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A Tribute to Alex Kapitanksi, The Flag Man of Oceanside

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Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a constituent whose efforts have touched thousands of Americans over the last seven decades. Mr. Alex Kapitanski, more commonly known as ``The Flag Man," recently passed away on February 17, 2010. Mr. Kapitanski holds a great legacy not only in my district of California, but across the United States.

A fixture at civic events, Mr. Kapitanski embodied love of country with his passion in providing American and state flags for display at thousands of events from school graduations, to parades, to countless military services. A resident of Oceanside since 1950, Mr. Kapitanski once estimated that he provided flags to more than 37,000 events and hung more than 3.5 million flags. He once said, ``I'll probably die with a flag in my hand."

His unwavering patriotism and commitment to his purpose has been recognized by presidents, generals and even Pope John Paul II. Just recently, Mr. Kapitanski, was honored in a special Presidents Day salute at the Oceanside Public Library and presented a proclamation from Oceanside Mayor Jim Wood with a film tribute and of course, plenty of flags on display.

Born on March 23, 1923, in West Rutland, Vermont, Mr. Kapitanski carried the spirit of the American flag from his early youth. His inspiration to begin collecting flags came from watching the superior conduct and community involvement of the legionnaires. At age 11, he hung his first flags by decorating the American Legion Post in his home town.

Mr. Kapitanski loved his country and served it with distinction at many levels. As a combat photographer during World War II, his primary mission was to go behind enemy lines to photograph enemy positions and gun emplacements. The military newspaper ``Stars & Stripes" once featured a photo of him bringing in a German soldier he had captured behind the lines while photographing a position in Normandy. The photo was sent by wire service to nearly every newspaper in the United States and beyond. During this time, Mr. Kapitanski received numerous commendations and awards for his heroism including a Silver Star from General Dwight D. Eisenhower and a Bronze Star from General Courtney H. Hodges.

With a passion to teach the meaning and significance of our nation's flags to area youth, Mr. Kapitanski's work truly came from the heart. Although he is no longer with us, his spirit will live on in the youth he determinedly sought to inspire. In a 2007 interview he said, ``My goal is to motivate the younger generation to preserve our freedom." He will certainly be remembered for his devotion to his work, his strength of character, and his steadfast efforts to pass on his love of country and patriotism to upcoming generations. Our thoughts and prayers continue to go to the Kapitanski family who will take up their father's cause to honor his memory. He is survived by four sons, Alex of Carlsbad, and Edwin, Albert and Allen of Oceanside; a daughter, Emilyann Ransom of Oceanside, and eight grandchildren.

Madam Speaker, I ask that my colleagues please join me in paying tribute to the Flag Man, Mr. Alex Kapitanski, who will surely live as a symbol of the great work that can be done when we strive to achieve. He will be dearly missed by his family, friends, and the many Americans he inspired over his long and rich life.