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HUEY helicopter under appreciated.

Retired chopper played role in combat, humanitarian actions.

It has been my pleasure in recent weeks to be in the company of some of America's great heroes of the past century, both military and civilian.

I count among those heroes the remarkable HUEY helicopter, which was retired after 50 years of service. This bird was co-author of the extraordinary military and unprecedented humanitarian effort in Vietnam. The humanitarianism took place during the heat of the battle. The GI fixed as he fought, he cured and educated and built in the middle of the battle.

Together, with HUEY we evacuated close to 1 million wounded, civilians as well as military, enemy as well as friendly combatants - and even a few scout dogs. Despite the fact that the HUEY is the most combat experienced aircraft in history (more than 7 million combat hours and more medals for heroism than any other plane), it gets as much respect as the warriors of that war. I have found few of the aviation museums I visit feature the incredible accomplishments of this bird.

It is my honor to join the heroic rotor heads who flew HUEY in the Alamo Chapter of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. There are no silk scarfs in this crowd; they have never flown to the face of God - they were between His ankles in the mud and blood of the battlefield. They bring to mind the prayer of the fighter pilot: "Lord, I pray for the eyes of an eagle, the quickness of a hummingbird, the reflexes of a cat, the radar of a cave bat, the heart of a lion and the balls of a helicopter pilot."

I remember reading of the combat-ending 100-hour mission celebration of a famous fighter pilot. Army helicopter pilots counted their missions in the thousands and there was no celebration and no going home. These men are pilots in the truest sense. It takes both hands and legs to fly that beast, there is very little riding - it is all flying.

The most recent meeting featured Viet Le, a member of the South Vietnamese Association of San Antonio. Le was lavish in his praise of the helicopter pilots and our humanitarian effort for his people. As our ally, he spent seven years of his life in a communist "re-education" gulag.

Heroism has an object and it differs from warrior to warrior, but for me the Reagan Library at its annual Celebration of Freedom Gala presented the kind of Americans I would die for. Present were some of the few conservatives from Hollywood, about half of the living Medal of Honor recipients and other wounded warriors. We were joined by firemen who responded so heroically to 9-11 to honor some great Americans who sacrifice for our troops.

A principal sponsor of this event is Gary Sinese. He is the new Bob Hope to our deployed GIs and with his Lt. Dan Band has brought comfort and home to thousands of weary warriors. Among those honored were Connie Stevens, Ann Margaret and George Schultz.

Schultz and the Library's namesake, Ronald Reagan, contrasted some great heavyweights of our past with some lightweight of today. His comments on the Middle East uprisings: They know what they are against; we need to know what they are for.

It was my pleasure to sit with Connie Stevens, who joined Bob Hope on many missions, and her two lovely daughters who also entertain troops. Connie said of the warriors present: "God took a little longer making you."

He also took a little longer making those wonderful civilians who support and are the foundation of warriors' sacrifices.

Retired Army Maj. Gen. Patrick Brady earned the Medal of Honor in Vietnam, flying more than 2,500 combat missions and helped rescue 5,000 wounded.

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