



WE HONOR OUR KILLED IN ACTION AND WANT AN ACCOUNTING OR RELEASE OF OUR MISSING IN ACTION OR PRISONERS OF WAR.

Official Newsletter of..."Run For The Wall"...October 2004

Quarterly Newsletter  
" We Ride For Those Who Can't "  
October 2004

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**REACHING INTO THE PAST**

By Sandra "LittleBit" McKinney

The telephone rang very early on Labor Day morning. Jackie was off enjoying a motorcycle trip with his cousin from Washington State; I half expected the call to be Jackie wishing me a good morning, but it was a strange voice on the line, a man's voice full of emotion.

He identified himself as Richard Brittingham. He told me he had only recently discovered our Run For the Wall web-site and that he had been reading the April 2003 issue of the newsletter, in particular a story titled "Case 1000 – MIA Vietnam". It was a story about Donna Elliott's efforts to hopefully discover the fate of her brother, SSGT. Jerry W. Elliott. Many of you are aware of Donna's tireless efforts to bring Jerry (MIA) home.

In that story, Donna listed the date, January 21, 1968, when Jerry jumped off a chopper to assist members of the 282nd AHC in a 'Blackcat 027", which had been hit by a B-40 rocket causing it to crash on the eastern slope of the

plateau. It was the last time he was seen alive. Well, Richard B. was freaking out when he read that story...he was very likely one of those to last see Jerry Elliott alive on the ground. You see, Richard Brittingham told me "I was there!" "On 21JAN68, I volunteered to be a door gunner for a helicopter because a guy named Seghetti (the door gunner) had been shot thru the foot and the Army needed a replacement real quick- I was a member of the US Marine Corp 3MP Bn with Forward Security at Adv Tm 4 in Quang Tri and volunteered to go to Khe Sanh. WO Gerald McKinsey was the pilot, I remember, and he got killed that day. LTC. Seymoe was there....."

At this point, Richard was getting choked with emotion and wanted to assure me that he was 'for real'. He asked me if I might be able to connect him with the author of Case 1000, Donna Elliott. Well, I had Donna's e-mail address readily available, but I felt an urgency to connect Richard and Donna. I went searching thru my RFTW files and thankfully found Donna's telephone number. I called her and interrupted her out mowing the lawn. I told her the story of my telephone call from Richard and could tell Donna was very interested. I gave her Richard's telephone number and she promised to call him.

Donna later told me that she knew of the volunteer on the mission and had him listed in her notes as "Marine??", but did not have any other information about him. Donna said, "Never in a zillion years did I ever expect to identify him, much less talk to him!"

Richard has been struggling with his memories these past 37 years and could not believe what transpired over the next few days. He told me "It has already been helpful beyond imagination for me- I feel like I have a ray of hope. Moreover, I may be of some value to Donna- she is still looking for the remains of her brother and I was an eyewitness to the last moments he was seen - in fact, I remember very clearly the right gunner calling out "there's a round eye down there". Richard continued, "I have now also talked to the pilot of the chopper I was on and learned some things- he told me I was carried off the chopper on a stretcher- I don't remember ANY OF THAT. He is clear on it though. I cannot thank you enough for helping me- I know I was an emotional wreck- in that moment- I am usually very stable- honest to God- it just hit me like a ton of bricks."

Since Richard was a Marine on loan to the Army, he had never really known what had happened after the mission. Helping Richard to make a connection with Donna was so tremendously rewarding for me. It is for moments like this that I am thankful for the opportunity to work the RFTW Newsletter and to be of help to the veterans.

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## **MILITARY MUSEUM AND LIBRARY IN SANTA BARBARA, CA**

From Mary "Bumps" McNally

My dad joined the Army during WWII and after the war, he and my mother lived in Japan as part of the occupation forces. He also served in Korea and retired in 1966 as a Lt. Colonel, after 22 years of active duty.

Lt. Col. John McNally shared this information with Mary and she wants to pass it on to the members of Run For The Wall. Her dad went to a retired officer's meeting in Santa Barbara and learned about this museum in progress.

Some of you veterans may be interested in how to donate your military treasures to a place that will welcome them and preserve them.

Two Short biographies:

1 - Pierre Claeysens was a teenager in German occupied Belgium in WWII. After the war he came to the United States and did quite well for himself. He never forgot the American military that liberated Belgium, and that allowed him freedom and prosperity. When he died last year he left a million dollars as seed money to start a Military Museum and Library in Santa Barbara. So far they've raised another half million toward a total of about 4.5 million

they'll need for a high traffic place near Stern's Wharf.

2 - Stefanie Salata is the Executive Director - 46, single, 6 ft tall and very straightforward. I'm sure you'd like her. She grew up in LA, got involved in Republican politics, went to Washington with the Reagan White House, returned to LA to work at the Reagan Library, then several years at the Los Angeles Museum of Art, and finally here to the Claeysens' Memorial.

So far they only have an office. They're trying for a store front while gathering resources for the museum.

Stephanie is especially interested in personal stuff with a complete story. For example, a picture with several guys around an aircraft doesn't mean much without ID, but if the names of the people, the location, the time, the military operation, etc. are available it's much more valuable. She talked to Mr. McNally's group at Harry's Restaurant, where the walls are full of pictures. Those with labels are much more interesting than those that are pictures only. It helped make her point.

If any of you guys want to consider donation of your stuff you can reach Stephanie at 805-966-1660. Her email address is [MsSalata@aol.com](mailto:MsSalata@aol.com) . Sounds like a very worthwhile project.

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## **EDUCATION CENTER NEAR THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL**

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund has chosen the architectural firm of Polshek Partnership Architects to head the design team for an Education Center near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The winning team was selected from four finalists out of a field of 39 entrants in a National Design Competition.

Maya Lin, architect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, participated in the selection process as a special advisor to the jury.

Known for architectural excellence and for the firm's long-standing commitment to cultural, educational, governmental and scientific institutions, Polshek Partnership's collaborative design approach has cultivated such projects as the American Museum of Natural History Rose Center for Earth and Space in New York City; the underground Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall; the Brooklyn Museum of Art's Entry Pavilion and Plaza; the Newseum/Freedom Foundation World Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; and the William J. Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock.

The exhibition designer for the Education Center will be Ralph Appelbaum Associates of New York. A firm of world renown, RAA has created such projects as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Rose Center for Earth and Space, The Newseum, and the new Corning Museum of Glass. RAA has received more than 90 awards, including the Presidential Award for Design Excellence and the Smithsonian's first National Design Award in Communications Design.

On November 17, 2003, President Bush, signed legislation allowing the Memorial Fund to construct an Education Center. It is expected to cost more than \$40 million and take three to five years to build. Just like The Wall itself, no federal funds will be used to build the Education Center.

For more information about this story, please read the press release on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund website: <http://www.vvmf.org/index.cfm?SectionID=373>

Holly Rotondi  
Director of Special Events

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund  
1023 15th Street, NW  
2nd Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
202.393.0090 ext.14  
202.393.0029 (fax)

Jan Craig Scruggs, Esq.  
Founder & President  
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund  
1023 15th Street, NW, Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 393-0090  
(202) 393-0029 fax  
[jscruggs@vvmf.org](mailto:jscruggs@vvmf.org) email

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## **MANY BLESSINGS**

By Rev. Jerry "Jay" Peters

Many of you may remember my first trip with RFTW. It occurred in 2001 on my then new Electra Glide Classic. It was a wonderful trip, as I met many great veterans and supporters. I also experienced my first time visiting Rainelle. What a great feeling to be admired and appreciated by such a wonderful group of kids. They know more about American history than most Americans.

And yes, there was a reason that Rainelle was so good for me. In 1999 I was disabled in the line of duty as a United States Marshal. (Since then I have fought Uncle Sam for every benefit that I have obtained. It was like I was the bad guy or something. Now, I know I do not have to go into the disgusting details of "red-tape" with a group of Nam veterans. You guys were treated much worse by the people and Nation that you were protecting. But rest assured, my negative experience gave me a greater appreciation for what you endured upon your return. And for that reason I apologize to each of you on behalf of the United States and its sometimes ungrateful public.) ANYWAY, back to the story.

Rainelle was good because I had an encounter with a group of kids. Unbeknownst to me, RC had told them I was a hero and was disabled serving this nation and sent them over to get autographs. What a humbling experience. It brought tears to my eyes and made me remember why I was so proud to serve. I then went and hugged RC and thanked him for allowing me such an unearned honor.

We went on from there in the seven days of rain that followed to the wall. During my trip I had several reasons for going. The main one was to offer ministry in any form available to the heroes that I revered. And during the trip those opportunities were endless. But I never knew how much that trip would minister healing to me.

In 2002 I was unable to go...but in 2003 I saddled up again and made the trip. Once again friendships were renewed and new acquaintances were made. This trip though was different, as my 19 year old son was serving with Army Special Forces in Iraq. I was riding for you all, for me and now for him. It was an emotional time because I knew that many of you guys served in Vietnam when you were that same age. The relevance was, on some days, overwhelming. But I put that aside as much as possible because my mission was to minister to those all around me.

I returned home from the 2003 trip and just weeks later (14 July, 2003) I got that terrible call. My one and only son had been badly injured during an ambush against his six man team. Over the next five months he was shuttled from

place to place, enduring many surgeries to accomplish repairs. I only got to see him for a few days when he returned to CONUS, then he was away again for rehab. Once again my heart went out to all you 19 year old guys that had a life changing experience in Vietnam. And, to those who did not return. What heartache must have filled the hearts of their friends and loved ones. And what pain you all must bear, knowing that your buddies did not return.

Many of you know the great outcome to my story. You had the chance to meet Josh during the 2004 RFTW. He and I hopped our Harley's and made the trip to LA from Missouri. We then rode part way back until we had to break off and go it alone. We both have disabilities and just could not continue on the regular trip. But those days we spent with you were wonderful. Everyone loved Joshua and welcomed him home with great pride, an act of giving from the heart that I have come to expect from the RFTW crew. You all are great! I was honored as a warrior to see your camaraderie, I was proud as a father to have him recognized for his service, and I was overwhelmed with joy to know that my son had come home..."ALIVE". Still able to ride next to dad across this beautiful country and enjoy the freedom for which we have all sacrificed.

To update you, we made our trip safely. Joshua loved every minute of the experience and said the trip was worth all the pain he endured. In addition, he is engaged to be married 27 November, 2004. That just so happens to be my birthday. What a present...to see him here to start a new life.

I want to thank all of you from my heart for your effort on behalf of all veterans and especially on behalf of my son. Your service to country, your honorable show of love and your undying commitment to all who serve, is more than commendable.

I will leave you with this thought and a prayer:

Each person associated with RFTW knows what sacrifice means. Many of us also know that the Bible says: No greater love hath a man than to lay down his life for a friend. Many of you have sacrificed for people that you do not even know; just as Jesus laid down His life for the redemption of those not yet born. Jesus sacrificed that we may all receive eternal life if we just believe in Him and accept Him as the Son of almighty God.

What does this have to do with the story? I am so grateful to God that Joshua came home. However, I am confident that had my son not returned, he would have rested in the arms of God as his savior and received eternal life according to God's Word. Joshua and I both hope that each of you know God and serve Him according to His will in your life. If not, we pray that at some point during your journey on this earth, you will understand God's endless love and sacrifice for you as you accept Him as Lord and Savior. If you choose not to accept Him, then all that you have fought for was in vain because the Bible says you will lose all of your freedom...forever.

Lord God, I thank you for your provision and your protection in our lives. I also thank you for the many men and women that I have met during RFTW. I pray continued blessings on each of them and trust you to guide them in their ways. Lord, I also ask that you grant each of us wisdom and understanding as we ponder these thoughts. May you give insight to those who seek you and grant salvation to all who would ask from their heart for your forgiveness. Grant your abundant peace to those who suffer and grant strength to us as we walk each day. In Jesus name...Amen.

Until we meet again.

Rev. Jerry "Jay" Peters (a/k/a, "YKYDL")....ask Pato-Pato to explain the name.

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## **FREEDOM ROCK IN RURAL IOWA**

It is an inspiration to anyone who feels the surge of pride when the American Flag is raised, or the National Anthem plays for one of our Olympians on the medal stand.



Every year, for the last five years, a talented artist, Ray (Bubba) Sorensen II, has done a Memorial Day tribute to our servicemen and servicewomen, both past and present, with a stirring tableau painted on a large granite boulder which stands next to Highway 25. The huge granite boulder came out the nearby Schillberg Rock Quarry and it weighs 56 ton (50.8Mg) and is 12 ft (3.7m) high.

"I love my country and I do it out of respect for the veterans. It's my way of thanking those who have protected the freedoms I enjoy today. God bless the USA," says

Sorensen.

For years this boulder was known as "the graffiti rock" and was decorated for high school rivalries, love interests, etc. Since the Memorial Day paintings began, the "rock" has remained with the annual tribute intact, until the artist himself paints over it, in preparation for the next year's tribute. The rock has been "defaced" once since Bubba has started this project, causing a local stir. The vandal, got a punch in the face from a Vietnam War veteran for his trouble, and vandalism has never again been a problem.

Sorensen, who is 24 years old and from Greenfield, Iowa, draws a sketch of his idea on paper and then draws the design by free hand onto the rock. This takes him anywhere from one to three weeks to paint. He says he is interested in military history and gets his ideas from books, movies, previous artwork and images by other artists. Bubba has been commissioned to paint a number of public murals including one at the birthplace of Henry A Wallace.

Visitors from every state and many foreign nations have come to view the rock. It was featured last 4th of July on the nationally televised Boston Pops Concert, as well as on many Network news presentations. If you are anywhere close, you shouldn't miss the opportunity to see what is truly an American treasure.

<http://www.ticz.com/homes/users/bob/On-A-Rock/On-A-Rock.htm>

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## **A LESSON TO MY SON**

by A PROUD AMERICAN, Irma S. Chambers

The other day, my nine year old son wanted to know why we were at war.

My husband looked at our son and then looked at me. My husband and I were in the Army during the Gulf War and we would be honored to serve and defend our country again today. I knew that my husband would give him a good explanation. My husband thought for a few minutes and then told my son to go stand in our front living room window. He told him: "Son, stand there and tell me what you see?"

"I see trees and cars and our neighbor's houses." he replied.

"OK, now I want you to pretend that our house and our yard is the United States of America and you are President Bush."

Our son giggled and said "OK."

"Now son, I want you to look out the window and pretend that every house and yard on this block is a different country." my husband said.

"OK Dad, I'm pretending."

"Now I want you to stand there and look out the window and see that man come out of his house with his wife and he has her by the hair and is hitting her. You see her bleeding and crying. He hits her in the face, he throws her on the ground, then he starts to kick her to death. Their children run out and are afraid to stop him, they are crying, they are watching this but do nothing because they are kids and afraid of their father. You see all of this, son....what do you do?"

"Dad?"

"What do you do son?!"

"I call the police, Dad."

"OK. Pretend that the police are the United Nations and they take your call, listen to what you know and saw but they refuse to help. What do you do then son?!"

"Dad, but the police are supposed to help!" My son starts to whine.

"They don't want to son, because they say that it is not their place or your place to get involved and that you should stay out of it," my husband says.

"But Dad...he killed her!!!" my son exclaims.

"I know he did...but the police tell you to stay out of it. Now I want you to look out that window and pretend you see our neighbor who you're pretending is Saddam turn around and do the same thing to his children."

"Daddy...he kills them?"

"Yes son, he does. What do you do?"

"Well, if the police don't want to help, I will go and ask my next door neighbor to help me stop him." Our son says.

"Son, our next door neighbor sees what is happening and refuses to get involved as well. He refuses to open the door and help you stop him." My husband says.

"But Dad, I NEED help!!! I can't stop him by myself!!!"

"WHAT DO YOU DO SON?"

Our son starts to cry.

"OK, no one wants to help you, the man across the street saw you ask for help and saw that no one would help you stop him. He stands taller and puffs out his chest. Guess what he does next son?"

"What Daddy?"

"He walks across the street to the old ladies house and breaks down her door and drags her out, steals all her stuff and sets her house on fire and then...he kills her. He turns around and sees you standing in the window and laughs at you.

WHAT DO YOU DO?!!!!"

"Daddy..."

"WHAT DO YOU DO?!!!!"

Our son is crying and he looks down and he whispers, "I close the blinds, Daddy."

My husband looks at our son with tears in his eyes and asks him... "Why?"

"Because Daddy...the police are supposed to help...people who need it...and they won't help....You always say that neighbors are supposed to HELP neighbors, but they won't help either...they won't help me stop him...I'm afraid....I can't do it by myself...Daddy.....I can't look out my window and just watch him do all these terrible things and...and.....do nothing...so....I'm just going to close the blinds....so I can't see what he's doing.....and I'm going to pretend that it is not happening."

I start to cry.

My husband looks at our nine year old son standing in the window, looking pitiful and ashamed at his answers to my husbands questions and he tells him.... "Son,"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Open the blinds because that man....he's at your front door...WHAT DO YOU DO?!!!!"

My son looks at his father, anger and defiance in his eyes. He balls up this tiny fists and looks his father square in the eyes, without hesitation he says: "I DEFEND MY FAMILY, DAD!! I'M NOT GONNA LET HIM HURT MOMMY OR MY SISTER, DAD!!! I'M GONNA FIGHT HIM, DAD, I'M GONNA FIGHT HIM!!!!!"

I see a tear roll down my husband's cheek and he grabs my son to his chest and hugs him tight, and cries..."It's too late to fight him, he's too strong and he's already at YOUR front door son.....you should have stopped him BEFORE he killed his wife. You have to do what's right, even if you have to do it alone, before.....it's too late."

THAT scenario I just gave you is WHY we are at war with Iraq. When good men stand by and let evil happen is the greatest EVIL of all. Our President is doing what is right. We, as a free nation, must understand that this war is a war of humanity. WE must remove this evil man from power so that we can continue to live in a free world where we are not afraid to look out our window and see crimes on humanity. So that my nine year old son won't grow up in a world where he feels that if he just "closes" the blinds the atrocities in the world won't affect him. Today, in this second year of "WAR on IRAQ", I felt compelled to write this and pass it along. Hopefully, you will understand the lesson my husband tried to teach our son.

## **THE HAND OF GOD**

By Donnie "Hoss Cat" Townsend

Tell me that God did not have his hand on my life the week of May 16, 2004.

We packed the trailer with all the motorcycles and numerous other items for the journey to Ontario, California. My father, Glen Townsend, left Ironton on his way to his house with my truck and trailer to get his personal belongings, he then planned to get on the road heading for Ontario and the start of Run for the Wall. On his way to his house in Hurricane, WV, a lady traveling west bound lost control of her vehicle. This caused her to go into the ditch on the right side of the road and when she came out of it, she crossed the west bound lanes, then through the median into the east bound traffic. She hit a truck directly in front of my dad and spun into the side of my truck, knocking herself into the trailer. When she hit the trailer, it was my bike that took the impact causing it to break the tie-downs and throw it on another bike in the trailer. It ripped out the side of the trailer and caused an enormous amount of damage to my bike and a couple others. There was debris scattered every where including helmets, riding gear and personal items from all of us. My father was not hurt and the lady driving the sport utility that caused the accident was okay and her two small children were okay, also. The lady driving the first truck hit was in serious condition.



God allowed miracles to work throughout this tragedy. My prayers are with the lady injured and so thankful that no one else was hurt.

God saw that we got back on the road right away and on our way to L.A. They totaled my trailer and we picked up a new one immediately. They over-nighted more than \$5,000.00 in parts for my motorcycle and got it repaired promptly. The Harley that my bike landed upon, was repaired and all of our gear was replaced. I know that if it was not meant to be for us to take part in RFTW XVI, God would not have allowed everything to fall in place for us.

Please pray that the lady who was injured would feel the touch of God and have a speedy recovery.

God works in mysterious ways and it is not up to me to ask why or to question His actions. I am thankful for what He has given me and will always do my share for Him.

Thank you for allowing me to share this story of what God has done for me lately besides giving me salvation and unconditional love.

God Bless!

## **2004 RUN FOR THE WALL**

By Sheila White

The mission of Run For The Wall (RFTW) is to ensure our MIA's and POW's will never be forgotten. RFTW is dedicated to achieving an accounting of all those listed as MIA since WWI. Support teams are involved in an on-going effort to locate remains of our service personnel in foreign lands. Our group's mission was to "Ride For Those Who Can't." We were reminded, "This Is a Mission, Not a Party" and "Freedom Isn't Free."

Each of us motorcyclists (numbering in the hundreds) was actually a very small part of





RFTW. Along the entire route, whether rain or shine, men, women, & children greeted us. Some draped POW banners and US flags over the railings of overpasses. Others, standing along roadsides and from their parked cars, waved and held up US flags. Men would be saluting in the rain and would hold their salute until all the bikes had passed.

“Thank you” and “we love you RFTW” signs drawn by the kids were displayed at an elementary school. The entire student body together with town dignitaries hosted a major event honoring RFTW. Town merchants had donated money for the lunch we were served.

At various patriotic events Veterans groups provided complimentary meals, snacks, drinks, and souvenirs and urged us to “please, take more.” Staff, volunteers, and patients applauded our arrival as we rode into the parking lot at a VA hospital. At another location, a Huey helicopter escorted us into town. Police officers in various cities and states provided traffic control and escorts.



Many of our RFTW group participated in the Rolling Thunder parade the day following our arrival at the Vietnam Memorial. Allen & I were among the hordes of spectators as thousands upon thousands of motorcycle engines sounded exactly like rolling thunder. It was fantastic! Moreover, spine tingling!

To me, the most emotional aspect of the entire ride was the countless citizenry who participated in so many wonderful ways to support this cause.

It doesn't matter if you're a vet or not. You are invited to be a part of this grand mission. Be prepared to ride regardless of weather conditions. Don't be surprised if you choke up from time to time or possibly shed a tear or two, or more along the way. A prized FNG (Fabulous New Guy / Fantastic New Gal) pin can be yours at next year's RFTW.

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## **GOLD STAR MOTHER'S DAY**

Sunday, September 26, 2004

By Wayne Nicholls, Vietnam Veteran

Sunday morning I put the American flag on the front porch next to the MIA-POW flag that I fly 24/7. It was a very special day, one that several of my neighbors needed to be reminded of. It was “Gold Star Mother's Day”.

RFTW Brother Danny Lopresto had coordinated a ride to the “Gold Star Manor” in Long Beach, California. Most years, they have a big ceremony at the retirement home. This year, nothing was planned. Hearing that, Danny contacted some of the local RFTW participants to gather and let our Gold Star Mother's know that they are not forgotten. Most riders met at Fingers' house at 11:00am for the ride to Long Beach. RFTW Brother Steven Neal and I, along with our wives, decided that we'd meet the group there.

It was a wonderful feeling to see some of our Brothers being led by Danny and Fingers, riding in formation. When they entered the gated property, we joined them in parade to our designated parking area. Greetings and hugs were plentiful as we gathered for our “group picture” and “rider's meeting”.

Danny explained the history of Gold Star Mothers, dating back to WWI when families of soldiers would display a blue star in their windows representing their child's service. When news came that their child had been killed, a Gold Star was placed over the blue one. In 1938, the President signed a proclamation, declaring the last Sunday in September as “Gold Star Mother's Day”.



Gold Star Manor in Long Beach (one of two dedicated facilities) had originally provided residence to 300+ Gold Star Mothers. Since the end of the Vietnam War, the number has dropped to less than 10. Unfortunately with our involvement with the war on Terrorism, the number of Gold Star Mothers will increase. Danny had made arrangements to visit and have lunch with the remaining Moms. Ed “Fingers” and Lil’ Lisa brought along beautiful corsages for each of these honorable women.

Jim “Jumper” Braga, 2005 RFTW California State Coordinator, provided a warm and heartfelt introduction of the “Run For The Wall”; who we are, what we do, and a very special, sincere thank you to the “Gold Star Mom’s” (and one “Gold Star Dad”) that had given the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

Then one of the Mothers stood to say, “Thank you, it is so nice to know that we are not forgotten” and she added that not a day passes without thinking about her child and it is nice to know he too is being honored. She brought tears to our eyes. It had been a wonderful day and another rewarding experience with the Brotherhood of Run For The Wall.

During the 2005 RFTW, we will carry the names of their sons with us to the Wall as we travel across this great nation.



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## **GRANDPA'S HANDS**

Author unknown



If these hands could speak...  
They would weave a tale  
More than 90 years long  
They would tell of a thousand hours  
Spent working with wood  
Sawing, planing, sanding  
Pieces of maple, walnut, oak and pine  
Shaping each into cupboards and cabinets, tables and lamps  
And so, so much more.

They would recall clutching a number 2 yellow pencil  
To fill in square after square  
Of the challenging daily crossword puzzle  
Or thoughtful placing wooden chips with letters embossed  
On the Scrabble board  
To cleverly create a word with a winning high score.

They would speak of the hundreds of miles  
Spent gripping the steering wheel of a Ford panel van  
Guiding it over country gravel roads  
To answer a farmer's call

To help deliver a calf or treat a sick cow.

They would describe the lifetime of mishaps  
That crumpled their form at the blade of a saw  
And loped off the digit of a finger and a thumb  
But never ceased working or creating  
The next widget or gadget , invention or project.

They would spin yarns about years of fishing  
And the BIG ONE that got away  
Of patiently waiting for hours holding the reel  
Anticipating the fish who might bite  
Long past daylight.

They would fondly reminisce about all the tobacco  
Tapped into an odd assortment of smoking pipes  
And the Swisher Sweet cigars that left sprinkles of ashes  
Wherever they traveled - carefree  
Smoked down to a nubbin' with the greatest of glee.

These hands have plowed fields, planted gardens & trees  
They have weathered the heat and the cold  
Of 91 Michigan summers and winters  
They helped raise five kids  
And countless puppies, kittens, chickens & pigs.

These hands have clapped in joy  
And clutched in grief  
But they have rarely been raised in anger  
For they are the hands of peace.

These hands have sprinkled salt in coffee  
To lessen the bitter taste  
They have delighted in the ease of electric can openers  
That operate with a mere push of a bar  
Not soft hands, not delicate hands but working hands  
Of a man who spent a lifetime working with those hands.

Grandpa's hands speak volumes  
Without saying a word  
They read like a book  
The tale of one man's long and colorful life.

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## **TAPS FOR SPC. BRANDON TITUS**

By Tom "Ghost" Titus

My son, Spc. Brandon Thomas Titus, 20, of Boise, Idaho was killed in action during combat operations in Iraq on August 17, 2004.

Words cannot really express the feelings I wish to convey to everyone in the RFTW family, especially to the 'old bunch' that I have been around for so many years.

As tragic as it is for a parent to lose a child, it really hits home when the tragedy is because of war. So many of us from the old RFTW bunch have ridden many miles together and some of us have continued to ride with newer supporters and first time Vet riders, but the miles traveled seem so different every year.

I may be back next year, 2005, but if I am absent, I want everyone to know how much your kindness has meant to my daughter and me during our time of grief. My son, Brandon, a 240B Gun team leader on the Lead Humvee, 3rd PLT (OutLaws) B Co, 2-14 10th Mountain Division, was killed in action; 17 August 04, near Baghdad, Sadr City, Iraq. He was like this 'old vet' in a lot of ways, we shared our love for this country, our love as Americans, our duty to the military and being part of the RFTW family.



There were many RFTW family members at Brandon's military funeral, in addition to two Senators, one Congressman, the Governor of Idaho, two Generals and many other dignitaries. But those who stood out the most were many of my old RFTW friends/family from as far as Ontario Province, Canada, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, Illinois, the mid-West, the deep South. The motorcycle escort from the church to the gravesite at the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery numbered at least 300+ bikes and the entire procession of bikes, autos, etc. stretched over seven plus miles. Brandon was the first Veteran laid to rest in the 'new' State Veterans Cemetery, he is the leader again. To each and everyone, 'THANK YOU very much for your support and for traveling so many miles!!

It was a great Honor to my only son, a young man who was Proud to Serve his Country and you all touched this Proud Father!

Next step here in Boise is establishing: The Brandon Titus Foundation..... to help other military families of Idaho soldiers killed in action and to remember our sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, aunts and uncles. I am doing this in my son's name as a father, a veteran and a biker. If anyone would like to contact me or help out, please contact me at 208-321-1151 Boise, Idaho.

Duty - Honor - Country  
Thank You All!  
RET. SGT. Tom 'Ghost' Titus - US Army  
RFTW Idaho State Point of Contact  
Boise, Idaho

Check out Veteran Brotherhood Association-Brandon Titus Memorial  
<http://www.veteranbrotherhood.org/index.html>

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## **RFTW REUNION WELL ATTENDED**

If we had taken an actual count, I bet we would have about 130 people at the Reunion in Wickenburg, Arizona on the week-end of October 8, 9, 10. We want to thank Steve "Sgt. Rock" Walker for his huge efforts in coordinating the event on short notice after we had to cancel in Prescott. The Wickenburg weather was extremely cooperative and the temp never went over 95 degrees F. It was nice and pleasant in the shade and I didn't see any major sunburn occurrences! We had one visitor all the way from Georgia, way to travel Mr. Ratcliff! Others were there from Wisconsin, Kansas, Arkansas, and of course California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. We had a super representation!

Don Morris and his troops had RFTW merchandise for sale and many were taking the opportunity to purchase patches, t-shirts and flags. Patty Hooper was there with the Task Force Omega, Inc. Motor Home. She was also doing a brisk business of selling pins, decals, magnets, t-shirts, all in support of POW/MIA issues.

We had a great Mexican food dinner at Anita's Restaurant on Friday evening. The wait-staff had a difficult time delivering the food as they kept getting caught up in the throng of hugs all around. Every time a new person would walk into the restaurant, there was another round of hugs. But we had the staff smiling at us before we left that evening! You know how contagious that happy attitude is when the RFTW "Family" is around!



Saturday afternoon there was a group ride and they gathered with the Mayor of Wickenburg, and Sgt. Rock presented Mayor Ron Badowski and the City of Wickenburg with a POW/MIA flag. (pictured)

We had a delicious chicken dinner at the Wickenburg Country Club on Saturday evening. The mayor was there and invited us to return again next year. Rock and RC had gathered many great raffle items and lots of people had to figure how to get that extra item into the saddle-bags for the trip home.

Sunday morning we gathered at Screamer's Drive-In for breakfast burritos and our last good-byes. There was rain predicted for the ride home and, sure enough, many of the riders found it! Hope that everyone arrived home safely. We are looking forward to seeing you all again in May!!!

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## **VOTE!**

From Del "Abe" Jones

I was going to do something about voting, or the lack of it, while watching Oprah about the forty million women who did NOT vote in the last Presidential election. I then thought about a poem my Grandfather, Charles F. Thomas, Jr. published in a self-published book of poetry, "The Aqueduct" back in 1936. I am not exactly sure when the piece was written but thought, "how apropos" for this day and time and felt I could not say it better.

I am ashamed to admit that over the years (many years) I think I have been to the polls three or four times. I am one of those who love to bitch about everything, though. I am also one of those who uses the excuse, "lesser of the two evils, why should I bother?" So what! Isn't voting for the "lesser" at least a step in the right direction?

Anyway, here is his poem exactly as written:

## **SINCE WOMEN GOT THE VOTE**

It warn't so many years ago—I kin remember when  
A man could git his hair cut, or shaved or drink with other men  
Without a woman sittin' there, right in a barber's chair,  
Or leanin' up against the bar an' drinkin' whiskey there.  
It's gittin' so a man cain't do the things he'd like to do  
Without some female buttin' in with a fancy how de you  
An' try to do he same dern things--or jest a leettle more  
Since women got the vote!

They useter tell us poor, dern fools how good the world would be;  
How sweet an' kind an' good an' pure; of all things wrong so free.  
How politics—a rotten game—the same in days of yore,  
They'd clean it up—the women would—if we'd give them the chore.  
An' show the world how plain, pore man had failed in his long job  
Of runnin' things like politics an' sorter playin' hob  
With wars, an' booze an' presidents an' other simple things  
If women got the vote!

Wal, now I hopes they're satisfied an' happy as can be;  
They smoke an' drink an' cuss an' swear an' wearin' pants like me.  
They stagger 'round like drunken sots—like dern fools useter be,  
An' roll their own, shoot craps, raise hell an' stage a fustclass spree  
Thet puts to shame the ol' time toughs like what we useter find,  
When men were men an' had a place an' women folks were kind  
An' didn't imitate fool man the way they want to do  
Since women got the vote!

Remember, this was written nearly seventy years ago! Hope it stirs up everyone to get off their butts and go to the polls. If we ever needed to get all of the American voters to the polls, now is the time!

Please visit my pages:

NEW PAGE! <http://mywebpage.netscape.com/delabejones/page2.html>

<http://mywebpage.netscape.com/delabejones/page1.html> (9/11 Memoriam) updated 5-18-04

<http://mywebpage.netscape.com/delabejones/instant/memorial.html> (more poetry)

My e-book, "THE WORLD, WAR, FREEDOM, AND MORE" available for FREE.

(re: Vietnam, Gulf War, and all Vets, Native American, Trail of Tears and  
Chief Joseph, ) available in .zip or .exe format. Just ask for it.

See pics of Ellis County Veterans Memorial in Waxahachie, Texas where two of my poems are etched go to  
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~txellis/photos/veterans.htm>

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## **A MISSION - NOT A PARTY**

By Judy Lacey

It was very different for me this, my second, year on the Run For The Wall. Last year everything was new and exciting, and it took me the entire length of the Run to really understand what it was all about. By the end I felt very much a part of it — but it wasn't until this year that I truly realized the impact RFTW can have not only on our veterans, but on supporters as well.

My friend, Valerie, and I (supporters in a 4-wheeler) renewed friendships from last year and made new and wonderful friends this year. We helped register riders before and during the Run, and helped out some at the merchandise truck this year. It's a great way to meet new people on the Run and to make a contribution to the group. This year we signed up many FNG's during the Run! That's good; it means the word is spreading.

We left Ontario, California, on May 19 with over 300 participants. What an exhilarating feeling being a part of such a noble mission. We signed up a lot more along the way and had over 1000 registrants by the time we got to DC, although a great many are "day-riders" and only ride with us for a short way. Seeing people lining streets and freeways waving flags and giving our Vietnam vets the welcome home they never got after the war is an indescribably wonderful feeling. The patriotism seems to intensify the farther east we go. In a Wal-Mart in Kansas, I

saw two entire aisles, top to bottom shelves, stocked with red, white, and blue wreaths for Memorial Day. I've never seen a display like that in California.

All vets going to the Wall for the first time are "FNG's" and are taken under the wings of other vets who look out for them and give them emotional support. No one wanted the "F----- New Guys" in their platoon because their inexperience could get you killed. On the Run, everyone tries to make up for that attitude by giving a lot of support to them. This year "Will" made it all the way to the Wall - it was his third try. The last two years he turned back because it was too emotional for him. Now he's looking forward to paying back the support he received from his brothers and sisters by helping another FNG next year.

We were caught in some real downpours in Kansas and Missouri, but otherwise, most of the way the weather was good. In Arizona and New Mexico there was a lot of wind, and it made for a tense and difficult ride for the motorcycles. We were caught in a hurricane in Mt. Sterling, Indiana . The wind was so strong - first it blew one way, then reversed. I've never seen and heard such lightning and thunder. We didn't know how the bikes could possibly take off on schedule - cars and trucks were getting off the highway. But when there was a lull in the storm we took off quickly and were only a half hour behind schedule. We heard later that there had been over 500 tornadoes that day. While watching TV in my motel one night in Missouri, a banner ran continuously on the screen, warning of "Severe thunderstorms and flooding in your area." It's a little rattling to a Californian who's not used to natural disasters any worse than 15 seconds of shaking. When it rains on the Run, I really felt sorry for those who have to sleep outside in tents. After all, most of these guys and gals are no longer youngsters (I think our oldest this year was "Smoke," who's 82); the aches and pains that come with age make sleeping on the ground pretty damned miserable. But they believe in the Run so much that they somehow endure it.

As usual, we had great support from state troopers, highway patrol, and local police with traffic. They escorted us on portions of the interstates and city streets. At state lines, troopers or highway patrol units would drop off and the next state's units would pick up. Topeka, Kansas, was awesome! Throughout the city, traffic cops were posted at every single on-ramp of the freeway, stopping traffic until after we had passed. The freeway was completely empty except for our group.

In Arizona Linda got a cell phone message that her mother was dying. The hat was passed and money collected to fly her home to West Virginia, and they put her motorcycle on one of the trailers and returned it to her when we went through West Virginia. Valerie and I drove her to the Flagstaff airport in the morning. We just heard from her that her mother was still alive and improving; she was so grateful to have been able to get home in time to have time with her mom. There are so many stories like this one: last year a Paula got a call that her 10-year-old son at home had been hit by a car and was seriously injured. The hat was passed, and in 10 minutes she received \$1,200 to get her back home and help with medical bills. This year Paula was standing at the same stop where she got the phone call last year, handing out cards with an angel coin attached, thanking everyone for their support. Her son is still recovering and needs more surgeries.

I'm fond of ceremony, and there's a lot of it on the Run. I never tire of watching the flag-folding ceremony and the POW Table ceremony always leaves me crying. The VFW in Williams, Arizona, performed a beautiful flag-folding ceremony with bagpiper at the Circle Pines KOA, and the VFW in Hugo, Colorado, performs the most impressive POW Table ceremony I've seen.

A favorite place of vets is Window Rock, Arizona, capital of the Navajo Nation. It's a very sacred place about 30 miles north of Gallup, New Mexico, with its name coming from a wind-carved "window" in a huge red sandstone formation. The Navajo are a very patriotic people, and a great many of their young men have always served in the military, so they feel a great affinity to other vets. As we entered their reservation, tribal police joined us and escorted us to their Veterans Memorial Park, a beautiful spot surrounded by red sandstone formations and overlooked by the "window." Along the way, Navajo adults and children lined the road, waving flags. At the Park a ceremony is held, with their reservation representatives honoring RFTW's mission. Many of the adults and children come out in colorful native dress, and vets and Navajos greet each other while patriotic music is played over the loudspeaker. This year the

Navajo people entrusted us with a torch with an eternal flame to carry to the Vietnam Wall and leave there. The torch was passed through the crowd, and I felt so honored to be one of those to hold it for a brief moment.

In Gallup, NM we have a really nice banquet with real china instead of paper plates! The banquet is put on by the City, Jackie McKinney, and the local Sundance Iron Riders motorcycle club. We got to see Dr. Sam Billison this year (he's one of the few remaining Navajo Code Talkers) — he was one of the speakers. He told us that the military chose 29 Navajos, put them in a room, and told them to come up with a code that would be difficult for the enemy to break. Inside the room, they all looked at each other, not knowing how to create a code because the Navajo language was only spoken, not written. But they did a good job because when the military tested the code, no one could break it. The group of 29 had to take an oath never to reveal the code, ever, to anyone. Another speaker was a spokesman from JPAC (Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command). They go into countries where we were at war (Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, etc.) and search for remains of POWs and MIAs to bring them back home. This is the main purpose of the Run For The Wall - to bring attention to the POW/MIA issue and keep after the government to bring back the remains of those that were left behind. I never even knew such an agency in our government existed. After the Run we got an email from JPAC telling us they had just recovered and ID'd the remains of 4 former MIAs in South Vietnam. SFC. Robert Bryson, who spoke to us in Gallup said the agency will exist until the last man is brought home. If you're interested in reading more about what this group does, go to: <http://www.jpac.pacom.mil/>.

One of the most revered and most-anticipated stops on the Run is "Angel Fire," home of the first Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The town is 30 miles east of Taos, New Mexico, and it sits in a beautiful green valley next to the beautiful Sangre de Cristo mountain range. From miles around, you can see an almost mystic vision: on the top of one of the green hills is a pure white sweeping structure, reminiscent of an angel's wing, soaring upward. The Memorial was built by Dr. Victor Westphall, who began building it five days after his son, David, a Marine Corps infantry officer, was killed in Vietnam on May 22, 1968. A Visitor's Center is located underground next to the chapel, and a restored Huey helicopter on display that had been shot down in Vietnam. But the chapel is what draws vets: it is where they say they feel tremendous healing. They sit inside the quiet, small, tent-shaped structure with narrow window that extends from the floor to its 20-foot ceiling. The silence is broken only by occasional quiet sobbing. There is no light inside except that which comes from the narrow window, and from the many candles burning at the base of a tall, free-standing cross. The Memorial, dedicated in 1971 and declared a National Monument, was administered first by the Disabled American Veterans and now by the David Westphall Veterans Foundation. Victor Westphall, who died last year, had been at Angel Fire for a quarter of a century. He talked to thousands of Vietnam veterans and thousands of other visitors. Vietnam vets all say there is such spirituality at Angle Fire, and that it helps them in the healing process.

After Angel Fire we stopped in Cimarron for dinner at the parish hall, and to spend the night. Another small town, this one very western, with a trading post, general store, and little else. But the town has a big heart; they line the road into town and welcome the vets with resounding cheers. Inside the parish hall the local people had laid out a veritable banquet for us. Last year in this hall, a mother from town put out a flag and asked RFTW participants to sign a banner with good wishes that she could send to her 18-year-old son who had just been deployed to Iraq. This year, the banner was on the wall, and the young man, looking barely out of boyhood, was standing next to it - he had just returned from Iraq two weeks before. He was swamped with bear hugs from the older vets, and given a hearty welcome home. At various places along the way to Washington D.C., we were joined by a few active duty personnel. I marveled at the ability of our Vietnam vets to give such a sincere welcome home, with no bitterness, to today's warriors when they themselves received not so much as a shouted "Welcome Home!" when they returned thirty years ago.

The morning of Day 4 Valerie and I went ahead of the group to an overpass in Raton, NM to videotape the motorcycles coming down the highway. We wondered if Gail and Marcia, the two women we met last year at the same overpass, would be there again this year. And they were, joined this time by the husband of one, waving large American flags to cars down below. The two women are rather notorious in the area; the police tried to shoo them away from the overpass several times, but "they finally got tired because we wouldn't give in, and they leave us alone now." They went up on the overpass when the U.S. first sent troops into Iraq, and vowed to wave the flag and "God Bless America" signs every weekend until all of our troops come home for good. They have kept their promise for the



most part, missing only when the weather is really bad during the winter. Almost all cars and 18-wheelers going by honk in return, which is more than enough satisfaction for these patriotic women. I think of them as the "Rosie the Riveters" of our time.

One of the most fun stops is at Thomas Park in Salina, Kansas. Besides a great barbecue, they have a band and pay tribute to POWs. Everyone forms a circle and joins hands (do you know how big a circle is with about 200 people?!) We sing Amazing Grace and patriotic songs, and one at a time they call out vets from the different military branches to the center of the circle and play their anthems. Each branch whoops and hollers with pride when they're called. This is the closest we get to having a party, as we're reminded that "It's a mission, not a party." You'd expect 600 bikers to wreak havoc wherever they go, but there is no alcohol or drugs allowed on the Run. The only exception is a beer or two at VFW halls or Moose Lodges at the end of some days. I happened to chat with a man who lives adjacent to Thomas Park, and he praised our group highly. He said living there, he has to put up with all kinds of noise with groups drinking and raising heck through the night; but he looks forward to RFTW because he knows it's a disciplined and respectful group. He always walks over when the Run arrives and talks with some of the vets. Valerie (a peace officer herself) and I seem to run into a lot of police officers on the Run, and one we met last year in Salina dropped by Thomas Park to say hello this year.

Everyone goes to sleep early on the Run; they have to — in order to get up at 5 a.m. to have time for breakfast before the riders' meeting every morning. After the meeting the chaplain leads us in a prayer, and a request that our men currently in Iraq and Afghanistan be kept safe, we're on the road again by 8 a.m. At the rider's meeting in Wentzville, Missouri, "Cruzer" had to leave the Run, but he had "Top" cut off his long braid and take it to the Wall for their brothers who could never come home and grow their hair long. After the meeting I went ahead of the group again and waited on an overpass in Dale, Indiana, to videotape the bikes. Mike and Berlina (from Hawaii) spotted me and joined me. (There were at least 10 people on the Run from Hawaii; one told me it cost \$500 each way to ship their motorcycles to California.) We were caught in a downpour, but continued waiting, dripping wet, so we could give our support to the riders by waving flags. A local police officer came to ask what we were doing on the overpass; he said there were complaints of cars parked on the bridge. I told him about the Run and how important it was to show a "welcome home" to the vets - and he stayed there with us to greet the riders. I even talked him into turning on his flashers. When the bikes came, he couldn't believe his eyes. He said he'd never seen so many bikes. He was like an excited little boy; his face lit up, and he started waving to the riders with us. When we parted, he said he was so glad he came and that he'd meet us there next year. I had initially addressed him as "Officer," and as he left, he said "Oh by the way, I'm the police chief." I love things like this about the ride - meeting wonderful people all over the country.

We woke up on Day 8 in Corydon, Indiana, to learn that there had been a horrendous storm during the night. The hotel we were in, the Holiday Inn, was inundated with travelers forced off the road. There were no rooms left, but the hotel brought out blankets and pillows and let dozens of people sleep on the sofas, chairs, and the floor in the lobby.

We stop each year at two veteran's hospitals in Indiana and West Virginia. The vets love to visit the patients and cheer them up. Some of the ambulatory patients are wheeled outside to greet us when we arrive, some on gurneys. Our vets grab their wheelchairs and take them for a spin, while some of us walk through the halls and drop into rooms to talk to those who can't be moved. I spoke to Dominic (88 yrs old), who wasn't much of a talker, and to Bob (82), who talked so much I couldn't get away when it was time to leave. It's an uplifting experience visiting these heroes.

In Kentucky is one of my favorite Vietnam Memorials: a sundial, built in 1988. On a grassy hill overlooking the state capitol, the memorial consists of a square cement plaza about 80 feet across, with a giant (about 20 feet high) sundial in the center. In a circle around the sundial verses from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 are inscribed, some of them well-known to us all: "a time to be born, and a time to die . . . a time to kill, and a time to heal . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh . . . a time for war, and a time for peace . . . ." Scattered around the plaza are the engraved names of 1,100 Kentuckians who died in Vietnam, and the dates of their deaths. The shadow from the sundial falls on each name exactly on the date they died. It is truly awe-inspiring. The names of Kentucky MIAs are etched in front of the sundial, where the shadow never falls. When their remains are identified and they are officially declared a casualty, their names are etched on the plaza and removed from the granite in front of the sundial.

Perhaps even more anticipated than Angel Fire is the stop in Rainelle, West Virginia. This is a very small town, rather poor, and seemingly frozen in time, with its 40's era gas station, tiny white frame homes with picket fences, and old brick buildings. In the early years of the RFTW, the group was refused a waiver of the toll on the nearby toll road, and the riders simply went around the long way. Winding through the hills of West Virginia, they came upon Rainelle and stopped for gas. The entire town came out to see what the bikes were about, and the mayor was summoned. After learning about the group's mission, the town welcomed them with open arms, let the children out of school to meet the vets (their heroes), and urged the vets to camp wherever they wanted. They even opened up the bank to let them pitch their tents inside! Ever since then, the stop in Rainelle is looked forward to by the vets and the children both. The children are taught during school about the sacrifices vets made in the wars, and to honor them. Along with the residents, the children line the streets and greet the Run with flags waving and much cheering. We all gather in the schoolyard and the children run from vet to vet, asking for their autograph on their shirts, hats, pictures, or pieces of paper stapled together to create an autograph book. There are speeches and certificates awarded, and RFTW presents the donations collected throughout the Run to the city to use for the school. This year more than \$3,000 was collected in coins and dollar bills dropped in the jar passed around at every stop. Last year the school put in new playground equipment, partially paid for by RFTW donations. The city provides lunch for us - in our choice of the school cafeteria or the Moose Lodge. We spend the whole day and night there; we're given the run of the city. Some go over to the Little League field to cheer the kids on; some just walk the street, talking to the townspeople and soaking up the atmosphere of a small town where the kids are carefree, polite, and unsophisticated and the adults call out "Welcome home!" to a vet walking into the drug store. Bikes line the main street, and they give rides to the kids. I drove down the main street late at night and saw tents pitched everywhere - next to the grocery store, next to the 7-11 - anywhere there was a patch of grass. There are tears in a lot of eyes when we leave the next morning.

In Woodstock, Virginia, we had lunch at the fairgrounds and merged with the Southern Route of RFTW. There were estimates of up to 500 motorcycles, all parked on a grassy hill. What a sight when we all left for the last leg to Washington, D.C. Just outside of D.C., the National Park police met and escorted us to the Lincoln Memorial, where we had a group photo taken.

In Washington, D.C., I visited the World War II Memorial - what a beautiful structure! A lot of people wondered why it took so long to build, when all the more recent wars had memorials put up first. One WWII veteran who was asked how he felt about getting his memorial so long after other wars got theirs said: "When I returned from Europe, I had a ticker-tape parade and a great amount of support from people nationwide and in my community. But those who fought in Korea and especially Vietnam had very little to come home to and not many government aid and programs to help them get back into society like I did. So when they had their memorials dedicated first, I didn't feel so bad because they needed to have the public recognize them for the sacrifices they made, like the recognition they gave me when I returned from Europe." Isn't that a wonderful and generous attitude?

I was invited to join a small group of about 18 vets one night to go to a special ceremony at the Vietnam Wall about midnight. They lined up 2 by 2 and marched to the Wall, with "Top" calling out to the crowd "Make a hole! Make a hole! Patrol coming through!" They stopped at the apex of the Wall and Top had someone cut off his ponytail and place it at the Wall in honor of his buddies who never were able to come home and grow their hair long. Probably the most incredible thing ever left at the Wall was left by one of our riders, Joe Dragon. A few years ago he put POW/MIA stickers and signs all over his motorcycle, parked it at the apex of the Wall, left the keys in it, and walked away. I recall seeing pictures of it - it became a very famous image. He said when they were in Vietnam all they talked about was coming home, letting their hair grow long, buying a motorcycle, and riding around the country. He left his bike at the Wall for the guys who never got to come home and ride. A Navajo in our group performed a ceremony that night in honor of his friend who was killed in Vietnam - it was a solemn and very interesting ceremony. He laid out a blanket on the ground with a flute, pipe, a wood stick, and a pouch of some kind of tobacco (peyote?). He blew the flute facing each of the four points of the compass, then lifted the wood stick to each compass point and invoked the spirits to protect all vets and active servicemen. He lit the pipe and passed it around for us all to touch but not smoke. Even at midnight the Wall was crowded, and everyone stopped to watch and photograph the ceremony.

A lot of the vets prefer to visit the Wall late at night, when it's not so crowded. The journey to the Wall is a very difficult one for many vets. Some have put it off for thirty years, and when they finally release all the bottled-up memories and emotions, they break down. When this happens, they need to be surrounded by their brothers and sisters who understand and are there to support them.

This is why the Run is a "mission, not a party." We must publicize the mission of Run For The Wall to all Vietnam vets and vets of other wars who have not yet healed. Tell them they can find healing here, with their brothers and sisters. And the next time you see a vet, tell him or her "Welcome Home and thanks for our freedom."

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## **ADMINISTRATION EXPANDS BENEFITS FOR EX-POWS**

WASHINGTON (Oct. 2, 2004) - Continuing its commitment to former prisoners of war, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi today announced that the Bush Administration will expand benefits to all former POWs with strokes and common heart diseases.

"This is an issue that has been studied and debated too long," Principi said. "We have scientific studies supporting the association of these illnesses to the military service of our former POWs."

The secretary, who oversees the operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), announced the new benefits in a speech tonight at a national convention of the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

The Administration's decision benefits former POWs with strokes and most heart diseases. Those veterans will be automatically eligible for disability compensation for those common ailments, and their spouses and dependents will be eligible for service-connected survivors' benefits if these diseases contribute to the death of a former POW.

In September 2003, Principi launched a nationwide outreach effort to identify and provide benefits to the estimated 11,000 former POWs who were not receiving VA disability compensation or other services. There are about 35,000 living ex-POWs.

The secretary also has urged Congress to change federal law that required that former POWs must be detained for at least 30 days to qualify for the full range of POW benefits.

The Administration's new decision will add to the list of 16 medical problems that VA presumes to be linked to the military service of former POWs. The new rules are likely to take effect on October 7, 2004.

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## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

By Jil Echols

Recently, as I checked the Run website, I noticed, as most of you have, that many of the colors had changed. What had once been the colors of the Vietnam War were now the colors that represent the United States to millions of people all over the world. I didn't really give it much thought at first; but strangely, it did stay on my mind for a few days. I imagine that there are some who were upset by this change, but I am not one of them. Upon further reflection, I can only thank the Run For The Wall Board of Directors for making this move.

I expect to one day take my son, who is now five, on the Run with me. If his heart is in any way inherited from me, he

will be “Doing The Run” for many years to come. Many things have changed in the methods that we use to fight wars, but the necessity for war will likely never leave us. Consequently, our soldiers will always be at risk. Although I pray daily that we never have the need for another Wall the size the one in DC now, that possibility continues. We will need the generations after mine to take up this banner and Remember.

I am of the same generation as many of those who have served and are serving in the Persian Gulf Wars. I know that we lose a far smaller number of men and women in battle today, but each of them is excruciatingly precious to their loved ones. My precious five year old may some day be called on to do the duty that so many of you did while I was playing in the park. I was too young to understand, just as he is today. Thank you now, for remembering those who have yet to serve.

My understanding of Run For The Wall is different than many of you have. You served, you put it all on the line, you lost brothers and friends. I am the mother who sees the battles on TV and cries, prays, and remembers men I never met. I have not had to deal with the same nightmares and memories that you have. My reason for taking this path is not to heal my mind or body. I do it to show respect to you and those who served with you. I want to remember those who seem so easily forgotten.

Run For The Wall is much bigger than one (albeit awful) war. Its intent is to remember every man or woman missing or held captive while protecting our liberty. Terribly, that mission is not over. Sadly, more names will be added to the lists. This color change recognizes that eventuality. I thank you now, for remembering my son and his friends as they put it all on the line.

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## **AN AMERICAN SOLDIER**

From Ron “Zoom” Young

Correspondence with [www.OperationMom.org](http://www.OperationMom.org):

Hello, My name is Ron “Zoom” Young of Charleston, WV. I’ve been active in an organization called Run for the Wall ([www.RFTW.org](http://www.RFTW.org)) for five years. Our mission is to serve those affected by war. This includes not only those with military service, but also family, friends or concerned citizens. We’re also active in POW/MIA issues. While the organization was originally formed by veterans of the Vietnam War, we welcome those impacted from all wars including our current campaigns.

For the last 16 years RFTW participants ride motorcycles from Ontario, CA to Washington DC, arriving Memorial Day weekend. We ride in a disciplined, close formation resembling a military march from coast to coast. Along the route we visit VA hospitals, schools, churches and civic functions. Such a journey is poignant given our mission of understanding and promoting the healing of war’s emotional wounds. Each year Run participants often share special “happenings” (and opportunities), things we often don’t understand at the time. We sometimes call this the “magic of the Run.” What happened to me during the 2004 Run was yet another opportunity as our journey crossed this great land.

My dear friend Denise “Krispy” Ferris, also of Charleston, and I, made our customary motorcycle trip west to California for the start of the 2004 RFTW. On our return trip east we decided to leave the pack for the day. We traveled to a ceremony in the Navajo and Hopi lands, and then rode into Window Rock, AZ. While getting our bearings in a large, empty parking lot a woman from California approached us in her car. She had designed a patch Krispy was wearing on her vest and spotted it from some distance. Ironically, Krispy received the patch in 2003 and didn’t have room on her vest. Only after much rearranging in the spring of 2004 did she find a spot. The patch almost didn’t make it on her vest ... and we wouldn’t have caught the attention of the designer without it.

During our conversation about RFTW's mission the designer mentioned the death of PFC Jesse Mizener of Auburn, CA. She was genuinely touched by his loss, and asked us to do her a favor. She presented me with a button containing a picture of PFC Mizener, inscribed as "An American Soldier." She asked me to please wear his badge and remind others of his sacrifice, and to remember the pain of his parents and young family. I accepted and carefully attached Jesse's badge to my vest for the journey to Washington, DC.

Along the remainder of the trip (AZ, NM, CO, KS, MO, IL, IN, KY, WV, VA and DC) I was asked about the picture of "An American Soldier." I shared what I knew of Jesse, and felt a growing respect and loss for the young man I'd never met. Sometimes I was asked what I'd do with the button after carrying it the next 2,000 miles in wind, sun and (lots!) of rain; I wasn't sure. Later as I rolled through the familiar mountains of WV with Jesse on my mind, I decided his badge deserved a fitting place for rest and, perhaps, discovery.

A few days later the RFTW Central Route (about 350 bikes) joined with the RFTW Southern Route (perhaps 250 bikes) just south of DC. A unit of about 600 motorcycles rolled into DC in formation and arrived at our destination: The Wall. Bringing our "Fine New Guys/Gals" (FNGs) across country to face the ghosts of their past isn't easy; we hear (and understand) their dread as we approach The Wall – a place of honor for those engraved on the memorial. After tending to, hugging and loving some FNGs, it was time for me to tend to Jesse.

Our current warriors have no national memorial. The Wall, however, is a beacon to all people seeking solace, understanding and peace. I selected a special place for Jesse at the apex of The Wall. I removed the button and placed it gently at the Wall's base. Others present seemed to understand the importance of this simple act. I said a prayer for Jesse and his family, my duty performed.

Can I ask a favor of you? Attached are a few pictures, including the placement of Jesse's button. I'd like to get them to the Mizener family, but I've not found a way to contact them. If you can, would you be so kind as to share the pictures with Jesse's family? Perhaps they would appreciate this story and pictures as a tribute to "An American Soldier".

In closing, I found your Operation Mom newsletter on the web. The love and care offered our soldiers demonstrates they aren't forgotten in their duty. May God bless you and your organization!  
Sincerely, Ron Young

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Dear Ron,

Thanks so much for sharing your heartwarming journey with us. We will be sure to get the info to Jesse's family. I had the privilege of meeting the family during a memorial service for Jesse.

May I share your story in our Operation:MOM newsletter?

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Gloria  
Operation:MOM  
[www.operationmom.org](http://www.operationmom.org)

#####

Hi Gloria,

Thanks for your letter. I'm thrilled to know Jesse's family will be contacted in a fitting manner. Also, feel free to

share my original e-mail in your newsletter.

Gloria, something else I'd like to share. Many of our young soldiers have endured the ugliness of war the likes of which we've not seen in over 30 years. Some have wounds that are obvious, but many more are internalized. If we've learned anything from Vietnam it is the fragile, emotional nature of our returning veterans. They'll need our support for years to come.

Thanks again, and keep up the good work!

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### **REST IN PEACE JEANNE WESTPHALL**

Jeanne Westphall, wife of Dr. Victor Westphall, passed away on August 1, 2004 at about 9:20 a.m. at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas. Son Doug and his wife Dorothy were with her at the time. She had turned 89 on July 15th, 2004.

Her funeral was held at the Angel Fire Memorial. For a long time she had wanted to be buried at the Santa Fe National Cemetery, where son David is buried. However, after discussion with Doug prior to her demise, she indicated that she wanted to be buried at the Memorial along side of her husband, Dr. Victor Westphall.

Doug Westphall sends his Thanks for the love and concern that was showed both of his parents over the many years.

These two wonderful people will be remembered for their love of their son, lost in battle in Vietnam, plus the love and respect they showed to the many veterans who visited the beautiful memorial in Angel Fire, New Mexico.

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### **LOVE FROM THE HEART**

From Brenda "Mom" Kramer

It was an honor to speak to all of the RFTW veterans at the West Virginia State Capitol Veterans Memorial on May 27, 2004. During the Vietnam era and beyond, you made our house a home. In my heart, you'll always be 17, 18, 19 year old kids who grew up to be fine men and women that I call my troops.

Pop Kramer died in 1992, but his spirit, as well as others, lives on in your Run For The Wall. It would make my day to receive letters and cards.

I was honored to receive a citation from West Virginia Governor Bob Wise. I wish to share it with all of you. The honor goes to all of my soldiers who have enriched my life. Our military family prayers and thoughts are with all the bike riders as you go across this beautiful country you so proudly served.

Love from the heart,  
Mom Kramer

Brenda Kramer  
Military Home Ministries  
100 Washington St. East, #311  
Charleston, WV 25301

*Citation from the Governor for Mrs. Brenda J. Kramer*

*As Governor, I am honored to recognize Mrs. Brenda J. Kramer for more than 30 years of dedicated service to the members of the military community. Your selfless efforts on behalf of the military personnel serving our great nation are an inspiration and set a tremendous example for us all. I applaud your loyalty and dedication in providing comfort and counsel to those who proudly serve The United States of America. On behalf of the citizens of West Virginia, I thank you for all you have done.*

*Very Truly Yours, Bob Wise  
Governor Of West Virginia*

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### **GOOD NEWS FROM PAKA "WILDMAN" WIENSTEIN**

The scumbag who hit me last year is doing five years in the state pen for an unrelated felony-The Mills of God grind slowly. I should have the trike finished before December and both Sheryl and I will be on the Run next year, 2005. Sheryl is looking for anyone who needs help driving either support vehicle or motor home, as I plan on doing Road Guard duty....ever see a Road Guard on a trike?

After a two month wait I got my new prosthesis, then proceeded to break it on the treadmill. Now I have ANOTHER one, which although it looks like I have elephantiasis, seems to be working better. I should be walking without assistance by next May.

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### **DEAR ABBY PROVIDES VETERANS WITH INFORMATION**

DEAR ABBY: Veterans and their families might be interested to know about a new Web site: [www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov). It's government-sponsored, and organizes 500 federal and state benefit programs, targeting citizens into one single site. Veterans can log on, answer a few anonymous questions and find out which benefits they may be eligible to receive. It's also a helpful site for case workers, relatives or caregivers.

I answered the questions for my grandfather, a World War II veteran from 1941-'45, and discovered 21 benefit programs for which he might be eligible. -- KEITH NELSON, WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEAR KEITH: Bless you for sharing this information with my readers. Upon further investigation, I learned that [www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov) was created by the U.S. Department of Labor, with contributions by 10 federal agencies and several states. (There is at least one benefit in every state.) Hosted by [firstgov.gov](http://firstgov.gov), which just celebrated its fourth anniversary, the site also includes a Spanish language version: [www.govbenefits.gov/es](http://www.govbenefits.gov/es). Bravo!

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### **MY WALL**

By Sgt. Jack Hutson, Xuan Loc, Vietnam 1965/1966

There are those that travel to The Wall or to The Wall that travels, each in their own way, looking for that thing that will set their memories free. Give sense to their dead loved ones. If for no other reason, The Wall is a good thing for them.

As for me, I have not seen The Wall nor made any effort to go see The Wall when it was near. I have been asked many times by my Vietnam brothers to go with them, I have chosen not to, not out of shame, but out of fear of my own demons.

I am not sure if the demons are real or a trick of my mind, for the things that I might have done, could have done, didn't do, should've done. I don't know, I know that I am not ready to face those demons yet, at The Wall.

I could not save those that died, I could not heal those that were wounded, I could not comfort the dying, I could not, I could not, I could not, I cry for those that sacrificed everything.

I can see the light, the light as it dims, as my brother goes beyond the grave, I see the relaxing of the body as it passes. I see the red that coursed, carrying all his dreams, hopes and memories, his desires, needs and future, spilling on this soil in a place that we had no business being.

My demon has no face, it is only an image, a black figure in the dark, a splash in the patty, a snapping twig, a crawling snake, a night so dark that it whispers the cries of the ones already gone, those that have died in this forlorn place called Vietnam.

The Wall for me is not a good place, it's not about closure. The Wall is a beginning, a trip to a world full of demons that I am afraid to face, I am not ready.

To those, that the bright light took you to the other world, I will meet you there when my flesh rots and I am released to be with my brothers again.

Written on August 22nd, 2004

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## **MILITARY SPOUSE MAGAZINE**

Many of you have children or acquaintances currently in the military. It is a challenge for the spouse back home to hold down the homestead while their loved-one is away serving our country. This magazine offers ideas, guidance and support. Thought you might want to check out this site and maybe provide a subscription to the magazine as a Christmas present.

<http://militaryspousemagazine.com/>

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## **SUBMITTING PICTURES TO THE RFTW WEB SITE**

There haven't been very many pictures sent to WebKat as of recent. She will gladly get the pictures posted once she receives a small volume. A few picture guidelines:

- Please put a caption for each image whether they are sent via email or by regular mail.
- If you are sending more than one image, please put them in a zip file.
- If you are emailing photos, **please reduce your images prior to sending.**

To send in photos for posting on the RFTW web-site:



Due to heavy virus activity of late, she will NOT open any attachments that do not include a note with the email. Please put a quick content in the email stating "these images are for RFTW". Any attachments found to have a virus will be immediately deleted.

You can send pictures to WebKat scanned in a 'jpg' or 'gif' format via email to [photos@rftw.org](mailto:photos@rftw.org)

Please reduce your images prior to sending. Their mailbox continuously overfills due to images that are way too large in byte and screen size. This prohibits others from sending in their photos when the mailbox is full. Preferably send images in zip format as well.

We appreciate you taking the time to share your photos with the rest of the RFTW "Family".

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## QUOTES

### COURAGE

"Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of readiness to die. You must seek your life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; you must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. In Christianity you can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it." G. K. Chesterton

### ROUGH MEN

"People sleep peacefully in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."  
George Orwell

### DEFENDERS

"The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten." Calvin Coolidge

### MILITARY SERVICE

"A young man who does not have what it takes to perform military service is not likely to have what it takes to make a living". John F. Kennedy

### MEDALS

"The number of medals on an officer's breast varies in inverse proportion to the square of the distance of his duties from the front line." Oscar Wilde

### VICTORY

"In war there is no substitute for victory." General Douglas MacArthur

## RFTW PRINTED NEWSLETTER TO CONVERT TO SUBSCRIPTION FORMAT

As we gain more and more participants in Run For The Wall, the volume of mailed newsletters continues to increase. The cost of mailing out the newsletter is becoming financially prohibitive. This will be the last newsletter that will be mailed out for free. If you wish to continue to receive a hard copy of the RFTW Newsletter, beginning with the January issue, we are requesting an annual donation of \$10.00 to help cover the cost of printing and postage. This small fee will not fully cover the cost of mailing out the four quarterly newsletters, but it will help to diminish the expense.

The newsletter will continue to be posted on the Run For The Wall web-site: [www.rftw.org](http://www.rftw.org) . The issues are produced in January, April, July and October.

Thank you for your understanding in this necessary financial decision. Please complete the form below and mail it in with your \$10.00 donation. Do not mail cash, please provide a check or money order.

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ENCLOSE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER FOR \$10.00 AND MAIL TO:

Sandra McKinney  
RFTW Newsletter Editor  
112 Sunset Drive  
Gallup, New Mexico 87301

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