



# **RUN FOR THE WALL**

## **Quarterly Newsletter**

### ***“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”***

#### **April 2009**

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#### **THE EDITOR’S NOTES**



I’d like to talk about something very personal. I’m certainly a different person today than I was in 2003 when I went on my first Run For The Wall. I had always held veterans in high regard and with great respect, but I never had the opportunity to really get to know them. I never truly understood that they are our heroes.

My grandfather served in the Spanish-American War in 1898, and a brother-in-law served in Korea. An old friend was a POW in Korea. But neither my father nor uncles nor anyone else in my family served in the military, so I cannot claim to be from a “military family.” But each year in RFTW I’ve met more and more veterans and very quickly learned why we owe so much to them. I am ashamed to admit that I paid almost no attention to what was going on in Vietnam. I was a young mother then, raising my children and worrying about feeding and clothing them. Life went on as usual during the war, which is a sad observation, and still is today as our boys fight in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Life continued to go on as usual over the years. Then one day I learned about RFTW. And I travelled with veterans across the U.S. And I listened to them and I talked to them. And I watched them as they visited their comrades at the Wall. And I cried with them as they cried for their comrades. I finally understood. And each year as I travelled with RFTW I felt closer and closer to our veterans. And that closeness and understanding lead me to become involved more closely with veterans. I wanted them to know how much I respected them, and how much I felt their pain for the way they were ignored—and worse—when they came back from Vietnam. I became an associate member of Vietnam Veterans of America and attend every meeting. I became a member of the Freedom Bridge Foundation in Lake Havasu City, where I am the Veterans Coordinator and do whatever I can to make sure our veterans are honoured and respected.

And in spite of my early ignorance of veterans, I recently received the highest compliment, however undeserved, from a veteran that I could possibly imagine.

I had been working for almost a year on a committee to bring the Traveling Wall to Lake Havasu. I was dealing, almost on a daily basis, with area veterans to organize volunteers for the many tasks required while the Wall was here. I received this email from one of those veterans:

*Hi Judy,*

*I want to thank you so much for everything you did to bring the Wall here and for all your help and for the love and understanding you have for us Vietnam veterans. Because of you I am home after 40 years of not being welcomed back. I love you and you will be in my heart wherever I go. Thank you again ...”*

I am undeserving of this tremendous compliment. I do no more than any other American should do to say thank you to our veterans who have given so much for our freedoms. I told the writer that it is I—and all Americans—who need to thank **him** and all veterans every day of our lives . . . You're my heroes.

*They are not forgotten ...*  
Judy “Velcro” Lacey

## **THE PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE**

By Mark "Straightarrow" Rittermeyer



Well it's hard to believe that 323 days have passed since Run For The Wall XX left Rancho Cucamonga, and that we have 42 days or less until Run For The Wall XXI will depart California, and cross this great land on a Mission to share our message with America.

I hope that most of you have begun to pack and repack, making sure that you have all that you will need. For all of you **FNGs**, welcome to the Run Family. There is a list of basic supplies listed in this issue, as well as on the website ([rftw.org](http://rftw.org)) that will assist you on your first Run. Also, please feel free to contact either Route Coordinator for more information, or for any questions you might have, and watch the Runs to the Run page on the website to see if there are others that you might join up with on your way.

Please know that we now offer **pre-registration online**, which will be available until midnight Pacific time, April 30th. We have already pre-registered over 500 for this year’s Run. You can pre-register for any of our morning or evening stops along the way, or you can register the day you join the Run.

The daily itineraries will be available on line April 1st, so be looking for them.

The entire Board of Directors, along with the Route Coordinators, and their staff are doing a tremendous job making the final preparations for this year's Run. This is a labor of love, and I would like to thank each of them ( as I hope you will also) for giving of their time and talents to make this year's Run and the Mission a success.

I look forward to seeing you in California, and/or along the way again this year.

Never Forget!!!

Mark "Straightarrow" Rittermeyer

## ► RFTW 2009

*Keep up with last-minute changes in this year's Run by checking frequently the Central or Southern Route websites. Access them from [www.rftw.org](http://www.rftw.org).*

### **ONLINE REGISTRATION ENDS APRIL 30**

RFTW Registration Committee

You may pre-register online for the 2009 Run. Beginning January 1, 2009 you can use your credit card or PayPal to register by clicking on REGISTRATION and following the instructions. On-line Pre-Registration ENDS April 30, 2009

HINT: Your registration isn't complete until you pay, and please add [info@rftw.org](mailto:info@rftw.org) to your accepted email addresses in order to receive your confirmation emails.

If you have not pre-registered and PAID on-line by Midnight Pacific Time April 30, 2009, you will need to register and pay at your RFTW beginning location.

Volunteers will be finalizing registration information and traveling to California early May.

### **PRE-RUN EVENTS: Tuesday, May 12, 2009.**

**From Jim "The Mayor" Frost, California State Coordinator**

There will be Tuesday (May 12<sup>th</sup>) activities again in 2009: a run to Riverside National Cemetery in the morning, a Blessing of the Bikes in early afternoon, and a meet & greet dinner in the evening. You may wish to time your arrival early enough to visit with friends from both routes on Tuesday.

#### **8:30 a.m.**

There will be a run to Riverside National Cemetery to visit the **Medal of Honor Memorial** and to pay respects to three Medal of Honor recipients. From there, we will ride to the **National POW/MIA Memorial** and meet the architect and sculptor of this magnificent monument, Lee Millett. We will then have a brief prayer and release everyone to get back to Rancho Cucamonga. March ARB also has an outstanding museum nearby which you may wish to visit while in the area.

The ride will stage at the RFTW host hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, 11481 Mission Vista Drive, Rancho Cucamonga, California. **Staging will commence at 8:30, with a rider's meeting at 9:15.** Detailed directions will be provided at the rider's meeting. Local friends and family with cages are encouraged to follow at a safe distance behind the riders.

Kickstands will go up at 9:30, followed by a 45 minute ride to Riverside National Cemetery. After visiting with the Medal of Honor recipients and spending time at the Memorial, we will proceed to the POW/MIA Memorial to meet with its creator.

Everyone will be on their own for lunch and to return to Rancho Cucamonga. Maps and information will be provided, but you may also wish to hook up with a few local riders for the trip back.

#### **4:30 p.m.**

For the second year, a **Blessing of the Bikes** will be held at Rancho Cucamonga's Central Park. Central Park is at the corner of Base Line and Milliken Avenue in Rancho Cucamonga, just a mile or so from the host hotel.

#### **5:30 – 7:00 p.m.**

For the third year, continuing Mil 'Big Dog' Thornton's concept, California supporters of RFTW will be hosting a Meet, Greet, & Mingle **dinner at Central Park** following the Blessing of the Bikes. The dinner is free for all who have registered and received their wrist bands. If you are not registered, the dinner will be \$10/person. The dinner is again being funded by the donations of various individuals and supporters of RFTW who will be recognized at the dinner, and will be attending as guests of RFTW.

Expect to dine with some of the best people on the planet, have a great meal, and a super program that's still short enough for you to enjoy the company of your friends... some of which you may not see again until RFTW 2010.

Donations are still being solicited and if anyone is interested in making a donation, you may contact Jim "The Mayor" Frost, California Coordinator, at [rftwca@hotmail.com](mailto:rftwca@hotmail.com)

See you in Rancho Cucamonga in May!

### **CHALLENGE TO RIDERS**

Russ Cockrum, Central Route Coordinator, challenges riders to check both Route Coordinators' Latest News on the webpage (often) as he and Greg Smith are posting pretty often.

### **DC HOTELS**

John Gosser, DC State Coordinator  
[dc.rftw@gmail.com](mailto:dc.rftw@gmail.com)

As of March 18: The status of registrations at Arlington hotels is that Holiday Inn is full, Windham is nearly full, and Comfort Inn still has rooms available. The Comfort Inn is not listed on the Southern Route Itinerary, so some may be trying to find rooms in other than contracted facilities.

### **WEST VIRGINIA HOTEL**

If you have a reservation at the Holiday Inn Express, I-64, Exit 39, in Hurricane, WV, you might want to check with them. There may be renovations scheduled and some reservations cancelled. If cancellations are necessary, they have a block of rooms available at the Comfort Inn, I-64, Exit 47A. Contact Tiffany or Courtney at 304-757-7177. These ladies have been extremely cooperative and apologetic about any inconvenience, they are willing to work with you in any way possible to make sure you have a place that night.

## **SR RAFFLE PRIZES NEEDED**

It is now also time to start gathering raffle prizes: shirts, jackets, hats, knives, tool sets, gift cards to major stores / restaurants / gas stations—anything that will fit into a small space on a bike! If it is something that is larger and or breakable (we have had companies and or supporters donate figurines, plaques, etc.), we usually make sure it is packed for shipping. That way, all the winners have to do is address it to themselves, pay a little postage, and leave it at the front desk of a hotel for mailing home. If you have something to donate please coordinate with Top Sarge at [angelluvers@att.net](mailto:angelluvers@att.net)

## **SR REGISTRATION HELP NEEDED**

Southern Route will be needing assistance across the country in both Registration (contact Top Sarge: [angelluvers@att.net](mailto:angelluvers@att.net)) and Merchandise sales (contact Carol: [carollolmstead@ymail.com](mailto:carollolmstead@ymail.com) ) from time to time. If you would like to work in either capacity you will have to have your own transportation, and if in Registration taking the ICO class form AMA will be a plus. If you have already completed an ICO class and need a refresher it can all be done online at the AMA website!!! Either of these positions would be an excellent stepping-stone into moving toward a greater level of participation with RFTW.

## **FUEL STOP REMINDER**

Russ "Sheepdog" Cockrum  
Central Route Coordinator  
RFTW 2009  
[rftwsheepdog@gmail.com](mailto:rftwsheepdog@gmail.com)

One thing that is unique to RFTW and particularly stressful to FNGs is our fuel stops. The Central Route will be pumping one grade of fuel, high octane. Pumps will be turned on prior to the arrival of the main pack, by members of our Fuel Team. You will pull up to the pumps two at a time side-by-side. Shut off your bike and have \$1's and \$5's in a pocket or tank-bag, easily accessible. The amount of fuel put in your tank will be rounded up to the nearest dollar, for example: if your bike takes \$6.37 of fuel, the fueler will ask you for \$7; please have the exact amount of bills ready. The excess amount goes to fuel our Chase Vehicles, which you will appreciate if you need them along the way. Do not ask for change, and do not argue with the fueler. If you feel a mistake has been made, after staging your bike, take it up with your Platoon Leader; he will follow up for you. I know some of you need to use Credit Cards; if at all possible get cash advances on your card so you can fuel with the pack. If charge cards are absolutely necessary, stay in line until a fueler directs you to the credit pumps, there will be pumps left open for you to use, but you will fuel on your own and then stage.

All bikes must fuel first, then stage, then take any restroom or refreshment breaks. This is a process that has evolved over 20 years and is the safest and most efficient way to fuel this many bikes in a timely manner. Please respect the members of the fuel crew; they have volunteered their time to help make your RFTW experience the best possible.

## **2009 RFTW MERCHANDISE**

All 2009 merchandise was ordered and arrived the first week in February. We began shipping orders February 15 or a little sooner. We made all the appropriate changes to the website the first week in January so we could begin receiving orders anytime after the website changes were posted. We do not run your credit card or deposit your checks until the order is shipped.

Website ordering will end April 24 this year to allow us more time to get the trailers ready for the "Run." Trailers will be in Rancho Cucamonga and one trailer will be on each route as in the past. In DC at least one trailer will be open most of Saturday, but both will be closed on Sunday for final inventory. Don't wait till the last minute. Ordering early gives you an opportunity to get all your patches sewn on and know what you will be packing for the "Run." Just a reminder: the Henley shirts have been discontinued. We have a few of each size left, but they won't last long.

The Board continues to thank you for your support of RFTW and we will see you in California come May 13 or wherever it is that you will be joining us.

Ride safe and be well,  
Don "9-Ball" Morris  
Director of Merchandise  
Run For The Wall BOD

### **CENTRAL ROUTE VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED**

Russ "Sheepdog" Cockrum  
Central Route Coordinator  
RFTW 2009  
[rftwsheepdog@gmail.com](mailto:rftwsheepdog@gmail.com)

Following are the areas still needing volunteers:

Central Route Staging Crew volunteer openings:

#### **Staging Crew Leader**

Dave "Trunks" Gladwill  
8576 Live Oak Road  
Stockton, CA 95212  
Home: 209-369-0879 Cell: 209 329-9367  
email: [gladwills@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gladwills@sbcglobal.net) or [dgladwill@slakey.com](mailto:dgladwill@slakey.com)

Also, Bill "Honebuns" Kable still has a few openings for Missing Man Position:

#### **Missing Man Coordinator**

Bill "Honeybuns" Kable  
521 Highlander Way  
New Stanton, PA 15672  
Home: 724-925-1740 Cell: 724-787-4672  
email: [tenrpipe@msn.com](mailto:tenrpipe@msn.com)

### **HOW WE RIDE**

By Colin Campbell

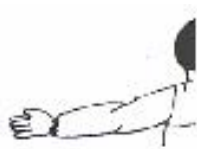
Run For The Wall follows a very regimented set of rules developed over the years to provide for the safe travel of this large contingency on its way to Washington DC and *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Foremost in our desire for safety is that every rider become adept and comfortable riding in accordance with these rules. If for any reason you are not comfortable riding in this manner, please discontinue your ride with the column. If you are not capable *and* comfortable riding "like we ride", you could pose a danger to yourself and your companions by attempting to ride in a tight formation. Above all, if a maneuver looks too dangerous or awkward for a rider (particularly a new rider) to complete safely, he or she should do what needs to be done to protect himself or herself to avoid an accident.

The rules are outlined as follows:

❖ **Signals**



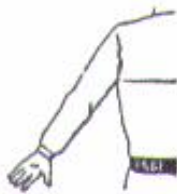
**Right turn**



**Left turn**

**Right turn:** Left arm out and elbow bent up. *Hand making a fist.*

**Left turn:** Left arm straight out from body. *Hand straight out in a fist.*



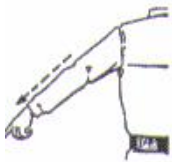
**STOP or  
Slow down**



**Speed UP**

**Slow:** Left arm down to side. Press flat palm up and down parallel to the ground imitating a braking motion.

**Speed up:** Pump left fist up and down



**Hazard in the  
Road**



**Close the Ranks  
open and close fist**

**Hazard:** Point at the area on the road with your hand and index finger (left or right side).

**Close Ranks:** Left hand overhead, *open and close fist*



**Staggered**



**Side-by-Side**

**Staggered Formation:** Left arm raised overhead, index finger extended.

**Side-by-Side Formation:** Left arm raised overhead, index and little finger extended.

**Blinker:** Left arm out and elbow bent up, thumb and forefinger contacting each other to indicate blinker on.

- ❖ **Distance Interval** – 2 seconds; visual marker for distance interval is one empty center stripe between cycles at 50 to 60 mph and two empty center stripes between cycles above 60. When in a *side-by-side* formation, the left side rider is responsible for maintaining the correct interval. The right side rider is

responsible for aligning himself with the left side rider. Rider's shoulders should be directly across from each other in the proper configuration. Every rider is responsible for maintaining the correct interval in a *staggered formation*.

- ❖ **Deceleration:** Unless a complete stop or an emergency stop is anticipated, riders should decelerate by rolling off the throttle and down shifting rather than braking. The appearance of brake lights in the formation increases the incidence of dangerous "rubber banding". Rubber banding (excessive acceleration and deceleration) increases accidents, wear and tear on equipment and increases rider fatigue. Increasing and decreasing speed should be accomplished utilizing small, incremental throttle roll-on and roll-off. Maintaining interval and position requires VERY slight throttle adjustments on an almost constant basis. Rapid acceleration and deceleration is very undesirable and should be avoided.
- ❖ **Riding the Zipper:** The centerline and the fog line are lovingly called the *zipper*. It's simple: do not have any part of your cycle or body beyond the zipper. If you do, road guards will hate you and semis will kill you **Just Say No** to hanging foot pegs, handlebars, or anything else over the zipper.
- ❖ **Sky popping:** Whales stick their head out of the sea just to the level of their eye to "take a look around". This is called "Sky Popping." Sticking out of your lane to see what's ahead is a great way to shorten your trip. Road guards travel much faster than the columns both in the left hand lane and on the right shoulder. Pulling out in front of one is a disaster for both riders. **Just Say No** to "sky popping".
- ❖ **Road Guard Courtesy:** You may receive signals/directions from road guards during your trip. Please comply immediately with these requests. Please do not take anything personally. Road guards are doing a very difficult job and are protecting our safety: Your cooperation is paramount to their success. At times, road guards need to pull into a column or pass through a column. When a road guard signals he needs in, immediately slow and give them the right of way. If you collide with a road guard, it is your fault - no questions asked.
- ❖ **Dive-bombing:** Pulling in too close after passing a vehicle is called "dive bombing." This is a "no-no." Trucks that are passed by the column should be given at least *one truck length* before riders pull back into their lane. Pulling in too quickly causes the truck driver to hit his brakes and makes them angry with us rather than being our fans. **No dive-bombing.** The same situation is true when the column moves into the left lane to pass slower moving traffic. At times there may be vehicles traveling in the left lane preventing the entire column from gaining access to the left lane as a unit. Do not speed around one of these vehicles and dive-bomb in front of them just to maintain your position within the column. Slow, pull in behind such a vehicle and rejoin the column after you have successfully passed the slower traffic in the right lane.
- ❖ **Passing signals back.** Please pass signals from the platoon leaders all the way back down the column. When you receive a signal, check your rearview mirror to make sure it was passed back.
- ❖ **CB Radio etiquette:** There will be a designated communication channel. Please do not talk on this channel unless you are performing an official function. All riders are welcome and encouraged to monitor the communication channel, but please maintain radio discipline.
- ❖ **Fueling:** During fuel stops on the Southern Route, fueling personnel wear an orange arm band and cap which indicates lines for premium grade fuel or a green arm band and cap which indicates the regular grade fuel line. On the Central Route, all fueling personnel will be wearing green vests and caps. File in side-by-side, two riders to a pump. Pay to the nearest dollar rounded up. Any excess monies collected will go toward future free fuel stops and fuel for chase vehicles.

## RUN Q&A

By Ron "Hammer" Young

Q. How fast does the pack ride?

A. A general guideline: the pack will ride at about five miles an hour below the posted speed limit. There will be times when the speeds will be less.



Q. How does the pack enter the highway?

A. We work with local and state authorities to aid our entrance onto the highways. The lead element will slowly enter the highway and maintain a slow speed as the pack follows. There is no reason to ride fast to "catch up" with the pack. The lead element continues a slow speed until the last man vehicle reports he/she is on the highway. At that point the Route Coordinator will slowly increase speed in five mile per hour increments at the rate of about 2-3 mph increase per minute. This increase is given to the Assistant Route Coordinator who is leading the 1st Platoon, who will then slowly bring the pack to the assigned speed. The Platoon Leaders will follow suit, and are responsible for maintaining the proper distance. As you can see, there is no reason to ride faster than the speed limit - follow these guidelines and the platoons will bring you up to speed properly and reduce "rubber banding."

Q. When will itineraries be available?

A. Daily itineraries will be finalized and posted a few weeks prior to departure. Please understand the incredible amount of work that must be finalized before this information is locked down. The notices and itineraries will be posted to the web site.

Q. How do I reserve my spot in the pack?

There are no reservations of riding spots in the pack. We ride two columns, side by side as conditions allow, and positions in the pack likely adjust as we do fuel stops. If you want to ride near someone ride in front or behind them, not to their side as those positions will adjust if riders fall out of formation.

Q. How much does it cost to go All the Way?

A. Cost of lodging, meals and gas to ride All the Way is largely a matter of personal preference. If you camp, some sites are free or reduced prices. Hotels will be indicated on our Route Schedule (see 1 above) and we often get a modest group discount from the standard rack rate. Gas is sometimes provided by supporters, but given the current state of gas prices, the level of future support cannot be certain. Most meals are provided free by local volunteers. Also, allow enough funds for emergency repairs and maintenance of your vehicle.

Q. Can I ride with the Run in my car?

A. Our number one goal is safety of the Run participants and the public. Personal vehicles can travel a few miles ahead or behind the pack, but cannot intermingle with the pack at any time. Due to limited space at most of our gas stops we ask you proceed to another station or skip a gas stop. Our gas stops range are spaced from 70 to 114 miles apart so "cages" will not need gas as often as the pack.

Q. Do I have to ride a certain brand of bike?

A. No, all bikes are welcome as long as they are safe, licensed and insured in accordance with your state's laws. If you go All the Way you will likely ride more than 5,800 miles depending on your hometown. Be sure your bike is up to a ride of this length, and allow for routine maintenance during the trip. Plan for tire and oil changes as appropriate.

Q. What special skills are needed to ride with the pack?

A. Riding with the pack requires good motorcycle handling skills, and you must be a competent, safe rider. Courses such as the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Experienced (Advanced) Rider's Course will help you sharpen your existing skills.

## **WHAT TO PACK FOR THE RUN**

Lots of FNGs have asked for suggestions on what to bring on Run for the Wall. When we thought about it, we decided that a lot of RFTW "old timers" might also find this information helpful. We went through our email and RFTW Bulletin Board posts from the past several years and brainstormed to compile this list. Tailor your checklist to your own personal needs—you may want to bring additional items, you may want to leave some

things at home. Thanks to Mark "Straight Arrow" Rittermeyer, Pup, Ghost, Iron Mike, Doorgunner, Sizzmo, Duct Tape, Deekin, Nuguyabe, Spook, Shadow, Suzanne S., Little Mac, Dragonrider, and others who contributed to this list.

<p><b>Motorcycles</b>          American &amp; POW-MIA Flags for bike          T-bag and/or saddle bags          Water bottle ("sport" bottle or "Camelback")          Bungee Cords (lots of 'em)          Duct Tape          Tool kit          Regular &amp; allen wrenches          Screwdrivers          Spark plugs &amp; wrench          Wire ties, zip ties          Shop rags          WD 40          Clamps          Rope          Jumper cables          Funnel          Can of Fix-a-flat          Tire repair kit          Replacement light bulbs          Fuses          Super glue          6' of 1/4" plastic hose or turkey baster (to siphon gas)          Motorcycle oil (however much your bike needs!)          Helmet (DOT legal)          Bandanna or "do-rag"          Jammies (or shorts or sweat pants)          Hankies          Shower shoes          Bath towel          Wash cloth (in zip-lock bag!)          Toilet Kit          Toothbrush          Toothpaste          Soap          Deodorant          Shampoo          Comb and/or brush          Roll of TP in Ziploc bag (be prepared!)          Sun block (Don't leave home without it!)          Chapstick          Personal first aid kit          Medications in marked containers          Prescription glasses</p>	<p>Sun glasses or goggles (2 pair)          Ear plugs          Laundry detergent (in heavy zip-lock bag)          Small sewing kit          Money          Credit Cards/Traveler's Checks          Driver's License          Insurance information          Dog tags for emergency identification          Emergency info: Next of kin, home and work phone numbers, doctors' phone numbers, list of prescriptions          Warm knit cap for under helmet and/or sleeping          Heavy jacket          Light weight jacket          Chaps          Warm gloves          Summer gloves          Rain Gear (jacket, pants and galoshes)          Padlock          Trash Bags for covering T-Bag in rain, laundry, etc.          Zip-lock bags (all sizes) organizes &amp; keeps stuff dry          Extra pair of boots          Jeans (2-3 pair)          T-shirts (at least 6)          Long-sleeved T-shirt (for the Mojave desert)          Warm sweat shirt          Underwear &amp; Socks (at least 6 pair)          Thermal underwear          Medications, glasses prescription, bank information          Cell phone and/or pager          Road Maps and Run Schedule          Business cards (to exchange with new friends)          Note pad &amp; pencil          Camera and film          Items you want to leave at The Wall          List of names you want to locate on The Wall</p> <p><b>Campers</b>          Tent with pegs          Waterproof Ground Cloth/Tarp          Sleeping Bag          Sleeping Mat or Cot          Folding chair or camp stool          Flashlight with extra batteries</p>
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**Misc. Reminders:**

- Cash: Take extra \$1 and \$5 bills for gas. When we fill up, total is rounded up; the extra money helps gas up the support vehicles.
- Throttle rockers will add some comfort to your ride (available at H-D dealers).
- Morning meetings are mandatory.
- Take showers at night so you won't be late for the morning meetings.
- If you get sleepy while riding, give a heads-up to the riders around you and pull off where safe. You can catch up at the next stop. RIDE SAFE!!!

## GET YOUR BIKE READY TO GO

By John “Shooter” McCabe

- If your tires need changing, change them now. If tires are good, check inflation just before we leave; have a tire pressure gage on hand.
- Change the oil just before leaving.
- Check all lights and have extra bulbs on hand.
- Check suspension air lines (for air shocks).
- Check operation of all switches; make sure things that should work do.
- If you have spoke wheels, get them checked at the dealer for spoke tension!
- Change air and fuel filters.
- Check brake and hydraulic clutch fluid levels.
- Check clutch and brake cables.
- Check every bolt, nut, screw you can get to, make sure things are tight.
- Check your luggage, make sure straps are not rotted or torn. (I have dodged sleeping bags, small luggage bags and other things falling off bikes...not fun for Road Guards at 90+mph)
- Make sure your bike is ready. If nothing else, take it to a dealer and have them go over it for you. The money you spend there will not compare to the funds it will cost you if things go wrong and you are 3500 miles from home.
- Make SURE you are ready, get the bike out and practice speed control at 65 mph by easy throttle movements NOT brakes. Practice slow maneuvering; we all know how to ride at highway speeds but it's those slow maneuvers we will be needing that may need to be honed a bit. Remember, we will be maneuvering in close proximity to other bikes (6-8 inches between bikes at times)—be ready for it.
- If you plan on riding two-up, take a few rides two-up and practice rider and driver communications. If you are a rider, your eyes are just as important as the driver's in a close formation ride. You are NOT a sight-seer—you are part of the overall bike safety team. This will be my 4th year as a Road Guard. Our job starts the morning you all get to the parking lot at the truck stop. When you come into the lot there at Rancho Cucamonga, please go SLOW, and tell the Road Guards which route you will be taking so we can get you to the proper lines. Have your gas tank FULL. Re-check your luggage one last time—make sure it's tight and secured on your bike. There will be a bunch of riders, bikes, media, and normal traffic in that parking lot so be careful and keep your head up.

## ► OUR STORIES

### LETTER FROM RAINELLE SCHOOL

*The following was received by West Virginia State Coordinator Denise “Krispy” Ferris.*



Denise,

I would like to share several things with you and RFTW. First, I personally want to thank everyone from RFTW who has done something nice for our school between visits. I received gifts for the children from many of the riders. For example, we have received pencils, book markers, photographs, book bags, key holders, lanyards, coloring books, and, as you can see, the list goes on and on.

Second, I am very pleased to announce that we are scheduled to have a new Rainelle School by 2011. The voters of Greenbrier County voted to pass a bond to build a new school for the community of Rainelle. The new school is to be built behind the old school.

Third, our students participated in the Agent Orange Balloon Release last November. I have attached a picture of our children participating in the balloon release to acknowledge awareness of the deadly affects of Agent Orange and remember those who have suffered from its effects.

Last but not least, we want to acknowledge RFTW for its overwhelming support of Rainelle Elementary Students. We look forward to seeing all of you in May. May God watch over our riders.

John Lewis, Principal

## **THE WALL**

### **By No-Chute**

In May of 2007, for the first time in 40 years, I faced The Wall. I had an uncontrollable rush of emotions as I faced this holy place. I could not control my tears, crying, feeling of helplessness, as I saw the names of those more deserving than me. Warriors all, who deserve the very best—I hope they smile at the creation of the most holy spot for any Vietnam Vet.

I recall in 2007 that some people decided to protest at The Wall on March 17. Veterans heard about it and while the protesters numbered 5,000 organized with busses and banners, permits and all, they were surprised when they met 35,000 veterans visiting The Wall that day and most of the night. They stood and protected The Wall in a non-violent manner, but not backing down either. The Wall is ours and it touches our soul in a way that no one can imagine. Good memories and those we block are there at The Wall.

When we leave Rancho Cucamonga on May 13 2009, at 0800 we will number 500 to 1000 riders and we will grow to 5,000 as we go across America. On-ramps will be closed for 10 minutes. It is an awesome sight. State police in most of the states, except for California, help us. They know. We rode through downtown Albuquerque NM and all the ramps were closed going in both directions; traffic stopped, thousands lined the overpasses, and American flags waved. We meet other groups in Washington D.C. and number 400,000 or more when we parade in Washington D. C. The President of the United States has met with our leaders. We are too big to ignore.

Our mission is healing and a quest to find out what true America is about as we ride across the United States of America in a central route and southern route. Others who can't join us let us know with banners on overpasses and greeting us at lunches, dinners, and even at gas stations. We ride for those on The Wall to keep their honor. We ride for those who can't and wish they were joining us. We ride for those still left behind from every war restless until they are home. They KNOW we will not stop until they are all home. We know we will not stop until they are all home.

We are absolute in our resolve.

## **HOLLYWOOD**

By Cowboy, RFTWSRC 2008

Having received numerous emails concerning Hollywood and his not delivering items purchased during RFTW 2008, I felt it time to offer an explanation on this subject, possibly long overdue. It should have been explained during the past few years' Runs.

Hollywood first became a *participant* on RFTW 2004. He explained his ideas for filming and photographing RFTW's Mission by accompanying RFTWSR across the country and documenting the Run. He is just a *participant* like the rest of us. He is **not** an **official** RFTW videotographer/photographer, nor has he ever been. After the first few days he commented that he had no idea how much tape he was going to be using on the Run. I think he had the idea that he would use a tape a day. He explained to everyone (riders) that he spoke with about his plans. He also began taking advance payments for the DVD he was to produce, with the promise of a delivery time of approximately two months after the conclusion of The Run.

Fast forward two months. No DVDs; thus emails began going to his address—no replies, and phone calls went to voice mail without callbacks. Numerous emails began going back and forth between riders (myself included) who had prepaid, concerning the lack of responses from Hollywood. Pity the poor Phoenix area riders that were called upon to try to get answers for us all. Promises of delivery were made, dates came and went, still no DVDs. Emails became semi threatening, even to the point of the word lynching being used. As a matter of fact, there are photos of a noose hanging off the windshield of my bike on the '05 run.

Fast forward again to May of 2005 at the Ontario host hotel. Hollywood arrives with DVDs and photos in hand. Has the list of all of us that paid and began distributing them. Lets make a long story a little shorter . . . RFTW 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 video and photographs taken, promises of delivery, lack of delivery, and lack of return emails or phone calls. May of 2006, 2007, 2008 previous years DVDs and photos available.

Thus, we who have dealt with Hollywood all these years have learned the following. His intentions are good, his DVDs and photos are awesome, his delivery dates, email and phone response's in plain English suck. Why do we keep going back and waiting for his always late DVDs??? Because his DVDs alone have done more to promote RFTW and its mission than what a lot of us combined have done. He always is front and center at our stops donating DVDs to the various folks that are supporting us. He also, we must remember, has another job.

Am I making excuses for Hollywood? **NO**, I am just trying to set the record straight for a person that has done much for RFTW over the years.

Do I condone his delivery date broken promises? **NO**.

Do I condone his lack of communication to riders who have placed orders? **NO**.

Would I, if a Route Coordinator again, welcome him back? **YES, ABSOLUTELY**.

## **MISSING THE RUN**

**By Ron "Eagle" Graham**

[rlg2639@yahoo.com](mailto:rlg2639@yahoo.com)

I'm from western Colorado, and this would have been my second Run For The Wall. But due to health problems I will not be able to ride anymore. That in itself is bad enough, but to not be able to ride with you all is killing me. I want to wish everyone God speed. Ride safe and have the best ride of your life.

## ► **OTHER STORIES**

### **THE VISIT**

*Thanks to Monsoon for sending this.*

My dad, Angelo, was in the hospital in Tacoma, Washington. A former Marine and veteran of the Korean War, he was having his third knee replacement surgery. A long and very painful operation was going to be made even worse, because dad was going through it alone. There was no one to hold his hand, no familiar soft voices to reassure him. His wife was ill and unable to accompany him or even visit during his weeklong stay. My sisters and brother lived in California, and I lived even farther away in Indiana. There wasn't even anyone to drive him to the hospital, so he had arrived that morning by cab. The thought of my dad lying there alone was more than I could stand. But what could I do from here? I picked up the phone and called information for the Puyallup, Washington Marine Corps recruiting station, where I joined the Marines ten years before. I thought if I could talk to a Marine and explain the situation, maybe one of them would visit my dad. I called the number. A man answered the phone and in a very confident voice said, "United States Marines, Sergeant Vanes. May I help you?" Feeling just as certain, I replied, "Sergeant Vanes, you may find this request a little strange, but this is why I'm calling." I proceeded to tell him who I was and that my father was also a former Marine and 100 percent disabled from the Korean War. I explained that he was in the hospital, alone, without anyone to visit and asked if Sergeant Vanes would please go and see him. Without hesitation, he answered, "Absolutely." Then I asked, "If I send flowers to the recruiting station, would you deliver them to my dad when you go to the hospital?" "Ma'am, I will be happy to take the flowers to your dad. I'll give you my address. You send them, and I will make sure he receives them," he replied.

The next morning, I sent the flowers to Sergeant Vane's office just as we had planned. I went to work, and that evening, I returned home and phoned my dad to inquire about his surprise visitor. If you have ever talked with a small child after that child has just seen Santa Claus, you will understand the glee I heard in my dad's voice. "I was just waking up when I thought I saw two Marines in their dress blue uniforms standing at the foot of my bed," he told me excitedly. "I thought I had died and gone to Heaven. But they were really there!" I began to laugh, partly at his excitement, but also because he didn't even mention his operation. He felt so honored. Two Marines he had never met took time out to visit an old Marine like him. He told me again and again how sharp they looked and how all the nurses thought he was so important. "But how did you ever get them to do that?" he asked me. "It was easy. We are all Marines, Dad, past and present. It's the bond."

After hanging up with my dad, I called Sergeant Vanes to thank him for visiting my dad. And to thank him for the extra things he did to make it special: wearing his dress blue uniform and bringing another Marine along. He even took a digital camera with him. He had pictures taken of the two Marines with my dad right beside his bed. That evening, he emailed them to me so that I could see for myself that my dad was not alone and he was going to be okay. As for the flowers, they hardly mattered, but I was glad for the opportunity to express my feelings. The card read, "Daddy, I didn't want just anyone bringing you flowers, so I sent the world's finest. Semper Fi."

## **MEETING ROBLEY REX**

**By John Fenzel, March 26, 2009**

<http://johnfenzel.typepad.com>

Today, I had the privilege of meeting 107 year old World War I veteran Robley Rex in Louisville, Kentucky. It's difficult to adequately convey in words what it's like to meet someone like Robley because, quite simply, there are no others even remotely like him. Now on the verge of his 108th birthday, Robley Rex is a Kentucky native who still retains his distinct Kentucky accent and southern gentleman charm. At the moment I met him, I was struck by how remarkably vivacious Robley is today. We came in our Army Combat Uniform (ACUs), and I could immediately see Robley sit up straight in his chair with his white dress shirt and bow tie. His eyes brightened, and a broad smile covered his face. He extended his hand to us, and I immediately felt a large strong hand firmly grip my own—at that moment, I immediately knew Robley Rex was in very good health for his age. What I was not fully prepared for was the total recall this exceptional man had—of his experiences, acquaintances, and historic details from his life—as far back as 95 years ago!



"What is your last name, again?" he asked. "Fenzel," I answered.

"F-E-N-Z-E-L," Robley spelled, and then pointed at his forehead. "That name rings a bell with me," he said. "I knew a Fenzel."

I explained to him that my grandfather had fought during World War I, along with his brothers. Robley Rex deployed to Brest, France in the waning years of World War I as an 18 year old military intelligence Soldier who translated German documents and radio intercepts into English. I explained to him that my grandfather and his brothers were from Indiana, lived in Chicago before they deployed to

France to fight in the war as well.

"I think I may have known one of them!"

"Did you ever meet General John J. Pershing," I asked?

To my surprise, Robley nodded enthusiastically. "Yes!" he said. "And not just to shake his hand in passing, but to stand beside him on a few occasions and talk to him! And Oh, what a spit-and-polish general he was!"

Rex paused for a moment, seemingly caught by a fleeting memory. "And you know one of our most decorated Soldiers of the time? It was MacArthur!" He said right away, answering his own question. "Pershing told young Captain MacArthur he was a hero, but he was putting too much at risk because, as The Blackjack [Pershing] told MacArthur, 'you have a bad habit of charging the front line beside your troops--and that cannot work well for long,'" Rex said with a scolding index finger, reenacting Pershing's faux reprimand.

Rex then turned to us, "Do you know MacArthur refused to carry a rifle on the front lines? He only carried his swagger stick!" Robley Rex shook his head, "And do you know what MacArthur told Pershing?" he asked, eyebrows raised. "He said, 'Sir, no bullet made has had my name on it yet!'"

I asked Robley what his best memory was from World War I? Again, Rex became lost in his thoughts for just a moment. Watching him closely, I realized I was witnessing a phenomenon I might never again see: someone retreating 90 years in the recesses of one's mind to pick a dominant positive memory from a traumatic time in our history.

Suddenly, Rex was looking me level in the eyes, but smiling brightly. "It would have to be the absolute discipline we all had as Soldiers," Rex answered. "You see, if a corporal told you to do something...to pick something up...to deliver something, you didn't delay! You did it right away! That was our culture. It was expected!"

Robley Rex remembered his company commander, Captain Lawrence, by name. "Captain Lawrence went to West Point and was classmates with Eisenhower and MacArthur," he explained. "And if Captain Lawrence called for you, you better be there quick!" Rex said, smiling.

I asked Robley how he was feeling at 107? Without hesitation, Robley answered, "I feel really good!"

At that moment, I was struck by something approaching a revelation. "Sir, you always smile, don't you?"

Rex nodded. "I have nothing to complain about." If there were any secrets to Robley's longevity, I was sure of at least one: Robley Rex is an eternal optimist who loves people and has a perpetual zest for life. Politeness and a welcoming smile are his trademarks. He's also an exceptional listener—even with a hearing aid in each ear. When he misses a piece of the conversation, he habitually nods, and smiles, and says, "Thank-You!"

We did not stay long, but I asked Robley if we could join him for his 108th birthday in May. His eyes lit up-- "I'd be honored!"

We collectively shook our heads. "No, Mr. Rex, the honor would be ours." I looked back at Robley Rex as we left him.

He was saluting us.

## **LOUISIANA GUARDSMEN “RUN FOR THE WALL” Soldiers honor fallen comrades in motorcycle pilgrimage**

By Cpl. Angela Fry  
527th Engineer Battalion Public Affairs Representative

RUSTON, LA. – Memorial Day is a time to honor fallen heroes of both past and present military conflicts. To members of the Armed Forces, honoring fallen comrades is something they face on a daily basis.

Louisiana National Guard Soldiers from Alexandria and Northeast Louisiana took the opportunity to join more than 600 veterans, current service members and supporters of the United States Armed Forces in a leg from Monroe, La., to Meridian, Miss., of the 20th annual Run For The Wall motorcycle pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is a grueling four-thousand-mile trek that ends in Washington, DC, on the Saturday before Memorial Day.

The Run, which began as a means of holding the government accountable for the thousands of servicemen whose whereabouts are still unknown, encompasses Veterans from World War II, the Vietnam War, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the conflict in Bosnia.

Lt. Col. Jerry-Scott Crooks of Deville, the administrative officer for the 225th Engineer Brigade at Camp Beauregard, took the opportunity to ride his motorcycle in the Monroe-to-Meridian leg as a means of honoring those who served before him.

“This event provided us with an excellent opportunity to gain knowledge and understand, after all of these years, what our veterans are proud of and why they served,” Crooks said. “It is extremely important to honor these Soldiers; to be honest, I do not feel we do enough.”

Crooks, who joined the Guard in 1980, went on to say that there was no better way to show support for those who served before him than to have the chance to ride side-by-side with these Soldiers.

“This was a massive show of support from thousands of people from across the country,” he explained. “Even though we come from different backgrounds we all share the common bond of the Army Values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

“Regardless of how much support we get from the civilian sector, we understand each other better than anyone else,” said Crooks, who will deploy to Iraq in 2009 with his brigade. “We are different. We do what we do because of those values. Most people do not understand this.”

For Staff Sgt. Perry Pee of Eros, La., the feeling of camaraderie between all the riders was an overwhelming emotion.



“I cannot express the emotions that I felt listening to the countless stories of many of these Veterans,” said Pee, a federal technician assigned to Detachment 2 of the 844th Engineer Company in Ruston. “While some of these Veterans are from World War II and the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, most of them served in Vietnam.”

“My oldest brother served two tours in Vietnam,” Pee added. “He doesn’t like to talk about that time in his life. These men and women gave me insight into what he might have gone through.”

Along with his pride in participating in this year’s run, Pee vows that he will eventually make the complete journey to Washington D.C. with the formation.

“Next year, I will go all the way to D.C.,” the veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom stressed. “Now that I know what The Run is about, I feel it is even more important to give support to our Veterans.”

“I serve in a time when many of even our young service members are Veterans,” he said. “I want them to know how important it is not to forget those who fought and lost their lives before them and that includes the Soldiers who have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The annual pilgrimage is a 12-day motorcycle formation to the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C. The Saturday before Memorial Day, the riders visit the Wall and other military memorials. The weekend ends with the Rolling Thunder Parade, which consists of more than 350,000 motorcycles from the central and southern routes of The Run.

The Rolling Thunder Parade routinely starts in the parking lot of the Pentagon, travels through downtown Washington, D.C, and ends at the Vietnam Wall. The Run For The Wall pays homage to 1,800 Soldiers unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, 8,000 from Korea, 78,000 from World War II and Navy pilot Scott Speicher from the Gulf War.

Additional information about the Run for the Wall and information on how to register for future events can be obtained from [www.rftw.org](http://www.rftw.org).

## **HISTORY OF THE POW/MIA BRACELET**

*The first POW bracelets were made by Carol Bates, who now works for the Defense POW-Missing Persons Office. The bracelets come in various finishes and on each bracelet is engraved, at a minimum, the name, rank, service, loss date, and country of loss of a missing man from the Vietnam War. Here is Carol's article on the origin of the bracelets.*

By Carol Bates Brown

In recent months, several individuals have contacted me looking for information on the origin of the POW/MIA bracelets worn during the early 1970s. The following is offered for those interested in learning the history of the bracelet phenomena.



I was the National Chairman of the POW/MIA Bracelet Campaign for VIVA (Voices In Vital America), the Los Angeles based student organization that produced and distributed the bracelets during the Vietnam War. Entertainers Bob Hope and Martha Raye served with me as honorary co-chairmen.

The idea for the bracelets was started by a fellow college student, Kay Hunter, and me, as a way to remember American prisoners of war suffering in captivity in Southeast Asia. In late 1969 television personality Bob Dornan (who several years later was elected to the US Congress) introduced us and several other members of

VIVA to three wives of missing pilots. They thought our student group could assist them in drawing public attention to the prisoners and missing in Vietnam. The idea of circulating petitions and letters to Hanoi demanding humane treatment for the POWs was appealing, as we were looking for ways college students could become involved in positive programs to support US soldiers without becoming embroiled in the controversy of the war itself. The relatives of the men were beginning to organize locally, but the National League of POW/MIA Families had yet to be formed.

During that time Bob Dornan wore a bracelet he had obtained in Vietnam from hill tribesmen, which he said always reminded him of the suffering the war had brought to so many. We wanted to get similar bracelets to wear to remember US POWs, so rather naively, we tried to figure out a way to go to Vietnam. Since no one wanted to fund two sorority-girl types on a tour to Vietnam during the height of the war, and our parents were livid at the idea, we gave up and Kay Hunter began to check out ways to make bracelets. Soon other activities drew her attention and she dropped out of VIVA, leaving me, another student Steve Frank, and our adult advisor, Gloria Coppin, to pursue the POW/MIA awareness program. The major problem was that VIVA had no money to make bracelets, although our advisor was able to find a small shop in Santa Monica that did engraving on silver used to decorate horses. The owner agreed to make 10 sample bracelets. I can remember us sitting around in Gloria Coppin's kitchen with the engraver on the telephone, as we tried to figure out what we would put on the bracelets.

This is why they carried only name, rank and date of loss, since we didn't have time to think of anything else.

Armed with the sample bracelets, we set out to find someone who would donate money to make bracelets for distribution to college students. It had not yet occurred to us that adults would want to wear the things, as they weren't very attractive. Several approaches to Ross Perot were rebuffed, to include a proposal that he loan us \$10,000 at 10% interest. We even visited Howard Hughes' senior aides in Las Vegas. They were sympathetic but not willing to help fund our project. Finally in the late summer of 1970, Gloria Coppin's husband donated enough brass and copper to make 1,200 bracelets. The Santa Monica engraver agreed to make them and we could pay him from any proceeds we might realize.

Although the initial bracelets were going to cost about 75 cents to make, we were unsure about how much we should ask people to donate to receive a bracelet. In 1970, a student admission to the local movie theater was \$2.50. We decided this seemed like a fair price to ask from a student for one of the nickel-plated bracelets. We also made copper ones for adults who believed they helped their "tennis elbow." Again, according to our logic adults could pay more, so we would request \$3.00 for the copper bracelets.

At the suggestion of local POW/MIA relatives, we attended the National League of Families annual meeting in Washington, DC in late September. We were amazed at the interest of the wives and parents in having their man's name put on bracelets and in obtaining them for distribution. Bob Dornan, who was always a champion of the POW/MIAs and their families, continued to publicize the issue on his Los Angeles television talk show and promoted the bracelets.

On Veterans Day, November 11, 1970, we officially kicked off the bracelet program with a news conference at the Universal Sheraton Hotel. Public response quickly grew and we eventually got to the point we were receiving over 12,000 requests a day. This also brought money in to pay for brochures, bumper stickers, buttons, advertising and whatever else we could do to publicize the POW/MIA issue. We formed a close alliance with the relatives of missing men -- they got bracelets from us on consignment and could keep some of the money they raised to fund their local organizations. We also tried to furnish these groups with all the stickers and other literature they could give away.

While Steve Frank and I ended up dropping out of college to work for VIVA full time to administer the bracelet and other POW/MIA programs, none of us got rich off the bracelets. VIVA's adult advisory group, headed by

Gloria Coppin, was adamant that we would not have a highly paid professional staff. As I recall the highest salary was \$15,000, a year and we were able to keep administrative costs to less than 20 percent of income.

In all, VIVA distributed nearly five million bracelets and raised enough money to produce untold millions of bumper stickers, buttons, brochures, matchbooks, newspaper ads, etc., to draw attention to the missing men. In 1976, VIVA closed its doors. By then the American public was tired of hearing about Vietnam and showed no interest in the POW/MIA issue.

## ► VETERAN AND VA NEWS

### **TOM SELLECK JOINS MEMORIAL FUND AS NATIONAL SPOKESMAN FOR THE EDUCATION CENTER AT THE WALL**

**Washington, D.C.** – Actor Tom Selleck has joined the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund as national spokesman for the new Education Center being built on the National Mall, said Jan C. Scruggs, founder and president of the Memorial Fund.

Selleck, whose recent television credits include his Emmy-nominated recurring role in the “Jesse Stone” movie of the week franchise, “Jesse Stone: Thin Ice,” and “Boston Legal,” is best known for his work on the television show “Magnum, P.I.” in the 1980s. The series was heralded in the veterans’ community as the first positive media portrayal of Vietnam veterans.

“When Magnum, P.I. came out, it constituted the first positive portrayal of Vietnam veterans in the media, which meant a great deal to those of us who served,” recalled Scruggs. In 1988, Magnum’s trademark wardrobe became part of the Smithsonian collection in Washington, D.C. “When we were looking for someone to help us raise awareness of this important project, Tom’s name came up right away.”

Selleck served in the 160th Infantry of the California Army National Guard during the Vietnam era. He feels a close connection to those who served, and especially to a friend who is remembered on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The Education Center at The Wall is a project developed by the Memorial Fund to help the millions of annual visitors learn about the Memorial, as well as the Vietnam War. While still in the planning stages, exhibits will include a wall of photographs of those whose names are on The Wall, a selection of the over 100,000 items that have been left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a timeline of key military events in the Vietnam War, rotating exhibits and a resource center, where visitors can find in-depth information. A section of the Center will illustrate the legacy of service demonstrated by the American people, showing images of those who served in all of America’s conflicts, from the Revolutionary War to Iraq. The Center will be built under ground near the Vietnam Veterans and Lincoln Memorials.

It is estimated to cost \$75 million to \$100 million to build. Nearly \$18 million has been raised so far, including a \$10 million lead gift from Time Warner.

Selleck will be in Washington in March for the unveiling of the new trailer for *The Wall That Heals*, the half-scale replica of The Wall that travels around the country, bringing the messages of healing and education to people who may not otherwise be able to visit the memorial in Washington. There are several replicas of The Wall in existence, but *The Wall That Heals* is the only one with a traveling museum. The museum is housed in the trailer that is used to transport the replica between communities. This year, the entire exhibit has been revamped by Ralph Appelbaum Associates, the museum design firm that is also planning the exhibits for the Memorial Center. This makes the new *Wall That Heals* museum a smaller version of what is being planned for

the Center. Selleck was on hand for the ceremony on March 26 to unveil the new museum to the public and to talk about the Education Center.

## **OPEN LETTER TO VETERANS**

From Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki

WASHINGTON (March 13, 2009) - Following is an open letter to Veterans from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki:

"My name is Ric Shinseki, and I am a Veteran. For me, serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs is a noble calling. It provides me the opportunity to give back to those who served with and for me during my 38 years in uniform and those on whose shoulders we all stood as we grew up in the profession of arms.

"The Department of Veterans Affairs has a solemn responsibility to all of you, today and in the future, as more Veterans join our ranks and enroll to secure the benefits and services they have earned. I am fully committed to fulfilling President Obama's vision for transforming our department so that it will be well-positioned to perform this duty even better during the 21st Century. We welcome the assistance and advice of our Veterans Service Organizations, other government departments and agencies, Congress, and all VA stakeholders as we move forward, ethically and transparently, so that Veterans and citizens can understand our efforts.

"Creating that vision for transforming the VA into a 21st Century organization requires a comprehensive review of our department. We approach that review understanding that Veterans are central to everything VA does. We know that results count, that the department will be measured by what we do, not what we promise, and that our best days as an organization supporting Veterans are ahead of us. We will fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for ". . . him, who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan . . ." by redesigning and reengineering ourselves for the future.

"Transforming any institution is supremely challenging; I know this from my own experience in leading large, proud, complex, and high-performing organizations through change. But the best organizations must be prepared to meet the challenging times, evolving technology and, most importantly, evolving needs of clients. Historically, organizations that are unwilling or unable to change soon find themselves irrelevant. You and your needs are not irrelevant.

"Veterans are our clients, and delivering the highest quality care and services in a timely, consistent and fair manner is a VA responsibility. I take that responsibility seriously and have charged all of the department's employees for their best efforts and support every day to meet our obligations to you. Our path forward is challenging, but the President and Congress support us. They have asked us to do this well-for you. Veterans are our sole reason for existence and our number one priority—bar none. I look forward to working together with all VA employees to transform our department into an organization that reflects the change and commitment our country expects and our Veterans deserve.

"Thank you, and God bless our military, our Veterans, and our Nation." Signed: Eric K. Shinseki

## **MEDAL OF HONOR Update 02**

The number of Medal of Honor recipients from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can be counted on one hand. Each of the five acted spontaneously and heroically to save the lives of comrades. Each exemplified the medal's criteria of "gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of one's own life above and beyond the call of duty." And each was killed in action or died from wounds received in action. Now, 146 years after the first Medals of Honor

were awarded to living soldiers, it remains to be seen whether anyone will ever again earn a Medal of Honor and survive to accept it. With the exception of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, no other major conflict in modern military history has failed to produce a living recipient of the nation's highest award for valor. And no war has ever produced so few Medal of Honor or service cross recipients. There are several possible reasons: the proliferation of other valor awards; the changing nature of warfare; and a review process that has become so rigorous — and, some say, meddling — that no living person can be good enough to pass all the tests. A *Military Times* analysis of Medal of Honor and service cross awards dating back to 1861, when the MoH was first authorized, shows a sharp decline, rekindling debate on whether the military is properly recognizing today's heroes.

Although numbers don't tell the whole story, America's 20th-century wars produced highly consistent rates of Medal of Honor heroism. From World War I through Vietnam, the rate of Medal of Honor recipients per 100,000 service members stayed between 2.3 (Korea) and 2.9 (World War II). But since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 only five Medals of Honor have been awarded, a rate of 0.1 per 100,000 — one in a million. A similar disparity occurs on the second tier of valor awards: Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross and Air Force Cross. Throughout the 20th century, the rate of service cross recipients per 100,000 troops ranged from a low of 19 in Korea to a high of 167 in World War I. But for the post-9/11 wars, it's only one per 100,000. "All of us are a little concerned about the fact that people aren't being recognized," said Army Reserve Col. Jay Duquette, who recently retired as deputy director of operations at Headquarters, 9th Regional Support Command, Fort Shafter, Hawaii. "There's a perception that somehow the political process has at the Defense Department or wherever created some sort of limitation on higher-level decorations," Duquette said. "I don't know if that is true. But that is a perception that exists among the lower-level officer corps."

Former Marine Joseph Kinney, a Vietnam veteran who has advocated for greater recognition of heroism in combat, is convinced that's true. The military awards system, he said, is "broken." Kinney testified before the House Armed Services Committee in 2006, urging the Pentagon to be more consistent in applying award criteria and to speed the review process for Medal of Honor nominees. In an interview, Kinney noted how much longer award reviews took in the George W. Bush years versus the Clinton administration. It took just 6½ months for the Clinton administration to posthumously award Medals of Honor to Army Master Sgt. Gary Gordon and Army Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart for heroic action in Somalia on 3 OCT 93. By contrast, during the Bush years, the speediest Medal of Honor approval took 18 months. One took as long as three years. "The system has failed because of this inordinate fear that somebody is going to get the Medal of Honor [and] be an embarrassment," Kinney said. "They decided that the Medal of Honor should go not only to people who are brave, but pure."

Defense and service officials deny that the process has become politicized. The approach used to recognize acts of valor remains unchanged, Pentagon spokeswoman Eileen Lainez said. "Each recommendation is carefully considered based on the merits of the individual's actions, eyewitness accounts and other supporting evidence," she said. "The standard for the Medal of Honor is high, as one would expect." Commandant Gen. James Conway also said the standards haven't changed. But he was at a loss to explain why no living service member has been awarded the Medal of Honor in these past 7½ years of war. "The nature of the award isn't such that you have to be dead to receive it. That's never been the standard for awards. It's not the standard today," Conway said. "It's arguably happenstance that the first five out of Iraq or Afghanistan have been posthumous. But that's not the standard and that's not the way commanders are looking at it in the field."

Comparing medal statistics and heroes throughout the ages is difficult. It's like comparing athletes from one generation to another: Which was better, the 1960s Celtics of Bill Russell or the 1990s Bulls of Michael Jordan? Who was a better boxer, Muhammad Ali or Mike Tyson? In sports, many factors muddy the waters of comparison: rules changes, more specialized physical training and increasingly bigger, faster and stronger athletes. Similarly, a variety of factors complicate valor comparisons: the evolution of the awards system, the proliferation of valor awards, variants of asymmetric warfare. Fred Borch, a retired Army officer and regimental historian for the Judge Advocate General's Corps who writes history columns for Military Times, noted that the vast majority of attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq result from improvised explosive devices. "It's pretty hard to be a hero against an IED," he said. Charles Mugno, director of the Institute of Heraldry at Fort Belvoir, Va., said the Medal of Honor essentially was the military's sole valor award until 1917. Today, there are two dozen valor decorations. "A lot of Medals of Honor were given out because there was no substitute," Mugno said. "If you look at the citations for [different campaigns], you'll see a significant difference in acts of valor and degree of valor."

The Hall of Valor database contains 3,467 Medal of Honor citations. To see how many have been awarded to the various services refer to <http://www.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/list.php?category=MilitaryBranches>. For a breakdown of awards by conflict refer to <http://www.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/list.php?category=ConflictPeriods>. For additional info refer to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society websites <http://www.cmohs.org> & <http://www.homeofheroes.com/moh/history/society.html> . [Source: NavyTimes Brendan McGarry article 28 Mar 09 ++]

## **HELP FOR VETERANS**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6, 2009 - For veterans struggling financially due to a job loss or decreased income, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers an assortment of programs that can relieve the costs of health care or provide care at no cost.

"With the downturn in the economy, VA recognizes that many veterans will feel the effects," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Therefore, it is important that eligible veterans learn of the many ways VA has to help them afford the health care they have earned."

Veterans whose previous income was ruled too high for VA health care may be able to enter the VA system based upon a hardship if their current year's income is projected to fall below federal income thresholds due to a job loss, separation from service or some other financial setback. Veterans determined eligible due to hardship can avoid copays applied to higher-income veterans. Qualifying veterans may be eligible for enrollment and receive health care at no cost.

Also eligible for no-cost VA care are most veterans who recently returned from a combat zone. They are entitled to five years of free VA care. The five-year "clock" begins with their discharge from the military, not their departure from the combat zone.

Each VA medical center across the country has an enrollment coordinator available to provide veterans information about these programs. Veterans may also contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit the VA health eligibility website at [www.va.gov/healtheligibility](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility).

## **VA MEDICAL FOSTER HOME**

VA's new medical foster home (MFH) program is helping veterans with home care and assistive devices when they are too old or infirm to live alone. It has been implemented at a number VA facilities and VHA plans to expand their program to 31 more sites. MFH is a unique partnership of adult foster home and Home Based Primary Care (HBPC), or Spinal Cord Injury Home Care (SCI-HC) serving those veterans that are in need of greater care. The program is designed to help veterans when they no longer can live alone. The veteran can choose to live in a home-like environment while they continue to receive their primary healthcare through the VA. In the past, many veterans living alone with no family support would have had to be placed into a nursing home. MFH offers a safe, favorable, and less costly alternative. MFH finds a caregiver in the community who is willing to take a veteran into their home and provide 24-hour supervision as well as needed personal assistance. The expectation is that this is a long-term commitment, where the veteran may live for the remainder of his/her life. Veterans who enter MFH are enrolled for VA healthcare and all meet one or more criteria for nursing home as well as HBPC criteria and must be enrolled in that program.

The cost of the MFH is the responsibility of the veteran who pays for his care using his own personal funds that may include a monthly benefit check from the VA; the veteran may receive concurrent home hospice care. All homes will be required to meet VA guidelines and any applicable state requirements. The benefits of this program are that sponsors are able to give back to our Nation's veterans, augment their income, and gain companionship while veterans are able to live in a compassionate and home-like environment, with needed supervision and support. The caregivers are paid on average \$1200 to \$2400 per month to provide this care. This includes room and board, 24-hour supervision, assistance with medications, and whatever personal care is needed. MFH is a very cost-effective alternative to nursing home placement and an opportunity for the caregiver to work from home. More than 400 veterans have been placed in MFH homes thus far. This program has been very successful at VA Medical Centers across the country and is currently implemented in:

- Augusta, GA 706-733-0188 x 7579
- Bay Pines, FL 727-398-6661 x 2609
- Boston, MA 857-203-5681
- Fayetteville, AR 479-587-5805
- Little Rock, AR 501-257-2048
- Memphis, TN 901-523-8990 x 7748
- Miami, FL 305-575-7000 x 3674
- Salem, VA 540-982-2463 x 2147
- Salt Lake City, UT 801-582-1565 x 2180
- San Juan, PR 787-641-7582 x 19800
- Sioux Falls, SD 605-333-6861
- St Louis, MO 314-652-4100 x 66387
- Tampa, FL 813-903-3611

If you have questions, know of community members who might be interested in serving as a caregiver, or of a veteran in need of MFH assistance, contact the MFH Coordinator at your local VA Medical Center. For veterans in need of any other services, contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Social Work Service: <http://vaww1.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash=1> . To determine availability of MFH in your area, contact (813) 610-0859 (east of the Mississippi) or (612) 396-8666 (west of the Mississippi). [Source: VA Public Relations Office 26 Feb 09 ++]

## **VETERAN'S PENSIONS Update 01**

If you are a wartime veteran with a limited income and you are no longer able to work, you may qualify for a Veterans Disability Pension or the Veterans Pension for Veterans 65 or older. Many veterans of wartime service

are completely unaware of the fact that if they are 65 or older and on a limited income they may qualify for a VA Pension without being disabled. An estimated 2 million impoverished veterans and their widows are not receiving the VA pension they deserve because they do not know about it. The VA has had limited success in getting the information to them. Generally, you may be eligible if:

- You were discharged from service under conditions other than dishonorable, and
- You served at least 90 days of active military service 1 day of which was during a war time period. If you entered active duty after September 7, 1980, generally you must have served at least 24 months or the full period for which called or ordered to active duty (There are exceptions to this rule), and
- Your countable family income is below a yearly limit set by law (The yearly limit on income is set by Congress), and
- You are age 65 or older, or, you are permanently and totally disabled, not due to your own willful misconduct.

Contact the VA for more information.

### **COMBAT VETERAN HEALTH CARE Update 04:**

A World War II-era law established that veterans who “engaged in combat with the enemy” receive special treatment when they seek disability compensation, making it less burdensome for them to prove the injury was from their time in the service. But members of veterans groups testified 24 MAR before a House Veterans Affairs subcommittee that the law is outdated, and some veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are struggling to obtain disability benefits because they don’t meet the definition. There is particular concern, they said, that the rule interferes with disability benefits for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder whose trauma may not be documented by the military. PTSD can affect people who experience a traumatic event. Symptoms can include flashbacks and anxiety. At his news conference on 24 MAR, President Barack Obama acknowledged that returning veterans haven’t always been given the benefits and treatment they need for post-traumatic stress and serious brain injuries. “Unfortunately, over the last several years, all too often the VA has been under-resourced when it comes to dealing with things like post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, dealing with some of the backlogs in admission to VA hospitals,” Obama said, in response to a question about spending in defense and veterans programs.

The mental disorder has affected service members in non-infantry roles such as truck drivers or cooks, who on today’s battlefields are vulnerable to roadside bombs or mortar attacks. They often lack a combat infantry badge or other documentation to prove their battlefield experience. The Veterans Affairs Department has said about half of all disability claims for PTSD are approved, and the majority of denials come because the veteran lacks evidence of injury related to his time in the service, according to a report last year from the Congressional Budget Office. Rep. John Hall (D-NY), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs subcommittee, which held the hearing, said the law should be updated to define a combat veteran as any veteran who served in a combat theater of operations or in combat against a hostile force. “There should be a better way for VA to assist veterans suffering from PTSD to adjudicate those claims without being burdensome, stressful and adversarial,” Hall said. It’s estimated that if the law is changed, thousands more veterans would seek disability compensation for PTSD, potentially costing hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Bradley Mayas, director of the Veterans Benefits Administration’s Compensation and Pension Service, told the subcommittee that changes have been made to make it easier for veterans with PTSD to qualify for disability compensation. Antonette Zees, deputy chief officer for mental health services at the Veterans Health Administration, noted that the VA provides health care for five years for the recent veterans, so some veterans are getting treatment for PTSD even if they are not receiving disability benefits for it. [Source: Army Times Kimberly Hefling article 25 Mar 09 ++]

### **ATOMIC VETS Update 03**



An estimated group of more than 200,000 former soldiers were witnesses to above-ground and undersea atomic tests conducted between 1945 and 1963. Nicknamed “atomic veterans,” the soldiers were part of the testing because various governments wanted to see if troops could operate on battlefields contaminated by radiation from nuclear bombs. In 1990, Congress passed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, offering veterans who took part in the tests a payment of \$75,000 each. Payments of \$100,000 were offered to miners employed in above-ground or underground uranium mines scattered across the western U.S. Those working downwind of the Nevada test site were offered payments of \$50,000. “They’re called atomic veterans, but they should be called atomic guinea pigs,” Canadian lawyer Tony Merchant said recently. Merchant represents a group of Canadian veterans who filed a class-action lawsuit in FEB 09 seeking compensation from Canada’s government for their radiation exposure and resulting ailments. Many of the U.S. atomic veterans have a taxing list of infirmities ranging from degenerative arthritis to a coronary artery bypass, diabetes and lymphoma (cancer of the lymph nodes). Lymphoma is one of 16 cancers the government presumes to be military service-connected if a veteran participated in a radiation-risk activity.

Today, the largest group of atomic veteran survivors is the National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV), and Gary Thornton is a member and former commander of the state chapter. The 225,000 military personnel involved with testing between 1945 and 1963 weren’t even authorized to speak about their experiences, as the information about their service remained classified until 1996, he said. The NAAV Web site states there are now as many as 195,000 atomic veterans left across America who either don’t know that their oath of secrecy about their service has been rescinded, or are not aware of the potential monetary benefits due them for their radiation-induced illnesses. Most of the surviving atomic veterans have long ago given up on seeing any medical or financial compensation for their service-related injuries, Thornton said. [Source: ArmyTimes David Clouston (Salina Journal) article 27 Mar 09 ++]

## **VA THIRD-PARTY INSURERS Update 02**

The leader of the nation’s largest veteran’s organization says he is “deeply disappointed and concerned” after a meeting with President Obama on 17 MAR to discuss a proposal to force private insurance companies to pay for the treatment of military veterans who have suffered service-connected disabilities and injuries. The Obama administration recently revealed a plan to require private insurance carriers to reimburse the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in such cases.

President Obama on 18 MAR dropped his proposal to collect money from private insurance companies for treating veterans with service-connected disabilities at Veterans Affairs Department hospitals. The administration had considered placing the provision in its fiscal 2010 budget request but met stiff resistance from members of Congress and veterans’ groups. White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said the administration had been “considering the third-party billing issue . . . to maximize the resources available for veterans. However, the president listened to concerns raised by the veterans’ groups that this might, under certain circumstances, affect veterans’ and their families’ ability to access health care. Therefore, the president has instructed that its consideration be dropped.”

## **VA CAREGIVER PROGRAM Update 01**

Researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine are recruiting participants for a pilot program aimed at improving at-home caregiving for U.S. veterans. The study will assess the effectiveness of an online workshop that provides training to at-home caregivers of veterans who suffer from traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Veterans who are caring for people with these disorders are also eligible. The six-week-long workshop, called "Building Better Caregivers," will train informal caregivers, such as family members and friends, how to not only provide better care, but also to manage their own emotions, stress and physical health. The interactive online workshop will also provide a

forum in which small groups of caregivers can share personal experiences and insights on solving problems, handling difficult emotions and celebrating milestones. Each week, participants will be asked to log on at least three times and spend two hours on lessons and homework.

Potential participants must be either a veteran who is a caregiver or a caregiver of a veteran; provide caregiving services for at least 10 hours a week; be over age 18; and reside in Hawaii, California or southern Nevada. The injured person must have TBI, PTSD or physician-diagnosed memory loss. To learn more, refer to <http://caregivers.stanford.edu>, call Diana Laurent at (650) 723-7935, or e-mail [caregivers@med.stanford.edu](mailto:caregivers@med.stanford.edu). [Source: Medical News Today article 13 Mar 09 ++]

## **VET RESOURCE**

The American Veterans & Service Members Survival Guide is available on line at [www.veteransforamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/survival-guide.pdf](http://www.veteransforamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/survival-guide.pdf). The new publication, provided by the Veterans for America organization, is a follow-up to the 1985 The Viet Vet Survival Guide. It is a downloadable no-cost resource for veterans of all periods. The guide will help a veteran understand what's going on, it is not a substitute for a good lawyer or other advocate. And it isn't the only source of information. The book gives particular emphasis to servicemembers and veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, while providing adequate information for vets of all other eras. It describes in depth:

- The problems of the military community,
- The benefits and services available to present and former servicemembers, and
- Issues that will be decided in the next several years.

It will help readers understand how various agencies work not just in theory but in practice and how they can cut through the bureaucracy and confusion and get the benefits and services to which they are entitled. Topics included in its 599 pages, among others, address frequent call-ups from the Guard and Reserve, getting out of the military, the Department of Veterans Affairs, disability compensation, pensions, medical care, educational benefits, housing benefits, claims and appeals, discharge upgrading, the criminal justice system, employment, reemployment rights, benefits for family members, the special problems of women servicemembers and veterans and domestic relations issues. While it focuses on programs run by the VA it also deals with programs administered by other federal agencies and the states

## **VVA ANNOUNCES NEW ALLIANCE**

(Washington, D.C.) – Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), on February 25, 2009, formally debuted a new alliance that will offer veterans, their families, and health professionals a new resource for information about healthcare risks experienced by those who served in the military. The Veterans Health Council, made up of veterans and health organizations, announced its mission, participants, and Website, [www.veteranshealth.org](http://www.veteranshealth.org), at a media event at the National Press Club.

“The mission of the Veterans Health Council is to improve the health of veterans by creating an ongoing forum for health professionals, employee representatives, advocacy organizations, and healthcare firms,” said John Rowan, VVA National President. “We want to inform veterans and their families about health risks related to their military service and the healthcare available to them; educate healthcare communities about the multiple health issues associated with military service; develop educational materials for medical schools, nursing schools, teaching hospitals, and related entities; and advocate on behalf of healthcare initiatives for veterans.” Up to 80 percent of veterans do not use the VA – the Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities – for their healthcare needs. VVA attributes this significant underutilization to the fact that most veterans are simply unaware that they may have health problems related to their military service--diseases, conditions, and maladies which entitle them to compensation and medical care from the VA, if they so choose.

The Veterans Health Council web site provides information on health conditions associated with military service and provides links to healthcare sites related to specific diseases. Most importantly, it offers general information on how to file a claim for disability compensation and provides a locator service for accredited veterans' service representatives who can assist in filing claims for benefits.

## ► POW/MIA UPDATES

### **Americans Still Missing (from the POW Network on 2-10-09)**

**World War I: 4,452**

**World War II: 74, 384**

**Korea: 8,178**

**Vietnam: 1, 708**

### **A breakdown of the 1708 military by status from Vietnam**

**KILLED IN ACTION/BODY NOT RECOVERED: 882**

**DIED IN CAPTIVITY/REMAINS NOT RETURNED: 029**

**PRESUMPTIVE FINDING OF DEATH: 797**

**Cold War: 125**

**Desert Shield: 12**

**Desert Storm: 2**

**Iraq: 5:**

## ► BRINGING THEM HOME

### **HOPPER, EARL P., JR.**



Funeral services for Lt Col Earl P. Hopper, Jr., United States Air Force Academy Class of 1965, will be held at 1:00 PM on April 3rd, 2009 at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona. Lt Col Hopper was born in California. He was the eldest son born into a military family and had the opportunity to travel worldwide as a young man. He started an active and accomplished high school career at Tombstone High School, Arizona. He later graduated with athletic and academic honors from Glendale High School, class of 1961. Upon commissioning and flight training, Lt Col Hopper was assigned to the 13th Tactical Fighter Squadron based at Udorn Airbase, Thailand. During this assignment, Lt Col Hopper was shot down over North Vietnam on January 10th, 1968 and declared

Missing in Action. Lt Col Hopper's status remained MIA through the course of the war, and for many years thereafter. In 1982, his status was changed to Killed in Action. Lt Col Hopper's crash site was discovered in November 1993. After numerous visits to and years of excavation of the crash site, his remains were recovered and his identification confirmed on 16 January 2002. His awards and decorations include his Air Force Aviator Wings, Purple Heart, Air Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. Earl Jr. was preceded in burial by his father Col. Earl P. Hopper, Sr., mother Bette L. Hopper, and sister Rebecca. His legacy will live on through his brothers Michael B. Hopper of Litchfield Park, AZ; Larry D. Hopper of Las Vegas, NV; Daniel W. Hopper of Phoenix, AZ; David "Buck" Hopper of Wittmann, AZ; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews and cousins. As a solemn reminder of his devotion to duty and country, Lt Col Hopper's name is included on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Walls in Washington DC, Phoenix, AZ, and Honolulu, HI. He is also one of 170 inscribed on the Air

Force Academy's War Memorial commemorating graduates who have fallen in battle. Finally, over forty-one years after Lt Col Hopper's final flight, he will be laid to rest, with the full military honors befitting a hero who gave his life for his country.

## **ROBERT TILLS**

### **Navy pilot, identified by JPAC, buried at Arlington 67 years after death in WW II**

Navy Ensign Robert Tills was born on Mar. 9, 1918. He died Dec. 8, 1941, He was just 23 years old. He was the pilot of a Navy PBY-4 Catalina Flying Boat aircraft. He liked to play guitar. He left behind a beautiful fiancé, his college sweetheart whom he was just weeks away from reuniting with, when he was killed in action. He left behind two younger sisters and his parents. He also left behind a mystery, what had happened to Tills' remains?

The day after the brazen attack on Pearl Harbor, Tills' plane was moored alongside another Navy PBY-4 in Malalag Bay, in eastern Mindanao, Philippine Commonwealth, before Japanese planes known as "Zeros" zoomed in for an attack. Tills and his Radioman, Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Albert E. Layton, took up defensive positions on their aircraft. Tills fired his aircraft machine gun at the Japanese fighter planes as they descended. Tills was killed when his plane was strafed with machine gun fire by the Japanese Zeros. His PBY-4 was engulfed in flames in just a matter of seconds. Layton, who witnessed Tills getting hit, was able to jump from the burning aircraft only moments before it sank. Tills was not recovered from the submerged aircraft. Tills was the first Navy Officer lost in the defense of the Philippine Islands during World War II.



Tills' puzzling case was finally solved by JPAC in 2008. JPAC identified Tills' remains and material evidence more than 66 years after his death. Partial remains, pieces of Tills' plane and some of his personnel items were unilaterally turned over by the Philippine government. Tills was found by local divers and fishermen in Malalag Bay in late 2007 and early 2008. JPAC flew an anthropologist to the Philippines to secure the remains and bring them home for identification.

On Mar. 19 Tills' remains were escorted from JPAC Headquarters in Hawaii to Virginia by Navy Reservist Lt. Cmdr. David Raine 42, Navy Casualty Division, Navy Personnel Command, Tenn., to be returned to his family for burial.

Raine has two connections to Tills: they are both originally from Wisconsin and they are both Navy pilots.

On Monday March 23rd, 2009, it was a crisp, clear day at Arlington National Cemetery where Tills was buried with full military honors, only two weeks after what would've been his 91st birthday. The ceremony included a missing man formation flyover by Navy F-18 jets and an achingly beautiful playing of taps by a Navy bugler. Tills' sister, Jean Aplin, 78, was there and so was his fiancé, Vicki Lee, 89.

As the post-funeral reception began to wind down and the room swirled with storytelling voices, Aplin reflected on the chapter in her family's history that was now coming to a close.

"I feel overwhelmed, I feel like I'm in a dream," Aplin said, "But I'm so happy, I'm so happy to see all our relatives, friends we haven't seen in a long time and I'm just amazed that we had such a turnout for this. "I'm just real proud of them [the military] and I'm glad they are doing this for him and as I said, it's like I'm in a dream" Aplin said. "I can hardly believe it and I love it. I think it was wonderful that they honored him that way and that so many people came."

Aplin said her advice for the families still waiting for answers is, "not to ever give up hope, we waited sixty seven years. It's wonderful the way they're still looking for those that are missing."

## ► EVENTS

### **THE HONOR RUN**

**Washington D.C. to California**

**September 5, 2009**

On September 5, 2009 the 1st Marine Division Association and Chapter 785 of the Vietnam Veterans of America will be holding the first annual "California Honor Run" to raise money for the Construction of a Fisher House and to assist other disabled military members and their families who are in need. The Fisher House will be located at Camp Pendleton.

The Fisher House program is a unique private-public partnership that supports America's military in their time of need. The program recognizes the special sacrifices of our men and women in uniform and the hardships of military service by providing a home for family members to stay while their loved ones receive treatment for injuries sustained in battle.

Author and motivational speaker, Dave Barr, will be leading a contingent of bikers from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (The Wall) in Washington, DC. The ride will cross the country in a show of patriotism and honor. A Northern California route, leaving from Redding, is also being planned. The route will head south to meet in San Marcos. On September 5 the riders will leave San Marcos. We'll ride up I-5, which will be lined at Camp Pendleton by hundreds of 3' x 5' American flags. [See SPONSOR A FLAG] The ride ends at the Oakley World Headquarters in Foothill Ranch, CA, where we'll have an "off the hook" celebration headlined by Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band.

Dave Barr, a Marine Corps Veteran and double amputee, will be joining us in Redding on **May 8, 2009** to provide information on the The Honor Run, the routes from The Wall and Redding, and his motorcycle travels around the world on his Harley-Davidson.

Law enforcement's onboard. So is the 1st Marine Division Association and Vietnam Veterans of America.

See <http://www.thehonorrund.org/> for more information.

### **PURPLE HEART RIDE**

**June 21, 2009**

**Blue Knights Maryland IX, Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club**

Please join us for our fifth annual motorcycle ride, to demonstrate our support for the members of the Armed Forces who have valiantly served our Country, and have been wounded. These brave Americans need our support with their recovery. This "Police escorted" ride, begins in Sykesville, Maryland and proceeds to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington,DC.

REGISTRATION: A donation in the amount of \$25 (more, if your heart dictates) per bike will be collected the morning of the ride. Registration will begin at 7 a.m. and continue until 10 a.m., at which time the ride begins. You MUST register to participate in this ride.

LOCATION: The FREEDOM PARK, Raincliffe Rd., Sykesville, Maryland.

Directions: From Rt. 32, head north into Carroll County. At the first traffic light, Raincliffe Rd., make a right turn. Proceed approx. ¼ miles to the park on your right. From the intersection of Liberty Rd. and Rt. 32, head south on Rt. 32 to the light at Raincliffe Rd. Make a left at that light and proceed to the park on your right.

For more information, check out [www.bkmdix.org](http://www.bkmdix.org)

## ► TAPS

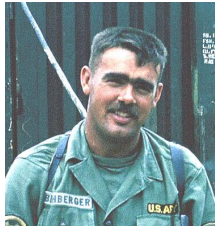
### **Russell Wallace Bennet Norma Jeanne Gallagher**

The father of RFTW's Art Bennett passed away on January 21, 2009. He was a WWII Army Air corps veteran who was shot down and spent the last months of the war in a German POW camp. After the war he was discharged for a short time and then reenlisted in the U.S. Air Force, from which he retired in 1962 after 26 years of service to our country.

On February 5, 2009, Art's mother passed away. Norma Jeanne Gallagher was a WWII Marine.

Art buried his parents March 7 at the National Cemetery in Riverside. Art, we offer our condolences and hope your heavy heart will find solace in the wonderful memories you have of your parents.

### **Paul "Sarge" William Bechberger**



Sarge (AKA Sogman) passed away Friday, January 16, 2009, at the New Life Hospice Center of St. Joseph, Lorain, due to complications from exposure to Agent Orange. Paul was born October 12, 1940, in East Cleveland. He served 26 years in the Army, including two tours of duty in Vietnam, two tours in Germany, and one tour in Korea; he was an infantryman and later a Cavalry scout. During his military career, he earned a Meritorious Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device, the Presidential Unit Citation, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Korea), Air Medal (21st Oak Leaf Cluster), National Defense Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Vietnamese Campaign Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal (4th Award), Aircraft Crewman Badge and Sharpshooter Qualification Badge (M-16 Rifle expert)

Paul was a lifetime member of R.E.A. (Retired Enlisted Association); D.A.V. (Disabled American Veterans) Chapter 49, Elyria; V.F.W. Post 1079, Elyria; and the American Legion.

Sarge was a member of B-Troop 1/9 (65-67). On October 23, 1965, the first real combat test came at the historic order of General Westmoreland to send the First Team into an air assault mission to pursue and fight the enemy across 2,500 square miles of jungle. Troopers of the 1st Brigade and 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry swooped down on the NVA 33rd regiment before it could get away from Plei Me. The enemy regiment was scattered in the confusion and was quickly smashed. SARGE was there!! He always remembered the brothers that fell at Plei Me

We all know someone like Sarge. He got up every day and raised the colors at his house or apartment complex, and took them down every night, with a smile and a salute. He did this rain or shine and later even in his wheel chair. He was a true hero and patriot. He would always have a pot of hot coffee at the house, shared with all who visited. He had many stories; he would sit and share them with me and other Nam Vets, his small circle of friends. I would like to share one story with you now.

During his second tour in-country working with SOG (68-69 Sniper), Sarge came out of the bush. He was, as all of us were at one time or another, dirty, tired, and in need of some rest. He saw a Red Cross station set up in the compound, he walked over and was getting a cup of coffee. The person at the station said hello and had some small talk and then told Sarge, "The coffee is 25 cents." Sarge looked at the person at the station and said something like, "Where do you think I've been that I have a quarter in my \*&@\*%\*# pocket?" He then turned the cup upside down and poured the coffee out. He said to the attendant, "You can keep your damn coffee!" Sarge then turned and walked back into the bush.

Sarge was wounded in-country and had ill effects to the day he passed. He volunteered at the USAFA in the pharmacy just to be near fellow vets and active duty. He always gave of himself to others and was willing to go out of his way to help all.

Sarge never made it to The Wall. He tried to make it to the moving wall here in Colorado Springs. He sat in Memorial park for about 8 hours trying to get to the wall, but he was alone and couldn't make it. How was Sarge connected to Run for the WALL? Sarge was first introduced to the Run after I rode in 2004 and told him about it. His health prevented him from riding. We even attempted to find him a ride in a cage 2005 and 2006, but his health was bad and he elected to follow on the website. When he learned of RFTW he felt renewed and felt that he would make it someday. Well in short he did not make it to The Wall; he was called home before he made it. The run had a great impact on Sarge; I know he communicated with some riders and me, plus his PTSD group and the VFW 1079. No doubt some were riders and all were friends. The best part of this story is that at the end, Sarge's wife Clarice called the VFW when Sarge was in a long flashback, and two members, both Nam Vets, reported to Sarge's bedside. The following is what happened: One of the vets called to Sarge and got his attention during the flash back and said something like, "Sarge, Sarge the mission is completed, you have done well it is time to come home now."

Paul just relaxed and soon after that he left us all and reported to God. The vets around Sarge helped Clarice with transportation and emotional support during this time of trial. They helped Sarge to report to his next duty station and be at peace at the end. This gives true meaning to our mission and the vets around him lived our philosophy. So as you ride, please remember Paul "Sarge" William Bechberger and all those who have given the last full measure

On Behalf of Clarice Bechberger and Sarge's surviving daughters we thank you for your thoughts and prayers.

WELCOME Home Paul!! Semper Fi, Sarge

Submitted in Memory of Sarge  
by Shoreparty

*Shoreparty is hoping to make some tags for riders to wear and leave at The Wall this year. He plans to take a picture of the tags at the wall with a card signed by as many as possible. The picture and card will be sent to Sarge's wife, Clarice.*

## ► CLOSING THOUGHTS

## SPONSOR A FLAG

To honor all those who have served and sacrificed wearing the uniform of this great Nation. The 1st Marine Division Association and the California Honor Run will fly 1,000 3' x 5' American Flags along the Interstate 5 Freeway just inside the fence line of Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton California over the Labor Day Weekend 2009. These Flags will be CLEARLY VISABLE from Interstate 5.

With a donation of \$20 you can sponsor one flag. With an additional fee of \$6.95 added to your donation we will ship one of the very flags that flew on Camp Pendleton in honor of those who serve along with a certificate. <http://www.firstgiving.org/gratefulpatriot1> to order a flag.

## *You Are Not Forgotten*



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Please mail this form with your check or money order (made payable to Run For The Wall) to Judy Lacey, 4249 Comstock Drive, Lake Havasu City, AZ 86406.

## 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)**