

**HB**

**283**

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## Juneau

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## Anchorage

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## **Representative Berta Gardner**

*House District 24*

### SPONSOR STATEMENT

HB 283

*"An Act designating the Alaska Highway and portion of the Richardson Highway as the Purple Heart Trail"*

The Purple Heart medal is a United States military decoration, awarded in the name of the President to those who have been wounded or killed while in service to their country. HB 283 seeks to recognize and honor award recipients by establishing a Purple Heart Trail in Alaska.

The Purple Heart Trail is a national project to designate portions of the interstate highway system as "Purple Heart Trail System", reminding Americans of the sacrifices made by their men and women in uniform. The original Purple Heart Trail was established in the Commonwealth of Virginia at Mt. Vernon and runs the length of the Virginia Highway.

Today, the Purple Heart Trail extends across the nation. Signage drawing attention to the designation is placed at appropriate intervals along the highways to stimulate thought and discussion among adults and children alike in contemplating the history of this nation, and those who have sacrificed for it.

Alaska's participation in this national effort is long overdue. We have a strong military tradition; an estimated 73,000 resident veterans, approximately 25,000 active duty military, and more serving in the National Guard. In recent months, many returning Alaskan soldiers have been honored with the Purple Heart Medal.

The Alaska Highway, completed during World War II by the US Army to serve as a supply route, is an apt choice for the designation as "Purple Heart Trail System". Signs designating the Purple Heart Trail will be seen by both visitors and residents alike and will demonstrate that Alaska recognizes and honors the sacrifices made by our wounded and fallen soldiers.

Please join me in supporting the establishment of a Purple Heart Trail in Alaska.

# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA  
2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: HB 283  
 Bill Version: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ( ) Publish Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifier (file name): HB283-DOT-NDE-02-29-08 Dept. Affected: DOT&PF  
 Title: Act Designating AK Hwy/Richardson Hwy as the Purple Heart RDU: Highways and Aviation  
 Sponsor: Reps Gardner, Lynn Component: Northern Region Hwys and Aviation  
 Requester: House Transportation Component Number: 2068

**Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)**

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

	Appropriation Required	Information						
		FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
<b>OPERATING EXPENDITURES</b>								
Personal Services								
Travel								
Contractual	150.0							
Supplies								
Equipment								
Land & Structures								
Grants & Claims								
Miscellaneous								
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>150.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>								
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
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**FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)**

1002 Federal Receipts								
1003 GF Match								
1004 GF	150.0							
1005 GF/Program Receipts								
1037 GF/Mental Health								
Other Interagency Receipts								
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Estimate of any current year (FY2008) cost: \_\_\_\_\_

**POSITIONS**

Full-time	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Part-time	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Temporary	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Installation of six (6) major signs (approx 5'x12'), six (6) minor signs (4.5'x3'), and three (3) informational kiosks along locations on the Richardson and Alaska Highways. The cost for initial installation includes the concrete foundations and crash supports that breakway in an accident. A contractor will install these signs under the direction of the Department.

Prepared by: Mary Siroky  
 Division: DOT&PF, Commissioner's Office  
 Approved by: Nancy Slagle  
Director of Division of Administration, DOT&PF

Phone: 465-4772  
 Date/Time: 2/29/08 3:00 PM  
 Date: 2/29/2008

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## **Representative Berta Gardner**

*House District 24*

### Sectional Analysis

### Sponsor Substitute House Bill 283

**“An Act designating the Alaska Highway and portion of the Richardson Highway as the Purple Heart Trail.”**

SS HB 283 amends Alaska statute title 35 to add a new section establishing the Purple Heart Trail.

**Section 210 (a)** Designates sections of the Alaska Highway as part of the Purple Heart Trail.

**Section 210 (b)** Gives the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities the responsibility to erect and maintain Purple Heart Trail signs. Designates the contents of the signs.

**Section 210 (c)** Gives the Commissioner of Transportation and Public Facilities the responsibility to select three visitor centers and/or pullouts to provide additional information about the Purple Heart Trail.

**Section 210 (d)** Gives the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities the ability to determine the appropriate size of the sign.

# STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
AND PUBLIC FACILITIES  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

**SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR**

3132 CHANNEL DRIVE  
PO Box 112500  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-2500

FAX: (907) 586-8365  
PHONE: (907) 465-3900

January 23, 2008

The Honorable Berta Gardner  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 422  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Gardner:

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) supports the concept of designating the Alaska Highway and parts of the Richardson Highway as the Purple Heart Trail. The automobile and the Interstate Highway System represent symbols of America's freedom to get up and go anywhere anytime; that combined with the fact that the Alaska Highway was completed by the army during the World War II make it an appropriate choice.

My staff is working with your office to determine the appropriate signage and locations as well as the cost of installation of Purple Heart Trail signs and maintenance. I look forward to the installation of the first Purple Heart sign.

Sincerely,



Leo von Scheben, P.E., L.S., M.B.A.  
Commissioner

cc: Gary Hogins, Chief Engineer, Design & Engineering Services, DOT&PF  
Russ Kelly, Legislative Director, Office of the Governor  
Randy Ruaro, Special Staff Assistant, Office of the Governor  
Mary Siroky, Legislative Liaison, DOT&PF



## RESOLUTION 2008-05

### A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE STATE OF ALASKA DESIGNATE THE ALASKA HIGHWAY AS A "PURPLE HEART TRAIL" WITHIN THE ALASKA ROAD SYSTEM

WHEREAS, it is fitting and proper to never forget those who have given their lives and shed their blood in defense of this great nation; and

WHEREAS, a Purple Heart Trail system has been established throughout the major road system of the lower 48 states; and

WHEREAS, Alaska is geographically located at the far northwest reaches of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of Alaska's citizens, Alaska's veterans, and Alaska's tourism industry to be part of the Purple Heart Trail system; and

WHEREAS, Alaska is proud to join this worthy effort in providing America with the ability to establish this Purple Heart Trail all across America; and

WHEREAS, the placement of signs indicating "Purple Heart Trail" will simply indicate a part of a nationally existing system; and

WHEREAS, the establishment of the Purple Heart Trail within Alaska will in no way change the name or numerical designation of any existing road; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Highway has a well established historical military significance since it was built during the WWII era for military purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Highway is the best choice to establish and continue the Purple Heart Trail into the confines of the Alaska Road System.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT: The City Council for the City of Delta Junction by this resolution hereby requests the State of Alaska provide for the signage and placement of the Purple Heart Trail signs at approximately 50 mile intervals along the corridor of the Alaska Highway system within Alaska beginning at Beaver Creek and extending on to Delta Junction; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT: In order to inform all travelers, a sign designating the purpose for the Purple Heart Trail also be placed with the Purple Heart Trail signs at strategic locations such as entering or leaving the vicinities of Beaver Creek, Northway, Tok, Dot Lake, and Delta Junction; that explains the reason for the Purple Heart Trail; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT: The designated note of purpose signs read as follows:

*IN HONOR OF THOSE BRAVE PATRIOTS  
WHO SHED THEIR BLOOD  
WHILE ENGAGED IN THE SELFLESS ACT OF  
DEFENDING OUR NATIONS FREEDOM*

PASSED AND APPROVED by a duly constituted quorum of the Delta Junction City Council this 4th day of December 2007.



CITY OF DELTA JUNCTION

*Mary Leith-Dowling*  
Mary Leith-Dowling, Mayor

ATTEST

*Pat White*

Pat White, City Clerk



Tok Chamber of Commerce  
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TO: State of Alaska  
Senator Ted Stevens  
Senator Johnny Ellis  
Representative Don Young  
Representative Berta Gardner

We are proud to offer our strong support for Alaska to be a part of the "Purple Heart Trail". We think its simple visible message is well deserved by those who bravely gave so much of themselves in defending this nation.

This worthy project can be of great benefit to our community and the State of Alaska. We believe that those who see the signs will have a better understanding of the sacrifices made by those who wear the Purple Heart. We believe that the traveling public, whether Alaskans or visitors, will realize that we care about our wounded veterans. We further believe that the signs will bear witness that we in Alaska not only care about our wounded veterans, but we are willing to put forth the effort to visibly display our deepest fondness for their sacrifice.

Many who travel our roads will surely know or be related to a wounded veteran or a veteran who lost their life in defense of our nation. The warm feeling they obtain will certainly be in their minds as they traverse the roads of our great state. By showing them we care we can instill a kind Alaskan memory of their travels, and hopefully we will see them again.

Be it known to all that the community of TOK Alaska will be proud to be part of the Purple Heart Trail. We support it and we encourage all Alaskans to support it as well.

Sincerely yours,

---

John A. Rusyniak, President  
Home 883-3124; Cell 206-724-4591; Fax 305-425-7901  
Email: [john@rusyniak.com](mailto:john@rusyniak.com)

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ALASKA'S NEWSPAPER

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## 20 wounded soldiers receive Purple Heart

Twenty with combat injuries honored for 'warrior spirit'

By GEORGE BRYSON  
gbryson@adn.com

Published: October 17, 2007

Last Modified: October 17, 2007 at 12:55 PM

Twenty Purple Heart medals rested in the serving tray Tuesday while 19 Fort Richardson-based soldiers wounded in Iraq stood at attention as best they could -- some leaning on canes, one missing a leg, a few with injuries to the head



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One by one the medals were pinned on their chests by Maj. Gen. Stephen Layfield, the senior Army commander in Alaska, who sternly told about 200 onlookers to "never ever miss the chance to say thank you" to the men -- all of whom are members of the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division.

The ways they were injured were as varied as their wounds. Some were riding in vehicles that were blasted apart by projectiles. Some were hit by roadside bombs. Some were walking on patrols and shot by

unseen snipers.

But Staff Sgt. Chad LeBlanc, of Anchorage, may have had the most unusual tale to tell. He was stationed at an outpost south of Baghdad and was just preparing to lie down for the night inside his "can" -- a small mobile trailer just large enough for two bunks -- when he heard the sound of mortar fire outside.

Sticking his head out the door, LeBlanc just had time to see a mortar round blast into a



ERIK HILL / Anchorage Daily News  
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Staff Sgt. Chad LeBlanc of Anchorage receives his Purple Heart medal from Maj. Gen. Stephen Layfield, senior Army commander in Alaska, as 19 soldiers assigned to the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division received their medals Tuesday at Fort Richardson

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neighboring trailer -- one that was usually occupied by his buddy, Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Ferguson, who just then was away on leave in Alaska.

Shrapnel from the blast hit LeBlanc in the stomach and limbs and burnt his face and arms. Before falling into shock, he managed to find help.

"I ran about 25 meters to where the medics were and laid down on the ground and told them what happened," he recalled. "Then they put me on a helicopter, I went to Baghdad -- and that was it."

In an operating room, doctors removed 14 pieces of shrapnel from LeBlanc's arm and a big chunk from his side. The shrapnel that entered his stomach had to be removed through his back -- an operation that has since made the 32-year-old Alaskan less mobile.

He knows it could have been worse. He could have been inside the trailer that took the direct hit -- Ferguson's trailer. As it happened, however, his buddy didn't make it through their deployment unscathed either.

Returning to their unit -- a team within the 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion that trains Iraqi army forces -- Ferguson was badly wounded about five weeks later when his vehicle was struck by an armor-piercing projectile.

The blast tore up his lower legs and shattered his left knee. Ultimately the leg would have to be amputated. On Tuesday, Ferguson was standing in the ranks with the other Purple Heart recipients, supported by a cane and a prosthetic leg.

"I set a record getting out of Walter Reed (Medical Center) for an amputee," Ferguson said, noting how anxious he was to return to Fort Richardson and his family. Now he's hoping to remain in the military -- he's served 11 years so far -- and in Alaska.

"If I could stay here until I retire in nine years, that would be perfect," he said.

Spc. William Swails, a native of Rockingham, N.C. -- who received his second Purple Heart on Tuesday after suffering shrapnel wounds to his hand and arm -- is hoping to remain on active duty in Alaska too. His wife, Chastity, is currently enrolled in the nursing program at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Spc. Justin Tauriainen, who grew up in Anchorage -- and returned by motor home to a large throng of friends and family greeting him at the Muldoon overpass last week -- received a Purple Heart as well.

On May 21, his armored engineer vehicle was struck by "multiple IEDS," the improvised explosive devices his unit was charged with removing. Tauriainen, 23, sustained shrapnel wounds to his head, back, hands and legs.

Before pinning the medals on the assembled soldiers -- Sgt. Casey Wright of Tucson, Ariz., was unable to attend the ceremony -- Layfield emphasized their collective bravery.

"We're forever in your debt," he said. "We acknowledge your sacrifice and we acknowledge your warrior spirit and we acknowledge what you did for our country."

Find George Bryson online at [adn.com/contact/gbryson](http://adn.com/contact/gbryson) or call 257-4318.

## Comments

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5 Wednesday, November 7, 2007 - 8:28am | **roryann**

### Thank you

Thank you all for your sacrifice and service to our great nation, we are forever in debt to you. God bless you.

4 Thursday, October 18, 2007 - 4:04am | **pagrizzly**

### From one Vet to many other Vet's

Thank you for your sacrifice and dedication. I was in the Vietnam Conflict. I didn't receive a purple heart, but my best friend during high school paid the ultimate price. I salute all the guys that are over there and may you come home safely. My son-in-law is scheduled to be deployed to Iraq in Jan or Feb, 2008. All of the men and women are in my prayers for a safe return. Freedom isn't fre ...

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3 Wednesday, October 17, 2007 - 4:53pm | **THANCE**

### Thank You

Thank you to all of the soldiers. As Justin's aunt I hated to see him go to Iraq but always felt it was necessary for our military to be there and how can I expect other families to sacrifice and then not be willing to let my family go. I am so sorry that you all were injured but appreciate you and your families so much. You are in our prayers. Justin, I praise God for sparing your life. You are ...

[read more](#)

2 Wednesday, October 17, 2007 - 1:17pm | **vixen**

### Soldiers deserve their Purple Hearts

I am a lifelong Alaskan. These men are so deserving of these medals. They are fighting for us all, at home and abroad. Please keep these men and all the other service men and women in your hearts and prayers. It is increasingly difficult not to be shocked when I read their ages, though. Most of them are younger than I am chronologically, but have lived a life time of experience and sacrifice ...

[read more](#)

1 Wednesday, October 17, 2007 - 4:55am | **miflannery**

### Thank You

As the General said, "We're forever in your debt." Thank you for the sacrifices you and your families have made for all of us brave heroes.

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ALASKA'S NEWSPAPER

# Anchorage Daily News



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## Purple Heart recipients

Anchorage Daily News

Published: October 17, 2007

Last Modified: October 17, 2007 at 12:55 PM

20 soldiers from the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne),  
25th Infantry Division  
Fort Richardson, Alaska

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The Purple Heart is awarded to any member of the United States armed forces who is wounded or killed in action against the enemy. Its origins date to General George Washington in 1782. It fell into disuse after the Revolutionary War until 1932 when President Herbert Hoover officially re-established it to honor the 200th anniversary of Washington's birth.

**Spc. Timothy E. Holmgren** is from Fuley, Minn. He is assigned to HHT 1-40th CAV. Pfc. Holmgren was a crew member for a 120mm mortar system. On April 30, 2007, Pfc. Holmgren's vehicle was struck by 300-plus pounds of homemade explosives. The vehicle flipped and was thrown 25. Pfc. Holmgren sustained a broken arm, leg, and three places in his back and lost his spleen.

**Cpl. Derek Davison** is from St. Louis, Mo. He is assigned to D Co 3-509 IN ABN. Cpl. Davison was struck by an IED on April 22, 2007 while conducting patrols in Iskandariyah, Iraq. He suffered shrapnel wounds to the left side of his body.

**Sgt. Jason Brown** is from Phoenix, Ariz. He is assigned to A-Troop 1-40th CAV. Sgt. Brown was a team leader in First Platoon of A-Troop. While on dismounted patrol on Aug. 4, 2007, his team was ambushed with small arms fire. Sgt. Brown sustained gunshot wounds in the leg.

**Staff Sgt. Sean Reed** is from San Diego, Calif. He is assigned to HHT, 1-40th CAV. Sgt. Reed was the gunner on a mounted patrol in Hawr Rajab on Aug. 4, 2007 when his truck hit a pressure plate IED and flipped over. Sgt. Reed received wounds to his face, arms, and lost part of a finger. He was joined at the ceremony by friends and family.

**Sgt. Jesse Forte** is from Greenville, Ohio. He is assigned to C-Troop, 1-40th CAV as a designated marksman in the sniper section. Sgt. Forte's dismounted patrol was struck by an IED while returning to FOB Falcon. Sgt. Forte received shrapnel to his right forearm. He was joined at the ceremony by friends and family.

**Sgt 1st Class Kenneth R. Franco** is from Queens, N.Y.. He is assigned to A-Troop 1-40th CAV. While on dismounted patrol on May 28, 2007, his platoon was ambushed with small arms fire. Sgt. Franco received gunshot wounds to his left calf during the engagement. He was joined for the ceremony by friends and family.

**Spc. Ruben Aguilar** is from Riverside, Calif. He is assigned to Delaware CO 1- 501st ABN. During a mounted combat patrol, his vehicle was struck by an EFP in the town of Mussaiyib. Spc. Aguilar suffered shrapnel injuries to all four extremities. He was joined at the ceremony by his wife, Annette.

**Spc. Michael Dolce** is from Sacramento, Calif. He is assigned to Delaware CO 1- 501st ABN. On June 25, 2007, while on a patrol; one of the vehicles was struck by an EFP in the town of Mussaiyib. Spc. Dolce suffered shrapnel injuries to his left knee and right wrist. He was joined at the ceremony by his wife, Amanda.

**Spc. John Kegley** is from Verona, Va. He is assigned to Delaware CO 1- 501st ABN. On 21 July, 2007, while conducting a mounted patrol in Mussaiyib, his vehicle was struck by an IED. He received shrapnel injuries to his right leg. He was joined today by his friends and fellow soldiers.

**Staff Sgt. David Moore** is from Tracy, Calif. He is assigned to Blackfoot CO 1-501st ABN. In April, 2007, while pulling security, the OP came under mortar attack. Moore sustained a head wound as a result of the attack. He was joined at the ceremony by his wife, Jessica.

**Spc. William Swails** is from Rockingham, N.C. He is assigned to Delaware CO 1-501st ABN. On July 21, 2007, while conducting a mounted patrol in Mussaiyib, his vehicle was struck by an IED. He received shrapnel injuries to his right hand and left forearm. He was joined at the ceremony by his wife, Chasity and son, Conner.

**Cpl. John Smith** is from Apollo, Pa. He is assigned to Comanche CO 1-501st ABN. Cpl. Smith was in an over watch position on Dec. 12, 2006 when his unit came under mortar attack. Cpl. Smith received a severe head injury as a result of the attack. He was joined at the ceremony by his wife, Lauren and her grandfather, Ralph Cargo, who is a Purple Heart recipient from the Korean War.

**SGgt. Casey Wright** is from Tucson, Ariz. He is assigned to Delaware CO 1-501st ABN. While on mounted patrol, SGT Wright's vehicle was struck by an EFP in the town of Mussaiyib. Sgt. Wright suffered shrapnel injuries to his left thigh. He was joined for the ceremony by his wife, Amberle.

**Spc. Lenwood Stewart** is from Springfield, Mass. He is assigned to C CO 3/509 IN ABN. On May 31, 2007, as a result of an enemy attack on his dismounted patrol, Spc. Stewart suffered third-degree burns to the left side of his body and shrapnel to his right leg as a result of an enemy attack on his dismounted patrol.

**Spc. Justin Tauriainen** is from Anchorage. He is assigned as an engineer in Alpha Company, 425th BSTB. On May 21, 2007, while conducting route clearance operations, his up-armored engineer vehicle was struck by multiple IEDs. He sustained shrapnel injuries to his head, back, hand and legs. He was joined at the ceremony by his mom, dad and extended family.

**Sgt. Richard Johnson** is from Houston, Texas. He is the lead crew served weapon operator assigned to the Brigade Personal Security Detachment. He was wounded on Aug. 14, 2007 while traveling in the lead up-armored HMMWV. The convoy was hit by a six-array EFP. Sgt. Johnson sustained injuries to his backside and groin area. He was joined at the ceremony by friends and

family.

**Staff Sgt. Chad Leblanc** is from Anchorage. He is assigned to Military Transition Team 820, 425th BSTB. He sustained severe shrapnel wounds and third-degree burns on March 13, 2007 during a mortar attack on Combat Outpost REO in Al Hillah, Iraq. Leblanc was joined at the ceremony by friends and family.

**Sgt. 1st class Joshua Ferguson** is from Minneapolis, Minn. He is assigned to Military Transition Team 820, 425th BSTB. He was wounded in an EFP attack on April 22, 2007, while on a combined combat patrol with the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army in Al Hillah, Iraq. Ferguson sustained severe injuries to both of his legs. He was joined at the ceremony by friends and family.

**Spc. Jose Collazo** is from New York, N.Y.. He is an engineer assigned to Alpha Company 425th BSTB at Camp Falcon. He was wounded Aug. 4, 2007, when the convoy he was traveling in was hit by an IED. He sustained blast injuries to his hand and head. He was joined at the ceremony by friends and family.

**Spc. Ramsey Raheer** is from San Francisco, Calif. He is assigned to HHB Battery 2-377 PFAR. Spc. Raheer was a forward observer for Headquarters Battery. On July 31, 2007, he was wounded in an indirect rocket attack at FOB Kalsu. Spc Raheer sustained shrapnel wounds to his back, stomach and arms. He was joined at the ceremony by friends and family.

### Comments

Please **log in** to post comments.

1 Wednesday, October 17, 2007 - 12:27pm | [dennissmoy](#)

#### **The Arctic Warriors**

God Speed to them all!!!

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## Hurt soldier receives Purple Heart

Latseen Benson recovering from severe injuries incurred in Iraq

A critically injured soldier with roots in Southeast Alaska was awarded a Purple Heart by the U.S. Army, family members announced this week.

Gen. Richard Cody, vice chief of staff for the Army, presented 26-year-old Army Spec. Latseen Benson with the Purple Heart, a military medal bestowed on soldiers hurt or killed during combat, on Dec. 20 in a chapel ceremony at Walter Reed Military Hospital in Washington, D.C.

Benson, an Anchorage native with many Tlingit relatives in Southeast Alaska, is recovering at the military hospital from injuries he received on Nov. 13 from a roadside bomb in Tikrit, Iraq. The explosion took part of both his legs.

"He's doing very well," said his aunt, Sylvia Carlsson of Anchorage, on Tuesday.

"Eventually (Latseen) is going to come home because Alaska is his home," Carlsson said.

Benson is spending time visiting other injured soldiers at the military hospital. His wife, Jessica, and his mother and stepfather are with him, Carlsson said.

Benson has become adept in his wheelchair and now "it is hard for people to keep up with him," she said.

"We are blessed because he was able to return to us," said his mother, Diane Benson, in a prepared statement released Sunday. Benson, once a Green Party gubernatorial candidate, was born and raised in Ketchikan but now lives in Anchorage, where she raised her son.

According to family members, Latseen Benson's injuries, which occurred during his second tour in Iraq, will not allow him to return to his previous Army service.

Diane Benson, as well as some of his other supporters in Alaska, had

expressed pain and outrage that Latseen Benson was required to return to Iraq after his first tour under the military's "stop-loss" policy. The policy forces soldiers to return to duty or extend their tours to deal with military personnel shortages.

"My son is a brave and dedicated soldier, and he served his country with honor," Diane Benson said.

Many Tlingits in Southeast Alaska have been raising funds to assist the Benson family. One fundraiser held at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall in Juneau netted about \$4,000, according to Ashli Hobbs, an assistant with the Tlingit and Haida Central Council.

• Elizabeth Bluemink at [elizabeth.bluemink@juneauempire.com](mailto:elizabeth.bluemink@juneauempire.com).  
Click here to return to story:  
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# State of Alaska Department of Military & Veterans Affairs



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## **Combat Badge & Purple Heart Awarded** *Purple Heart pinned on Eagle River's Dan Collins*

**Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan** – U.S. Soldiers representing units from Fort Polk, Fort Stewart and Fort Bragg, who arrived in Kandahar Air Field last month to help augment operations for the 207th Infantry Brigade and 297th Support Battalion of the Alaska Army National Guard, were awarded the 10th Mountain Division patch in a combat patch ceremony here on Oct. 8.

The shoulder insignia represents a Soldier's unit of assignment during deployment to a combat zone. The lineage of the 10th Mountain Division insignia as a combat patch dates back to 1944 when it was approved for wear on the right sleeve of the uniform, after the division's heroic efforts on the battlefields of World War II.

"You are being awarded this patch after completing 30 days on the ground," said Col. R. Stephen Williams, commander of the 207th.

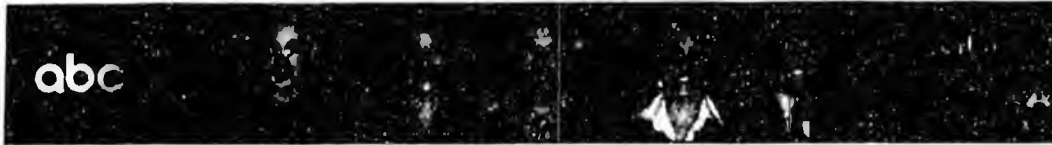
The Soldiers are eligible to wear the patch after only one day, but Williams, from Chugiak, Alaska, says that 30 days has given the Soldiers time to reflect on what they have accomplished here in that time. "You've all done a great job," he added.

In addition to the combat patch ceremony, the Purple Heart, along with the Combat Action Badge was awarded to Maj. Dan Collins, staff judge advocate for the 207th, for injuries he received when a rocket struck the dining facility on June 29 at Kandahar Air Field.

Collins, a resident of Eagle River, Alaska, was wounded in several areas on the left side of his body, including his shoulder and left leg, where he sustained nerve damage. Collins' injuries were substantial enough that he was sent to the United States for further treatment and rehabilitation.

"He could have stayed home but came back to serve," Williams said. "That's the kind of commitment we are looking for, and that's the kind of attitude we need."

While he admits that he is not completely recovered, Collins indicated he is glad to be back. "I've come back because I made a commitment to the commander and the unit," Collins said. "JAG officers are Soldiers first, so I came back to complete the mission."



Alaska's Supreme Court has ruled that teenage girls don't need a parent's permission before getting an abortion. Governor Palin calls it

HOME

ALASKAN SOLDIERS HONORED WITH THE PURPLE HEART AWARD

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**Video High**  
**ANCHORAGE** - Friends and family gathered on Ft. Rich on Tuesday, to honor the bravery of seven injured soldiers. Each of the soldiers received the Purple Heart Award, a symbol of their service and sacrifice.

A ceremony was held in honor of the seven wounded soldiers. Each of them stood at attention, as they were pinned, despite the severe injury they survived.

The Seven Ft. Richardson Based Soldiers being Honored with the Purple Heart Award on Tuesday, July 10, 2007. The Purple Heart recipients stood before dozens of their comrades as they received their awards. Many of the army soldiers that attended this ceremony are currently deployed, but they decided to take one of the two breaks that allows them to return home, at this time to be able to attend this ceremony.

But, it was a trip back home well worth it. The purple heart is only awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces who is wounded or killed in action against an enemy.

The following is a list of the names of the soldiers that received the Purple Heart Award on Tuesday:

Major Marc Hoffmeister, Staff Sergeant Juan Cabrera, Specialist Olin Bingham, Specialist Sean Edmunds, Specialist Matthew Lacher, Specialist Zachary Slith and Specialist William Verme.

Although it's nice to receive an award, Soldiers say that receiving this one in particular wasn't their first choice, considering it's awarded to service men and women wounded or killed in action.

Major General Stephen Layfield presented the medals on Tuesday, he is the senior Army Commander in Alaska.

The Purple Heart Award has quite a bit of history behind it, it dates back to the days of George Washington.

The original Purple Heart was designated by George Washington as the badge of merit, back in 1782. It was only awarded to revolutionary war soldiers, after the war it wasn't used again until 1932 when President Hoover officially re-established it to honor the 200th anniversary of Washington's birth.

Reported by Christina Coleman

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 Story Updated: Jul 11, 2007 at 2:06 AM AKST

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VIEWER POLL

Could Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich win an election against Sen. Ted Stevens in 2008?

- Yes, Stevens is vulnerable due to the FBI probe
- No, Begich doesn't have the necessary name recognition
- I just don't know

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TONIGHT ON ABC



CAVEMEN 7.00



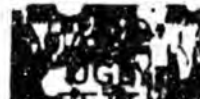
CARPOOLERS 7.30



DANCING WITH THE STARS 8.00



BOSTON LEGAL 9.00

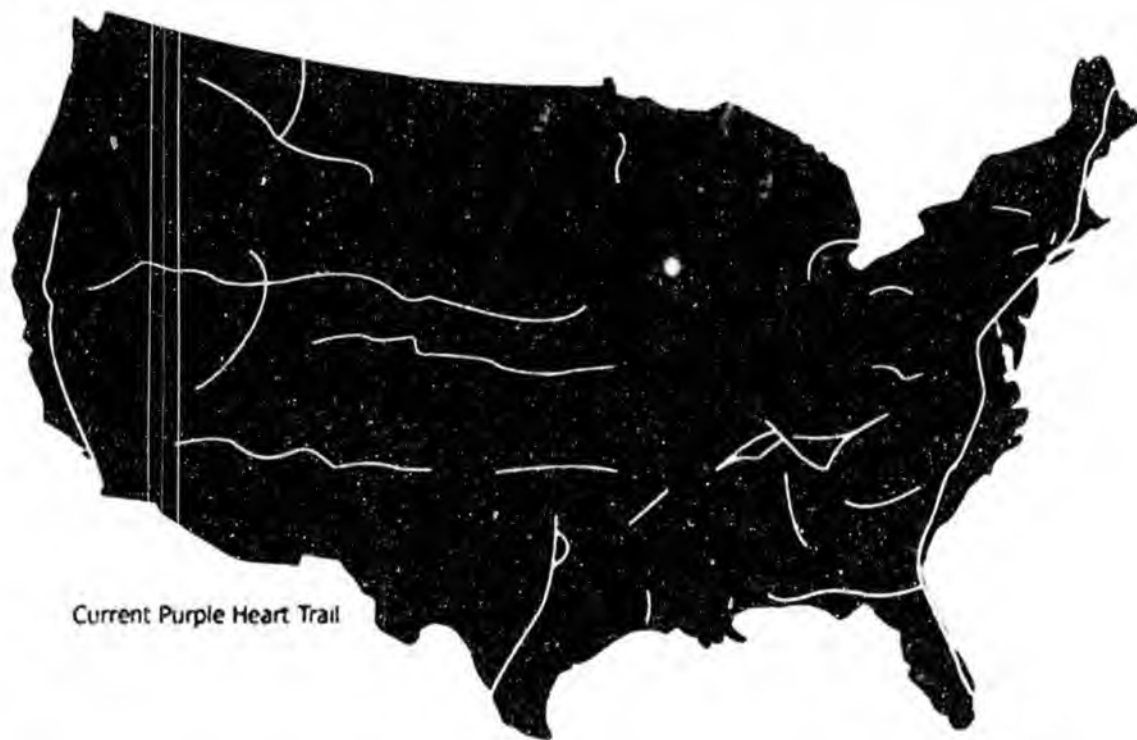


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abc NEWS WIDE



**Purple Heart Trail** was initially established in the Commonwealth of Virginia from its start point at Mt. Vernon, VA. Through positive legislative support of the Virginia General Assembly and through the leadership of two of its governors, The Honorable George Allen (now U.S. Senator) and incumbent Governor James Gilmore the trail now extends down Virginia highway 235 (the Mt. Vernon Parkway) to US Route #1, thence to I-95. All of I-95 is designated the Purple Heart Trail from the Potomac River in Alexandria, on the Maryland border, down to the State of North Carolina. It branches off at Fredericksburg on Virginia Highway 3 (the Kings Highway) to Stafford County and thence to the George Washington Birthplace National Monument in Westmoreland County, VA. Another leg goes eastward on I-64 at Richmond, the state capital, to the city of Norfolk. The Virginia Department of Transportation has placed 'Purple Heart Trail' signs at all rest stops on I-95 and I-64 and at other special points along the total trail.



Current Purple Heart Trail

Ultimately, the Purple Heart Trail will be extended from Virginia to all other states and major cities of the United States. Historically, the Purple Heart Trail concept was inspired by the George Washington Chapter #1732 of Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania, VA, in 1992. In convention of the Order, the delegates voted to approve a resolution establishing a symbolic Purple Heart Trail throughout the 50 states. With the Commonwealth of Virginia being the home of the two distinguished general officers involved in the development of the Purple Heart, Generals Washington and MacArthur, the Department of Virginia members of the Order took the lead to institute The Purple Heart Trail in Virginia, with a memorial marker to be erected and dedicated at Mt. Vernon as the start point of the trail.

In 1996, the General Assembly of the Commonwealth approved the first step in establishing the Purple Heart Trail parallel to I-95 and that portion of Virginia Route 3 from Washington's birthplace in Westmoreland County, VA, to his boyhood home at

<http://www.purpleheart.org/purple-heart-trail.html>

Ferry Farm in Stafford County, VA. In 1998, through subsequently legislative fiat, the trail was extended to Norfolk, VA, ending at the tomb of General Douglas MacArthur on Interstate 64 from Richmond (I-95) to Norfolk and to Mt. Vernon. The purpose of the Purple Heart Trail is to commemorate the patriotic American heritage given to us by George Washington and General MacArthur and for the people of Virginia, and ultimately all the states, to memorialize those service persons who have had the Purple Heart medal bestowed on them or their next of kin for wounds received in combat in defense of our nation.



By marking these trails with appropriate signage, it was conceived that the automobile and the Interstate Highway System represent very tangible symbols of our freedom; the ability to get up and go anywhere anytime. While taken for granted by so many, this and so many other freedoms we enjoy as Americans have been earned through the sacrifice of millions of Americans who have shed their blood and the many who have died in defense of freedom and liberty. The signage was intended as a reminder that freedom is not free and would stimulate thought and discussion among adults and children alike in contemplating the bountiful heritage enjoyed by all Americans as part of their legacy.

Major highways are the ideal setting for this virtual trail, and ultimately, the Military Order of the Purple Heart would like to see the entire Interstate Highway System, conceived by General Dwight D. Eisenhower during his tenure as President of the United States, designated as major portions of the Purple Heart Trail. Instructional kits have been developed and are in the hands of all Department Commanders on how to initiate necessary legislation in their respective states to implement the continued growth of the Purple Heart Trail System.

National Commander Louie Spinelli has accepted expansion of the trail as a major thrust of his leadership during his term of office. We who are on the forefront of this great effort, can take great pride in establishing this system as a most noble and patriotic endeavor of the Military Order of the Purple Heart that will become an indelible part of our continuing service to this great nation. If your state is not yet on board, we encourage all local chapters to take this up within the scope of their Americanism projects. Most legislatures have been found to be most receptive in support of legislative initiatives required to implement the program. The mood of the country is also such that many salons would welcome the opportunity to offer the necessary legislative language to make it happen. God Bless America, our home, sweet home!



Legend: White  
 Background: Green  
 Route Plaque: Black on White

Make symbol proportional  
 to graphic shown.

Road Class	Dimensions (inches)									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	
Expressway	150	72	2	8	10	6	6	6	4	
	K	L	M	N	P	R	S	T	U*	
	5.75	138.5	13.25	24	49.5	10	30	18	11.75	

\* Proportionately scale Purple Heart Emblem to 30" wide

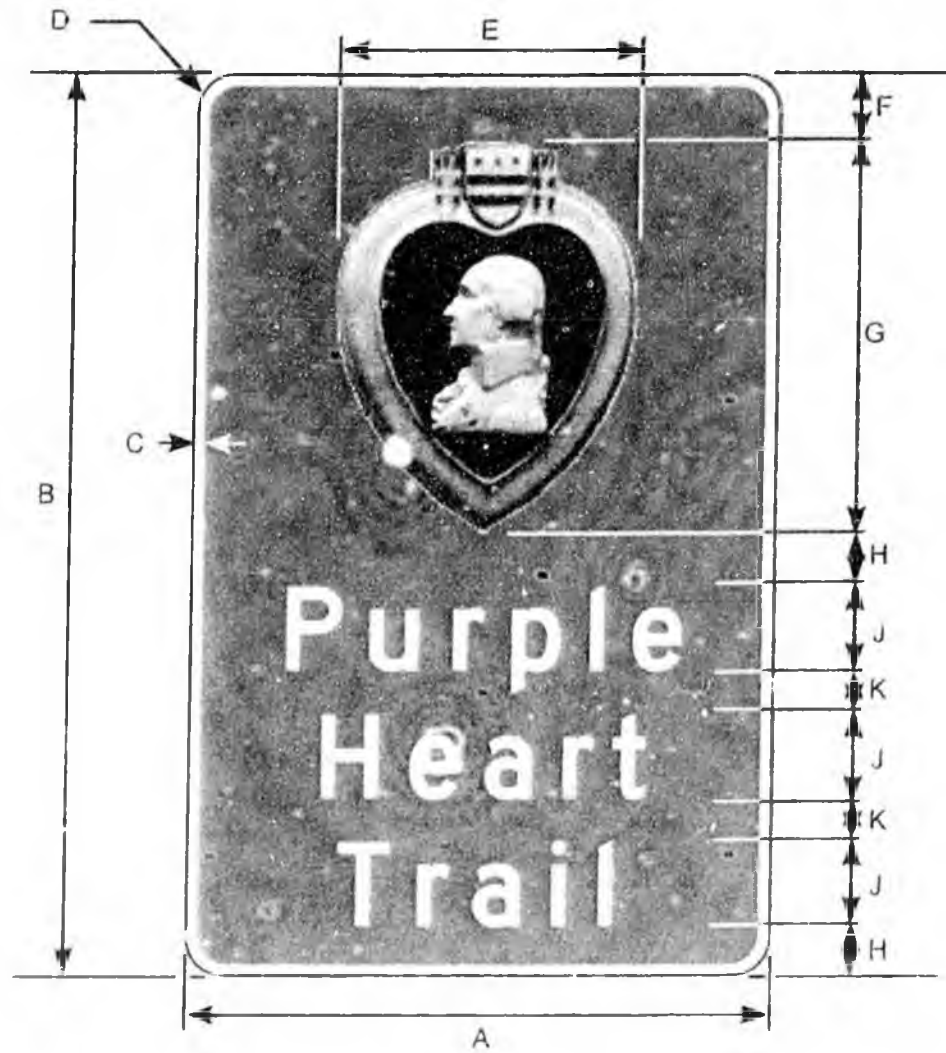


Legend: White  
 Background: Green  
 Route Plaque: Black on White

Make symbol proportional  
 to graphic shown.

Road Class	Dimensions (inches)									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	
Expressway	132	54	2	3.5	8	10	5	9	24	
	K	L	M	N	P*					
	43.5	5.25	30	14.75	8.75					

\* Proportionately scale Purple Heart Emblem to 30" wide



Border and Legend: White  
 Background: Green  
 Marker: Black on White

\* See Appendix B-4 for  
 Standard Arrow Details.

Make symbol proportional to graphic shown

Letter Size (inches)	Dimensions (inches)									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K
5	36	54	0.75	2.25	19.2	4	24	3	5	25



END  
DOUBLE  
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↑  
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