy Altstatt Bunkers. Served in U. S. Army, USMC Veteran Mom
Julie Foreman. U. S. Army Vet with active duty USMC son
Joan Kovacs. Gold Star Sister to Michael Lally KIA Vietnam
Andru Peters. Veteran
Dodie and Mike Harris with Tom Kosec. Tom is cousin to Thomas Reitmann, U. S.
Air Force pilot KIA Vietnam
Ernie Stone
Jane Drazkowski
Tom Drazkowski
Greg Drazkowski. Retired Wisconsin Fire and Rescue

WI attendees at Governor Walz's formal signing of the bill:

Jessica Schmitt. Gold Star Wife, Victory and Valor for Vets (VVVP)
Jerry Simon. New Richmond VFW
Dave Green. New Richmond VFW
Candace Bettendorf. Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)

Jessica Jenkins. VVVP
Bryan Bodrog. Purple Heart Marine Veteran, VP VVVP
Jonathan Arnold. Army Veteran, VVVP
Linda Auger. Gold Star Mother
Breann Jenkin. Gold Star Family

Ernie Stone. Jane thanks him for believing in the project and for his support. Thank you for sticking with this project.

Tom Drazkowski. Jane thanks him for the endless support, wisdom, and humor to ensure this project kept moving forward.

Countless family and friends on both sides of the aisle, both sides of the Mississippi... too numerous to name...you know who you are...Thank You!

Resources

Bridges for the Fallen. Dedicating bridges to our Fallen to ensure their legacies are never forgotten. www.bridgesforthefallen.com or look for Bridges for the Fallen on Facebook. Video at <https://video.foxnews.com/v/5187347287001#sp=show-clips>

VA Home Front, National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, 877-424-3838

Minnesota Patriot Guard. A volunteer organization that ensures honor, dignity, and respect at memorial services for fallen military, honorably discharged veterans, and line of duty police, firefighters, and first responders. www.mnpatriotguard.org

Eagle's Healing Nest. A safe place for veterans, soldiers, and their families to heal from the invisible "wounds of war from the inside out." General office hours = 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Service to Veterans is available 24/7. Please call 320-351-6200 for emergency assistance.

If you are experiencing an emergency, please contact Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, Press 1. chatfree@VeteransCrisisLine.net

Dept. of Veteran Affairs, Suicide Prevention, 1-800-273-8255

Hiawatha Valley Family—Beyond the Yellow Ribbon. Connecting service members and their families with the community. www.hiawathavalleybtyr.org

BackingtheBlueLine. www.backingtheblueline.org/about-us

Minnesota Firefighter Initiative. <http://mnfireinitiative.com/>

Website for the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor. www.bridgeofvalor.com

Jane Drazkowski, janedraz@yahoo.com, 651-212-1593

Tim Alms. Professional Photographer, Red Wing, www.timalmsphoto.com, 651-380-8438

Jewel Pickert. B2B Copywriter, jewel@jewelpickert.com, 651-829-1423. Originally from Wisconsin, Jewel has lived in Minnesota since 1988.

About the Eisenhower Bridge of Valor Committee Co-Chairs

Jane Drazkowski:

"Nobody wakes up one morning and decides to name a bridge. I didn't either. I'm a retired pediatric oncology nurse who happened upon these circumstances and these wonderful people. I just tried to do the right thing, and I was the lucky one.

"I now volunteer in several military arenas...mentoring moms with children entering the Marine Corps, fundraising with Gold Star mothers to honor their children, and standing with the Minnesota Patriot Guard to honor our Fallen. We can never do enough for those who serve and families who suffer."

Ernie Stone:

"Two years before this special report was done, Jane attended a Red Wing Tea Party meeting to present a concept to honor the Fallen. Local men who gave everything to secure the freedom of others.

"I'll be straight. At first, I did not agree with the change, nor did I understand how influential the name of a seemingly ordinary structure could be. A bridge currently named after a great man, General Dwight David Eisenhower.

"Sometimes we believe something to be true in our very being; yet, never earnestly think it through as deserved. For me, this was one of those occasions.

"My Dad, at 17, joined the U. S. Navy well over a year before Pearl Harbor. 12 hours after the first torpedoes were dropped in Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked the Philippines, where my father was stationed. Five months later, they surrendered, and the Bataan Death March made its impression on his psyche.

"Since I cannot comprehend what my parents had to process to make it through life, I realized that I needed to listen to those who did not want the name to be about one person or one war.

"I now understand this, because I lack life's experience to witness the courage and meaning of Valor. The American story is not always about the leadership. It is, however, always about those who act without regard of self. Human instinct is strong with self-preservation. How can so few act without consideration of their own future?"

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