

Illinois National Guard Soldiers ride to remember fallen servicemembers as part of Gold Star 500

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CAIRO - 34 Veterans of the Illinois National Guard will ride bicycles during a four-day endurance ride, traveling a 500-mile journey from Cairo, Illinois to St. Charles, Illinois, as part of the Gold Star 500.

The ride is in remembrance of the 34 Illinois National Guard Servicemembers who were killed while supporting operations overseas since 9-11. Each cyclist will ride to honor a fallen Servicemember in order to preserve their name and ensure their sacrifice is not forgotten.

Illinois National Guard Survivor Outreach Services will coordinate remembrance ceremonies at several stops the cyclists make.

The ride begins Sept. 20 when the cyclists will start in Cairo, Illinois, and spend the night in Mount Vernon, Illinois. At 5:30 p.m. there will be a remembrance ceremony at the Mount Vernon Elks Lodge, 1107 Jordan St. in Mount Vernon, Illinois.

On Sept. 21, the second leg will conclude in Paris, Illinois. At 6:30 p.m. a remembrance ceremony will be held at the Kiwanis Park, North Highway 1 in Paris, Illinois.

On Sept. 22, the third day will conclude in Kankakee, Illinois. At 6:30 p.m. the cyclists will take part in a remembrance ceremony at the Bradley American Legion, 835 W. Broadway St. in Bradley, Illinois.

On Sept. 23, the final day, bikers will finish at St. Mary's Park, Route 31 and Prairie St. in St. Charles, Illinois around 3 p.m. The Gold Star 500 Reception and Fallen Hero Remembrance Ceremony will be held after the cyclists arrive.

Each night the Veterans will sleep at an Illinois National Guard Armory.

The Gold Star 500 is an endurance cycling event which honors the service and sacrifice of 34 Servicemembers from the Illinois National Guard who gave their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The cyclists will pay homage to fallen heroes and ensure they are never forgotten.

During each of the stops there will be an event to remember the fallen Servicemembers with Gold Star families invited to attend. Fallen heroes ranks range from Specialist to 1st Lieutenant and their ages ranged from 19 to 59. Five of the Servicemembers were female; 29 were male. Fifteen Servicemembers were killed in Iraq; 19 were killed in Afghanistan. Eighteen of the 34 were part of the Illinois Army National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team deployment to Afghanistan in 2008-2009. All were fathers, sons, brothers, mothers, daughters and sisters.