

Song of war dead touches home

By Ali Cheeseman

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DOVER — It's a common tale — one of a man and his guitar traveling the country, reaching out to people with lyrics and melody.

But folk artist John Flynn has brought to life a topic that for many was considered only a headline.

In the Wilmington resident's song "Dover," he sings of the fallen soldiers flown into Dover Air Force Base's Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs, the Department of Defense's largest joint-service mortuary facility and the only one in the continental United States.

"The song is beginning to speak to people on a personal level," Mr. Flynn, 50, said about "Dover," which was released on his "Two Wolves" album in 2006.

Initially he refused an interview because of the sensitivity of the subject, but said he decided to go through with it after a soldier encouraged him to.

"I wrote it about the time our country sacrificed our one thousandth son or daughter to the war," he said. "It seemed to me people were missing the point when they were talking about the photos of the war."

Using names and biographies found on the Faces of the Fallen link on the Washington Post's Web site, Mr. Flynn crafted the song and put faces and names to the reports of service men and women who lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Remembering, noticing or paying attention to these sacrifices is the least we can do," he said.

"Whether you're for or against the war, if a building was on fire — whether by arson, lightning or faulty wiring — you have to honor the devotion and courage of the men and women willing to run into the burning building."

In the song, Mr. Flynn tells the airplane to "bring 'em down easy/Out of the Delaware skies ... Dover is waiting/To welcome the heroes you fly."

Of the eight names mentioned in the song, only one is representative of a group of people, he said.

Jeremiah represents the fathers and mothers who won't be coming home, Mr. Flynn said. The rest of the names and descriptions are of actual people.

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"Dover" has stirred up some controversy since it has had more radio airtime on local stations, he said, but he has received a lot of positive feedback, especially from military personnel.

The father and brother of one man mentioned in the lyrics contacted him, Mr. Flynn said, and after a show on the road the cousin of another service member approached him and expressed gratitude for remembering.

"It didn't occur to me that they would reach out to me," he said. "Now that the radio is playing it more, more attention is being paid by service personnel."

Mr. Flynn started playing the guitar at 12 and worked his way through college playing with bands and entering contests.

Instead of continuing his pre-law studies, Mr. Flynn said a visit to Nashville's Music Row resulted in a publishing contract, but that eventually ended when he decided his writing was not what country music was looking for.

"My songs tended to want to be about a little more than country music was comfortable with," he said.

Since then Mr. Flynn has released eight albums, which can be purchased in stores or online either at his Web site, <http://www.JohnFlynn.net> or sites including Amazon.com.

"This shouldn't be about me or my position on the war or my career as a folk singer," he said. "God is speaking to us through these sacrifices and we're not paying attention.

"The song is about paying attention to them."

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