

EXPLORER

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The Voice of Marana, Oro Valley and Northwest Tucson

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Taps, every Saturday at 5

BY DAVE PERRY

Tucson Local Media Contributor

Vickie Duprey caught the eye of her uniformed husband, James, who stood near their vehicle just outside the Arizona Heroes Memorial in Oro Valley's Naranja Park.

"It's 5," Vickie mouthed, her palm and five fingers extended toward James. "It's 5!"

James knew the time, 5 p.m. Saturday. He'd been interrupted by a man with two German Shepherds, all of them walking slowly into the Oro Valley memorial. The man, and Oro Valley couple Jane and Con-

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James Duprey posed with trumpet after playing Taps on Aug. 29 at the Arizona Heroes Memorial. Flags were at half-mast to honor the late Dolly Parton. (Dave Perry/Submitted)

On 9/12, he was alone in the sky

BY DAVE PERRY

Tucson Local Media Contributor

Twenty-five years ago, on Sept. 12, 2001, U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Ronald Shoopman flew an F-16 from San Antonio to Tucson.

That morning, his fighter jet was the only aircraft in American air space west of the Mississippi River.

The day before, on Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners, crashing them into the Twin Towers in New York City, the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., and a field in Pennsylvania, killing 2,977

people in the deadliest attack on American territory since Pearl Harbor.

Immediately, "airplanes all over the country were grounded," said Shoopman, a longtime Oro Valley resident who was then serving as Wing Commander for the Arizona Air National Guard's 162nd Fighter Wing, hosted at Tucson International Airport. "The president (George W. Bush) ordered everybody to land. We couldn't sort out the good guys from the bad guys."

Shoopman had flown the F-16 from Tucson to Randolph Air Force Base for meetings with fellow Wing commanders. Now,

he had a new order, from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld — get back to Tucson, and put people and airplanes on alert and into the sky, fully armed, to do whatever was necessary to protect America's symbols of power.

"It was important for me to be back there," Shoopman said.

Silence, while a tower fell

The morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Shoopman and other Wing commanders were talking

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TAPS FROM PAGE 1

rad Paul, had come to hear James J. Duprey, MSgt, USAF, Ret., play Taps, that solemn, 24-note call used by the U.S. military to signal end of day, and to honor the fallen.

Duprey plays Taps every Saturday at 5 p.m. at the Memorial. Since Dec. 6, he's missed two Saturdays while recovering from hip replacement surgery.

"I do it for the veterans, the first responders, police, fire, everyone that's given back to our country," he said. "It's for all the ones who are here now, and for those who will not be forgotten. It's my way of sending a message — 'you will not be forgotten.'"

'There's a little ritual I do'

Duprey doesn't simply play Taps.

"There is a little ritual I do," he said.

"He tries not to talk to anybody before he goes in," Vickie said. "He's got to be in the mental state."

The Dupreys, longtime Oro Valley residents who now live in Catalina, arrive at the Memorial about six minutes before 5 p.m. On this particular hot Saturday, he wore the color guard uniform of the



James Duprey, MSgt, USAF, Ret., plays Taps every Saturday at 5 p.m. at the Arizona Heroes Memorial, within Oro Valley's Naranja Park. All are welcome to watch and listen.
(Dave Perry / Submitted)

Oro Valley American Legion Post 132, of which he is a member.

Two minutes before 5, Duprey pops out of his car, picks up his trumpet and whisper mute, and plays the first note of Taps into the back seat, six, seven, eight times. After a deep breath, he stands, tucks the trumpet under his left elbow, and begins to march with purpose, eyes straight ahead. Duprey walks through the entrance to the Memorial and pivots 90 degrees, walks farther, then does a second pivot.

"I look up at the American flag, and hold that for about 20 seconds," he said.

Before he plays, Duprey pauses, and says to himself "how would I want Taps played for me? And then it begins. It's as if it was me being remembered. That makes me strive to do the best I can."

When he's finished, Duprey tucks the trumpet under his arm, gives a slow salute to the flag, bows his head in prayer for the fallen "and those who carry the torch of noble sacrifice," and marches out.

"No more, no less," he said. And, sometimes, with no one else there, "just Vickie and me."

Giving people time to think

Taps takes about one minute to play.

"If you play Taps too short, it's just a song," Duprey said. So he plays it longer, 1:10, even 1:20. "It gives people time to think," he said. Their emotions awakened, listeners "start to remember the person" being honored. "If they think of loved ones," he said, "I've done my job."

"It's a moment to remember how human we are, and how limited our life span is," Duprey said. "Wouldn't we all, in one way or another, want to be remembered? We want somebody to witness our lives. We care about everyone that gave of themselves. I don't see anything more honorable than that."

Duprey gets nervous before he plays. He expects to be nervous on Friday, Sept. 11, the 25th anniversary of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Duprey is playing Taps at the Tucson Arena, where 2,000 people are climbing steps in the 911 Tower Challenge. They'll honor the thousands who lost their lives that day, to include 343 firefighters and 71 law enforcement officers.

Then, that evening, he'll play Taps at

SEE TAPS PAGE 3



TAPS FROM PAGE 2

the Arizona Heroes Memorial.

"There's something about Taps," Duprey said. "The nervousness comes from wanting to do the best job."

For whom he plays

Without saying as much, Duprey plays for his father, the late Joseph C. Duprey. The senior Duprey served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was D-Day Plus 13, a part of the Allied wave that jumped into France 13 days after D-Day. Joseph Duprey earned a Purple Heart.

And Duprey plays for his older brother, the late Richard Duprey, who served in the Air Force for 26 years. "I so admired my older brother," James said.

Inspired by Richard, James joined the Air Force shortly after graduating from high school. He served 20 years and 22 days, retiring as a master sergeant. Post-service, he worked for the aerospace company Bombardier in Tucson, then earned a degree as a Licensed Practical Nurse. Duprey was a night-shift LPN just under 20 years in Florence prisons before retiring earlier this year.



James Duprey's father, Joe, was a decorated veteran of World War II. He is wearing the French Jubilee of Liberty Medal, presented for his service in the days after D-Day. (James Duprey/Submitted)

He never missed a prison nursing shift. Not one.

"I am dedicated to what I do," he said. "I'm always wanting to give back."

Beyond the American Legion, Du-

prey is also a member of Bugles Across America, from whom people can request someone to play Taps. And the Dupreys recently joined the Citizens Volunteer Assistants Program of the Oro Valley Police Department.

"I can't retire," Duprey said. "I have no idea what that is."

He prefers the trumpet

Duprey played the trumpet as a kid. Taps can be played either a bugle or a trumpet. He prefers the latter because "I just love the sound I get off the trumpet." And, his wife points out, having two hands on the instrument helps keep the nerves at bay.

For extra-special occasions, Duprey wears one of "three really good uniforms" – the Legion Honor Guard uniform, a formal Bugles Across America uniform, and his retired Air Force uniform. "I'm still authorized to wear it," he said. "We keep it in absolute pristine condition." Vickie takes care of the clothing.

Duprey wears nice but cooler clothes when it's hot. Playing in the heat "means even more to me. I said I was going to be

there. I can say I was there, I did it, and I never gave up."

"He's definitely a man of his word," Vickie said. "I'm very proud of him."

It 'gives me peace'

Playing Taps, and the ritual within, "gives me a peace," Duprey said. "It's a summarization of everything I've fought for, and tried to be successful at, and everybody I've tried to be successful for. Remember the past, and appreciate the present. I'm that guy."

When he finishes, people sometimes come up to Duprey and say "sir, sir, sir," with tears in their eyes. "What you do is absolutely fantastic. Thank you for your effort, for your dedication."

"It's such a nice moment," Jane Paul said after Duprey finished. "It's just a lovely thing to do." ★

James Duprey plays Taps at 5 p.m. every Saturday

WHERE: The Arizona Heroes Memorial, Naranja Park, Oro Valley.

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