



RUN FOR THE WALL

Quarterly Newsletter

“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”

July 2016

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THE EDITOR'S NOTES

This issue has always been my favorite because we hear from FNGs about their first experiences with Run For The Wall. You're going to love reading their stories. Nothing pulls at the heartstrings like hearing that a few more of our heroes have finally received their Welcome Home and have been blessed with healing.

To all of our 2016 FNGs, welcome to RFTW. You're part of the RFTW family forever now.

Maybe it's just my imagination or wishful thinking, but it seems like DPAA is ramping up POW/MIA recoveries. In particular, there have been many recoveries and identifications of the remains of 429 crew members killed on the USS Oklahoma when it was bombed December 7, 1941 in Pearl Harbor. There have also been many recoveries from Vietnam. As you read their names in "Bringing Them Back," please honor the memories of those heroes.

The recent terrible flooding in West Virginia touched our beloved town of Rainelle, where Central Route has stopped since the very first year. I've talked to a friend in Rainelle who lost her home. There is so much devastation and sorrow, but they are strong people and will overcome this tragedy, as they have many others. Our prayers go out to the people of Rainelle, many of whom lost their homes. Read more about it in "Other Stories." RFTW is collecting donations for Rainelle, so be sure to read about how you can help.

I also want to give a huge thank you to all of my RFTW family for your calls and cards when I had cancer surgery. It was a scary time, and hearing your voices and reading your words of comfort helped me get through the ordeal. Edwin Musto, thank you for calling from New Zealand! I was kind of out of it when you called, and hope I didn't sound ungrateful to hear your voice. I was so thankful to my daughter Donna who came from California so I wouldn't be alone. Thanks to some of my Lake Havasu Military Moms for going all the way to Las Vegas to visit me in the hospital, and also those in my RFTW family: Martha Zaragosa, Paladin, and Tanker. I'm sure I'm forgetting some of you, but please know that your calls and visits meant a lot.

I've got to tell you about Tanker's visit. I was a little out of it at the time, but I knew Martha Z. was in my room. But I also heard a man's voice and tried to figure out who it was. I lifted my head—and saw Tanker. It didn't occur to me to wonder why he was visiting me when he lived in Texas. Turns out he was visiting his sister who lives in Las Vegas and was having surgery in the same hospital I was in—in the very room below mine. While Tanker was in her room he checked his emails on his phone and saw the email Danny Lopresto had sent out about me being in the hospital. When he saw the number of the room I was in, Tanker said he looked up at the ceiling, realizing I was right above him. He hopped on the elevator and walked into my room. Then he called Danny to tell him he expected recognition for traveling the farthest and fastest to visit me—"1,295 miles in 17 minutes!"

Gotta love the RFTW family!

Judy "Velcro" Lacey

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.



INCOMING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello RFTW Riders:

Many of you know me, or have heard of me already. My name is Harry Steelman – they call me “Attitude.” I stand for Safety. This year the Board of Directors has, once again, selected me as their president. I am truly humbled by this honor which they have bestowed on me. I will do my very best to live up to any expectations that they or you may have.

Our Board is made up of some very fine individuals and I hold each and every one in the highest regard. We are now nine. Four of us, Ken Ward, Don Burns, David Klemme, and I are past Route Coordinators, lending that level of specific route leadership experience to the group. All of us have held positions in platoon leadership, at least four of whom, John McKee, Ken Ward, Doug Levyre, and Kirk Olson have also been Road Guards. Harlan Olson has also worked leadership positions in Advance teams. Some have held leadership positions on multiple routes. All three routes are represented on this year's Board and collectively we are all qualified and ready to ensure that the appropriate level of continuity is provided as our new Route Coordinators gather their respective staffs and begin preparations for RFTW XXIX. I know that they are well on their way to putting together an excellent program.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank the thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations that give so selflessly of their time and personal funds to see us across our great nation. These entities work all year to put together the local events that make our journey so amazing. We would be hard pressed to get to Arlington without them. If you have never done this run before, brace yourself. The outpouring of support, understanding, and from the bottom of the heart LOVE from our fellow Americans will bring you to your knees. From the Law Enforcement and Fire Department support and the countless number of people who put another countless number of hours in preparing meals and programs; from the spiritual support provided by churches and houses of worship along the way and the Veterans' organizations, providing emotional and moral support, sometimes even fuel and tolls at our stops, right down to those who greet us on the overpasses and bring their children down to the right of way fence to wave us on with so much respect, on behalf of all of the RFTW riders - I THANK YOU; so very, very much. You are ever so much an integral part of our mission.

Now, as for the business at hand, the Board of Directors for Run For The Wall stands committed to the riders, with emphasis on the FNGs, and to continuing to guide and assist the Route Coordinators to make the Run increasingly better. This is part of our job. We also strive to maintain continuity from year to year and Route to Route. The RCs are tasked with the day-to-day operation of the Run and they take that task very seriously. Safety remains their key focus. The BOD exists to provide the administrative support necessary to keep this great event on the road. We also consider it our responsibility to keep safety the primary focus in the continuous search for improvements to the Run. We are committed to these tasks for the entire year leading up to the event and beyond. To that end, we can all expect change to occur and change, as we all know, is not always well received. Five of us have been on the Board for two or more years; this will be my sixth and last; second as president. We are well aware of the impacts that are made by the decisions that we make. Some of these decisions are made after hours, days, weeks, months, even years of deliberation and discussion. None are taken lightly and none are made “off the cuff.” RFTW is not an easy journey. The days are long. Some days are very hot and some days can be quite cold. Some days are terribly dry and some extremely wet, often windy. Some days are jubilant, some reflective, and some



downright heartbreaking. We ride through it all. We on the BOD know and understand the environment and impacts, and consider them as we develop our decisions. At the end of the day we know that we cannot please everyone all of the time, but we do recognize the need to make solid decisions with good conscience.

We also host a benevolence fund to provide assistance to organizations that further our mission. It is impossible to miss the media coverage of the devastation this year in many parts of our country. Fires, tornadoes and floods seem to be the top story more often than not. One community particularly dear to RFTW is Rainelle, WV. When, 28 years ago, the first Run was turned away at the WV toll gates, they were directed to an alternate route through the mountains. Large bands of leather-clad motorcyclists were often not well received by peaceful communities in 1989, but the town of Rainelle, recognizing this particular band as being made up of veterans who had fought and bled to ensure that their constitutional rights and privileges were preserved, welcomed them into town, providing shelter in the school gymnasium, and generally showing their gratitude in a way that is hard to come by today. Rainelle is a very small and extremely poor mining town even to this day. And the devastation to certain areas has been complete. A number of RFTW personnel have given of their time and resources to get into this community and provide assistance. Each of our three routes has made generous donations to the cause, which has been matched by the RFTW treasury to the tune of some \$15,000.00. We have provided rain gear, mud boots, and clothing to assist those working endless hours to clear the devastation. We will soon be getting the word out of a “Coats for Kids” program to help see some of the less fortunate children through the winter. We are also working with the local VFW Post to identify any veterans who may be in need of particular assistance.

Some of this is coming out of our recent face-to-face meeting in Springfield, MO., along with several other developments, to include a new website that will be coming on line soon. But I am holding true to my usual long-winded self, and will address some of these things in the next newsletter.

You can help us, and we encourage you to do so. First, please use after-action reports and emails or phone calls to the BOD members to make your feelings and ideas known. Second, attend one or more of the three reunions to stand up and speak your piece. One is already behind us, being held a little early this year. The next reunion is to be held in Angel Fire/Eagle Nest, NM over Labor Day weekend and I encourage everyone who possibly can to join us. Our New Mexico folks have put significant effort in making this event extremely worthwhile. We will be placing over 300 bricks along the walkways commemorating the service of Americans nationwide in all conflicts at the New Mexico Vietnam memorial, which if you have not yet had the good fortune to visit, is an emotional and spiritual experience second to none. And third, I would, at the risk of receiving some severe criticism, ask everyone to be careful and mindful with what you post on the website forum. Yes, we fought for the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press and I would be the last one to suggest that we put any sort of damper on what you post. HOWEVER, almost everyone refers those seeking information regarding the Run to our forum. Everything that is posted there is representative of who we are and what we do—if you will, our mission. To that end we all need to be responsible in our postings and provide positive reinforcement to those who would look to join us and who need information on how to best do that and on what to expect. Please be respectful of the RFTW and to those who have made it one of the mainstays of their healing experience and, in fact, their lives.

Thank You for this opportunity,
“Attitude”

Honor All Who Serve

God Bless the USA, God Bless RFTW and GOD BLESS THOSE WHO SUPPORT OUR MISSION!

OUTGOING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Into the Sunset...

Welcome to my last post as President of RFTW..!

It has been a most interesting three years on the Board of Directors, ending with my final year as President. Over these years we as a BoD have striven to step back from the details and grasp the “50,000 foot view” of managing the corporation. We have had many insightful discussions, rambling phone calls, email strings that went on for days, and the occasional “Let’s try that again.” But, we kept pushing forward. We went through Bylaws revisions, Robert’s Rules of Order deliberations, insurance issues, SOP updates, drafting of new guidelines, selecting Route Coordinators, being sued, and countless other issues. But we kept pushing forward. And as I completed my final days on the BoD and contemplated where RFTW has been, and the group that is now leading it forward, I thought to myself: They will keep pushing forward.



When I went on the Board I had more than one person tell me: “You’re going to lose a lot of friends.” When I took on the role of President I had more than one person tell me: “You’re going to lose a lot of friends.” As far I as know, I lost none—and may have gained a couple along the way. Leadership is about doing the best you can to serve. If you do your best that’s all you can do. And if you do it with mindfulness of your mission and selflessness of ego, you will generally do the right thing.

As I write this I want to challenge the new BoD members to lead the corporation with mindfulness of mission and selflessness of ego. Serve its needs so it in turn may serve its mission.

So NOW — I think it is time to go KSU and see some country. Wave if you see the Road Nymph and me along the way. The Ride is FAR from over...

Fair Winds and Following Seas!!!

Greg “Pied Piper” Smith (Ok – sometimes Yoda)

► NEW RFTW BOD

The new 2016-2017 RFTW Board of Directors:

President:	Harry “Attitude” Steelman
Vice President/Chairman of the Board:	Les “Easy” Williams
Treasurer:	Ken “Catfish” Ward
Director of Operations & Training:	Doug “Sgt. Major” Lyvere
Director of Merchandise:	Ray “ZZ” Brammer
Director of Public Relations/Communications:	Kirk “Pretty Boy” Olson
Director of Rick Management:	John “Wicked” McKee
Secretary:	Dave “Papa Smurf” Klemme
Director of Purchasing:	Don “EZ” Burns

2017 CR Coordinator: Dick “Winky” McKay.
2017 Midway Coordinator: Mark “Diesel” Breland
2017 SR Coordinator: Ray “Ghost Rider” Wyatt

► MEET THE NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS

Harry “Attitude” Steelman, President

Greetings from San Juan Capistrano, CA. It’s a really rough place to live, but someone has to live there! Not everyone is saddled with the responsibility of having to make use of a 12-month riding season! But I aimlessly ramble, so let me take a few moments to tell you all a bit about myself.

Born and raised eons ago on the East Coast in Wilmington, DE, about 30 miles South of Philly. I even graduated (barely) from William Penn High School. I decided to get away from home for a few years and go to college to raise a little “Cain,” so south to Ole Miss I went. Not only did I go south, but so did my grades and then a little “Cain” I did raise! Having to return home after my second year to explain to my Dad that I could never return to that school (and perhaps the State of Mississippi) not only because of my grades, but because I had been charged with “conduct unbecoming” was one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do. But it was the turning point of my life.



It didn’t take long to receive my “Greetings from the President” so, rather than spend the next several years pounding the boonies, I enlisted. I was going to be a cryptographic repairman (computer technician, but I didn’t know what a computer was in 1967 (neither did any of my friends). I was off to Army Basic, but lo and behold my two years of unsuccessful college experience was enough to qualify me to be an officer in the U.S. Army. Of course I wound up as Infantry and after several months of training I was bound for the Republic of Vietnam – as a “ground pounder”. I served as Team Leader of MAT 9 (Mobile Advisory Team), Advisor Team 68, MACV in the Minh Duc District of Vinh Long Province, IV Corps about 100 klicks North of Can Tho. I got home after serving my full twelve-month tour, safe and sound with all moving parts intact and no physical holes.

Back to school securing a Bachelor’s Degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Delaware (The “Fightin’ Blue Hens!”) and off to pursue a Railroad career with the Union Pacific Railroad. I’ve been Railroading ever since, but not always with a Class 1. Fifteen years were spent consulting and constructing light rail (trolley) systems and passenger corridors all over the country. This is why I say the we are “currently” living in SJC, since I have lived in 13 states over the past 34 years. I retired from Amtrak as Division Engineer over the western half of this good old USA in 2013 and now “work” as a railroad consultant to Class I railroads and commuter lines.

I made my first “Run” on ’07 and was immediately hooked. My wife joined me in ’08 and we were immediately “drafted” into “Registration Duty.” I also served that year as Assistant Platoon Leader. ’09 found Martha back in charge of Registration and me riding in the 6 pack, “just to get a feel for how this thing operates.” This of course prepared me completely to be Assistant Route Coordinator the following year with Miss Martha back at the Registration Desk. And then Central Route Coordinator in 2011; the year of “Surviving Williams” and the “Topeka Turn Around.”

The following year I was elected to the board of Directors, serving as president in 2014. I decided to stay on the board for three more years and am now honored to be serving as president once again.

I was very much honored to have been asked to lead the Central Route across our great nation, and then to serve as the Board president. To be elected to this position a second time is extremely humbling. The riders themselves and those they represent are some of the most important people in our lives and we all have the utmost respect for them and their sacrifices. I tell my employees that the most important focus in railroading is safety and I strongly believe that the same holds true for the Run For The Wall. If you hear me talk of nothing else, you will hear me talk about Safety. I also believe strongly in acknowledging the efforts of those that contribute to the administrative and operational success of the Run, and I have a few ideas in mind designed to show my appreciation for them and all who participate – at any level.

Enough already! I'll be back – I look forward to meeting as many of you as I possibly can. Please take a moment to say "Hi" somewhere along the Route. **HERE WE GO!**

WHAT A RUSH!

Harry "Attitude" Steelman
"Honor All Who Served"

Kirk "Pretty Boy" Olson, Director of Public Relations/Communications



Greetings! I can hardly believe that 10 years ago, I was telling my parents, Harlan and Janelle Olson in 2007 (their FNG year) that they were **CRAZY** for doing this weird motorcycle ride across the country. I said, "Do you know how far that is!?" The next year they did it again... I said, "You're nuts! Do you know how far that is?" In 2009, I finally went on the Run, and little did I know then that I would be honored and blessed to serve this wonderful organization and community on the RFTW BoD seven years later. I have been a Central Route Road Guard for seven years, and have friends on all three routes. If you are new to RFTW, you have just found and become part of a great organization and family.

RFTW changes how you think, feel, and even makes you a better motorcycle rider to boot. If you have a few runs under your belt, you know the agony and anticipation of waiting until May.

My responsibilities in my new capacity on the BoD include the RFTW website, all things tech for RFTW, and Public Relations, just name a few. I'd like to set a goal to help our younger generation get involved with RFTW, whether that be guys and gals joining the Run for a day or two or All the Way. It is imperative that the mission of RFTW stay alive and we introduce RFTW to new riders. Remember, we are all RFTW Ambassadors 365 days a year. If you have ideas, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing all of you next May, and at some of the reunions in between.

Kirk "Pretty Boy" Olson

Dave “Papa Smurf” Klemme, Secretary

Hello. My name is Dave “Papa Smurf” Klemme, and I am honored to have been chosen to serve on the Board of Directors for Run For The Wall.

I served in the United States Marine Corps, as both an enlisted man and an officer, from 1967 to 1992. During my enlisted days, I served as a UH-1E “Huey” Crew Chief/Door Gunner. I have three close friends and fellow Marine crewmembers that went out together one day, and never returned. To this day, they remain among the missing, and every year I make this Run in their memory. They are why our mission is so near, and dear, to my heart.



I started Run For The Wall as an FNG (Fun New Guy) in 2004, and have been a “Central Route Guy” ever since. If I had it to do over again, I would probably have alternated between the Central and Southern Routes, with a turn on Midway thrown in when they started up, as well. But having been with Central Route for so long now, I can’t imagine not being with them every May. Last year was my 12th Run. For the first six, I was content to be a pack rider, but I began to realize just how much benefit I had received from this experience without having given anything back. In 2011, I joined the Staging Team, and did that job for two years. In 2013, Don “E-Z” Burns asked me to be his Assistant Platoon Leader, and when Don was selected to be the Assistant Route Coordinator in 2014, I was asked to take over his Platoon Leader position. When Don assumed his role as the 2015 Route Coordinator, he again reached out to me to be his assistant. Last year I had the privilege of leading the Central Route as Route Coordinator for RFTW XXVIII.

I am looking forward to being able to serve the RFTW community of riders as a member of the Board. We have many challenges facing RFTW as we shape the future of our Run. I am particularly concerned about finding innovative ways to reach out to today’s younger vets. Many of today’s leadership are getting a little... ahem... shall we say “more mature?” as the years go by. Some of us don’t have too many more Runs left in us. We need to pass the torch, and we need younger riders, veterans and non-veterans alike, to step forward and carry that torch into the future.

If you have any ideas you’d like to share with the Board, please don’t hesitate to do so. Contact information for all Board members is listed on our website. I personally welcome your comments and ideas as we move forward.

Be well and ride safe.

Dave “Papa Smurf” Klemme

Secretary, RFTW Board of Directors

“Freedom Isn’t Free”

► RFTW 2016 REPORTS

2016 FINAL REGISTRATION STATS

John “Wicked” McKee

Director of Risk Management

Route	Pre-Reg		No-Show		Walk-ins		Total	ATW	Arrived in D.C.			Totals
									M/C	Passenger	4-Wheels	
Central	466	-	46	+	194	=	614	306	372	64	32	468
Midway	238	-	22	+	60	=	276	182	176	36	21	233
Southern	429	-	64	+	195	=	560	256	321	58	31	410
	1133	-	132	+	449	=	1450	744	869	158	84	1111

AFTER REPORT FROM CENTRAL ROUTE COORDINATOR:



As happens each year at this time, we now put RFTW XXVIII in the books alongside all our previous Runs.

By almost any measure, the Central Route was an exceptionally successful experience. I have so many people to thank that it would be impossible to name them all here, nor would I try for fear of leaving even one person out. Our State Coordinators did a magnificent job across the board making arrangements for our visits to each state, and the communities we visited showered us with their affection and support. I never cease to be amazed at the outpouring of patriotism we find all across this great land... if anyone needs to have their faith in our country restored, all they need do is make this trip across the Heartland of America with us and they will find that America is alive and well. I also cannot say enough about our leadership and support teams... our Road Guards, platoon leadership, fuelers, staggers, Ambassadors, Chaplains, registration folks, medics, and the Hydration Team, who worked seamlessly to provide our riders, and particularly our FNGs, with the experience of a lifetime. I am particularly indebted to our Leadership Support folks... finance, “raffle rousers,” our Leadership Support Vehicle driver, our photographer, and all of the other folks who took so much of the load off my shoulders. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my Assistant Route Coordinator, Dick “Winky” McKay.

Without his unflagging help and support, I could not have done this job. I am delighted to announce that Dick has been confirmed as the Central Route Coordinator for RFTW XXIX in 2017.

We were blessed with great weather throughout our Run on Central Route, and we enjoyed the hospitality of communities all across this wonderful country. Every stop, and every event along the way, has its own special significance for us, but there are always a few that stand out. These are but a few of the highlights:

In Gallup, New Mexico, we were welcomed by the Navajo Nation and invited to participate in their ritual dance to honor our country’s warriors. The Navajo are a deeply spiritual people, and being asked to join in their ceremony touched every heart.

In Colorado, we found new friends and supporters in the wonderful community of Fountain. Only a couple of weeks before our Run started, our lunch venue in Colorado Springs fell through, but the city leadership and people of Fountain stepped up to provide us with a great lunch in their fire station and made us feel right at home. We look forward to renewing our friendship with these wonderful folks in the years to come.

We were able to cross Kansas with our bikes upright! Those who have ridden I-70 across Kansas before can attest that the crosswinds can be brutal, but this year the conditions were perfect and we didn’t have to wear out the sides of our tires (or even them out on the return trip).

In Wentzville, Missouri, we literally crossed paths with a gentleman who was walking across our country to the Wall. He started on the West Coast far earlier than we did, and plans to arrive at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day. Speaking with him was an inspiration.

Also in Missouri, we had an honor platoon visit the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery and lay a wreath at Mark Schroeder's grave site. Mark was a Patriot Guard Rider who was killed only a few weeks before our Run while participating in a PGR mission. Mark was also a Run For The Wall rider and would have been a member of our Staging Team this year.

As always, the Catfish Fry in Corydon, Indiana, was superb. I can't speak for anyone else, but I did some serious damage to my boyish figure that evening!

And then there's Rainelle. In a trip characterized by many highlights, Rainelle, West Virginia, always stands a bit above the rest. The children from the school were out in force to meet us and we had a great time renewing our old friendships, and making new ones. Through the exceptional efforts of our fund raisers, and the incredible generosity of our riders, Central Route was able to donate over \$21,000 to the Rainelle School and its children. This will have a special significance this year because, as many of you know, Rainelle was recently devastated by flooding and the entire community is in need of assistance. Hopefully, some of the money donated this year will help in that effort. Run For The Wall has also responded directly to this disaster with additional donations on behalf of all three routes, with matching funds from the RFTW Board of Directors. Central Route is also sponsoring a winter coat drive to make sure that every child in the school will have a new coat for the winter. I urge everyone reading this to donate what you can to this effort. Our point of Contact (POC) for the coat drive is Jenny Ward (jhhamilton@hotmail.com).

I want to take a moment to recognize one of our FNGs this year. Edwin Musto is from New Zealand. He planned his trip to the US for months to participate in RFTW, and was one of our most enthusiastic riders. Unfortunately, Edwin was involved in an accident on our leg from Junction City to Topeka, in Kansas. While he avoided serious injury in the accident, his Goldwing was no longer rideable. Not to be deterred, Edwin finished his Run to D.C. in a rental car, arriving in time to ride the Missing Man escort into Arlington National Cemetery, and to participate in our Mission Accomplished ceremony at The Wall.

Edwin is now back in New Zealand, vowing to be with us again next year, and we all look forward to seeing him again. If you look up the words "grit" and "tenacity" in the dictionary, you'll find Edwin's picture next to them.

Leading Central Route this year was an experience I will treasure the rest of my life. I do not have the words to adequately express my gratitude to all of the people who worked so diligently to make this year's Run such a wonderful experience. I hope to see all of you again next year, and for many more Runs to come.

With deepest respect and gratitude,
Dave "Papa Smurf" Klemme
2016 RFTW Central Route Coordinator
Freedom Isn't Free

AFTER REPORT FROM MIDWAY ROUTE COORDINATOR:

This year's Run was OUTSTANDING! I was blessed to have a very strong Leadership Team. Everyone stepped up to the plate and did their job flawlessly. A lot of the credit goes to the State Coordinators. They worked hard all year round setting up hotels, fuel stops, food stops, etc. They are the unsung heroes! Our Midway Route Road Guards protected and guided us. We had very little rain and no accidents (thank God!). All the riders kept their head in the game and we all arrived safely into Washington, DC.



I felt very fortunate that the Board of Directors gave us the leeway to govern and lead as we saw fit. This allowed all of the Midway Leadership Team to really shine. I would not have had a very successful Run without them. From what I am told, most of them are returning in 2017 to support the new Route Coordinator, Mark "Diesel" Breland. I wish all of them well and also offer my heartfelt thanks for all that they did to support me this past year.

Daryl "Top" Neil
Service Before Self!

AFTER REPORT FROM SOUTHERN ROUTE COORDINATOR:



By the Numbers!

Any way you measure it, the 2016 Run For The Wall: Southern Route was a great success.

The weather was perfect – not too hot in the desert and not too wet in the mountains. Last year, it seemed as though we wore our rain gear almost every day.

We had 557 registered riders. Some went all the way, some participated for as many miles as their schedules permitted. Each one a member of the RFTW family.

Our scheduled mileage from Ontario to the hotel in Arlington was 2,976 miles. That did not include the back-road detour through open range in New Mexico. Luckily we encountered no livestock, but I think the Missing Man Formation was chased by a startled blue heeler. He gave up when he realized there were another 100 + bikes passing through. We only had one accident along the way, and that was in Odessa, a town with Run Family who were able to check on the rider and store his equipment.

On the road, every meal was donated. Sixteen out of 23 fuel stops were donated. In Jackson, MS a family there to greet us decided on the spur of the moment to pick up the fuel tab for the pack. Other fuel stops were donated by Riders who wish to remain anonymous, former members of leadership, and Father Steven's legacy fund. Other corporate sponsors included Lockheed Martin out of Fort Worth, TX.

Entire cities joined in supporting us in Blythe, CA, Wilcox, AZ where it was officially Run for the Wall Day, Colorado City, TX, Meridian/Lauderdale Co. MS, Ashville, AL with Thunder at the Pig, and our home away from home, Wytheville, VA.

KIA Motors in California donated two new vehicles for our use all the way to DC. We used one for the Registration Team and the other for the two nurses traveling with us.

Along the way individuals, small companies and large corporations, Veteran's groups, churches, cities and counties presented us with checks and cash. Our own riders also reached into their pockets and gave generously in support of our Mission. The generosity was amazing and additional contributions were made on the Rider's behalf since we've been home. The total amount of money distributed was as follows:

Colorado Middle School \$4,000
Montvale Elementary School \$4,000
Spiller Elementary School \$4,000
Dubiski Career High School \$3,000
Grants to three individual students \$5,250 total
United Military Women of the Southwest (Memorial in Las Cruces, NM) \$1,000
Mineral Wells, TX Ntl. Vietnam War Museum \$1,000
Wytheville, VA Veteran's Memorial \$1,001
Sons and Daughters in Touch \$500 (matched 500 grant from Board of Directors)
Tuscaloosa VAMC- Veteran's Services \$1,487.22 (raised by passing Marty's hat, and matched by the RFTW Southern Route)
Silverdale Cemetery of Unknowns \$2,300 (raised in auctioning the patch and donations)
Defenders of Freedom Stop22 \$5,021 (riders donations, bracelet and patch sales)
Defenders of Freedom Stop22 \$2,200 (RFTW Southern Route)
Seed money for next year \$5,000

We lost count of the number of bridges covered with friendlies and the number of Fire Departments who came out to salute the Pack. Each evening the sit reps were posted on the website and a blog. One blog post received over 15,000 views. When you turn on the evening news it may not look like there are many patriotic Americans out there, but we know better!

The Fallen Heroes Cart was safely delivered to Regan National Airport. Untold numbers of Heroes will be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve upon arrival.

And then there are the 22. Twenty-two a day. Some of us will be meeting up with Defenders of Freedom in Coppell, TX on July 23rd. We'll be presenting them with the funds you raised to support their efforts in suicide intervention. We'll be hanging out with their members and encouraging them to Keep the Faith!

On behalf of all the Southern Route Leadership we'd like to thank you for making this such a successful Mission.

Keep the Faith,
Chicken Joe aka Joe Connors
Ghost Rider aka Ray Wyatt

► OUR STORIES

AN FNG'S REWARDING EXPERIENCE

By Frank Rodriguez, Brighton, Colorado

Back in early April, I was scrolling through Facebook and somebody had posted something about RFTW. I had heard about it in the past, so I looked it up and found the RFTW forum. I learned about the meeting on April 1st at Johnson's Corner, north of Denver, Colorado. The information we received and being I am an Army veteran during the Vietnam era, gave me a lot to think about. My brother and I attended that meeting and a week later we were registered.

We joined the Central Route in Goodland, Kansas. The first two or three days were very stressful, since we were not used to riding that close to other riders, but after the third day we noticed how much smoother our platoon was riding.

Last year in August, I lost my brother-in-law; he was a Vietnam veteran that struggled with his demons since that war. My wife honored me by suggesting that I take some of his ashes to "The Wall" where he belonged amongst his friends and brothers. Thank you to my wife for her understanding and honoring me to be the one to deliver her brother's ashes. She said her brother loved riding his motorcycle and to "take him for a ride" one more time.

To me, the run was a very rewarding experience. A special thanks to Major Dan Clark for taking care of us all the way to The Wall. Thank you to our platoon leader "Tanker" for a safe ride. All the people we rode with in #1 Platoon were great and very willing to help with whatever we needed. I really wasn't quite ready for the great welcome at all the towns we passed. I was especially touched by the Vietnam Memorial in Kentucky, also the stop at Rainelle, WV, and seeing all the kids was awesome.

I am not a very emotional person, but the RFTW was touching in so many different ways. The RFTW family is a great family to belong to. I would recommend the RFTW to any of my friends. I don't think I've ever been treated so darn good by any group of people as I was all the way to D.C.

THE LONG ROAD TO RFTW

My FNG story begins several years ago. I had a goal to buy a bike after life dealt me some sour cards. I had always wanted another bike since selling my last one up in Rapid City South Dakota in 1978. Yes, it had been that many years since I rode a motorcycle. Then, several years ago, as I was working on White Sands Missile Range, I saw a large group of bikes roll in through the El Paso gate on War Road as part of Rolling Thunder coming up from El Paso Texas. There were hundreds and hundreds of bikes. It was exciting and exhilarating at the same time. A few years passed and I had not purchased my bike yet. I had become a member of American Legion Post 10 in Las Cruces NM. I was asked if I would like to cook breakfast for a group doing the Run For The Wall. I said no problem. Little did I know what I was in store for. I thought to myself, aww, probably about 50 or so bikes at the hall. Boy, did I get a huge surprise when I arrived early at 0400 hours to cook breakfast. There were bikes on both sides of the hall parked in lines. I found there were people sleeping on the floor and couches in the back as well as bikers camping in the Girl Scout hut area where there is grass. It was then, in May of 2015, that I received my first pin, met Stoney, Chrome, and a bunch of the others from the Southern Route. I made up my mind then and there that I was going to be a part of this mission. I was so proud to cook breakfast for these heroes my brothers and sisters in arms. I made it a point to mention to those I met that I would ride with you next year. I did not own a bike. In May of 2015 I enrolled through Barnett's of Las Cruces; in a Motorcycle Safety Foundation Basic Course, determined to get my endorsement. It had been nearly 37 years since I rode a bike; but I passed with flying colors and became the proud owner of a motorcycle endorsement. Yet, I still didn't have a bike. Then, in June of 2015 I settled on "The Red Witch," the 2006 Harley Davidson Road King that I now ride and dove

into riding with a vengeance. I knew if I wanted to ride with the Run For The Wall bunch I needed to get good and get good fast.

I joined the local Southern New Mexico HOG group, became a Legion Rider and joined in on my first ever motorcycle rally to gain riding experience and time in the saddle. I rode long trips, up mountains, through rain and with riders more experienced than I. I did this because I did not want to embarrass those participating in The Run For the Wall. As May of 2016 was fast approaching, I had proudly clocked in over 8,000 miles on my new used Harley. I felt pretty confident so I started watching the videos on you tube about the Run for the Wall and I looked out for a way to get registered. It was February at this point. I found the website and initially had planned on hooking up with the Run in Las Cruces but changed my mind and said "gee, it's only 726 miles to Ontario. If I'm going to do this I need to go All the Way." I talked to my local HOG group about this, pitching the Run asking for others to ride with me. I got several to help out with the breakfast and then Chuck, our president, told me that he knows a guy named Chad who is with the Run For the Wall and he worked at a local place of business in Las Cruces. I was so excited to find this out I rushed along with Harrold, a good friend of mine, over to where Chad worked. Little did I know who "Chad" was at that point. I walked in and asked to speak to Chad. I was overwhelmed when this 6-foot plus burly dude came walking out and I introduced myself to him. It was then that I was to get to know who Chad Odell and Gunny Gregory were.

Wow! The magic began to happen and I didn't even know it. I asked Chad if I could hook up with him going to Ontario and he agreed. My journey was just beginning. Roughly a week before, Chad was unfortunately involved in an accident which caused him to break his collar bone and prevented him from participating in this year's Run. I then was scrambling desperately to locate riders going to Ontario. I discovered Hooper's Hooligan's. By this time I was well acquainted with the RFTW forum and was connecting with many riders. I spoke with Chief4, Sloke, Rucksack, Sidewinder, Cynder, Dr Z, and many more. I had reservations made, but not all the way. I connected with Wicked. Little did I know how important Wicked would be to me, and he continues to be a unique part of my ride to this day. More on that later.

I was able to connect with Hooper and made plans to meet up at the Ramada Inn when they rolled through from Dallas. I was like a kid meeting his childhood heroes by this point. Harrold and his cousin Ben would be riding with us. Then the day before I was due to leave for Ontario arrived and I met with Hooper and his Hooligans.. It was here that I officially met Wicked and Mojo, Clifton, Jerry (the Southern Route photographer), Papa and Gump's parents, and HornDog. What a great group. I was so pumped. You would have thought I met the Fantastic Four or the X-Men. What a great group of people. Then, on 14 May 2016, the real work began and off we departed after introductions, a safety brief, and a prayer. I was never a more proud Vet than I was that day.

Now for that side story I promised about Wicked. I had noticed that Wicked was from Odessa Texas. I had a friend who I went to high school with and had been trying to figure out how to find him. His name is Audi Hollowell. He and I were like two peas in a pod back in high school. We worked together building sheep fence and relocating it from cut alfalfa field to alfalfa field and moving over 1600 head of sheep each time. We had built a tremendous friendship in Roswell, NM. My family moved from Roswell in 1974 to WV and we lost contact. My brother a few years back discovered that Audi lived in Odessa Texas and I knew Odessa was pretty good sized, but I had to take a chance and asked Wicked if he could try to locate him. Low and behold, the Run for the Wall gods were smiling down on Wicked and he reconnected me with my high school buddy from 41 years ago. What an exciting development. As the Southern Route was stopping in Odessa and after an initial phone conversation. I was able to meet with Audi and his wife Jean

who I was also friends with way back then and had not seen either in 41 years. My good friend Carl Koren, who still lives in Roswell NM, made a special trip to Odessa Texas just to watch us ride in and have a 41-year reunion of the old neighborhood. What a special and most emotional time this was for me. Thank you, thank you, thank you Wicked for doing this. I will forever be indebted to you for this unique opportunity.

Now back to the ride. With Papa and Clifton riding Road Guard for the Hooligans, we made our way west toward Ontario Calif., stopping in Safford AZ to eat where we met up with Gump. Now Gump is a pretty special person to me. When we first connected at the restaurant I didn't realize who he was right away. His parents were there with us and they kept talking about Alamogordo NM. Gump was sharing about his daughter's graduation. I kept telling myself I knew him. I just couldn't place him. I finally asked if he had graduated from Alamogordo High School. He said yes, and then it clicked. I had taught Joe when he was a senior when I was a long-term substitute teacher. I even talked to him about joining the Air Force or considering the military. He of course chose the Army. I was so shocked when I discovered he had been captured during the Gulf War. Joe has always held a place of honor in my life. He is like another son to me for so many reasons. It was an honor and a privilege to be riding to Ontario California with him. What a joy this brought to my life. Equally cool was riding with Harrold and Ben, Harrold because we are both from the local HOG chapter and Ben because he is such a cool guy. I like hanging with them both. I can't wait for them to return to New Mexico and we can reconnect. That was the trouble with D.C.—you get lost in the maddening crowd and friends get separated. However, the connection is always there no matter the distance.

I will never forget the Veterans Park in Deming NM and the visit to the museum. I will revisit soon. Then, connecting with Deano and his bunch from the American Legion Post 138 was simply amazing. They fed us a terrific spaghetti dinner plus the comradeship and hospitality was off the chart. That post is filled with so much energy and good vibes it is unbelievable.

On we marched to Ontario after visiting the Mighty Mo and the Arizona Memorial. What a moving moment in our journey of healing. As we came into California, we were met with a terrible sand storm near Twenty-Nine Palms. I had not been to the San Bernardino Valley since 1993. Wow! The growth was incredible. As we rolled into Ontario, we were met with cheers and clapping of hands. I was so proud to be finally at the beginning. There were so many bikes and bikers it was overwhelming to me. My first great riding experience with Hooper and his Hooligans was over but just beginning. The level of pride was swelling inside me and I couldn't wait for the FNG briefing. I was just a chatter box of information and deep desire to be included. I was looking forward to the Riverside National Cemetery ride. I was completely blown away when we arrived at the RNC. So much to take in and so much to experience. The reverence was mandatory, the speakers phenomenal, and the experience breathtaking. To just be there to see Edwin raise the POW flag was a reward in and of itself. Unforgettable. Off we rode back to Ontario.

Then the big day arrived, the day of departure. I knew what the rest were in store for because we had just ridden through the heat of the desert to this beautiful cool 70-degree moist weather. If it had not been for the Forum and nearly 26 years of living in the high desert, I would not have been as prepared as I was to make the trek to Phoenix and beyond. Again, we rolled back to the host hotel in Phoenix I had just a few days ago visited. I met up with Robbie and Arod along with Dean our Alaska Airlines connection for the Fallen Heroes Cart and a few of us took advantage of the hot tub to rest our tired butts and ease the road aches and pains.

Wow! Too cool! Each and every stop I was reminded of why I served and each and every stop I was so grateful for the generosity of the citizens of this great country for welcoming us home. I can never hope to

repay them for their kindness except ride this ride each and every year until all are accounted for and all come home.

I was able to meet one of my 1975 instructors from Camp Bullis, TX by happenstance at one of our stops. I was thrilled by Earl in Jacksonville Mississippi and I was amazed by the riding skills of our police escorts in New Mexico, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Upon arriving in Washington DC I was so moved by the vastness of the Mall. The size of the Lincoln Memorial took my breath away and the compassionate emotions everyone had at the Vietnam Memorial Wall was a moment in my life I will never forget. The visit to the Arlington National Cemetery will forever remind me of why I am able to ride this ride and have the freedoms that I do. I was deeply moved and honored to lead our 3rd Platoon with Sidewinder and I was deeply honored to participate in the Missing Man Formation from Lynchburg to Staunton, VA in honor of my grandfather, Walter H. Brown, my father Howard L. Brown, and my uncles Donald Brown and Jack Ramsey. I dedicated my ride to my next door neighbor Steve Leask of Bravo Company 1st of the 9th, 1st Cavalry Quon Loi 1969-1970.

I have been honored to serve this country as a Vietnam/Gulf War/Cold War Veteran for over 20 years. Both of my sons have served and my youngest is still serving. Yes, I am a Blue Star Dad. My grandfather served under Patton in WWII and was in both the European Theater and Pacific Theater. My family reaches all the way back to the Revolutionary War and before. We have a long, long, long line of family members serving this country and God willing I will serve this great nation and its people for many years to come.

I would like to add to this. I am so appreciative and grateful to all of the Southern leadership for getting us safely to Washington D.C. Chicken Joe (who will be deeply missed next year), Flame, Ghost Rider (who I hope is taking on the reigns), Bugs (who stepped in and filled in for Chad at last minute notice), Sidewinder, Road Runner (even though she kept losing that dang orange hat of hers - lol), and all of the Road Guards, POW, MIA and KIA coordinators, Outreaches Mazz and Kourney. Without all of these folk and of course the staging and refuel teams plus the ambassadors, this ride would not have been as successful as it was. We have some mighty shoes to fill for next year. I want to do the Central Route, but these Southern folks have my heart. How can I not pass up visiting Jacksonville Mississippi again? I hope I get to ride with TC again. He and BC were a hoot! Geez... everyone was a welcome addition to my long list of family...

Very Respectfully,

Tim "TECH DOG" Brown

Training Instructor, Site Defense Force US Army Army Testing & Evaluation Command, WSTC Bldg.
21221, Headquarters Ave. White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico 88002.

WE'RE HOOKED!

By Dave and Deb Schultz

My wife Deb and I did RFTW ATW Southern Route this year. We are civilians so were not really sure what to expect. We have some military in our families including Deb's dad, my four uncles, and a nephew who was combat Army in Iraq. We also have been doing PGR missions for a few years and have done over 100. The point of all that is we want to support our veterans, and thought RFTW would be another chance to do so.

We were very overwhelmed the whole trip! We not only received warm welcomes as FNGs, but as civilians as well. We met many great people, and are grateful to those veterans who shared stories of all kinds, incredibly sad and happy alike.

Sitting with our friends over a few beers, we sometimes talk about how America has lost its way. We and our friends who followed along on Facebook kept getting shocked every day with the outpouring of support that people showed veterans across America. The support shown in whole towns that took the time and effort to stop what they were doing and serve lunch and welcome all was crazy. Just as touching was the lone person in the middle of nowhere standing on a bridge. The police help and support was unbelievable. The cops lined up at the end of a state saluting would make even the biggest cynic about America think a little.

We were lucky enough to be allowed to do the Missing man formation, 2 outreach missions, and the ride through Arlington. Each was a memory to last a lifetime. Being asked to carry William Marshall Price's picture across country and place it at the Wall still brings chills when thinking about it.

The amount of work and organization to put this altogether is impressive. Occasionally we would hear someone complain about a mess-up. That is nuts! Nothing this large can be done without error. We highly commend all the teams and staff who put it together.

As you might be able to tell, we are hooked! I hope that more civilians can lean about RFTW and either ride, or help along the way. We hope to be able to help next year's FNGs by being a tail gunner. If not we will join a team and do our part to make another great RFTW next year.

HOW CAN THIS NOT AFFECT YOU?

By Steve Wilson

Vietnam Veteran US Army

2 Tours 67-68 and 69-70

Longmont, Colorado

I started my journey in Angel Fire, NM and was not really sure what was going to happen on this ride. Prior to going on this trip I had heard many stories and suggestions about what to expect and happenings along the way. Well, nothing can prepare you for the outpouring of support from all the towns and cities we stopped at along the way. There is more patriotism out there then you can imagine. Riding into towns with hundreds of people lining the streets with flags a waving and saluting you as you ride by. The people on freeway overpasses saluting and waving flags along with fire trucks and police cars saluting and having emergency lights on as we pass under. If this doesn't bring a tear to your eye I don't know what will.

It was an eye opening experience and there are not the proper words to explain how I felt both while on the ride and after returning to my home. I met and rode with some truly enjoyable individuals. A couple of individuals that come to mine are Squirt Gun and Bullett, known as tail gunners on the ride. There were many more, but names don't come to mind.

One of the most memorable stops was at the town of Rainelle, West Virginia. It has been a stop of the Run for over 28 years when the run first got started. These towns people and kids are amazing. You find yourself signing autographs for the kids like rock stars; never have I been asked for my autograph for anything in my life. There truly is a special bond between the RTFW riders and this town. They fed us with

a great home cooked meal and shared their stories from over the years of the ride stopping there. I now find myself praying for these townspeople as they were hit by a major flood that devastated the town. After an overnight in stop in Lewisburg, we continued on into Arlington, VA, our final stop. There waiting on us was the Midway and Southern route riders, waving and saluting us as we rode to the hotel parking area.

The following morning we FNGs rode to Arlington Cemetery and to the tomb of the unknown soldier. Having seen the changing of the guards on youtube, in person is a different experience. Afterwards off to the Wall, where all riders had their picture taken while sitting or standing on the steps of Lincoln Memorial and having a bagpipe player playing God Bless America and us all singing it as she played. How does this not affect you in some sort of way?

I plan on riding again next year, taking my wife along to experience this first hand. Photos and talking about it doesn't do this ride justice. See you all next year Platoon 10 of the Central Route. A special thanks to Harlan and Kirk for talking me into going.

WE'VE GOT YOUR SIX AT SIX

By Jenniffer "Flame" Connors

6,179 miles later we are back at home. It was a satisfying ride with some amazing people. Can't say the actual riding itself was good; it was hard. Riding in a formation with folks of all riding abilities and skill levels isn't easy. Everyone who rode with us is certainly a better rider than when they started out.

It is the things that happen along the way that make it all worth the short nights and long days. Comrades who had not seen each other since the battlefield recognized unit patches on each other's vests. They hugged and were stunned at the coincidence of seeing each other after all these years. I've seen so many of these seemingly impossible coincidences to realize it must be God's hand at work. Saying "You" and "You" need to be together again: "You need to talk, share the burden of grief you are carrying, and begin the healing."

I met a guy in California – he lost his wallet and as keeper of the lost & found, I had it. When he came to claim it we only had a few minutes before departure. He told me he understood that the Run would change him; he just hoped it would be for the better. He seemed distant, had that faraway look in his eyes. He was taking another route, so I gave him a hug, and told him I'd look for him in DC.

Somewhere along the way, Hobbit took me aside and told me about a Rider she was worried about. She was very concerned that he was contemplating suicide. The Rider was on another route and she had alerted the chaplains riding with them. She asked me to keep S in prayer as we rode across the country.

Ten days and hundreds of hugs later we arrived in DC. On Saturday we made our way to the Wall to complete the Mission. CJ and I had not planned to spend the afternoon there, but thought we'd go back to the hotel and rest. I had a sore throat, was sneezing and coughing. But that didn't happen. We got a bite to eat, more Gatorade, and CJ had a nap in the shade. We visited with our new friends from Alaska Airlines and others as they passed by the kiosk there across from the mall.

The phrase "I've got your six" is a military reference meaning I've got your back – I'm watching out for you. Santa Ed and others made it a point to tell riders they'd be there on Saturday night at 0600 hours to

join them at the Wall. "I've Got Your Six at Six." It was 4:50 when CJ asked if I was ready to head back to the hotel, and suddenly I knew I needed to be at the Wall at six.

I was at the stand where they keep the directory of names, offering help to those who were unsure how to locate their loved ones. I noticed one of our riders near the entrance to the walk that takes you down along the Wall. Another rider came and whispered in my ear that this rider needed all the support he could get. Three of us joined him, one on either side, and one behind him as we slowly made our way down from the western entrance. We rose up on the east side without having stopped. But there at the thin point of the eastern edge of the Wall he fell to his knees. The tears came, wrenching sobs.

Each of us turned our back to him creating a protective shield between him and the tourists with their intrusive cameras. A small bit of privacy in a very public place. Finally he stood and the three of us embraced him. It seemed as if he was standing taller than before. He told us about that day. About the nightmares where he still feels the bullets passing by his head as others around him fall. He wiped away the tears and looked at me. "I knew this was a good group of people when you returned my wallet intact. I think I'll sleep tonight." With that he turned and walked away. I went back along the Wall, greeting and hugging riders as they paid their respects. Indeed, we had their Six.

I found myself back near the western entrance and a group of our folks enjoying the shade and talking quietly with each other as their eyes scanned the crowd looking for someone who might need help. I saw Hobbit there, and asked if she had news of S, the rider she was so concerned about. She tilted her head and looked at me kind of funny. She said, "Flame, that was S that you were just with at the Wall. I think he is going to be fine now."

This is why we ride. This is how we Keep the Faith.

TASSIE DEVIL'S FIRST RFTW

Last year, when I was in Aptos, CA on a home exchange, my cousin's husband Eugene (Pete) Peters, a serving Chief Warrant Officer, asked if I would be interested in participating in "The Run For the Wall" from Ontario CA to Arlington National Cemetery with him and his friend, Jack Campbell, a fellow Vietnam Veteran.

Well, it didn't take me long to make up my mind to take up the offer and the wheels started turning as I tried to work out how to make the thing happen. I flew to Hawaii, then to San Francisco, where Pete picked me up.

I thought long and hard about why I would be doing the run, and there are many family members who will be in my thoughts as I'm on the road to Washington, D.C. and as I face the Vietnam Wall. It will be a very emotional trip for a number of reasons. My immediate family has served in many theatres of conflict from Milne Bay, PNG to Norway and with eleven years in the RAN I have seen active service in Malaya, Borneo, and Vietnam. I dedicated my participation in the RFTW to another cousin, Flying Officer Basil Roberts of Townsville, Queensland, who with Flight Sergeant Norm Steer was Killed in Action in 1944 flying an RAAF Beaufighter of 455 (Ship-buster) Squadron out of RAF Langham Station UK.

I will be mindful that this ride is a mission and not a fun run. I will be in the company of and will meet many who have given so very much in their service to their country.

We headed for Ontario to join the three groups travelling on three different route Run For The Wall

DAY ONE (or ... the day I broke my duck).

Ontario CA to Williams AZ. We registered for this ride of a lifetime. The Run For The Wall has been in operation for 28 years and is run with military precision and it shows. Pete and I were given No 4 platoon at first, but we discovered that this platoon required riders to assume a side-by-side formation which we were a little apprehensive about. We were able to change to 8th Platoon which rides in staggered formation.

We soon learned that 400 bikes will arrive at a petrol station and are directed two on either side of a pump. The riders stay on the bike and fill their tank, and pay cash to the attendants which is rounded up to the nearest dollar. No change is given, so if the bill is \$8.00 and you gave \$10.00—you just made a \$2.00 donation to the road team.

400 riders in 10 platoons gathered in the staging area for a full briefing by the Route Coordinator, followed by a briefing by each platoon leader. Hand signals need to be understood for turning left or right, slowing down, and forming staggered formation or side-by-side formation. What to do if a rider needs to leave the pack for any reason. It goes on.

The run has an excellent safety record due to this planning.

The route today took us from Ontario near Los Angeles to Barstow, CA overlooking the Yucca Valley where Pete and I came down from the previous evening, then on to Ludlow where we refueled. Next we entered the Low Desert (under 2,000 ft) with fantastic rock formations pink earth and blue coloured mountains in the distance.

As we started off towards the next town called Needles, CA. so-named for the sharp eroded peaks, where we would be stopping for lunch, the engine of the Sportster started to misfire. Before long, about 20 miles down the track, it started becoming dangerous and I had to leave the pack. Riding in close formation with a misfiring engine is not much fun.

“It’s a lonesome away from your kindred and all,
By the camp-fire at nigh where the wild dingo’s call”.

Well, the chase truck caught up with me and put the Sportster on the trailer and we headed for Needles for lunch before delivering the bike to the Harley dealer at Kingman AZ. The Service Manager was most obliging and diagnosed the fault as a faulty voltage regulator. Alas, there was none in stock, but as I was looking downcast and shuffling my feet in the dirt (works every time), he suggested that he may be able to scavenge one from a shop bike to get me on the way.

By the time the bike was repaired and the account settled, dark clouds were forming over the High Desert (over 4,000 ft), so I decided to put some wet weather gear on and head for the hills of the Grand Canyon. The bike was now running like a Swiss watch, but lightning flashed and the rain clouds had a funny green tinge. Wonder what that means.... Hail, that’s what. I pulled to the side and waited for the worst to pass, then carried on. I got to Grand Canyon Williams at 8 p.m., refueled, and joined Pete and Jack for a pizza and a beer.

After all the drama I completed the first stage of the run. In cricketing terms, if you score more than a zero, (looks like a ducks egg), then you've broken your duck. That's what I did.

DAY 2

After breakfast with Mayor John Moore in Williams, Arizona, we headed for Gallup, New Mexico. We passed through Winslow AZ and Holbrook.

"There's a girl my Lord in a flat-bed ford" kept repeating in my head for some reason.

In Gallup, New Mexico, the Navajo Indians of the Black Creek Gourd society did us the honour of performing a Gathering of Veterans ceremony. Another ceremony was a blanket dance to raise money for local charities. It was wonderful, and we were very honoured to be able to see some of the Native American culture firsthand.

DAY 3

The city of Gallup provided breakfast and we set off for the Angel Fire Vietnam Memorial. Lunch was provided by the Camel Rock Casino and fuel by Harley Davidson.

The Town of Angel Fire is at 8,500 ft elevation and just beautiful scenery. I can't put into words the emotional impact of this very special memorial. We spent the night in Eagles Nest, New Mexico, and I presented one of my Royal Australian Navy lapel pins to the Mayor.

We all attended a civic reception at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The key note speaker was Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Col Don (Doc) Ballard. His speech was direct, sensible and non-politically correct. I enjoyed it immensely.

DAY 4

We left Eagles nest early and our first stop was Raton, New Mexico, where the local high school cadets put on a flag-raising ceremony for us. We then crossed into Colorado and passed through Pueblo and Limon, where fuel was donated by the local American Legion Riders. It's been a long hard day, but we finally made it to Goodland Kansas.

I love the sound of high power piston engines. One of my favourites is the Bristol Hercules 14 cylinder, sleeve valve radial engine that powered the Beaufighter ship busting aircraft my Cousin Basil Roberts was navigating when he was killed in action. The 3,500 hp Bristol Hercules had a unique sound and was named "Whispering Death" by the Japanese in New Guinea because by the time it was heard, it was too late and the 6 cannons and 6 machine guns were used to devastating effect.

When riding in staggered formation at up to 70 mph, three bike lengths apart, the idea is to be smooth in power adjustments and avoid braking. It's amazing how everyone has developed this skill. All except Fred.

True to form, Fred would fall back with the throttle switch deactivated, and then he would flip the switch ON and all hell would break loose as God knows how many wild horses were let loose. Before he collided with the guy in front he would flip the switch OFF and we were all rewarded with a fifteen gun salute POP POP POP.

Had to get that off my chest.... Sorry.

Today we broke away from the pack to visit Harrison, Nebraska. One of the main reasons for this trip was to visit the birth place of my Dad and the burial place of my Grandmother.

Ella Florence Pine was a refined young girl from Napa CA who fell in love with a swash-buckling cowboy from Rich Hill MO, now a homesteader at Rocky Point WY. She and John Quincy were married and set up home together. By the age of 27 they had four kids, the eldest being my Dad, John Quincy the second, known as Jack to avoid confusion. Ella died in tragic circumstances of a gunshot wound shortly after the birth of Jesse Pine Fleming, Pete's wife's father.

I entered the cemetery and started looking for Ella's grave. I nearly stepped on a large and beautiful snake that crossed my path. I warned Pete, who kept his distance. I walked in the direction that the snake came from and there was Ella's grave.

"G'day Ella. I hope you don't mind me popping in unannounced.

I'm John Quincy from Tasmania, your first grandson. Nice touch with the welcoming snake, by the way. Love your sense of humour. Mind if I use that trick some day? I just wanted to say that your descendants are thriving and are doing you proud. You are very much loved in our family and I personally think you are such a beautiful and elegant young lady.

I made a little gift for you. I filled an old juice bottle with water to hold it down and cable tied (too hard to explain) your photo with you holding Dad and Blanch holding Clarence.

I know that life as a homesteader in remote Wyoming in the 1920s would have been far different from your previous life, but you produced four exceptional boys who went on to make their mark in the world, not to mention the hordes of grandkids and great- grandkids yet to hold your memory dear. What happened on that awful day in 1922? An accident? Or the black dog of depression? Depression is something that still has not been fully understood to this day, although now we have finally admitted its presence and are trying to provide care.

Do you mind if I sit with you for a while? So peaceful here. Look at those rolling hills. You've got a nice view of the whole countryside from here. And the birds' calls....

Ella, I think your granddad James Pine taught you the snake trick. Remember how he was race classified on his marriage certificate as "Other," meaning Native American? A bit of tribal magic in play here, I reckon.

So long my sweet lady. Rest in Peace,"

Your devoted Grandson,
John Quincy

DAY 5

Breakfast at the Goodland KS armory by the local citizens, and a fuel stop at Oakley KS.

The plains of Kansas go on and on. Beautiful neat homesteads and massive acreage of cereal grain. The horizon is bare and free of trees or hills just like the Nullarbor plain of Western Australia. (I always thought Nullarbor was an aboriginal word but it's Latin for No Tree).

At the next fuel stop I was given a special treat; I was asked if I would like to join the six pack at the front of the column behind "The Missing Man" position. I gladly accepted the offer and am humbled that I was chosen. What a great bunch of welcoming folk.

Tonight we are in Junction City Kansas.

JUNGLE JIM DAY 6

At fuel stops along the way friendly natives hand out all manner of free stuff. I recognised a small tube of vegemite by its distinctive packaging artwork and colouring. The name was different, but a quick glance suggested it was some kind of candy. I removed the lid and swallowed. As my German Engineer would have said, "This is not normal."

Turns out it was lip balm....

The good news is: I have really soft and glossy lips, and... I can set my clock by my bowel movements.

When my newfound friends heard the story, they called me "Jungles" because I was so thick and dense.

This morning after breakfast at the Fraternal Order of Eagles donated by Combat Vets (CVMA) and HOG, we headed for Topeka fuel Centre and refuelled. Here I was offered another break-away from the main group as the PR Manager escorted a father and son combo and a friendly Tassie Devil to Land Line Magazine studios for an interview. Time was of the essence, so a convoy of six of us in close side-by-side formation sped along at 80 mph. Quite exhilarating. After the interview we rejoined the main group and headed for Concordia MO.

Final destination for the day was Wentzville MO. Wentzville is a super patriotic town and welcomed us with a high school band.

DAY 7

We staged at the old church in Wentzville MO and after breakfast we set out for the VA hospital at Jefferson barracks in St Louis, MO. to visit with patients. Tonight the good folks of Corydon IN gave us a slap-up catfish fry up. My kind of meal.

DAY 8

The first stop of the day was the VAMC Robley Rex Veterans Medical Center. This is a massive and state of the art facility, easily one of the best hospitals I've ever laid my eyes on. The staff and patients tell us how much they look forward to the visit each year and all lined up to see us on our way. The sound of 400 motorcycles starting up at staging and getting ready to roll is what an airfield in WW2 Britain must have sounded like before a big raid.

At the VA hospital I struck up a conversation with Richard Hatfield, who served in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne as a Vehicle Spec 5. Richard is a humble man, but he loves to talk and I loved listening to him. One of his tales made me laugh out loud: "I was too stupid to be scared," he said. Another Richard saying is: "I can now accept being accepted." That is the mission of Run For The Wall.

Richard said that despite what the newspapers printed, he believed the care and attention he received was top class. That was his opinion. anyway. He survived Vietnam but was felled by a tree back in the States which broke his neck and shattered his back. For all that, he was happy we took the time to come and see him and have a chat.

One of the fabulous nurses of the VA hospital understood how important is for our riders to come each year and mingle with the veterans and how much the visit does to boost morale.

DAY 9

Today Pete and I broke away from the pack to visit old friends in Beckley, WV. We headed out to Rainelle Primary school in a few hours. This school has a special relationship with the Run. I've separated all my remaining trinkets into a separate bag, because the kids go nuts for anything from the bikers.

One of the highlights of the trip was a visit to the primary school in Rainelle, West Virginia. The kids at the school have been associated with "The Run" since the beginning. It started with the first Run when Gunny decided to bypass the toll system by taking a route through the mountains.

When I left Hobart for the US, I was weighed down by kilos of pins, wrist bands, Biro's (pens/pencils) and stickers. I wondered if the little Sportster would be able to carry such a load. When we reached Rainelle my fears were eliminated. The kids went berserk. My stash of goodies disappeared like the burning sun hitting a fog.

The annual Run event has prompted many students to join the forces, but once again, the patriotism of the Midwest and Southern towns has left a deep impression on me.

DAY 10: THE MISSION COMPLETED

We were warned not to become complacent on this last day. We refuelled at Stanton and Tom's Brook.

At 3:15 p.m., escorted by State police, we rolled into Arlington Virginia. It has been a tiring journey, but we have felt a sense of accomplishment in completing the mission. The ride would have been so much easier if we were left to our own devices and travelled to Arlington in a relaxed manner. But that is not the point. We ride for those who can't. It's not about us. ‘

Tomorrow my FNG (Fricken New Guy) badge will be turned upside-down by someone who has ridden all the Way before. This person will be someone I respect, someone who has gone out of their way to befriend me perhaps? I haven't decided yet. There are many I could choose. The choice will come to me in the fullness of time.

CLOSURE:

The first stop of the day for 1,200 riders, both FNGs and RFTW vets today is the Arlington National Cemetery. For the first time in Run history, the Police provided an escort. The National Cemetery is hallowed ground and full decorum is expected and enforced.

At 12:15 p.m. RFTW took part in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Guard ceremonial drill work was the epitome of military excellence.

At 2 p.m. a group photo of the entire RFTW team in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

So, where will I leave my tribute to Cousin Basil?

As I was contemplating this question, a fellow veteran approached me and said, "Would you like me to flip you"? I answered in the affirmative, he gave me a hug, turned my FNG button upside down, and said, "Welcome Home Sailor."

On our way back to California, out of the blue, a young girl, a young man or older person would approach us and warmly thank us for our service.

What a wonderful country you live in.

Thank you United States of America for welcoming this old Tasmanian Devil to your midst. You have a beautiful country which you can be justly proud. Thank-you Cousin Lyn, Eugene (Pete), and Jack Campbell for your friendship, Companionship and support.

Thank you Run For The Wall directors for your high professionalism and organizational skills that made the Run work smoothly. You guys are unbelievable.

From an ancient Tassie Devil's point of view may I just say, in these times of political correctness, when our kids are scared out of their wits by our glorious leaders warning of imminent death and destruction because we have not worshiped at the altar of international experts from the UN, your country is in fine shape. Your people are friendly, kind, considerate, and welcoming of visitors from far-flung lands. Your officials are courteous, helpful, and efficient. Your roads and infrastructure are well-maintained, logical and efficient.

Please accept my thanks for your hospitality, friendliness, and nurture while I've been in your neck of the woods.

If anyone tries to tell you that the world is doomed for destruction and tries to make you ashamed of the advances you and your ancestors have created to make life on this planet comfortable, then give them the same answer your Lt. General Harry W. O. Kinnard gave the Germans at the battle of Bastogne when the Germans asked them if they wished to surrender.

Tell them, "NUTS."

Tassie Devil signing off.

Cheers,

JQ (John Quincy Fleming)

THANK YOU FROM AN FNG

By Sheri Pyle

As an FNG this year I must say thank you to Top for being an amazing Team Coordinator. This was a very healing trip for me. As many of you know, I rode this in honor of my husband, Billy, who passed away three months ago, and his twin, Johnny, who was KIA on 2/14/68. There were many tears along this trail but I am so thankful for the many new friends that I have made to help me let those tears flow in a safe and loving environment. Thank you to Platoon 2 for leading us safely from Ontario to DC and for the many new road names I have received.

ARNIE'S JOURNAL

By Arnie Swift

Arnie Swift has been writing journals of his travels for many years. He wrote this a few days before RFTW 2016.

Greetings from Raytown!

Once again it is that time of the year, and just what time is that? Run for the Wall. For the past few weeks friends like Eric and Sonia, Rock, Skeater, Kent Markley, the Wards and countless others have been posting pictures and sharing how far down the road they have gotten on their journey westward. My friend Judy Lacey managed to post a gazillion photos of her 14 years of being involved with the Run, many of which I was in. I remember those times well. Today happens to be a Thursday and I would normally be arriving in Southern California this evening.

However today is the 12th of May and it happens to be my 14th anniversary of being married to my amazing wife Cindy. It is only the second time since we have been married that I have been home for this event. This month I have been able to enjoy her birthday, Mother's Day and now our anniversary. So why in the world would I share with you about the Run? Glad you asked.

It is impossible to be involved with something for 20 years and not have it be a part of your life or affect it in a major way. In those twenty years I have gone through four different motorcycles. From '97 to 2003 it was an '81 Goldwing. Then for several years it was a '98 Voyager. Then it became an '04 Goldwing which was my favorite ride of all. And last but not least it was a '76 KZ900 which was a lot of memories but not the perfect bike for the Run. It is even harder to believe that I have well over 100,000 miles on a motorcycle just from doing the Run.

During those years I was blessed to have been asked to serve in several positions: Assistant Pace Setter under Phil Rittermeyer, Chaplain and twice Senior Chaplain, Assistant Route Coordinator under Russ Cockrum, Route Coordinator in 2010, an Ambassador, and a Road Guard. I managed to have two different road names, first was Iron Butt and finally after an incident in Eagle's Nest, Postmaster. I only had one real breakdown in all those years and that was a flat tire on the rear of the Voyager coming out of Kingman.

In many ways the Run was a continuation of my military days. In Vietnam we became family and the same is true of the Run. Interesting how you won't see someone for a year and the conversations start right where they left off. For 10 days you come to rely on those around you for support, help and laughter. You pass by

millions of people standing on overpasses, alongside the road, in their fields waving and saluting. You spend nights in small towns that have opened their arms to receive you and share part of your journey. Towns like Goodland, Rainelle and other ones. Those little towns all of a sudden have something to be proud of and a reason for existing even if it is only for one night. It is amazing the impact the Run has on communities and the responsibilities the Run has to maintain integrity.

There are people that I will indeed miss seeing. A couple of ladies that year after year stood on overpasses in the wonderful town of Salina. Denise Lewis and Jennifer Harmon, thank you for your support and friendship. There are towns that will be forever etched in my brain, Pratt, KS, Santa Rosa, NM, Albuquerque, NM, Gallup, NM, Kingman, AZ, Mt. Vernon, IL. These are towns that I stopped at going and coming from the Run.

I want to thank each and every one of you who have faithfully followed along with me on those journeys. You are as much a part of that Run for the Wall family as the riders themselves.

Before I leave you I want to thank the following and I know that I will forget some names but you are not left out on purpose. Deakin, Pup, Terry, Cliff, Joe 'Dragon' Lozano, Me Ook, Rock, Skeater, Two Lane, Smiley, Mini Bikes, Rocket, Attitude, Catfish, Bones, Grizz, Stoney, Gallupe, Jackie and Sandra McKinney, Kent Markley, Fingers, JR Franklin, Curtis, Gryder, Dave Wittman, Kevin, Pastor Dan, Sheepdog and Judy, Straight Arrow, John and Ela King, Too Tall, Strangelove, Grumpy, Ross, Judy Lacey, Steve Duke and his wife, Frank, Phil Rittermeyer and hundreds of others.

Thanks again for listening to an old man rant. May God richly bless you all.
Rknee

RFTW GENEROSITY

By Dee "Shortstack" Barker

The generosity of the RFTW family never stops surprising me. Recently a Navy veteran passed away; he was a biker at heart. When Susan McGregor and Dustin Hanson, riders of the Midway route, heard about his passing and that his widow needed help, they reached out to the riders of southern Oregon to provide an honor guard detail and flag line for his funeral. Then they purchased his motorcycle from her and donated it to the Combat Hero Bike Build, so that this veteran's bike would go on providing freedom to one of our heroes.

A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

An FNG Story, RFTW 2014

For those of you who have never experienced the loss a spouse due to suicide, all I can say is that you are very fortunate. My loss came May 20, 2011. Six years after her retirement from teaching Seventh Grade Math for thirty years and tutoring three and four nights a week afterwards, My wife took her life in the woods a half mile behind our house. It took four days before volunteers found her; without a doubt, the worst four days of my life. I could never explain the feelings and emotions I experienced during that period. She left a two page letter telling me how much she loved me and that her actions were not my fault but due to her continued failing health. She asked for me not to have any memorial or even obituary. She only wanted cremation and nothing else. No directions as to where her ashes were to be placed. It was my

decision to scatter her ashes from a helicopter over a beautiful peaceful area in the Appalachian Mountains; an area we had toured many times on my motorcycle. I no longer have my riding partner; it's like I'm missing part of my bike.

The tragedy of losing my wife now supersedes the other continuing tragedy that I have experienced in life. Using the word "continuing" is due to the fact that as a Platoon Sergeant, the bodies of three of my Marines lost in the last combat action of the Viet Nam War, May 15, 1975, have never been recovered. The pain, horrors and extreme miseries I experienced for four days searching for my wife somewhat ended when she was recovered and put to rest. The families of PFC Gary L Hall, LCpl Joseph N Hargrove and Pvt. Danny G. Marshall have had to endure the like for over 39 years now never having had the opportunity to experience closure by laying their sons to rest. Their loss has weighed heavily on my mind for years and has now been elevated as I relate my own experience to what their families must be going through. Fighting depression is one hell of a battle experienced by many vets (and civilians). Tough times never last, tough people do; many times I have to ask myself, "Why?"

Monday May 19, 2014, (the day before the third anniversary of losing my wife) I rode my 2003 Harley-Davidson Ultra motorcycle from my home in central Alabama to Meridian, MS. to meet up with 350+ other military vets on their bikes at the Meridian Agriculture Center. The group had started their trip several days before in California as the Southern Route of the "Run For The Wall" on their annual journey to Washington, D.C. to honor those who never made it home. I read somewhere that some crazy Marine had started this RFTW thing back in 1989 so I thought this would be the ride I belong on. Maybe it would ease some of the painful memories of those four days in May 2011. Besides the Southern Route there is a Central Route and a Midway Route all starting in California, and all finishing in Washington D.C. on Memorial Day. The theme for the ride is always, "We ride for those who no longer can."

Spent that night in Meridian on the ground in a small tent outside the Agri. Center as several others did who opted not to pay for a room. In the morning my body was telling me to remember my age and in the future to shell out the money for a room. My plan was to ride with the group all day on the 20th, spend the night in Chattanooga then back home the next day.

After departing Meridian we stopped at a VA Hospital in Tuscaloosa, AL and visited other Vets for lunch; always a pleasure to hear stories from some of the older vets and thank them for their service, and our freedom. Next stop Asheville, AL. for fuel and a break, then on to Chattanooga for the night.

First time I had been on a road trip since I lost Cindy. Riding the roads we had been on so many times before was getting to me and the thought of riding through an area the next day not far from where I had spread her ashes was something I did not think I could handle and convinced myself that going home would be the best idea now that May 20th was coming to a close.

We had supper at and donated by Thunder Creek Harley-Davidson, then after a short period of socializing everyone departed to various hotels nearby. Not having reservations and not really wanting to socialize anymore I opted to search for a room a little further away from where everyone else was staying; actually about 10 miles away. After checking into a Hampton Inn I made preparations to head home in the morning (not caring if I actually made it or not). Removed my wristband and tape on my bike identifying me as a registered biker with the "Run For The Wall" and started to settle in for the night. Heard what I recognized as a Harley pull in nearby and wondered if it was someone with the RFTW group since as far as I knew I was the only biker there.

Around 10:30 that night I walked outside (was on first floor) and towards the lobby to get some ice. About five doors down I noticed another Harley-Davidson similar to mine; had a USMC Gunnery Sergeant sticker, a Drill Instructor Association sticker, plus one that really stood out, "Mayaguez Recovery", which was the last combat action of the Vietnam War.

WHO THE HELL WAS THIS PERSON?

There were only a little over 200 of us that were on the operation, May 15, 1975. Looked for lights on in nearby rooms and saw none so I left a note on the bike for him to contact me in room 151 before leaving in the morning, as I was heading home at daylight.

At 0530 (5:30 am) there's a knock on my door...it had been 39 years since the operation so we had to announce our names and immediately hugged each other. We really did not know each other while in the unit, but the fact we were there together is all it took to be Brothers (besides being Marines).

I knew that it was a Marine who started the "Run For The Wall" in 1989 from California and was in awe when I found out that the crazy Marine was standing in front of me; Retired Marine Gunnery Sergeant James Gregory, aka Gunny. Told him to go outside and look at my bike which was covered. When I removed the cover I'm sure if you looked close enough you would have seen tears in both of our eyes.

Sign on front of my bike:

HALL HARGROVE MARSHALL
BRING THEM HOME!

Those three Marines were the main reason he started the "Run" and for all the other guys who never made it back. We were riding for all of them.

He and his wife, Patti, just got in town to join the run the night before. They had been at the Annual Mayaguez Reunion in Branson, MO. I was going to go but had some mental and emotional issues relating to May 20th that made me cancel a few days before.

We were the only ones associated with the "Run" at that Hampton Inn, which was several miles from the main group. Gunny said for me to come down to his room as he wanted to show me something. Not knowing Patti was in the room, off I went barefooted and only a pair of gym shorts. Went a few doors down, met his wife and was shown pictures on his laptop of the Mayaguez Reunion they had attended the day before.

James told me they choose the Hampton Inn away from the main group to ensure they would get a full night's sleep since once they're around their "family" all night socializing is too hard to resist and they were already worn out from being on the road for several days.

I informed them I would have breakfast with them and then head back south. Well, like a true Marine, he informed me that I would be going to DC with them and not home (and riding along side of them)...sooo, after breakfast, off we went.

Believe it was somewhere around Bristol, TN. that Gunny suggested we peel off from the main group and take a more scenic route through the mountains to Wytheville, VA where we were to spend the night.

To say the least, it was scenic all right. Confident I was following someone who was familiar with the area, the ride was very enjoyable (even though some of the roads did not seem to be traveled often). My comfort soon turned to concern when Gunny's GPS directed us to turn left up ahead into what was actually a farmer's driveway. Was it time for me to turn on my GPS since Gunny's Piece of S___ was leading us astray? Without hesitation though Gunny was up and running in a new direction while I was praying he may have relatives in them there hills to help us out. Soon we were back on a well-traveled highway (one which I swear we had been on earlier). Eventually we did arrive in Wytheville a little behind the main group. Laughing about our adventure, Gunny stated his mind drifted off to how we met up in Chattanooga and he wasn't paying attention to where we were.

They introduced me to some very interesting Viet Nam and Middle East Vets; Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. They also had their own personal stories worthy of more recognition than they will ever receive. Many supportive people also made the ride wearing patches on their vests stating, "Maybe we weren't there, but WE DO CARE." Their support as true Americans can only be described as invaluable and sincerely appreciated. All welcomed me to join their family.

I felt like the Honored Guest of the man who started this run after he got on stage and told the story of our meeting in Chattanooga. Literally everyone there knew The Gunny and had high respect for his accomplishments.

There were several former and retired Marines riding with Run For The Wall but James and I were the only ones with customized helmets; Mine on left, his on the right.

To this day, we are still scratching our heads as to how in the world did two Retired Marines, the only two, (as far as we know) end up staying at the same Hampton Inn just a few rooms apart. The only two associated with Run For The Wall, whose main group were in hotels several miles away. Two Marines who had not seen each other in 39 years and shared experiences of the last combat action in Viet Nam. Two Marines who have been haunted for years by the loss of three fellow Marines 39 years ago. Two Marines proud enough to mount the Marine Corps emblem on the front of their helmets long before seeing each other again in 2014. Both of us being Ex-Drill Instructors...and that's just some of the things Ex-DI's do. And two Marines riding Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic motorcycles (but only one without his partner).

As Patti stated at breakfast, "Our meeting in Chattanooga was meant to be."

One of the true heroes, a WWII Vet welcomed us to Lynchburg, VA. I had the honor to meet and thank this man for our freedom that he fought for on Omaha Beach during WWII.

James and Patti had to leave early heading back home to Charleston, SC so I ended up touring DC pretty much on my own (Democrats must have laid out those streets). Actually I wanted to be alone anyway when I visited "The Wall" for the first time to find the names of Hall, Hargrove and Marshall. "Mission Accomplished." Spent the night in Arlington, Virginia then headed back home 721 miles with three 30 minute nap-stops. Rode back by myself with "years to come of fantastic memories", and something to finally look forward to next year.

Thanks Patti and James (Gunny); meeting both of you made May 20th bearable.

Semper Fi,
Sincerely,

► OTHER STORIES

RAINELLE was one of the cities in Greenbriar County, West Virginia that was hit by the so-called “once-in-a-thousand years” flood on June 24. Many people lost their homes, but saddest of all 26 people lost their lives, 17 in Greenbriar County. At the time of this writing, there was only one confirmed death in Rainelle, but there are still people unaccounted for. The people of Rainelle have welcomed and been good to RFTW Central Route since 1990; please pray for them and their families.

In an emergency shelter in Rainelle, Marcus Reynolds found a bit of humor amid the sorrow. "While we're at it, would you be interested in any oceanfront property?" he said. "I understand there's some available."

Bill Kious of Rainelle was asked how those at the shelter, many of them on modest incomes, were able to laugh.

"Frankly, because we've lived a rough lifestyle," Kious said. "It's a nature to us that we can't get rid of."

RAINELLE DONATIONS UPDATE

First, thank you, thank you, thank you to everyone who has made a donation to Rainelle Relief. To date, we've received \$2,723 in donations. This comes in handy, as I received a call from Linda Stimmel (RFTW WV State Coordinator) and Denise Ferris with specific items needed. With the Board's approval, we have purchased the following items:

- Mud/rain boots for adults and children
- Variety of new socks for adults and children
- Variety of underwear for adults and children

Jenny and I will be leaving on Friday to deliver these requested items to Rainelle. In speaking to our contact, Pastor Bob, he is already grateful to RFTW for Linda and Denise and their immediate action. He expressed to me how much the people of Rainelle love the Run For The Wall Riders and what our Mission is.

With the items that Linda and Denise took, the items that we're taking, and Lori Clay's clean-up supplies, this is just the first of many truckloads to help our beloved Rainelle. We'll keep you posted of our efforts and future opportunities.

Ken “Catfish” Ward - BOD Treasurer

If you would like to make a donation to help the people of Rainelle, here are ways to do it:

1. By check—made payable to Run For The Wall, Inc. Mail Attn: Ken Ward, 1766 S. Erie Highway, Hamilton, OH 45011. In the memo line please write “Rainelle Relief.”
2. On RFTW.org using the “Donate” button. Any donations made this month will be donated to “Rainelle Relief.”

3. I will be attending the All Routes Reunion in Springfield. You can simply hand me a check—made payable to Run For The Wall, Inc.

Whichever is the easiest for you, please do. Since RFTW is a 501(c)3 organization, your donations will be tax deductible.

MANY PEOPLE IN RAINELLE SAY THEY'VE LOST EVERYTHING

By Cody Neff Register-Herald Reporter, June 25, 2016

RAINELLE — The flooding in southern West Virginia has left people homeless, stranded and even dead. People say it will be burned into their minds for the rest of their lives.

One man said June 24 will always leave a bad taste in his mouth, especially now that he has lost everything.

“I’d say this is the worst birthday present that God has ever given me,” Frankie Martin said Friday. “I’m 68 today. What a mess.

“I had a body shop on Seventh Street, but it is ruined. I wouldn’t be too worried, but my paperwork for everything, and I mean everything, is in my office in the shop. I don’t even know if I still have an office.”

The people who hadn’t been shuttled to Ansted for refuge gathered in the town shopping plaza.



Standing by his truck and surrounded by dogs, David Woodrum said he was thankful for his brother-in-law.

“I was at work all day when this happened,” he said. “I tried to get home and we couldn’t. Thankfully, my brother-in-law was able to climb into the attic with nearly 20 animals, including some puppies. They stayed there all night.



“I know it was 4 feet deep. The way I see it, maybe the Lord wanted us to move and He gave us a little push. We’ll probably go to Lewisburg.”

Volunteers had gathered under tents to serve hot dogs and water to rescue workers and the folks who stayed behind.

“I’ve never seen a flood like this before,” Joann Gilkeson said. “I’ve lived in Rainelle since 1951. I can say that I’m glad to see people banding together and showing their love for each other.

“There are so many people helping, and you know who has compassion for others because they’re here doing all they can.”

One man said he can forgive Mother Nature for taking everything from him.

“You know what made it worth it?” Billy Mosley said. “I’ve always wanted to ride in a Humvee. Yesterday, I got to ride in one and it was everything I’d hoped it would be.”

Mosley was leaning on his crutches as he shared the story about his Humvee ride. His right leg was broken, but he still managed to hop around town to chat with people.



“I live up on Main Street,” he told a few people. “I know Marie’s Fabric Shop is destroyed. The furniture store is full of trash. The cars that were around back were completely underwater.”

“This is history,” he added. “I’m living through history, man.”

VIETNAM WARRIOR WHO WROTE 'BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY' RECOUNTS ANOTHER FIGHT

By Steve Lopez, LA Times, June 26, 2016

I don’t know how Ron Kovic does it.

Forty-eight years in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the chest down.

Forty-eight years of simple things being difficult, Vietnam still casting shadows.

And yet for Kovic there’s drive and determination, goals to meet and plans to keep.

After the war, he was so filled with rage and despair, he didn’t think he’d live to see 30.



In a fevered race with mortality, he wrote the acclaimed “Born on the Fourth of July” in less than two months, ripping pages out of a Sears & Roebuck manual typewriter purchased in Santa Monica.

Now, that book about his evolution from U.S. Marine and battlefield warrior to anti-war activist is 40, and the Fourth of July baby is approaching 70.

We met for lunch Wednesday at a seaside restaurant near Kovic's home in Redondo Beach, and when he reached for a cup of coffee on the table in front of him, I saw him wince in discomfort. His shoulders are worn out after nearly a half a century of hoisting himself in and out of the chair.

And yet, to hear him tell it, he leads a relatively normal life. He writes, drives a specially equipped van, visits friends, goes to favorite restaurants. He got dreamy-eyed when he talked about girlfriend TerriAnn Ferren, who works at the Torrance Cultural Arts Center and writes a weekly column for the Torrance Tribune.

"She's wonderful," Kovic said of Ferren, whom he met at a party, under a full moon, at the home of former Lakers coach Bill Sharman and his wife Joyce.

Kovic told me he just bought Ferren a ninth-anniversary ring.

"I'm grateful to be here," Kovic said. "I'm grateful that I can still contribute, give back, tell a story."

His first story was a smoldering sensation. Tom Cruise played Kovic in the Oliver Stone movie based on the book.

On July 4, a 40th anniversary edition of the book will be published, along with Kovic's second book.

The new one is called "Hurricane Street," and it's another raw expose on the cost of war. The book, which he calls a prequel, drills deep into the 17-day drama of a 1974 sit-in and hunger strike staged by Kovic and a band of fellow wounded veterans who took the federal building on Wilshire Boulevard by storm.

Kovic, an outpatient who was living on Hurricane Street in Marina del Rey at the time, was tormented by nightmares and a sense of injustice. Those who made great sacrifices were shabbily treated and cared for, in his opinion. On Hurricane Street, he and others plotted their rebellion.



The coups made national headlines at the time, as the invading army of war casualties commandeered the 13th floor office of U.S. Sen. Alan Cranston. The men refused to leave until Cranston and VA officials answered their call for better healthcare at the Long Beach Veterans Administration Hospital's spinal cord injury unit and other hospitals in the U.S.

Soon, Kovic writes, the senator's office was like a MASH unit, mattresses everywhere. A supportive friend tended to the men's needs, even as the physically injured and psychologically wounded vets bickered over who was in charge and how best to make their case. They were riven with pain, depression, guilt, anger, paranoia and fear of enduring lifelong disabilities.

“Bottles of saline solution dangle from IV poles as Sharon scurries around the room emptying bags filled with urine... We have literally transformed Senator Cranston’s office into a make shift VA hospital ward. All the medical supplies that Eddie got are now lined up perfectly along the office windowsill: twenty-four irrigation-solution bottles, eleven boxes of latex rubber gloves, sixty tubes of lubricant for cleaning out our rear ends, six dozen plastic bags to put the crap in...

“Twenty-six catheter-change kits used to insert the catheters into our penises and inflate the little plastic bulbs inside our bladders, enabling us to urinate without wetting our pants. Several boxes of government diapers have been added for those who are incontinent.”

This story, like so many others related to the war, burned inside Kovic for years. He’d begun writing it, moved to other topics, circled back again but still couldn’t see it through. The breakthrough came one morning several years ago.

“He told me the story,” says Ferren, to whom Kovic dedicated his new book. “He just started talking and I thought quite frankly that he was making up a story as he went along...He said, ‘No, it’s all true.’

“I just couldn’t believe it and I said, ‘You have to write this down. Honey, this is history.’”

In the introduction, Kovic says he’s written a work of “memory and fiction,” condensing some events and building two composite characters. He changed some names and details “out of respect for privacy, and to fill gaps in my memory.”

The book is an unflinching anti-war declaration, written in blood and the sweat of too many haunted nights by a Vietnam Marine Corps sergeant who later opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We need to be more thoughtful before we send another young American service person off to be involved in wars that need not be fought,” he told me.

In “Hurricane Street,” Kovic wanted to tell as honestly as possible the story of Vietnam veterans who felt betrayed, defeated and divided, but came together “and ultimately triumphed.”

Veteran care is better now, Kovic said, with many dedicated healthcare providers, and his own doctor at Long Beach VA is Vietnamese-American. But across the country, he said, more improvements and a greater commitment are needed, especially given delays in treatment and the unacceptably high rates of suicide among veterans.

Kovic writes that he no longer feels sorry for himself and no longer grieves as he did 48 years ago. Still, when he makes his regular hospital visits for treatment, he aches to leave quickly and return to the life he has made for himself.

“A man needs his dignity no matter how much he has lost,” he writes. “I am so grateful to be alive.”

92-YEAR-OLD WWII VETERAN RUNS ACROSS THE COUNTRY



Veterans and staff members at the Biloxi VA Medical Center hosted a special visitor earlier this year. Ernest Andrus stopped by the hospital at the end of January, one of his days off, to attend a reception in his honor. These days it's not so easy to get on Andrus' calendar as the 92-year-old WWII Veteran runs across the country four days a week to raise awareness of the sacrifices the men and women of the military made during World War II and the many conflicts since that time. "Freedom isn't free," Andrus said. "We can't forget our comrades that were injured or killed serving and protecting our country. That's what I hope I can achieve with this run. Plus I always

wanted to do this."

Once Andrus made up his mind to run across the country, he spent several months planning the trip. In October 2013 he touched the Pacific Ocean near San Diego, turned east and began jogging. He's been running ever since, and in January, as he ran along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, VA staff jumped at the chance to invite him over. "As you can see from this large turnout," said Anthony Dawson, the director of the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, "we are all in awe of what you are doing and honored to have you here today for a visit. If we switched the numbers of your age making you 29 it would still be an amazing accomplishment. But at 92, wow!" Here's how Andrus came to running across the country at age 92.

Ernest Andrus was a corpsman in the Navy, joining at the start of the war. He left the Navy when the war ended in 1945, and enrolled in college on the VA GI Bill, found a job and went on with his life. He didn't spend a lot of time dwelling on his experiences during the war, as some did. He said it was too hard to do. "I wasn't right in the middle of the action," Andrus said, "but I saw enough. I found it easier to just not spend a lot of time thinking about those that didn't come back. Not like some of my crewmates did. Not for a long time." As a corpsman aboard a LST (Landing Ship, Tank), Andrus said he stayed busy tending to the wounds and illnesses associated with war. He assisted in surgeries, and to this day recalls an amputation that was performed aboard his ship. As the surgeon began the procedure, the patient needed blood. Andrus was the same blood type so he rolled up his sleeve, while he was holding the IV bag (they didn't have a pole), and gave blood. He had to do this several times throughout the night. He remembers feeling light headed and weak. "We all did what we had to do," Andrus said. "I didn't do anything that any other man in our crew wouldn't have done."



Andrus' life ticked along at a normal pace for the next 60 years or so. One day he received a phone call from some of his former crew members, to include the skipper, and nothing was ever the same after that. "We were at a point in our lives when our families were grown, our careers were over and now we had time to think. So we began reminiscing about our time in the service. And one thing we all agreed on was

we wanted the younger generations to understand the sacrifices so many made which made America the country it is today,” he said. “We wanted the younger generations to understand the sacrifices so many made which made America the country it is today,” Andrus said.



So the group of about 30 got together and decided they could preserve the memories of life aboard a Navy LST by finding and refurbishing a decommissioned ship and turning it into a floating memorial. They located the USS LST-325 in Greece, got it back to America and it now is available for tour in Indiana. The refurbishment took years of red tape, fundraising and countless hours of coordination, but the group persevered. The effort serves as a testimony to Andrus’ sheer grit and determination as he treks across the country to share the

message that America should acknowledge and appreciate all that Veterans have done to preserve freedom. “We have a great country,” Andrus said.

“We can’t forget how we got here.” If all goes as planned, Andrus will arrive on the east coast of Georgia, near Brunswick, on Aug. 20, 2016, one day after his 93rd birthday.

[Source: VAntage Point | Mary Kay Gominger | March 3, 2016]

WHY ARE THEY CALLED “A, B, AND C RATIONS”?

A-Rations were class A meals prepared in mess halls like we had when we were at Army bases. B-Rations are the same as C-Rations except they came in larger 1 gallon cans and were prepared in the field mess hall. C-Rations were prepared by soldiers in the field. The whole time we were in Vietnam we were usually served two C-Rations and one B-Ration each day. Relished and reviled, C-Rations fed millions of troops in the field. The iconic green cans were far from home cooking, but they did sustain a fighting man when he was far from home—or at least the mess hall—until 1981, when they were replaced by the Meal Ready to Eat, or MRE. “If you were in the field, hungry, and you could heat them up, they were great—slightly better than shoe leather.” War Is Boring. “If you were in garrison where you had a choice, forget about it!” All in all, we knew how to eat them, heat, enjoy them, and make the most of them all over a year. We all may have eaten about 6-7 months’ worth of C-Rations and we have all lived to tell about it. We all came up with ways to make them taste better and kinda enjoyed them somewhat.”

Background of “C-Rations”: Napoleon once said an army marches on its stomach. In other words, poorly fed troops fight poorly— food is a force multiplier. But food preservation for long periods of time and the logistics of moving food to troops on the battlefield are two of warfare’s oldest challenges. The U.S. Military is no different. During the 1930s, the War Department did its best to develop several kinds of compact, long-lasting rations that could feed men in combat. One was the C-Ration, first issued in 1939. It was three cans of different meat and vegetables—field manuals of the time described the contents as having “the taste and appearance of a hearty stew”—and three cans containing crackers, instant coffee and sugar. It wasn’t Mom’s home cooking, but it was filling. Each C-Ration contained about 2,900 calories and sufficient vitamins to keep the troops healthy. Actually, the Roman soldiers were by far the best fed Army of all time, and they lived a long time as well.

And After WWII: C-Rations were just one of the letter-coded rations the military issued during World War II. Most soldiers and Marines from that time remember—and detest—the K-Rations of the era, which had three separate meal units for breakfast, lunch and dinner. During the Korean War, C-Rations soon eclipsed the K-Ration as the most commonly issued field ration. But the food was boring—“menu fatigue” was the term military dieticians used. In 1958, the Defense Department created 12 different menus. Each menu contained one canned meat item; one canned fruit, bread or dessert item; one “B unit” that contained items such as crackers and chocolate; an accessory packet containing cigarettes, matches, chewing gum, toilet paper, coffee, creamer, sugar, and salt; and a spoon. Just enough to get full and sometimes sick.

<http://vva975.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016-VVA-SC-Newsletter-02-May-Aug-2016.pdf>

► VA NEWS

VICTORY IN COURT

Court Rules VA Has Shortchanged Veterans Since 2009

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims agreed with the National Veterans Legal Services Program argument that the VA failed to revise its reimbursement regulations to comply with a 2009 Congressional Mandate.

On April 8, a unanimous three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims struck down a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regulation that VA had been relying upon since 2009 to deny reimbursement requests from veterans who incurred emergency medical care costs outside the VA healthcare system. The Court's decision rebuked the VA, emphasizing that VA's reimbursement regulation became "wholly inconsistent" with the governing statute when Congress amended it in 2009, but thereafter the VA unlawfully "declined to remedy this inconsistency."

The case, *Richard W. Staab v. Robert A. McDonald*, was brought by the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) on behalf of an Air Force veteran who had a heart attack in 2010 and was rushed to a non-VA hospital, where he underwent open heart surgery and incurred approximately \$48,000 in emergency medical expenses. Medicare covered a portion of this medical bill, and the veteran sought VA reimbursement for the portion of the medical expenses not covered by Medicare.

"This is a major win for veterans, and their families," said Bart Stichman, Joint Executive Director of NVLSP and one of the attorneys in the case. "Often veterans have to seek emergency medical care outside the VA healthcare system, and for years the VA has refused to reimburse these veterans for any of the expenses incurred simply because secondary insurance covered a portion of the medical bill. This practice has violated federal law since at least 2009. The court's ruling means the VA will have to amend the unlawful regulations it should have amended in 2009 and do right by these veterans. It's not just a win for one veteran. Veterans who have pending claims for reimbursement will benefit. Plus, veterans whose reimbursement requests were turned down years ago may now be able to get paid by claiming that the previous denial contained "clear and unmistakable error."

NEW VA CONTRACT AWARDS FOR MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMS

The VA announced on March 29 the award of 12 major contracts that will enhance its ability to deliver timely disability benefits claims decisions to the nation's veterans in line with the MyVA initiative. The contracts make up a \$6.8 billion enterprise-wide Medical Disability Examination Program under Public Law 104-275, and represent a major step forward in improving the disability examination experience for veterans.

A unique feature of this multi-contract award will see the consolidation of the contracts under a single program management initiative, with representation in the central management group from both the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). To date, contracts for medical examinations have been managed by both administrations with varying degrees of efficiency and delivery time of exam reports, which are critical to Veterans' disability determinations supporting their compensation and pension claim.

The new program management and delivery process will also continue to ensure broad national and international coverage of medical examination requirements to meet Veterans' needs world-wide. Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, Tom Murphy noted that, "This will be a major accomplishment for Veterans going forward, not only for the efficiencies and additional oversight, but VA can now maximize the capacity of inherent capability and leverage the contract expertise and capacity as needed. The goal will be to reduce the veteran's wait times for examinations as much as possible thereby providing faster claims decisions and enhancing Veterans' experience in a positive way." Contracts were awarded to the following firms: VetFed Resources, Inc., 2034 Eisenhower Ave., Ste 270, Alexandria, VA; Veterans Evaluation Services, Inc., 3000 Richmond Avenue, Ste 540, Houston, TX; and QTC Medical Services, Inc, 21700 Copley Drive, Ste 200, Diamond Bar, CA.

The contracts are being awarded for a period of 12 months with four, 12-month options, with an aggregate ceiling of \$6.8 billion. The contract will be managed by VA's Strategic Acquisition Center based in in Frederick, MD.

VA DISABILITY RATING USES CREATIVE MATH

When it comes to service-connected compensation claims, the VA takes the view that it should not add whole numbers together to get your rating but, instead, the VA takes percentages of percentages. It is as if the VA says if you are 10% disabled then you are 90% healthy. Therefore, the next rating is not added but is used to take a percentage of the 'healthy' 90%. So for a veteran with two 10 ratings the first ten percent rating would be 10% of 100, which is 10%.

The second ten percent rating would be 10% of the 90% (again the 'healthy' percent of the veteran), which is 9%. So the combined rating would be 19%. The percentages are all rounded up or down to the nearest ten percent. Here, the rating would be rounded to 20%.

The combined rating system starts to work against a veteran when he gets closer to 100%. It gets harder and harder to get that higher rating, especially once a veteran is over 50%. For instance, if a veteran has two ratings of 50% and two of 20% the combined rating is 80%. So even though $50+50+20+20$ equals 140 in real math; it is only 80 in VA math. The difference that it leads to in compensation is huge. According to the VA compensation rating table, a veteran, with no dependents, rated at 80% would receive \$1,551.48 per month. A single veteran rated at 100%, on the other hand, would receive \$2,903.83 per month. This veteran receiving a rating of 100%, which is only 20% greater than the 80% rating, gets almost 100% more money a month!

There are other factors that make the ratings change, too. For example, if a veteran has a rating on each leg or each arm, then those ratings are combined together and give the overall combined rating an extra boost. Also, if a veteran has too many ratings on one arm or leg then VA stops counting those ratings. Further, a veteran can step up to 100% through total disability due to individual unemployability. That veteran must show that he cannot work and that he meets a certain rating.

[Source: Veteran News Now | Matt Hill | June 17, 2016 ++]

ARIZONA IS HOME TO 100th VETERANS CEMETERY

The VA announced the opening of the 100th VA grant funded Veterans cemetery. An \$8.9 million grant from the VA funded the new Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery in Marana, Arizona. The cemetery is the 100th Veterans cemetery funded with a VA grant awarded to a State or Tribal organization.

“This significant milestone underscores the importance of our partnerships with State and Tribal organizations to increase Veterans access to benefits, said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. “This grant helps VA fulfill its goal of providing at least 95 percent of Veterans and spouses with access to an open national, state or tribal cemetery within 75 miles of their home,” McDonald said.

VA's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program complements VA's 134 National Cemeteries across the country. Since 1980, the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program has awarded grants totaling more than \$665 million to establish, expand, and improve 100 Veterans cemeteries in 47 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan. These VA-funded Veterans cemeteries provided more than 35,000 burials in 2015.

The new cemetery opened on March 14, 2016 and was dedicated on March 26, 2016 with a public ceremony. The cemetery, on approximately 20 acres, includes 1,802 pre-placed crypts, 1,638 cremains gravesites and 1,920 columbarium niches and will help serve the needs of approximately 105,000 Arizona Veterans and their families.

Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable who have completed a period of active duty service as required by law, their spouses and eligible dependent children may be buried in the Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Marana.

The closest VA national cemetery to the new Arizona cemetery is VA's National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona in Phoenix, approximately 91 miles away. The nearest VA grant-funded state Veterans cemetery is Southern Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery in Sierra Vista, which is located at a distance of about 107 miles from the new site.

For more information on VA's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program, visit: www.cem.va.gov/cem/grants.
For more information on Arizona's Veterans Memorial at Marana, visit: <https://dvs.az.gov/arizona-veterans-memorial-cemetery-marana> .

CLAIMS PROCESSING ERRORS DELAY FIDUCIARY BENEFITS

On March 24 the VA announced that an information technology system that it deployed in 2014 and enhanced in 2015, the Beneficiary Fiduciary Field System, allowed it to identify claim processing errors affecting approximately 14,000 Veterans and survivors. These Veterans' and survivors' claims were initially filed over many years, with some going back as far as 2000. The errors concern cases in which VA had proposed that due to disability or age the beneficiary was unable to manage his or her VA benefits without assistance, but did not complete the action by transferring it within VA for appointment of a fiduciary. These cases represent approximately four percent of such proposals since 2000.

VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) became aware of a potential problem when it received inquiries about delayed fiduciary appointments from affected beneficiaries or their families. A system-wide review by VBA using the new technology found claim processing errors that had occurred at each of its regional offices and pension management centers across the country. In these cases, one or more of the procedures for controlling and transferring the workload were not followed, resulting in the fiduciary appointment delays.

"We sincerely apologize to these Veterans and their survivors for this regrettable delay," said VA Deputy Secretary Sloan D. Gibson. "We are taking immediate action to complete these cases, initiate the fiduciary appointment process, and ensure that these errors do not happen again. We must also continue to transform the claim process for beneficiaries needing fiduciary assistance and properly resource our fiduciary program to ensure that beneficiaries have the help they need to effectively use the benefits they earned."

VBA has set up a dedicated team to immediately review the cases, notify beneficiaries, complete the claim processing steps, and appoint a fiduciary as quickly as possible. Because the law requires VA to check the qualifications of the fiduciaries it appoints, including conducting a face-to-face interview, VA anticipates that it may take as much as six months or more to complete the fiduciary appointment process for these beneficiaries. However, the beneficiaries will continue to receive their monthly benefits as VA works to appoint a fiduciary to assist them.

Additionally, VBA has already modified its systems to better track this workload and plans to remove manual transfer processes that are prone to error through enhancements to its automated claims processing system, the Veterans Benefits Management System.

For more information, Veterans can contact (1-888-407-0144).

Additional Information on VA's Fiduciary Program: The VA fiduciary program provides oversight of beneficiaries who, due to injury, disease, or the infirmities of age, are unable to manage their VA benefits. VA's role is to conduct oversight of beneficiaries to ensure their well-being, and oversee the fiduciaries it appoints to assist beneficiaries with the management of their VA benefits. In 2015, VA protected more than 224,000 beneficiaries, who received over \$3 billion in VA benefits. Beneficiaries in the fiduciary program include Veterans, surviving spouses, dependent parents, adult children, and minor children. The number of beneficiaries served by the program has grown by 50 percent since 2011 and VA projects continued growth as it increases its benefit claims production (1.4 million claims in 2015) and the beneficiary population ages.

TOXIC EXPOSURE RESEARCH LEGISLATION

Needed for Veterans of Every Generation

National Vietnam Veterans of America issued a press release on Feb. 10 on toxic exposure research. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald told Members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs that no legislation on Agent Orange or Toxic exposures is needed. This statement by the DVA Secretary is in line with testimony, delivered before Congress on three occasions in the last eight months, in which the VA claims no research legislation is needed as other Agencies of the Federal Government are doing all of the research studies needed.

John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) responded, “With all due respect to the Secretary, he could not be more wrong. Furthermore, we have yet to receive a list of these research studies referenced in VA testimony which purportedly pertain to veterans and their progeny.”

“The events in the past week highlight the shameless wall of ignorance erected by the VA bureaucrats. Case in point is the Secretary’s recent policy regarding the Blue Water Navy veterans of Vietnam. The policy states that a ‘bright line’ can be drawn across the mouth of a flowing river, with those on the inland side of that imaginary line being ‘exposed,’ and those two feet away, on the harbor side of the line, ‘not exposed,’” said Rowan. “Those ‘exposed’ are eligible for presumptive service connection for certain conditions, and therefore medical care and compensation, while those who served two feet away are not. We are leaving our Navy veterans out in the cold, and sadly, many of them have died and their widows have been abandoned.”

“Also on Wednesday, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report on Gulf War illness, which I find troubling,” noted Rowan. “Psychiatrists/psychologists comprised half of a panel charged with evaluating medical conditions, most probably caused by exposure to toxic chemicals. It comes as no surprise that this recent report ignores the many toxins to which Gulf War veterans were exposed and reverts to the canard that unless ‘causality’ can be proved by a specific toxin, there can be no forward movement. One would hope the VA and DOD would be looking for an ‘association’ of exposure to one or more toxic substances and the presence of adverse medical conditions, rather than placing an emphasis on the ‘mind-body continuums.’ ”

“Yes, technically the VA is able to do what is needed without legislation,” said Rowan. “However, the VA has made its case repeatedly that, in the absence of legislation, there will be no justice accorded veterans with Toxic Wounds, nor for their innocent children and grandchildren. America’s veterans of every generation DO need early passage of S. 901 and H.R. 1769, the Toxic Exposures Research Act, and vigorous oversight after enactment to ensure that VA actually does what is mandated in law; we need immediate passage of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015, H.R. 969 and S.681; and we need to push for the extension and expansion of the Agent Orange Act of 1991, to include veterans of recent and future wars, so that a system is in place to systematically review battlefield exposures, and they won’t need to refight the battles we have.”

VICTORY FOR VICTIMS OF ARMY’S BIOCHEMICAL EXPERIMENTS

By William C. Triplett, From The VVA Veteran

An appeals court in January handed veterans who were unwitting victims of chemical and biological experiments a long overdue victory in a toughly fought lawsuit brought seven years ago on their behalf by Vietnam Veterans of America and Swords to Plowshares.

Instead of money, thought, the veterans were awarded two things that are arguably more important at this point in their lives—access to detailed information about the experiments and access to health care provided by the experimenter, the U.S. Army.

While some of the particulars of this story may be new, its broader themes are familiar, certainly to Vietnam veterans. “It’s another example of the government hiding things, not giving up information that would help veterans,” said VVA President John Rowan.

There was a lot to hide.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland—and with help from the Central Intelligence Agency—the Army developed a secret program to test biochemical agents on unsuspecting soldiers. They were only told they would be testing out new clothing, such as field jackets, and various weapons. They were never told anything about being infected with, or exposed to, things such as deadly nerve agents (sarin and VX), incapacitating agents (BZ), lethal pathogens (plague and anthrax), and even hallucinogens (LSD and mescaline).

According to a CNN report four years ago, when one soldier who’d been subjected to many tests either by injection or pill “questioned the staff about whether he was in any danger, they reassured him, ‘There is nothing here that could ever harm you.’”

The Edgewood program was motivated by Cold War fears of possible Soviet biological or chemical warfare attacks. Initially, the tests were defensive in nature—soldiers were often injected or given an antidote shortly after exposure—to discover the best ways to survive such attacks. But subsequent tests were designed for offensive capabilities.

The experiments and the people experimented upon numbered in the thousands. The program went on for years until congressional inquiries and hearing put an end to it in the mid-1970s.

The program’s effects on victims, however, was only beginning.

As soldiers finished at Edgewood and prepared to return to their normal duty stations, they were ordered never to discuss anything they had seen, heard, or done while there. The historical record strongly suggests that they obeyed—until later in life when many started coming down with multiple diseases and ailments.

Suspecting their illnesses were tied to the Edgewood experiments, the former soldiers filed claims for service-connection with the VA, which, it turned out, had actually been part of the Edgewood experiments at one point. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that by 2009, the VA, hardly a disinterested party, had denied “97 to 99 percent of their claims for disability and death benefits.”

Frustrated, eight Edgewood veterans approached the San Francisco-based law firm Morrison Foerster, which was known for representing veterans. VVA soon got involved because of its longstanding interest in the potential long-term effects of veterans’ exposure to toxic substances. Eventually Swords to Plowshares, a veterans rights organization also based in San Francisco, became involved, too.

The decision was made to sue, but not for monetary damages. The plaintiffs wanted to know exactly what was done to them. They also wanted appropriate health care for illnesses they believed resulted from the

testing. The suit, filed by Morrison Foerster, named the U.S. Army, the CIA, and the Department of Defense as defendants.

Time, however, was on the government's side. An estimated seven thousand eight hundred soldiers—possibly more—had been experimented upon, but some had died and others were dying. Before the lawsuit could even move forward, the Army tried to get it dismissed, claiming a slew of legal points such as lack of jurisdiction and expiration of the statute of limitations.

The Army also tried to invoke the Feres doctrine, which essentially immunizes the U.S. military from being sued for money regarding injuries sustained during service. While the plaintiffs made clear they were not seeking cash, the Army argued that the money that would be spent in providing health care could be construed as a financial award.

A year passed, and in 2010 a District Court judge ruled against the defendants on all counts. The case would be allowed to proceed.

It would be another three years, however, before any further progress was made. But it was major progress. In November 2013 the same District Court issued an injunction compelling the Army to inform the veterans about the details and health effects of experiments performed on them. Specifically, the judge said the Army has “an ongoing duty to warn [the veterans] about newly acquired information that may affect their well-being now and in the future as it becomes available.”

The judge also said that Army Regulation 70-25 “entitles plaintiffs to medical care for any disabilities, injuries, or illnesses suffered as a result of participation in the experimentation program.” But the judge didn't compel the Army to provide that care, citing care available from the VA.

Morrison Foerster felt the Army should be compelled to provide medical care, and appealed that part of the ruling. “The Army has its own independent duty under its own regulations to provide care,” said Ben Peterson, a Morrison Foerster attorney involved with the litigation. “That's entirely separate from the VA,” Put another way, why shouldn't the Army be made to comply with its own rules? Especially, as the law firm maintained, since studies had shown links between the tests and some illnesses the veterans had developed.

As Morrison Foerster filed an appeal for a second or tandem injunction, the defendants appealed not only to overturn the injunction to disclose information about the tests, but also, once more, to have the case dismissed entirely. The move didn't surprise Rowan. “It's all part and parcel of the government not wanting to tell anybody anything,” he said. “It was that way with Agent Orange, the Atomic soldiers, and so many others.”

The case went to the Ninth Circuit of Appeals, which reviewed all arguments and issued a decision two years later, in June 2015. Once again, the ruling came down completely on the veterans' side. The Ninth Circuit denied the Army's attempt to have the case tossed, upheld the District Court's injunction for the Army to provide access to information about the tests, and—perhaps most importantly—granted Morrison Foerster's request to file a second injunction forcing the Army to provide health care.

As such, the Ninth Circuit effectively disagreed with the District Court only on that last point, and only in part, writing “we cannot agree that the Army's duty to provide care is excused by the availability of

medical care from another government agency [the VA], even if that care would overlap to some degree and in some manner with the care that the Army is required to provide.”

That might seem to have put an end to things and therefore been cause to celebrate, but the case wasn't finished. While the Ninth Circuit had granted the second injunction, it was up to the District Court to spell out exactly what the injunction would say. So the case went back there.

The Army hadn't given up, either. Its attorneys petitioned the Ninth Circuit to rehear the full case in hopes of obtaining a more favorable ruling. It wasn't until January that the court responded—declining to rehear.

VVA hailed the decision as a clear and final victory. “It reaffirms our position that caring for veterans in part of the continuing cost of war,” Rowan said, noting the Ninth Circuit's refusal to rehear sends a signal that the government cannot ride roughshod over its own regulations and the rights of veterans.. This case has succeeded in exposing the breadth and scope of some of the top-secret experimentation that the military first denied and then acknowledged had been conducted to the potential detriment of the health of thousands of test subjects.”

Rowan also saluted Morrison Foerster “for their unwavering support of veterans.” The law firm of course welcomed the victory, but as Patterson said: “Keep in mind, it's possible the Army could try to get the Supreme Court to take the case. They've got ninety days to do it.” That is, from the date of the Ninth circuit's January ruling, meaning the deadline for filing a request for Supreme Court review would be around the end of this April.

“It's been a long case,” Patterson said. “We got both the District Court and the Ninth Circuit to say, yes, you have to do these things for veterans. It'd be great if the Army did the right thing” and did not file for Supreme Court review.

For the moment, the only matter still outstanding is the specific wording of the injunction making the Army responsible for providing health care, which the District Court has not yet issued. It could come any day, though, and it will certainly be reason to celebrate.

VA AGENT ORANGE BENEFITS

A federal court had ordered the VA to reassess its policy denying Agent Orange benefits to Navy sailors who served in the Vietnam War. The VA's conclusion: They still don't qualify. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has once again turned down an effort by Navy veterans to get compensation for possible exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. In a document released 5 FEB, the VA said it would continue to limit benefits related to Agent Orange exposure to only those veterans who set foot in Vietnam, where the herbicide was sprayed, and to those who were on boats in inland rivers. The VA compensates these veterans for a litany of associated illnesses, including diabetes, various cancers, Parkinson's Disease, peripheral neuropathy and a type of heart disease.

Advocates for some 90,000 so-called Blue Water Navy veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam have been asking the VA for more than a decade to broaden the policy to include them. They say that they were exposed to Agent Orange because their ships sucked in potentially contaminated water and distilled it for showering, drinking, laundry and cooking. Experts have said the distillation process could have actually concentrated the Agent Orange, which contained the toxic chemical dioxin and was used to kill vegetation

and deny enemy cover. ProPublica and the Virginian-Pilot profiled their effort to gain coverage in September as part of an ongoing project to chronicle the impact of Agent Orange on vets and their families.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims last April struck down VA rules that denied compensation for sailors whose ships docked at certain harbors in South Vietnam, including Da Nang. Those ports, the court determined, may have been in the Agent Orange spraying area. The court ordered the VA to review its policy. But on Friday, the VA largely stood by its old policy and once again asserted that there's no scientific justification or legal requirement for covering veterans who served off the coast. "Environmental health experts in VA's Veterans Health Administration have reviewed the available scientific information and concluded that it is not sufficient to support a presumption that Blue Water Navy Veterans were exposed to Agent Orange," the VA said in a fact sheet. Vietnam veteran Jim Smith has been diagnosed with prostate cancer and believes Agent Orange exposure may have played a role. "My feeling is the VA is thumbing their nose and sending the middle finger back to the Blue Water people," he said.

"It's like nobody at the VA has any kind of science background whatsoever."

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, criticized the VA's decision. "Rather than siding with veterans, VA is doubling down on an irrational and inconsistent policy," he said in a statement. "Young sailors risked their lives during the Vietnam War, unaware that decades later, they and their children and grandchildren would still feel the toxic effects of exposure. Veterans who served offshore and in the harbors of Vietnam were exposed and deserve the presumption of service connection for Agent Orange-related diseases." Blumenthal and others are seeking adoption of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which would ensure that all vets exposed to Agent Orange are compensated. The VA opposes the legislation, as it has several previous iterations dating back to 2008.

The VA's new review rejecting benefits relied on a 2011 report by the respected Institute of Medicine, as well as other published research, according to the agency's fact sheet. The Institute of Medicine report said there was no way to prove Blue Water vets were exposed to the chemicals, but it identified plausible routes that Agent Orange could have traveled out to sea and into a ship's distillation system. Although military policy at the time recommended against distilling water closer than 10 miles to shore — where the chemical concentration would have been highest — veterans said doing so was often unavoidable, and their commanding officers routinely ordered it. The VA said it is working with veterans groups to "initiate a groundbreaking study of Blue Water Navy Veterans health outcomes. We hope to have data gathered and analyses published in 2017."

Veterans called the VA's decision a betrayal. John Wells, a Louisiana lawyer who has spent more than a decade advocating for Blue Water veterans, said his group would continue challenging the VA and push for legislation that would mandate coverage for the Blue Water veterans. "It wasn't completely unexpected. We're used to being betrayed by the VA," Wells said. "We're going to fight this thing until we're done or dead." Jim Smith, who served aboard the ammunition ship Butte, has been diagnosed with prostate cancer and believes that Agent Orange exposure may have played a role. "My feeling is the VA is thumbing their nose and sending the middle finger back to the Blue Water people," he said. "It's like nobody at the VA has any kind of science background whatsoever." Blue Water vets — so named to set the sailors apart from their Brown Water Navy counterparts, who patrolled the murky rivers of South Vietnam — were initially deemed eligible for compensation under the Agent Orange Act of 1991, only to have the VA change its interpretation a decade later.

[Source: ProPublica | Charles Ornstein and Terry Parris Jr. | February 8, 2016 ++]

GULF WAR SYNDROME UPDATE

Exposure to pesticides and other toxins appears to be the cause of Gulf War illness in U.S. veterans, a new analysis states. The Boston University researchers reviewed studies on Gulf War illness, and said their findings "clearly and consistently" show a link between the disorder and exposure to pesticides and taking pyridostigmine bromide (PB) pills, which were meant to protect troops against the effects of nerve gas. There's also evidence of a connection between Gulf War illness and exposure to the nerve gas agents sarin and cyclosarin, and to oil well fire emissions, according to the findings published in the January issue of the journal *Cortex*. These toxins damaged troops' nervous and immune systems, and reduced the amount of white and gray matter in veterans' brains, said study leader Roberta White in a news release from the university. White is a professor of environmental health at Boston University's School of Public Health.

The main causes of Gulf War illness are like so-called "friendly fire," said study co-author James Binns. "We did it to ourselves," he said in the news release. "Pesticides, PB, nerve gas released by destroying Iraqi facilities—all are cases of friendly fire. That may explain why government and military leaders have been so reluctant to acknowledge what happened," Binns said. About 700,000 U.S. troops fought in the first Gulf War 25 years ago, and as many as 250,000 veterans of that conflict have Gulf War illness, the researchers said. It is a debilitating disorder that features symptoms such as fatigue, joint and muscle pain, headaches, concentration and memory difficulties, gastrointestinal problems and skin rashes.

For years, Gulf War veterans have claimed that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs did not take Gulf War illness seriously. In 2008, a committee created by Congress and directed by the White House released a report that said Gulf War illness is a real disorder that's distinct from stress-related syndromes. The report from the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses called for research into the causes and treatments of the illness.

Binns was chairman of that committee. Efforts to find effective treatments for Gulf War illness have been unsuccessful, but recent research has started to offer promising leads, the researchers added.

[Source: HealthDay News | February 1, 2016]

VA PTSD STUDY

The Drug Enforcement Agency has given its blessing to a study on the effect of medical marijuana on post-traumatic stress disorder, the first randomized, controlled research in the U.S. for PTSD that will use the actual plant instead of oils or synthesized cannabis. According to the research's nonprofit sponsor, Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, the DEA's approval gives researchers the go-ahead to buy the marijuana for the study from the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Once the marijuana has been secured, the group will begin recruiting and enrolling participants, perhaps as early as June, MAPS spokesman Brad Burge said.

"The contract with the state of Colorado was signed on April 20 — an unofficial national holiday in some circles — meaning the funds are en route to MAPS. We are now preparing to place the order for the marijuana for the study,"

Burge said in an email to Military Times. Colorado in 2014 awarded a \$2 million grant to MAPS for the research and at the same time gave an additional \$5.6 million to several other organizations to support medical marijuana studies.

The research first received approval in March 2014 from the Health and Human Services Department and was set to get underway at the University of Arizona and other locations within a year. But the program was delayed after the Tucson, Arizona, school terminated the contract of Dr. Sue Sisley, who was then the primary researcher on the program. Marcel Bonn-Miller with the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine is now overseeing the project, with Sisley running half the study in Arizona and Ryan Vandrey overseeing the other half at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Work also will be conducted at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

Participants will include 76 veterans who have treatment-resistant PTSD. The study will use marijuana of various strains and potency for comparison purposes.

The use of medical marijuana to treat PTSD remains controversial because while some veterans say the plant eases their symptoms and has allowed them to stop using prescription medications, very little scientific research supports these claims. Advocates say the research will fill a much-needed gap in medical literature. "This is a critical step in moving our botanical drug development program forward at the federal level to gather information on the dosing, risks, and benefits of smoked marijuana for PTSD symptoms," said Amy Emerson, director of clinical research for the MAPS Public Benefit Corporation.

[Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | April 21, 2016]

VA VET CHOICE PROGRAM UPDATE

Thanks to the bipartisan efforts of three members of Congress, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) will audit the VA's Veterans Choice program, which has been plagued by countless complaints from veterans and health care providers alike. In an effort to help veterans, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA), and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) have convinced the GAO to conduct a comprehensive audit of the Veterans Choice program.

The program was created in response to the tragic wait time scandal, in which at least 40 veterans died while waiting for appointments at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care system. When Congress passed the Veterans Choice and Accountability Act and President Obama signed it into law in August 2014, the idea was to expand the availability of hospital care and medical services for veterans. In May 2014 Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki had to resign because of the wait time scandal. Then, in November 2014, Sharon Helman was fired by the VA. Helman had been the VA executive who was in charge of the Phoenix VA Health Care System at the time of the scandal and the subsequent attempt to cover it up. At the time, many people thought that the problem was solved because of Shinseki's resignation and Helman's firing. However, CNN was perceptive enough to ask, But will that improve things at VA hospitals? The answer seems to be an emphatic no. In fact, there is ample evidence that that the Veterans Choice program is a disaster.

Senator Isakson is the chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and Senator Blumenthal is the ranking member of that committee. During a committee hearing held on 28 JAN, Isakson asked VA Secretary Robert McDonald how the VA plans to address the many issues the VA has faced during its

implementation of the Veterans Choice Program. McDonald had no answers. For example, Isakson pointed out that earlier this month a large health care provider in New Hampshire announced that it would no longer participate in the Choice Program because the VA has failed to provide payment for services rendered. Despite the best efforts of Congress and the President, the VA has found another way to make sure that veterans get the short end of the stick. NPR reports that the New Hampshire pain management company, PainCare, has notified its patients that as of February 1st, it will no longer accept Veterans Choice. PainCare spokesman Tom Barnes told NPR, "Of course we want to continue with these patients. The thing is, we're doing a lot of work, but we're not getting any reimbursement for it."

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter represents the Rochester area in Western New York. She explains the situation this way in her press release. "In summer 2014, more than 120,000 veterans were waiting more than 125 days for health care services. In response, Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which established the VCP. Two third-party administrators—Health Net and Tri-West—were awarded \$5 billion and \$4.3 billion, respectively, to implement the program." Health Net is responsible for the non-payments to PainCare.

However, Health Net could not tell NPR what percentage of claims it had paid on time or even how many claims have been paid on time. PainCare finally got its first payment from the Veterans Choice program in December, but it is still owed about \$70,000.

But that is only part of the problem. Barnes says that dealing with the Veterans Choice bureaucrats is a nightmare.

"Even just receiving a phone call; if they call us, they require us to recite our company name, our address, our phone number, and fax. And that's when they call us. Same thing when you call them." Barnes also says that according to the VA, it has to schedule the veteran's first appointment, and that visit must fall within an authorization period determined by the VA without consulting the health care provider. Moreover, there have been many times when the VA hasn't called to make the appointment before the authorization period expired. When that happens, the veteran has to start all over again trying to get an appointment for medical care. How ironic is that, when you consider that this kind of time delay was the exact reason why the Veterans Choice program was created in the first place?

[Source: Examiner.com | Thomas Mangan | January 24, 2016]

VETERANS GROUPS SUE VA OVER CAMP LEJEUNE'S TOXIC WATER

On April 27, Vietnam Veterans of America, along with The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten, filed suit under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to compel the Department of Veterans Affairs to produce records on the Camp Lejeune Subject Matter Expert (SME) program. The VA created the SME program in 2012 to evaluate disability compensation claims. Since that time, the public has filed numerous requests for information on the SME program, but VA has largely ignored such requests.

"It is high time the federal government and all of its entities stop lying and withholding evidence on the toxic substances to which veterans and their families have been exposed. To have anonymous subject experts is not the American way, and in a democracy, this lack of transparency is not acceptable," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America.

Between 1953 and 1987, nearly one million veterans, their families, and civilian employees at Camp Lejeune, a Marine training base in North Carolina, were exposed to toxic drinking water in one of the worst contaminations in U.S. history. Many have since developed illnesses like kidney, bladder, and breast cancer, and many have lost their lives as a result. Thousands of veterans have applied for disability compensation for diseases related to their exposure to toxic water aboard Camp Lejeune. The VA has denied the vast majority of these claims.

Initiated in 2012, the SME program tasks an anonymous group of clinicians with issuing medical opinions on the disability compensation claims of Camp Lejeune veterans. Since the VA created the SME program, the grant rate for these claims plummeted from approximately 25 percent to 8 percent.

From the limited information publically available, veterans groups and medical professionals have identified concerns about the clinicians' credentials, methods, and expertise. SME program clinicians have repeatedly cited scientific reports that VA officials have admitted are outdated. In at least one case, the VA relied on a report by an SME program clinician who cut and pasted a Wikipedia entry to provide a medical opinion on a rare type of cancer.

Veterans groups submitted a FOIA request to the VA in December 2015, seeking comprehensive records on the Camp Lejeune SME program, including policies, procedures, and objectives; fiscal impact; data and statistical information; and training records. The VA has not responded to this request.

Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said, "the SME program has been using incorrect and outdated information. The alarming drop in the grant rate of Camp Lejeune claims deserves real, penetrating scrutiny."

"The VA claims it created the Camp Lejeune SME program to assist veterans, but it is adversarial and unjust. Everything we know about the program indicates it should be scrapped," said retired Marine Master Sergeant Jerry Ensminger, founder of The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten, who lost his daughter at age nine to childhood leukemia linked to exposure to Camp Lejeune's toxic water.

"The VA's lack of transparency is alarming. The qualifications and methodology of the SME clinicians are concerning. Given that the VA has called this program a model for toxic exposure compensation claims in the future, veterans need to understand how this program works." said Rory Minnis, a former Marine and law student intern at the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School.

► OTHER NEWS

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY EXPANSION

The Army is beginning a yearlong environmental assessment of a proposed 38-acre expansion of Arlington National Cemetery that it hopes will extend the life of the facility by 20 years. More than 400,000 people are buried at the cemetery, with as many as 30 new burials a day. Without the proposed Southern Expansion Project, the cemetery will run out of room in the mid-2030s, even with the strict eligibility standards in place for burial there. On 27 APR, cemetery officials briefed the public on the southern

expansion, which hinges on a land swap with Arlington County and the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The negotiations have been ongoing for several years and the broad outline of the swap is in place but no deal has been reached. The Army would get land adjacent to the existing cemetery to use for burials, while the county and state would get land to improve transit and traffic on its bustling Columbia Pike corridor, which serves the Pentagon and other commuter hotspots. County officials say the Army is worried that mass-transit operations adjacent to the cemetery would be aesthetically incompatible with the cemetery itself. County officials say they will design and build any new facilities in a way that addresses those concerns. At Wednesday's hearing, Army and county officials both expressed optimism about reaching a deal that will be beneficial for all involved. "To me, this is a good opportunity not only for Arlington National Cemetery but for the region as well," said Col. Doug Guttormsen, the cemetery's engineering director.

Greg Emanuel, Arlington County's director of environmental services, said the cemetery is one of the county's jewels and the county has every interest in protecting it as it seeks to redevelop the land and transportation network adjacent to it. "All parties are moving in the right direction," he said. The Army Corps of Engineers will conduct its environmental assessment of the proposed expansion over the next year and will solicit public input. In addition to permits and environmental assessments, the Army will eventually need to obtain funding from Congress for the expansion. Guttormsen said the cost is currently estimated at \$274 million. Guttormsen said that if all goes well, construction on the project could begin in 2018.

[Source: The Associated Press | Matthew Barakat | April 27, 2016]

DEPORTED MARINE VET GETS SECOND CHANCE

Daniel Torres is finally a citizen of the land he once served as a U.S. Marine while living a lie, and this time he has a chance to make things right. Five years ago, Torres was ready to ship out to Afghanistan for his second tour when his military superiors learned he'd lied about his immigration status in order to enlist. Instead of deploying, he was deported. The 30-year-old has been living in Mexico ever since, with a network of exiled U.S. veterans. But Torres, who told his story of banishment to FoxNews.com earlier this year, recently learned his status has been unexpectedly changed, to naturalized citizen. "It is all still very surreal for me," Torres, who came to America from Mexico with his family as a teen and enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2007 using falsified documents, told FoxNews.com. "I haven't seen my family in five years, and now I will be able to spend the summer with them and see my Marines – we definitely have to have a reunion for that."

Torres' new standing came courtesy of a special provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows people who serve in the U.S military during a time of conflict and who deploy overseas to be entitled to citizenship regardless of legal status in the country or place of residence. It's exactly the kind of loophole Torres could find himself specializing in as a lawyer, the career he now hopes to fashion. Torres' long nightmare began in 2011, as he was preparing to go to Afghanistan. He lost his wallet, and in the process of trying to re-establish his credentials, his long-held secret unraveled. Born in Tijuana, he had come to the U.S. illegally as a child. When he had enlisted, he had done so with phony identification. "I just didn't want to be another Mexican living in the United States," Torres told FoxNews.com. "I wanted to say I had contributed, that I had done something for the country."

He got an honorable discharge, but was no longer welcome in the military – or the U.S. He tried to join the French Foreign Legion, but washed out due to an injury suffered in Iraq. Unable to return to the U.S. due to his now red-flagged illegal immigrant status, Torres returned to his city of birth – Tijuana. Once there, he relied on a network of former servicemen and women at the Deported Veterans House, a bunker founded in 2013 by deported veteran Hector Barajas. The nonprofit group offers legal and moral support as well as basic food and accommodation to deported veterans of all walks of life – including non-citizens who served on the battlefields in Korea and Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Mexico, Torres tried to stay positive and hold on to the dream of getting back to the U.S. "I knew I had to pay the price for lying, what I did was wrong. But I had just hoped I wouldn't have to pay the price forever," Torres said.

"When I wanted to throw the towel in, I remembered that I was a Marine and Marines don't quit," he said. "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Red-flagged as an illegal immigrant and unwilling to sneak across the border, Torres embarked on a law degree at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. Now in his last year, Torres plans to finish his degree and hopes to enroll in a Master's program in San Diego next year so he can practice law in both countries.

And while Torres can now legally move back and forth between the two countries, he said his job is far from complete until the hundreds of other deported veterans also get their citizenship – and their VA benefits they are unable to access while banned from entering. "I'm just one person," he said. "I want to get everyone else home -- there are guys here that need medical help and need to see their children."

The Pentagon estimates that up to 65,000 non-citizens are currently serving, and a prominent incentive for joining is that fast-track to citizenship – although it is not guaranteed. Barajas said many simply weren't made aware of their rights and how to begin the process when they were active or after being discharged, and ran into trouble when it was too late. Former Marine Dominic Certo, author of "Gold in the Coffins," and an adviser to the veterans advocacy organization Operation Homefront, believes people who fight for the U.S. deserve to live here. "Anyone who has served our country and risked their lives or provided service for the citizens of this country as a veteran deserves amnesty -- especially when there are so many who have done nothing to earn citizenship or provide a military service to our country," Certo said. [Source: Fox News | Hollie McKay| May 10, 2016 ++]

AMERICAN LEGION AND VFW SPEAK OUT

Senate lawmakers and even the Defense Department have picked a fight with a group they usually go out of their way not to offend: the nation's veterans. The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars have come out strong against a Senate bill that would make veterans preference in federal job hiring a one-time benefit, meaning the veteran gets to use it once and that's it.

The Legion slammed the change in the harshest terms, accusing the Defense Department -- which included the change in the National Defense Authorization Act -- of betraying the men and women who had served in uniform.

"One would think the agency that produces veterans and service-disabled veterans would have the additional moral obligation to uphold the institution of Veterans Preference," Legion National Commander

Dale Barnett said in letters to senators and representatives. "Instead, the [DoD] turned their backs on their former employees."

In language less impassioned but no less determined, the VFW released a statement condemning the change. "Veterans preference is a hand up, not a handout, for those who honorably serve our nation in uniform," VFW National Commander John A. Biedrzycki Jr. said.

Under current law, veterans may use the preference in the federal job market whenever they apply for a job or promotion. The argument has long been that the years they spent away in uniform put them at a disadvantage to peers who entered federal service early on. Supporters of the Senate provision claim that once the veterans are hired, however, they are no longer at a disadvantage. That is disputed by the veterans' organizations. "Four years of military service plus four years of government service will never equal eight years of government service," Biedrzycki said.

"Even after they are hired, veterans will always be behind their peers who didn't serve in uniform."

According to a 17 JUN report in The Washington Post, a senior Pentagon official went to Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) asking for the change. The argument made to McCain is that the benefit results in too many qualified non-veterans losing jobs to unqualified veterans. One source, who spoke to Military.com on background about the provision, said the Pentagon is finding it difficult to bring in some specialists and even management people because a highly skilled and experienced person and a veteran with several years' experience will both, on paper, meet the minimal requirements cited in a job posting. And veterans preference means the job will go to the veteran even though the DoD may really want and need the skills brought to the table by the non-vet, the source told Military.com.

This is not the first time that veterans preference has been threatened. In 2014, the Merit Systems Protection Board released a report claiming that veterans preference was spurring resentment among non-veterans in the federal workforce and also decreased job opportunities for women applying for jobs. "To any civilian workers who have problems with veterans preference, The American Legion's message is simple: Become a veteran," said the Legion's then-national commander, Michael Helm. "Those who have served in uniform have earned such preference." Helm also pointed out that there are now more female veterans who could be hired.

[Source: Military.com | Bryant Jordan | June 20, 201 ++]

NEW CEO FOR WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

The head of the military agency that searches for and identifies the remains of missing servicemen is resigning after just one year to take over a troubled nonprofit that cares for wounded troops. Retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael S. Linnington became the director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency last summer. He plans to leave next month to become the CEO of the Wounded Warrior Project. Linnington became the leader of the POW/MIA mission at the Pentagon after Congress and groups that advocate for families of the missing had criticized the way the military was handling identifications.

Since Linnington took the helm, the agency's laboratories have nearly doubled the identifications of missing servicemen.

At the Wounded Warrior Project, Linnington will lead a nonprofit that has been criticized for lavish spending. The New York Times and CBS News in January reported employees, veterans and charity watchdogs were complaining the organization was profiteering off veterans. Linnington said in a phone interview he hadn't planned on leaving the POW/MIA agency so soon and wasn't looking for a new job. But he said the opportunity at the Wounded Warrior Project was for "incredibly noble work." "I'm very proud of the things we've done at the DPAA over the past year but I was approached by a group that needed some leadership in caring for our wounded warriors. I'm a 35-year soldier. I brought soldiers to combat and welcomed many of them home that were grievously wounded," Linnington said in a phone interview.

Reports on the Wounded Warrior Project by CBS News and The Times described extravagant parties and last-minute, business-class air travel at the nonprofit. One former employee compared it to "what the military calls fraud, waste and abuse." The Jacksonville, Florida-based organization's directors fired two executives after hiring outside legal counsel and forensic accounting consultants to conduct an independent review of its records and interview current and former employees. The military's efforts to find and identify missing remains have suffered from many problems over many decades. In 2014, the AP disclosed an internal Pentagon report that said a DPAA predecessor organization — the Hawaii-based Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command — was wasteful, acutely dysfunctional and often mismanaged. Shortly afterward, the Government Accountability Office issued a report saying the MIA accounting effort was hampered by weak leadership, infighting and a fragmented approach to planning. The Pentagon later streamlined the change of command and made other organizational changes.

Linnington, who retired from the Army as a lieutenant general before assuming a civilian role at the Pentagon, said consolidating the Defense Department agencies responsible for identifying missing servicemen has helped Ann Mills-Griffiths, chairwoman of the board at the National League of POW/MIA Families, said she was surprised by Linnington's announcement. She said he had told her group last year he was at the agency for the long haul, meaning the next 10 years. "I can only say it was a total shock. Just stunning and unexpected," Mills-Griffiths said.

Linnington said his successor should have compassion, integrity, teamwork, respect and innovation. "If we continue to focus on our families and providing families the fullest possible accounting of their loved ones, based on those values, I think we'll be fine," he said.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | June 3, 2016 ++]

IWO JIMA FLAG RAISING

Raiser's Identity Questioned

After reports surfaced that the Marine Corps was investigating the iconic photo taken of six individuals raising the American flag over Iwo Jima in 1945, James Bradley, the son of one the supposed flag-raisers and the author of a best-selling book about the event, said that he believes that his father was not in the picture. The picture was taken on Feb. 23, 1945, by Associated Press photographer Joseph Rosenthal less than a week into the brutal 36-day battle for the small volcanic island. The photo captured the second flag-raising atop Mount Suribachi that day: The first flag was raised and quickly taken down, to be replaced by the larger second one taken off a nearby landing ship. The Marines, at the time, identified the five Marines and one Corpsman depicted in the photo as John Bradley, Rene Gagnon, Ira Hayes, Harlon Block, Michael Strank and Franklin Sousley.

Block, Strank and Sousley were killed trying to take the island from the Japanese; the other three have died in the years since. Bradley published the book about the events surrounding the photo in 2000. Titled "Flags of Our Fathers," it was later made into a movie directed by Clint Eastwood. But it was only after his father, John Bradley, died in 1994 and after the Marine Corps received a set of previously unreleased photos in 2010 that he realized that his father had been talking about being a part of the first flag-raising but not the second. "We had no photographic evidence that he was in the first flag-raising and then it comes out 70 years later [after] the Marine [Corps] sits on these photos ... and it turns [out] he was in the first [flag-raising]," Bradley said in an interview 3 MAY with The Washington Post. "And then I realize he was talking about the first flag-raising," Bradley said. "I was never so excited that my father raised the flag on Iwo Jima, and I'm not so disappointed that he's not in the second photo," Bradley said. "I was trying to write a factual book about the heroes of Iwo Jima."

Bradley added that he then edited the book to reflect that his father was in both the first and second flag-raising, something that two amateur historians took issue with. Their findings, namely discrepancies with what was believed to be Bradley's uniform, were first published in 2014 in the Omaha World-Herald. The paper was the first to report the Marine Corps had opened a formal inquiry into the photo over the weekend. "The Marine Corps is reviewing information provided by the Smithsonian Channel related to Joe Rosenthal's Associated Press photograph of the second flag raising on Iwo Jima," Marine Corps spokesman Maj. Chris Devine said in an emailed statement 3 MAY.

"As such, with the information and research provided by the Smithsonian Channel, who used advanced digital technology to examine battle footage, the Marine Corps decided to review their photo-enhancements, film analysis, and findings."

Devine did not give a timeline for the investigation. "Rosenthal's photo captured a single moment in the 36-day battle during which more than 6,500 U.S. servicemen made the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation, and it is representative of the more than 70,000 U.S. Marines, Sailors, Soldiers and Coast Guardsmen that took part in the battle. We are humbled by the service and sacrifice of all who fought on Iwo Jima," Devine added. According to Joss Gross of the Smithsonian Channel, the Smithsonian has been working on a documentary regarding Rosenthal's photo, noting that "forensic evidence appears to reveal a case of mistaken identity" in the picture. "In January, following months of thorough, scientific analysis, the production team provided their findings to United States Marine Corps historians and have since been working closely with the service as experts review the information," Gross said in a statement, adding that the evidence remains confidential.

Rosenthal's photo quickly became one of the enduring images of World War II and a symbol that a war-weary country could rally around as support lagged on the home front. Rosenthal was thought to have initially staged the photo after he thought someone was asking him about a different picture that involved a group of Marines posing with an American flag atop Suribachi. Bradley's father, a corpsman during the battle, was the recipient of the Navy Cross for his heroism there. The medal was something he kept secret from his family, and they did not find out about the award until after he died. According to Bradley, the story of his father's misidentification spans more than just the one photo, and the identities of other flag-raisers might also be incorrect.

"It's like there's a four-car accident and you're only focusing on one car," Bradley said of the intense interest in his father's presence in the photo and the new evidence that has come forward. "Why are we talking about the second flag-raising now? Because of the photos released of the first flag-raising." Bradley emphasized that his book features the stories of many more people than just his father, something he hopes

people understand. “The title of my book is ‘Flags of Our Fathers’ not ‘Flag of My Dad,’ ” Bradley said. [Source: Washington Post | Thomas Gibbons-Neff |May 3, 2016 ++]

SHOULD WOMEN REGISTER?

This has been a historic year of firsts for women in the U.S. military. The military has welcomed the first women Army Rangers, the first woman Army infantry officer, the first Marine enlisted infantry woman and the first woman combatant commander. Amidst these momentous changes, Congress has debated – almost against its will – the future of Selective Service registration and the military draft. While the Senate approved the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act with an amendment that would require women to register for Selective Service, the House did not.

The Senate and House are now at odds on whether the issue is important enough to be included in the final version of the legislation. The authors of this article strongly encourage Congress to confront this issue directly in the upcoming conference committee, and recommend that they support the inclusion of women in the Selective Service system. If they are not willing to support this change, then they encourage them to at a minimum explore the role of the Selective Service system at a time when gender is no longer a barrier to national service. While we celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments of women who blazed new trails in the military in 2016, we fully recognize that a culture of inclusion in the military can only exist if all practices, laws and regulations that create or imply partiality or bias to a specific category of people are eliminated.

Instead of relying on emotional rhetoric about female frailty or obligations to protect our daughters, we must be willing to view the problem in logical terms. The truth is that no one wants young men or young women to be drafted against their will and sent to war. But as the saying goes, "If you want peace, prepare for war." Today, the threats to our national security are complex and numerous. Our nation's military leaders are currently in the process of accepting that service women can compete for every job, and that such opportunity will make the military more capable of meeting contemporary and future threats.

If a draft were ever to occur, the question must be asked, what would we be missing if we excluded women?

With 71 percent of the nation's youth unfit for military service, the exclusion of qualified women from compulsory service during a time of war would severely limit our access to qualified citizens and possibly put our nation at significant risk.

If women meet existing high standards for service and enjoy all of the benefits of citizenship in time of peace, they must be equally responsible for defending the nation in a time of war. We cannot expect full equality if we continue to support a Selective Service that only requires compulsory service by men. With the newly opened opportunities for women to serve in ground combat roles we must acknowledge the inconsistency presented by the current restriction against women registering for selective service, and demand change.

The Service Women's Action Network supports requiring women to register. They believe that men and women should be held to the same standards and expectations for the performance of their duties, whether as members of the military or as American citizens. At the same time, as the voice of service women, they believe that our military is currently well supported by its all-volunteer force and is not in danger of

becoming dependent on a draft. Given changes in society and technology, they also would welcome a robust debate on whether it is time to abolish Selective Service registration entirely.

Yes, women are daughters, wives, sisters and mothers. But they are also soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and American citizens from every walk of life. Ultimately, facts, not emotions, must rule the day when it comes to deciding what is best for national defense. If Selective Service is still deemed necessary, requiring women to register for the draft will remove a final barrier to full citizenship and will go far to eliminate the existing perception in the military that there are double standards for women. Most importantly, the change will ensure that our national security remains in the hands of the most qualified individuals, and that the ultimate sacrifice of death in combat is borne equitably by all citizens, regardless of race, socioeconomic background or gender.

Once women could not vote. Now they can. Once they could not serve in the military. Now they can. We owe it to our nation to make this final step toward making women equal citizens with equal rights and equal obligations in times of peace and war.

[Source: US News & World Report | Col. Ellen Haring & Lt. Col. Kate Germano | June 22, 2016]

PEACE CAMP FOR YOUTH

July 21-28, 2016

The Republic of Korea in conjunction with the 65th Anniversary of the Korean War, has decided to commemorate not only the U.S. Veterans, but also invite back their grandchildren in a special program for all of the United Nation Countries.

Grandchildren learn native dress and culture. The ROK pays for everything in South Korea.

This year's 6th PCFY will have the registration cost cut in half!

FCPS History Teacher and MHT Tour Leader Shayne Jarosz will take back college age (18 years old – waivers available for 17-year-old high school graduates) to Seoul to experience the thanks of the grateful Korean people who were saved from communist takeover in 1950-1954. The Peace Campers will interact with like-aged grandchildren from the other 18 U.S. Peace Keeping Force Countries as well as South Korean college students. Cultural events and fun will be the priority this summer in and around Seoul.

Post Tour to Beijing, China

Beijing is only a two-hour flight from Korea. The price is right since your grandchildren have already paid for the Trans-Pacific flight. Now is a special time to visit Beijing since all of the main tourist attractions have been renovated as seen during the 2008 Olympics and again for the 2013 National Day. An experienced MHT Tour Leader will be with the group!

Military Historical Tours, the official Korea Revisit Tour Coordinator for the KWVA:800-722-9501
mhtours@miltours.com, www.miltours.com.

CLOUDBREAK COMMUNITIES: HOUSING FOR IN-NEED VETERANS

Cloudbreak Communities is possibly the gold standard for housing for homeless and in-need veterans in the United States.

Cloudbreak Communities is the branded name for a family of mission-driven, Limited Liability Companies (LLC), each engaged in the development of supportive housing for homeless, formerly homeless, and at-risk veterans. Owned and operated by Cantwell-Anderson, Inc.; a California Corporation, the various Cloudbreak companies which make up the Cloudbreak Communities brand, have successfully completed the development of nearly 2,800 housing beds in nearly 1800 units located in five states and coalesced a myriad of support service providers to deliver needed care to the veteran residents. Another 700+ units are under active or planned development.

According to their website, “the Cloudbreak Communities approach toward special needs housing development stems from the framework of collaboration believing that all parties’ talents are maximized when empowered to operate within their expertise. We are fiercely loyal to the concept of ‘collaborate in everything and be redundant in nothing.’ It is thus that we assemble the best local teams of public, private, non-profit and community-based organizations to go about the business of planning, developing, financing, services development and coordination. The focus of Cloudbreak Communities is primarily on acquiring and planning real estate, construction and property management and delivering on space needs of support service providers operating within each of our individual geographical communities. We believe in creating safe, clinically supported communities where veterans can reach their highest level of independence and personal satisfaction.”

The most recent Cloudbreak Communities housing units are in Phoenix, AZ. Victory Place IV is the fourth housing unit for veterans in Phoenix. Homeless and in-need veterans are being helped by the dedication of 96 more affordable housing units in South Phoenix that are being run by a partnership between U.S. Vets. Inc. and Cloudbreak Communities, the builders.

The partnership that put these apartments together at a cost of \$11 million to provide housing for 96 single apartments for veterans obtained the funds through a collaboration of the federal and state government, private funding, and City of Phoenix.



Single veterans in need of housing may call the Phoenix rental office at 602-821-9237.

Veterans in the following cities may email or call:

Westside Residences, 725 & 733 S Hindry Avenue, Inglewood, California 90301, Dawn Jones
djones@cantwell-anderson.com

Kalealoa Residence Hall, 91-1078 Yorktown Street, Kapolei, Hawaii 96707, 808-682-1949, Chuck Patterson
cpatterson@cantwell-anderson.com

The Meadows, 525 E. Bonanza Road, Las Vegas, Nevada, 702-429-7917; T. Andrew Taylor -
cblv@cantwell-anderson.com

► REUNIONS

ALL ROUTES REUNION

Place: Springfield, MO

Dates: July 7-10

The 2016 RFTW All Routes Reunion will be in Springfield, Missouri July 7-10 at the Ramada Hotel. See hotel information below. Please don't be discouraged if the host motel is booked, as we have other nice motels in the area.

Ramada Plaza Hotel/Oasis Convention Center

2546 North Glenstone Ave.

Springfield, Mo 65803

[Ramada Plaza Hotel & Oasis Convention Center Springfield MO](#)

Room rates are \$89.00 per night plus tax and includes a full hot breakfast buffet. This \$89.00 rate will be extended to three (3) days prior to and three (3) days following the Reunion dates. Due to a limited block of rooms at this rate, the hotel advises to book early to avoid availability issues.

Please have all reservations made by June 15, 2016. Any rooms at the group rate not reserved by June 16, 2016 will be released back to the hotel's general inventory. Phone reservations: 417-866-5253 or 888-532-4338. Just say "Run For The Wall Block" for the group rate.

Banquet dinner Saturday July 9 2016 at 5 p.m. The cost of the banquet is \$35.00 per person. Checks may be made payable and mailed to me with your Option Choice and Quantity from Menu below. Please have this to me no later than June 27, 2016 so the motel can have enough food to prepare and don't forget to include your email address. Once I receive your payment I will respond with an email receipt that will be your dinner admission. Mail to: DeWayne Howard. 4729 North Farm Rd. 159, Springfield, Mo 65803.

Menu Choices:

All entrées include: Mixed Field Green Salad, Chef's appropriate starch and vegetable, Chef's Dessert, warm rolls with butter, freshly brewed regular and decaffeinated coffee and iced tea.

- Option 1- Island Bistro Medallions

Tender beef medallions marinated in island spices and seared, then served with a mango and demi-glace reduction.

- Option 2- Prosciutto- Wrapped Chicken

Airline chicken breast wrapped with prosciutto ham and pan-seared, then topped with a boursin cream sauce.

- Option 3- Pesto Pasta with Grilled Portobello Mushrooms.

Activities:

- The RFTW Board of Directors have agreed to have their July Face to Face Board meeting to run concurrent with this reunion. Board Members will be available at the Saturday evening banquet dinner for questions from the reunion attendees.
- “Meet and Greet” Friday evening, July 8th in the hospitality room set aside for RFTW.
- Guided group rides are planned for Friday and Saturday, led by local experienced riders familiar with the spectacular motorcycle roads full of twisties and chock-full of Ozarks scenery. However, if you want to wander off on your own, you’ll have a great time with all the beautiful scenery the area has to offer. If enough interest is shown, a Sunday ride is also possible if you don’t have to blast back home, so let me know.
- Local attractions include Lambert’s Cafe, Branson shows and attractions, Silver Dollar City, Shepard of the Hills, a reasonably new Vietnam Memorial at School of the Ozarks near Branson, Bass Pro Headquarters, five area lakes within 1½ hour ride of Springfield, and much more.
- If enough people sign up, Felix Claudio of [Ride-Like-A-Pro](#) will also have an advanced riders class to enhance your riding skills. The regular cost is \$175.00; however, if you use the special discount code RFTW2016, the cost of the course will be reduced to \$125.00. Classes offered at the Ramada Oasis, Springfield, Mo on Friday July 8th or Saturday July 9th, 2016 from 9:00am to 1:00pm. Rain or shine. Due to Felix having to travel so far he has requested a 15-participant minimum and to be signed up no later than June 15, 2016 so he can make travel plans.

If you have any questions, please contact me at claytonh10@mchsi.com or 417-848-1787.

ANGEL FIRE REUNION

Eagle Nest / Angel Fire, New Mexico

September 1-4, 2016 - Labor Day weekend

It's that time of the year to make your reservations and plan on attending the Angel Fire Reunion in Angel Fire and Eagle Nest, New Mexico.

For those who would like to come to Albuquerque on Sept 1, we have the Holiday Inn located at 5050 Jefferson NE (I-25 and Jefferson) as our hotel of choice. The RFTW rate is \$ 84.00 + tax for a king bed or for two queens, or \$89.00 + tax includes a hot breakfast. Call and tell them you’re with Run For The Wall. We will go to dinner at a local Mexican food restaurant a few miles away, Los Cuates at 8700 Menaul Northeast. KSU from the hotel at 6:40 p.m.; dinner around 7 p.m.

The host hotel for September 2-4 is the Laguna Vista Lodge, 51 Therma Dr, EagleNest in Eagle Nest (575-377-6522). Other motels: Cottonwood (575-377-3382), Gold Pan (575-377-2286), or Econo Lodge (575-377-6813). See CR Itinerary/hotel list for more hotels.

Friday, September 2: KSU at 9:30 a.m. from the Holiday Inn in Albuquerque for a ride to Cochiti Elementary School en route to Angel Fire. We will meet the kids that come and see us each year as we go by the school on the Run, and provide them with RFTW pins. Current plans include having lunch with the

kids then riding to Eagle Nest and Angel Fire that afternoon. A "meet and greet" at Calamity Jane's Saloon will start at 6 p.m. with a few hors d'oeuvres provided.

Saturday, September 3: We will start gathering at the Westphal Foundation National Memorial at Angel Fire 7:30 a.m. for the brick-laying ceremony. Burritos and coffee will be available for \$3.00. We will bring bricks up from the garage area and begin the preparations for the brick laying, The ceremony will begin at 9 a.m. with a break for lunch at the site around 12 noon. Please volunteer to participate. You won't regret it.

Saturday Night Dinner will be at 6 p.m. at the senior center in Eagle Nest at a cost of \$20 per person. Choices will be Mexican food or brisket and sausage. Please email me at stevebicss@gmail.com to make reservations so we can have the proper amount of food prepared. I will have a PayPal account setup shortly for prepayment.

Sunday, September 4: We will have a short service in the chapel located on the memorial grounds. I will post the time on the Forum in the next week or so.

Look forward to seeing you all on the 2nd and 3rd of September.

Steve Berniklau
505-362-4975

KERRVILLE, TX - All RFTW Riders Reunion

Place: YO Ranch Resort Hotel, Kerrville TX

Dates: September 24-27, 2016

Room rates per night: Single/double/Triple/quad rate \$92.00

Online <https://bookings.ihotelier.com/bookings.jsp?groupID=1553280&hotelID=12007> code for making phone reservations: RUNWALL16 Ask for the RFTW – Veterans group rate

Block of rooms will be held until 12 noon 8/23/16

Phone: 877-967-3767 Address: 2033 Sidney Baker Kerrville, TX 78028

The YO Ranch Resort is located off Interstate 10; take exit 508. Hotel is south of I-10, approximately 1/2 mile on the left.

To check out the hotel amenities and accommodations go to www.yoresort.com

For those needing RV accommodations:

- Kerrville-Schreiner Park 830-257-5392 (closest to the hotel, city park, call for reservations)
- Buckhorn off I-10 800-568-6458

Friday – Arrival day is open for those interested in the Friday rides or catching up with friends. Dinner at VFW post 1480 reasonably priced @ \$8.00.

Saturday morning /afternoon –Breakfast at VFW post 1480 (reasonable @\$6.50 - 7.50) various rides and meetings are being planned. More details later.

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

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

Saturday's dinner and a RFTW 2016 Reunion rocker are included in the non-refundable registration fee. For first-timers to YO RFTW Reunion, a reunion patch is included.

Registration cost: Now until September 10 - \$35.00

Registration cost: September 11 – September 22 - \$50.00

Deadline for the registration is September 19th paid in advance. The deadline is required by the hotel to confirm head count for Saturday’s dinner. Prior registration and payment is required.

(Please print clearly)

Name(s)_____

Road name(s)_____

Number of Attendees:_____

Full Address:_____

Email:_____ Phone:_____

First time attendee Yes_____ No_____

Thur 4pm EBBBQ RSVP Please if attending Yes_____No_____

Friday evening dinner at VFW Yes_____No_____

Saturday Breakfast VFW Yes_____No_____

Send checks payable to: R.W. Mead 120 Ridge Grove Rd Kerrville TX 78028 For more info, contact Sam or Cowboy at: rwmead@hotmail.com cell: 830-928-6634 or 915-422-5547

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

► PENDING LEGISLATION

To follow these bills, go to

<http://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%22legislation%22%7D#>

HOUSE LEGISLATION:

H.R.76: HERO Transition from Battlespace to Workplace Act of 2015. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a tax credit to encourage private employers to hire veterans, to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the reasonable efforts an employer may make under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act with respect to hiring veterans, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Rep Jackson Lee, Sheila [TX-18] (introduced 1/6/2015)

Committees: House Ways and Means; House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/6/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means, and in addition to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 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.

H.R.215: Defending Veterans from Sequestration Act of 2015. A bill to amend the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 to clarify the treatment of administrative expenses of the Department of Veterans Affairs during sequestration Sponsor: Rep Brown, Corrine [FL-5] (introduced 1/8/2015)

Committees: House Budget

Latest Major Action: 1/8/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on the Budget.

H.R.294: Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into contracts and agreements for the transfer of veterans to non-Department medical foster homes for certain veterans who are unable to live independently.

Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 1/13/2015)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/13/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via MOAA's or DAV's Action Networks at <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/bills/?bill=64031751> or DAV's <https://www.votervoice.net/link/target/dav/4QGqKF3zG.aspx>

H.R.303: Retired Pay Restoration Act. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit additional retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and either retired pay by reason of their years of military service or combat-related special compensation.

Sponsor: Rep Bilirakis, Gus M. [FL-12] (introduced 1/13/2015)

Committees: House Armed Services; House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/13/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the Committee on Armed Services, and in addition to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 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 MOAA's or DAV's Action Networks at <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/bills/?bill=64031751> or DAV's <https://www.votervoice.net/link/target/dav/4QGqKF3zG.aspx>

H.R.969: Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. A bill 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, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Rep Gibson, Christopher P. [NY-19] (introduced 2/13/2015) Related Bills: S.681

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 2/13/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via the FRA, NAUS, or DAV Action Networks <http://capwiz.com/naus/home> and/or [http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=64151566&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=64151566&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) and/or <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/M2J2hNjcfqL7FjgaUAOClg>

H.R.2114: Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015. A bill to direct the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance for individuals affected by exposure to Agent Orange, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Rep Lee, Barbara [CA-13] (introduced 4/29/2015)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs; House Energy and Commerce; House Foreign Affairs

Latest Major Action: 4/29/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committees on Energy and Commerce, and Foreign Affairs, 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.

H.R.2591: Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund Act of 2015. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow taxpayers to designate overpayments of tax as contributions and to make additional contributions to the Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Rep Israel, Steve [NY-3] (introduced 6/1/2015)

Committees: House Ways and Means; House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 6/5/2015 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Health.

H.R.5083: VA Appeals Modernization Act of 2016. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the appeals process of the Department of Veterans Affairs Sponsor: Rep Titus, Dina [NV-1] (introduced 4/27/2016)

H.R.5091: Appropriate Care for Disabled Veterans Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to reinstate the requirement for an annual report on the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans. Sponsor: Rep Denham, Jeff [CA-10] (introduced 4/28/2016) Related Bills: S.2883

H.R.5099: VA New Construction Partnership Agreements. A bill to establish a pilot program on partnership agreements to construct new facilities for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Ashford, Brad [NE-2] (introduced 4/28/2016)

H.R.5128: Protection and Advocacy for Veterans Act. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to improve the monitoring of mental health and substance abuse treatment programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Roby, Martha [AL-2] (introduced 4/29/2016)

H.R.5149: VA Emergency Ambulance Service Reimbursement. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the circumstances under which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide reimbursement for emergency ambulance services. Sponsor: Rep Coffman, Mike [CO-6] (introduced 4/29/2016)

H.R.5151: Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance Extension. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide an extension of the special survivor indemnity allowance provided to widows and widowers of certain deceased members of the uniformed services. Sponsor: Rep Grayson, Alan [FL-9] (introduced 4/29/2016)

H.R.5162: Vet Connect Act of 2016. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to disclose to non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers certain medical records of veterans who receive health care from such providers. Sponsor: Rep O'Rourke, Beto [TX-16] (introduced 4/29/2016)

H.R.5165: Medical Leave for Disabled Veterans Act. A bill to amend the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 to provide a partial exemption to veterans from the eligibility requirements, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Delaney, John K. [MD-6] (introduced 5/3/2016)

H.R.5174: VA Educational Assistance. A bill to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to educational assistance, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Radewagen, Aumua Amata Coleman [AS] (introduced 5/10/2016)

H.R.5175: VA Disapproval of Deceptive Educational Programs. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to disapprove, for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, programs of education determined to have utilized deceptive or misleading practices in violation of section 3696 of such title, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Takano, Mark [CA-41] (introduced 5/10/2016)

H.R.5176: Evaluate TAP Program Effectiveness. To direct the Secretary of Labor to carry out a research program to evaluate the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program in addressing the needs of certain minority veterans. Sponsor: Rep Takano, Mark [CA-41] (introduced 5/10/2016)

H.R.5178: VA On-Campus Educational And Vocational Counseling. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide educational and vocational counseling for veterans on campuses of institutions of higher learning, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Wenstrup, Brad R. [OH-2] (introduced 5/10/2016)

H.R.5229: Women/Minority Veterans Transition to Civilian Life Study. To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a study to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, especially in regards to women veterans and minority veterans, in transitioning to civilian life, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Takano, Mark [CA-41] (introduced 5/13/2016)

TOXIC EXPOSURE ACT BILLS

H.R.1769, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015, introduced by Congressmen Benishek (MI-1) and Honda (CA-17)—now with 201 cosponsors--was reported out of the House Veterans Affairs Committee on May 24 and has been placed on House Union Calendar No. 460 for a floor vote.

H.R.1769 bill legislative language has also been added to Title III Matters Relating to Toxic Exposure [in H.R.5286](#), the VA Construction and Lease Authorization, Health, and Benefits Enhancement Act, introduced by Chairman Miller House Veterans Affairs Chairman on May 19, 2016.

S.901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015, introduced in the Senate by Senators Jerry Moran (KS) and Richard Blumenthal (CT), now has 48 cosponsors. The bill's legislative language has been included in the Veterans First Act, S.2921, under Title II, Subtitle I, Research and Toxic Exposure. S.2921 was introduced by Senators Johnny Isakson (GA), Chairman, and Richard Blumenthal (CT), ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. On May 12, 2016, the Veterans First Act was voted out of the committee and placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar, under General Orders Calendar No. 467, for a floor vote. [S.2921 Veterans First Act \(Reported in Senate - RS\) \[S.2921.RS\]\[PDF\]](#) S.2921 has 48 Senate cosponsors.

VETERANS FIRST ACT

Hopefully, this will result in better care for our veterans.

On April 28, U.S. Senators Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., chairman and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, respectively, announced the Veterans First Act to begin to change the culture at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The bill will give the VA the tools to fire bad actors, will prohibit bonuses for employees accused of wrongdoing, and will institute protections for whistleblowers.

The *Veterans First Act* also includes numerous provisions to improve services for our nation's veterans, including expanding a VA program that allows seriously-injured veterans to receive care in their own homes, enhancing programs for veterans' mental health care, and beginning to address the VA's massive backlog of veteran disability claims appeals.

The *Veterans First Act* makes it easier for leadership at the VA to remove employees at all levels. It holds accountable all VA leaders, including political appointees, for managing the Department. It removes the Merit Systems Protection Board, which recently reversed the demotions of three senior executives at the VA, from the appeal process for executives at the department. The bill also prohibits bonuses for employees who have been found guilty of wrongdoing and includes numerous protections for whistleblowers.

Other notable provisions of the bill include the improvement and expansion of the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to provide all generations of veterans with the opportunity to receive care in their own homes, as well as the strengthening of the care veterans receive in their communities, through allowing the VA to enter into provider agreements with community doctors and ensuring those providers get paid promptly by making the VA the primary payer for services rendered under the Veterans Choice Program.

Building upon the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs work throughout this legislative session, the *Veterans First Act* specifically:

- Changes the culture at the VA by improving accountability to make it easier for the VA Secretary to remove bad actors at all levels of the department.
- Expands the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to all generations of veterans.
- Strengthens the Veterans Choice program by establishing prompt payment standards and streamlining the requirements for community medical providers to enter into agreements with the VA.
- Enhances education benefits for veterans, surviving spouses and children, and allows thousands of mobilized Reservists to earn GI Bill eligibility.
- Addresses the crisis of opioid over-prescription among veterans.
- Enhances research on the potential health effects from toxic exposure to veterans and their descendants.
- Strengthens programs to combat veteran homelessness.
- Improves the disability claims and appeals process by requiring the VA to launch a pilot program that will cut down the massive backlog of appeals awaiting action.

VETERANS FIRST ACT UPDATE

The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee approved a large omnibus package 29 APR, which addresses a range of MOAA-supported initiatives.

Provides a plan to extend special Caregiver Act services for the full-time caregivers of catastrophically disabled veterans from the Vietnam era. Currently, benefits apply only to caregivers for Post-9/11 vets. But the benefits would not be triggered until two years after the VA certifies a successful upgrade of information technology systems to support the expanded services. Caregiver Act services include training for qualifying caregivers, access to CHAMPVA health care, a stipend, and respite care.

Establishes an Office of [VA] Accountability and Whistleblower Protection and tightens disciplinary and removal rules for senior VA executives.

Require the VA and DoD to jointly update guidelines for the management of opioid therapy for chronic pain in wounded, ill or injured service members and veterans.

The Senate Committee took a different approach than its House counterpart on a controversial cut to the housing allowance under the new GI Bill. The House adopted a 50-percent cut to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for future GI Bill benefit transfers to dependent children (current transfers would be grandfathered at the full rate). The Senate instead aligned the BAH rate for all qualifying GI Bill users with the five-year cumulative five-percent cut to the rates established in the FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. GI Bill recipients would continue to get the same housing rate as active duty families at the E-5 with dependents rate.

Strengthens administrative procedures for care for veterans in communities.

Authorizes GI Bill eligibility credit for time spent in medical hold status.

Creates a pilot program to reduce the appealed claims backlog.

Allows survivors who lost their spouses early in Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts (Sept. 11, 2001 - Dec. 31, 2005) up to five additional years to use their Fry Scholarship GI Bill benefits.

Enables Fry Scholarship users to participate in GI Bill matching by private colleges under the Yellow Ribbon program.

Authorizes GI Bill benefits for involuntary Guard - Reserve call ups for “pre-planned and budgeted” operational missions.

Enhances research on the health effects of toxic exposures impacts on descendants.

Enables speedier payment of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for active duty deaths reported by a military service.

Honoring as veterans certain career members of the National Guard and Reserve Panel Chairman Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) noted at the press conference for the bill, “When people look back at what Congress accomplished this year, the Veterans First Act will be at the top of the list.” The bill must now be reconciled with a House veterans omnibus measure passed last November.

[Source: MOAA Leg UP | April 29, 2016 ++]

SENATE:

S.241: Military Family Relief Act of 2015. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the payment of temporary compensation to a surviving spouse of a veteran upon the death of the veteran, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Sen Tester, Jon [MT] (introduced 1/22/2015)

Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/22/2015 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

S.681: Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015. A bill 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, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Sen Gillibrand, Kirsten E. [NY] (introduced 3/9/2015) Related Bills: H.R.969

Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 3/9/2015 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

To support this bill and/or contact your legislators send a message via DAV's Action Network at <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/M2J2hNjcfqL7FjgaUAOClg>

S.1105: Homeless Vet Dependent Children Caretaker Per Diem. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize per diem payments under comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans to furnish care to dependents of homeless veterans, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Sen Heller, Dean [NV] (introduced 4/28/2015)

Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 4/28/2015 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

S.2800 - Disabled Vets Student Loans

Americans with permanent disabilities, including veterans, would not have to pay taxes on student loans forgiven by the federal government and private lenders under a new bipartisan bill in the Senate. The Stop Taxing Death and Disability Act would eliminate the tax that the Internal Revenue Service levies on forgiven student loan debt, considered income, as a result of death or disability. The bill also would relieve the tax debt on discharged student loans for families whose child has died, or has developed permanent disabilities. The Education Department and many private student loan lenders forgive student loans on behalf of borrowers if their child dies, or the borrowers themselves are rendered permanently disabled or develop severe chronic health conditions. But the IRS tax penalty on the cancelled debt can be thousands of dollars.

“Taxing people who have had their federal and private student loans canceled due to a total and permanent disability or because of the death of their child is grossly unfair and defeats the purpose of those loan cancellation programs,” said Persis Yu, director of the National Consumer Law Center's Student Loan Borrower Assistance Project. Sens.

Chris Coons (D-DE), Angus King (I-ME), and Rob Portman (R-OH) are sponsoring the legislation. The senators' constituents reached out to their offices, including a Maine family whose son, a recent college graduate with student loans, died from a brain aneurysm in 2012. “Although the federal government and

private lender forgave the outstanding loan balances, the parents were then presented with a tax bill of over \$24,000 from the IRS,” according to a statement from Coons’ office. “This family has since had to dip into their 401(k) to pay the bill and are now sending over \$400 per month in tax payments to the agency.”

The Stop Taxing Death and Disability Act also ensures that parents whose child becomes totally disabled can qualify for student loan forgiveness as well as the tax exemption. “Currently parents are allowed to discharge federal student loans if they develop a total and permanent disability, or if their child dies, but not if their child develops a total and permanent disability,” according to a press release from Coons. Congress already exempts certain groups from paying income tax on forgiven student loans, including public sector employees who remain in their jobs for a while. The Education Department has identified 387,000 totally and permanently disabled individuals eligible for, but not currently receiving loan forgiveness. Several vets’ groups support the bill, including the American Legion and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | May 3, 2016 ++]

S.2851: Veterans' Disability Compensation Automatic COLA Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Thune, John [SD] (introduced 4/26/2016)

S.2871: VA OIG Choice Program Ombudsman. A bill to establish the position of Choice Program Ombudsman within the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs to manage complaints regarding the provision of hospital care and medical services under section 101 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. Sponsor: Sen Thune, John [SD] (introduced 4/28/2016)

S.2883: Appropriate Care for Disabled Veterans Act of 2016. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the requirement of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for the specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans. Sponsor: Sen Brown, Sherrod [OH] (introduced 4/28/2016) Related Bills: H.R.5091

S.2888: Janey Ensminger Act of 2016. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's review and publication of illness and conditions relating to veterans stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and their family members. Sponsor: Sen Burr, Richard [NC] (introduced 4/28/2016) Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs.

S.2896: Care Veterans Deserve Act of 2016. A bill to eliminate the sunset date for the Veterans Choice Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to expand eligibility for such program, and to extend certain operating hours for pharmacies and medical facilities of the Department, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen McCain, John [AZ] (introduced 4/28/2016)

S.2921: VA Employee Accountability, Health Care & Benefits Improvement. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the accountability of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to improve health care and benefits for veterans, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Isakson, Johnny [GA] (introduced 5/11/2016)

* *See press release below*

S.2922: VA & Academic Affiliates Partnerships & Contracts. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for partnerships and contracts between the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and eligible academic

affiliates for the mutually beneficial coordination, use, or exchange of health-care resources, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Whitehouse, Sheldon [RI] (introduced 5/11/2016)

S.2925: VA Medical Facility Kitchen/Food Service Inspections. A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the inspection of kitchens and food service areas at medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that the same standards for kitchens and food service areas at hospitals in the private sector are being met at kitchens and food service areas at medical facilities of the Department. Sponsor: Sen Kirk, Mark Steven [IL] (introduced 5/12/2016)

[Source: <https://beta.congress.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> May 14, 2016 ++]

* June 9, 2016 press release from VVA President John Rowan to Senate Leadership:

“The Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee has done its job,” said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America, “and now it is time for Senate leadership to hold a floor vote on S. 2921, the Veterans First Act, which VVA fully endorses.

“This legislation embraces S. 901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2016, which is, for us, the most important piece of veterans’ legislation since the Agent Orange Act was enacted in 1991,” Rowan said. “It will help ensure that the offspring of all veterans from all eras, who have been exposed to toxic substances while serving our nation in uniform, will benefit from peer-reviewed, epidemiological research into illnesses associated with a parent’s military service.”

S. 2921 will also extend caregiver benefits to catastrophically injured veterans who served prior to 9/11, and it will grant the necessary leasing authority so that development of the West LA Veterans Affairs Campus can proceed apace in providing housing and other services for homeless veterans, men and women who, for decades, have needed these services.

“Vietnam Veterans of America fully supports S. 2921,” Rowan said. “And we will do our utmost to ensure that the bill is enacted into black-letter law.”

► BRINGING THEM HOME

As of May 15, 2016, the number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,841), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,621), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). The total accounted for from the Vietnam War is 962.

WORLD WAR II

After 70 years, crewmembers of a B-24 and C-109 aircraft that were lost in India in January 1944 and July 1945 were finally brought home.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), in conjunction with the Department of Defense, U.S. Embassy New Delhi, and the Government of India, held a repatriation ceremony April 13 in New

Delhi, India to pay full honors to what they believe are the possible remains of crew members. This event marked the first time the U.S. has repatriated remains from the country of India.

Remains from the B-24 bomber were recovered by a DPAA expeditionary team last fall. Eight personnel assigned to the 14th Air Force, 308th Bomb Group were aboard the aircraft at the time of its loss, with all unaccounted for. To recover the remains, the DPAA team navigated treacherous terrain to hike 9,000 feet above sea level in the Indian Himalayas. In order to potentially fulfill the nation's promise to its service members, the team faced 30-60 degree inclines and falling debris from higher positions and braved some of the most severe conditions encountered by DPAA.

Along with the remains from the B-24, the ceremony incorporated remains turned over from a third-party organization to the U.S. government. The remains are believed to belong to members of a four-man Army Air Force crew that was aboard a C-109 that crashed as it travelled from Jorhat, India to Hsinching, China.

Upon arrival at the DPAA lab in Hawaii, the remains will undergo DNA testing as well as dental and biological analysis in order to identify the crew members.

“The successful closure of this mission, bringing remains home, is a major milestone in our quest to be able to work with the Indian government to be able to recover our missing personnel,” said Dr. John Byrd, DPAA's Lab Director. “We have been working with the Indian government to set up procedures by which we can get remains released from the country and into our lab for testing. This was the first time that we have been able to exercise these new procedures that we developed with the India government for evaluating remains and returning them to the United States.”

The repatriation of these remains is in line with the DPAA's mission to provide the fullest possible accounting of America's missing to their families and the nation.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced on May 20 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, unaccounted for since World War II, have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Marine **Pfc. Elmer L. Mathies, Jr.**, 21, of Hereford, Texas, was buried May 28 in his hometown. In November 1943, Mathies was assigned to Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Mathies died sometime on the first day of battle, Nov. 20, 1943.

Despite the heavy casualties suffered by U.S. forces, military success in the battle of Tarawa was a huge victory for the U.S. military because the Gilbert Islands provided the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet a platform from which to launch assaults on the Marshall and Caroline Islands to advance their Central Pacific Campaign against Japan.

In the immediate aftermath of the fighting on Tarawa, U.S. service members who died in the battle were buried in a number of battlefield cemeteries on the island. In 1946 and 1947, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company conducted remains recovery operations on Betio Island, but Mathies' remains were not recovered. On Feb. 28, 1949, a military review board declared Mathies' remains non-recoverable.

In June 2015, a nongovernmental organization, History Flight, Inc., notified DPAA that they discovered a burial site on Betio Island and recovered the remains of what they believed were 35 U.S. Marines who fought during the battle in November 1943. The remains were turned over to DPAA in July 2015.

To identify Mathies' remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched a sister; laboratory analysis, including dental analysis and anthropological comparison, which matched Mathies' records; as well as circumstantial and material evidence.

DPAA announced on May 20 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, unaccounted for since World War II, have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Navy **Motor Machinist's Mate 1st Class John E. Anderson**, 24, of Willmar, Minnesota, will be buried May 28 in his hometown. On June 6, 1944, Anderson was in Landing Craft Tank (LCT), Mark 5, Hull Number 30, which landed on Omaha Beach, France during the invasion of Normandy. Upon landing, men and equipment left the tank, while Anderson went to the engine room to check the sand traps. The tank was subsequently destroyed by either enemy fire or an enemy mine. Anderson was killed in the attack.

On July 1, 1944, a set of remains were recovered from the boiler room of the LCT, and were interred by the Army at the temporary American cemetery near Omaha Beach, St. Laurent-sur-Mer #1 and designated X-91 St. Laurent. At the time, Army Graves Registration did not have access to the Navy's records, and were unable to identify the remains as Anderson's. The remains were later reinterred at the Normandy American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

In January 2015, following a request by the family of MoMM1c Anderson, a new historical investigation by DPAA showed a strong association between the unidentified remains and Anderson.

Under its new disinterment process, in August 2015, DPAA successfully recommended the remains designated X-91 St. Laurent be disinterred for analysis by the DPAA laboratory.

To identify Anderson's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence; mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched a sister and a nephew; as well as anthropological analysis.

USS OKLAHOMA

On December 7, 1941, 429 sailors were killed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. From December 1941 to June 1944, Navy personnel recovered the remains of the deceased crew, which were subsequently interred in the Halawa and Nu'uauu Cemeteries.

In September 1947, tasked with recovering and identifying fallen U.S. personnel in the Pacific Theater, members of the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) disinterred the remains of U.S. casualties from the two cemeteries and transferred them to the Central Identification Laboratory at Schofield Barracks. The laboratory staff was only able to confirm the identifications of 35 men from the USS Oklahoma at that time. The AGRS subsequently buried the unidentified remains in 46 plots at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP), known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu. In October 1949, a military board classified those who could not be identified as "non-recoverable."

In April 2015, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a policy memorandum directing the disinterment of unknowns associated with the USS Oklahoma. On June 15, 2015, DPAA personnel began exhuming the remains from the NMCP for analysis.

DPAA recently identified and repatriated the following remains from the USS Oklahoma:

Seaman 2nd Class Challis R. James, US Navy; accounted for May 25, 2016.

Fireman 1st Class Frank E. Nicoles; accounted for May 20, 2016.

Lt JG Aloysius H. Schmitt; accounted for May 19, 2016.

Warrant Officer Darly H. Goggin, US Navy; ccounted for May 25, 2016.

Navy **Seaman 2nd Class Dale F. Pearce**, 21, of Dennis, Kansas, was buried May 26 in his hometown. To identify Pearce's remains, scientists from DPAA used circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons, which matched Pearce's records.

Ensign Lewis S. Stockdale, 27, of Anaconda, Montana, was buried March 18 in Honolulu.

Petty Officer 1st Class Vernon T. Luke, 43, of Green Bay, Wisconsin, was buried March 9 in Honolulu, Hawaii. To identify Luke's remains, scientists from DPAA used circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons, which matched Luke's records.

Fireman 3rd Class Kenneth L. Jayne, of Suffolk County, N.Y., had been missing since Dec. 7, 1941, when the battleship USS Oklahoma he was aboard suffered multiple torpedo hits and capsized as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Ensign Joseph P. Hittorff was accounted for on April 6, 2016.

Fire Controlman 1st Class Paul A. Nash was accounted for on April 5, 2016.

Chief Storekeeper Herbert J. Hoard accounted for on April 4, 2016.

Machinist's Mate 1st Class Alfred F. Wells was accounted for on April 7, 2016.

Seaman 2nd Class Vernon N. Grow, Company D, 1st Btn, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Div. Lost Dec 21, 1950 in North Korea; accounted for June 2, 2016.

Lt. Julian B. Jordan, 37, from Georgia, and **Seaman 2nd Class Rudolph V. Piskuran**, of Ohio, were buried on dates and locations yet to be announced.

Fireman 2nd Class James B. Boring, 21, of Vinton County, Ohio, Navy **Fireman 3rd Class Edwin C. Hopkins**, 18, of Swanzey, N.H., and **Ensign Lewis B. Pride Jr.**, 23, of Madisonville, Ky

Ensign William M. Finnegan was accounted for on May 9, 2016.

Ensign John C. England was accounted for on May 9, 2016.

Machinist's Mate 1st Class Harold F. Carney was lost on the USS Oklahoma on Dec. 7, 1941 in Pearl Harbor. He was accounted for on April 27, 2016.

Seaman 1st Class William E. Welch was lost on the USS Oklahoma on Dec. 7, 1941 in Pearl Harbor. He was accounted for on April 1, 2016.

Navy **Chief Petty Officer Duff Gordon**, 52, of Hudson, Wisconsin, was buried March 30 in his hometown. To identify Gordon's remains, scientists from DPAA used circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons, which matched Gordon's records.

The DPAA announced on April 27 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from World War II, were identified and being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Air Forces **1st Lt. Leonard R. Farron**, 23, of Tacoma, Washington, was buried May 4 in his hometown. On Oct. 15, 1942, Farron was the pilot of a P-39 aircraft with the 67th Fighter Squadron, 347th Fighter Group, 13th Air Force, when he failed to return from a strafing mission over Tassafaronga, Guadalcanal. His squadron mates reported they last saw Farron 10 minutes before landing, but there was heavy anti-aircraft fire and enemy fighters swarming the area at the time. No one reported seeing Farron crash.

On Dec. 30, 1942, a soldier from the 25th Infantry Division (ID) located a crashed P-39 with a tail number closely matching Farron's plane, and with the body of the pilot still in the cockpit. However, the remains of that pilot were not recovered at that time. On Jan. 28, 1949, a military review board declared Farron non-recoverable.

In January and February 2013, an investigation team with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) searched on Guadalcanal for information relating to Farron's crash, but no wreckage consistent with a P-39 was found. In July 2013, a JPAC historian located relevant information regarding Farron's P-39 crash while researching Guadalcanal ground losses associated with the 25th ID. Based on that information, another JPAC investigation team traveled to Guadalcanal, interviewed local citizens, and located an aircraft crash site with wreckage consistent with a P-39 in an area matching the 25th ID record.

From January to February 2015, a DPAA recovery team excavated the crash site and recovered wreckage, human remains and personal military gear.

To identify Farron's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched two maternal cousins, and dental analysis, which matched his records.

The DPAA announced on April 7 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from World War II were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Air Forces **Capt. Arthur E. Halfpapp**, 23, of Steelton, Pennsylvania, was buried April 14 in Annville, Pennsylvania. On April 24, 1945, Halfpapp was assigned to the 87th Fighter Squadron, 79th Fighter Group, and was the pilot of a P-47 aircraft that crashed during an armed reconnaissance mission southeast of Alberone, Italy. After the crash, the mission flight leader circled the burning wreckage, and did not see any signs of life. Following the war, the Army Graves Registration Service searched for Halfpapp's crash site; however, his remains were not located. On May 24, 1948, a military board amended his status to non-recoverable.

In 2014, members of the Italian association Archeologi Dell’Aria reported they had excavated a crash site potentially associated with Halfpapp and recovered possible human remains and personal effects. DPAA is grateful to Archeologi Dell’Aria for their vital assistance in this recovery mission.

To identify Halfpapp’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched his maternal niece and nephew.

Papua New Guinea: The DPAA announced on March 16 that the remains of two U.S. servicemen unaccounted for since World War II were identified and being returned to their families for burial with full military honors. Army **Pvt. John H. Klopp**, 25, of New Orleans, was buried March 23 in Arlington National Cemetery. Additionally, group remains representing Klopp and Army **Pvt. Earl J. Keating**, 28, also of New Orleans, will be buried in Arlington National Cemetery that same day. Keating was buried May 28 in his hometown.

In December 1942, Klopp and Keating were assigned to the Anti-Tank Company, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, when their unit was involved in an intense engagement with enemy forces along the Soputa-Sanananda Track, which is present-day Papua New Guinea. On Dec. 5, 1942, American forces manned a roadblock position and repulsed a heavy Japanese attack, but sustained heavy casualties. Klopp and Keating died during the fighting and were buried by their fellow soldiers within the American perimeter. The American Graves Registration Service team was unable to locate Klopp’s and Keating’s remains after the war.

In October 2011, an Australian citizen in Papua New Guinea contacted DPAA regarding personal effects that possibly belonged to Klopp and Keating. The Department of Defense surveyed the site and recovered human remains and material evidence that correlated to Klopp and Keating. Additionally, in September 2012, another local citizen turned over more remains and personal effects to a U.S. recovery team.

To identify Klopp’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched his maternal niece and maternal half-brother, and dental analysis, which matched his medical records.

To identify Keating’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA analysis, which matched his nephew, as well as dental analysis, which matched his records.

Philippines:

Army **Cpl. George G. Simmons**, of Hamilton, Mont., had been missing since Nov. 19, 1942, while fighting in the Philippines. It would be later learned he died in a Japanese prison camp. He was assigned to Battery H, 60th Coastal Artillery Regiment.

Sgt Bailey Keeton, US Army, Company D, 1st Btn, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Div., 93rd Bombardment Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group; Lost Nov. 19, 1942 in the Philippines; accounted for June 1, 2016.

Pvt. Evans E. Overbey, US Army Air Forces, 93rd Bombardment Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group. Lost Nov. 19, 1942 in the Philippines; accounted for June 1, 2016.

Cpl Frederick G. Collins, Jr. US Army, 263rd Quartermaster Company, Quartermaster Corps Hqts. Lost Nov 19, 1945 in the Philippines; accounted for June 7, 2016.

Malaysia: Flight Officer Judson B. Baskett, Army Air Forces, 1305th Army Air Force Base Unit. Lost Nov. 27, 1945 in Malaysia, accounted for June 15, 2016.

Netherlands: Army Pvt. John P. Sersha, 21, of St. Louis County, Minn., had been missing since Sept. 27, 1944, while fighting in the Netherlands. He was assigned to Company F, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division.

Vanuatu Island: U.S. Army Capt. Elwood J. Euart was lost Oct. 25, 1942 in Vanuatu. He was assigned to Headquarters, 103rd Field Artillery Btn, 43rd Infantry Div. He was accounted for on May 11, 2016.

Germany: U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Donald L. Beals was lost April 17, 1945 in Germany. He was accounted for on May 10, 2016.

Tarawa Atoll: U.S. Marines Pvt. Palmer S. Haraldson was lost on Nov. 22, 1943 on Tarawa Atoll. He was assigned to Company C, 1st Btn, 6th Marines, 2nd Marine Div.

U.S. Marines **Pfc. John Saini** was lost on Nov. 20, 1943 on Tarawa Atoll. He was accounted for on April 21, 2016.

U.S. Navy **Pharmacist's Mate 3rd Class Howard P. Brisbane**, Headquarters Company, 2nd Btn, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. Lost Nov 20, 1943 in Tarawa Atoll; accounted for June 2, 2016.

U.S. Marines **Pfc. James F. Mansfield**, 19, of Plymouth, Mass., was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. He reportedly died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943.

U.S. Marines **Pfc. Anthony Brozyna** was lost on Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943. He was assigned to Company G, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. He was accounted for on April 6, 2016.

U.S. Marines **Pfc. John F. Prince** was lost on Nov. 20, 1943 on Tarawa Atoll. He was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. He was accounted for on April 2, 2016.

U.S. Marines **Pvt. Harry K. Tye**, 20, of Gallagher, W.Va., was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. He reportedly died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943.

KOREAN WAR:

Sgt. 1st Class Richard David, US Army, Company K, 3rd Btn, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Div. Lost Nov. 2, 1950 in North Korea; accounted for May 23, 2016

The DPAA announced on June 20 that the remains of a serviceman missing from the Korean War have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Sgt. Bailey Keeton, Jr.**, 20, of Oneida, Tennessee, was buried June 25 in his hometown. In late November 1950, Keeton was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, as one of approximately 2,500 U.S. and 700 South Korean soldiers who were assembled into the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT). The 31st RCT was deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when it was engaged by overwhelming numbers of Chinese forces, driving the remnants of the 31st RCT, known historically as Task Force Faith, to begin a fighting withdrawal to more defensible positions near Hagaru-ri, south of the reservoir. As the unit withdrew from the area, only wounded soldiers were evacuated. Keeton could not be accounted for by his unit at the end of the battle, and the U.S. Army reported him missing in action as of Dec. 2, 1950.

Although the U.S. Army Graves Registration Service hoped to recover American remains from north of the Korean Demilitarized Zone after the war, administrative details between the United Nations Command and North Korea complicated recovery efforts. An agreement was made and in September and October 1954, in what was known as Operation Glory, remains were returned. However, Keeton's remains were not included and he was declared non-recoverable.

During the 32nd Joint Recovery Operation in 2004, U.S. and North Korean recovery teams conducted operations on the eastern bank of the Chosin Reservoir, Changjin County, North Korea, in the area where Keeton was reported missing in action. At least nine individuals were recovered and returned to the laboratory for processing. To identify Keeton's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial and anthropological evidence, as well as DNA analysis, including mitochondrial DNA, Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA and autosomal STR DNA, which matched a sister and a brother.

The DPAA announced June 20 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Cpl. George P. Grifford**, 18, of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington D.C. On Nov. 30, 1950, Grifford was a member of the 37th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near Kunu-ri, North Korea. He was reported missing in action after the battle.

In 1953, the Chinese reported that Grifford died Feb. 6, 1951, while being held prisoner in North Korea. Based on this information, a military review board amended his status to deceased.

In 1954, United Nations and communist forces exchanged the remains of war dead in what came to be called "Operation Glory." All remains recovered in Operation Glory were turned over to the Army's Central Identification Unit for analysis. The remains they were unable to identify were interred as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the "Punchbowl."

In 1999, due to advances in technology, the Department of Defense began to re-examine records and concluded that the possibility for identification of some of these unknowns now existed. The remains designated X-14029 were exhumed on Feb. 25, 2015, so further analysis could be conducted. To identify Grifford's remains, scientists from DPAA used circumstantial evidence, dental analysis, and chest radiographs, which matched Grifford's records.

DPAA announced on June 17 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, were identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Master Sgt. Richard Davis**, 30, of Black Lick, Pennsylvania, was buried June 24 in Blairsville, Pennsylvania. In early November 1950, Davis was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, near Unsan, North Korea, when Chinese People's Volunteer Forces attacked the regiment, and forced the unit to withdraw. Many soldiers became surrounded and attempted to escape and evade the enemy, but were captured and marched to POW camps. Davis was declared missing in action as a result of the battle that occurred between Nov. 1 and 2, 1950.

In 1953, during the prisoner of war exchange historically known as "Operation Big Switch," nine repatriated American soldiers reported that Davis was held at POW Camp 5 and died in February or March 1951. Additionally, Davis' name appeared on a POW list compiled by the Chinese, dated April 8, 1951. Based on this information, a military review board amended Davis' status to deceased in 1951.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea between 1996 and 2005, included the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the vicinity where Davis was believed to have died.

To identify Davis' remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched a niece and great niece, Y-Short Tandem Repeat DNA analysis, which matched a nephew and a sister; dental comparison analysis, which matched Davis' records; and circumstantial evidence.

The DPAA announced on June 9 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Korean War were identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Sgt. Harold Sparks**, 21, of Seattle, was buried June 16 in Kent, Washington. In early November 1950, Sparks was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, near Unsan, North Korea, when Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF) attacked the regiment and forced the unit to withdraw. Many soldiers became surrounded and attempted to escape and evade the enemy, but were captured and marched to POW camps. Sparks was subsequently declared missing in action as a result of the battle that occurred Nov. 2, 1950.

Sparks' name did not appear on any POW list provided by the CPVF or the Korean People's Army. Based on this information, a military review board amended Sparks' status to deceased in 1951. In 1953, however, during the prisoner of war exchange historically known as "Operation Big Switch," five repatriated American soldiers reported that Sparks was held at POW Camp 5 and died at the camp.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea between 1996 and 2005, included the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the vicinity where Sparks was believed to have died.

To identify Sparks' remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial, Y-chromosome Tandem Repeat, and autosomal DNA analysis, which matched his

sister, two nieces and a cousin; anthropological analysis, which matched Sparks' records; and circumstantial evidence.

U.S. Army **Sgt. 2st Class James P. Shunney**, of Providence, R.I., was lost on Nov. 2, 1950 in North Korea. He was accounted for on May 3, 2016. He was assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was accounted for on May 3, 2016.

Chosin Reservoir:

The DPAA announced on April 28 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Korean War were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Army Cpl. **David J. Wishon, Jr.**, 18, of Baltimore, was buried May 6 in Arlington National Cemetery. On Dec. 1, 1950, Wishon, assigned to Medical Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, was declared missing in action after his unit was heavily attacked by enemy forces in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Due to a prolonged lack of information regarding his status, a military review board amended his status to deceased in 1953.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea, included the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the area where Wishon was believed to have died.

Additionally, in October 2000, a joint U.S./North Korea recovery team recovered human remains from an alleged burial site in Kujang, North Korea.

To identify Wishon's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, consisting of two forms of DNA analysis, including mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA, which matched his sisters.

Hoengsong, South Korea:

The DPAA announced on April 1 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Korean War were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Army **Cpl. Robert P. Graham**, 20, of San Francisco, was buried April 8 in Colma, California. In February 1951, Graham was assigned to Company A, 13th Engineer Combat Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, which was engaged in a battle near Hoengsong, South Korea. Under heavy enemy attack, his unit was ordered to withdraw south to Wonju. During the withdrawal, they fought continuously with the enemy and encountered numerous roadblocks. Upon arrival at Wonju, Graham was reported missing on Feb. 13, 1951.

In 1953, during the prisoner of war exchanges historically known as "Operation Little Switch" and "Operation Big Switch," repatriated U.S. soldiers told debriefers that Graham had been captured by enemy forces and died in March 1951 at Suan POW Camp. His remains were not among those returned by communist forces in 1954, however.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea between 1996 and 2005, included the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war.

North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the area where Graham was believed to have died.

To identify Graham's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, to include mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA analysis, which matched his nephews.

Pfc William R. Butz, US Army, Company K, 3rd Btn, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Div. Lost Dec 12, 1950 in North Korea; accounted for June 8, 2016

Sgt Harold L. Curtis, US Army, Company I, 3rd Btn, 31st Infantry. Lost December 12, 1950 in North Korea; accounted for June 8, 2016

Cpt. Charles B. Crofts, US Army, Headquarters Company, 1st Btn, 32nd Infantry. Lost Dec 21, 1950 in North Korea; accounted for June 7, 2016.

The DPAA announced on March 28 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Korean War were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Sgt. Wilson Meckley, Jr.**, 22, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was buried April 4 in Arlington National Cemetery. In November 1950, Meckley was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, and was assembled with other soldiers into the 31st Regimental Combat Team, historically known as Task Force Faith. While operating along the eastern banks of the Chosin Reservoir, elements of his unit were overwhelmed by Chinese People's Volunteer Forces and were forced to withdraw to more defensible positions at Hagaru-ri. During this withdrawal, Meckley was reported missing on Dec. 2.

In 1953, during the prisoner of war exchanges historically known as "Operation Little Switch" and "Operation Big Switch," returning American soldiers who had been held as prisoners of war did not have any information concerning Meckley. In 1954, a military review board amended his status to deceased.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea, account for the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the area where Meckley was lost.

To identify Meckley's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and two forms of DNA analysis, including mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA analysis, which matched his brothers.

Commingled Remains of 600 Servicemen:

The DPAA announced on March 2 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Korean War were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Army **Pfc. James M. Smith**, 19, of Abbeville, Georgia, was buried March 9 in Arlington National Cemetery. In February 1951, Smith was assigned to Company K, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, and was supporting the South Korean Army in attacks against the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF). On February 12, the CPVF counterattacked and forced the South Korean Army units to retreat, leaving American forces to fight alone. After the battle, Smith was reported missing in action. In

April and May of 1953, the U.S. Army Quartermaster Graves Registration Companies conducted searches of the battlefields associated with Smith's unit, but no remains associated with him were located.

In 1953, during prisoner of war exchanges known as "Operation Little Switch" and "Operation Big Switch," no repatriated American service members were able to provide any information regarding Smith's whereabouts. A military review board amended his status to deceased in 1953.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea, account for the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the vicinity where men captured from Smith's unit were believed to have died.

To identify Smith's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence; two types of DNA analysis, including mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched a brother and a cousin, and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA analysis, which matched a brother; and dental analysis, which matched Smith's records.

NORTH KOREA HANDS OVER 17 REMAINS

The remains of 15 South Koreans and two Americans who were killed more than 60 years ago in North Korea were officially handed over 28 APR.. The repatriation of South Korean soldiers killed while fighting in the North is relatively rare, as the bitter enemies remain technically at war after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice.

However, some remains were accidentally excavated by U.S. teams searching for their own dead under a now-defunct agreement with North Korea. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, U.S. Forces Korea commander, said it is important to not forget the servicemembers killed during the war. "Because of their sacrifice, the Republic of Korea is a thriving democracy and a prosperous economy," he said as he presided over the handover ceremony at U.S. Army Garrison-Yongsan's Knight Field that was attended by the South Korean defense minister and the head of the U.S. agency overseeing the search for POW-MIAs. "As we stand in their shadow, we hope that their return brings a sense of peace and closure to their families."

After a 21-gun salute and the sounding of taps, an honor guard reverently carried a casket, covered with a U.N. flag, containing the American soldiers' remains to a black hearse. South Korean soldiers then collected the 15 boxes draped with their nation's flag from a long table and carried them to a white bus decorated with a yellow wreath. South Korean search teams found the two sets of American remains last year in Yanggu province near the Demilitarized Zone, the site of fighting involving the 9th Infantry Division in the summer and fall of 1951. The South Korean soldiers' remains were recovered by teams with the U.S. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency operating in North Korea in 2000-04. They were found in several places, including Kujang, Unsan and on the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir, an area that saw some of the fiercest fighting of the war, the military said.

Forensic investigators in Hawaii determined the remains were not American and later confirmed they were South Korean, officials said, adding they were still working to identify individuals. Retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael S. Linnington, DPAA director, said the repatriation stems from a memorandum of agreement signed last November confirming cooperation on recovering remains of soldiers from both countries. The head of the South Korean Defense Ministry's excavation mission said the remains of some 40,000 South

Koreans are believed to be buried in North Korea. “We are ready to bring them home if only North Korea would agree to it,” he said in an earlier statement. Joint U.S.-North Korea teams conducted about three dozen recovery operations between 1996 and 2005, but they were stopped after Washington expressed safety concerns. Talks to restart the effort began in 2011 but broke off after North Korea launched a rocket despite a ban on ballistic missile technology. Tensions also have risen this year with the Page 17 of 123 North staging its fourth nuclear test in early January and a long-range missile launch a month later, leading to a fresh round of harsh U.N. sanctions.

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Kim Gamel | April 28, 2016]

VIETNAM WAR

The DPAA announced on June 16 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Vietnam War were identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Sgt. 1st Class Alan L. Boyer**, 22, of Chicago, was buried June 22 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. On March 28, 1968, Boyer was a member of Spike Team Asp, an 11-man reconnaissance team assigned to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), conducting a classified reconnaissance mission in Savannakhet Province, Laos, when they were attacked by enemy forces and requested extraction. Due to the rugged terrain, the U.S. Air Force CH-3 extraction helicopter was forced to use a ladder in an attempt to recover the team. The helicopter came under heavy fire, and after recovering seven of the Vietnamese team members, began pulling away. Reports indicated that Boyer began climbing the ladder, which broke as the helicopter pulled away, sending him falling to the ground. The other two Americans on the team and the remaining Vietnamese commando, while at one point were last seen on the ground, may also have started climbing the ladder when it broke. On April 1, 1968, a search team was inserted into the area, but found no evidence of the missing team members.

On Oct. 30, 1992, a joint U.S./Lao People’s Democratic Republic team traveled to Savannakhet Province to investigate the case. Two local Laotians reported seeing three men fall from a helicopter in 1968 when the rope ladder broke as they were climbing. The Laotians reported that local militia buried the bodies in graves near where they were found, but the men were unable to pinpoint a specific location.

Multiple subsequent investigations and three excavations of reported burial areas failed to yield the remains of Boyer.

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel office received remains from an American citizen who claimed to have received them from several unnamed Lao emigres. One of the remains was determined to be that of Boyer. To identify Boyer’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched his mother and sister.

Kon Tum Town, South Vietnam:

The DPAA announced on January 14 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Vietnam War were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Staff Sgt. Kenneth L. Cunningham**, 21, of Ellery, Illinois, was buried Jan. 21 in Albion, Illinois. On Oct. 3, 1969, Cunningham was assigned to the 225th Aviation Company, 223rd Aviation Battalion, 17th Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade, as a crewmember of an OV-1C aircraft. Cunningham and his pilot were conducting a night surveillance mission when they failed to return at their scheduled time. On Oct. 5, a search and rescue aircraft crew located OV-1 wreckage atop a 7,000-foot mountain peak north of Kon Tum Town, South Vietnam. Due to inclement weather, a ground party was unable to land, and hostile activity in the area further rendered recovery efforts unsuccessful. Cunningham was declared missing in action.

In March 1993, a joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) team interviewed witnesses in Kon Tum Province about the crash of the aircraft. The team surveyed the crash site and recovered various aircraft parts, aircrew related items, and personal effects.

In April 1996, January 1997, and in November 2010, additional joint U.S./S.R.V. teams excavated the crash site and a possible burial site, finding possible human remains, aircraft wreckage, personal effects, and military gear.

To identify Cunningham's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used anthropological analysis and mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched his mother and brother, as well as circumstantial and material evidence.

Major Dean A. Klenda, USAF, lost Sept. 17, 1975 in North Vietnam, 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron. F-105 Thunderchief. Recovered Dec. 8, 2014, identified Mar. 1, 2016.

Khe Sahn, Vietnam: The DPAA announced on December 10 that the remains of a U.S. serviceman missing from the Vietnam War were identified and would be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army **Sgt. 1st Class Billy D. Hill**, 21, of Wichita, Kan., was buried Dec. 17, in Killeen, Texas. Hill was assigned to the 282nd Aviation Company, 14th Aviation Battalion, 17th Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade, as a gunner on a UH-1D helicopter. On Jan. 21, 1968, the helicopter he was in with five other soldiers was struck by enemy fire and crashed near Khe Sahn, Vietnam. One of the two crew members who survived the crash stated he believed Hill was struck by enemy fire just prior to the crash. Hill was declared missing in action following the crash.

On April 8, 1968, soldiers searched the crash site area and recovered the remains of two of the soldiers of the helicopter. The remains of Hill and one other soldier remained unrecovered. On Dec. 12, 1975, a military review board amended Hill's status to deceased.

Between 1993 and 2014, seven investigations were conducted regarding the whereabouts of Hill, but no remains were attributed to him. In 2014, members of DPA's predecessor organization, the Joint Personnel Accounting Command, reanalyzed unknown remains returned from Vietnam during a unilateral turnover in 1989, which were reportedly recovered in the vicinity of Khe Sahn.

To identify Hill's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and two types of DNA analysis, including mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched two cousins, and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA and autosomal DNA analysis, which matched his father.

Lt. Cmdr. Frederick P. Crosby, US Navy, Light Photographic Squadron (CFP) 63. Lost June 1, 1965 in Vietnam and originally listed as KBNR; accounted for May 25, 2016.

Col. Patrick K. Wood, of Kansas City, MO, US Air Force, Det. 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. Lost Feb. 6, 1967 while piloting an HH03E Jolly Green Giant on a search and rescue mission near the Mu Gia Pass in North Vietnam when it was shot down. The other three crew members were killed in the crash. He was original listed as MIA; accounted for May 27, 2016.

Major Patrick H. Wood distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in connection with a military operation against an opposing armed force as a Rescue Crew Commander of an HH-3E helicopter near Mu Gia Pass, North Vietnam on 6 February 1967. On that date, Major Wood flew two sorties in an attempt to rescue a pilot downed deep in heavily defended hostile territory. An intensive search under constant fire failed to locate the pilot and the first sortie was cancelled due to rapidly deteriorating weather. Major Wood undertook a second attempt fully aware that fighter cover and flak suppression support were unavailable due to marginal weather. Despite intense and accurate 37mm fire, Major Wood successfully located and hoisted the downed pilot into his aircraft. At this point, the hostile forces, thwarted in their attempts to capture the downed pilot, and the possibility of luring other aircraft to destruction, directed all their fire-power toward Major Wood's aircraft. Heavy 37mm fire exploded above the aircraft on climb out, and one hit was taken in the cabin. Although his aircraft was severely damaged, Major Wood attempted to clear a ridge line which would have provided a sufficient altitude for a safe bailout for his crew. In the face of a known highly dangerous area, extremely adverse weather conditions, and exceptionally heavy hostile fire, Major Wood pressed his humanitarian efforts to save a fellow airman. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness, Major Wood reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

RECOVERY MISSION IN VIETNAM

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency returned from a recovery mission in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, April 12, after deploying in an effort to recover the remains of a U.S. Air Force pilot and navigator who were lost when their RF-4C Phantom aircraft went missing during a reconnaissance mission during the Vietnam War in January 1968. Braving austere conditions, the team faced a 51 degree slope in order to successfully excavate the possible resting place of the service members. In total, the team excavated 800 square meters which led to the discovery of possible life support equipment and possible remains.

"DPAA's mission is a great example of how our country repays the debt we owe all our service men and women for the sacrifices they make every day," said John Campbell, an archeologist with the Corp of Army Engineers. "Both in the closure it can provide to the families of lost service members, and the participation of active service members in bringing their comrades home."

Comprised of 16 members, the team included specialized individuals specifically trained for medical aid, explosives detection and mountain repels training. The joint effort ensured that all obstacles faced by the team were handled safely and professionally.

"The team faced a lot of challenges with the adverse mountain conditions, unpredictable weather and the intense operating tempo," said U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Christopher Perez, team leader. "From day one until the end, they all kept in mind the reason they were there. When they were tired, they focused on keeping the nation's promise, and it made all the difference, and they did an admirable job."

The mission was the second time DPAA was sent to Socialist Republic of Vietnam this fiscal year, continuing in their diligent effort to account for missing Americans from past wars, for the fullest possible accounting to their families and the nation.

"Being able to do this job is an awesome feeling and an honor," said U.S. Army Sgt. Hector Garcio, who assisted in the recovery. "Being in pain at times while on the site digging, screening, building and hiking means nothing and the pain is replaced with excitement and joy when we find a fallen service member. I

always keep the thought of the service member we are looking for while I am in pain to keep me going. I also keep their family in my thoughts as well knowing that I am helping them get closure. At the end of the day, it is worth all the pain and soreness when we get to bring a fallen service member back home and fulfill our nation's promise of leaving no one behind."

► SICK CALL

We wish our following RFTW family member a good recovery. Our prayers are with you.

Harry "Attitude" Steelman

Harry's RFTW trip this year was cut short when his bike went down near Angel Fire NM. He's at home waiting for his broken leg to heal.

► TAPS

Richard Harrison

Richard Harrison, 71, died May 22 following injuries sustained in a single vehicle motorcycle collision in Manhattan, Kansas, his hometown. Richard rode with RFTW for many years, and was the Kansas State Coordinator from 2000 to 2007.

Rich had just left the RFTW ceremony in Junction City and was on his way home. Onlookers said he appeared to have slumped over his tank and bars and did not appear to try to correct his course as he drifted off the road. Many of us knew and loved Rich; he was a good man and will be missed.



Michael King

John "Ice Scout" King's 31-year-old son Michael was killed in a traffic accident on his way to work the morning of June 11. He was a fine father of two boys, a welder/construction worker, and a Marine who served two combat tours in El Anbar Province. The RFTW family is deeply saddened and sends prayers to John and Ela and the rest of the King family.

"Mrs. T"

Juanita "Mrs. T" from the Tuscaloosa Pilot fuel stop suffered a heart attack and passed away early this year. She was a proud supporter of the Southern Route, an ardent supporter of RFTW and its mission. She was the widow of a Vietnam Navy vet. She would come outside after the fueling as RFTW was leaving and salute them as they left. Her fondest wish was to ride with RFTW to DC. She loved her RFTW guys, and proudly wore her RFTW pin on her work shirt.

► CLOSING THOUGHTS

19 Marines of WWII brought home

http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=C6f_FvZpm3g

Many participants in this year's Run wrote blogs on their journey. You may want to read some of these:

Daniel Slocum and his father, both veterans, rode their bikes and were FNGs this year. Daniel also took a lot of great photos: <http://danielslocum.com/blog/2016/05/14/2-men-2-motorcycles-22-days/>

Ken "Navy Buff" Munro's Midway photos: http://runforthewallmidway.com/photo_gallery/

Angel Fire photos:

https://www.facebook.com/bill.rager.7/media_set?set=a.10206662229017938.1073741850.1339507600&type=3&uploaded=220

CR Sitreps: <http://rftw.org/index.asp?lg=1&w=pages&r=132&pid=21>

Midway Sitreps: <http://rftw.org/index.asp?lg=1&w=pages&r=145&pid=156>

SR Sitreps: <http://www.rftw-sr.org/sitreps/index.html>

You Are Not Forgotten

