



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 2006

**Quarterly Newsletter
" We Ride For Those Who Can't "
October 2006**

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THE EDITOR'S NOTES



Veterans Day is coming up, and we will each celebrate it in our own way. Some of us will honor our heroes by visiting cemeteries, some will pause a few moments to remember those who gave all, and some will pay tribute to our veterans by attending community parades and ceremonies. Whichever way you celebrate the day, if you are a veteran, wear your service medals and ribbons proudly on November 11. In a Veterans Pride Initiative, Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson and leaders of major veterans organizations are calling on America's veterans to wear the medals they earned during military service. Read about it under “VA News” in this issue.

I believe we have a great newsletter, and it's because we have many members who are willing to share with the rest of us their experiences with RFTW. They are people who enjoy writing and their stories all have something of value to us. But I was surprised that we received so few stories about this year's Run for the July issue. There are so many wonderful things that happen on the Central and Southern Routes, and we'd all enjoy reading about them—especially those who cannot join us on the Run. I think we'd all really like to see more articles of personal experiences from our ranks. If you wrote a journal on the Run this year, or in years past, or if you had a particularly moving experience while on the Run, or even a very funny one, please consider submitting it for publication. The stories don't have to be just about the Run; maybe you talked to a WWII vet with a great story, or maybe something occurred during your service that you'd like to share with us. Every story is important in some way. Please share yours with us. Our deadlines are about the 20th of December, March, June, and September (for the January, April, July, and October issues, respectively).

Having said that, we did receive several outstanding stories for this issue; I'm sure you'll enjoy reading them. But please remember that we always need material for every issue, not just after the Run. Contribute whenever you can, because sharing experiences is what RFTW is all about, and what keeps it the great organization it is.

Please be sure to read every word of “Longest Held POW/MIA” in this issue. I found the story while looking through the Task Force Omega of KY website <http://greasyonline.com>. This is a wonderful website for all of us interested in POW/MIA issues. It contains the most current information about legislative issues, POW/MIA and casualty reports, VA information, and more. The story of Colonel Chaicharn Harnavee will inspire you. And RFTW FNG Derek Lovett has written a great journal of his first Run. It will bring back memories for a lot of us. I think you'll enjoy every article in this issue.

Before every issue I send out emails to many of you who have expressed, at one time or another, an interest in submitting articles or items to our newsletter. Unfortunately, each time I get up to a dozen emails returned for one reason or another: recipient unknown, host server unknown, mailbox full (everyone's pet peeve!), and so on. Maybe you've changed it recently and I'm not aware of it. I don't want you to think that I've forgotten you, so if you think you should be—but haven't been—getting emails from me before each newsletter reminding you of the upcoming deadline for articles, please send me your correct email address (judylacey@aol.com).

Patriotism continues to become more and more a force in the lives of many Americans. Flying the flag is the right thing to do; welcoming home our military from Iraq is the right thing to do; and giving respect to our troops is the right thing to do. Slowly but surely over recent years our country has come to realize that it owes a huge apology to Vietnam vets for its treatment of them when they returned home. The apology comes in a great many little ways—for example, in a little ditty going around the Internet: Someone revised “You might be a redneck if ...” to “You might be a TRUE AMERICAN IF ...” One of the phrases is: **“You might be a TRUE AMERICAN if you treat Vietnam vets with great respect, and always have.”**

Never Forget,
Judy “Velcro” Lacey

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The RFTW Board of Directors and RFTW itself have been impacted by several necessary changes in structure and focus. The following information will guide us through RFTW XIX, May 16 to May 27, 2007.

The past several years we have had a lawsuit hanging over us that has influenced our decisions and actions. The accident was on 5/22/04 between Colorado Springs and Limon Colorado. It involved David T. and Amy Jo Russell. They had not registered with RFTW. They did, however, name RFTW in one of their lawsuits. The cost of Mr. Russell's suit is \$19,737.67 as of this date because of the initial legal fees including a settlement of \$6,000.00. This is now behind us.

The Board of Directors has been reorganized to give a clearer definition of job responsibilities and new directions.

President: John Gebhards
Chairman/Vice President: JR Franklin
Secretary: Sally Downs
Treasurer: John King
Director of Risk Management: Mike McDole
Director of Merchandise: Don Morris

My personal thanks to each of the volunteer board members in stepping up to the plate and taking on additional projects.

We have experienced some confusion on who had the latest information/changes when both routes were combined during the 2006 Run. During the four days that both routes are combined (one day in Ontario, CA and three days in Toms Brook/DC), we have placed one of the route coordinators in charge of each day and the other coordinator and staff in support. All road guards and the supporting road guard captain will report to the tasked road guard captain.

Ontario, CA: Ron Young, Route Coordinator; Kent Markley, Road Guard Captain.
Toms Brook to DC: Frank Perry, Route Coordinator; Chris Hall, Road Guard Captain.
Saturday DC: Ron Young, Route Coordinator; Kent Markley, Road Guard Captain.
Sunday DC: Frank Perry, Route Coordinator; Chris Hall, Road Guard Captain.

Because of past incidents and the "sue crazy" environment we are living in, we are forced to charge a registration fee beginning in 2007. We have agonized about finding and acquiring insurance to protect RFTW as a corporation from real or frivolous lawsuits. We are in the process of negotiations with AMA (American Motorcycle Association) to be covered under their organization. We have also been forced to use the RFTW credit card to purchase run merchandise the last several years. The extra interest charges and fees do not make good business sense. The registration fee will go for AMA insurance and to support the initial procurement of merchandise. If the registration fee is a hardship, please see the route coordinator.

Mike McDole, Director of Risk Management, is responsible for the implementation of the AMA rules and regulations. He will create a team of (ICOs) Insurance Communications Officers (2 each who will be AMA trained) for each route. The ICO's responsibility is to monitor their route compliance with AMA guidelines and ensure rider's meetings are conducted each morning.

Due to the necessity of obtaining liability insurance for the organization, our registration process has become more involved and will require additional information. In order to participate in RFTW, proof of a valid driver license with a motorcycle endorsement and liability insurance will be required of all riders operating motorcycles, excluding passengers. Documentation will need to be validated at registration before RFTW wrist bands will be issued. If your state does not require a motorcycle endorsement on your driver license then this requirement will be waived. The 2007 Registration Form will be posted on the RFTW website by the end of December and you are encouraged to take advantage of being able to complete this form prior to joining either route. Especially now, since the registration process

requires additional information, having this form completed ahead of time will save time and increase efficiency for our Registration Teams. Thank You in advance for your patience and understanding with making these necessary changes.

We have discussed a “Northern Route” for several years. There is a group “The National Veterans Awareness Ride” made up of some of our past participants. We have approached the NVAR with an offer of them becoming our “Northern Route.” They have their own website, coordinators, and leadership group. They have decided not to join RFTW. We have a highlighted link on our web site and wish them all success. This matter is now closed and we will not pursue a “Northern Route”.

You will notice an addition of “End of Days Activities” on our daily itineraries. This is to make clear when the RFTW responsibility ends for that day. We will be watchful again this year and enforce the ban on drinking and use of recreational drugs during the run. This includes RFTW supporters dispensing alcohol at official Run dinners or at any time prior to the end of the RFTW daily scheduled activities. We are adding an additional requirement of no visible display of a firearm. Even if you have a concealed carry permit, pack the firearm in your bags. Institutions that we visit prohibit the display of firearms on their property.

All riders need to be responsible for their own actions. They should have sufficient resources to provide their gas, lodging, food, and motorcycle maintenance on the Run and on the trip back home. In the event of an accident, you are also responsible for getting your bike back home.

Both Route’s Senior Route Chaplain and the Chaplain’s Corps have been asked to obtain first aid training and provide proof of certification.

Registration will be conducted in the morning and evening for riders joining the Run. The morning rider’s meetings are mandatory for all participants. The Southern Route will have two exceptions to this requirement (Tonopah, AZ and Terrell, TX) for 2007 and will be in compliance for 2008. For those two exceptions in 2007, we will send an advance Registration Team and will conduct rider’s meetings at both locations.

AMA has a stringent requirement regarding participation by minors. When a parent accompanies a child, they will have to sign a waiver as part of registration. There may be an issue with registering a child who accompanies someone other than a parent (e.g., a grandparent) who does not have the authority to sign a waiver on behalf of the child. It is noted that different states observe different ages of majority, ranging from 17 to 21 years of age. Further clarification is needed and will be provided by RFTW at a later date.

I would like to thank the participants at both Angel Fire, NM and Kerrville, TX Reunions. The generosity of our riders always astounds me. RFTW received over \$4,100.00 from merchandise sales and donations from the two reunions. The RFTW Board does not sponsor or schedule any reunion. This is done on the local level. The Board has a requirement for an annual meeting and we usually conduct that meeting during one of the reunions.

Thank you for your support.
John “Slammer” Gebhards
President RFTW

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PROFILES OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBERS

Ed. note: Following are profiles of our board members and descriptions of their jobs for RFTW. We hope this will help you to become more familiar with them and understanding of how much work and how many people it takes to run RFTW efficiently.

John “Slammer” Gebhards, President



LTC John E. Gebhards, USA-Ret. After graduating from college in 1967, I enlisted in the Army and completed BCT/AIT in 11B at Ft. Dix, NJ. I was assigned as an 11B/05C to the 199th Infantry Bde., Ft Benning, GA. I am a graduate of Infantry OCS, ASA Telephone and Teletype Security Course, Signal Advance Course, Engineer Construction Course, PsyOp/SF Operation Course, as well as Command and General Staff College and other courses.

I am a Senior Parachutist and Fallschirmspringer (30268)-Fallschirmjager. My last assignment (35A5P) was as Assistant G-5 (PsyOp), 1st SOCOM. Ft. Bragg, NC. I served in Vietnam and Persian Gulf War and retired (medical disability-GSW to the neck) with 25 years service in 1992. My top three awards are the Bronze Star (Achievement), Purple Heart and Meritorious Service Award (2).

I retired again in 2002 from 3M then retired again (final) in 2006 from a Consulting Firm. I am married to Phyllis “Leg Wrapper” (38 years) and have one son (married, John Wesley and Annie) who lives in DC. We now have a grandson (Maxwell Joseph) and are doing laps back and forth to DC.

I serve as Vice Director of the Warren County Emergency 911 Board. I am currently serving an elected second four-year term. We are in the process of a major radio upgrade for a new county wide network.

I met the run by chance in '98 at the Wentzville, MO., VFW. That first year, I did not travel very far, just into Illinois. I rode a 76 XLHC with a La Pena (Ouch) seat—it was an interesting experience. In the spring of '99, I received a rather strange call from an old team-mate telling me about a ride he wanted to make to DC called "Rolling Thunder." I took the bait. It was good seeing Don Canada, and once again I was back among brothers. We traveled the Central Route and had a great experience. I now had a '85 BMW at that time and it ran well. I was hooked. Today, I ride a black '03 Ultra.

I helped Jim David in 2000 as road guard in Missouri. In 2001, I switched to the Southern Route and helped with Communications and Road Guard for “Center Punch.” In 2002 and 2003 I was Assistant Coordinator on the Southern Run. In 2004 and 2005 I was the Southern Route Coordinator. In 2004 I was elected to the Board of RFTW as Chairman. I continued as Chairman in 2005 and was elected President in 2006.

The position of RFTW President is the principal executive officer of the corporation. Subject to the direction and control of the board of directors, I am in charge of the business and affairs of the corporation. I see that the resolutions and directives of the board of directors are implemented except in those instances where that responsibility is assigned to some other person by the board. In general, I discharge all duties incident to the office of president and such other duties as may be directed by the board.

The president does not preside at any meeting of the board of directors; rather the chairman/vice president of the board presides over such regular and special meetings as may take place.

This is a challenging time for RFTW and all Veterans. Together we will move forward.

John “Slammer” Gebhards

J.R. Franklin, Chairman and Vice President



Greetings to everyone, I hope this finds you well and getting ready for our Mission next May. It is an honor to serve you as the Chairman / Vice President of RFTW. Most of you know me but may not know my history, so I will fill in some facts. I was drafted in May of 1966 less than a month after I turned 19. I trained with my unit, "B" Company, 4/47 Inf., 2nd Brigade, 9th Inf. Div., at Ft. Riley, KS for 8 months before flying to Vietnam as part of our advance party in January 1967. Our unit was part of the Army side of the Mobile Riverine Force, which was a joint Army/Navy unit. We lived on ship and went to battle in landing craft, somewhat unique for an Army guy. I served as a Squad Leader, Sniper, Platoon Sergeant, Supply Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant again stateside, and was discharged still 20 years old and could not vote yet. I was wounded twice and the

Army did not have much use for me after that. After my discharge I went to work for an oil company in southwest Kansas and worked for them for 25 ¾ years. I resigned from the oil company in 1994. In 1996 I started to advocate for veterans and continue to do so at this time.

In 2000 I took my 19-year old daughter, Amber, with me for 33 days on the motorcycle. We were FNGs on the Central Route of RFTW. I got so much out of the Run that I felt I needed to give back something. I had found the America I had fought for and never saw upon my return from Vietnam. My anger started to subside and I started to move forward with my healing. Over the next years I served the Run as a Road Guard for three years, ARC in '04, RC in '05 and went on the BoD in '05. I now serve as the Chairman/Vice-President on the BoD of RFTW. What follows is my duties in that capacity:

The board of directors shall elect from among themselves one person to act as chairperson/Vice-President. This individual shall have no greater authority than any other directors except that the chairperson shall be responsible for conducting all meetings.

The previous tradition of excluding the Board Chairman from voting only in the event of a tie vote is changed to now observe a vote by the Chairman on all issues. In the event a tie vote should occur on any issue, the proposed motion does not pass without a majority vote.

The Vice/President shall assist the President in the discharge of presidential duties. In the absence of the president or in the event of inability or refusal to act, the vice-president shall perform the duties of the president.

The Vice-President is in training to become the President, but does so only upon being voted into that position by the standing BoD.

I hope this gives everyone a better understanding of who I am and what I do.

Respectfully,
J. R. Franklin

Mike “Tanker” McDole, Director of Risk Management



For those of you who I may not have had the opportunity to meet, my name is Mike “Tanker” McDole and I was elected to Run For The Wall Board of Directors in 2006.

My duties as Director of Risk Management include liability insurance representative for RFTW, establishing registration processes and guidelines, dissemination of critical information to participants, ensuring adequate infrastructure exists for riders to share concerns with the route leadership, and any other issues related to risk management.

My wife of 38 years, Delores “Girlfriend,” and I first went on the Run in 2000 and have been all the way every year since. What began as a “one time event” has turned into an annual pilgrimage across our great country to promote healing among all veterans, call for an accounting of all POWs and MIAs, and to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. We began as participants in an event and have become part of the “RFTW Family,” an experience that cannot be adequately described merely with words. The camaraderie of participating in this meaningful experience creates bonds that will last a lifetime. Every year we see many brothers and sisters experience much needed healing for invisible wounds received several decades ago during troubled times in our country. We also watch as our “RFTW Family” experience America in a way that renews their hope for our nation’s future as they are “welcomed home” during our 10-day journey. We will continue our endeavor to make the Run a memorable experience for all, especially the FNGs, and encourage everyone to do the same.

I am looking forward to, once again, our 10-day journey with the greatest group of people I have ever met. Additionally, please feel free to contact me at any time with issues related to risk management, registration, or any other matters. See

you in May and ride safe.

Mike “Tanker” McDole
Freedom Isn’t Free

John “Ice Scout” King, Jr., Treasurer



As the Board of Directors Treasurer since 2005, I am responsible for ensuring accurate stewardship of RFTW’s finances. This includes developing the budget, accounting for the income and the expenditures, and keeping the other Directors current on our overall financial position. Our goal is to be open and accountable and fiscally responsible.

Several people help do this work: Linda Apodaca is our bookkeeper. Wally Wallenfelsz is a CPA who participated in the Run several years ago and he files our annual non-profit tax return with the IRS. Dan “Deekin“ Coyne, an attorney who led what is now the Central Route, files our annual non-profit corporate reports with the State of Illinois. As with every other aspect of RFTW, these volunteers see that these tasks are completed on time and in proper order so that the Run can continue.

As for my personal information: I was an ROTC graduate and commissioned into the Air Force in 1967. I served 4+ years as a supply officer in a Field Maintenance Squadron at Nellis AFB. What I do with RFTW is my payback to those of you who went to Vietnam and my investment in the young veterans, like my USMC son and daughter, who are putting it all on the line for us today.

I first rode with RFTW in 1999. Being a brand new rider on an 883 Sporty, I didn’t go very far and was barely able to keep up in the pack. In 2000 and in 2001, I rode that Sporty to Cimarron and then to Limon. In ’02, I got a Road King and went All The Way with the Southern Route. I had to turn back early in ’03 but went All The Way in ’04, ’05, and ’06. I have served as a Southern Route Road Guard for the past three years.

Riding with RFTW has been both the greatest teacher and the best measure of my riding skills. What I do out there today is what I learned here on the Run.

Without doubt, my most powerful experience with RFTW was participating in the wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknowns in 2002. It is almost beyond my ability to describe those emotions representing RFTW and all of our brothers and sisters. Redemption is the theme that keeps rising to the surface.

What is so very gratifying is to see those same emotions in the eyes of every FNG we take across and to the Wall. Such is the power of the Run.

God Bless & Ride Safe
John “Ice Scout,” King, Jr.

Sally Marie “Sizzmo” Down, Secretary
(Sizzmo’s bio and picture will be in the next issue)

Don “9-Ball” Morris, Director of Merchandise



First of all I would like to thank those who have allowed Della and me to serve RFTW for the last few years. It is a pleasure and an honor to serve.

I have to give a lot of credit to Della “Pocket” Morris, my wife of 12 years, who has been there with me and for me throughout this adventure. RFTW has truly changed our lives and allowed us to become members of a family that we love spending time with all year long.

I am a small-town farm boy from Iowa who was drafted in July 1967. After Basic and AIT I attended NCO Academy where I became an SSG E-6. After OJT in Fort Polk, LA, it was off to Vietnam and an all-expenses paid vacation with Delta Company, 1/7th Cavalry as a Combat Infantryman. After in-country training I became a Squad Leader and eventually Platoon Sergeant of the Second Platoon. No need to go into my experiences in Vietnam because we all have our own stories. When I returned home, like many of you I put my Vietnam experience in a drawer, closet, or anywhere else that it could not be discovered. RFTW changed all that.

Della and I made our first "Run" in 2001. We picked up the Southern Route in Phoenix and have gone all the way ever since. Della is one of those few gals who has ridden every mile on her own bike. In 2003 I received my Road Guard training; in 2004 and 2005 I was the SR Assistant Coordinator working with my good friend "Slammer." In 2006 I had the privilege of leading the SR as Coordinator. Della was the Merchandise Team Leader in 2004 and Missing Man Coordinator in 2005, 2006 and will again be coordinating MMF in 2007.

I have recently been elected to the RFTW Board of Directors along with Mike "Tanker" McDole. My position as Director of Merchandise is one I actually requested. I have been involved in sales and marketing most of my adult life and felt it was the best way I could use my talents to help the organization. My responsibilities include storing and maintaining the two merchandise trailers, maintaining the inventory, filling orders, redesigning the merchandise portion of the website, along with all purchasing for the organization. I look forward to working closely with both the CR and SR merchandise teams this coming year. All of us on the Board appreciate your support of RFTW by purchasing t-shirts, hats, bandanas, patches, decals and a few new items that we will have in 2007.

God Bless,
 Don "9-Ball" and Della "Pocket"
 "All Gave Some, Some Gave All"

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2006 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

RUN FOR THE WALL Profit and Loss Statement January 1, 2006—October 10, 2006

Income:				
	Supporter Donations		\$28,111.16	
	School Donations		\$22,003.15	
	Merchandise Sales			
	Run Sales	\$82,091.90		
	Mail Order Sales	\$12,684.83	\$94,776.73	
	Newsletter Subscriptions		\$70.00	
Total Income				\$144,961.04
Cost of Goods Sold:				
	Patches	\$5,930.94		
	Bars	\$1,976.70		
	T-Shirts	\$30,176.31		
	Hats	\$3,654.00		
	Flags	\$1,524.95		
	Lapel Pins	\$3,758.18		
	Bandanas	\$750.00		
	DVD Long Ride Home	\$1,590.00		\$49,361.08
Gross Profit				\$95,599.96

Run Expenses:

Run Admin				
	Rt. Coord. Emergency Funds	\$2,100.00		
	Equipment	\$365.90		
	Certificates	\$182.60		
	Plaques	\$2,879.95		
	Supplies	\$782.55		
	Meeting/Event	\$3,306.67		
	Start Up Exp	<u>\$1,000.00</u>	\$10,617.67	
Chase Vehicles				
			\$5,856.08	
Support Vehicles				
			\$6,295.58	
Merchandise Trailer				
	Fuel	\$3,230.98		
	Repairs	\$460.21		
	Improvements	\$1,970.72		
	License & Permits	\$350.00		
	Insurance	\$1,000.00		
	Supplies	\$483.77		
	Shipping & Handling	<u>\$38.20</u>	\$7,533.88	
Registration				
			\$2,550.46	
Road Guards				
	Armbands	\$2,624.50		
	Radios & Supplies	\$1,196.52		
	Badges, Pins, Hats	<u>\$1,299.69</u>	\$5,120.71	
Route Coordinators				
	Lodging	\$1,469.73		
	Postage	<u>\$43.60</u>	\$1,513.33	
Fuel Crew Platoon Leader				
			\$1,066.54	
Donations to Schools				
			\$22,003.15	
Donations to Supporters				
			\$2,335.00	
State Coordinators				
			<u>\$540.00</u>	\$65,432.40
Non-Run Expenses:				
Admin Service				
			\$1,076.81	
Bank Charges				
			\$3,125.73	
Legal Services				
			\$13,551.17	
Board of Directors				
	Conference Calls	\$3,268.62		
	Discretionary	\$700.00		
	Annual Meeting	\$523.10		
	Fuel	\$85.87		
	Telephone	<u>\$305.00</u>	\$4,882.59	
Newsletter				
			\$202.89	

	Merchandise		\$227.00	
	Shipping		\$2,922.97	
	Promotional		\$1,932.58	
	Merchandise Trailer Purchase		\$8,000.00	
	Inventory Adjustment		<u>-\$1,871.21</u>	\$34,050.53
Total Expenses				\$99,482.93
Net Income				(\$3,882.97)

**RUN FOR THE WALL
Balance Sheet
January 1, 2006—October 10, 2006**

Assets:		
Current		
Checking & Savings	\$9,725.55	
Inventory	\$23,108.82	
Fixed:		
24' Merchandise Trailer	\$13,500.00	
Cargo Mate Trailer	<u>\$8,000.00</u>	
Total Assets		\$54,334.37
Liabilities & Equity		
Current Liabilities		
		\$1,793.47
Equity:		
Opening Balance		\$45,273.04
Retained Earnings		\$3,150.83
Net Income		(\$3,882.97)
Total Equity		\$52,540.90
Total Liabilities & Equity		\$54,334.37

DONATIONS

The only income which RFTW has comes from either merchandise sales or donations.

Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law and are greatly appreciated.

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TIME TO RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

It's time for those of you receiving mailed hard copies of the RFTW newsletter to renew your subscriptions. Please mail your donation of \$10 to help cover the cost of printing and postage before December 1 in order to receive your January issue.

The newsletter will continue to be posted on the Run For The Wall website: <http://www.rftw.org/>. The issues are

published in January, April, July, and October.

Please fill out the form below, include your check or a money order (no cash!) and mail it to:

Linda Apodaca
P.O. Box 727
Rociada, New Mexico 87742

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone # _____ Email: _____

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>> **2007 RFTW**

CALL FOR ROAD GUARDS
By Ron "Hammer" Young
2007 Central Route Coordinator

The 2007 Central Route has need for additional Road Guards. This group is responsible for the safety and welfare of the pack as we cross this great land. Road Guards are often the first to arrive at a location and their interactions with the public make the first impression of RFTW – professionalism and courtesy are very important.

Qualifications:

- 1) Must ride solo—no passenger.
- 2) Must ride a motorcycle without sidecar, trailer or trike kit.
- 3) Must have excellent, safe riding skills.
- 4) Motorcycle Safety Foundation Experienced Riders course recommended, but not required.
- 5) Must have ridden with RFTW previously—prefer All The Way, but not required.
- 6) Ride a safe, dependable bike.
- 7) CB preferred, but not required.
- 8) Good work ethic.
- 9) Willing to help riders, answer questions, offer advice and keep your cool.

If you are interested, call Kent Markley, 2007 CR Road Guard Captain, at 719-337-3804.

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ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY RIDE
By Patrick "Dragonrider" McCarthy
2007 RFTW Central Route DC State Coordinator

In 2007 all FNGs will be invited to ride into Arlington National Cemetery for the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Tomb

of the Unknowns on Saturday morning. Each bike participating must have an operator or passenger who is a 2007 FNG. The pack will form in the Marymount University parking lot (across the street from the Holiday Inn) at 0900.

RFTW is the only group permitted to parade into Arlington national Cemetery. Proper respect and decorum is expected of all participants.

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>> OUR STORIES

RFTW REUNION IN ANGEL FIRE

The RFTW Reunion at Angel Fire was more than just a Reunion—it was a working weekend. Months before the Reunion, Monte Apodaca asked Thomas D. Turnbull, Manager of Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park, what work RFTW could do at the Memorial to help out. More than 100 RFTW members showed up, and went to work cleaning up, weeding, planting sod, clearing pathways, laying flagstone, etc.

Almost all materials (sod, flagstone, etc.) were donated by local businesses. A local man, Roy Hopwood, approached Tom about the need to “spruce up” the Westphalls’ gravesites. He worked with RFTW the whole weekend, and supervised the laying of the flagstone walkway around the gravesites, which is his specialty. Tom



was amazed at how much work RFTW was able to get done in two days. In a videotaped thank you, Tom expressed his heartfelt appreciation for all we accomplished. “RFTW was able to do more in four hours than my worker and I could have done in months.” Especially appreciated was the beautiful job RFTW did clearing around Dr. and Jeanne Westphall’s graves. They planted sod, put wrought iron fencing around both graves, and laid flagstone around it. Read the special thank you to RFTW

on the first page of the Memorial’s website (<http://www.angelfirememorial.com/>). Visit Central Route’s website (<http://www.rftwcr-2006.us/angelfire.html>) to see more photos of the Reunion.)

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RFTW REUNION IN KERRVILLE

By Diane “Mojo” Perkins

What a way to end the year of riding (for some of us!) and yet start a new year of planning and anticipation for RFTW 2007. The Texas reunion in Kerrville was just that. Great weather, beautiful hill country riding, superb accommodations and, best of all, seeing our RFTW family, again, happened for the approximately 90 who came. Janice Wentworth found a GREAT place to host the reunion—The YO Resort Hotel. This place has it all—good food, a nice bar—complete with big screen TV for the football fans, pleasant hotel staff, meeting rooms—all in a very authentic western décor (well, 99.99% western—the background music was another matter!). Pied Piper had a couple of on-your-own rides mapped out for those who wanted to take in the hill scenery. The afternoon meeting with everyone was productive and informative. Tadpole,



Hammer, Slammer, 9-Ball, Tanker, J.R., Milo, and others all listened, took notes, answered questions and encouraged feedback, as they did at Angel Fire. Saturday evening was a delightful and fun dinner at the hotel. Too quickly the weekend ended. One last breakfast and coffee with the family, and we headed back home.



Because of how well the reunion went in Kerrville, it has already been planned and confirmed with The YO Resort Hotel to have it there in 2007. The date has been set, so, as Janice has told us, mark it on

your calendar! Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, September 28, 29, and 30, 2007. (P.S. Bring your swimsuit—the swimming pool looks great!)

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(Ed. note: If you were on the Southern Route this year, you may have signed a denim jacket in honor of the 9/11 victims. Here's the story behind it.)

THE JACKET

By Joe Tyree, Oakland, MD ('06 All The Way)

On August 17, 2006, I took off on my bike for Somerset PA to present the jacket I took with me across the Great USA that has many names inscribed in memory of those on Flight #93.

The ceremonies started that afternoon with a ride to the crash site for a short memorial service. The jacket was to travel from Pennsylvania to the Pentagon, then to New York City Twin Towers site. Its final resting place will be at the Archives at the crash site of Flight #93. The jacket is supposed to be displayed there so that all can see the names on it. A copy of the following will be displayed with it: IN MEMORY—Riding for those who cannot ride can be very memorable—especially when you travel on a motorcycle from the East Coast to the West Coast. The sights are phenomenal. You meet some very special people on the way! To make the trip more exciting, a jacket was carried (this one to be exact) everywhere I traveled. Many signatures were inscribed on that coat in memory of Vets, POWs, those living, and those who died, and just plain ol' down-to-earth riders like myself doing something for a good cause!

Travel included a stay in California, on to Arizona, New Mexico, stopping at the Navaho Nation where our Native American warriors signed the coat with pride! Leaving there, crossing Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and into Rainelle, West Virginia where schoolchildren and local people and Task Force Omega signed. For Memorial weekend there were parades, the Moving Wall in memory of heroes. Attending were American Cambodians who also signed. All was in honor of the heroes of Flight #93. God Bless You All!

(Ed. note: Most of you know “Pegleg,” and if you do, you probably know how completely committed he is to helping other veterans. This is one busy guy! Pegleg wrote this as a way of apologizing to friends for not keeping in touch as well as he usually does. When you see what's he's been doing, you'll forgive him for not giving us his usual full attention! Pegleg, you're our hero for the unselfish donation of your time to pay tribute to our KIA in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to welcome home our men and women from today's wars. Keep up your wonderful and good works.)

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YOU HAVEN'T HEARD FROM ME BECAUSE ...

By Roland “Pegleg” Marchand

I've been really busy with all the volunteer stuff and just haven't gotten back to talking with a lot of friends.

Well, along with Marine Corps Honor Guard at Riverside National Cemetery, I've been doing funerals and homecomings for the PGR.



This picture is of a Marine seeing his wife and child for the first time in 9 months after serving in Iraq. They said it was OK to use the picture; I thought what a picture meant to all of us who never got the Welcome Home we missed 40 years ago. We pulled in to the base at 29 Palms and this was taken at 11:00 a.m. Saturday morning and every one of these guys' and gals' family and friends

were waiting for them to arrive. It was awesome.

I have been made VSO (Veterans Service Officer) for the PGR in California, so a lot of my time is being used up fast. I'm also working with VVA 785 for the BBQ and Marine Corps Toys for Tots. Below you will find the missions I hope everyone from this area of California will participate in. The veterans at the V.A. Hospital Long Beach welcome our visits with open arms. Also, the ride out to Fort Irwin is special; we will be escorting the VA Loma Linda Hospital to Fort Irwin for the Christmas Party for kids whose parents are serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The two missions below are something I hope the RFTW Family can come to. It will make a big difference to these hospitalized vets and to these children whose parents are serving in the War on Terror. Remember, all Vietnam vets how it felt not being home for Christmas. Think what it would feel like as a child not having one—maybe both—parents at war and not home for the holidays. We owe them at least that much. Hope to see you all the end of November and middle of December. Read below.

[VA Hospital Long Beach Christmas BBQ](#) will be at 1100 hours at the Spinal Cord Wing on the 16th of December. We will have three outstanding bands and Santa arriving with gifts for our hospitalized Veterans.

This "Toys for Tots" run is being coordinated with 1st Sgt Toves, "Pegleg," the "Embalmer" and the Monsoon. This is a major effort, so we need everyone's support. We will have the 1st Sgt bring his "big trucks" and Marines to the Christmas BBQ at the VA on the 16th of December. We ask that all participants please bring an unwrapped toy for "Toys for Tots" and a small wrapped gift for a hospitalized Veteran. We will have three bands: the "Big Band" in the hall, and the Stephens "Steel Drum Band" and the Wilson High School Band in the patio. This will be one Christmas BBQ to remember!

If you decide to join us for this special day, please let me know so the VA would have a number to work with as far as food and drinks. Family and friends are also welcome. You can come in a cage, bike, or what ever. We will have a special place to park the bikes so the Hospitalized Veterans can see them.

[Christmas Party and Toy Giveaway at Fort Irwin](#) near Barstow, California, November 29, 2006. This is the 3rd Annual event; I've done this for the first two years and these kids whose fathers and mothers are serving in Iraq or Afghanistan are given a Christmas Party with two 80 ft. trucks full of donated toys. This is the kids' day—all we do is stand behind tables and let the kids have any toy or anything else they want. The VA in Loma Linda will have a Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus there for the Kids.

The VA wants us to escort the vans taking volunteers to Fort Irwin and we can help pass out toys. They also want the kids to be able to see the motorcycles (you know how boys are about motorcycles).

The V.A. and Fort Irwin would like for each one of us to bring a small backpack stuffed with school supplies such as:

- Pencils
- Pens
- Crayons—small box
- Ruler
- Pencil Sharpener—small hand-held
- Paper
- Or other school supplies you can think of

You don't have to go overboard. A couple of items would be fine. K-8 will be the ages.

We will be leaving around 8 a.m. and will get home around 5 p.m.

I need your full name and passenger name and license plate number of your motorcycle. Please either call me at (951)

277-3341 or email me with the info: rolandmarchand@ca.rr.com. They are going to allow 60 motorcycles, so please let me know as soon as possible.

Let's make this a BIG DAY for these KIDS who have enough to worry about with their parents away for the holidays.

Remember if you are around any military installation, there is a real good chance there are kids there whose parents are off to war and would love to you spend the day with them and make their Christmas a time to remember.

Your brother always, and with God's blessing I should be ready for the Central Route next year 2007. God Bless, and my family and I wish you all a safe and wonderful Holiday Season.

SEMPER-FI,
Pegleg

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RFTW—MY BEGINNING

By Shadow

In the spring of 1994 I was watching the TV from a hospital bed after back surgery and saw a short news clip about a group of bikers (vets and their supporters) who were passing through West Virginia on their way to DC and The Wall. I became interested in this event and thought once I recovered I would find out more about this group and event and perhaps participate. Later I was to meet Bill (Bridges) Riser while out riding and he began to tell me about riding with RFTW and going to DC and The Wall. I realized this was what I had seen on TV and I made plans to attend the next year.

Now I (like most of us) have been a part of many events—poker runs and charity rides—but nothing would come close to what I was to encounter on this ride. We all have attended events where if you didn't ride a certain bike or belong to a certain group you were shunned or ignored. But not with this event—and people. You see, THE CAUSE was bigger than all of that. That was the first time I heard of family—the Run For The Wall Family. And I was pleasantly surprised to find it true. Everyone's focus was *on the mission and helping one another*. I was made to feel welcome and a part of things and quickly became involved in it all. Learning about how it started and why it continues and the dedication of those who participate was an inspiration.

Being involved and a part of RFTW opened my eyes to many things and gave me the opportunity to make so many friends through the years. The amazing bonding with the children and people of Rainelle—the arrival in DC and the ride to The Wall itself and of course the demonstration ride through DC with the public waving and cheering us on. Those who stood along the route and would look you right in the eyes and mouth the words THANK YOU—THANK YOU FOR NOT FORGETTING! Afterwards, arriving home it took me weeks—perhaps months—to comprehend all I had seen, heard, and experienced. It was a life-changing experience to become a part of RFTW and all it does. Each spring as May approaches the anticipation builds and I eagerly count the days. No, I am not a veteran, but I support and believe in our veterans—both past and present. And though I cannot sometimes make the entire trip; I do at least make the run here in West Virginia and hopefully one day I will be able to make the entire ride. I consider it an honor to be able to show my support and do the positive things RFTW accomplishes. The values we ride and stand for are more than words. And by our living them the public has come to know we are not a bunch of bikers looking to party—WE ARE FAMILY that believes in our country, our freedom, and our veterans both past and present. No—we won't forget and we won't let them forget!! Not until all are accounted for. Yes, RFTW has been a positive influence and I hope to continue to do all I can to support and make the mission a success. May God Bless and protect us in our endeavors throughout the year and during next year's RFTW 2007. See you all in May.

MY FRIEND, OUR FLAG, OUR FREEDOM

By Andrew Fanning (from Monsoon Dispatch July 2006)

I smiled. My dress blue uniform chafed my neck. My head hurt and my eyes were swollen. I had just placed one of my brothers in the hearse I now followed. There was still the ceremony at Arlington. I listened to the traffic report and I smiled. Traffic on Interstate 95 Northbound is completely shut down from south of Woodbridge to the George Washington Parkway as an unbelievably long funeral procession moves its way up the HOV lane. I've never seen anything like it.

I smiled because Brian would have wanted it this way. Not the pomp and circumstance and the uniforms and the crying. He never cared for anyone to make a big deal of him, but I know he was looking down from above chuckling that he shut down 95.

I fought alongside of Brian in An-Nasiriyah during the invasion of Iraq on May 23, 2003.

I remembered being with him in Kuwait and Iraq. Some of his Marines had been mine; my platoon sergeant had been his. We would smoke cigarettes and provide commentary on the invasion of Iraq, our Marines, how bad our feet stunk, the merits of the different accessory packs included in the MREs, our families, our friends, why we believed in God. I remembered how happy he was when his son was born and how we planned to get our children together to play.

I walked alongside of Brian as one of his pallbearers May 15, 2006.

We were brothers in arms. It was an unspoken understanding: No matter how bad it gets for you, whether we disagree or not, I'll be there for you, to see you through. Now let's go do what we do. It was a friendship forged in combat.

The procession turned off the George Washington Parkway into Arlington National Cemetery, and my memories were interrupted by the rows and rows of headstones. How many Marines with whom I served were buried there? 5? 10? 20? It didn't matter. Today there would be one more.

It was a beautiful morning at Arlington National Cemetery. It had rained the night before and everything seemed clean and fresh. The ground was still wet underfoot. The ceremonial guards from the Marine Barracks at 8th and "I" were standing in formation at parade rest. Dress blues with white pants. We wore the same thing.

The Army sergeant careened his horse around the hill. As he came to a halt in front of us, he manipulated the reins wheeling the dapple gray about. The horse pawed the asphalt and chomped his bit. The hoofs from the other four dappled grays could be heard as the caisson approached. The other horses drawing the caisson halted in front of the sergeant and the hearse drove up to the caisson. Every Marine came to attention as six Marines from the Burial Detail marched to the hearse and secured him on the back of the caisson.

This was Brian's last parade.

The Guard Platoon marched out to the street; a Marine band followed. As the caisson passed we all saluted our friend and fell in behind him, watching him ahead of us, catching ourselves falling in time with the drummer, our left foot striking the deck at the beat of the drum.

The chaplain said a few words at the gravesite. The burial Marines lifted him and held him at shoulder height. We saluted as the bugler sounded Taps. His final salute was fired. Seven riflemen, three shots each:

Aim, *CRACK!* Aim, *CRACK!* Aim, *CRACK!*

I didn't cry when I carried him in and out of the chapel, when they played taps or when the rifles cracked.

It took the folding of a flag.

That flag was the symbol, of who he was, who we were, and what we stood for. It was a reminder of our obligation and our birthright. I watched as those six Marines lifted the corners and drew the flag taut. I watched as their practiced hands folded his flag with care, reverence and precision. Their hands never left it. Despite knowing how many times this simple procedure had been rehearsed mating the corners, aligning the seams, measuring by eye, adjusting the fold, snap and pop every movement deliberate. When I watched them I knew they meant it.

Those Marines were taking such care because that flag, our symbol of dedication, determination and freedom, had encased the casket of one of the finest captains in the Marine Corps. That was his flag. It would be squared away. It was their obligation. Now a triangle of white stars on a blue field, the flag was passed by six Marines from the casket's head to its foot. When it came to the last two, with both pairs of hands on the flag, they looked at each other, nodded, and Brian's flag was immediately clasped to the last Marine's chest. I've never seen a child held more securely. This was the spirit of Semper Fidelis.

That's when it happened. When that Marine clasped the flag to his chest, I cried.

Captain Brian S. Letendre was killed in action May 3, 2006 at a checkpoint in Ramadi, Iraq. While at the checkpoint, his men came under mortar and small arms fire. While Brian ensured the defense of the position, an insurgent drove a vehicle into his position and detonated a large explosive device.

Brian Letendre is a hero to those who knew him, to those who fought next to him, and to his family. However, heroism is more than bravery. Brian is a hero because he believed in a principle larger than himself and was willing to fight for it. If there was someone who was willing to fight for right and freedom, he would be there to lead him. He was a Marine.

Did I cry because I lost my friend? Absolutely, and I cried because I knew our country had just lost someone who understood, who got it. I cried because the folding of a flag reminded me who I was, what I was doing and why it mattered. It is a powerful reminder.

Why do Americans have to be reminded that this great experiment, this idea, this vision of our Founding Fathers that was fought so hard for is not something to take lightly? When our forefathers fought for independence, they didn't fight for a tangible reward—they fought for a philosophy, an idea, a promise. A promise of freedom. So have those who have taken up arms for our nation ever since. They were selfless. So was Brian Letendre.

This Independence Day let us remember what matters. It doesn't matter that the potato salad is runny. It doesn't matter that gas is expensive. What matters is that we remember who we are, the patriots who got us here, and why we have the liberty to do what we do. As we grill burgers, remember that there are cemeteries full of patriots and those away who will not join us in our celebration and for whom the rockets red glare has a different meaning.



Let us remember those Americans who are currently carrying rifles the world over. Let us remember that we have to make sacrifices for the good of the whole.

So fly our flag, watch it wave and let it be our reminder. Let it remind us that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Let it remind us of the vow to support our country that we learned in grade school. In these dubious days where the Pledge of Allegiance goes unheard in our schools because heaven forbid someone might get offended, just say it! Renew your obligation to your flag, to your country and to each other. Set an example so our children are taught and reminded how important this idea of freedom really is, that freedom is something we must clasp to our chest and protect at all cost just like Brian's flag. Let our flag stand for something. Pray that God will keep us steadfast.

And remember Captain Brian Letendre, United States Marine Corps.

Captain Drew Fanning is an active duty Marine infantry officer. He has completed multiple deployments during the past 12 years including two recent tours in Iraq. He is an Olmsted Scholar and is currently living in Egypt where he is enrolled in the master's program at the American University in Cairo.

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USMC 1st DIVISION HOMECOMING

By Wayne Nicholls

I didn't get much sleep on September 2 with anticipation of getting up at o-dark thirty to meet and greet the USMC 1st Division returning from Iraq. They'd be landing at March Air Reserve Base, Riverside, CA on September 3 and bused to Camp Pendleton to be greeted by their loved ones.

When our own RFTW "Pegger" learned his son would be returning home from his tour of duty, he wanted to provide Craig and the troops something special. He contacted RFTW Patriot and Veteran's Advocate Danny Lopresto. Danny got the "word" out and with the help of Roland "Pegleg" Marchand, Ed "Sparks" Carrillo, and Bill "Monsoon" Mimiaga, a well-managed plan was placed into motion. "Pegleg" notified the Patriot Guard Riders while "Sparks" interfaced with March Air Reserve Base. "Monsoon," a retired Major with the USMC, made telephone calls to his "connections" at Camp Pendleton. Everything was "good to go" for our mission.

I was up and out of my door a little after 0230 in Long Beach, CA. I headed over to pick-up Fred riding his new Ultra Classic. We were on the 91 Freeway at 0320 hrs. This had to be the "best ever" ride on the normally crowded 91 Freeway. We zipped along with very little traffic and arrived at March Air Reserve Base in two-thirds of the time it would normally take to make the ride.

Even as early as we were, we were not the first ones there. At least a dozen bikers were waiting; some with RFTW, mostly those with the Patriot Guard Riders. You could already feel the excitement in anticipation of our mission. Most of us recalled the importance of the day we came home. Now it was our turn to give our military a good "Welcome Home."

We had nearly 40 bikes when the USMC buses approached the gate leaving March ARB. We rode out in front of them with our emergency flashers on. The Troops were waiving to us from the bus. "Welcome Home" I yelled, hoping they could hear me over the roar of the motorcycles.



*Pegger and his wife with son
Craig and wife and daughter*



It was a nice early morning ride to Camp Pendleton as we escorted the four military buses. Our route would take us the "back way" into Camp Pendleton through the Fallbrook area in San Diego County. Nice two-lane twisties as we rode in formation. We were greeted at the Guard Station and motioned in as welcomed guests. First order of business required our young troops to turn-in their weapons. This task was accomplished swiftly and the next stop would be the Parade Field to arms of family and friends.

It was a rewarding sight for the riders to stand back at a short distance and watch as our young American heroes exited the buses. Family and friends screamed with joy at seeing these kids return home. Many of the troops would be introduced to new members of their families for the very first time. One lucky Marine was greeted by his wife holding twin babies. The proud soldier didn't know who to hold first. We were all overwhelmed with emotion and pure happiness.



It was the most rewarding day I've had in a long time. It was also my birthday and there couldn't be a better way to celebrate my birthday than being around friends and welcoming our young heroes home.

God Bless our Troops!

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TRIBAL FUNERAL FOR AN AMERICAN INDIAN MARINE

By Jim "Dinky Dau Doc" Finch

Hospital corpsman, Ninth Engineer Battalion, Vietnam July 1966-April 1967

The website below is one of the many reasons the memory and history of the Native American people should be held in respect and honor. I have felt the spirits during my recent Run For The Wall and in my case it was clear and understandable. The Red Rock community waved and watched us ride by them. This was over a stretch of five to ten miles long. It seemed as they were all there to welcome all warriors past and present. It felt surreal even though I was watching it unfold before my eyes. And my eyes wept with pride as I was riding. There were so many people there, but yet I felt as one riding on behalf of those who could not make the journey with us. I am so proud of all the riders I rode with and the spirits of many gone before us. They were with us sharing the pride in the spirit of the mighty Native American tribes while enchanting us to continue our journey. Please take the time to check this site out http://www.bentbay.dk/Indian_war.htm. It depicts the Tribal Funeral for an American Indian Marine who died in Iraq. You will find it worthwhile and your spirit will rise in honor.

(Ed. note: Following are some entries from Jim's journal on his first all-the-way trip with RFTW this year.)

Day one of my memories of 2006 RFTW was one of the most grueling rides. It was 117 degrees of heat floating off the freeway for over three hundred miles. The only saving grace was that when we spotted some clouds in the sky. The lightning was an amazing sight and soaked us, which felt comforting and cooling. I lagged behind and spent a few hours on the freeway by myself feeling the affects of heat and exhaustion. Williams, AZ was cool but still a bit warm when I arrived exhausted and hungry. I felt I could not make this ride to the end in Washington D.C. I doubted my ability and stamina were not up to the task at hand. Thanks to Ole Doc and my wife (by phone), I decided to continue on. Mixed emotions over dealing with past memories and haunts flooded in.

Day two I was waiting at a rest stop for the rest of our riders to show up. A man came up to me and asked if I was going to the wall. I said yes. He handed me a folded bill for donation. I didn't even catch his name and I unfolded the bill. It was a hundred dollar bill. I turned around and he had left without even giving me his name. I gave the bill to VVA Chapter 785 for helping the cost of our group of riders. His only request was to leave some flowers at the Wall for our fallen heroes. It will be done. Thank you to the man in the white pick up truck. And this was only the beginning of May 18, 2006.

We arrived at Red Rock for a Native American Warriors assembly honoring all the veterans of all wars. I was sitting in the back rows when a Native American came up to me and said "my name is Ron and I would like to give you a gift. I didn't look into the bag until after the opening ceremonies were complete. It was a beautiful tee shirt from the Navaho Nation. I looked at the back of the shirt and it was dated May 18, 2006. I shed a few tears as the date means so much to me. The way it was presented was in Native tradition and quite an honor to me. Later when I was talking with another tribal member from another town, I was told it might be Ron Tao who is the artist of the shirt. I don't know for sure but believe it was possible. I pray I spelled the last name properly with respect in his honor. Ron told me he had served with the First Marine Division. I had served with them, also. It makes my eyes water to look at the shirt. It was like an omen to let go and live in peace with my demons. It is like these people saw my pain and offered to help me mend. I don't understand it but it happened. Just what is going on with this journey for me?

Angel Fire, NM offered me the opportunity to shed more tears. I went in the chapel with Mustang and lit up two candles.

I was so confused over just what two friends to think of. I have so many more names to offer so I decided to tearfully light them for all my lost brothers. I don't know how many—perhaps twenty or so, maybe more. Some I cannot remember their names because they were Marines who I worked on in sick bay or at the Field Hospital near Marble Mountain. Some called it China Beach but we called it Marble Mountain Hospital when I was there. It was near where my mine sweep team stayed nights by ourselves. I suppose about twelve of us stayed alone nights and would sweep the road near Marble Mountain before anyone could travel it each day.

The Viet Cong or NVA regulars would place mines each night under the cover of darkness. It was my job to “pucker up” as I walked with my team to unearth the deadly traps. I was a lazy corpsman whose job was somewhat boring until the shit hit the fan. Corpsman Up, the Marines would say.

I am rambling on here so will sign off for now. I can't remember what happened today. Oh, yes.... The thunder and lightning with hail and wind gusts causing us to tilt our Harleys to keep upright. The hail hit us with painful stings as I was only wearing a tee shirt with a vest. It was warm enough and I was thankful to be wearing my leather pants keeping my legs and behind dry and warm. I had to hold my hand up to protect my face from the stinging coming from the left side. It was hard to see, but we forged on for our fallen brothers and those who cannot make this ride.

At nearly sixty years of age and forty years later, I am very thankful to be able to make this run. This is for them. And, this is for me to heal some of my wounds during the adrenalin rushes of combat. The tears are becoming worth it and I will continue to shed tears proudly in the future. I feel no less of a man to show my pain today.

Friday, May 26, 2006: The last few days have showered me with many emotions. From Angel Fire, NM to West Virginia the days have passed too fast for me to absorb all I have seen and experienced. Former Ninth Engineers Tony "Rock" Valentine and Wayne Kearby came to visit us as we make this important journey. A close friend of mine (Ben Stanley) also visited us. We are “Brothers Forever” and this is a very close bond. It is amazing how these brothers have traveled hundreds of miles for a brief visit. God Bless them all.

Today was [so far] the highlight of my personal journey. This is due to the children. As in Vietnam, these children sparkle with curiosity and truth. Today we were riding our Harleys and while stopping for food we noticed a group of grade school children with their teachers waiting for the main body of motorcycles to drive by. This is a very small community in West Virginia and the excitement of the roar of our engines created a must see situation for the classes.

The road they were standing on was just off the main highway. John and Mustang decided we should circle back to give them a bird's eye view. Little did we know just how important this decision would be to them and especially to us. This personal contact would prove to be well worth our time and effort.

The children's eyes lighted up with excitement as we drove by and circled back. Their faces lit up and smiles galore as we walked our motorcycles by them. We shook their small hands and made sure to stop and pull the shy ones out for a handshake. They especially liked it when we would rev the engines up just a little. The boys were saying “This is better than recess” and I agreed. Those wonderful smiles and excitement made my eyes water and my chest swell up with pride. Not only did we get thanks from the children but the teachers as well. It was truly our honor to see all of this.

Vietnam Veterans of America and the other bikers joining us on behalf of our missing and fallen brothers are just normal and proud men who enjoy spreading good will. We are again, Brothers Forever.

Semper Fi, Dinky Dau Doc

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MARINES WELCOMED HOME



A number of RFTW members have been participating in “escort runs” for returning Marines from Camp Pendleton and 29 Palms Marine Corps Base. These "escort runs" are for returning and departing Marines to and from Iraq. Our “old veterans” are doing this as a special way of saying "Thank you and Welcome Home" to our American Heroes. In particular, RFTW’s “Pegleg” Marchand and Danny Lopresto have been organizing and coordinating many of these

welcome homes. Danny also performs an important service for all of us by collecting and forwarding to everyone news about upcoming events. We’re proud of you, guys!

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AN FNG’S STORY

By Derek Lovett

My name is Derek Lovett. I served in the US Navy from September of 1973 to September of 1979. Not long after I bought my bike my good friend Pegger mentioned the Run for the Wall. I joined the run for a half day in 2005 and decided then that I had to go all the way. I wasn’t even sure why. Below are excerpts from the journal I kept during that trip. I have left a few of the “went jogging and fell on my \$#@” kind of entries to try to keep this from being too long. I was carrying the medals my father earned in WWII, one of my Uncle Don’s medals (he was KIA in France in August of 1944) and the medals my grandfather earned in WWI.

May 17: It’s been a long day. It started at 3:30am and is ending at about 9pm. Pomona Valley Harley provided donuts at Ontario and bought the gas at Ludlow. The most surprising, and inspiring thing I’ve seen are the people on the overpasses, my wife Linda included, of course. In one spot, just outside of nowhere Arizona, there were about 15 people waving flags and waving to us. It’s cool.

When we got to Williams, AZ, we paraded through town (it’s not a big town, but hey, a parade). It was very moving to see these people greeting us vets. It wasn’t like this 30 years ago. I think the first Gulf War changed people’s minds about the people that serve. They have also learned that you have to separate the war from the warrior, and that serving our country was an honorable thing to do, even back then.

May 18: At a gas stop this morning I said to Pegger, “I’ve been in two parades in two days.” He said, “You ain’t seen nothing yet.” He was right; the amazing part was just starting. When we rolled into Winslow, AZ for a fuel stop we went through the middle of town, had to be a few miles. All through town there were groups of people waving and we waved back. The same thing happened in Holbrook when we stopped for fuel and lunch. That’s another thing; I haven’t bought a meal yet.



Pegger and his FNG Derek

A truly moving experience was with the Navajo nation. They have a tradition of welcoming returning warriors and they welcomed us in their tradition. They had presentations and announcements, the usual stuff, and then they started what’s called a gourd dance. All of us veterans were asked to stand in the stadium (in Red Rock State Park) and form a circle. A Navajo tapped me on the shoulder and gave a gourd on a carved piece of wood with a handle wrapped in beads. We were all given a gourd and asked to join the gourd dance. We didn’t actually dance, some of the Navajo did, we just stood in our spots and shook the gourd. While we were doing that most, if not all, the Navajo in attendance walked around the circle and shook our hands or hugged us. I have never said thank you in one spot so many times. There must have been a hundred Navajo that went around the circle, from 4 or 5 years old, to the oldest able to walk. Two Navajo who around the circle were a grandfather and his grandson. His grandson had served one tour in Iraq was due to return in two weeks. They asked us to keep him in our thoughts and they each went around the circle.

Before that ceremony Pegger and Danny asked me to carry out a special mission. The group of RFTW riders who live in the South Bay area has made three Navajo prayer bundles. In each prayer bundle are prayer ties; each tie has a man's name that is listed as Missing in Action in Vietnam. Neither Danny nor Pegger is going all the way so they discussed who should carry the prayer bundle that Danny had on his bike to the Wall in DC. They decided on me. Usually an FNG is only expected to stay with the group and learn the ropes of how the Run works, but in this case they decided they would ask me to carry out this special mission. I'll have guidance from Fingers and Jerry, the other two guys with bundles. Mine has 500 prayer ties with names, so in addition to my father, my uncle and my grandfather I now have 500 more people with me. The prayer bundle is an honor to carry. After the gourd dance we talked to two medicine men and one of them took us to a corner of the stadium and he blessed the prayer bundle. After that we walked the bundle around the ring, to the four compass points representing the four seasons. Then the bundle was blessed and handed over to me. I'm carrying the bundle on my bike.

May 19: Today we started with breakfast in Gallup. From there we went to a dedication of a Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Grants, NM. The governor of NM was there and gave a speech. I was standing about 30 feet from him. There was also a helicopter fly over. That helo stayed with us for about 3 hours after that, following us through Albuquerque and on north. At the next fuel stop all the gas was paid for. At the lunch stop, all the sandwiches were paid for. At Cimarron, NM we were treated to a spaghetti dinner, three days and I haven't bought a meal.

Today we stopped at Angel Fire. It's the first Vietnam Vet's Memorial, started in 1969 by Dr. Victor Westphall to honor the son he lost in Vietnam. It's a very special place; a few guys were pretty overcome with emotion (I've been crying two or three times a day, and it's quite overwhelming sometimes, the parades and the memorials). The memorial is beautiful, set in a small valley in northeast New Mexico. I have pictures and I'm going to make a painting. Tomorrow I'll take a short break from riding in the pack. It's very difficult to ride all day in a pack this big. I plan to buy my first meal, not because I have to, the people of Cimarron are preparing breakfast for us, but because I want a nice sit down breakfast and mostly a break from riding in the pack.

May 20: I started the day by leaving Cimarron about 2 hours ahead of the pack. It was nice riding without the pack. Riding in a group this large is a lot like riding in heavy traffic at 60 to 70 miles an hour all the time. The ride from Cimarron to Raton was beautiful. I had a chance to look at the sky, the mountains and a deer in a field next to the road.

The reason I went ahead was to salute the Run. As a new guy I have a duty to show my respect for the Run. I ended up with two other guys whose intent was the same as mine. The three of us waited on an overpass and when the pack came over the hill we took some pictures. When the pack exited the highway they made a left onto the overpass where we were standing, we moved to the center divider and saluted the Run, from the first bike to the last support vehicle. Then we went back to the bikes and got back in the formation.

After everyone refueled we paraded through Raton, NM then took a small highway to Trinidad, CO. At Trinidad we didn't stop, but you guessed it, we paraded through town. It continues to amaze me how many people come out to see us go by and to wave. Many have American flags and there are also many POW/MIA flags. I still get teary eyed when we parade through a town and I've lost count of how many we've paraded through. When Pegger said "You ain't seen nothing yet," that was a tremendous understatement. After Trinidad we had a long ride to Limon, CO. We were traveling north on a state highway and there was lightning just northwest of us. I could see the storm was moving southeast and it looked like we were going to miss it until the highway turned gently to the left straight into the front. The lightning got closer, the wind picked up and suddenly we were getting very wet. The rain was cool and had large drops, but the tough part was the wind. It was difficult to keep the bike on a straight line and that can be disastrous in a large pack. The rain was hard, but only lasted about 10 minutes so we got through ok. When we got to Limon there was, that's right, another parade through town. I'm ready for another day. No, we don't get any days off.

May 21: Today we started with free breakfast, but I don't remember who picked up the tab. It's just been amazing how many people have volunteered time and resources to the Run. At one gas stop today the gas was paid for by a bunch of groups in Burlington, KS. I talked to one of the folks manning the fuel stops and he said they gassed up all the bikes in 17 minutes. We have added quite a few bikes since we started, so I'm guessing we're approaching 300 now. The cities of Burlington and Oakley had a lot of people along the streets waving at us. It's overwhelming sometimes, most times,

no every time. In Oakley the Veterans of Foreign Wars and several other groups provided lunch, cold fried chicken (it was better that it was cold, we've been hot for days), beverages and chips. We were near a museum and I went to look around. It was surprising how many shark teeth they had in there. They also had lots of old prairie/farm/ranch stuff, not the type of museum I usually go to. At our overnight stop in Salina we got maybe the warmest reception yet. We rolled into a park near the highway and there were hundreds of people in the park waving, clapping and whistling. They provided dinner and there was even a local band there to provide entertainment. It's the end of day 5 of a 10-day trip. We're over half way to DC (day 10 is really just a half day). Tomorrow will be long and hot, 397 miles through the rest of Kansas and into Missouri.

May 22: I'm trying to figure out why I'm riding in the Run. When I left it was a trip with my Father, my Uncle and my Grandfather. Then I picked up 500 MIAs. Now I'm thinking the ride is more about me than I at first thought. I joined the Navy after the cease fire in 73. There wasn't really a chance I would have to go in harm's way. For the longest time I thought that made my service more of an interesting period in my life that was beneficial in setting the path into a career, rather than a period of serving my country. At the time it was not cool to wear a uniform in most areas. I have heard it said before and I believe it, the Vietnam War had left a cultural hangover that lasted for years after the cease fire in 73. People that chose to join the service were usually perceived to be not quite ready for college, or maybe just choosing to be a little different (like me). This hangover lasted throughout the 70s and 80s. The actions in Grenada and Panama were minor when compared to a real conflict and therefore didn't change any perceptions. I think the change started when Iraq invaded Kuwait. This was an act of aggression that would, if left unchecked, have a dramatic influence on the American economy. I was in favor of the defense of Kuwait. I think that conflict was necessary. When the troops returned home they were conquering heroes. When the troops came home from Vietnam they were viewed as the ignorant tools of a corrupt government. When the troops got home from Kuwait they got parades. During the hangover the first thing we could think of was trying to look like we were anything but in the service. The Run for the Wall started during the hangover, in 1988. As the Run got bigger, the attitude of the people also changed. We have been treated as returning heroes. There may even be a twinge of guilt in some people over the way the troops were treated during the Vietnam War and during the hangover. Bottom line is that I'm feeling better about my service to my country. I think the Run is about Grandpa, Dad, Uncle Don, 500 MIAs, and it is also about me.

At the morning rider's meeting there was a special request for volunteers to visit a retired Navy Master Chief who is dying of pancreatic cancer. I volunteered. A group of about 20 of us rode ahead after the lunch break and visited Master Chief Bob Hunt of Columbia, MO. He was quite moved. He's still getting around well and mingled with us and shook hands all around. We took a group photo. We just hung around with him for about 20 minutes. I told his daughter that I had lost my father to cancer in 99 and I knew what she was going through. Knowing others have gone through the same thing doesn't really prepare one for the inevitable, but I think she felt a bit better. I broke up a bit when I told her that, I still miss my Dad.

May 23: No personal revelations today. We started with another free breakfast at the VFW in Wentzville, MO. Our first stop was the Wentzville Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. After a brief ceremony, we saddled up again and went on to Jefferson Barracks, MO, just south of St. Louis. We stopped at the VA hospital there and visited with some of the patients. This is one reason we ride. On the Run for the Wall patch it says "We ride for those who can't" and these are some of those who can't. We talked to a lot of the guys and they were very appreciative. It may surprise some folks, but VA hospitals are not just filled with old guys—there are young guys, and women, recovering from wounds in the hospital as well. I didn't go to any of the wards, but a few riders did to say hi to those folks. From Jefferson Barracks we went to Mt Vernon, MO for lunch and gas. The gas and lunch were paid for by local groups. There was even entertainment. It turned into a big picnic at a truck stop—incredible. The VFW here in Corydon, IN provided dinner for us at a horse racing track just south of town. On my way to the hotel I spotted a White Castle burger joint and had to stop for a couple. Again today there were people on overpasses along the highway waving at us. That will never get old. One more thing, seven days in the saddle and counting, my butt hurts.

May 24: We stopped at another VA hospital, this time in Louisville, Kentucky. It's great to be able to stop at these places and give the guys a thrill. Like the other VA facility there are men and women, some younger than one might think. They had entertainment and refreshments. I met a World War I veteran named Robley Rex. He's 105 years old. When the Harley-Davidson company was started Rex was already 3 years old. I showed him my grandfather's medals

and told him what they were. He looked at them, pointed at one and said, “That looks like World War I.” I said, “They are, they were my grandfather’s.” I’m not sure how well he could hear that, but he did brighten up and look at me closer. He still volunteers around the hospital three days a week. We stayed about an hour then had to hit the road.

A most frightening development, the bike started making a horrible rattling noise. At a gas stop I had to load the bike on the trailer of a chase vehicle. There are four chase vehicles ready to pick up bikes that breakdown. I rode for about thirty miles with “Top”, a retired Marine Top Sergeant, and his wife Diane. They dropped me off at the nearest Harley dealer, it happened to be in Lexington, KY. When we stopped at the Memorial they had to load another bike on the trailer and two of us ended up at the dealer with problems. They were very accommodating, the other rider, Slim Jim, was back on the road in about an hour with a new battery and I was back out in about 2 hours. My bike had a loose compensating sprocket, whatever that is. When it started making that noise I started thinking in the thousands of dollars range, but it turned out to be rather simple and they fixed it under warranty. The bike was two days beyond the two year warranty Harley offers, but they said don’t tell anybody! I had a nice ride from Lexington to Hurricane, WV. It’s relaxing not riding in that large group, but you miss the shared experience. It’s always funny to listen to the folks complain at every stop about this and that, but they wouldn’t trade this for anything right now. It’s still an incredible experience for me. I’m looking forward to seeing DC, but at the same time I’m worried about going to the Wall. When Linda, Ralph, Gloria and I visited the Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor I had one of those moments when something surprising just pops into your head. Obviously I didn’t know any of the people on that ship, but as I looked at the names I realized that in a way I knew all of them. It will be that way at the Wall in DC. I don’t know anyone whose name is on the Wall, but in a way I know all of them.

May 25: Today started a little wet, but it cleared up. We rode from Hurricane to the Veteran’s Memorial in Charleston, WV. It honors vets from WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. It’s an impressive monument at first sight, but as I got closer I saw that all of the names of West Virginians Killed In Action were etched inside on granite. It was very moving to see the names of all the people killed in each war. The largest number was for WWII. I felt that this is just a sample of the Vietnam Veterans Wall in DC. It’s going to be an emotional visit. I talked to Fingers about his plans for the Navajo prayer bundles and he said the bundle should be taken to the Wall then taken back to California. The prayer ties inside are then burned to release the spirits.

Our lunch stop today was at a place very special to the Run for the Wall, Rainelle, WV Elementary School. When the Run first got started back in the hangover days Rainelle was the first to welcome the riders with open arms. All along the route we’ve been collecting money for the school and one anonymous rider has pledged to match each dollar up to \$10,000. After the parade through town (then we turned around and paraded through again) we parked and got off our bikes in front of the school. The kids were out there with little autograph books! It was a hoot! They asked for autographs from the veteran heroes that had rode into town. Apparently they spend a significant amount of class time talking about veterans. We had lunch and there was a ceremony on the sports field (I don’t think it’s really a football field, but it’s about that big). At the ceremony Sgt Rock made the announcement that with the matching donation the Run had collected about \$23,000 for the school. The Principal and administration were quite surprised.

Tomorrow we go to the Wall.

May 26: Not a very eventful ride this morning and afternoon into Arlington. It looked like rain first thing in the morning so I wore my rain gear. Later it looked like it was clearing up so I took the rain gear off. Sure enough, riding into Arlington it rained.

We met up with the Southern Route at the lunch stop and we’re now about 800 bikes strong. That has to be pretty impressive to see go by. Most of the bikes, mine included, have an American flag and a POW/MIA flag flying from the back. There was a disturbance near the National Mall and we couldn’t go straight to the Wall. There will be a group going out at 6:15 this evening. I’m going then. I have the Navajo Prayer bundle to take to the Wall. It’s been strapped to the bike since Red Rock Park in Gallup. I’m feeling a bit of anxiety about going to the Wall—I know it will be a difficult trip. I’m also concerned about some of the guys I’ve been talking with for 10 days now. A few of them have never been to the Wall and they have much heavier burdens than I’ll ever understand. I want to be sure to watch for Lumpy, and the Marine on the BMW (never caught his name), and Stan (retired Master Chief, US Navy) and a retired

Raytheon Electrician. These guys may need somebody to lean on and I want to help if I can. I think that's another reason I'm on the Run. These guys need support and if I can do something to help them get across the country and to the Wall, I think I've done a good thing. The ride across the country is very difficult physically, but also emotionally. We've had 10 days in the saddle to think about the Wall. The BMW guy seemed quite anxious this morning. He said he had been to the National Mall before, but never worked up the courage to go to the Wall. He's ready now to do that. I hope the ride across country has helped him get ready to deal with the emotions he's sure to feel.

I'm back from the Wall. That was difficult. I took the prayer bundle; I'll talk about that later. At first sight the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial is not large or imposing like many monuments around DC. The Wall is set into a hillside. As I got closer the significance of the Wall began to set in and the Wall seemed to get bigger. I started by touching each panel that had names etched into it. I told myself I was doing this because I'm a kinesthetic kind of guy, I like to touch things to make them real (this can be problematic in museums, ask me about it sometime). I think I was really trying to distract myself. I touched all the panels the first time I walked the length of the Wall. When I turned around at the end the Wall I turned and there were tears in my eyes. It was much like the Arizona Memorial, but much stronger. I had just spent 10 days with a lot of guys who had friends on the Wall. It makes it so much more powerful when the names on the memorial are those of your own generation. I didn't see any of the guys I had ridden with for the last 10 days. I walked back along the Wall and turned back again. After my third pass I ran into one of the Chaplains from the Run. There were three with the Central Route to handle any difficulties that someone might have. After he gave me a hug he took my FNG (F "expletive deleted" New Guy) button off and put it back on upside down, signifying I was no longer a new guy. I had been crying off and on since I got to the Wall; now I had the prayer bundle to deal with. My instructions were to take the bundle to the Wall and read a Navajo prayer (in English, I don't speak Navajo). The prayer was to the four seasons and the earth and sky.

After that I went to the WWII Memorial. My Dad and Uncle and Grandfather then became the focus. We walked around the Memorial and they reminded me it was American, not Canadian. I said I know that, but it was the best I could do on this trip. It's just like them to get smart-mouthed at a time like that. It was refreshing, really.

I felt a lot better about the trip as I walked back to the Wall. When I went by again I ran into a guy I had been to a number of funerals with while riding with the Patriot Guard. Mil Thorton was on R&R from his group in Vietnam. The guy that carried Mil's radio while he was on vacation was Killed in Action while Mil was gone. Mil knew six or seven other guys on the same panel. Mil said it gets easier each time you go to the Wall. I think he's right. The fourth time (or maybe the fifth, I lost count) I walked the Wall it was easier. Being a veteran is something that people who haven't served just don't understand. Civilians will never understand the emotions of veterans. While serving our country we develop a camaraderie that is not duplicated in any other endeavor. This bond spans the branches of the service and any gap in ages. Robley Rex, the WWI vet in Louisville, was thrilled to see other veterans visiting. He's 55 years older than me and we share that veteran bond. I share that bond with all the guys on the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor and I share that bond with all the names on the Wall and I share that bond with all the people serving now. There were lots of tourists around the Wall, most were polite, and some were not. While some of these veterans were trying to deal with a lot of very complex emotions I realized that many of the people walking by just didn't have a clue.

I called Pegger and told him I had taken the bundle to the Wall and read the prayer. He thanked me and said my mission was complete. When I got back to the hotel I saw Fingers and told him, too. The bundle is not as heavy as it was when it was handed to me.

May 27: Today I had the honor of riding into Arlington National Cemetery. We rode into a side entrance and parked near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We observed the laying of a wreath and the changing of the guard. The area of Arlington where we were parked I think is an area where relatives of the military personnel are buried. At least that's what it looked like to me. I didn't see any of the white crosses we normally associate with Arlington. The Tomb of the Unknown is manned by a guard 24 hours a day, every day. The guard moves very slowly and deliberately back and forth in front of the tomb. It is a very fitting way to honor the unknown soldiers lost in every conflict. Those Missing in Action are lost in a different way. I would like to think the guard is for them, too.

After the visit to Arlington part of the group rode to the National Mall. We parked wherever we could, which can be

difficult, but on a motorcycle it wasn't too hard. I did the "tourist with a camera" thing around the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (The Wall), the Lincoln Memorial, the Reflecting Pool and the Washington Monument. There were lots of vendors in an area called Thunder Alley. I walked through there a couple of times. After a couple of hours I rode back to the hotel. Tomorrow morning the staging for Rolling Thunder is at 6:00 am, with departure at 6:30 am. I need to be packed up and ready to hit the road. I plan to ride in Rolling Thunder then head home. This trip has been physically and emotionally draining. I'm tired.

May 28 and 29: Rolling Thunder was Sunday in Washington, DC. What an event that was. The Run for the Wall group of 300-400 bikes (not everyone participates in this) arrived at one of the Pentagon parking lots just before 7 a.m. The lot already had probably a few thousand bikes. All morning they just kept rolling into the lot. The Pentagon is a big building and has some huge parking lots. They just kept coming. I quit taking pictures about 10 am because the number of bikes was just too large to fit in the frame from half a mile away (I went walking around and found a vantage point). The bikes started rolling out for the parade around the National Mall at 12 noon. I'm glad we got there early. It took forty minutes for us to get going from our position. I'm sure the last part of the parade left at least 3 hours after the beginning. I'm guessing something over 300,000 bikes were there. I haven't seen any official estimates. The parade was well attended and lots of people waved flags. It looked like thousands lining Constitution Ave and Independence Ave. I held my fingers up in a Peace Sign as much as I could (I have to drive the bike too, remember?). I guess it was my chance to say something in DC about the current conflict. After 30 minutes the parade reached its end and I rolled out on Interstate 66. I rode about 325 miles then stopped for the night.

Today was filled with just riding, about 650 miles. I caught some rain between Memphis and Little Rock, other than that it was an uneventful day.

June 3: I made it home Thursday, the 1st. I had a problem with the bike and wanted to get it home. I rode about 850 miles the last day. Pegger had left several messages, concerned about me getting home. He's a good man. I'm still thinking about the trip. I'm not sure how long it will take to digest. I'm thinking about what I can do to help someone else make the trip. There are many who need it.

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THE MISSION CONTINUES

By John "Shooter" McCabe

Pastor, RFTW Road Guard, Veteran

Run For The Wall—I first heard about the mission from a guy that was attending the Sturgis motorcycle rally in Sturgis South Dakota. He was not talking to me but I overheard parts of the conversation. The more I over heard the more I knew I had to know more. I am thankful he took the time to chat with me and tell me about RFTW. You see I needed something but I did not know what and this event called RFTW seemed just the thing. The events of September 11, 2001 took place just a month later and my spirit was crying out to "do something about it". We all know what we felt, "let's go get them." Well, our minds were in the right place but the passage of time would not allow our aging bodies to do the things one must do in combat. So, I was looking and found RFTW from a biker in a crowd of over 750,000 people. I know it had to be my answer and yes God does work in mysterious ways.

In 2002 my wife and I rode as participants going all the way from Ontario to Washington D.C. on our 1999 Harley Davidson Road King. We started the run and I did not understand. See, I was never in Nam, have never been under direct enemy fire ... I was on a ship where there are no jungles to run through, no grenades to throw, no incoming fire from some unseen enemy. I did not understand what I saw; I felt like I was in a group feeling sorry for themselves. That didn't last long, though. The first memorial we visited, the first tears I shed, the first time someone truly looked at me in the eye and said "welcome home," then I understood ... loud and clear I understood. All of the memories of what I had done on flight decks of carriers came flooding back, all the bombs I loaded all the guns I armed all of the times I fixed those machines of war so they could deliver their deadly payloads. Yeah, I understood then. I saw, I cried, I was healed

from wounds I never knew I had. Wounds of guilt, sorrow and most of all wounds of hate were healed and removed from me. It was one of our senior Marines that put me back together from my first ever visit to the Wall. Thank you “Top”; I will never forget what you did for me and for my wife.

On that same trip I saw this group of guys with yellow armbands that had “Road Guard” printed on them. They were the greatest, they rode with honor, with a purpose that only they could know, they were the ones who made sure we went where we were supposed to go and when we were suppose to be someplace they made sure we were there. They had “the right stuff” for such a calling. I told my wife that I would like to be one of their ranks some day, but I was not sure I had the “right stuff.” Well, here it is five years later and I have had the honor to ride with the Road Guards for the last four years. J.R., Cruiser, thank you for teaching me to be a RFTW Road Guard; it seems I have the “right stuff” in me after all. In those four years I have experienced the pleasure and honor beyond my wildest dreams of being one of a very select group of people that I thought I could never measure up to. Road Guards, thank you for letting me be a part of your elite group.

RFTW has come to mean a great deal to me over the years. This year I have accepted the position of Assistant Route Coordinator for the Central Route RFTW 2007. I will miss being a Road Guard, but that’s ok; I will be one again some day, but for now other duties call. My position will be whatever the National Coordinator for the Central Route wants it to be. I will support him and mission in whatever manner is needed. I wish to take this time to thank the Board of Directors for this privilege to serve in such a capacity.

The healing continues, the mission goes forward; the road ahead is waiting to be discovered. I wish to thank all of my RFTW family for the support and kind words over the years; you will never know the respect I have for each and every one of you. As RFTW 2007 is planned, scripted, and executed, I only hope at the conclusion of the mission we can say “well done.”

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HONORING GOLD STAR MOTHERS

On September 24 RFTW, VVA Chapters 785 and 53, and Patriot Guard members spent the day with the Gold Star Mothers at Gold Star Manor in Long Beach, an annual event. These wonderful mothers lost their sons during the Vietnam War and appreciate spending time with those who served as their sons did. They consider our visiting vets their “sons.” We’re proud of our brothers and sisters who give their time and hearts to our Gold Star Mothers as a way to thank them for their sacrifices. Our own “Pegleg” Marchand was MC for the day.

Monsoon, VVA Chapter 785 editor, reported that “one mother, Esther, had lost both her sons and the loss was just so terrible for her. Raymond and Rory are both buried in Glendale and her fondest wish is to have them re interred at the Riverside National Cemetery. Then there was Virginia, who waited forty years for her son's return, his remains were found in a field in Vietnam and just returned home last year. We met Marguerite whose son Alexander, a Marine, was lost just eight months ago; we welcomed her home as our new Gold Star Mother. It was a very moving and emotional day for all . . .”

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>> MORE STORIES . . .

(Ed. note: Following is the biography of the longest held prisoner of war from the Vietnam War. He fought for our freedom. This story will remind us to honor not just our own veterans but also those from other countries who fought beside us. Many of us owe our lives to our foreign friends who hate communism as we do and will not bow to it regardless of the consequences.)

LONGEST HELD POW/MIA

By Buzz Parish (17-10-04), Bangkok Thailand

(From the Task Force Omega of KY website)

Chaicharn Harnnavee, Colonel (Retired)

Royal Thai Army, Special Forces

Born: 19 February 1931, Ayutthaya Thailand

Enlisted in the Royal Thai Army at LopBuri, Thailand, August 1952

Promoted to Sgt. 1964

Married: Wife, Chalerm Sri

One Daughter: Chaweewong, 29

In February 1965, Sgt. Chaicharn was stationed in Xiene District, Lom Laos with the Royal Thai Army, Special Forces (SF) as a radio operator (voice intercept). On 21 May 1965 (a day off, for fun) he joined American civilian pilot, Ernest Brace as his "spotter. They were flying a PC-6 (Porter) on a re-supply mission, delivering construction supplies to be used in the building of a hospital. Traveling with them was a Lao Special Forces Soldier and a pregnant Lao lady and her young child.

Upon reaching their destination at Baum Lao, Laos, they landed and taxied to the end of runway and turned the aircraft to offload passengers and supplies. They immediately came under heavy attack from small arms fire. The Lao Soldier, the lady and her child were killed instantly. The aircrafts wings and engine were also hit and caught fire. Sgt. Chaicharn and Ernest Brice tried to then escape and evade into the jungle 50 yards away. Under heavy AK fire, they made it to the jungle, but were met and captured by a 300-man North Vietnamese Army (NVA) force.

Soon after capture, they started their fifteen-day march to Dien Bien Pho, North Vietnam. Each man was bound and each was assigned six NVA Soldiers as guards for their march. During the march they were fed very meager rations and received no medical assistance.

Sgt. Chaicharn and Ernest Brace would spend the next three years in Dien Bien Pho. They were kept in small huts about 15 yards apart. During his entire stay in this camp, Sgt. Chaicharn was kept in ankle stocks at all times. At night, in addition to the stocks, they would also tie his wrists together and he would also have to wear a neck iron. The only time he was allowed out was 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the evening. Ernest Brach and he were not allowed to communicate at all. They were given only meager amounts of rice and a tiny amount of vegetables. There was no meat and no medical attention.

At one point, Ernest Brace managed to escape for three days. During this time, Sgt. Chaicharn was brutally beaten because of Ernest Brace's escape.

In 1968, Sgt. Chaicharn and Ernest Brace were taken by truck to the Hanoi Hilton Prison in North Vietnam. Sgt. Chaicharn was immediately placed in solitary confinement and remained there for the next two years. After this time he was allowed out two hours a day to clean the compound and work at water purification for the compound. At the end of his two-hour shift, he would then be placed back into solitary. During his cleaning duties, he was allowed no contact with others.

After about a year of cleaning duties, he was able to make contact with another captive, a South Vietnamese Air Force pilot called "Maz." Maz could speak Vietnamese, French, and English. At this point, Sgt. Chaicharn spoke neither English nor Vietnamese, only Thai. Through hand signals, or gestures, they were able to start communicating. As time went on, they began to understand each other more and more. Maz eventually passed a code to Sgt. Chaicharn for them to communicate. Then later, Maz passed the American "Tap Code" to Sgt. Chaicharn and he began to teach himself English so that he could better communicate.

Because of his access to more areas of the Hanoi Hilton (for cleaning) and at great risk to himself, he began to steal pencils, paper and mirrors used for signaling. The better he got at understanding English and the codes, the more he stole

and helped the other prisoners of war (POWs). Sgt. Chaicharn went so far as to smuggle his own food to other POWs that were in worse shape than he. American POWs credit Sgt. Chaicharn as being the reason they are alive today.

In 1973, with "Operation Homecoming" Sgt. Chaicharn was the only POW left at the Hilton. Because he was Thai and captured in Laos, he alone was not released.

Approximately one month after everyone else had left the Hilton; Sgt. Chaicharn was loaded onto a truck and taken north to Pho Yen Province, North Vietnam, by the Chinese border. When he arrived, there were 216 other Thai POWs, all having been captured in Laos. They all know the war is over, but they are not being allowed to go home.

Soon after his arrival, because of his age (42), he was put in Command of all Thai POWs. The Vietnamese wanted all POWs to volunteer to go through "Re-education" training and become Communists. Sgt. Chaicharn was charged with making sure that all his men did this. He refused to do it.

Because of his refusal, Sgt. Chaicharn was placed in the "Dark Room" for six months. The "dark room" was a box, 3ft.x 6ft placed in the sun. There was one hole near the top of the box that was about 1-1/2" to 2" inches diameter. This hole faced east. That was his only way to know day from night. During this entire six-month period, he was allowed a bath once per month and that was also the only time he was allowed to empty the pot that held his body waste.

Each morning the guard would kick the box and he was supposed to answer, so they would know he was alive and there. On his last day, he did not answer... his body had shut down. His legs no longer worked, he couldn't feel anything and didn't know where he was. The guard turned him over to the doctor and after some time he started to respond.

Once he was well enough again, he was called to the Camp Commanders office. Sitting before the Commanding Officer (CO), Sgt. Chaicharn was asked if he was ready to get his men to undergo "Re-education"? He told him "NO." The CO then pulled an AK-47 rifle leveled it at Sgt. Chaicharn and chambered a round. He then asked again saying he could kill Sgt. Chaicharn now, or he could work with them. Sgt. Chaicharn stood up and said, "Go ahead." "I am not a Communist and I don't want to be. The war is over, I just want to go home. I will not be a Communist" The CO sent him out of his office.

At about this time in the U.S., American former POWs were asking questions as to what had happened to Sgt. Chaicharn. So many owed him so much, and he was alive when they left the Hanoi Hilton. During his whole time of captivity, there had been no word of his status to the Thai Gov. Where was he now? The former Vietnam POWs in America were lobbying U.S. and Thai Government's to get answers.

About three months after the incident with the Camp CO, the agreement was signed between the Governments of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and the U.S. When released from captivity on 29 September 1974, Sgt. Chaicharn was the only Thai POW asked for by name. He was also the longest held POW of the Viet Nam War: 9 Years, 4 months, and 8 days.

Within one month of his return to Thailand, Sgt. Chaicharn was honored by a personal promotion to the rank Captain, by His Majesty, The King of Thailand.

When it was learned by the American POWs that now Captain Chaicharn had been returned to Thailand, Colonel Flynn, USAF, Commander Lackland Air Force Base, TX and former Vietnam POW, contacted Capt. Chaicharn and asked him to come to America for a one-month tour. They wanted to say "Thank you" to Capt. Chaicharn for his gallantry and service to all the former POWs of the Hanoi Hilton.

Shortly after his tour of the U.S., Capt. Chaicharn was sent to Lackland AFB in TX for 10 months training in English and then on to Ft. Bragg NC for seven months training in Psychological Operations (Psy Ops). It was also during this time that Capt. Chaicharn was honored for his bravery at the Hanoi Hilton by being presented with the "Silver Star" and "Legion of Merit" awards by the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon. Capt. Chaicharn is also the only foreign national to have his picture hanging in the "Hall Of Heroes" at the Pentagon.

After his schooling in America, Capt. Chaicharn returned to the Special Warfare Command at LopBuri, Thailand where he taught until his retirement in 1992 with the rank of Colonel.

Col. Chaicharn is now an elected City Councilman for the city of LopBuri, Thailand.

Col. Chaicharn is one of the true heroes of the Vietnam War.

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(Ed. note: The following was posted September 16 on www.greasyonline.com. Danny "Greasy" Belcher is Executive Director of Task Force Omega of KY, Inc. TFO is an organization whose only goal is to have prisoners of war and missing in action (POW/MIAs) accounted for. "We want all documents related to POW/MIAs declassified and the truth told about what happened to them. First we want those that were known to be alive in the enemy's control returned or their bones and the reason they died. Then we want the remains of others returned where the enemy knew their final resting place.")

MATT MAUPIN'S FATHER SPEAKS UP

By Danny "Greasy" Belcher

Please read the information that Iraq POW Matt Maupin's father Keith Maupin sent me. We need to find Scott Speicher and Matt Maupin. They need to come home. There is no excuse for incompetence, betrayal, and abandonment.

Danny,

Thanks for being willing to say something in our absence. There is so much to say I don't know where to begin. This was sent to us from a church a little north from here. I think it would be good.

"To whom it may concern,

My name is Matt Maupin. I was born on July 13, 1983, in Batavia, Ohio. In 2001 I joined the U.S. Army not only for college monies but to defend yours and my country. I was assigned to the 705th Transportation Company in Dayton, Ohio. Three days before I returned from my basic training the 705th deployed to Iraq. I was assigned to the 724th Transportation Company in Bartonville, Illinois.

On April 9, 2004, I was on a fuel convoy near Baghdad International Airport, when our convoy came under attack, I was taken captive by Iraqi insurgents. I am still listed as Captured/MIA. Though I know there are those of my brothers that would prefer me to be called a POW/MIA. I believe that doing so would give the insurgents that captured me a sign of recognition of something they are not.

I spent my 21st birthday in captivity. As my second and third year of captivity draws nearer, I need to ask a favor of all my fellow Americans.

Would you please display my picture? When you are saying prayers for my brothers and sister soldiers, please say a special prayer for me and my family. Please pray that the Lord give me courage and strength. That he give my parents hope that I will return soon to them. I feel that if all Americans pray for peace and my safe return it will happen. Please to continue to pray for me until I return home.

God bless you. Together as one we will make a difference.
Thank you"

There is one more I think would be appropriate for this event. A poem written for Matt.

Remember My Face

It's been so long now I can't help but feel
my life is over, is this all really real;
I've been a prisoner for such a long time,
no one left behind, was that just a line.

They beat and threaten my life with a shiv,
name, rank and serial number, that's all I give;
Does anyone even remember my name,
or am I a soldier and prisoner of little fame.

How much longer will I be held in this place,
my name is Matt, do you remember my face;
I'm an American soldier who willingly served,
I can't help but think this is so undeserved.

Have I been abandoned in this horrible place,
will I die and disappear without leaving a trace;
What about my buddies, who fought by my side,
are they still fighting, has the war turned the tide.

Will they come for me and free me from this fate,
or will I die in this place a victim of fanatical hate;
The country I love and served with such pride,
has it turned its back on me now, has it lied;

Please don't leave me behind,
it would be a disgrace;
My name is Matt Maupin,
please, remember my face.

Unsigned. Written Saturday, May 28, 2005

Please tell them that after all these years, the Army is learning. They are learning that these soldiers of today are all volunteers of the Army. No one was drafted and they have to treat them and their families with completely different attitudes. They are doing this. Compared to the men left behind in Vietnam, the Army is trying to do the right thing. We are in contact with them on a minimum of weekly basis. We have a direct line to the Pentagon. Unheard of during the Vietnam conflict.

I would ask you to tell them to not allow the Army and our government to allow Matt to become a folder and be forgotten like they did the to all the men left behind in Vietnam.

If it weren't for groups like Task Force Omega, some of the Rolling Thunder members, and groups like the Chained Eagles of Ohio, all the men would have been forgotten in Vietnam.

One more mention from me ... there are worse things that could happen to a soldier than being killed on the battlefield. That would be being forgotten.

As I read this, Danny, it makes sense to me. If you would want to feel it necessary to change it a bit, I don't have a problem with it. Just don't let them miss the point.

To call Matt Maupin missing is missing the point.

Till they all come home,
SSgt. Keith Matthew "Matt" Maupin, captured 9-Apr-04

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>> **VA NEWS**

WEAR MEDALS ON VETERANS DAY

WASHINGTON (Oct. 18, 2006)—The Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and leaders of major veterans organizations today called on America's veterans to help kindle a new spark of patriotism on Veterans Day by wearing the medals they earned during military service. "We are announcing a Veterans Pride Initiative to remind Americans of the pride and honor in the hearts of those who have served," Nicholson said. "We expect Americans will see our decorated heroes unite in spirit at ceremonies, in parades and elsewhere as a compelling symbol of courage and sacrifice on Veterans Day, the day we set aside to thank those who served and safeguarded our national security." The campaign is modeled after a tradition in Australia and New Zealand, countries who honor the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) on April 25. ANZAC Day sees veterans wearing their military decorations whatever they are doing on that day. Nicholson said he hopes a U. S. tradition will ensue to emulate this pride in being a veteran and in honoring our veterans. VA is offering information about the campaign on its Web page, <http://www.va.gov/veteranspride/>, where veterans also can obtain information about how to replace mislaid medals and learn how to confirm the decorations to which they are entitled.

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DD-214'S NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has provided the following website for veterans to gain access to their DD-214s online: <http://vetrecs.archives.gov/>. This may be particularly helpful when a veteran needs a copy of his DD-214 for employment purposes. NPRC is working to make it easier for veterans with computers and Internet access to obtain copies of documents from their military files. Military veterans and the next of kin of deceased former military members may now use a new online military personnel records system to request documents. Other individuals with a need for documents must still complete the Standard Form 180, which can be downloaded from the online web site. Because the requester will be asked to supply all information essential for NPRC to process the request, delays than normally occur when NPRC has to ask veterans for additional information will be minimized. The new web-based application was designed to provide better service on these requests by eliminating the records center's mailroom processing time.

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ANOTHER MISSING COMPUTER WITH VET FILES

(Ed. note: This is the second occurrence of stolen VA files; the first was in May.)

WASHINGTON (Aug. 7, 2006) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that a subcontractor, hired to assist in insurance collections for VA's medical centers in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, has informed the Department that a desktop computer containing personal information on some veterans is missing from the company's offices.

VA's Inspector General, the FBI and local law enforcement are conducting a thorough investigation of this matter," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

VA was notified on the afternoon of Thursday, August 3, by the subcontractor, Unisys Corporation, that the computer was missing from its Reston, Va., offices. VA immediately dispatched a team to Unisys to assist in the search for the missing computer and to help determine the precise nature of the information it may have contained.

While the investigation is in an early stage, VA believes the records involved are limited to people who received treatment at the two Pennsylvania medical centers during the past four years. It is believed the desktop computer may have contained patients' names, addresses, Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, insurance carriers and billing information, dates of military service, and claims data that may include some medical information.

Initial estimates indicate the desktop contained information on approximately 5,000 patients treated at Philadelphia, approximately 11,000 patients treated at Pittsburgh, and approximately 2,000 deceased patients. VA is also investigating the possibility the computer may have contained information on approximately another 20,000 people who received care through the Pittsburgh medical center.

Investigators are working on this incident with the full cooperation of Unisys. VA is also working with Unisys regarding the offer of credit monitoring and individual notifications to those who may be affected.

Upon learning the computer was missing, VA personnel took immediate steps to notify the appropriate senior VA leadership, including the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, appropriate congressional offices and committees, VA's Office of the Inspector General and other law enforcement authorities, including the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security's Computer Emergency Response Team.

The ongoing investigation will provide VA more details on the precise number of veterans whose information the computer may have contained. VA will provide further updates as the investigation produces additional information.

"VA is making progress to reform its information technology and cyber security procedures, but this report of a missing computer at a subcontractor's secure building underscores the complexity of the work ahead as we establish VA as a leader in data and information security," Nicholson added.

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AGREEMENT ON DATA BREACH ANALYSIS

WASHINGTON (August 6, 2006)—Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson today announced the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has entered into an agreement with a company that will provide free data breach analysis services to VA to ensure that information contained on computer equipment stolen in May from a VA employee's home—and later recovered by law enforcement—was not compromised.

ID Analytics, a California-based company, will conduct the analysis across multiple industries to detect patterns of misuse and determine whether or not there is any suspicious activity specifically related to this computer equipment theft. The company will provide VA an initial analysis, and will then continue to offer its assessments on a quarterly basis.

"Protecting veterans from fraud and abuse remains an important priority for VA," said Secretary Nicholson. "Data breach analysis will provide VA with additional assurances that veterans' personal information remains unharmed."

On July 13, the FBI indicated it is highly confident the data stored on the recovered computer equipment was not accessed or compromised. On August 5, Montgomery County, Md., Police announced the arrests of two men they

believe are responsible for the theft. According to law enforcement authorities, the arrested men did not specifically target the computer equipment. Authorities also provided reassurances that the information was not compromised.

Prior to the arrests, VA indicated that, out of an abundance of caution and to further safeguard the recovered information, the Department would conduct data breach analysis. VA's agreement with ID Analytics fulfills this commitment.

To view and download VA news release, please visit the following Internet address: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel>

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NEW DATA SECURITY ENCRYPTION PROGRAM

WASHINGTON (Aug. 14, 2006)—Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary R. James Nicholson Monday announced that all VA computers throughout the agency will be upgraded with enhanced data security encryption systems beginning immediately.

"I have promised America's veterans that I intend to make VA information security a model of data security and this expedited encryption program is a major step in that direction," said Nicholson "A system-wide encryption program will be a tremendous step forward in improving the safety and security of sensitive veteran information."

The computer encryption program follows the award of a \$3.7 million contract August 11 to SMS, Incorporated, a service-disabled, veteran-owned small business located in Syracuse, New York. The encryption solution consists of GuardianEdge and Trust Digital products.

Under the terms of the award to SMS, all laptop computers across the entire VA system will be the first to receive critical data security encryption programs followed by desktop PCs. Portable media, like flash drives and CDs, are also included in the security encryption program.

Final testing of the software is underway, and implementation and training materials are currently being developed with the actual encryption of laptops scheduled to begin August 18. The agency expects to have 100% of its laptop computers fully encrypted within four weeks.

While the laptop and desktop computer encryption program is underway, Nicholson has also directed advanced enterprise encryption solutions to be explored as a follow-on to the laptop and desktop encryption program, including all VA servers and data centers.

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VA LEADS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN CONTRACTING WITH DISABLED VETERANS

WASHINGTON (July 27, 2006) - Edging closer to its target for contracting with service-disabled, veteran-owned businesses, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has bested other federal agencies, according to a report on last year's federal contracting program.

Of 18 federal agencies that procured at least \$1 billion through contracts, VA led in its percentage—2.15 percent—awarded to small businesses run by veterans disabled during military service. VA awarded more than \$200 million to these veteran-owned businesses in fiscal year 2005.

"VA is committed to helping veterans, not just with health care and other benefits, but in experiencing the opportunities of entrepreneurship," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

VA's leadership role in supporting service-disabled, veteran-owned businesses was cited in the recent Small Business Goaling Report by the Small Business Administration. According to the report, VA's \$9.8 billion in total acquisitions last year made it the fourth largest purchaser of goods and services within the federal government, behind the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and NASA.

Across the federal government, the report said contracts with service-disabled veterans increased to \$1.9 billion last year, up by 58 percent since 2004.

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VA BENEFITS FOR FORMER POW'S

Former American prisoners of war (POWs) are eligible for special veterans benefits, including enrollment in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care for treatment in VA hospitals and clinics without copayments as well as disability compensation for injuries and diseases that have been associated with internment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

Records show that 142,246 Americans were captured and interned during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Somalia and Kosovo conflicts, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. There were no servicemembers reported missing in action from the Bosnia deployment or from recent Afghanistan operations. Of the 125,214 Americans surviving captivity, about 29,350 were estimated to be alive at the end of 2005.

With nine out of ten former POWs having served in World War II, the estimated number of living POWs decreased from nearly 32,500 to 29,000 during 2005 due mainly to the estimated death rates for World War II and Korean POWs.

As of August 2006, there were 16,884 former POWs receiving compensation benefits from VA. Approximately 13,000 of them are rated as 100 percent disabled.

Additional Resources: POW coordinators are assigned to each VA regional office and medical center and are available to provide more information. Former POWs may contact VA regional offices with general benefits questions at 800-827-1000. Medical eligibility questions may be directed to 877-222-8387. Additional information for former POWs also is available from VA's Web site at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>.

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>> BRINGING THEM HOME

NAVY AVIATOR MISSING IN ACTION FROM VIETNAM WAR IS IDENTIFIED **News Release from the United States Department of Defense, September 21, 2006**

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced yesterday that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

He is Lt. Cmdr. James E. Plowman, U.S. Navy, of Pebble Beach, Calif. He was buried yesterday at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C.

On March 24, 1967, Plowman and a fellow officer departed the USS Kitty Hawk in their A-6A Intruder on a night strike mission of an enemy target in North Vietnam. Radar contact with their aircraft was lost over the Ha Bac Province as they were departing the target area. A pilot from another aircraft reported two missile warnings on his radar screen immediately before contact was lost with Plowman's aircraft.

Between 1993 and 1996, joint U.S.-Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted three investigations in the province. The team interviewed two local villagers who saw the 1967 crash, and both men recalled seeing human remains at the site. The team also surveyed the purported crash site and found several small fragments of aircraft wreckage.

In 1996, another joint U.S./S.R.V. team excavated the suspected crash site. The team found human remains from amid the scattered wreckage. The team was also handed some remains by a local villager who claimed to have recovered it while scavenging the crater for metal.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used mitochondrial DNA in the identification of the remains.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO Web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/> or call (703) 699-1169.

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LEGENDARY PILOT "EARTHQUAKE MCGOON" HEADS HOME

New York (AP) -- More than a half century after he died in the flaming crash of a CIA-owned cargo plane and became one of the first two Americans to die in combat in Vietnam, a legendary soldier of fortune known as "Earthquake McGoon" is coming home.

The skeletal remains of James B. McGovern Jr., discovered in an unmarked grave in remote northern Laos in 2002, were positively identified on September 11 by laboratory experts at the U.S. military's Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) in Hawaii.

Six feet and 260 pounds—huge for a fighter pilot—McGovern carved out a flying career during and after World War II that made him a legend in Asia.

An American saloon owner in China dubbed him "Earthquake McGoon," after a hulking hillbilly character in the comic strip "Li'l Abner."

He died May 6, 1954, when his C-119 Flying Boxcar cargo plane was hit by ground fire while parachuting a howitzer to the besieged French garrison at Dien Bien Phu. Killed along with "McGoon," 31, were his co-pilot, Wallace Buford, 28, and a French crew chief. Two cargo handlers, a Frenchman and a Thai, were thrown clear and survived. Ho Chi Minh's communist forces captured Dien Bien Phu the next day, ending a 57-day siege that had captured the world's attention.

Dr. Thomas Holland, director of JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory, said McGovern was only the second person ever identified through "nuclear" DNA from a male relative—a particularly difficult task with bones that are decades old. The first was another Southeast Asia casualty identified recently. Most cases rely on mitochondrial DNA, from female relatives.

McGovern first went to China in 1944, as a fighter pilot in the 14th Air Force's "Tiger Shark" squadron, descended from the famous Flying Tigers, the Chinese air force unit of American volunteers formed to fight the Japanese in the months before the U.S. entered World War II. McGovern was credited with shooting down four Japanese Zero fighters and

destroying five on the ground.

McGovern's exact fate was unknown until a French visitor learned of the crash during a 1959 visit to the Laotian village of Ban Sot. That report was suppressed by the CIA, Smith said, but after a private historian found it in French files years later, a group of former CAT pilots led by Smith persuaded the CIA to back a search effort.

In 1997, an American MIA team investigating an unrelated case found a C-119 propeller at Ban Sot, and a JPAC photo analyst spotted possible graves in aerial photos. Excavation in 2002 uncovered remains that turned out to be McGovern's.

JPAC experts are still seeking the remains of co-pilot Buford, one of 35 civilians among 1,797 Americans still unaccounted for in Indochina.

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>> OTHER NEWS

ANGEL FIRE IMPROVEMENTS

The New Mexico State Parks recently accepted public comment on proposed plans for Phase I repairs and improvements to Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park. Phase I will include renovations and upgrades to the Peace and Brotherhood Chapel and grounds.

“Now that the Memorial is a State Park, it needs some work,” said State Parks Director Dave Simon. “These proposed upgrades remain true to Dr. Westphall’s vision to honor veterans while improving the Memorial and visitor service.”

For the Phase I project, State Parks contracted with Santa Fe architect Ted Luna, who designed the original chapel, to evaluate the existing structure and grounds. State Parks’ goal is to preserve the original vision for the Memorial, while incorporating features, such as improved facilities for ceremonies, which are designed to ensure the longevity of the Memorial.

“The concept behind the chapel improvements is meant to inspire peace and brotherhood, creating a sense of simplicity without sterility,” said Luna. “The chapel has healing elements, allowing many vets to come to grips with their experience. Some vets may not understand the power of healing that the chapel invokes, but they know it’s there.”

Proposed improvements to the Chapel and the Memorial grounds include:

- Upgrade amphitheatre/stage area with new sound system, landscaped audience seating area, removable stage cover, and two walls designed to tie-into existing wings of chapel;
- Repair and replace damaged masonry on chapel exterior and replace roof;
- Remove existing cross from interior, replace with 15-foot marble Eagle Fountain designed by Doug Scott, sculptor of “Dear Mom and Dad” statue currently on-site;
- Add window to north wall to improve lighting and facilitate visual flow from hillside;
- Upgrade carpet, mud mats, and seat cushions;
- Upgrade heating system with energy-efficient model;
- Upgrade interior/exterior lighting;
- Improve doorways for handicapped accessibility and snow-removal.
- Repave and stripe existing parking lot and upgrade exterior sidewalk lighting.
- Construct concessionaire/exhibitor area adjacent to upper parking lot.
- Construct new concrete walkway from Huey helicopter to concessionaire/exhibitor area.

Long-term improvements will occur in two phases. Phase II projects, scheduled for next year, will include renovations and upgrades to the museum/visitor center.

The Memorial officially became New Mexico's 33rd State Park in November 2005, and is now the only state park in the country dedicated solely as a Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Victor and Jeanne Westphall originally established the Memorial in 1971, after their son David was killed in Vietnam.

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PENDLETON TO DO “THE RIGHT THING” FOR WOUNDED

By Rick Rogers , San Diego Union-Tribune, August 7, 2006

The first West Coast barracks for Marines and sailors wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan will open Thursday at Camp Pendleton.

Much more than a roof and walls, the Wounded Warrior Center is designed to give troops a sanctuary where they can recuperate while planning for the next step in their lives. Base officials said the center, less than a quarter-mile from the Camp Pendleton hospital, could accommodate 26 service members. They expect half of its rooms to be filled by next week.

“This is a way we are going to give back to the Marine Corps and the civilian communities,” said Maj. Gen. Michael Lehnert, commander of the seven bases that make up Marine Corps Installations West. The goal, he said, is to help wounded service members return to active-duty status or to assist them in transitioning to the civilian world.

“We are going to do the right thing,” Lehnert said. “This is exciting.”

And needed.

Since March 2003, nearly 19,000 U.S. troops have been wounded in Iraq alone. The Marines and the Army have suffered the most deaths and injuries during the Iraq war because they handle the bulk of ground-based operations.

Col. Timothy Maxwell, who runs the Wounded Warrior Center at Camp Lejeune, N.C., said that Camp Pendleton was getting “a wonderful facility” that would make a big difference in the lives of service members and their loved ones.

Until Camp Lejeune officials began operating their center in September, Maxwell said, wounded Marines and sailors convalesced at home or in the often empty barracks of their deployed units.

In October 2004, Maxwell himself was gravely wounded when shrapnel from enemy mortar cut into his brain. He remembers the physical anguish and mental isolation he felt during the recovery period. At that point, Maxwell started thinking that it would be good to have wounded or formerly injured service members help one another in a centralized location. His idea was eventually developed into Maxwell Hall, which is a part of the center.

Lejeune officials initially established six rooms for the program; now they have 40. Of the center's 47 staff members, only one was not wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The Lejeune staff members coordinate doctors' appointments and help patients wade through paperwork and to figure out what they want to do next.

“This is more than a barracks—we are a unit. We can't deploy and we can't fight, but we are still Marines,” Maxwell said. “We have morning formations, though the Marines don't stand at attention because a lot of them can't stand.”

Camp Lejeune's program has grown because its commanders supported the center. But it was a tough sell at first, Maxwell said. Originally, he remembers, some commanders objected to the idea of having their Marines cared for in barracks not under their supervision.

“And they were right. I know that I wouldn't want my Marines being cared for by someone else,” said Maxwell, a former infantry officer. “But once they saw our barracks, they left as believers.” That's because unlike traditional barracks, the center has ramps instead of steps, hand-bars along its walls and, most important, staff members know first-hand the guilt, the fear and the frustrations that arise during the recovery process.

Maxwell predicted that Camp Pendleton's center would make converts, too.

“We are really excited about the new barracks” there, he said. “They will start out so far ahead of us because they (have learned from) the mistakes that we made.”

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MORE ON HELMETS

By Tom Ragan, Santa Cruz Sentinel

WATSONVILLE, CA—It looks like Richard Quigley's legal home-schooling, not to mention the hundreds of hours of community service he's spent at the Santa Cruz Law Library, have paid dividends.

A Santa Cruz County Superior Court judge ruled Wednesday that at least a dozen citations leveled against Quigley for not wearing a motorcycle helmet are unconstitutional because the California Highway Patrol has failed to properly define what constitutes a safe motorcycle helmet.

In his seven-page ruling, Judge Michael Barton sided with Quigley, 61, of Aptos, whose argument in numerous court appearances over the years is that his soft leather baseball cap is just as much a helmet as the so-called standard hard-shelled helmets worn by most motorcycle riders.

The California Highway Patrol must define what a helmet is or any citations written by officers are unconstitutional, Barton ruled.

The interpretation of what constitutes a helmet, the judge wrote, is unfairly left up to the CHP officer's "subjective opinion," and the set of guidelines and safety standards are "vague."

Quigley, who's been fighting the helmet law for 15 years, since it first went into effect, was elated at the judge's detailed clarification of a ruling last month.

"I finally feel a sense of victory," said Quigley, who's received dozens of citations for wearing a baseball cap as a helmet for more than a decade. "The point in all this is that the CHP doesn't have any idea what a helmet is, and until they figure it out, they shouldn't be issuing tickets."

In July, Barton sided with Quigley and dismissed nine helmet citations against him on the premise the law was too vague. Wednesday, he dismissed the final two citations against Quigley, ruling that "The CHP is the only state agency authorized by the statutes to adopt reasonable regulations establishing specifications and standards for motorcycle safety helmets. The CHP's failure to adopt such regulations, and make them available to the public, has rendered the helmet law statutes void for vagueness as applied."

The judge's order and its implications caught the California Highway Patrol off guard, and the agency's general counsel was seeking legal advice late Wednesday, said Tom Marshall, a spokesman for the CHP.

"We're going to review the decision to determine what, if any actions, we will take," said Marshall.

Closer to home, the California Highway Patrol office in Aptos was waiting on a decision from Sacramento.

"It's going to be interesting to see what happens from here," Quigley said, adding, "If I were a cop, I wouldn't be writing any more tickets. They might get sued if it's unconstitutional."

Since the motorcycle law went into effect, Quigley said he has never paid any fines as a result of a citation. Instead, he said, he has served hours of community work at the Santa Cruz Law Library.

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NURSE BREAKS SILENCE, REVEALS WWII ATROCITY

By MARI YAMAGUCHI, AP

TOKYO (Sept. 16)—The Toyama No. 5 apartment block is quiet at midday—laundry flapping from balconies, old people taking an after-lunch stroll. But the building and its nearby park may be sitting on a gruesome World War II secret.

A wartime nurse has broken more than 60 years of silence to reveal her part in burying dozens, perhaps hundreds, of bodies there as American forces occupied the Japanese capital.

The way experts see it, these were no ordinary casualties of war, but possible victims of Tokyo's shadowy wartime experiments on live prisoners of war—an atrocity that has never been officially recognized by the Japanese government, but is well documented by historians and participants.

The neighborhood on the west side of Tokyo is deeply troubled.

"I feel sorry for remains with such a sad history," said Teppei Kuroda, a college senior who lives there. "I think they should be dug up and mourned properly."

Their first burial was anything but dignified.

Former nurse Toyo Ishii says that during the weeks following Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, she and colleagues at an army hospital at the site were ordered to bury corpses, bones and body parts—she doesn't know how many—before the Americans arrived.

A mass grave of between 62 and more than 100 possible war-experiment victims was uncovered in a nearby area in 1989. But Ishii's account—publicly released in June—could yield a far larger number and a firmer connection to Unit 731, Japan's dreaded germ and biological warfare outfit.

"If the bones are actually there, they are likely related to Unit 731 itself, because the facility that used to stand in that part of the compound was closely linked to the unit," said Keiichi Tsuneishi, a Kanagawa University history professor and expert on Japan's wartime biological warfare.

Ishii's disclosure led to a face-to-face meeting with Health Minister Jiro Kawasaki and a government pledge to investigate. But it may be a long time before anything is confirmed. Health Ministry official Jiro Yashiki rules out a speedy exhumation.

"People still live there and we can't visit each family to remind them of the bones ... just imagine how they feel about it," he said. "What if we find nothing after all the trouble?"

The 84-year-old nurse's story is the latest twist in the legacy of Japan's rampage through Asia in the 1930s and '40s. From its base in Japan-controlled Harbin, China, Unit 731 and related units injected war prisoners with typhus, cholera and other diseases as research into germ warfare, according to historians and former unit members. Unit 731 also is believed to have performed vivisections and frozen prisoners to death in endurance tests.

The 1989 find, during construction of a Health Ministry research institute at the former army medical school site in Tokyo, revealed dozens of fragmented thigh bones and skulls, some with holes drilled in them or sections cut out. Police denied any evidence of a crime, and the bones were not properly analyzed until two years later.

In 2001, the Health Ministry concluded that the remains—many of them of non-Japanese Asians—were most likely from bodies used in "medical education" or brought back from the war zone for analysis at the medical school.

The ministry said the bones could not be directly linked to Unit 731, though it acknowledged that some interviewees had suggested they were shipped from Manchuria, northern China, where the unit was based.

In 2002, the Health Ministry built a memorial repository for the bones. But it has refused repeated requests for DNA tests from relatives of several Chinese believed to have perished in Unit 731.

Ishii says she was never involved in or knew about experiments on humans. Her account dwells on the final chapter of the war and the rush to conceal it. In an interview at her Tokyo home, she said she was assigned to the hospital's oral surgery department in 1944. She said the hospital had three morgues, where bodies with numbered tags around their necks floated in a formalin-filled pool, awaiting dissection. Body parts were preserved in bottles. After the surrender, workers piled the bodies and bottles in carts and brought them to empty lots in the compound, she said.

"We took the samples out of the glass containers and dumped them into the hole," she wrote in a statement to the government in June. "We were going to be in trouble, I was told, if American soldiers asked us about the specimens."

She said a hospital official told her years later that a public housing complex for the families of senior doctors and hospital officials, including himself, was built at the site to cover up the mass grave. That complex was later replaced by Toyama No. 5.

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>> EVENTS

VETERANS DAY IN LAUGHLIN, NEVADA

November 9-12, 2006

Many of our RFTW, VVA, and Patriot Guard members celebrate Veterans Day every year at the Ramada Express Hotel in Laughlin. It's not just coincidental, either. It's because the Ramada is committed to helping our veterans.

The Ramada Express started its Veterans program ten years ago as a way to pay tribute and say "thanks" to American Veterans. The tribute began with a museum that was meant to last only a few weeks. The Veterans program grew to include a patriotic show and a speaker program for Veterans to share their stories. The Ramada gives each American Veteran a free commemorative pin as a way of saying thanks.

In 1999 the Ramada Express created the American Heroes Foundation (AHF), a non-profit organization to raise funds for recognized Veteran causes. The Board has placed an emphasis on its donations to health care for Veterans. The need to transport disabled American Veterans to their medical appointments is critical in the area and is our top priority. Since its beginning, AHF has purchased 13 vans to transport Veterans to their medical appointments in Arizona, Nevada, and California. The Foundation continues to work with local and regional Veterans organizations to support the needs of

Veterans. The AHF Board of Directors distributes funds based upon an application process and has awarded vans through the DAV, American Legion chapters, and other non-profit groups dedicated to serving Veterans.

The opening ceremony will salute America's Veterans on Thurs. evening, Nov. 9. On November 11 at 5 p.m., there will be a free Patriot Day Presentation (Pavilion Theater). And the Ramada Express is also hosting the three-day Laughlin International Rally and Motorsports Festival, North America's longest, toughest rally.

While at the Ramada, be sure to visit the American Heroes Museum of Memories. Also, all U.S. veterans are invited to stop by the Distinguished Players Club booth to receive a very special free gift—a beautiful commemorative patriotic pin designed exclusively for you along with a matching Distinguished Players Card—Ramada Laughlin's way of saying "thanks" for a job well done.

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VETERANS DAY AT KNOTT'S BERRY FARM

November 1-23, 2006

Knott's annual tribute to the Military, past and present. Veterans or current serving military plus one guest get in FREE with proper ID presented at Knott's turnstile (DD-214, Veterans Administration Hospital ID or Active Military Service ID). You may purchase up to six additional tickets for just \$10.95.

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CHRISTMAS PARTY AND TOY GIVEAWAY AT FORT IRWIN

November 29, 2006

The 3rd Annual Christmas Party and Toy Giveaway will be at Fort Irwin near Barstow, California, November 29, 2006. This party is for kids whose fathers and mothers are serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. The VA wants us to escort the vans taking volunteers to Fort Irwin and to help pass out toys. Roland "Pegleg" Marchand is helping to coordinate the event and has the following info to share:

The V.A. and Fort Irwin would like each person to bring a small backpack stuffed with school supplies such as:

- *Pencils*
- *Pens*
- *Crayons - small box*
- *Ruler*
- *Pencil Sharpener - small hand-held*
- *Paper*

Or other school supplies you can think of

You don't have to go overboard. A couple of items would be fine. K-8 will be the ages.

We will be leaving around 8:00 a.m. and will get home around 5:00 p.m.

Only 60 motorcycles will be allowed, so please let Pegleg know as soon as possible if you plan to go. He will need your full name and passenger name and license plate number of your motorcycle. Either call him at (951) 277-3341 or email him with the info: rolandmarchand@ca.rr.com

VA HOSPITAL LONG BEACH CHRISTMAS BBQ

December 16, 2006

The VA Hospital Long Beach Christmas BBQ will be at 1100 hours at the Spinal Cord Wing on the 16th of December. There will be three outstanding bands and Santa arriving with gifts for our hospitalized veterans. Bring an unwrapped toy and also a wrapped gift for a hospitalized veteran. Call Roland "Pegleg" Marchand (951) 277-3341 or email rolandmarchand@comcast.net.

>> SICK CALL

After the Angel Fire Reunion, **Abe "Nuguy" Duran** had a crash Sunday morning on his way back to Colorado. He suffered a broken wrist and broken ribs, but fortunately was wearing his helmet. Let's pray for his speedy recovery!

Jackie McKinney of Gallup, NM, recently had his second knee surgery, this time it was a total knee replacement. He is recovering well ahead of schedule and has a goal of dancing by Christmas. Please keep him in your thoughts, that he will have a complete recovery and be good as new again.

>> TAPS

HAYDEN "PAPPY" JONES

Hayden "Pappy" Jones, the veteran who was at the Vietnam Memorial Ceremony in May in Midland/Odessa recently passed away. He was well known throughout the veteran community, and is the one who briefly spoke to the RFTW Southern Route this past May. Hayden was instrumental in obtaining the chopper that's mounted at the Permian Basin Vietnam Memorial. Two memorial services were held—one at the Permian Basin Vietnam Memorial, and one in Arkansas.

PAUL "BUZZARD" FIALA



The RFTW family has lost another dear brother. Paul "Buzzard" Fiala passed away due to injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident on Saturday, August 19, 2006. Paul had been riding with RFTW since 1998 and had served on the Southern Route as Road Guard for the past several years. He was a Marine and Vietnam veteran. He will be missed by all of us that were honored to have known him and who called him "friend" and "brother." Nineteen RFTW riders and 40 Patriot Guard Mission bikes were present for his memorial service. Russell Fechner and Oscar Pena were Co-Ride Captains of Paul's memorial ride. Russell organized the American and Marine flags to lead, followed by the Missing Man formation. Frank Perry rode Missing Man and carried Traci and Paul on Paul's final ride, about 45 minutes long. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Tracy, and family in this time of sadness and sorrow.

MICHAEL MONSOOR

RFTW rider and VVA Chapter 785 member John Boyle just lost his nephew, Navy SEAL Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor, who was killed in Iraq in September.

SEAL Team Three deployed to Iraq last spring and within a month of arriving, Mike had already distinguished himself.

As one of the platoon machine gunners, Mike made quite an impression on the battlefield. On May 9, 2006 a teammate was shot in the legs, immobile, and exposed. Suppressing enemy fire with his M60, Mike fought his way to his wounded comrade's position and dragged him out of the line of fire while maintaining constant pressure on enemy insurgents with his weapon. That action earned him a Silver Star ... in the first month of his first deployment.

In the final weeks of that deployment, Mike, along with two fellow SEALs, were occupying an overwatch position on a rooftop in the Mulab district of Ramadi which is basically the most dangerous neighborhood of the most dangerous city in Iraq. A hidden enemy managed to toss a grenade onto the rooftop near the three SEALs, and Mike without hesitation warned his comrades verbally before placing himself in a position to block the lethal blast of the grenade from killing his teammates. One of the SEALs he saved said that Mike's countenance was completely calm and he showed no fear, only resolve. He had only a couple of weeks remaining in the deployment and he did not flinch at the moment of truth. At the memorial for Mike, all three SEALs whose lives Mike personally saved hobbled up together to thank Michael and his family for their very existence and to show their family's gratitude for sparing them the grief that Michael's family is now experiencing.

His parents named him after the Archangel Michael—the great protector whose mission was to protect the world from the satanic forces of evil. St. Michael's Day is celebrated on September 29, the day Mike gave his life for his friends.

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>> **ETC.**

RESTAURANT HONORS VETERANS

All veterans will receive a free lunch or dinner entrée at McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurants nationwide on Sunday, November 5th in honor of Veterans Day week. Vets should show proper identification (VA card, American Legion membership card, veterans ID discharge papers, etc.). Reservations are strongly encouraged.

In a show of thanks to our nation's veterans, Bill McCormick and Doug Schmick offer to serve those who've served at their McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurants. Last year the company served nearly 15,000 vets nationwide. This year's event is taking place on the Sunday before Veterans Day so that families can participate.

McCormick & Schmick's annual veterans program began as a small effort in just one restaurant in 1999. Due to its overwhelming popularity and positive response received from veterans the program has expanded nationwide.

McCormick & Schmick's have restaurants all over the U.S.—Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, Atlanta, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and many more. The El Segundo, CA, restaurant is at 2101 Rosecrans Ave., Suite 1280 (310-416-1123). To find a restaurant near you, visit <http://www.mccormickandschmicks.com/>

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NEW WEBSITE FOR VIETNAM VETERANS

There's an awesome website called "Finns Site, Vietnam Veterans Reunion Place" (<http://www.finnssite.org/>)

The website was started in August 2006 by Dana Halfors (Finn), a member of Vietnam Veterans Chapter 537 in Newburgh, New York and is loaded with great info for Vietnam vets. In addition to a 24/7 chat room and photo gallery where you can upload military, In Memory Of, The Wall, and Vietnam photos, there's also a Vietnam Veterans Scrap Book, where you can contribute and read stories from your Vietnam vets, family, and friends, and also stories about Iraq

from veterans and families. Most important of all, there's a Reunion Place, with a Members Directory where you can find old friends and those you served with. The website also allows you to create your own journal, or blog, to which you can give access to family or friends.

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AMERICAN VETERAN SEARCH

www.veteransearch.com is the original American Veteran Search website. It is not just a database that you can search for your buddy in, or a guest book to post a message. They actually get involved with the search process. They have access to several other large databases both on and off the Internet, which they pay to subscribe to and have access to search, although they do not charge veterans for the service. If you don't have a computer or Internet access, you can call (718) 279-4040, and they will search for your buddy for you. The website also has reunions, fallen vets, POW/MIA, and other sections. Subscribe to a free monthly newsletter.

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WEBSITE FOR MILITARY BENEFITS

This website is filled with info on every military benefit you can imagine. From pay to the GI Bill, from VA home loans to health care, your military service has earned you valuable military benefits. Whether you're on active duty, a veteran or retiree, this website makes using your military and veteran benefits easy. <http://www.militarybenefits.com/>

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>> CLOSING THOUGHTS

THE DIE IS CAST

(The Military)

By Del "Abe" Jones

From his Native Americans poems

*We may wear different uniforms
And our traditions not the same
We may sing different marching tunes
But our drummer's beat's the same.*

*With our Freedom's Flag unfurled
We travel land and air and sea
To protect this way of life we live
To show others how life could be.*

*We all march shoulder to shoulder
Proud Sisters and Brothers, all
We take a solemn vow and swear
We will answer our Nation's call.*

Some may serve one hitch or two

*For some, will be their life's career
Some will serve, "over there"
And there's some, will stay right here.*

*We come from all walks of life
To join in that one common cause
To guard and protect the U.S.A.
So we won't be, that Land, that was.*

*We are out there at the forefront
For all the rest the World to see
To show them all how proud we are
Of this great Land of the Free.*

*All who serve should take a bow
Then stand straight and tall with pride
Salute that ol' red white and blue
Sisters and Brothers, side by side.*

*Someday maybe, they won't need us
And wouldn't that be just fine
For all mankind to live in Peace
Sometime there, on down the line.*

*But until that day finally comes
And tyrants are part of our past
We must be ready to face them
For, that's how our die is cast.*

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RUN FOR THE WALL



WE RIDE FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T

**To promote healing among Vietnam veterans and their families and friends
To call for an accounting of all Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action (POW/MIA)
To honor the memory of those Killed in Action (KIA)**

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