



RUN FOR THE WALL

Quarterly Newsletter

“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”

January 2010

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THE EDITOR’S NOTES



My curiosity constantly leads me to exciting discoveries and continuing learning. When I come across a word or phrase I’m unfamiliar with, I can’t sleep until I have looked it up and learned its meaning.

I recently came across the term “REMF” in the Vietnam Veterans of America magazine. There was no explanation of the acronym in the article, and I could read no further until I knew what it meant. I Googled REMF and learned that it referred to those who do not serve in-country, but rather in the “rear echelon.” They are the ones who provide support for the soldiers in combat. Some combat soldiers look down on anyone who doesn’t serve in the front lines, thus the derogatory “MF” was added to rear echelon.

Looking further, I found a website by a Vietnam veteran REMF. He dedicated the website to all those soldiers who served behind the lines. The man, Bob Wheatley, is a remarkable writer, and I was riveted to his stories. In particular, I was spellbound by his story of Pachara, the product of a Vietnam woman and American soldier, called “Bui Doi”—“the dust of life.” These children of American soldiers seldom enjoy a normal life, as they are unwanted and ridiculed, and the abuse this particular girl was subjected to was extreme and heartbreaking. I recommend that you read through this website; I’m sure you’ll be as affected as I was. Look under “Other Stories” for an excerpt from that story and from his memoir.

It won’t be long before the 2010 Run; the discussion boards are filling with questions and plans. The boards are particularly helpful to FNGs. Ask any question and you’re sure to get responses and helpful suggestions. RFTW

is not like any other motorcycle event; most old-timers (I mean that in a loving way!) are always ready to extend a hand to help the first-timers, especially those veterans who are going to The Wall for the first time. They know how hard it can be to face that Wall, and they will be your support.

Also, in this issue take a look at some of the pending legislation in the Senate and the House that is of interest to veterans: A Purple Heart Forever Stamp, Veterans Missing in America Act of 2009, and a Medal of Honor coin, among others.

To all Veterans, thank you for your service, and Welcome Home.

*Freedom is never free. It is paid for with the blood of the brave.
It is paid for with the tears of their loved ones. It is up to us to
preserve and defend that which they have paid so dearly for.*

Judy “Velcro” Lacey

THE PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

By John “Ice Scout” King

Happy 2010 to each of you! Many of us are winter-bound, the bikes are put away and some are already getting cabin fever. That’s all the more reason to be getting ready for the Run!



RFTW XXII leaves Rancho Cucamonga on May 19th. That’s only four months away.

So here is where we are right now. Hundreds of riders have already made their hotel reservations and registered online.

The State Coordinators are ironing out the route details in their areas and the detailed itinerary will be published on the website by February 28.

The 2010 merchandise will be available for on-line purchase by the end of January. This year’s Run pin will have a “2010” rocker added. Also, there is a new toll-free number to use when ordering. It is 1-877-741-RFTW (7389).

Our Route Coordinators, Ray McDowell and Arnie Swift, still need volunteers for some of their support jobs. There are lots of details to be squared away during the Run and workers are always in demand. Every job is important. Let Ray and Arnie know how you can help.

Earning an All The Way patch is a big achievement and it is highly respected by other riders everywhere. However, many riders have a hard time getting away for the three weeks it take to go across the country and then return home. Sometimes, job and family responsibilities limit the time we have available, but don’t let this stop you from participating! Think of RFTW as 10 one-day rides and join in as you can. Go as far as your time permits, see for yourself what RFTW is about, and get to know the people. Then, plan to join again the following year and go a little farther.

Eventually, you will make the entire Run from California to DC. Most of us who have been with the Run awhile started this way. You can too!

Part of our Mission is to promote healing among ALL veterans. Our nation has been at war for over a decade. Countless young men and women have answered this call to service. Whether they are currently on active duty

or have completed their tour, the issues which they face as they go on with their lives are no different than those which confronted Vietnam veterans. At our reunions and on our forum, we have talked about the importance of including these veterans in our family. Sometimes though, it is difficult to know just how to make this happen. After all, we are the old guys and sometimes we don't connect easily to different generations.

Each of us can help. Direct and personal contact is always the best way to communicate. When you talk with younger veterans who ride, they will likely ask about the Run. Share your experiences with them, listen to their stories, and invite them to ride with us.

Both the Central and the Southern Routes travel past numerous military installations. Find a way to involve those commands; ask them to provide a color guard to welcome the Run and spread the word on base so the troops who want to ride with us can plan ahead. These are just a couple of the things each of us can do to reach out to our younger brothers and sisters.

Imagine how good it will feel to help bring one more rider into the family. I encourage each of you to reach out and welcome these heroes home.

Thank You, and Ride Safe,
John "Ice Scout" King

► **RFTW 2010**

RFTW 2010 DC HOTELS

From John Gosser, Washington D.C. Coordinator

The status of reservations at the Holiday Inn is "sold out" and others are seeing a good volume. Participants can contact Suzanna Espinoza at the Holiday Inn and ask to be put on a waiting list and she can fit them in when someone drops out.

Also, when people realize they will not be needing a room in DC they need to cancel as soon as possible. Others are waiting for the rooms and we cannot afford to lose rooms again this year from late cancellations. There is also a "last date to cancel or pay anyway" date.

► **OUR STORIES**

THE GREATEST GENERATION?

By Roland "Pegleg" Marchand

I volunteer at different Veterans Hospitals and visit Marines at Camp Pendelton who have lost limbs in these Wars we are fighting right now. I met a Lt. Col. at the VA Hospital in California and he gave me a very different take on the Greatest Generation. He is a WWII Veteran so the statement he made really was an eye opener for me.

I lost a Leg and Kidney in Vietnam 1968 and while I was sitting eating at the VA Canteen he came up to me and asked if I was a Vietnam Veteran. I said "Yes, Sir" and he began sharing with me that he felt as many other WW II Vets he has talked to that maybe the Vietnam Veteran may really have been the Greatest Generation.

He stated the Vietnam Veteran fought in the most unpopular war in this country's history and came home to a nation who wanted nothing to do with them, spit on them, called them baby killers and really the only thing

those young boys did is what their country had asked them to do fight Communism. Yet they never gave up fighting for rights as veterans to be taken care of by the same government that deceived them about the war they had fought in. No, they protested in Washington for better health care and to be given benefits to help them adjust to civilian life.

He said his generation (WW II Vets) never rallied to get taken care of, just accepted the fact that the government did not owe them anything. Well the benefits all veterans receive today and the men and women serving now are because the Vietnam Veterans not only fought a war abroad but came home to another war as the WWI, WWII, and Korean Veterans stood by and kept quiet.

We never stood up for the Vietnam Veterans, he said, and yet we as veterans of all wars and our families are now getting benefits no one ever knew about before Vietnam. It's the Vietnam Vet who is fighting a war today so all veterans will receive the care they deserve.

So, the so-called Greatest Generation must then be grateful that the Vietnam Veteran Generation did not expect what the government was giving them and fought a terrible battle at home that still is being waged today.

So I ask, "who is the Greatest Generation?" I guess that is only a few WWII veterans' opinions.

But something to think about . . .

SEMPER-FI

LOCAL COMBAT VETERAN FEATURED IN BOOK

From Combatant Books

The Villages, Florida, October 22, 2009

Gerald Nostadt of Huntington Beach is featured in a book just released. Nostadt was an armored cavalry scout in Task Force 1/4 CAV of 1st Infantry Division, the famed Big Red One. The experiences of Nostadt and his unit are depicted by his task force commander in *One Hell of a Ride: Inside an Armored Cavalry Task Force in Vietnam*, by Col. (Ret.) William C. Haponski.

Task Force 1/4 CAV consisted of armor, armored cavalry, air cavalry, mechanized infantry, infantry, artillery, and engineers, supported by Army helicopter gunships and Air Force, Navy, and Marine fighter-bombers. In 1969 it fought five major battles and numerous smaller ones against North Vietnamese Army regiments of the 7th Division. The largest battle ever fought in the bloody Michelin Rubber Plantation, and battles along infamous Highway 13, kept the enemy from repeating its intended attack on Saigon that so inflamed world opinion a year earlier during Tet '68.

In the book, Nostadt, then a Specialist 4th Class, tells what it was like to be on listening post outside the perimeter of a fire support base while the base was fighting off an attacking enemy regiment in the middle of the night. Wounded, he helped save another wounded man's life. He says these experiences are unforgettable, and he treasures the bonds he made with his buddies during those tough times.

Nostadt was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Combat Infantryman's Badge.

The story of the task force is set against the backdrop of the Indochina Wars, 1945-1975, in the critical area north of Saigon where French forces fought two decades earlier. The author uniquely tells the story from two points of view: that of his task force, and that of the enemy they fought. Military historian Lewis Sorley says, "This authoritative account is destined to become an instant classic." The 560-page book with numerous photos and sketch maps is available at Amazon.com and other online bookstores.

Jerry Nostadt is president of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 785, and has participated in RFTW for a number of years.

LETTER FROM IRAQ

(Editor's note: 1SG Steven Squires wrote an article in the July 2004 RFTW newsletter about his experience in The Run that year. He and his wife are both serving in the Army. I just received this email from Steve. Those in Central Route who will be in Wentzville this year, be sure to look for Missy and their two boys there. Their son, David, rode with RFTW in 2004)

Hey Judy,

I just wanted to drop a line to you. I am currently deployed in Iraq and will not be able to participate in the Run this year. This will be the first time since 2002 that I am not able to be around the RFTW. My wife, Missy (she deployed to Iraq in 03-04) and the boys will be at the Wentzville, MO stop when you all come in.

I should be able to be there in 2011.

Take care,

1SG Steve Squires
United States Army
1139th MP Co
OIF 10

► OTHER STORIES

ASHES FOUND IN TRASH LED TO PROPER BURIAL

St. Petersburg Times, Jan 5, 2010

(Thanks to Ken "Walrus" Sabo for sending this.)

The two teenagers got to the cemetery first. He wore his dark green dress uniform from the National Guard. She wore a long black dress. They stood on the edge of the road, across from rows of matching military headstones, waiting for the funeral of the man they had never met.

Mike Colt, 19, and his girlfriend, Carol Sturgell, 18, had driven more than an hour from their Tampa homes last month to be at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. They weren't really sure why they had come. They just knew they had to be here.

"It's kind of sad, huh?" asked Sturgell, scanning the sea of white gravestones. Colt nodded. "Yeah, but it feels kind of important."

At 12:20 p.m., a Tampa police car pulled up, then a white Lincoln Town Car. Another police cruiser followed. Two officers stepped out.

"Thank you for being here," Colt said, shaking both of their hands.

"No, thank you," said Officer Dan College. "If it weren't for you guys, none of us would be here."

More than a month ago, on the last Saturday of November, the young couple was hanging out at Sturgell's house when her brother rode up on his bike, all excited. He had found two fishing poles in this huge pile of trash. Come check it out, he said. So they did. At the edge of the trash mound, sticking out from beneath a box, Sturgell spied a worn green folder. She pulled it out, brushed off the dust. Across the top, bold letters said, "Department of Defense." Inside, she found retirement papers from the U.S. Army; a citation for a Purple Heart issued in 1945; and a certificate for a Bronze Star medal "for heroism in ground combat in the vicinity of Normandy, France ... June 1944." In the center of the certificate there was a name: Delbert E. Hahn.

Why would anyone throw that away? Sturgell asked.

And who is that guy? Colt wanted to know. Must be old, a World War II vet. Looks like he served at D-Day!

That night, they took the paperwork back to Sturgell's house and searched Delbert E. Hahn on the computer. Nothing. They talked about who he might have been, the life he might have led. The next morning, they went back to the trash heap and searched for more clues. They rummaged through boxes, overturned furniture, picked through piles of the past. Colt moved a ratty couch - and something fell out. A metal vase, or box, some kind of rectangular container about a foot tall. On the base was the name: Delbert E. Hahn.

"It's him," Colt told his girlfriend. "This must be him, in his urn."

Sturgell screamed. She didn't want to touch it. It was kind of freaky, she said, discovering the remains of some dead guy.

"He shouldn't be here," Colt said. "No one should be thrown away like that, just left in a parking lot."

The dead man wasn't alone. Under the couch, the couple found two more sets of remains: a cylinder-style container with Barbara Hahn printed on the bottom and another urn, which had no name.

Tampa police Cpl. Edward Croissant had just reported for the night shift that Sunday when his officers showed him the urns. This kid and his girlfriend had found them and brought them to the station. Then an officer told Croissant about the Purple Heart. The Bronze Star. And the Normandy invasion. And Croissant became irate. He had served eight years in the Navy. He's in the Coast Guard Reserve. "I had three uncles in World War II. That was the greatest generation. If it wasn't for those men, we would have nothing," he said. "That man saw combat. And someone just dumped him there? He deserves a better ending."

Police called the Department of Veterans Affairs and learned Hahn had died in 1983, at the age of 62, -and was a highly decorated war hero. The staff sergeant had served in the infantry and been honored with five Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. Barbara Hahn, they learned, was the soldier's wife. So how did their remains end up in that mound of garbage? Where was the rest of their family, or friends, anyone who would want their ashes? And who was in that third urn? Neighbors filled in some of the story: Barbara Hahn had been a widow forever, they told police. For years, her mother had lived with her. Her mother's name was Barbara, too. The elder Barbara had lived to be more than 100. They thought she died around 2000. That third urn, neighbors told police, must be her. The younger Barbara, the soldier's wife, got sick in 2003. A couple came to care for her, and she wound up willing them her mobile home. When she died, the couple moved in, took out a mortgage, then didn't make payments. The bank foreclosed on the trailer late last year. In November, officials sent a maintenance company to clear it out. The workers must have just dumped everything behind the vacant building on Busch Boulevard, neighbors told police. Including the remains of three people.

Just before 1 p.m. Dec. 16, the two teenagers led the car line through Florida National Cemetery. Police followed, then the funeral director who had the urns. Outside a wooden gazebo, two rows of National Guardsmen stood at attention. The funeral director handed the first soldier a flag, the next one the cylinder with

Barbara Hahn's remains, the third one the brass urn with Delbert Hahn. (Barbara's mother's remains are still in the evidence room of the police station. Since she wasn't a veteran or married to one, she wasn't entitled to be buried in the military cemetery.)

"Let us open the gates of the Lord," said a military chaplain, who led the procession of strangers into the gazebo. "Let us remember," said the chaplain, "none of us lives only unto himself."

The teenagers sat on the front bench. Three officials from Veterans Affairs sat behind them. They had spent weeks searching for the Hahns' relatives, any distant kin or friend, someone who might want their ashes - or at least want to come to their burial. They couldn't find anyone. Even the couple whom Barbara Hahn had willed her home to didn't show.

By the time the chaplain lifted his head from the Lord's Prayer, a long line of men had wrapped around the gazebo.

Wearing blue denim shirts and work boots, they clasped their caps in their hands and bowed their heads. Dozens of groundskeepers from the cemetery had left their Christmas party to come pay respects to the man who, in death, had been so disrespected.

A bugler played taps. The riflemen fired three shots. And 56 people watched the honor guard fold a flag over the urns of the man and woman they never knew.

MEMOIR OF A VIETNAM VETERAN

By Bob Wheatley

(Editor's note: Wheatley maintains a website <http://www.viet-remf.net/HomePage.htm> to "honor the service of all who served in rear echelon assignments on land, sea and air, whether 'in-country' or 'in-theater' and to give visitors to this site some sense of the sacrifices and contributions to the Vietnam War effort made by those in the rear—those who were referred to by some as 'REMF's.' " He's an excellent writer, and you'll find his website good reading. Following is an excerpt of his memoir of his service in Vietnam.)

It was in October of '68. I was returning for discharge after four years in the Air Force, the last two years of it overseas. It felt wonderful to be back on American soil! I was absolutely elated! I had been so very far from home, half a world away, for what seemed such a very long time. Now I was at last back home to stay in America, the greatest country in all the world! And the time I'd spent in the Third World, made me appreciate her blessings all the more.

I had returned safe and uninjured. I didn't consider myself a hero by any means, but I was proud to say that I had done my duty and served my country with honor in time of war. I recalled the stories my father had told me of his return after the war in Europe. The emotions I was feeling on my return must have been much the same as those he had experienced. Many times Dad had described for me the moment of his arrival back in the States. Safe on American soil once more, he and his crewmates, upon disembarking the aircraft, fell to their knees and kissed the ground - both an expression of their relief at having survived, and an act that bore testimony to the deep love of country, which had driven them to offer themselves in service to it. How sweet it must have been to have survived those 25 terrible missions over Germany, to have beaten the odds and returned home to an appreciative, welcoming nation! I can only imagine, for that kind of welcome was something my comrades and I were not destined to experience.

In my father's time, the returning troops had been celebrated - heralded and hailed as heroes by virtually everyone they met. America could not do enough for its veterans! No amount of thanks and praise was adequate. As long as he was in uniform, Dad could not buy a meal, pay his way into a movie, buy himself a

beer, or pay for a hair cut. The people whom he had served would not think of taking money from this, a man who had willingly risked his own death in defending them! My father and his comrades were honored, even idolized for their unselfish service to the nation. As it had always been for returning warriors, they were greeted with open arms, given succor and reassured that the sometimes terrible things they had to do in service to the nation were indeed just and necessary. For them, there was a period of healing and gradual re-acclimation and reintegration into civilian life. But these were far different times in which I found myself, and this was not the America of my father's youth. It was not even the same America I remembered growing up.

Oh, I certainly harbored no expectation to be met with brass bands and parades, but I did want to feel welcomed home and that my service to country was appreciated by someone. It would be thirty years before anyone outside of my own family said, "Welcome Home" or "Thank you for your service" to me. What a difference those few words might have made in my young life! After a day of hectic de-processing and just before our release to civilian life, we were gathered together for a final debriefing. It was then, the reality of what we'd been hearing over there in the news reports struck home. We were warned not to wear our uniforms into town. For to do so was to run the very real risk of being attacked by the locals on the streets! I'm at once outraged and saddened by the thought.

How twisted we had become as a nation! Men who would have been honored in every corner of America in wars past were now to be spat upon, urinated upon, pelted with rocks and eggs and tomatoes, and called "Baby Killers". And that label, "Baby Killer" hurt many of us much more deeply than those who were using it could ever begin to know. The fact is, many of us who served had never killed anyone, let alone babies. But that didn't matter. The reasoning was, "If you didn't do it yourself, you enabled it by just being there." The label was applied across the board to all who had served in that war. And its stigma would last far longer than any pain wrought by eggs or rocks or fists.

1989 RUN FOR THE WALL—"An Old School Run"

By Evo Red, February 8, 2008

Taking part in the inaugural Run For The Wall (RFTW) was a turning point for me. It double-clutched my motorcycle riding from pastime to passion. It was my catalyst to write tales in biker magazines, found a motorcycle club (www.windandfiremc.org), to co-organize RFTW in 1992 and to ride over 500,000 Harley-miles through 18 countries. This year marks the 20th time that RFTW motorcycles will cross the USA in a gesture of remembrance and as a statement calling for a "full accounting" of all POW-MIAs.

The people in our Armed Forces are the pillars of our freedom, "Freedom is not free!" The choice of peace or war is not the warrior's; it's the decision of politicians. Having escaped combat unscathed after 15½ months "in country" I felt a debt to those left behind. A combination of my veteran's urge to do something, my enthusiasm for Harley-riding, a desire to search the Wall for a soldier I'd met and my yearning to ride across the USA convinced me that RFTW was a golden opportunity. This is an abridged story of my seizing that opportunity, a little about the riding, a bit about the POW-MIA events and some insight into a few of the RFTW people.

Run For The Wall has undeniably become the blueprint for motorcycle long distance group riding. The event has evolved over the years into a fine tuned machine. The first run though was more heart than machine. It was a bunch of bikers on a mission, led by an impassioned Marine Corps Gunny Sergeant, trucking in the fast lane with dated bikes and no chase vehicle. In that '80s era, society held a much different perspective. Bikers on Harleys were more apt to be considered "scooter trash." California didn't have a helmet law. Legal highway speeds rarely topped 55. Cell phones weren't around. Computers were mainly found at the office. The crowd at the Laughlin River Run, a mere 1,500, was there for the cheap rooms and MDA charity. Honda was the bike seen most on the road. "Harleys" were synonymous with "oil leaks and breakdowns." American iron was still

the bike choice of most law enforcement agencies. The “baby killer” stigma of Vietnam Veteran wasn’t too far gone.

In 1988 the biker nation addressed the fate of American POW-MIAs when two vets inaugurated a motorcycle ride through Washington D.C. called Rolling Thunder (RT). This event has evolved into a massive annual protest drawing several 100,000 riders to The Capitol on Sunday of Memorial Day Weekend. Having attended the 1988 event, a year later James “Gunny” Gregory and Bill Evans co-founded RFTW as a coast-to-coast hookup to Rolling Thunder. Gunny envisioned the run becoming a huge groundswell of motorcycles riding across the United States. While never reaching the foreseen mass of thousands, RFTW annually draws hundreds of riders into a pack that casts a dramatic impact wherever it passes.

In 1989 the RFTW schedule was nine days on the road, Friday, May 19 to Saturday, May 27. Run money was generated from sales of t-shirts, caps and patches (the pictorial RFTW *White Patch* and the yellow *Jane Fonda American Traitor Bitch* patch). Sales profits and financial support enabled The Run to uniquely provide for the riders rather than charge them to participate.

In preparation for my cross-country trek I factored in the rain, camping and states with helmet laws. I ordered a riding suit from Aerostich in Duluth, packed my tent, sleeping bag and my *Old Gold* full face helmet. Unknowingly, I also sabotaged my trip by installing a custom saddle that would figuratively become a pain in the ass.

So, there I was by my lonesome in San Diego for the start of the 9-day trek. In my head I’d puffed up a bit about having ridden 200+ miles to get to the starting point. I learned later that San Francisco Firefighter Pete had come from the Bay Area, Country Ed had ridden from Oregon, Doc had traveled from Tennessee and Jon had shipped his Harley & its trailer from Hawaii.

I didn’t fit the mold of the stereotypical biker or Vietnam Vet. On cold wet days in my riding suit I appeared more like a gold domed, black/blue Michelin man. In good weather I came closer to the cliché: no helmet, sun glasses, a pretty cool patched jean vest, boots and Levis. At the kickoff in San Diego I was standing near my loaded-up Harley when a TV news crew shuffled past me to get to a guy with “the look.” The service decals adorning his midsize Yamaha, a nice screen image, must have caught the camera crew’s eye. *Decal guy* rode short and was gone before the day’s end. Nearby in the crowd I spotted a backyard built, custom trike that attempted to look like the Starship Enterprise. Never saw that *Star-trike* again either, maybe it got beamed-up or blasted off at light-speed.

It seemed to me that the crowd at the San Diego kickoff numbered close to 300. Gunny’s more accurate tally quoted a lesser 115 there at the Marine Corp Depot. Of those, a stark 15 made it to Washington, D.C.

Off we went clipping down the freeway, CHP escorted at 10 mph over and filmed above by a news helicopter. It became immediately evident that, besides needing the basic riding skills to hold a line within a column, a good dodging reflex was essential. At random times various objects would fall from the bikes up ahead. Picking a clear path meant making split second zigzags. The usual obstacle was either a U.S. or POW-MIA flag. At 30 miles into the ride a sleeping bag came bouncing down the lane. Some days later the best/worst award went to a drive-chain that sprung loose and whistled past the head of a trailing rider.

It might have been the first day or maybe the second that, just ahead of the pack, a pickup truck pulling a trailer spontaneously shot across the shoulder, careened off into the dusty flatland and flipped over. Its crash left wreckage strewn everywhere and multiple victims. Without hesitation The Pack pulled over to give assistance. “Doc”, not a road name but the real deal with a medical clinic in Tennessee, swung into action treating the injured.

At the first day's last stop, the Las Vegas VFW Lodge, all the riders were given plastic badges: "Run For The Wall – All The Way." Taking a cue from that idea, on The Run's last day I made "All-The-Way SD to DC 1989" embroidered patches for everyone, everyone who had actually traveled the full route. A variation of those first "All-The-Way" patches has become a RFTW tradition.

The 1989 run had support vehicles but no pick up vehicle for downed bikes. I can attest to this because I broke down five times and fended for myself. Rather than the downtime turning each case into a mini crisis, my impromptu repairs became magnets drawing helpful strangers offering assistance. Helpfulness seemed the norm for RFTW encounters. Truckers were initially pissed at us bikers for clogging their highways until they keyed into our mission. Those eighteen wheelers then linked themselves to The Pack as recon units broadcasting advanced notice of our approach. A couple of times tractor-trailers even converted to tow mode and transported broken bikes to repair shops. In Virginia, a Dryers guy, whose truck happened to be sharing a rest stop with us, dug into his freezer compartment and handed The Pack a couple of cases of ice cream bars.

Sometimes The Pack had police, sheriff or highway patrol escorts. More often we worked our seat-of-the-pants roadguard system. Sans flashy arm bands or bike banners, two riders would crank on ahead and block-off onramps or intersections. I'll never forget glancing over from the column to the sight of a wide-eyed Country Ed parked steadfast across an onramp. He was dead in the sights of a semi rolling downhill towards him with its tires trailing blue smoke. The next instant I figured Ed would be squashed like a bug. Nope. He lived to road guard another day!

When confronted with threats from petty rules-of-the-road infractions, we had our own spin doctor. Don would spew forth his surefire "brother officer" routine. If the *surefire* was a *misfire* he'd try "guilt" with a plea aimed towards courtesy for a war veteran run...never failed.

I didn't know anyone when I joined Run For The Wall. About three days and 1,000 miles down the road, the ever-increasing friendship between the core riders reached family level. We were the ones traveling the complete route. We always rode at the head of the column. We looked out for each other. We knew each other's riding skills and habits. Whenever a "core" member was absent that person was missed and asked about.

Why did this feeling of belonging spring forth? The connection was driven by our unspoken unity of riding in appreciation of the sacrifices made to country and freedom by the people in the Armed Forces. Once the ride was underway the sharing began: the day-in day-out intense concentration of pack riding; the heat, cold, rain and snow; waiting in line together, eating breakfast, lunch and dinner together, the somber ceremonies; the heartfelt welcomes; the effort to be on time ready to go; all the while traveling eastward through time zones...getting up earlier and earlier and earlier.

The Core's mix of random personalities conveyed both a serious and a laid back mood. The driving force of The Run was pack leader Marine Gunny Sergeant James Gregory. Gunny rode his Harley with doubled-up saddle bags, a white RFTW cap that turned charcoal by D.C., a bandana across his bearded face and ski goggles covering his glasses. He radiated enthusiasm, leadership and the roaring voice of a seasoned D.I. His passion roused the pack's spirit. With Gunny's focus being the run's mission it was no surprise that the quirks of finance and politics ruffled an occasional feather en route. Not immune to glitches, he made one wrong turn, took one Utah "short cut" *adding* a couple of hours and needed a few push-starts to get his FXR running.

Bill Evans, the cofounder of RFTW, probably suffered the worst fate of anyone making the 1989 trip. To quote Gunny, "Bill and I were in the lead. However, before we reached Ontario, Bill lost some of his gear, blew a tire and then blew his motor. He spent the rest of The Run in the back of a pickup."

"Country Ed" was a likable, mellow guy, the soul of the ride, whose appearance might evoke the image of a brown-bearded Santa-Biker. Ed quit his job when his boss reneged on a promise to grant him time off for The Run. The Pack tagged Country's bike, an aging Kawasaki 900, ugliest ride. For the long haul Ed had "stiffened"

its suspension by welding metal plates to the frame in place of the rear shocks. With its saddle from a Harley-Davidson, Country tagged his bike a "Kawa-Harley". Four thousand "hardtail" miles of no rear shocks, Oregon to San Diego to D.C., took a toll on Country's back tire. No problem; the Core chipped in and bought him a fresh one.

The "Booze Brothers" were three guys so named for consistently, some way or another, having a beer in hand. Gary, brother one, had the best tattoo on the run. It was an awesome full back tatt of a three-mast sailing schooner to which he grumbled, "Yeah, but I never get to see the thing!" He rode most of the way with a hole in one half of his Softail's fat bobs. My breakdowns and his gas problems occasionally brought us together running catch-up. Gary had the "biker look": good beard, aged leathers, worn jeans and a clichéd type Harley. Russ, Gary's actual brother, was a friendly bushy bearded guy with always a smile on his face. Jon was the guy from Hawaii, an adopted brother due to the endless supply of six-packs rolling out of his bike trailer. Remarkably, but understandable from their ingrained riding skills, the three were always heads-up on the road. Off the road, yeah, well, okay, there was that one rumored carpet miscue. The guys' usual night mode was camping. Probably due to the rain, the three had split a motel room with short-straw Jon getting the floor. Mid slumber at nature's call, just as in camp, Jon got up and relieved himself "next to his tent".

"Sportster Tim" was noted for not quite making the gas stops due to his Harley's peanut tank. Many a time he would ride-in just as The Pack was riding-out. Tim offset his short fuel by hanging an emergency supply from his ape-hangers...two empty hand grenades filled with gasoline. At motor's sputter, he'd screw off their tops and shake the "pineapples'" juice into the "peanut".

"Big Bill" was "only" going to Vegas, then "only going to...", then "only" went to the East Coast with the rest of us. Along the way someone stole his chaps off his bike. Bill was mighty proud when he got a CNN close-up at Rolling Thunder. He turned sheepishly humble when we clued him that his wife was probably watching and wondering about the RFTW groupie on the back of his Harley dresser.

Ralph and Lois, who appeared more like nicely dressed weekenders on a whim, rode double on a 1984 FXR that had racked up over 130,000 miles...figuring in the years and tacking on the 6,000-mile RFTW trip, that's an annual average of 30,000 miles!

I was a pretty nebulous Core member except for my Softail breakdowns. 3,000 miles of having one or another trailing rider staring at my bike's vanity plate tagged with the name "Evo Red". Three times on the way to The Wall my Softail broke down due to electrical problems; the eventual culprit being my custom saddle. The saddle's pan rode directly atop my battery cables, rubbing the connections loose and ultimately breaking a cable end. My quick fix was to use road alligator shims (18-wheeler tire shreds) that I taped to the frame under the pan as spacers. A few years later, on another RFTW, I had seven breakdowns but with a chase vehicle those were a snap. (*Breakdowns aside, "Evo Red" lasted 344,000 miles before I sold it to a friend. He repainted it and plans to ride "Evo Black" All-The-Way this year.*)

It was unspoken that we rode to comfort those along the route personally affected by the trauma of war and the POW-MIA fate. Those same people supported us and we tried our best to reciprocate our appreciation. The "doughnut hat trick", a trivial happening, none-the-less was a hint of this mindset. The column was met at a stop with supporters offering doughnuts and coffee. The pack heartily drank the brew & stuffed itself with doughnuts, giving smiles and thanks. 70-miles down the road the column was met at another stop with supporters offering doughnuts and coffee. The pack heartily drank the brew & stuffed itself with doughnuts, giving smiles and thanks. 90-miles down the road the column was met at a third stop with supporters offering doughnuts and coffee. The pack heartily drank the brew & stuffed itself with doughnuts, giving smiles and thanks. Anyone supporting our cause was a kindred spirit.

The Run itself became a successful outpouring of support. Day-in and day-out an emotion of patriotism carried throughout the trip. All across America groups and individuals cheered, waved and fed us while repeatedly we

were filmed and interviewed by the news media. In Green River, Utah the local ABATE Chapter hosted a spaghetti feed for the pack. The scene was a throw back to the days of the Wild West: an outdoor fire, six-gun packing camp cooks, beer flowing and rowdy laughter filling the air.

The Rockies leg with its snowdrift edged highways provided us with a Continental Divide “Kodak Moment.” Snow was a bit unusual. Rain on the other hand was nothing but ordinary and expected. Our route through Colorado along Highway 50 led to a cold night’s camping at the Gunnison KOA. Vegas JR was running 60w oil in his Shovel. Starting his bike, the next morning at that altitude and temperature, was like trying to kick it over with tar inside. Working it long and hard became a team effort until his Harley finally fired up. A year or so later JR was killed alongside the road, hit by a car while helping another biker.

Our trip through Kansas was unsurpassed, awesome and unforgettable. It began at the border with a State Patrol escort. As we rode down the interstate a small plane flew back-and-forth overhead trailing a banner of large red letters proclaiming “RUN FOR THE WALL”. That little plane somehow proved to us that people really cared about what we were doing. Farther down the interstate we exited at Colby, dropped down through the underpass and emerged into a welcome as if we had just come back home rather than been off riding for 1,500 miles. The underpass blossomed into an archway of red, white and blue. Aligning both sides of the roadway were people with American flags held high. The flagged pathway led to a reception area where speeches rang out from a temporary stage. We were handed buttons proclaiming “Colby, Kansas Run For The Wall”. Near the stage a tent was set up as a service area for free oil changes and needed repairs.

That first Kansas day ended in Salina where we camped in the heart of town at Thomas Park. A local chapter of the Vietnam Veterans’ Motorcycle Club was on site ready to party and feed us a full blown hog roast. The pig feed, band and camaraderie lasted into the wee hours. I vaguely remember seeing a modified (by knocking the legs from one side) picnic table used as a bike jump ramp. I clearly remember Rebel standing tall with his Vietnam Vet club colors, leggings and civil war cap. Meanwhile as the park festivities flourished, Harley-Davidson of Salina had its mechanics wrenching on RFTW bikes until 11:00 p.m. Some of us turned-in at a reasonable hour; others, Stewart included, partied with the best of them. The next morning when the pack pulled out a lone tent set in the grass with its blue-flamed CHP-auction bike parked along side; it took Stewart a day-and-a-half to catch up.

Leaving the park the VVMC and our RFTW column joined forces in a bike caravan to the Kansas Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial. An incomparable ceremony was in store for us there with a color guard setting the tone. Various dignitaries, including a state senator and the governor’s aid, took part. If not for a sudden emergency, the governor had planned to attend. Speeches filled everyone with pride. A patriotic song hushed the crowd as a vocalist rendered a ballad she’d written, dedicated to a veteran. At the ceremony’s end a lone bugler played Taps, followed by a rifle salute and an on-the-deck fly-by from a pair of fighter jets whose engine roar cracked through the stillness.

Our final Kansas experience came at the I-70 toll station. RFTW was provided a dedicated pay lane marked with a yellow diamond sign: “Run For The Wall Only.” ABATE of Kansas had set this up, along with covering the toll charge for all the riders.

In 1989 the scheduled night’s stop before D.C. was Natural Bridge, Virginia, but inadvertently during that day a small town along US Alternate 60 in West Virginia became the RFTW homestead. Unbeknownst to the pack, the citizens of Rainelle had learned that we were coming. Their impromptu welcome spun into a full blown parade. Waving children – set free from school – and much of the population lined the streets to welcome The Pack. Meanwhile, I was back in Ashland, Ohio at a gas station getting another bike repair. In subsequent years I made up for that lost *first welcome* by getting fully involved with the rides & autographs given to the Rainelle kids and the dinner afterward at the Moose Lodge. With only one small motel in town my usual Rainelle stay was 11 miles up the road at Mrs. Crawford’s Oak Knoll B&B. Her place was a rustic two-story house set alone high upon a knoll. Motherly gray-haired Mrs. Crawford would serve a down-home breakfast for her guests from

a large wood table in her kitchen. Mister Crawford would mostly relax in his easy chair before the fireplace in the front room.

For some reason the D.C. area RFTW/RT camp was setup at Front Royal, Virginia about 70 miles from The Wall. I was the sole rider to choose otherwise and camp at an alternate closer site, Burke Lake Park in Fairfax. At Front Royal after riding nearly 3,000 miles from San Diego, "Mate" Pete loaned his Harley to a vet for the final leg to The Wall. His remarkably unselfish act was made even more so by the fact that Mate had wrenched on bikes the entire route helping Core members stay up and running. Sam had another last day story. He and his wife Margo had done grunt work supporting the run the whole trip; but, Sam's bike gave out that final day. No problem, he still rode into D.C. on a Harley; I packed him there two-up on my Softail. The following year Sam's resolve to get some POW-MIA answers took him to Vietnam where his try at a first hand look-see almost got him imprisonment by the Communist.

Finally we arrived at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall. Being there invokes emotions unique to each person. Many visitors leave a souvenir, in effect a piece of self, at the monument. I searched The Wall and its log books for a fellow soldier I had met. We had landed in Vietnam together but then lost contact. Luckily, I didn't find his name.

The run's end was on Friday but on Saturday in D.C., besides sightseeing, there were a couple of stellar biker events. The Crow Bar, a famed D.C. biker hangout, had a section of downtown K Street blocked off for a party. Fort Washington H-D, just outside The Beltway, hosted its annual open house, bike show and free barbeque.

On Sunday, Rolling Thunder's parade/demonstration took to the streets. The RFTW pack showed up at staging, the Pentagon Parking Lot, four hours ahead of time for a spot in front. Around noon the column proceeded four abreast across the Arlington Memorial Bridge into the city proper. Crowds lined the streets and spilled out into the roadway. Traffic was backed up several cars deep on every side road. During the stop-start parade crawl through town, in mid-90 degree heat, my clutch gave out in the middle of Constitution Avenue. Relatively unfazed, I pushed my bike to the side of the road, sat there by the curb on my Softail, shrugged, smiled and waved to the rest of the RFTW crew as they passed by.

My ride out of D.C. back to Fairfax without a clutch was its own adventure. Stop signs and lights were a bitch. I'd have to shut off the motor, wait for the green and then try a push-start while hitting the starter and trying to jump-on and go. Along the way, I paused at the Black Eyed Pea restaurant for my solo birthday dinner, May 28th. From there it was a short no-clutch-putt to my tent at Burke Lake. The following Monday, Memorial Day, I left my Softail at the commuter lot and took the train to the Smithsonian. I half hoped "Evo Red" would get stolen. On Tuesday, Manassas H-D fixed me up. Wednesday's "good-to-go" lasted about 200 miles, taking me to Nutter Fort, WV where a sporadically running motor called for repair #5. A slight delay was built within B&B H-D's repair plan; Ma had to come cover the counter upstairs so Pa could wrench on my Harley down in the basement. B&B did a great job of meticulously locating and fixing my ignition wiring problem.

The rest of the 3,000 miles home went pretty clean except for Globe, AZ where I was handed a warning ticket for eye protection...no sunglasses on my trip around the block back to my motel room.

For a rider, who is not a biker, riding RFTW "All-The-Way" is a transformation.

Over the years both The Run's size and organization have grown. As a visual demonstration, the pack's size projects the strength of the statement being made. A few RFTW all-the-way veterans choose now to make the ride as "outriders." They ride the route ahead or behind the pack, making the trip more enjoyable. I have no argument with that tact because they have "been there – done that" and are supporting The Run in their own way; but, a good feeling comes from running with the pack. It took me until 2002 to realize the source behind that good feeling. In 2002 to honor the 343 FDNY firefighters killed by the Twin Towers Attack, my club rode from New York to the Firefighter Memorial in Colorado Springs, CO. Our motorcycle pack of over 300 was the

first group at Ground Zero for the one year anniversary of September 11th. As with RFTW we had supporters for our effort. It dawned on me that the point of the ride was not enjoyment and the focus behind its support was not to entertain. The ride was for a belief. Supporters and riders both shared the ideal of honoring the FDNY 343. The same holds with RFTW; the focus is the ideal of demanding a full accounting of all POW-MIA's while making a statement that those who gave all will not be forgotten. Helping to convey this worthwhile message is what creates the good feeling shared by everyone who runs with the pack.

Epilogue: Run For The Wall 2008

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

Run For The Wall 2008 was everything I figured and more. The "more" was the organization's polish and its expression of emotion. RFTW has noticeably been fine tuned to just the right amount of control and planning necessary to facilitate the immense task of moving the pack coast-to-coast; its numbers swelling at times beyond 300 riders stretched in a 3-mile long column. The amazing aspect of this effort is its display of compassion by its stops at VFW locations, memorial sites and veteran's hospitals. I was truly impressed with the 20th Run. Initially RFTW was created as a POW-MIA ride from California to Washington D.C. meant to support and participate in Rolling Thunder. That focus remains but I believe The Run has become its own entity. It is virtually a "hands on" expression in support of the POW-MIA issue, veterans, military personnel and their families and friends. The Run is a patriotic gesture that touches individual people.

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

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

The RFTW Mission Statement is right on: "To promote healing among ALL veterans and their families and friends, to call for an accounting of all Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action (POW/MIA); to honor the memory of those Killed in Action (KIA) from all wars, and to support our military personnel all over the world."

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

► VA NEWS

HOUSE BILLS TO BENEFIT VETERANS:

H.R.33 : ***Disability Benefit Fairness Act of 2009*** to amend title II of the Social Security Act to eliminate the 5-month waiting period for entitlement to disability benefits and to eliminate reconsideration as an intervening step between initial benefit entitlement decisions and subsequent hearings on the record on such decisions.
Sponsor: Rep McIntyre, Mike [NC-7] (introduced 1/6/2009) Cosponsors (3)
Committees: House Ways and Means Latest Major Action: 1/6/2009 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

H.R.43 : ***Medicare Access to Rehabilitation Services Act of 2009*** to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to repeal the Medicare outpatient rehabilitation therapy caps.
Sponsor: Rep Becerra, Xavier [CA-31] (introduced 1/6/2009) Cosponsors (128) Related bill S.46
Committees: House Energy and Commerce; House Ways and Means
Latest Major Action: 1/6/2009 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via
<http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/alert/?alertid=14486941&type=CO>

H.R.177 : ***Depleted Uranium Screening and Testing Act*** to provide for identification of members of the Armed Forces exposed during military service to depleted uranium, to provide for health testing of such members, and for other purposes.
Sponsor: Rep Serrano, Jose E. [NY-16] (introduced 1/6/2009) Cosponsors (None)
Committees: House Armed Services
Latest Major Action: 1/30/2009 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

H.R.237 : ***Military Retiree Health Care Relief Act of 2009*** to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a refundable credit to military retirees for premiums paid for coverage under Medicare Part B.
Sponsor: Rep Emerson, Jo Ann [MO-8] (introduced 1/7/2009) Cosponsors (2)
Committees: House Ways and Means
Latest Major Action: 1/7/2009 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.
To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via
[http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12921516&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12921516&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id])

H.R.247 : ***Protect Our Veterans Memorials Act of 2009*** to amend section 1369 of title 18, United States Code, to extend Federal jurisdiction over destruction of veterans' memorials on State or local government property.
Sponsor: Rep Green, Gene [TX-29] (introduced 1/7/2009) Cosponsors (None)
Committees: House Judiciary
Latest Major Action: 2/9/2009 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.

H.R.333 : ***Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act*** to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated less than 50 percent to receive concurrent payment of both retired pay and veterans' disability compensation, to eliminate the phase-in period for concurrent receipt, to extend eligibility for concurrent receipt to chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service, and for other purposes.
Sponsor: Rep Marshall, Jim [GA-8] (introduced 1/8/2009) Cosponsors (120)
Committees: House Armed Services; House Veterans' Affairs
Latest Major Action: 2/6/2009 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via [http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12406456&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12406456&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) and <http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12888756>

H.R.671 : ***In Memory Medal for Forgotten Veterans Act*** to direct the Secretary of Defense to issue a medal to certain veterans who died after their service in the Vietnam War as a direct result of that service.

Sponsor: Rep Filner, Bob [CA-51] (introduced 1/26/2009) Cosponsors (3)

Committees: House Armed Services

Latest Major Action: 2/6/2009 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

H.R.761 : *Parental Burial in National Cemeteries (Corey Shea Act)*. To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the eligibility of parents of certain deceased veterans for interment in national cemeteries.

Sponsor: Rep Frank, Barney [MA-4] (introduced 1/28/2009) Cosponsors (3) Related Bill H.R.3949

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 10/28/2009 House committee/subcommittee actions. Status: **Provisions of measure incorporated into H.R.3949** .

H.R.1042 : ***Enemy POW Hospitalization Policy***. To prohibit the provision of medical treatment to enemy combatants detained by the United States at Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in the same facility as a member of the Armed Forces or Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility.

Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 2/12/2009) Cosponsors (9)

Committees: House Armed Services; House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 2/13/2009 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Health.

H.R.1708 : ***Ending the Medicare Disability Waiting Period Act of 2009*** to amend title II of the Social Security Act to phase out the 24-month waiting period for disabled individuals to become eligible for Medicare benefits, to eliminate the waiting period for individuals with life-threatening conditions, and for other purposes.

Companion Bill S.700.

Sponsor: Rep Green, Gene [TX-29] (introduced 3/25/2009) Cosponsors (104)

Committees: House Ways and Means; House Energy and Commerce; House Transportation and Infrastructure

Latest Major Action: 3/26/2009 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials.

H.R.2254: ***The Agent Orange Equity Act*** to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam.

Sponsor: Rep. Filner, Bob [CA-51] (introduced 5/5/2009) Cosponsors (226)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 5/8/2—0 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via

[http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert?alertid=13301656&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert?alertid=13301656&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id])

H.R.2546 : ***Right to Display Service Flag***. To ensure that the right of an individual to display the Service flag on residential property not be abridged.

Sponsor: Rep Boccieri, John A. [OH-16] (introduced 5/21/2009) Cosponsors (31)

Committees: House Financial Services

Latest Major Action: 5/21/2009 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Financial Services.

H.R.2586 : ***Honor Guard 13-fold Flag Recitation Option***. To prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from authorizing honor guards to participate in funerals of veterans interred in national cemeteries unless the honor guards may offer veterans' families the option of having the honor guard perform a 13-fold flag recitation, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Rep Broun, Paul C. [GA-10] (introduced 5/21/2009) Cosponsors (46)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 5/21/2009 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

H.R.2642 : ***Veterans Missing in America Act of 2009*** to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assist in the identification of unclaimed and abandoned human remains to determine if any such remains are eligible for burial in a national cemetery, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Rep Tiberi, Patrick J. [OH-12] (introduced 5/21/2009) Cosponsors (9)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 5/21/2009 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

SENATE BILLS:

S.404 : ***Veterans' Emergency Care Fairness Act of 2009***. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand veteran eligibility for reimbursement by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for emergency treatment furnished in a non-Department facility, and for other purposes. Companion Bill H.R.1377.

Sponsor: Sen Akaka, Daniel K. [HI] (introduced 2/10/2009) Cosponsors (1)

Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 2/10/2009 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

S.572 : ***Purple Heart Forever Stamp***. A bill to provide for the issuance of a "forever stamp" to honor the sacrifices of the brave men and women of the armed forces who have been awarded the Purple Heart. Companion Bill H.R.1305.

Sponsor: Sen Webb, Jim [VA] (introduced 3/11/2009) Cosponsors (17)

Committees: Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Latest Major Action: 4/23/2009 Referred to Senate subcommittee. Status: Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs referred to Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security.

S.772 : ***Honor Act of 2009***. A bill to enhance benefits for survivors of certain former members of the Armed Forces with a history of post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, to enhance availability and access to mental health counseling for members of the Armed Forces and veterans, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Sen Bond, Christopher S. [MO] (introduced 4/1/2009) Cosponsors (12)

Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 4/1/2009 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

You can read and check the status of all bills at <http://thomas.loc.gov>

AND DON'T FORGET . . .

When you retire, you will qualify for a higher social security payment because of your military service. If you had active duty service any time from 1940 through 2001 (the program was done away with in January 2002), you qualify for up to \$1200 per year of earnings credit credited at time of application.

You must ask for this benefit to receive it when you retire. Take your DD-214 to the Social Security Office.
<http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>

► BRINGING THEM HOME

JPAC HOSTS ARRIVAL CEREMONY

HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii -- The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command will conduct an Arrival Ceremony at 9 a.m., Friday, Jan. 22, in Hangar 35, to honor fallen U.S. personnel whose identities remain unknown.

There will be three flag-draped transfer cases. One case from the Independent State of Papua New Guinea is associated with losses from World War II. Two cases are associated with the Vietnam War: one from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and one from the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Following the ceremony, the remains of these fallen Americans will be transported to the JPAC Central Identification Laboratory, where the forensic identification process begins. Once identifications are established, the names will be announced following the notification of next-of-kin.

A public tour of JPAC will be offered from 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. for the first 25 requests received. Contact Petty Officer 1st Class Taylor at (808) 448-1940 no later than 12:00 p.m. on Jan. 13 to reserve a spot for the public tour. Walk-up requests the day of the ceremony will not be accepted.

LAST TWO POW'S FROM AUSTRALIA BROUGHT HOME

In April 2009, an Air Force investigation team deployed to Vietnam found human remains at the site where the wreckage of a Royal Australian Air Force Canberra bomber was located. The aircraft, which went missing on November 3, 1970, was flown by Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver. The wreckage was located in thick jungle in an extremely rugged, remote and sparsely populated area of Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, near the Laotian border.

Flying Officer Michael Herbert was 24 years old when the Canberra bomber was lost. He was the pilot of "Magpie 91" and was a veteran of 198 operational sorties over Vietnam. FLGOFF Herbert joined No. 2 Squadron in February 1970. He was from Glenelg, South Australia.

Pilot Officer Robert Carver was also 24 years old. He was the navigator on "Magpie 91" and had conducted 33 sorties in Vietnam. PLTOFF Carver joined No. 2 Squadron in September 1970. He was from Toowoomba, Queensland.

YEAR-END POW REPORT

Vietnam-Era Unaccounted For Statistical Report

From Dept of Defense, current as of December 15, 2009

Cases: VN - 479 • VS - 835 • LA - 343 • CB - 59 • CH - 7 = 1723

Pursuit Status: Further Pursuit - 930 • Deferred - 133 • No further Pursuit - 660 = 1723

VN = VIETNAM NORTH • VS = VIETNAM SOUTH • CB = CAMBODIA • CH = CHINA • LA = LAOS

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR POST-1973 - REPATRIATED BY:

VIETNAM 654
CHINA 3
LAOS 235
CAMBODIA 31
TOTAL 923

U.S. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS: Since the fall of Saigon in 1975, the U.S. Government has acquired 23437 reports possibly pertaining to Americans in Southeast Asia:

SUMMARY OF REPORTS FIRSTHAND LIVE SIGHTINGS - 1997
HEARSAY SIGHTINGS REPORTS - 5522
CRASH/GRAVE SITES - 5926
DOGTAGS - 9992
TOTAL - 23437

a. Of the 1992 firsthand reports received since 1975, 1942 (97.49%) reports are resolved.

- 1341 (67.32%) reports were equated to Americans who are accounted for (i.e., PW returnees, missionaries, civilians jailed at various times for violation of Vietnamese codes).
- 45 (2.26%) reports were correlated to wartime sightings of military personnel or pre-1975 sighting of civilians who remain unaccounted for.
- 556 (27.91%) reports were determined to be fabrications.

b. The remaining 55 (2.75%) unresolved firsthand reports represent the focus of the U.S. Government analytical and collection efforts:

- 49 (2.45%) pertain to Americans reported in a captive environment.
- 6 (0.30%) reported sightings of Americans in a non-captive environment (i.e. working as truck drivers; married with Vietnamese family).

c. Since mid-1982, 9992 Dog tag reports have been received on over 10,000 names.

- Generally speaking 93% of those names reported are individuals who returned to the U.S. alive
- 5% correspond to U.S. remains that have been recovered/identified and buried in the U.S.
- and 2% relate to individuals who remain unaccounted for.

d. In all instances, dog tag reports receive thorough investigative attention, to include informing the military services of those reports with valid names so next of kin can be advised as appropriate.

The following timeline presents an overview of unresolved firsthand sightings by the year of the sighting:

Timeline: Unresolved Live Sighting Reports

CAPTIVE
Pre-1976 : 36
1976-1980 : 3
1981-1985 : 0

1986-1990 : 1
1991-1995 : 0
1996-2000 : 5
2001-2005 : 5
2006-2010 : 5
Total : 55

NON-CAPTIVE

Pre-1976 : 1
1976-1980 : 1
1981-1985 : 0
1986-1990 : 0
1991-1995 : 0
1996-2000 : 1
2001-2005 : 0
Total : 4

POW/MIA MEMORIAL



Thanks to Lorena Turnbow for sending this picture of a new POW/MIA memorial in Colorado City. It's located at 15th and Austin streets, and illustrates that a memorial does not have to be expensive or extravagant in order to honor our POWs/MIAs.

► SICK CALL

Bill and Chris Hanlon

Chris and Bill Hanlon were both hospitalized recently. Chris is fighting bone cancer, and Bill suffered a heart attack. Both are doing well at the moment. Chris is going through chemotherapy and may have a bone marrow transplant in the near future. Please keep them in your prayers.

► TAPS

Larry "Stepper" Rodgers

Larry passed away on December 12, 2009. A memorial service was held on January 9. His wishes were for his ashes to accompany the Southern Route to Washington D.C. and be left at The Wall.

Ret. Col. Lewis L. Millett, Medal of Honor Recipient

Retired Col. Lewis L. Millett, who received the Medal of Honor during the Korean War for leading what was reportedly the last major American bayonet charge, died Nov 14.

Millett, 88, died in Loma Linda, Calif., after serving for more than 15 years as the honorary colonel of the 27th Infantry Regiment Association.

CITATION: Rank and organization: Captain, U.S. Army, Company E, 27th Infantry Regiment. Place and date: Vicinity of Soam-Ni, Korea, 7 February 1951. Entered service at: Mechanic Falls, Maine. Born: 15 December 1920, Mechanic Falls, Maine. G.O. No.: 69, 2 August 1951. Citation: Capt. Millett, Company E, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action. While personally leading his company in an attack against a strongly held position he noted that the 1st Platoon was pinned down by small-arms, automatic, and antitank fire. Capt. Millett ordered the 3d Platoon forward, placed himself at the head of the 2 platoons, and, with fixed bayonet, led the assault up the fire-swept hill. In the fierce charge Capt. Millett bayoneted 2



enemy soldiers and boldly continued on, throwing grenades, clubbing and bayoneting the enemy, while urging his men forward by shouting encouragement. Despite vicious opposing fire, the whirlwind hand-to-hand assault carried to the crest of the hill. His dauntless leadership and personal courage so inspired his men that they stormed into the hostile position and used their bayonets with such lethal effect that the enemy fled in wild disorder. During this fierce onslaught Capt. Millett was wounded by grenade fragments but refused evacuation until the objective was taken and firmly secured. The superb leadership, conspicuous courage, and consummate devotion to duty demonstrated by Capt. Millett were directly responsible for the successful accomplishment of a hazardous mission and reflect the highest credit on himself and the heroic traditions of the military service.

In the 1960s he ran the 101st Airborne Division Recondo School, for reconnaissance-commando training, at Fort Campbell, Ky. Then he served in a number of special operations advisory assignments in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. He founded the Royal Thai Army Ranger School with help of the 46th Special Forces Company. This unit is reportedly the only one in the U.S. Army to ever simultaneously be designated as both Ranger and Special Forces.

Millett retired from the Army in 1973.

Millett was born in Maine and first enlisted in 1940 in the Army Air Corps and served as a gunner. Soon after, when it appeared that the U.S. would not enter World War II, he left and joined the Canadian Army. In 1942, while Millett was serving in London, the United States entered the war. Millett turned himself into the U.S. Embassy there. He was eventually assigned to the 1st Armored Division. As an antitank gunner in Tunisia, Millett earned the Silver Star after he jumped into a burning halftrack filled with ammunition, drove it away from allied soldiers and jumped to safety just before the vehicle exploded. He later shot down a German fighter plane with a vehicle-mounted machine gun.

As a sergeant serving in Italy during the war, his desertion to join the Canadian forces caught up to him. He was court-martialed, fined \$52 and denied leave. A few weeks later he was awarded a battlefield commission. After the war, he joined the 103rd Infantry of the Maine National Guard, and attended college, until he was called back to active duty in 1949.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Millett earned the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, two Legions of Merit and four Purple Hearts during his 35-year military career. After his retirement, he remained active in both national and local veterans groups from his Idyllwild, Calif., home. His son, Staff Sgt John Morton Millett,

was a member of the 101st Airborne Division returning from duty in the Sinai Dec. 12, 1985, when a charter plane crashed upon takeoff after stopping at Gander, Newfoundland. He was one of 256 Soldiers killed in the crash.

On Feb. 7, 1994, retired Col. Millet was honored with a ceremony on Hill 180, now located on Osan Air Base, South Korea. The ceremony became an annual one and the road running up the hill was named "Millet Road." In June 2000, Millet returned to Seoul, South Korea, and served as keynote speaker at the Army's 225th Birthday Ball at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. All eight of the then-living Korean War Medal of Honor recipients attended the event.

This year, Millet served as the grand marshal of a Salute to Veterans parade, April 21 in Riverside, Calif. He died November 14 at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Loma Linda, Calif., of congestive heart failure. A memorial service for Millet was held December 5 at the National Medal of Honor Memorial, Riverside National Cemetery in California.

Reflecting on his career, Col. Millett once told an interviewer: "I believe in freedom, I believe deeply in it. I've fought in three wars, and volunteered for all of them, because I believed as a free man, that it was my duty to help those under the attack of tyranny. Just as simple as that."

Ret. Col. Robert L. Howard, Medal of Honor Recipient

SAN ANTONIO – Retired Army Col. Robert L. Howard, a Medal of Honor recipient who retired in San Antonio and was one of the most highly decorated soldiers from the [Vietnam War](#), died December 23, 2009.



Citation: First Lieutenant Howard's platoon had left its helicopter landing zone and was moving out on its mission when it was attacked by an estimated two-company force. Lieutenant Howard was wounded and his weapon destroyed by a grenade explosion and his platoon leader had also been wounded and was exposed to fire. Although unable to walk, and weaponless, Lieutenant Howard crawled through a hail of fire to retrieve his wounded leader. While administering first aid and removing the officer's equipment, an enemy bullet struck one of the ammunition pouches on the lieutenant's belt, detonating several magazines. Lieutenant Howard momentarily sought cover and then realizing that he must rejoin the platoon, which had been disorganized by the enemy attack, he again began dragging the seriously wounded officer toward the platoon area. Through

his outstanding example of indomitable courage and bravery, he was able to rally the platoon into an organized defense force. He crawled from position to position, administering first aid to the wounded, giving encouragement to the defenders and directing their fire on the encircling enemy. For 3 1/2 hours his small force and supporting aircraft successfully repulsed enemy attacks.

Col. Howard, 70, died at about noon at a hospice in Waco, where he'd been for about three weeks, suffering from pancreatic cancer, said Benito Guerrero, a close friend, Vietnam veteran and retired sergeant major.

Col. Howard, a larger-than-life figure on the national military scene, appeared at many patriotic events in San Antonio. At his suggestion, the local Blue Star Mothers of America chapter began holding an annual ceremony in late December to remember the troops serving overseas.

"He said, 'Don't forget the troops at Christmas.' He was very adamant about that," said Chris Peche, who in 2004 helped organize the event, now held at the Alamo.

In April, Col. Howard traveled, as he often did, to Iraq and Afghanistan to talk to U.S. troops about service. Just two months ago, he visited troops in Germany, Bosnia and Kosovo.

Col. Howard, born July 11, 1939, grew up in Opelika, Ala., and served in the Army from 1956 to 1992. After retiring at Fort Sam Houston, he decided to stay in San Antonio.

Col. Howard, who served five tours of Vietnam, was a sergeant first class in the Army's Special Forces on Dec. 30, 1968, when he rallied a badly shot-up platoon against an estimated 250 enemy troops. Despite being unable to walk because of injuries, he coordinated a counterattack while aiding the wounded and was the last man to board a helicopter, according to military records.

He was nominated for the Medal of Honor, the highest honor for valor, three times in a 13-month period. His long list of awards also included the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star and eight Purple Hearts.

He also had been an advocate for troops missing in action. He told a Senate panel in 1986 that he believed there still were Americans, possibly more than 100, living in captivity in Southeast Asia.

In April 2009, Howard traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to talk to troops. About two months ago he visited troops in Germany, Bosnia and Kosovo.

“As one of America’s most decorated veterans, Col. Howard inspired everyone he met to consider their own commitment to our nation’s essential values, and was the bravest soldier I ever met,” Texas Gov. Rick Perry said in a statement. “His unshakeable commitment to freedom, displayed in countless episodes of battlefield gallantry, lives on in the actions of our military men and women who continue to serve in hostile conditions overseas.”

Col. Howard is survived by three children, including a daughter living in Waco, retired Maj. Gen. Alfred Valenzuela said. A memorial service was held in San Antonio and he was buried at Arlington.

Robert Purcell, Vietnam POW

Col. Robert Purcell — Percy to those who knew him — died in his home in Fort Worth on December 6, 2009 at the age of 78. He was an Air Force pilot and spent almost eight years as a POW in a North Vietnamese prison during the Vietnam War. On July 27, his 25th combat mission in the F-105 Thunderchief, Col. Purcell’s low-flying aircraft was hit by ground fire. He lost a wing. He ejected, and the plane exploded.

Everyone thought he died. His family in Louisville had a funeral. In reality, he was the 17th man taken prisoner of war.

There were many stories told about Purcell’s honor and sense of humor. In one of them, a prison guard came into Col. Purcell and retired Air Force Col. Bernard Talley’s cell one day. He wanted them to bow. Col. Purcell wouldn’t. Following his lead, Talley refused, too. The guard slapped Purcell. Then he slapped him again harder. Then again.

"Why don't you hit me harder?" Col. Purcell said. The guard closed his fist and struck. Punch after punch followed. Col. Purcell repeated his request. The guard kept complying, until he quit because his hands hurt.

When the guard left their cell, Col. Purcell asked Talley to tap out a message to the other prisoners using the code they developed to communicate with one another through walls.

"Tell them Magoo understands English," Col. Purcell said, using the nickname for that guard.

In another story: In 1966, after a U.S. raid in Hanoi, the guards pulled many of the prisoners out of the camp, shackled them together and forced them to march through an angry mob in town. People were throwing rocks, screaming, wanting the blood of the only aviators they could get their hands on.

Reynolds didn't think they would survive the crowd.

Col. Purcell turned to him.

"Look, it's a parade," he said. "I love a parade."

That was Col. Purcell to all who knew him — stubborn, tough as nails, loyal and witty in the darkest hours

At the end of his military career, completed in 1980 at Carswell Air Force Base, he had received the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars for valor, two Purple Hearts, two Legions of Merit and a Distinguished Flying Cross.

Although the Air Force never cleared Col. Purcell to return to flight, he became a simulator pilot instructor for American Airlines for 15 years after his military retirement.

► CLOSING THOUGHTS

A Soldier Reports to God

Author unknown

The soldier stood and faced his God
Which must always come to pass
He hoped his shoes were shining
Just as brightly as his brass.

"Step forward now, you soldier,
How shall I deal with you?
Have you always turned the other cheek?
To My Church have you been true?"

The soldier squared his shoulders and
said, "No, Lord, I guess I ain't
Because those of us who carry guns
Can't always be a saint.

I've had to work most Sundays
And at times my talk was tough,
And sometimes I've been violent,
Because the streets are awfully tough

But, I never took a penny
That wasn't mine to keep...
Though I worked a lot of overtime
When the bills got just too steep,

And I never passed a cry for help,

Though at times I shook with fear,
And sometimes, God forgive me,
I've wept unmanly tears.

I know I don't deserve a place
Among the people here
They never wanted me around
Except to calm their fears.

If you've a place for me here, Lord,
It needn't be so grand,
I never expected or had too much,
But if you don't, I'll understand."

There was a silence all around the throne
Where the saints had often trod
As the soldier waited quietly,
For the judgment of his God,

"Step forward now you soldier
You've borne your burdens well,
Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets,
You've done your time in Hell."

ALSO . . .

This video was updated for Vietnam Vets:
http://www.beforeyougo.us/play_byg_vn

Tribute to fallen Marines:
<http://00f2630.netsolhost.com/farewellmarine.html>

John Wayne: Why I Love America::
<http://sagebrushpatriot.com/america.htm>

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