

Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act

In the spring of 1965, the nation was gripped by the struggle for civil rights. Nationally televised scenes of police officers attacking peaceful voting rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama on March 7, “Bloody Sunday” as it was later named, led then-President Lyndon Johnson to call on Congress to bring forth a powerful new law. A law meant to realize the vision encapsulated in the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, that the right to vote should not be based on race or the color of a person’s skin. A law designed to eliminate a pattern of discrimination that had hindered the process of voting for so many Americans for decades. The Voting Rights Act, as it came to be known, was signed into law on August 6, 1965, and continues to be one of this country’s greatest pieces of civil rights legislation.

While the 15th Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed that the right to vote would not be based on race or color, in practice, barriers were often set up to block individuals from voting. Some groups used tactics of violence or intimidation, but often, it was government action that served as the primary obstacle to minority voting. Examples of such barriers include literacy tests and poll taxes.

The Voting Rights Act prohibited literacy tests and strengthened the authority of the U.S. government to challenge the use of poll taxes in court. Further, the Act focused on certain states that had demonstrated discriminatory patterns in voting. These jurisdictions would have to submit proposed changes in their voting laws to the U.S. Attorney General or the United States District Court for the District of Columbia for approval before they could be enacted. In order to gain approval, the Federal government would need to ensure that the proposed language did not have a discriminatory purpose or effect.

The passage of the Voting Rights Act led to a dramatic increase in African American voter registration. For example, in March of 1965, only 6.7% of the African American population in the state of Mississippi was registered to vote. By November of 1988, that number had climbed to 74.2%. Similarly, the African American voter registration rate in Alabama rose from 19.3% to 68.4% during the same time frame.¹

As significant as these numbers unquestionably are, the Voting Rights Act should not be viewed merely as a solution to a regional problem. The threat to our democracy that is created when even a single person is deterred from exercising their right to vote cannot, and should not, be underestimated. For, what is a democracy, but the will of a majority of its citizens, and what is a majority, if not the collective spirit expressed through an endless stream of individual voices. To take away, even the smallest part, jeopardizes the whole.

As great as the effect of the Voting Rights Act has been on African American voter registration in the South, the true power of the law lies in its ability to enable voters throughout this country to express their concerns and take an active role in our democracy. The ripples created when this stone was cast into the waters of our democracy have spread throughout this country and continue to be felt today and will affect many future generations to come.

In recognition of the profound and lasting contribution of the Voting Rights Act to the strength of our democracy, and in honor of the courageous civil rights activists whose

¹ Source: U.S. Department of Justice

perseverance and sacrifices brought forth this law, I dedicate this 2005 edition of the *Connecticut State Register and Manual* to the observance of the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Susan Bysiewicz

Susan Bysiewicz
Secretary of the State



(From LBJ Library photo by Yoichi R. Okamoto)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. receives ceremonial pen used to sign the Voting Rights Act, from President Lyndon Johnson, August 6, 1965



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, #LC-USZ62-133090 Photograph by Peter Pettus

Participants in the 1965 Selma to Montgomery, Alabama voting rights march.

In Memory of

John A. Chapman

Phillip A. Jordan

Kemaphoom Ahn Chanawongse

Wilfredo Perez, Jr.

Richard Selden Eaton, Jr.

David Travis Friedrich

Anthony D'Agostino

Phillip R. Albert

Jeffrey Braun

Eric Thomas Paliwoda

Benjamin Gilman

Tyanna Avery-Felder

Felix Delgreco

Nathan B. Bruckenthal

Melissa Hobart

Jacob D. Martir

*Servicemen and women from Connecticut lost in
Afghanistan and Iraq,
March 2002 – September 2004**

* Photographs and biographical sketches for the service members listed above were published in the 2004 Edition of the Connecticut State Register and Manual.

In Memory of

William Brennan

Kevin J. Dempsey

Joseph Michael Nolan

Michael J. McMahon

Henry E. Irizarry

Robert Hoyt

Thomas E. Vitagliano

Lawrence R. Philippon

John T. Schmidt, III

Christopher Hoskins

Steve Reich

David Coullard

*Servicemen and women from Connecticut lost in
Afghanistan and Iraq,
October 2004 – October 2005*



Army Chief Warrant Officer William Brennan

Army Chief Warrant Officer William Brennan died Oct. 16, 2004 when the helicopter he was flying collided with another over Baghdad, [Iraq]. He grew up in Bethlehem, Conn., and leaves a wife and two daughters in Hawaii. He was 36 years old.

When one of William Brennan's nieces e-mailed him last year to sign a petition against the brewing U.S.-led war in Iraq, the Army helicopter pilot gently declined.

No one prays for peace more than a soldier, the Bethlehem native replied in an e-mail.

Brennan, his family said, was not nervous about leaving for Iraq. He was a capable soldier whose 15-year military career included a tour in Bosnia and flying surveillance helicopters around New York City after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Brennan's family [also] remembered him as a prankster, a fun-loving dad who doted on his daughters. Even as an adult, he was a kid who still collected comic books and had a weakness for Snickers bars.

"If you ever saw the 'Little Rascals Show,' he was just like that, always doing something," said his older brother, Nick Brennan.

As a kid, Will rode around the neighborhood with Ralph, the family cat, perched on his head.

He was the kind of guy who would make a friend wherever he went, a person who could make the most serious of folks crack a smile, his family said.

His nieces nicknamed him "Uncle Buck," after the goofy movie character played in a 1980s comedy by the late John Candy.

"He was like a 36-year-old child," Theresa Brennan, 18, said of her uncle. "The party didn't start until he was there."

William Brennan was an altar boy, graduating in 1986 from Holy Cross High School in Waterbury. He was a Boy Scout and 4-H member in Bethlehem and played lacrosse in high school, his family said.

Called "Will" by most of the family, he received his associate's degree from Mattatuck Community College before joining the Army and becoming a pilot. His inspiration was his late godfather, William Horvay, an Army helicopter pilot who served in Vietnam.

In one of the e-mails the family shared, Brennan wrote the niece who had asked him to sign the anti-war petition that he supports the right to demonstrate but also supports America's intervention in Iraq.

"Throughout your family's history there have been many times [your father, grandfathers, uncles and cousins] had to leave to defend freedom. Do not ever take your right to free speech for granted. Demonstrate all you want."

"I love demonstrations. The ones that realize that someone fought and died for them to have that right, I respect even more. Love, Uncle Will."



Marine Corporal Kevin J. Dempsey

Marine Cpl. Kevin J. Dempsey of Monroe died Nov. 13, 2004 in an explosion in Al Anbar Province in Iraq. Dempsey, a graduate of New Canaan High School, was in the 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion, attached to the II Marine Expeditionary Force. He was 23.

To the Marine Corps, he was Cpl. Kevin J. Dempsey of Monroe, Conn. To a lot of people in the state that now mourns his death, he was Jack.

Jack the wrestler. Jack the football player. Jack the New Canaan High School graduate. Jack, who enlisted with the Marines not long after 9/11.

“He just loved the Marines to death,” said Wayne Hildebrand, a friend who wrestled on the same team as Dempsey, the New Canaan Rams.

Both Dempsey and Hildebrand joined the service after high school; Hildebrand joined the Army. “He loved what he was doing, and I guess that’s what matters.”

The two talked on the phone before Dempsey went to Iraq. “He was kind of pumped about it,” Hildebrand said. “I wished him good luck and to come back safely. Unfortunately, it didn’t all work out that way.”

Barbara Dempsey [Cpl. Dempsey’s mother] said, “He was the love of our life. He had so much to offer the world. We’re so very proud of him.”

Paul Gallo, who coached Dempsey in wrestling until his 2000 graduation, remembered him as a serious kid, the kind an adult could sit down and talk to. Dempsey’s father had died young. Dempsey seemed to have been left with a sharp focus and a hardened will.

With only a couple of years of wrestling, he wasn’t the most technically adept, Gallo said. But the 189-pound wrestler was tough. “He just went out there and tried to destroy his opponent,” he said. “You were scared walking out against him.”

“He was a fighter his whole life,” Gallo said. “He wasn’t afraid of anything.”



Army Sergeant Joseph Michael Nolan

Army Sgt. Joseph Michael Nolan, a Waterbury native and graduate of Wolcott High School, died Nov. 18, [2004] in Fallujah, [Iraq]. He was 27 years old.

A military intelligence expert, [Sgt. Nolan] was killed when his vehicle was struck by an explosive device.

[Joseph Michael Nolan] was born in Waterbury and graduated from Wolcott High School, where he played football, said his uncle, John Nolan. He was one of three children.

From Connecticut, Nolan moved to Philadelphia to attend St. Joseph's University, his uncle said. Joseph was known to family members as "Joey" because his father is also named Joseph. A linguist, he began reading military books at age 10 and was fascinated with international affairs.

"He speaks Arabic," John Nolan said.

Nolan was assigned to the 312th Military Intelligence Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, from Fort Hood, Texas.

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Army Lieutenant Colonel Michael J. McMahon

Army Lt. Col. Michael J. McMahon, who grew up in West Hartford and graduated from Conard High School, died Nov. 27, 2004 in a plane crash in the mountains near Bamiyan, Afghanistan. McMahon, 41, left a wife, also a lieutenant colonel, and three children.

“He was a man who loved his troops and would take care of them,” Nora Boyer, one of McMahon’s sisters said.

In addition to being a leader, her brother was also a juggler, so adept at juggling rocks that locals would invite him into their homes to juggle, and then turn in their weapons, Boyer said.

Born at Fort Campbell, Ky., and raised in West Hartford, McMahon graduated in 1981 from Conard High School, where he was a cheerleader. “He was a real rah-rah guy,” Boyer said. He was the son of Elizabeth and retired Lt. Col. Dennis McMahon. McMahon’s stepmother was the late Maria O’Neil McMahon, a Hartford native and former professor in the social work department at St. Joseph College in West Hartford.

McMahon graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1985 and was commissioned in the aviation branch. He married his wife, Jeanette, in 1987.

Beginning his service as a platoon leader and executive officer in the 101st Airborne Division, McMahon would serve in various capacities at home and abroad in Europe and Korea before taking control of the 3rd Squadron, 4th U.S. Cavalry at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii on June 24, 2003.

McMahon believed in preparing to be great by being good at the basics, he said in a statement of philosophy on a military website. “Fundamental soldiering (marksmanship, common tasks, force protection) must be second nature to all troopers,” he wrote. “[T]he chain of command is sacred and is what truly sets us apart from those we’ve sworn to defend.”

“The health of the squadron is measured by the leadership we practice, the discipline we demand, and the expectation of safety we require,” he wrote.

McMahon had just completed a month long set of missions into the mountains, where he was commander, when he called his family members on Thanksgiving, Boyer said.

And he had a lot to be thankful for—especially his recently received birthday package of a family movie, an Army football T-shirt, and a banged-up bicycle helmet, she said.

The helmet was to remind him to keep his combat helmet on when he took off his helicopter pilot’s helmet, she said. Because one time, he didn’t.

“He quelled some sort of uprising outside of Herat when he was involved in rescuing people from a U.N. compound,” Boyer said, adding that it was then that he was hit in the head with a rock in the process—an incident for which he got a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, family members said.

So when they talked on Thanksgiving, McMahon told his sister that he’d wear the bicycle helmet with pride. “He said he was going to put the helmet on and try to take care of himself better,” she said.

Kelly Cook, another sister, said her brother was “charismatic, energetic, the pied piper, people followed him everywhere, and he didn’t say a bad thing about anybody. He’d ignore you if you did.”

And he was a multi-tasker, she said. “He’s the only person I knew who could watch TV, work on his computer, and beat all his nieces and nephews at Skip-Bo at the same time,” she said. Skip-Bo is a card game, she said.

“They’d say, ‘Mike, Mike, pay attention,’” she said. “And he’d say, ‘I am paying attention.’ And then he’d beat everybody.”

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Army Staff Sergeant Henry E. Irizarry

Army Staff Sgt. Henry E. Irizarry of Waterbury died Dec. 3, 2004 in Taji, Iraq, when a roadside bomb detonated near his vehicle. He was 38 years old.

“He wasn’t happy about going to Iraq, but he knew it was his duty,” said his widow, Jessica Irizarry. “He was in the reserves for 20 years, and he took the responsibility seriously. He was such a good man.”

Irizarry was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, of New York. Army officials said Irizarry’s duties included reconnaissance and gathering information on the enemy.

[In describing him], however, it was not his military ability that his wife recalled, but the personal side of a man she described as the love of her life and “the best father in the world.”

“He loved his children more than anything,” said Jessica Irizarry, who met her husband in New York, where they both lived before moving to Waterbury six years ago.

The family moved to Connecticut in 1997. They were married for seven years, and have three children. He has two from a previous relationship, and was a grandfather.

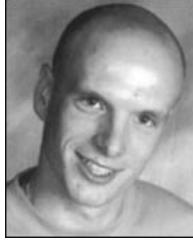
Jessica Irizarry described her husband as kind and generous, taking delight in making sure the couple and their children took a vacation each year and spent time together whenever possible.

“He loved Disney World in Florida,” she said. “And he loved to go to movies.”

Henry Irizarry was a leader at Aposento Alto Pentecostal Church in Waterbury.

“Church was very important to him,” his wife said.

He was employed at Industrial Heaters in Waterbury.



Army Specialist Robert Hoyt

Army Spc. Robert Hoyt, a member of the C Company, 102nd Infantry Battalion from Bristol, was killed Dec. 11, 2004 when his armored vehicle struck a bomb in Baghdad, [Iraq]. He was a graduate of E.O. Smith High School in Storrs and has family in the Ashford area. He was 21 years old.

Rob Hoyt and Steve Pozzato grew up together in Ashford, where they were next-door neighbors and best friends. They did typical kid things such as riding bicycles, playing video games and football and forming their own rock 'n' roll band.

After they graduated from E. O. Smith High School in Storrs in 2001, the two got jobs, lived together for a while and continued to pursue their dream of becoming professional musicians.

Until the day Hoyt announced that he was joining the Connecticut National Guard.

"I never saw it coming," Pozzato said. "He just wanted to do something. And if he felt like doing something, he did it."

"He died doing what was expected," Pozzato said. "He died a soldier, and he was a damn good one."

Pozzato, 21, remembered that Hoyt, whom he had known since age 3, was a talented drummer and songwriter for their band, called Clarion.

At E.O. Smith, several teachers recalled Hoyt as a quiet, intelligent, independent student with a sense of humor and a joy for music and life.

"He always had the desire to do the right thing," said Pat Baruzzi. "He was the strong, silent type."

Baruzzi, who had Hoyt in her English class for his junior year, said he would write often about his family, especially his mother, Kathleen Hoyt.

"He really was a fine young man," she said.



Army Staff Sergeant Thomas E. Vitagliano

Army Staff Sgt. Thomas E. Vitagliano was killed, along with another member of the 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, by a car bomb on Jan. 17, 2005 in Ramadi, Iraq. He was 33 and had been engaged to marry. He was a West Haven native.

[Staff Sgt. Vitagliano's family issued] a statement through a deacon of their church.

"Tommy's life revolved around family—his family here at home, and his military family with which he served and shared the bonds of family," they said. "His family asks for your prayers for themselves, and for all families who have lost loved ones in the service of their country."

Before his service in Iraq, Vitagliano, who was not married, was with his unit in South Korea, said [family spokesman] John Hoffman, a deacon at Holy Infant Church in West Haven.

Before joining the Army in 1990, Vitagliano had briefly served in the Marine Corps. Hoffman said he had also attended Virginia's Hargrave Military Academy.

"That's really where he made this connection to have his life in the military," Hoffman said.

Vitagliano was also a student at both Milford Academy and Notre Dame High School in West Haven.



Marine Lance Corporal Lawrence R. Philippon

Marine Lance Cpl. Lawrence R. Philippon of West Hartford was killed by small arms fire May 8, 2005 in Al Anbar province in western Iraq. He was 22 years old.

[Lance Cpl. Philippon] died fighting insurgents in western Iraq as part of a major offensive along the Syrian border. [He was] a rifleman with the 2nd Marine Division.

[Philippon], a Conard High School graduate, joined the Marine Corps two years ago, and was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment in January, [Marine Corps spokesman Lt. Barry] Edwards said. Philippon had asked for duty in Iraq after being chosen while in basic training for the Marine Corps Color Guard in Washington, D.C. Family members [noted that] Philippon carried the Marine Corps flag at the state funeral for President Reagan last June [2004].

Philippon had received the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal and the National Defense Service Medal, [Lt.] Edwards said.

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Marine Lance Corporal John T. Schmidt III

Marine Lance Cpl. John T. Schmidt III of Brookfield died May 11, 2005 in an army hospital in San Antonio of combat injuries he suffered Jan. 30, 2005 in Al Anbar province in Iraq. He was 21 years old.

In an interview with the Danbury News-Times this year, Schmidt's grandfather, Richard Backlund, said his grandson was a "typical teenager" who grew up in Danbury and moved to be with his mother in Florida, where he graduated from high school.

He returned to Connecticut for a year with his mother before surprising his family by telling them he wanted to enlist in the Marines, his grandparents said.

Schmidt had been in Iraq less than two weeks when he was wounded, the News-Times said.

He was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, N.C. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, Schmidt's unit was attached to 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force.

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Army Specialist Christopher Hoskins

Army Spec. Christopher Hoskins of Killingly died June 21, 2005 in Ramadi, Iraq, when his unit came under small arms fire. He had recently re-enlisted. He was 21 years old.

Claudia Hoskins and her daughter, Kristin Mayo, spoke to reporters in Killingly, where her son grew up and first expressed a desire to enlist in the Army.

“He was most proud of his time in the service,” Claudia [Hoskins] said, pointing to pictures of her son, which spanned from Hoskins as a baby, his kindergarten picture, playing Little League, and later, his graduation from Killingly High School, as well as basic training in the Army. “You can tell by the pictures that we loved him very much.”

Hoskins enlisted in 2003 and recently signed up for another four years.

[His mother] said that her son volunteered to go to Iraq when his unit was called because he had such strong camaraderie with the men in his unit.

“He didn’t have to go, but he went,” she said. “He enjoyed being a soldier and he died doing what he loved to do.”

Those who knew him said that Hoskins was not one to shy away from challenges. His high school wrestling coach said that Hoskins joined the team as a junior with no prior wrestling experience. But the quiet young man worked his way into the starting lineup of a team that eventually won a conference championship, coach Rich Bowen said.

The last time that Hoskins visited his family, in January, he told his mother what he would want if he died. It was a conversation, his mother said, that doesn't usually take place for someone so young. Her son would have turned 22 in August.

“I have no regrets about those conversations,” Claudia Hoskins said. “It helped me know as a mother what he wanted.”

Among Hoskins’ desires was to set up two memorial funds to benefit youngsters in Killingly, one to help pay for assistive technology in the school system because his younger brother, 15-year-old Sean, is a student with special needs. The other fund to be established will benefit the high school art department because Hoskins had a love of the graphic arts.



Army Major Steve Reich

U.S. Army Major Steve Reich, a West Point graduate and baseball standout from Washington, Conn., died June 28, 2005 with 15 others when militants shot down a helicopter in eastern Afghanistan. He was 34 years old, and had recently married.

[Maj. Reich] was a star pitcher in high school and for the U.S. Military Academy's baseball team. He carried the American flag while representing Team USA in 1993 at the World University games and pitched briefly in the minor leagues before being recalled to active military duty.

Reich pitched the championship game for his high school in 1987 before starring at the U.S. Military Academy.

"He was one of the best to ever come through here," said Bob Beretta, a spokesman for the Army baseball team. "When we say someone here is the best since, it's always the best since Steve Reich."

He was a member of Team USA in 1993, making 17 appearances on a team that played in Italy, Nicaragua and Cuba and the World University Games. He later signed with the Baltimore Orioles system, but pitched in only two games in 1996 before the military recalled him to active duty.

"You see this big huge smile of pride," [family spokesman Gary] Fitzherbert said, referring to Reich carrying the flag for Team USA.

"That's how we all remember him."

Reich, who was married in March, was stationed at Fort Stewart, Ga., and was on his fourth tour of duty.

Reich rose to the rank of major and for the past six months was a company commander in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, a unit known as "The Nightstalkers."

Reich learned to pilot three models of Army helicopters, including the MH-47, friends said. He met his wife, Jill, while stationed in Georgia, Fitzherbert said.

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Marine Sergeant David Coullard

Marine Sgt. David Coullard, who grew up in Glastonbury, was killed Aug. 1, 2005 by small-arms fire in Haditha, Iraq, with five others in a sniper team. He was 32 years old.

“He’s a hero,” said Anita Dziejcz, who as a single mother raised her son in Glastonbury. “He’s just like any fireman or policeman. You know the risks each time you head out. And that’s kind of prepared me. But it doesn’t make it any easier.”

Coullard, who had served in the Marines for about 10 years, loved the military, said childhood friend Ned Gompper. The events of Sept. 11, 2001, only “increased that love of defending the country,” said Gompper, who grew up across the street in Glastonbury and was an only child.

“We were brothers. That’s how close we were,” Gompper said. “He was out and signed back on. That’s how much he believed in defending his country.”

Coullard, a 1992 graduate of Glastonbury High School, joined the Marines after a brief stint at Manchester Community College. Anita Dziejcz said her son always wanted to be a Marine and was preoccupied with the military.

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