



RUN FOR THE WALL

Quarterly Newsletter

“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”

July 2008

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THE EDITOR’S NOTES



Another year of RFTW has passed—a most extraordinary year. To celebrate RFTW’s 20th anniversary, we were honored to have four helicopters from the Wings & Rotors Air Museum in Riverside, CA accompanying us to the Wall, two with each of our routes. What a thrill it was hearing the drone of their blades as we traveled.

We have some great stories in this issue; be sure to read them all. There is also information on ordering our group photo at the Lincoln Memorial, and information on our reunions in Angel Fire and Kerville, Texas. They’re not far off, so make your reservations soon.

Milo continues his “Wreckage of the Past” column with a description of the very first RFTW in 1989—don’t miss it. Also, a noted author is seeking tributes from Vietnam veterans. She has a website where Vietnam vets can search for each other and find information on the missing. I had my own extraordinary experiences this year and share them with you in this issue.

If you’re writing about your experience this year but haven’t finished yet, please send it to me for the next issue. A very important part of our newsletter is our stories; we especially like to hear from FNGs about their first ride with RFTW.

They are not forgotten ...

Judy "Velcro" Lacey

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Mark "Straightarrow" Rittermeyer



Well, most of us have been home for a little over a month now, and hopefully you have had time to take in all that RFTW XX was to each of you. I have had so many reports from FNGs and old hands alike on what the Run meant to them. Each had a story to tell, and an experience that made a difference to them, and to those who welcomed them home.

I would also like to thank Roger "Cowboy" Mead and Ron "Hammer" Young and their teams for making RFTW XX a success, for getting the message out, and completing the mission. Also, please welcome Ron "Hammer" Young to the Board of Directors, and we say thank you for a job well done to JR Franklin, as his term on the Board has expired.

Please know that the Board will be announcing the Route Coordinators for 2009 later this month.

Just a little sick call: John King is recuperating from a motorcycle accident with an auto, and Mike McDole is recovering from surgery on his neck.

I hope to see all of you at one of the two reunions. Ride safe, and Never Forget!!!

► RFTW HISTORY—FROM THE WRECKAGE OF THE PAST

by Milo ("Nayber") Gordon

The Original Route:

Day 1: Originally Gunny (Jim Gregory) left from the Landing Zone in San Diego, CA. They hooked up with other riders at the TA Truck Stop in Ontario, CA, then went north on I-15 to Las Vegas, NV for their first night's stay. You need to remember, most of the riders were broke vets who camped all the way across. Each night ended at a campground. There was a large contingent that rode up to Las Vegas with the formation. The Vietnam Vets M/C, VFW, and other organizations hosted dinner, breakfast, and other activities.

Day 2: A large contingent of riders (about 100 to 150) rode to Las Vegas with the formation. When they left this morning they were a very small group. Size varied between 8 and 15. Because they were a small group, formation and structure of the ride was pretty loose. They did make some side trips as time and Gunny's inspiration allowed. Because of construction on I-70, the pack rode on I-15 to UT Hwy 20 to US Hwy 89 to Hwy 62 to Hwy 24 through Capitol Reef National Park then east on I-70. They had a warm welcome at the Utah line from ABATE of Utah. ABATE of Utah also sponsored dinner that evening at the Green River campground.

Day 3: The small group headed east on I-70 this morning. They were welcomed into Colorado by the Vietnam Vets M/C and several vets' organizations. They experienced snow, on the way over the I-70 pass, going into Denver. The Sons of God had set up camping and dinner under cover. The weather had been bad so this was a great welcome by all. They stayed overnight at the KOA in Denver, CO.

Day 4: From Denver, they headed out onto the prairies of the Central U.S. At the Kansas line they were again welcomed by ABATE of Kansas and various vets groups. They had a nice lunch and welcome at Colby, KS, even an airplane pulling a Run For The Wall banner. Salina, KS had a big welcome for them at the campground. They had a Pig Roast, a band, and other activities in their honor. The local Vietnam Vets M/C, HOG, and other organizations sponsored this welcome.

Day 5: The first stop for this day was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Junction City, KS. ABATE of KS paid the toll for the KS turnpike. They had 2 lunch stops. The first, at Topeka, was sponsored by Arby's and ABATE of KS. The second was in Kansas City, MO sponsored by the UAW. The local Vietnam Vets M/C, Homecoming II, and other organizations sponsored their overnight stop at Wentzville, MO. They made a visit to the first Vietnam Veterans Memorial during this stop.

Day 6: Their first stop today was for a news conference at the St. Louis Welcome Arch. This event was sponsored by local HOG and other organizations. They then rode to Mt. Vernon, IL for lunch and a welcome by the local Vets of the Vietnam War. They were met at the Indiana border by ABATE of Indiana and other riders for an escorted trip through Indiana. They went onto Owensboro, KY for their overnight stay. The Kentucky Biker Assoc. and other organizations put on a large dinner, band and very warm welcome.

Day 7: Their schedule started getting busy from here on into DC. Local escort was provided by various police departments in IN and KY. They made stops at Louisville, KY for ceremonies and a snack. They then went onto the KY Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Frankfort, KY and then to their overnight stay at Mt Sterling, KY. The Kentucky Bikers Assoc. was primary host throughout their travels in KY. They provided a nice welcome, dinner, band, and breakfast at the campground.

Day 8: Today the Vietnam Vets M/C met them for an escorted ride across WV. Today is also the day Gunny made an unscheduled detour to avoid a hassle at the WV turnpike. That decision brought us to Rainelle, WV and a police chief who felt that Vietnam Vets needed a welcome home parade. He organized an impromptu welcome that has been going on for 20 years. That whole experience will need to be dealt with in another column. They stayed at Rainelle most of the afternoon and then rode into Natural Bridge, VA. ABATE of Virginia had a welcome waiting for them at the campground.

Day 9: This was the last day of the ride. They went up I-81 to I-66 and stopped for breakfast at Front Royal, VA. Americans for American Vets hosted them at the campgrounds. The pack continued into DC, first stopping at the Marine Corps Iwo Jima Memorial for family photos. Gunny being a Marine and all, it seemed appropriate. Then they rode to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial where RFTW's mission was complete. Most of the riders returned to Front Royal that evening with dinner and breakfast made available by AFAV. This day was the day before Rolling Thunder II.

Day 10: RFTW met and formed up at the Pentagon to lead Rolling Thunder. Estimates for Rolling Thunder II were about 19,000 to 20,000 motorcycles. The parade ended at Arlington Cemetery. Gunny had arranged for RFTW to place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Gary Wetzel (MOH) had been with RFTW since KY and now placed the wreath then addressed the audience about POW/MIAs. This speech upset the VA curator, but what could he do?

Following that ceremony, the group said their good-byes to each other and then they individually began their journeys home.

The original run left California on a Friday and got to The Wall on a Saturday. They then joined Rolling Thunder on Sunday.

► RFTW XX WRAP-UP

THANK YOU FOR THE EXPERIENCE

By Cowboy

RFTW-SR Coordinator 2008

As I announced in Coachella, CA, my theme for the 2008 Run was “Thank You.” Now that I am home and have begun to wind down, I can truthfully say **Thank You** all for an outstanding experience as the Southern Route coordinator. The leadership team that worked with me to get the riders across the country was second to none. I will not attempt to name each and every one who made this Run such a success—they know who they are and what an outstanding job they did to make this Run the accomplishment it was. A massive Thank You for all the volunteers and supporters in the towns we visited.

The highlights of this years Run was (1) making it through AZ without an accident, (2) making it to DC without any of the riders going down seriously. Although we had a couple of situations (leadership mainly), some of the situations I found us in could have been worse. For instance, the first rain in El Paso (it doesn't rain in the desert) in 77 days during rush hour and no rain since. And the **"to HAIL and back"** ride in NE Alabama: three bikes down, two right back up and running, one on a trailer until it could be inspected. The General was wet, shaky, but still as loveable as always. I call this a successful Run.

Could some things have been done better? Yes, there is always room for improvement, and we learn (hopefully) from our mistakes. To those on the leadership team coming back next year, I know you will support and work with the 2009 Route Coordinator as strongly as you did with me. To returning riders, you may see things being different from this year as the new Coordinator attempts to refine ways of doing things. Give him all the support and confidence you showed me. To FNGs thinking of joining in 2009, go for it—join the RFTW family for an experience that no amount of money can buy, an experience of a lifetime and one that may just get to you and keep bringing you back year after year.

Finally to Bill Evans, but especially my brother, James "Gunny" Gregory, **Thank You** for starting something that has taken on a life of its own, something that gets right into your heart and won't let go. **Thank You.**

Thank you Judy for ALL you do as well.
Cowboy

SR CHARITY DONATIONS

By Cowboy

RFTW-SR Coordinator 2008

The RFTW 2008 Southern Route raised donations for three schools: Colorado Middle school in Colorado City, TX; Spiller Elementary in Wytheville, VA; and Montvale Elementary in Montvale, VA. Total donations for each of the schools came out to be \$3,500. This money goes to help the schools buy items for the kids that their budgets might not allow.

Another \$7,000 was raised for Freedom Is Not Free (www.freedomisnotfree.com), which helps WIA and KIA family members. The money will go to help fund a summer children's camp. Information on their latest summer camp is posted on www.rftwsr-2008.us.

To all the riders and awesome supporters along Southern Route's way that helped make this possible, all I can say is . . . Thank You!

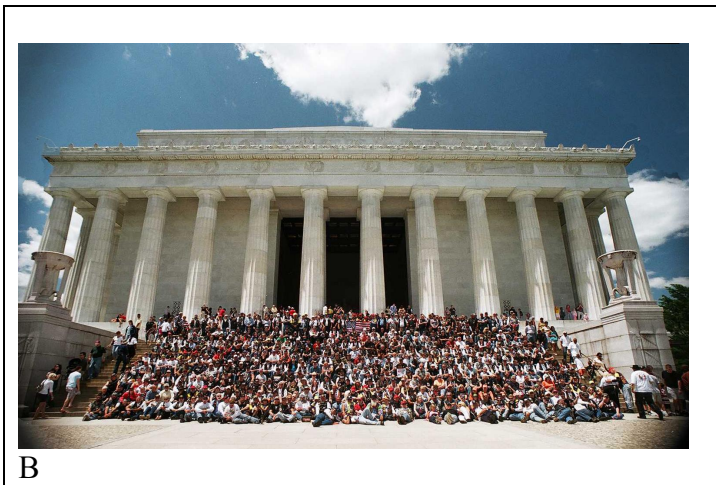
2008 WEST VIRGINIA GROUP PHOTO



You can see and print out the group photo that was taken at the Charleston Capitol building here: <http://www.wvgov.org/albumlisting.aspx?albumid=307&albumName=2008+Run+for+the+Wall+Rally+>

If that doesn't work for some reason, go to www.wvgov.com and click on Photo Gallery, then scroll down to RFTW.

2008 WASHINGTON D.C. GROUP PHOTO



Ric White is the photographer of the group photo at the Lincoln Memorial in DC. He makes the prints in 2 sizes: 12" x 18" (\$15) and 20" x 30" (\$25). \$5 shipping for each photo.

Send check or money order payable to KZ Ric White, P.O. Box 180789, Dallas, TX 75218. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery. If you have any questions, you can contact Ric at pikzr@aol.com. Please use the following form:

ORDER FORM FOR RFTW GROUP PHOTO BY KZ WHITE AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL WASHINGTON D.C.

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12" x 18" (\$15) _____ Quantity _____

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Mail this form and your payment (make check/money order payable to KZ Ric White, P.O. Box 180789, Dallas, TX 75218. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery. *(Please make a copy for your records)*)

► OUR STORIES

AN FNG'S EXPERIENCE ON RFTW XX

By Cindy Sharp

(Ed. Note: I received the following email from Cindy: "Judy: I followed your blog from the time your group left California/Lake Havasu until I joined in Hurricane, WV. Thank you for the wonderful stories and insights you gave anyone who took the time to read them.")

My dad and I both joined RFTW as FNGs this year. He joined in Wentzville, MO and I in Hurricane, WV. We had talked about doing this for 6 to 8 months and I must say that I really didn't know what an experience it would be. My dad is a Navy vet, with 20 years of service and I have to say that I am really proud of him. It wasn't until the last few years that I actually knew that he had been in Vietnam during that war. I knew that his years of service were during that time, but he never really talked about the experience until lately. Now I have a better understanding of why.

During this trip, he told me about four guys that he served with whose names are on the Wall. As he tells it, "Navy guys are not supposed to be up there." Two pilots and their navigators were killed while he served with them. One plane was shot down over Vietnam and both the pilot and navigator died in captivity one day apart. The other two were in a plane that crashed during a landing attempt on their carrier. My dad had been to the memorial once before, when his two sons were young and hadn't really had time to pay his respects. He only had the names and ranks of his fallen comrades but not the locations of their names on The Wall. Unfortunately he still hasn't been able to pay his respects.

We made two visits to The Wall. The first visit, on Friday night after we arrived in DC, he did not have the location information so we simply walked along the Wall in silence. When we were about two-thirds of the way through, he put his arm around me and leaned on my shoulder and we walked the rest of the way rather quickly. He attempted to revisit The Wall on Saturday after we had been to Arlington but couldn't bring himself to walk its length again. However, I was able to get to the location books and find the information he will need in the future to finally pay his respects to his friends.

I will never forget the physical presence that exists when you walk along The Wall. It is something that I have never felt before and I imagine that the feeling is there every time. If I get a chance to go there again, I'm sure that I will find out firsthand for myself. The only other place that I felt that physical presence was in Arlington Cemetery.

I mentioned that we were at Arlington—we were honored enough to be in the group of 250 RFTW FNGs who were allowed to ride their bikes into the Cemetery. Again, something I will never forget. It too has a physical presence that simply cannot be described. You have to feel it to understand it.

I am not a military veteran, simply the proud daughter of a 20-year Navy veteran. I was honored this year to be allowed to experience all that RFTW is and does this year with my Dad. I hope to get the chance to

do so again. He has indicated that he would like to make the trip again, possibly next year, and God willing, I will join him if he so wishes.

Another note I'd like to share is how proud I was to be a West Virginian when the group rode into Rainelle. Other than the greeting I read about at Lake Havasu, I did not get to experience anything so moving. When I spoke to one of the veteran RFTW folks about it (I think it might have been Bounce) I actually got tears in my eyes and my voice broke. I am proud of the Mountaineers of WV! They know what it means to be of service to our great country. West Virginia has one of the highest per capita number of military servicemen and women in the country, and, even though I wasn't born here, I am proud to be considered a Mountaineer. I would like to get more people out to greet the RFTW as it comes through the Capitol city of Charleston, WV and if I am able to participate, you can be sure that I will be one of them.

Thank you for taking the time to read the ramblings of an FNG who just had to share her experiences with someone who would understand.

RUN FOR THE WALL XX

By Evo Red (Jerry Elbert)

Maybe it's my years catching up to me? I'm in this numb, funky mood having just returned from a fairly long, 7,000 mile, road trip. I did what I set out to do, ride in the pack across the USA on the 20th Anniversary run of Run For The Wall (RFTW). My desire to ride the 20th Run stemmed from my being one of the fifteen who rode "All-The-Way" on the 1st Run in 1989. A couple of years later in 1992, Bungee and I took the RFTW helm and joined a long list of people whose efforts have kept the tradition alive. Anyway, my state of mind is adrift as if I've returned from an alternate universe. I suppose the sheer intensity of pack-riding 3,000 miles side-by-side blended with emotional visits to veterans' hospitals, witnessing the open expressions of love for this country and my seeing the gratitude conveyed toward those serving in the armed forces merged into an overdose of things dear to me that I have been missing.

Run For The Wall 2008 was everything I figured and more. The "more" was the organization's polish and its expression of emotion. RFTW has noticeably been fine-tuned to just the right amount of control and planning necessary to facilitate the immense task of moving the pack coast-to-coast; its numbers swelling at times beyond 300 riders stretched in a three-mile long column. The amazing aspect of this effort is its display of compassion by its stops at VFW locations, memorial sites, and veterans' hospitals.

I was truly impressed with the 20th Run. Initially RFTW was created as a POW-MIA ride from California to Washington D.C., meant to support and participate in Rolling Thunder. That focus remains, but I believe The Run has become its own entity. It is virtually a "hands on" expression in support of the POW-MIA issue, veterans, and military personnel and their families and friends. The Run is a patriotic gesture that touches individual people.

Rolling Thunder is the greatest single motorcycle demonstration ride anywhere; figure every rider from Sturgis Bike Week gathered together in one pack riding through Washington D.C. to support the POW-MIA issue!

In comparison, Run For The Wall is a 3,000-mile meet-and-greet motorcycle run that renews people's beliefs in the ideals of our country. It evokes intense emotional gratitude and relief from those affected by war. People see the column of bikes and realize that the riders care enough about POWs and MIAs, veterans, and armed forces personnel to trek all the-way across the USA.

The RFTW Mission Statement is right on: “To promote healing among ALL 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) from all wars, and to support our military personnel all over the world.”

A mantra often heard throughout the 10-day run is “This is a Mission, Not a Party.” I think those words are an understatement. RFTW is not “the easy way to get to D.C.” An individual focused on fun or a brand new rider looking for a first time journey should consider a more solo path. Running side-by-side day after day requires a certain level of skill and an attitude conducive to sustained concentration. A side benefit of traveling in this harsh environment is that afterwards all other riding seems effortless.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

By Harry “Mustang” Parmer

Participating in RFTW can provide many unique experiences for anyone who decides to go on this noble mission, and the opportunity to travel across our great nation on a motorcycle will exceed the wildest expectations that you would get from any travel agency. But anyone can travel beautiful America whether you participate with RFTW or decide to go it alone in your car, RV, or motorcycle.

What differentiates the RFTW experience from others is less identifiable because to Veterans it holds countless opportunities to see, hear, and tell of things that rarely get noticed in America's day-to-day activities. This is one of the reasons that make RFTW so powerful and it is why so many old timers repeat their journey, year after year, even after they put their kickstands down for the final time.

On the second day of the Run this year, my partner and FNG, Jim “Crosshairs” Pyle, and I had one of these unique experiences and we met one of these “old timers” that I speak about, but he wasn’t a participant with RFTW in the sense of transiting our great nation. This old timer is a resident of Holbrook, Arizona and he looks forward to RFTW’s stop in his hometown every year. Why this year he decided to tell us his story will remain a mystery to us for eternity, but we can tell you that our chance encounter with this gentle man will most certainly have lasting affects on both of us.

Crosshairs and I had just finished lunch and were standing beside our bikes outside the Legion Hall enjoying a couple of cigars. As the old fellow walked toward us he gained my attention because he was wearing a baseball hat that said, “Korean War Veteran.” As most Veterans know, those honorable and courageous Americans who served in Korea, “The forgotten war,” are rarely acknowledged for their service and sacrifice in America's mainstream society. Korea was like Vietnam, an unpopular war, so when a truce was negotiated with the communists, Americans simply moved on with other more pressing matters in their lives. I guess there’s truth in the poem that I paraphrase, *“In times of war, God and soldiers are adored, and when war is over and all is righted, God is forgotten, the soldiers slighted.”*

As I watched the old fellow move towards us his eyes locked onto mine, as he got closer. I then noticed that he was carrying a picture frame. Crosshairs turned toward him as the old fellow walked up to me. He stopped a few feet away and said, “You’re a big man.” I laughed and said something stupid, but he ignored my comment as if he didn’t hear me. He then turned the frame he was carrying around and showed us a picture of a young man in uniform. The old fellow then said, “This is my grandson. He was killed in Iraq.”

As we stared at the picture I heard the old fellow’s voice crack. I looked into his eyes and saw tears welling up. He continued to hold the picture so we could see his grandson’s face. Crosshairs reached out

and touched the old fellow on his shoulder. I said some words of condolences and asked God to bless him and his grandson. But in the end, what we said and did was secondary to this old fellow. He approached us with his sadness because he knew we would understand death and sacrifice in a way only fellow warriors know. He approached us because he knew he could trust us when his tears flowed for our understanding, comfort, and shared sadness.

As we watched him walk away, still holding his grandson's picture, we shared in his grief. He continued his journey walking past the rows of parked bikes, pointing his grandson's picture in the direction that he himself was looking. It was like he was sharing his experience with his grandson, so he too could be with fellow Veterans as we passed through on their journey.

As we fired up our iron horses and turned to leave Holbrook, we saw the old fellow standing at the end of the street on the sidewalk still holding the picture of his grandson. In all reality, this will likely be the last time Crosshairs and I will ever see this gentle man with his picture of his beloved grandson. But in truth, we will remember both of them, forever.

A MEMORABLE JOURNEY

By Judy Lacey

This was my sixth year going all the way with Run For The Wall Central Route, and it was by far the most incredible experience.

The Ex-Pow:

On the first day I went ahead of the pack to go up on the Lake Havasu overpass on I-40. I live in Lake Havasu and I wanted to thank the huge group of Havasu residents who have gone out on the overpass the past three years to honor our veterans. I also had POW magnets to give to everyone there. A woman came up to me; she removed a POW bracelet from her wrist and asked me to take it to The Wall for her. I would be honored to do that, I told her. She said she didn't know if the POW, SSgt. Richard Perricone, had been released or died in captivity. That night I set up my laptop and searched the Internet. I found many mentions of Perricone. In Vietnam he was in Company B, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division. He was captured by the VC with six other men from Company B in Pleiku Province, South Vietnam, on July 12, 1967 and was held for two years in a Cambodia POW camp. He and some others were then marched on the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the Hanoi Hilton, where he was held another 4 years.

After they were released on March 5, 1973, Perricone said he and two others tried to escape in November 1967, but were recaptured the same day. One of his group was killed, so he didn't try to escape again.

In the book, [We Came Home](#), some of Perricone's story was told:

"The camp I lived in was 20 miles inside Cambodia. The buildings I lived in were made of small trees—put together like beams. They were about three inches apart. The roof was made of large leaves. The beds were made of thin strips of bamboo tied together with vines. There were stocks the whole length of the bed. At night we put our legs into the stocks. The stocks were two trunks about five inches in diameter. But after the escape attempt, our legs were in the stocks all of the time. The general routine each day was: We would get up at about 5:30 A.M. Eat our first meal at 7 A.M., which was two or three cups of rice and the tops of sweet potato plants. We would then just lay around all day. Then at 4, we would have our second meal. Then, at about 5:30 or 6, we would be locked up again for the night. Some life, don't you think???"

"We were allowed to bathe about once a week or ten days. This mostly depended upon which guard was on duty that day.

And these excerpts are from a February 21, 1998 story in the Daily News, NY:

Most just picked up their lives and found jobs and wives and had children in anonymity. But all are bound by an experience that, in Perricone's words, "You can never picture, nobody could ever picture. There are just a handful of us; we're the only ones who can picture it."

All but about 75 of the POWs were pilots, so Perricone, being an Army grunt captured on the ground, is among an even more exclusive fraternity. He keeps in touch with five other men in his company who survived the Hanoi Hilton with him.

"We were very tight . . . we became like brothers," he said. "After spending 5 1/2 years together, closer than brothers. When we meet, we kiss and hug."

"The scariest part was the darkness, at night you couldn't see a thing, and you didn't know what was out there, or coming at you," he said. "When the light came up, you could finally breathe a sigh of relief."

The third platoon of B Company, 1/12th Infantry Battalion, 4th Division, had barely taken that first gasp of morning air on July 12, 1967, northwest of Pleiku, when hell arrived.

"We walked right into an ambush," Perricone said. "The company was wiped out except for seven guys. I got shot in the leg, had shrapnel in my arm, and I got knocked out by a hand grenade, and the next thing I knew a guy was shaking me awake; I was already tied up."

In the first days, "we didn't know what they'd do, I was worried about torture, that they'd pull my fingernails out," Perricone said. "They didn't do that stuff, but they'd beat the s--- out of you. They broke my nose."

He and six other men from his company were held in the Cambodian jungle, in a thatched hut, their feet in stocks at night, eating rice and tops of sweet potatoes. Two pals died of disease.

There were two previously captured soldiers there. "We were told not to talk, so we communicated by songs," he said, laughing. "I'd sing, 'Hello my name is Richard, I'm from New York,' and the guards didn't realize we were exchanging information."

He said he could hear American voices every two or three weeks, being so close to the border of South Vietnam, and figured if they fled their captors and headed south they'd be saved. So, on Nov. 22, 1967, "we contemplated the great escape," Perricone said.

He was the healthiest, so he had to jump the guard. They waited until the dumbest guard was on duty. They called him Elvis because of his long sideburns, and Perricone slammed him with a rock.

"We ran, and pretty soon we heard shots ... they caught us, all except for one guy, Joe, and took us back and beat us with sticks," he said. "A few days later, a Viet Cong guerrilla came in with a sack dripping blood. I thought it was gonna be Joe's head. The guy took out a shirt, it had Joe's name on it and about 20 bullet holes. He threw it on the ground and said, 'That's what's left of your friend.'"

They were held in the jungle until Thanksgiving Day 1969, when they were marched to North Vietnam on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a three-week trek. Perricone passed truckloads of soldiers and supplies heading south to fight U.S. troops.

His new prison was Hoa Lo in Hanoi, dubbed the Hanoi Hilton, where he was kept in a locked cement room with other captives, most of them pilots. Those who "misbehaved" were put in solitary.

"They told us we were never going home, that we'd be tried as war criminals after the war," Perricone said. "They showed us movies of anti-war protesters ... it hurt to see that."

But the sanitary conditions were better, and he heard news of what was going on back home.

"The other prisoners told us about the girls wearing short skirts, and flower power, free love, the new cars," he said. "We heard American music. The Vietnamese would play Connie Francis records, but always called her Francis Connie."

They ate pumpkins and cabbage, sometimes bread. "The biggest topic for five years was food," he said. "We'd talk about how good it would be to go to a diner for pancakes, or to have a big steak."

He remembers the December 1972 bombing of Hanoi like it was yesterday.

"We were in a room with no windows, just a small opening on the ceiling, and you could see the flashes and hear sirens ... you'd hear surface-to-air missiles taking off right next to you. In 1973, the carpet bombings, they came really close. It would go on for three or four minutes straight. It was the most frightening, to think that I was going to die this way, after all those years of being sick and being a prisoner."

Some of the POWs cracked under the pressure and made propaganda statements. Perricone doesn't condemn them. "Some guys just couldn't take it ... the ones who complied got to write home, they got some privileges."

He endured until that March day in 1973 when the North Vietnamese released him, sending him home with a plastic bag containing candy and toiletries, including a metal comb made from a recycled, shot-down U.S. plane. He still has the gray and maroon striped pajamas he wore in captivity.

In the first three years home, Perricone suffered from nightmares. He saw every Vietnam War movie that came out.

"I lost 5 1/2 years of my life, years that should have been the best part," he said, wistfully.

"But I don't regret going."

Then I found something on Perricone from 2004, and finally from 2007. Originally from New York, he was now living in Florida. And I found an email address for him. I sent an email to him that night, telling him that I hoped to tell the wearer of his POW bracelet that I had found him. I thought I couldn't be so lucky as to find him this easily—surely the email would be returned, undeliverable. But two days later I received a response from him. He said he was teary-eyed to read of the woman who wore his bracelet all these years. He also said that after he was captured, his father gave one of his bracelets to Gen. Westmoreland, who wore it until he was released. He said some day he would like to meet me and also the woman who wore his bracelet. I have put him in touch with the woman, and the three of us are staying in contact.

After I found Perricone, I decided not to leave the bracelet at The Wall after all. I felt that since he was alive, the woman who wore his bracelet might want to keep it. And I was right; when I called her after the Run to tell her about finding him, she was glad I kept it to return to her. I was almost sad to give up the bracelet, as I had become accustomed to wearing it on the Run and afterward. Richard sent me another to take its place—it will be a reminder to me of the power of hope.

But that wasn't the end of this story: About a week after I returned home after RFTW, I received emails from two other women who also had been wearing bracelets for Perricone since the late 60s. Both had just decided to try to find information on Perricone, and both of them—at the same time—had found him mentioned on the blog I was writing along the Run for Lake Havasu City (www.havasufreedombridge.com). Richard said about 40,000 POW bracelets with his name were made during the Vietnam War. That's an extraordinary number, but I imagine as year after year passed, many people chose a bracelet for a POW who was still in captivity.

The WWII Hero

I knew that the ashes of a World War II hero, Eddie Livingston, were being carried on RFTW this year. Pam Baker was traveling with RFTW, along with some American Legion Riders from the Placerville, CA area, to carry her uncle's ashes to DC and then to Alabama for burial. She invited riders to help carry his ashes from time to time. I was one of them.

Eddie Livingston shed his blood on all five battlefields. He had 7 purple hearts, 3 bronze star medals (1 with V for Valor), 2 Presidential Unit Citations, and was awarded but never actually received the Distinguished Service Cross for Normandy. I talked with Pam a lot about her uncle. She had never met him, but when she learned he was living in an uninhabitable house in Alabama, with no one to look after him, she immediately drove there and brought him to live with her for the last 18 months of his life. Pam is a remarkable person; so determined is she that no one should ever again be abandoned by not only the VA but by society, that she is doing everything she can to bring light to Eddie's story. She started a website called "Eddie's Place" to tell Eddie's story; she gave several interviews to local newspapers along our trek to Washington, D.C., and she is an advisor for a movie soon coming out about Eddie's life. The

more I talked with Pam, the more I felt closer to Eddie. My son, “Grumpy,” and I were honored to carry Eddie’s ashes for several days.

The Ring

A few days after I returned home, I got around to returning phone calls on my recorder. One was from someone in Lake Havasu who mentioned Rolling Thunder. I called him and it turned out he was one of two guys who started Rolling Thunder in 1987-88—Ray Manzo and Larry Darkow. Larry and I talked about an hour when he said “Hey, come on over and have a glass of wine with my wife and me”—they live only a few blocks from me! I went over and we sat and talked about two more hours. Larry told me how Rolling Thunder started—3,800 motorcycles showed up that first year—and he showed me his memorabilia from the very first Rolling Thunder, including newspaper articles, photos from Rolling Thunder I, even the original RT back patch in silk—the only one in existence.

What a great visit we had—what were the chances the founder of Rolling Thunder lived right here near me, and would call me?! Before I left, Larry went into another room and came back holding something in his hand. He said he wanted me to have this—and dropped a ring into my hand. It was one of only two Rolling Thunder 1988 rings that Larry and Ray had made for themselves the first year. I was flabbergasted and told him no, he shouldn’t part with something like that—especially to someone he barely knows. He insisted; said he hasn’t worn it for years and he had a feeling I was the right person to give it to.

What an incredible journey it was for me this year. Run For The Wall has changed my life over six years. I have learned to appreciate our veterans more than ever and also to do whatever I can to help raise awareness of our POWs and MIAs who have yet to be brought home. And I’m grateful to RFTW for the many wonderful friends I’ve made. I wear a pin on my vest that says “We Are Family”—and it’s true.

► OTHER STORIES

RESCUING MEMORIES

Paratrooper, man he saved from prison camp speak for first time since 1945

by Ted Roelofs | The Grand Rapids Press

May 26, 2008

This story was sent by Gary Black. It is about a friend of his who spent almost four years in a Japanese prison camp in the Philippines. His family was there as missionaries when the war broke out. He was 14 or 15 at the time. They were liberated by the 11th Airborne on a day when their death had been planned. For the complete story, see http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/05/world_war_ii_rescue.html.

War is often the story of things gone wrong: A missed drop zone. A jammed rifle. A shift in wind or weather. These things happen. And people die.

But the dice sometimes tumble into place in ways that defy the odds.

In February 1945, 2,147 starving captives in a Philippine prison camp were rescued on the day of their execution, perhaps minutes before their death. Those spared included a Grand Rapids missionary family of five. The raid came off with such stopwatch perfection that Hollywood would have thrown back the script: Not one prisoner died. In a brief, fierce battle, Allied forces overcame about 250 Japanese soldiers at the Los Banos camp. Not one American soldier died.

"It's God's plan, let's put it that way, that we be liberated," said David DeVries, 83, who walked out of the compound at age 20 weighing 92 pounds, along with his parents, sister and brother.

DeVries looked up that morning to see a white string of paratroopers, including 19-year-old Sgt. Frank Krhovsky, swing out of a blue sky just outside the camp.

"This raid was done to perfection," Krhovsky recalled. "There was not one thing that went wrong." In the pandemonium of the rescue, Krhovsky climbed aboard one of 54 amphibious trucks used to ferry the prisoners to safety. He struck up a conversation with a 15-year-old boy who happened to sit next to him up front. Henry DeVries Jr., David's brother, told the paratrooper where his family was from: Grand Rapids. As a former resident of nearby Ionia, Krhovsky didn't have to ask where that was. "What are the odds?" he asked.

Krhovsky, 82, did not talk to anyone from the family after that day. He has no recollection of speaking to David DeVries, who sat farther back in the truck and is the lone family member from the prison camp alive today. But 63 years later, the retired physician and East Grand Rapids resident spoke with David DeVries, a California resident, in a phone call arranged by The Press.

"It's unbelievable," Krhovsky told DeVries. "This is absolutely remarkable."
Said DeVries: "Frank is one of my heroes."

The DeVries family returned to Grand Rapids in May 1945, curious about the paratrooper they knew as "Frank Khooshsky" -- their best guess at the spelling -- whom they hoped to thank. They didn't get the chance. Krhovsky was discharged from the Army in 1946, thinking from time to time he would like to find the DeVries family. But he was soon absorbed in school, at Aquinas College, the University of Michigan and medical school at Marquette University in Milwaukee.

"I tried to get ahold of them after I got back. But, after a while, you move on." So their paths diverged, and the war that brought them together faded from memory.

Henry DeVries Sr. and his wife, Gladys, left in 1923 for the island of Mindanao, where they worked to establish what was called the Philippine Faith Mission. David DeVries was born there in 1924, followed by his sister Gene, in 1926, and Henry Jr. in 1929. The missionary couple established a medical clinic and spread the gospel in remote villages where natives had never seen a white man.

By early 1942, war had swept over the islands. The Japanese had attacked a day after bombing of Pearl Harbor and eventually forced the withdrawal of Allied forces. Unknown to his parents, David DeVries was taken captive in January in Manila, where he had gone for high school. The rest of the family was captured in May. In April 1943, David was transferred to the prison camp at Los Banos, about 40 miles south of Manila. Henry Sr., Gladys, Henry Jr. and Gene were sent there a year later.

Life at Los Banos, a former agricultural school ringed by a double barbed wire fence, was a grim fight for survival. By fall, daily rations consisted of a cup of worm-infested rice. It was execution by starvation, a deliberate strategy by the Japanese in the waning months of the war. By February 1945, prisoners were dying almost every day at Los Banos. "I was pallbearer for a lot of my friends," David DeVries recalled.

With the Allies winning the battle for the Philippines, word leaked out the Japanese intended to speed things up. Filipino guerrillas, working with the Allies, learned Feb. 23 was the execution date. At 7 a.m., after the guards completed their calisthenics, more than 2,000 prisoners would be killed. But plans already were in motion to see that never happened, and planners got a vital edge when a civilian engineer named Pete Miles escaped the camp. Miles gave them troop positions and the location of guard towers. He also told them where the Japanese soldiers' weapons would be while they were outside, in their underwear, for workouts: in a locked rack in a connecting room between two barracks.

Two days before the assault, a 31-man platoon departed under darkness across nearby Lake Laguna and took up positions outside the camp with about 20 Filipino guerrillas. Hours before the raid, the amphibious trucks slipped across the lake and rumbled over land to rendezvous. At 6 a.m. Feb. 23, paratrooper Krhovsky stood at Nichols Field near Manila as nine C-47 crews fired up their engines and prepared to take off. About 130 paratroopers from the 11th Airborne Division would make the jump from 400 feet, as low as they could safely jump. Krhovsky sat in silence to the thrum of the plane's twin engines. And just before 7 a.m., David DeVries looked up. The prisoners were lined up outside for roll call, a preliminary step, he later figured, to their mass execution.

Parachutes filled the sky, and the assault began. Krhovsky hit the ground, unclipped his chute and made his way through holes in the fence with his Thompson sub-machine gun. The Japanese never made it to the arms rack. It was all over in 15 or 20 minutes. At the camp, Krhovsky said the captives had a hard time believing they were free.

Decades later, former Joint Chiefs chairman Colin Powell summarized what had happened that day. "I doubt that any airborne unit in the world will ever be able to rival the Los Banos prison raid. It is the textbook airborne operation for all ages and all armies," Powell said.

Ten weeks after the raid, the DeVries family was back in Grand Rapids, all smiles in a Grand Rapids Herald photo from their arrival. David DeVries now is a retired geologist living in Palm Springs, Calif. He likes to volunteer his time as a docent at the Palm Springs Air Museum, which, coincidentally, acquired a camouflaged C-47. DeVries sometimes will pause near the plane and stare, transported back to the day his family found freedom.

► POW/MIA UPDATES

POW GROUPS PUSH FOR N. KOREA TO RETURN U.S. REMAINS

Family Groups Want No More Concessions Without Accounting for U.S. POW/MIAs Current U.S. Push Only For Japanese Abductees, Not Americans

Bellevue, Washington (June 30, 2008) As the U.S. government marches toward improved relations with North Korea, it is ignoring one of its most important obligations—requiring North Korea to account for over 8,000 American Prisoners of War and Missing in Action from the Korean War (1950-3.) The leading groups representing family members of the captured and missing and concerned veterans and citizens are calling on the Bush Administration to demand answers from North Korea immediately—before any more concessions are granted.

After the end of the war, the United States government demanded an accounting for hundreds of Americans reported captured by the enemy but never returned or accounted for, plus thousands of missing men whose fates are a total mystery. The North Koreans and their Chinese allies refused to provide any credible response. In 1957, a "Sense of the Congress" resolution was passed that stated an accounting and/or return of U.S. POWs and MIAs from Korea should be "a primary objective of the foreign policy of the United States." In recent years, escapees from North Korea have described seeing men they believe were U.S. prisoners and North Korean officials have mentioned the presence of living "survivors" or "war criminals" from the conflict. Pentagon investigators have also uncovered evidence supporting wartime claims that U.S. prisoners were shipped from North Korea to secret prisons in China and the Soviet Union, from which they never returned. Just two weeks ago, a Chinese government report was revealed that admitted—breaking 50 years of Chinese and North Korean denials—Sgt. Richard Desautels was taken from North Korea to China, where Beijing now claims his remains cannot be found. (View fact sheet on US POW/MIAs in North Korea at www.nationalalliance.org/koreapowfacts.htm).

“The United States must not drop North Korea as a ‘State Sponsor of Terrorism’ until it takes a significant first step in accounting for our lost heroes and agrees to a detailed program of accounting for American POWs and MIAs, starting with those captured alive but not returned at the end of the war and the ‘survivors’ and ‘war criminals’ mentioned by the North as remaining alive after the war,” said the National Alliance of Families for the Return of America’s Missing Servicemen (National Alliance of Families/NAF) and Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing.

“My father would be astonished to know North Korea has been dropped from ‘Trading with the Enemy’ status and is now poised to get other major diplomatic concessions with absolutely no requirement to account for him and his lost colleagues,” said Bill Sowles, son of Korean War POW/MIA SFC Lewis Sowles, who disappeared in North Korea during 1950.

Despite this, current negotiations with North Korea do not include U.S. POWs and MIAs. Instead, the U.S. has focused on accounting for Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea. Last week, President Bush stated: “The United States will never forget the abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Koreans. We will continue to closely cooperate and coordinate with Japan and press North Korea to swiftly resolve the abduction issue.”

The POW/MIA family groups strongly support an accounting for Japanese abductees, but call upon President Bush and Congress to honor America’s promise to its lost heroes, our Prisoners and Missing from the Korean War.

POW-MIA HEARING TO BE FIRST IN 11 YEARS

By [Rick Maze](#) - Staff writer, [armytimes.com](#)

Wednesday Jul 9, 2008 9:20:14

A House subcommittee has scheduled the first congressional oversight hearing in more than a decade to look at military efforts to locate and identify service members missing from past wars.

Navy Rear Adm. Donna Crisp, who heads to Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, and Charles Ray, the deputy assistant defense secretary for POW and MIA policy, will testify Thursday before the military personnel subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

One focus of the hearing will be joint efforts between the U.S. and China to discover the fate of missing Korean War veterans. An agreement signed earlier this year has opened Chinese archives that may contain clues to what happened to more than 8,000 U.S. service members unaccounted for at the end of the Korean War.

For example, on June 25, the Pentagon announced the identification of the remains of a Korean War soldier. The remains of Army Sgt. Gene F. Clark, who had served with the 1st Cavalry Division in 1950, were identified by military officials and turned over to his family for burial.

Clark’s unit, the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, was attacked by Chinese forces and withdrew from its defensive positions along the Nammyon River, according to defense officials. Clark was one of more than 350 U.S. service members reported missing from the battle.

Clark was identified from remains that North Korea turned over to the U.S. in 1993, which pre-dates the new agreement on opening the archives.

Armed services committee aides said the hearing also will ask questions about whether POW/MIA operations are getting enough resources and attention in a Pentagon where military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are the top priorities.

The last armed services committee hearing was held in 1997, as Congress was considering an overhaul of the Missing Service Personnel Act that set up requirements for searching for missing service members, identifying remains and dealing with the families of the missing.

POW/MIA ACTIVISTS OF THE YEAR

Neshanic Station, N.J., June 25, 2008 – The National Alliance of POW/MIA Families has named two members of Rolling Thunder National Members to share its POW/MIA Activist of the Year Award.

Paul J. Carro of Summit, N.J., and Augustus “Gus” Dante of Neshanic Station, N.J., were honored at the Alliance’s 2008 national conference, held June 19-21 in Washington, D.C. Both were selected for their efforts over the past year on behalf of H. Res. 111 to establish in the House of Representatives a Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs.

Carro and Dante began working with long-time POW/MIA activist and MIA researcher Roger Hall in summer 2007 to help obtain congressional support for the resolution, which was sponsored by Rep. Peter King (R-NY) in January 2007.

H.Res 111 calls for a Select committee to “conduct a full investigation of all unresolved matters relating to any United States personnel unaccounted for from the Vietnam era, the Korean conflict, World War II, Cold War Missions, or Gulf War, including MIAs and POWs.” A similar committee in the U.S. Senate concluded in 1993: “There is evidence, moreover, that indicates the possibility of survival, at least for a small number, after Operation Homecoming....”

In June 2007 the measure had about 60 co-sponsors. Carro and Dante began a grass-roots campaign, calling and making personal visits to congressional representatives. Their efforts contributed in large measure to the resolution’s current tally of 280 co-sponsors—a nearly 50-50 bi-partisan list representing nearly two-thirds of the U.S. House of Representatives, including 100 percent sponsorship by every one of New Jersey’s congressional representatives.

Despite the large number of co-sponsors, H Res. 111 is currently stalled in the House Rules Committee, apparently as a result of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s reluctance to allow any additional Select committees during the current congressional session. This position has frustrated Carro, Dante, Rolling Thunder, the National Alliance, and other organizations that support the measure, including the Vietnam Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and other groups.

“How is it possible that more than 60 percent of the House representatives have co-sponsored this bill, indicating that they want to bring this measure to the House floor for debate and to vote on it, yet it has gone nowhere,” said Carro. “These congress people represent more than 250 million people—how can their voices be ignored? How can Ms. Pelosi and Ms. Slaughter (House Rules Committee Chairperson) hold this up? It’s unheard of to have this many co-sponsors and have it stuck in the Rules Committee,” he added.

Carro has long been active in POW/MIA issues, first as a member of the Vietnam Veterans of America, and then as a member of Rolling Thunder. Before retiring in 2003, Carro owned and operated a successful insurance business in Chatham and Madison. In addition to Rolling Thunder, Carro volunteers at the Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center in Oldwick, N.J.

Dante, who served in the U.S. Army as a Military Policeman (MP) from 1962-64, has been a member of Rolling Thunder for four years. He also belongs to American Legion Post 12 in Somerville, N.J.

► VA NEWS

VA REACHING OUT TO VETS WITH MORTGAGE PROBLEMS

WASHINGTON (June 12, 2008) - Many homeowners have found it difficult recently to pay their mortgages, but quick intervention by loan counselors at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has actually reduced the number of veterans defaulting on their home loans. "VA is reaching out to veterans—both those who use our home-loan guaranty program and those who don't take advantage of our guaranties—to keep people in their homes," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

Accounting for much of this success are VA counselors at nine regional loan centers who assist people with VA-guaranteed loans avoid foreclosure through counseling and special financing arrangements. The counselors also can assist other veterans with financial problems. VA counselors have helped about 74,000 veterans, active-duty members and survivors keep their homes since 2000, a savings to the government of nearly \$1.5 billion. Depending on a veteran's circumstances, VA can intercede with the borrower on the veteran's behalf to pursue options—such as repayment plans, forbearance, and loan modifications—that would allow a veteran to keep a home.

To obtain help from a VA financial counselor, veterans can call VA toll-free at 1-877-827-3702. Information about VA's home loan guaranty program can be obtained at www.homeloans.va.gov.

VA BEGINS NEXT PHASE OF COMBAT VET OUTREACH

WASHINGTON (May 30, 2008) – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today it has completed making calls to veterans potentially identified as being ill or injured from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF-OIF), and will immediately begin targeting over 500,000 OEF-OIF veterans who have been discharged from active duty but have not contacted VA for health care.

“We promised to reach out to every OEF and OIF veteran to let them know we are here for them—and we are making real progress in doing so,” said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

A contractor-operated “Combat Veteran Call Center” is making the initial calls on behalf of VA. All potentially sick or injured veterans on VA’s list received an offer to appoint a care manager to work with them if they do not have one already. VA care managers ensure veterans receive appropriate care and know about their VA benefits.

In the new phase, beginning today, veterans who have not accessed health care from VA will be called and informed of the benefits and services available to them. Additionally, military personnel received information about VA benefits when they left active duty, and the Department had sent every veteran a letter with this information after their discharge.

For five years after their discharge from the military, these combat veterans have special access to VA health care, including screening for signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. VA personnel have been deployed to the military’s major medical centers to assist wounded service members and their families during the transition to civilian lives.

VA OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

Citing the confusion veterans face when trying to arrange benefits, the House Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee passed H.R.2192 on June 5 which would create an Ombudsman office within the Veterans Affairs Department (VA). The bill introduced on May 7, 2007 and sponsored by Rep. Paul Hodes D-NH) was adopted by unanimous voice vote, along with the adoption by voice vote of a substitute amendment from Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee Chairman Michael Michaud (D-ME). The bill instructs the VA secretary to create an office of the ombudsman, and designate the head of the office. The office would act as a one-stop shop for information on benefits administered by the VA, including medical, housing and education.

When testifying in support of his bill before the Health Subcommittee on 14 JUN 07, Hodes said the VA has separate hotlines for different benefits, and the process can be confusing to veterans returning from overseas. Michaud's substitute amendment expanded the duties of the new office. Under the amendment, the VA secretary will designate an ombudsman director in each of the department's three administrations, health, benefits and cemeteries. The ombudsman director in each administration will report to the head ombudsman. The amendment also defines the official duties of the office of the ombudsman as providing patient advocacy and problem resolution, provide assistance in understanding benefits, provide information on claims submissions, and field complaints from veterans.

The VA secretary will also designate six regional ombudsmen throughout the United States for both the health and benefits administrations. However, the VA does not support the bill. VA Undersecretary for Health Michael Kussman testified at the Health Subcommittee hearing on the bill that it would create an unnecessary level of bureaucracy within the VA. Kussman added the VA already has officers such as patient advocates and benefit counselors, and many state level veterans departments also have counselors. The bill currently has 43 cosponsors.

SHAD UPDATE 06:

Veterans who believe they're suffering health problems from secret chemical and biological weapons testing conducted years ago will testify before Congress the week of June 9 on House bill H.R.5954 introduced on May 1 by Rep. Mike Thompson, Mike [CA-1].

Thompson and some of the bills' 25 cosponsors have been trying for nearly seven years to get the U.S. Defense Department to acknowledge that the tests occurred and that affected veterans should be compensated and given treatment for their diseases. The bill is to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide veterans for presumptions of service connection for purposes of benefits under laws administered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs for diseases associated with service in the Armed Forces and exposure to biological, chemical, or other toxic agents as part of Project 112, and for other purposes. It also requires the secretary of Veterans Affairs to notify all veterans subject to the testing of the potential hazards. It is estimated there are about 500 veterans still surviving that were affected by the project. Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT) said in a prepared statement, "This is great news for all of the Project 112 veterans who have waited decades to receive proper health care. It's obvious we've gotten the committee's ear and they're interested in finally righting this wrong." The Defense Department now says 6,440 service members took part in 50 tests under Project 112 between 1962 and 1973, including open-air tests above a half-dozen U.S. states. In testimony prepared for the hearing, obtained in advance by The Associated Press, Bradley Mayes, the Veterans Affairs Department's director of compensation and pensions, calls the legislation unnecessary, "due to the lack of credible scientific and medical evidence that adequately demonstrates any statistically significant correlation" between the tests and participants' diseases. Last year, the Institute of Medicine, which advises the government on medical and health matters, found no specific health effects as a result of Project SHAD. Rep. Thompson and others argue that the report was

shoddily done and left out key information. During the tests, conducted amid Cold War concerns about the Soviet Union's weapons capabilities, the military tested germs such as bacteria that could cause tularemia and Q fever, serious diseases more commonly found in animals. Also used were nonlethal simulated agents, including E. coli now known to pose health dangers. Some of those veterans now suffering from various maladies say test participants were given experimental vaccines but weren't told of any risks, only that the shots were a protective measure. Dr. Michael Kilpatrick, the Pentagon's deputy director for force health protection and readiness, acknowledges that some participants weren't fully informed about the project they were part of but says safety precautions taken then were appropriate for the time.

Among the various Project 112 tests was SHAD, an acronym for Shipboard Hazard and Defense, which was conducted during the 1960s. SHAD encompassed tests designed to identify US warships' vulnerabilities to attacks with chemical or biological warfare agents and to develop procedures to respond to such attacks while maintaining a war-fighting capability. The Defense Department for years denied that the testing occurred. Although it now acknowledges the tests, it won't provide health benefits through Veterans Affairs for those exposed veterans who are now suffering various cancers and illnesses. During the SHAD tests crewmembers were inside ship's sealed quarters when they were sprayed with biological and chemical agents in the Pacific Ocean. Participants claim that paper filters designed to prevent the agents from getting through the air ducts to the sealed spaces often deteriorated. They were required to wash down the boats after the spraying, but they wore the same gear every day and it was cleaned with cancer-causing agents. Their bunks, clothes and lockers also were exposed during the cleaning.

For a list of ships that were used in SHAD operations, visit: <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin/>

► OTHER NEWS

VIETNAM VETS INVITED TO SEND TRIBUTES

(Ed. Note: Monika Jensen-Stevenson is a former Emmy-winning producer for 60 Minutes, and co-author with William Stevenson of Kiss The Boys Goodbye. The Vietnam Veterans Coalition awarded her the Vietnam Veterans National Medal.

I would very much like you and your friends to send tributes and to use the site to find people you have lost track of and information on the missing. I am hoping that in two, three years, I have a complete list of tributes from Vietnam vets (and the vets of other wars) that will be available to everyone, in perpetuity, that can be downloaded and printed . . . well you get the point. I am so appreciative for all your help and look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions, please email me at www.myfamilymemoirs.com.

Best,
Monika

They were the brightest, bravest and best who gave their all: Would you, who knew them best, give a few minutes of your time to keep them alive forever in our hearts and minds? Send an email with a story—just a few sentences (or more)—about your brother "Kings" in Vietnam (and other wars) to: Tributes@myfamilymemoirs.com. All submissions will be put in www.MyFamilyMemoirs.com archives for anyone to access. It's free. It's for posterity

► BRINGING THEM HOME

IRAQ POW REMAINS FOUND

Two POWs, missing in Iraq since May 12, 2007, have been recovered and identified. Sgt. Alex Jimenez, of Lawrence, MA, and Army Pvt. Byron W. Fouty, 19, of Waterford, Mich., members of the 2nd Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division, were kidnapped by al-Qaida while providing overwatch for an improvised explosive device crater in Al Taqa, south of Baghdad. The volatile area is known as the "triangle of death. Four other soldiers were killed in the attack. The body of a third captured soldier, Pfc. Joseph Anzack Jr, of Torrance, CA, was recovered from the Euphrates River 10 days after the attack.

REMAINS OF 11 WWII SERVICEMEN RETURNED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced on April 26 that the remains of 11 U.S. servicemen, missing in action from World War II, were been identified and returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

They are Capt. Robert L. Coleman, of Wilmington, Del.; 1st Lt. George E. Wallinder, of San Antonio, Texas; 2nd Lt. Kenneth L. Cassidy, of Worcester, Mass.; 2nd Lt. Irving Schechner, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; 2nd Lt. Ronald F. Ward, of Cambridge, Mass.; Tech. Sgt. William L. Fraser, of Maplewood, Mo.; Tech. Sgt. Paul Miecias, of Piscataway, N.J.; Tech. Sgt. Robert C. Morgan, of Flint, Mich.; Staff Sgt. Albert J. Caruso, of Kearny, N.J.; Staff Sgt. Robert E. Frank, of Plainfield, N.J.; and Pvt. Joseph Thompson, of Compton, Calif; all U.S. Army Air Forces.

REMAINS OF FOUR FROM VIETNAM IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced on May 27 that the remains of four U.S. servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

They are Maj. Barclay B. Young, of Hartford, Conn.; and Senior Master Sgt. James K. Caniford, of Brunswick, Md. The names of the two others are being withheld at the request of their families. All men were U.S. Air Force. Caniford was buried May 28 in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C., and Young's burial date is being set by his family.

Remains that could not be individually identified are included in a group which will be buried together in Arlington. Among the group remains is Air Force Lt. Col. Henry P. Brauner of Franklin Park, N.J., whose identification tag was recovered at the crash site.

On March 29, 1972, 14 men were aboard an AC-130A Spectre gunship that took off from Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, on an armed reconnaissance mission over southern Laos. The aircraft was struck by an enemy surface-to-air missile and crashed. Search and rescue efforts were stopped after a few days due to heavy enemy activity in the area.

In 1986, joint U.S.- Lao People's Democratic Republic teams, lead by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), surveyed and excavated the crash site in Savannakhet Province, Laos. The team recovered human remains and other evidence including two identification tags, life support items and aircraft wreckage. From 1986 to 1988, the remains were identified as those of nine men from this crew.

Nearly 600 Americans were lost in Laos during the Vietnam war, and many were known to have survived their loss incident. However, the U.S. did not negotiate with Laos for these men, and consequently, not one American held in Laos has ever been released.

MEMORIAL SERVICES FOR NINE VETERANS

Through the efforts of the Missing in America Project Veteran Recovery Program, the cremated remains of nine veterans have been identified. A memorial service, with full military honors, will be held at the Riverside National Cemetery on August 6, 2008 at 2:45 p.m. in Shelter G for the following: *Albert Charles Bricker, Thomas Bruce Bright, Rick Dennis Champagne, Charles F. Duff, Harold Francis Hanlin, Willie Jones, Robert James Matthew, Kenneth Owen Nelson, and Wayne Weikko Ronka.*

On January 11, 2008, services were held at Jefferson Barracks, MO for six veterans identified by MIAP.

The mission of the MIAP project is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremains of veterans through the joint efforts of private, state and federal organizations. These forgotten veterans have served our country and, as such, deserve to be buried with honor and respect.

Begun in January 2007, MIAP has the support of the American Legion & Riders, Old Guard, Patriot Guard, VVA, Rolling Thunder, Marine Corps, Gathering of Eagles, and many other veteran organizations. For more info, visit www.miap.us/

NAVY PILOT MIA FROM VIETNAM WAR IS IDENTIFIED

On June 20, 2008, the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

He is Lt. Cmdr. Ralph C. Bisz, U.S. Navy, of Miami Shores, Fla. His funeral arrangements are being set by his family.

On Aug. 4, 1967, Bisz took off in an A-4E Skyhawk from the USS Oriskany to bomb an enemy petroleum depot near Haiphong, Vietnam. As he neared the target, his aircraft was struck by an enemy surface-to-air missile and crashed near the town of Hai Duong in Hai Hung Province. No parachute was observed and no emergency beeper signal was received.

In 1988, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) repatriated to the United States human remains from Hai Hung Province, which they attributed to Bisz on the basis of their historical records of the shootdown as well as documentation of his burial.

Between 1988 and 2004, joint U.S./S.R.V. teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted several investigations of the incident and surveyed the crash site. A team found aircraft wreckage at the site which was consistent with an A-4E Skyhawk. Teams also interviewed witnesses who recalled the crash and burial of the pilot in a nearby cemetery. Additionally, one witness indicated that he oversaw the exhumation of the American's remains from the cemetery, and their turnover to district officials.

Between 1993 and 2004, 25 samples from the remains turned over in 1988 were submitted to several laboratories for mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis, but yielded inconclusive results. In 2007, the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used refined DNA collection techniques and succeeded in

obtaining verifiable mtDNA. Using forensic identification tools, circumstantial evidence, mtDNA analysis and dental comparisons, scientists from JPAC identified the remains as those of Bisz.

Welcome home, and may you finally rest in peace.

► EVENTS

ANGEL FIRE REUNION

September 5-7, 2008

Angel Fire, New Mexico

We will be laying more bricks on the path at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and planting at least one tree, so be prepared for a working weekend.

Hotels:

Econo Lodge at Eagle Nest (Host Hotel) 505-377-6813
\$69.99 (includes Continental breakfast)
715 Hwy 64 E, Eagle Nest, NM 87718

Angel Fire Resort (505) 377-6401
\$99 (includes full breakfast)
10 Miller Lane, Angel Fire, NM 87710

Gold Pan Motel 575-377-2286

Angels Nest Retreat 575-377-0533

Golden Eagle RV 575-377-6188
\$28 RV; \$15 tent camping

Weathers RV 575-377-2276
\$25 RV; \$10 tent camping

Willow Creek RV Park 575-377-1664
\$18 RV

Lost Eagle RV Park 575-377-2374
\$30

Monte Apodaca is handling the Angel Fire Reunion. He needs a head count before August 10, 2008. You can email him at Lharley8@aol.com. Please mention RFTW Reunion on the subject line. Please note that Monte has so much email that he will not respond to an e-mail that has no mention of RFTW.

Details are still being worked out. The Reunion Dinner will be Friday night, and a barbecue Saturday night. A schedule of events will be posted under Events on the website soon.

TEXAS REUNION

September 19-21, 2008

YO Ranch Resort Hotel & Conference Center

Kerrville, TX

Ready for a great time in the Texas Hill Country to catch up and reminisce on the recent ride? Here is your opportunity to see old friends and make new ones with riders attending from both Central and Southern routes.

The YO Resort is a full-facility hotel with restaurant, lounge and conference rooms. This hotel provides us with everything we need for a relaxing fun weekend with our RFTW friends and family. A block of hotel rooms is being held until 7 a.m. on August 19th. Ask for the RFTW group rate. 877-967-3767

Friday – Arrival day is open for those interested in the Friday rides or catching up with friends. No scheduled activities.

Saturday morning /afternoon -Various route and board meetings are being planned. More details later.

Saturday evening - A buffet dinner is being served in a private room for the group. The dinner will include coffee and tea service. Adult beverages will be available from the lounge.

Sunday morning is open for breakfast and coffee with friends before heading home.

Information on area events and points of interest will be available to registrants at the hotel.

Saturday’s dinner and a RFTW 2008 Reunion rocker are included in the, non-refundable, registration fee. For first timers to YO RFTW Reunion a reunion patch is included.

Registration cost: Now until August 15th - \$30.00 each

Registration cost: August 16 – August 28th - \$45.00 each

Deadline for the registration is AUGUST 28th paid in advance. The deadline is required by the hotel to confirm head count for Saturday’s dinner. So tell your friends. Prior registration and payment is required.

(Please print clearly)

Name(s) _____

Number of Attendees: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Send checks payable to: Janice Wentworth, 788 FM 288, Quitman, TX 75783. For more info, call Janice at 214-906-5357, or email her at stitchnbitch1@earthlink.net. Paypal payment is available – call or email Janice for details.

An email receipt will be set upon payment. The email receipt will be your dinner ticket/confirmation.

NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY

Friday, September 19, 2008

A Pentagon ceremony for National POW/MIA Recognition Day will be held on Friday, Sept.19, 2008. This ceremony will feature troops from each of the military services. The president will issue a proclamation commemorating the observances and reminding the nation of those Americans who have sacrificed so much for their country.

Observances of National POW/MIA Recognition Day are held across the country on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, schools and veterans' facilities. This observance is one of six days throughout the year that Congress has mandated the flying of the National League of Families' POW/MIA flag. The others are Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day. The flag is to be flown at major military installations, national cemeteries, all post offices, VA medical facilities, the World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the official offices of the secretaries of state, defense and veterans affairs, the director of the selective service system and the White House.

► SICK CALL

John King spent a few days in the hospital after an accident while he was riding home from Taos, NM. He broke his left elbow, which was reconstructed; his bike was totaled.

Harley Rodg missed the Run this year because he was diagnosed with cancer. He reports that the non-Hodgkins lymphoma he has is fairly non-aggressive, but he is undergoing chemo treatment. Roger hopes to be back on the Run next year with his sewing machine. Becca invites friends to visit the CarePage she is keeping for Rodg. You can follow his progress at <http://www.carepages.com/ServeCarePage?cpn=HarleyRodg&uniq=30333&ipc=patientupdatefree> and receive updates that Becca will send out.

Delores McDole (“Girlfriend”) is having testing done for a medical problem.

Mike McDole is recovering from surgery on his neck.

Judy Cockrum is having recurring problems with her knee (a torn meniscus) and is spending a lot of time at the doctor’s.

Pato Pato, while heading back home after the Run, was hit by a car in Colorado. Thankfully, he wasn’t injured seriously, mostly road rash. The car driver was arrested. In an email, he said: “Aloha Judy - please pass along my many thank you’s to everyone who wished me well after my ordeal in Colorado after the Run. A quick update: I suffered road rash on a good portion of my arms, knees and hind end. And thanx to the good folk of Colorado they got the idiot who tried to kill me and the police arrested him for many different charges along with child endangerment. He goes to court on July 1st and then we will find out why he did what he did. Will keep y’all posted, but wanted everyone to know the details and to say thanx. I am home on the rock and doing just fine...cya soon...hugs and pinches....patopato

Bill “Monsoon” Mimiaga recently underwent aggressive treatment for breast cancer and is recovering.

Jack “Chief” Brammer is recovering from throat surgery.

ANNE PERRY has been suffering with polymyalgia rheumatica for several years and **FRANK PERRY** was recently diagnosed with spinal stenosis. They will probably no longer be able to join us on the RFTW. They each have made huge contributions to RFTW. We'll miss you both greatly.

We wish these friends speedy recoveries and good health hereafter. Please keep them in your prayers.

► TAPS

EARL P. HOPPER, SR.

Colonel Earl P. Hopper, Sr., US Army (Ret), 86, a native of Glendale, AZ passed away on July 11, 2008. Earl and his wife, Patty, were involved with POW organizations as well as RFTW and Task Force Omega.

Earl enlisted in military service with the Arizona National Guard, the 158th Infantry known as the Bushmasters on May 1, 1940. Late in 1942 he returned from Panama to attend OCS at Ft. Benning, GA.

Earl served with distinction in WWII with the 101st Airborne Division, during the Korean War with Military Intelligence, and as an advisor to a South Vietnamese Brigade during the Vietnam War. His 30-year military career also included 2 peacetime tours of duty in Germany and 1 in Korea as well as 3 peacetime tours with the 11th Airborne Division and 2 tours as an Advisor to the Arizona National Guard. He also served as the Executive Officer of the Student Brigade and later the Deputy Commander of the Officer Candidate School at Ft. Benning, GA.

In addition to many peacetime awards and decorations including the Legion of Merit and the Good Conduct Medal, his combat awards and decorations include the Silver Star, 4 Bronze Stars, Presidential Unit Emblem (101st Airborne, Battle of the Bulge), Combat Infantry Badge, Purple Heart, the Belgian Fourragere and Master Parachutist Badge.

He attended a wide variety of military schools including Officer Candidate School (1943), Infantry Officer's Advanced Course (1943), Airborne Jump School (1944), Intelligence Officers Course (1952), Command and General Staff College (1956), and the US Army's Special Warfare School (1964). In 1968 Earl was inducted into the Infantry Officers Hall of Fame, Ft Benning, GA.

After his oldest son, LTC Earl P. Hopper Jr., US Air Force, was lost over North Vietnam on 10 January 1968 and retiring from military service, Earl began his "second career" becoming a nationally and internationally recognized leader in the Prisoner Of War/Missing In Action issue. In addition to meeting with Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush on this most vital issue, over these many years he met with numerous Senators, Congressmen and other US Government officials. As a leading expert, he testified before many Congressional hearings on behalf of our missing countrymen. He also felt honored to have been 1 of 10 people chosen to officially break ground for the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, DC. In addition to being a member of many veterans' organizations, Earl was a charter member of the National League of Families and one of the founders of Task Force Omega, Inc.

A Celebration of Life Memorial Service will be Saturday, July 26 at the Chapel of the Chimes, Glendale, AZ, followed by graveside military honors immediately afterward.

► WORTH READING/VIEWING:

The US Army Band and Chorus welcome Pope Benedict XVI at the White House Rose Garden ceremony on 15 April. Also in the program was a group of high school students. One of the fathers recorded it, added some graphic enhancements to the recording, and posted it on the web. The song, of course, is the "Battle Hymn Of The Republic." It will send a few shivers up your spine.

<http://www.greatdanepromilitary.com/Battle%20Hymn/index.htm>

The man in the door:

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=qH2vbYs6ebc>

If I Die Before You Wake (sung by Dustin Evans, an Iraq soldier)

<http://www.axpdf.com/wake/index.htm>

This song is wildly popular on the Internet, but most people think it was written and sung recently by a soldier while serving in Iraq, and that he should be given a recording contract. Actually, the singer has been recording for years. The song was sung by Dustin Evans and written and recorded by Dustin Evans, Rick Tiger and Dave Brainard in Iraq sometime before December 2005. Evans was at that time lead singer for Western Underground, and still is with them, as is Brainard. The lyrics of the song are beautiful and deserve to be read carefully:

If I Die Before You Wake...

Back home now I know you're probably sleepin'
Over here it's the middle of the day
I finally found the time to write a letter
Sittin' here a half a world away

I heard about all them folks protestin'
As if I really want this war
But that don't stop me from believin'
There's just some things worth fightin' for

And if I die before you wake,
I pray the world will take
A good look at what God's given us
That we could only understand,
everything is in his hands
All we need is a little faith and trust
I want you to know it ain't too high a price to pay
If I die before you wake

Tell everybody that I miss them
And I can't wait to get back home
But until then I'll serve my country
And be proud to wear this uniform

And if I die before you wake,
I pray the world will take
A good look at what God's given us
That we could only understand,
everything is in his hands
All we need is a little faith and trust
I want you to know it ain't too high a price to pay
If I die before you wake

No it ain't too high a price to pay
If I die before you wake

► CLOSING THOUGHTS

The only difference between this woman and the wives of this war is the name has changed from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan . . .

A VIETNAM WIFE

I arrived early for my appointment. As I walked through the front door, I thought maybe today would be a short day. It was 8:30 a.m. I was surprised to find there were at least 10 people sitting in the waiting room.

Methodically one by one the nurse appeared and called a name. Someone would stand and follow her to get weighed and their vitals taken.

Then they returned to their seat as she walked past the line of doors and dropped a folder outside one of the doors. Over and over it was repeated as she returned to her room and appeared, holding a folder and calling another name. The look on her face stayed the same.

Almost like the order she continued to call names, deposit folders, and return to her room only to appear again. I wondered if she even looked at their faces, or did they just remain names. Another name that she could cross off of her list for the day.

I looked around at the people who shared this room with me. An old man in his 80's was sitting across from me. I saw him when I entered the building.

He was standing in the hallway staring into a picture of a war scene that hung on the wall. He didn't move when I passed. I don't think he even heard me or knew I was there. I must have been seated a half hour before I looked up to see the elderly man appear. He was walking with a cane and moving very slowly. I wondered if it took him all that time to get here, or if he couldn't tear himself away from the images in the painting? Were they the same images he held in his mind after all these years? He sat in his chair, holding onto his cane as if it was a part of him. I wondered how many years his fingers grasped that worn piece of wood that steadied him. He never removed his overcoat. His eyes scanned the room. His hands shook, more like a tremor, but he didn't seem to even notice or care. His eyes met mine and I smiled at him. His expression remained the same, but his hand seemed to wave to me. His eyes moved onto another person. Again his expression remained the same. Then I realized that his hand continued to move as in a wave, his lips forming silent words. His hands moved with the unspoken words. I don't think his eyes ever met mine. I don't know if he ever noticed anyone as his eyes scanned the room. His doctor appeared and said his name. Still, there was no movement. The doctor touched his arm and he willingly followed him, slowly. As he left, I looked into his eyes. His eyes held an almost total emptiness, as if they had stopped seeing many years ago. All I could see was a look of far away. I thought as he left, he reminded me of a robot. Somewhere he found the strength to keep moving through life but not really living. His eyes were looking but not seeing. His body in this room but he lived somewhere in the past.

As each one returned to their seat, they all reminded me of programmed robots. Sometimes their seat was already taken by another.

Nobody sat beside me.

I almost wanted to laugh and say, "Hey I don't bite." I just remained silent.

One man had no other chair so he grabbed the back of the chair beside me and yanked it over about a foot and sat down. I could hear him murmuring to himself. Once I thought he was talking to me and I looked at him. His eyes were expressionless. He wasn't talking to me, and he wasn't seeing me. Another thousand yard stare.

I looked around the room. I paused to look at each face.

A thin man with a ponytail, probably about my age, was wearing a leather jacket that said SCOUT. Under it were the words, Vietnam. He talked nonstop yet nobody seemed to be listening, or at least they didn't acknowledge it. He sat for a few minutes talking and then walked around the room only to return to his seat and start talking again. Beside him was another man about the same age. Clean shaven, handsome, and dressed so much different from the man beside him. My eyes moved to look at his eyes. They were so big, almost frozen like when you have been scared nearly to death and staring straight ahead. He didn't even acknowledge the words from the man in the biker jacket. He sat there waiting for the expressionless nurse to call his name. While he waited, he must have been visiting another place because his big round eyes made no contact with anyone in the room.

He was starring, but not seeing.

Another man was reading a book that he brought. I think he was just covering his face to shut out his surroundings. His hat lay beside me in an empty chair, it was covered with pins. I recognized the crossed rifles of the infantry. I recognized the pins that all Vietnam Vets wore. No reason to move the hat, nobody wanted to sit there anyhow.

A heavy set man appeared. I looked at him and he smiled. He sat beside the only other woman in the room. My only impression of him was that he was talkative. He started a conversation with the lady. I looked at her. She appeared uncomfortable. She returned his questions with one word answers, trying to turn away, like she didn't want him to ask another question. After a while he seemed to give up.

Then he looked at her and said, "Did you serve?" She said, "Yes, Navy."

He said "Welcome Home." There was only a nod in return and then her eyes also seemed to cloud over and take her to another place and another time. The man stood up and said he was going for a smoke, the first of many.

I didn't want to look around anymore. I didn't want to see eyes that didn't see and people that were there but they weren't there. I had seen it all before. I see it many times in the darkness of night. As I sat there, I wondered if they knew I never walked on foreign soil. Never served my country. Never held my buddy while he drew his last breath, or seen more hell than anyone should ever have to witness. Did they know I wasn't one of them, or think I wouldn't understand? Is that why they chose not to sit beside me? Then I asked myself if they knew how I did serve my country. Did they know about those who served in the aftermath? Did they know about the effects their nightmares had on the one that stayed by their side? Even with his anger raging, she stayed right there. She stayed right beside him in the darkest of nights when he returned to the hell of War, in his nightmares? There was no answer, just eyes that didn't see and minds that were only half way home.

There were young men whose memories were of times not so long ago.

There were men my age who still lived partly in Vietnam with vivid scenes forever flashing in their mind. Scenes that wouldn't let them see today.

There were old men whose bodies were nearly worn out, yet the scenes of long ago were so fresh in their mind; fresher than what happened this morning.

You are not so different from me, but you don't know that.

I am not your brother. I didn't walk where you walked, but I walk where you walk in your dreams. I walk amongst the screams that are the result of the hell you are witnessing as if it is now. Sometimes I am the enemy in your mind in those darkest of nights because I am the only one there. The one you think may kill you if you don't kill me first, because I am perceived to be the enemy when you can't wake up from your nightmares. I am the one who refuses to give up because I know you are doing the best you can and because I love you. No, not really, I am only representative of the one who has loved you, stood by you, and refused to give up trying to bring you home.

I didn't walk where you walked; I only walked in the aftermath. Yet I am here for the same reason, to survive the nightmares of my PTSD.

I was the wife of a Vietnam Vet. Now I am a widow. An Agent Orange widow.

Yes I held one of your brothers in my arms and watched him draw his last breath. His nightmares have gone, but mine remain.

You are our heroes. You are a special breed of men and women.

We are a special breed too. We are the Vietnam Wives. They call our illness secondhand PTSD, but it doesn't feel secondhand. It feels as real and scary as yours does.

You are Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. You are proud. You are a brotherhood. Sometimes we have nobody that understands what we have been through, but even alone we know that we walked the walk. We didn't walk your walk, but we walked ours.

We wouldn't have changed a thing, because we love you. We are the Vietnam Wives. We are struggling to survive, to overcome, to keep on loving. Then we ask ourselves, why couldn't our love bring you completely home? Today I will see the same doctor you see. Today I will ask the same question you ask. Why can't I stop the nightmares? Then I will ask why my love was never enough to bring your brother completely home. I tried so hard to make him forget but I never could and now I can't forget.

No, I am not from any of the branches of the military, but I served.

I was a Vietnam Wife, and now I am an Agent Orange Widow.

My husband served until he drew his last breath. First he served beside you and then in his nightmares.

I will serve until I draw my last breath, because I cannot forget. I will always be a Vietnam Wife.

I understand that thousand yard stare much more than you think I do.

I no longer have my Vet. I wonder if you have any idea what you mean to me, and the attachment I have to you. You were my husband's brother. You are my brother and I would like to be your sister. If you cannot understand then just know that I was proud to be the Vietnam wife who loved your brother. Until I finally draw my last breath and Heaven takes away the scenes of war's aftermath, I will remain a Vietnam Wife, and
I am proud.

My attachment to you is strong.

My love and respect for you will never end. I hear you say "Welcome Home" to each other. Only my God can welcome me home.

I never left my country, or did I? I think I did, last night in my nightmares. That is where I served my country.

I was not Army, Navy, Marines, or Air Force.

I served in a branch that my country never recognized. I AM A VIETNAM WIFE.

© Mary Rogers

04/20/07

You Are Not Forgotten



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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)