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Senate

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, today I stand to recognize the six Air Force B-52 crew members of Raider 21 who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country. I would like take a few moments to honor their courage and heroism.

The crew was based at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana and was deployed to Guam with the 20th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron as part of the U.S. military's continuous bomber presence mission in the Pacific. The unarmed bomber crashed Monday, July 21, during a swing around the island as part of Guam Liberation Day celebrations, marking the day when the U.S. military arrived to retake control of the island from Japan during World War II. The B-52 had been scheduled to conduct a flyover in a parade. The six crew members assigned to the 2nd Bomb Wing included Maj. Christopher M. Cooper, 33, aircraft commander; Maj. Brent D. Williams, 37, navigator; Capt. Michael K. Dodson, 31, co-pilot; 1st Lt. Joshua D. Shepherd, 25, navigator; 1st Lt. Robert D. Gerren, 32, electronic warfare officer; and Col. George Martin, 51, flight surgeon, who also was the deputy commander of 36th Medical Group at Anderson Air Force Base.

B-52s have been the backbone of the U.S. military's manned strategic bomber force for more than four decades, used for missions from attacks to ocean surveillance. They are capable of dropping or launching the widest array of weapons in the U.S. inventory, including cluster bombs and precision guided missiles. B-52s were first placed into service in 1955, and 93 remain in the Air Force's fleet. The Air Force has been rotating B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers through Guam since 2004 to boost the U.S. security presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Search operations continue in the Pacific Ocean sadly, they are primarily for the recovery of debris that may aid in the investigation of the crash. The 8th Air Force Museum in Shreveport, Louisiana, has created a memorial to the crew members that will be at the museum for 30 days. Those wishing to express condolences and pay tribute to the crew are welcome to sign a remembrance book. The book will be shared with the families and eventually presented to the 20th Bomb Squadron. In addition to the book, the memorial consists of framed photographs of each of the crew members, six pairs of flight boots and six flight helmets as well as other items from the 2nd Bomb Wing.

There is no doubt July 21 was a tragic day, not only for the families of the fallen crew members, but for the B-52 family, the community, and this nation. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the families of these airmen and our hearts grieve for their loss.

Thus, today, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring these great Americans and thanking them for their devotion and service to our Nation.