



WE HONOR OUR KILLED IN ACTION AND WANT AN ACCOUNTING OR RELEASE OF OUR MISSING IN ACTION OR PRISONERS OF WAR.

Official Newsletter of... "Run For The Wall"... July 2004

Quarterly Newsletter
" We Ride For Those Who Can't "
July 2004

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JUST A FEW WORDS

By Sandra "LittleBit" McKinney

Here we are, home once again from our annual trek across the country. Friends ask if I had "FUN" on my vacation.....well, that is a difficult question to answer! First, I really don't classify it as a vacation, although it is a break from the "normal" routine. Yes, there are some fun aspects to the Run, like seeing old friends and making new friends, but in all honesty, it is an exhausting, emotional, stressful and, oh, so very rewarding trip! We are on a mission to keep alive the concerns for the MIA's and POW's and to aide in the healing of Veterans and their families.

You know, it really bothers me when I hear a veteran challenging the dedication of a non-veteran who is involved in the Run. I do not think that the term “wanna-be” is an appropriate title for anyone who contributes their time and energy to carrying the spirit of the Mission. Each and every person has a reason for being involved in RFTW; war veteran, service veteran, family member of a veteran, or a family member of an MIA or POW, or by God, maybe they are just down-right patriotic and believe in the Red, White & Blue!!!! I recall the little song I learned as a child in Sunday School....”Red or yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.” It doesn’t matter whether we are veteran or civilian, as long as we are not pretending to be something we are not. It just matters that we offer service, support and hope. If we don’t include those who were not in the service, how can we expect the Mission to grow and survive? We are all the “little children of the world” trying to make a difference in something that is bigger than all of us! We are all ambassadors to the cause.

The Run has grown so much; that is good news, because we have more people involved in carrying the message. But all growth generates ‘growing pains’. With each year’s growth, we add more Road Guards. If you had an encounter with a Road Guard, that is good, he was doing his job. But then there are the growth pains for the Road Guard... dealing with an issue with one person that can affect the “whole picture”- that of the entire Run. Road Guards are human and can lose control. That is not a good thing, but if a request from a Road Guard escalates to profanity, maybe there is that “whole picture” thing involved, and you are not responding fast enough for your safety or that of the entire Run. A Road Guard should remain calm and congenial at all times; anger and profanity can generate hostility and a lack of action from the person involved in the conflict. Many of our Road Guards are military veterans and expect “reaction without question”, well, not all people will respond that way. But keep in mind that the Road Guard is privy to information that you do not know, and when he places a demand on you, please respond immediately. And Road Guards, bear in mind that you are dealing with people that are overwhelmed and possibly scared, there is need for constant care and sensitivity in doling out your commands.

More growth pains.....Each year we get more people riding with RFTW. Again, that is good news, but it is so important that everyone knows the proper procedures for riding in the pack. For that reason, it is not a good idea to jump in at a gas stop or a lunch stop, or especially to jump in from an on-ramp. You need to register with the group before riding with the pack, that means joining up at the start of the day, hearing the morning rider’s meeting, learning the hand signals, procedures for gas-stops, riding protocol and positions of bikes, trikes, trailers, cars, etc. Just because you know how to ride a motorcycle, does not mean that you know how to ride with a large pack such as RFTW. For the safety of you and the other riders, it is imperative that you understand that. There is no passing, no changing of positions, no jockeying around within the pack. Once you start in a position in the morning, you stay there until the next stop. The only reason to leave the pack is for an emergency or safety issue. If you see someone riding in an unsafe manner, it is important to notify a Road Guard and let them deal with that issue. That is their job. We welcome all riders; those that want to make the full trip from LA to DC, those that can only ride for a few days, and those that are with us for just a day. “Day-Riders” are just as important to the mission as the one who rides “all the way”. But the Mission Statement stresses the importance of traveling across the United States **SAFELY**. By following these guidelines, we can make the trip safe and an even greater success.

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“RUN FOR THE WALL”

by Tom Lockett - 2004

We ride across America,
on the Run For The Wall:

Through the deserts and the mountains,
we honor those who gave their all:

We want to bring them home again,
our prisoners and our lost:

As we seek our destination,
we're reminded of the cost:

Legions of missing faces,
of those that should be here:

Fill our thoughts and memories,
we shed so many tears:

We survived the battles,
and came home from the war:

Haunting memories of those faces,
we will bear forever more:

So we ride across America,
from L.A. to D.C.:

To remind this blessed nation,
that freedom isn't free:

The cost is etched on monuments,
or markers made of stone:

Too many of our fallen,
have never made it home:

They can't be lost forever,
so we must do our best:

To honor our commitment,
and bring them home to rest:

This is why we gather,
the reason that we ride:

So the families of these heroes,
can find some peace inside:

With the knowledge that a loved one,
has finally made it home:

And they lay in U.S. soil,
in this land we call our own.

SOUTHERN ROUTE 2004

By John "Slammer" Gebhards

My thanks to all that supported and participated in Run For The Wall Southern Route 2004. It was an honor to lead the Southern Route; thank you for that opportunity.

The Southern Route was significantly larger this year and presented additional challenges for all of us. We met the challenges head on and succeeded in our mission to increase the awareness of the POW/MIA issues.

The 100% accountability is not just a trite phrase; it's a real issue with all Americans and Veterans. Part of our mission is to alert younger generations to the importance of this issue.

My sincerest thanks to: our Assistant Coordinator, Don "9-Ball" Morris; our Road Guard Captain, Joe "Firefly" Cappel and his outstanding group of Road Guards and Strike Team Members (Dave "Wrong Way" Cappel, Don Flieschman, Snuffy Robles, Abe "NuGuy" Duran, John King, Jr., Bob Rogers, Rick "Spook" Hayden, Ray "Rayman" Huston, Warren "Bigfoot" Cummins, Vance Scott, Rich Dunaway, Harry "Tippy" Handy, Ted "Oscar Bear" Riedel, Don "Bear" Chase, Craig "Sarge" Severance, Kim "Target" Rosenquist, Donnie "Hoss Cat" Townsend, Diann "Mojo" Perkins and Tom Bowe); our Chaplain, Buddy "Aloha" Haskell; our Sign-in Administrator, Shirley "Top Sarge" Scott; our Merchandise Coordinator, Della "Pocket" Morris; our Press Coordinator, Anne "Miss Anne" Perry; our Ceremonies Coordinator, John E. King, Jr.; our Chase Vehicle Commander, James "Skyraider" Minton; our Merchandise Vehicle Driver, Glen Townsend, and our First and Second Platoon Leaders, Ron "Plum Crazy" Berg and Frank "Tadpole" Perry. All of our appreciation to the State Coordinators: Ed "Fingers" Gohn-CA, Bob Rogers-AZ, Roger "Cowboy" Mead-NM, Diann "Mojo" Perkins-TX, Janice Wentworth-TX, Linda Thompson-LA, Don "Pappa Bear" Stringer-MS, Rusty Watts-AL,

Lou "Maps" Mulsand and Laurie "Airborne" Clay-VA/DC.

All of you went above and beyond the call of duty every day; and finally I would like to thank my wife, Phyllis, for her help, patience and understanding.

I would like to again especially thank my Road Guards, whose professional and courteous manner made this run a success. I look forward to seeing my friends again on Southern Route 2005.

I salute and thank you for a job well done.

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CENTRAL ROUTE 2004

By Mark "Straightarrow" Rittermeyer

RFTW XVI is now history, and efforts are already under way to make RFTW XVII a success. I would like to thank all of the participants who helped to make this years run so successful. And a special thank you to all of the staff who worked so tirelessly to assure the success of the Run. Also a special thanks to all the State Coordinators, Road Guards, and to Jerry (Peaches) Simpson, and J R Franklin.

I appreciated being given the opportunity to serve the Run, and to assist in keeping the Mission in front of America. I believe that we have been successful in keeping the POW/MIA issue in front of countless Americans, and getting the Run safely across the country. I would like to let you know that everyone that was involved in an accident has recovered, and is home.

I also want to acknowledge all of you who expressed such kind words of appreciation, and shared photos, and notes. They were greatly appreciated.

In closing I would ask that you give your full support to the leadership of RFTW XVII. As you know these are tireless, and thankless positions that are filled by good and faithful men and women who believe in the Mission.

Again, thank you for allowing me to serve you.

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THEY ARE CALLING

By Larry "Skip" Briggs

Barkley, Johanson, Smith, Greason, Williams, Jones, Perisho. Seven names grit blasted into a black granite wall in Washington DC. Did they all know each other? No, but they do now. Did I know any of them? Yeah, and I can feel them calling me. *"Come on, man! Get on that Harley, that Indian, the Yamaha or that Gold Wing and come see us. Come touch us, come feel our tears, come stand with your brothers on no legs and hug them, like we would hug you if we only could. Come cry with our buddies who carried us out of that god-awful place, only to watch us die in their arms in the mud or on the choppers going home. Come on, man! Suck it up and come look for us up here on our Wall. Reach out and touch us and we'll hold your heart in our hands while you cry. It's OK, brother. You got lucky. You made it back."*

Mt. Vernon, Illinois

Our ride started in Carbondale, Illinois as the three of us rode in the rain to Mt. Vernon to hook up with the Central Route guys riding in from St. Louis at noon. My first big mistake - Buying cheap rain gear that didn't hold up in the rain. By the time we get to Mt. Vernon, my rain pants are nothing but ribbons of cheap plastic flapping in the wind. Fifty bucks at Wal-Mart later, replace with rain suits for my son and I that almost survived the rest of the trip. I somehow managed to burn them up on the way home, along with my leather saddle bags and my favorite leather jacket I never wore on the trip. They were all sacrificed to my pipes. We park outside the roped off staging area and wait for pack to ride in. First the road guards in a small tight unit, then the main group roaring in to gas up two-by-two. Truly something to see. Even more exciting to experience later on the Run when we did it again and again. These guys and women have been on the road for almost a week now, starting in California and coming the Central Route, adding riders and bikes at every gas and overnight stop along the way. As I look into their eyes as they drive up to the pumps, I see tired, I see determined, I see people truly dedicated to a mission I didn't have a clue about. I didn't know any of them and they didn't know me. I was going to be a FNG and they didn't want to know me now. I would have to prove my way in.

After the free lunch (there were many along the way) and presentations, we mount up and head out. My fear and apprehension is hanging in my throat as we hook onto the back of the pack hoping to keep up and ride staggered. The road guards quickly hustle us into double-up as we head East to DC in the rain. The gas is free, the lunch is free, the song the guy sang made me cry for the first time in a long time. It pulled up all the old memories I thought I had put to sleep long ago. Finally, I knew why I was really doing this.

Florez, Romero, Wienstein, Cesnaros, Zanick, Higgenbottom, Jackson. Seven more of the 58,245 names on that black Wall who called to us as we rode in the rain across America two up, staggered and crashing all the way to get there. Some of us are so damaged physically we can't ride a bike so we come in trucks, or cars, or RV's. Some of us are so damaged emotionally we can't talk to the guy sitting on the motorcycle beside us at the gas stops or the staging in the rain for the next day's ride. Some of us have no arms, or legs or faces, but we're coming anyway, dammit! Some of us left California with nothing but a beat up Harley and \$20 in our pocket wondering how the hell we're gonna get there, how were we going to eat and how were going to get back home. Our buddies, total strangers, truckers, waitresses

along the way, even the police helped us through. Some of us slept in the rain with no poncho or tent and got up the next morning ready to ride soaking wet. Some of us slept in hotels or motels with men whose snoring would wake the dead. Some of us went down, some of us were hurt badly, some of us had to quit because we had something broken enough we couldn't shift or mount the bike. Our bikes broke, our bodies broke, we lost our money, we lost our equipment, we lost our way. But somehow, most of us who started, came on no matter what. Our guys were waiting for us.

Leigh, Britton, Roberts, Dean, Wilson, Bennett, Mulliken. Captains, privates, ensigns, sergeants, lieutenants, commanders, generals. All name-blasted in Optima without rank or privilege as we rode from every state in this great country to rendezvous in D.C. We rode in packs that stretched out as long as 5 miles, with the Road Guards herding us along and working hard to keep us out of harms way. We fought the cars who didn't know who or what we were as they cut into the line and expected us to move over. We kissed 18 wheelers as they cut the corners on rain slick highways and scared the hell out of those riding behind us who saw it coming. We saluted and waved to all those people standing on the overpasses in the rain. They were mothers, people holding babies, grandfathers, overweight dads, sons and old men saluting, teenagers on bicycles gawking, girls waving and blowing kisses but didn't have a clue why. They waved POW/MIA flags, American flags, even Confederate flags as we rode under them with tears in our eyes and lumps in our throats. We thanked and prayed to whatever gods we believed in to watch over us and keep us safe from the terror of the road and the crazies who didn't want to share it with us. We all rode together with only our vests telling our story, or expressing our feelings when we can't say them ourselves. Cobra pilot, Airborne, Ranger, Navy Seal, 3rd Marine, 9th Infantry, sniper, prisoner of war, 1st Cav, 5th Brigade, Purple Heart, Medal of Honor, seaman, Jane Fonda - Traitor Bitch, Silver Star, combat infantryman, jet pilots, medics, combat ribbons and beads. They told no stories as they rode, only late at night and softly. They only remembered the men that died that day when they didn't. They came guilty, proud, angry, resentful, damaged, fearful, scared and at peace. They came with wives and girlfriends riding on the back, in sidecars or trucks and cars that followed the pack. Many had already been on the road for nearly a week. Some brought their kids and slept them in trailers. Some rode alone and in total silence, except for the ear-splitting roar and thunder of the Harley's when they're cranked up wide open. Some of those riding were load, boisterous, friendly and deadly quiet. "Watch out for the quiet ones", some who had made the ride before, said. But most were respectful of the mission ahead. They came with no attitude as people at the gas stations and food stops along the way gave them the respect they never got when they came home. At the Hurricane layover, I saw only one guy not wanting to remove his cover or honor the flag he served under *because of his issues*, when they sang the Star Spangled Banner. He was quickly and quietly shown how.

Veteran's Hospital

Wilcox, Sarazin, Grabowski, Bodkins, Williams, Bookshire, Gleason. They call us as we pull into the VAMC tucked into the side of a hill in West Virginia. The guys they allowed outside and knew we were coming, stand along the road in their robes waving or just silently follow us with their eyes as we go by. Some are standing at rigid attention in fuzzy house slippers saluting as we go by and wave or salute back. Eight young soldiers in Dessert Storm camo are standing along the upper wall, saluting and making the tears run down the inside of our helmets. Some shook our hands or turned away as we came down the halls, hurting from the pain they felt and we only imagined. We passed the rooms where both young and old soldiers lay face down or covered in their sheets, hiding from the same fears most of us barely had control of and fought every day. We passed the locked wards where they kept "the real sick ones" and wouldn't let us go in. We would have sucked it up and gone, but gladly accepted the fact we couldn't. We could see them in our minds, because we too had been them. If they only knew some of us had been locked behind those same doors in other hospitals and prisons here and "in-country". We walked down the halls hoping to see a soldier who had a smile on his face, or her face. We saw many. We saw eyes that had nothing behind them, just gazing into space, nothing registering on their internal screen. Some looked forward to us coming, some couldn't wait for us to leave, because we were messing up their schedule, their day, their life. We reminded them of them when they were whole.

The Sundial Memorial

We shuck our rain gear as we dismount and park along side the curving, downhill road and walk to the Memorial standing out in the now, still wet grass from the rain. Their names are carved in the stones beneath our feet as we try to not step on them as we read. We feel them stirring beneath us as we hope the sun will come so you can see the sundial do it's work. To see whose name it will touch on this 26th day of May 2004. This site is not only beautiful and serene, but a marvel of technology as it touches each name of a soldier who died on this date in Vietnam. All the MIA'S names are never touched by the sun. Like little white grave stones laying flat beside their brothers who also died on another day, another time, in that other country we went to save.

The stop is short, but welcomed as we walk back up the road, remount and fire up. Their good-byes barely audible beneath the stones from the roaring of a thousand motors as we head for Charleston.

Charleston

It sends chills down your back and tears down your cheeks when we're met in Charleston by triple lines of people applauding, waving and crying on both sides of the road as we ride to the steps of their beautiful, gold-domed capital. Tables loaded with Krispy Kremes, cookies, coffee and water help as we gratefully get off the bikes and listen to the welcome speeches of those who were there because they wanted to be...not because they had to be. The 80-plus lady who told us she and her husband had been taking soldiers into their home since WWII and taking care of them until they could get them into a Veteran's hospital. She called us her sons and her boys, then stood on the edge of the street in her pure white dress with roses in her arms as we rode out and blew kisses to all of "Her boys" as we tried to clutch, shift, throttle and throw them back to her all at the same time.

Rainelle

We gassed, we ate, we rode in the rain to Rainelle, where the good part was waiting for us. The travel gods smiled and stopped the rain just before we took the 35 miles of wet, muddy, sandy, slippery, winding, curving snake of a road up the mountains to Rainelle...competing all the way with the loggers and other big trucks coming back down. We slide down in the mud, and sand and across rain-wet railroad tracks as people along the road pick us up and waved us through. The whole town was excitedly waiting for us as we rode down main street and looped back to park in front of the school. The minute we powered down and dismounted, we were attacked by a hundred little people with flags, hugs, kisses and hand-made autograph books with pencils grasped in their little hands. God! It felt good to be there, to be with them, to see the look of excitement in their eyes, to take pictures, trade gifts and to get off that damn motorcycle. Their innocence was complete. Even though we had lost our innocence a long time ago in another country, in another war, we got to "play-like" in Rainelle that day. Let's hope they can keep theirs forever. Thank God for little children. We ate, we rested, we played with the kids, we slept in their gym. We talked into the night, we snored, we slept restless or not at all, because the hard part was coming tomorrow. It wasn't going to be the ride back down the hill to Raphine or the 78 miles to Woodstock to meet up with the Southern group; we would be 83 miles from the Wall in Woodstock...and they were calling to us. My heart soars but it's starting to hurt too. Three days later, riding mostly in the rain two-up and staggered at 65-80 miles an hour, we arrive in D.C. without the police escort they promised. We head straight for downtown and the Wall.

Washington, D.C.

The group picture was easy on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, once someone finally figured out which steps we were supposed to be sitting and standing on. The rain had stopped, the field we parked in was close and most of the guys were ready for the Wall...not all, but most.

"Come on, man! You're not gonna ride all this way and not spend time with us? Come on. We've been waiting just as hard as you rode here to see us, to touch our names, to cry, to feel all the things we wish WE could feel. Come on. You can do it. We need you out there in front of us, praying on the grass with Mark or just trying to find us up here, or just trying to walk from one end to the other without falling apart. We get to watch some of you do that every day,

but not as many as today. Come on. This is a celebration for us. Welcome home, man. Hold your head up, let those tears roll down your face. Feel it. There's no shame in that. You don't have to be tough for us. We know how scared you were back there. Hell! We were all scared. We know what you feel now. Touch us, put a flower or a picture down for us, say a prayer, take your picture with us, rub our names and take it home to put with the other rubbings you did last year, the year before that and all the other times you came. Embrace and cry with the brother standing next to you. He needs it just as much as you do, maybe more. We feel you and we will be alright. We'll be here forever and we'll see you soon. It is an honor for us to be on this Wall for you. Hang tough, man. Hang tough, but come back. Always come back. We need to see you here."

And we walked away into the crowd with our hearts heavy, tears streaming and our guts ripped out, to buy patches, flags, banners, listen to the music and anything else that will keep us close to the Wall for a few more minutes. Some of us couldn't leave. Some couldn't wait to leave, some couldn't even leave the wet field we parked in. Everything else after the Wall, becomes only an act that proceeds the main show. Sunday! We're all really waiting now for Sunday...but Saturday comes first. We head back to the motels and the first bus, loaded with WWII vets and their wives, start rolling in. And my-oh-my! What grand stories they tell freely and without the pain, as we drink coffee and listen for hours. They are as excited as little kids going to their first big league baseball game. They will not be prepared for the hammer of emotions that will hit them on their dedication day at their new Memorial. We smile and politely listen like little boys at our grandfather's knee, telling us stories of his wars, his battles. We let them stay innocent.

Arlington National Cemetery - The Tomb of The Unknown Soldier

To be allowed the rare privilege of riding into the Arlington National Cemetery with a thousand plus motorcycles is incredible. It's almost like the motorcycles themselves knew to tone it down, to keep the pipes quiet and be more respectful. Our low rumble was only a kiss on the cheek, compared to what we were all used to on the road. The crosses disappeared into the trees, some with names. Some with only numbers...52, 83, 218, 31, and all from the wars we fought or were too young to fight in. Anzio, Normandy, Guadalcanal, Germany, France, the Philippines, Bataan, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan. A lot with names we read about in the history books, a lot we never heard of but died for the right to be free. Today, they all rode with us and we watched in respectful silence at the changing of the guard and we placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, even though our guy wasn't there anymore. A million cicadas singing their one note chorus as we realize how lucky we are today to be standing there on the hill watching, instead of lying quietly under the rolling hills of white crosses all around us. Our motors roared quietly as we headed out, past the crosses, the names, the numbers and back to the Wall or lunch with the D.C. Ramblers, then back to the motels, hotels and camp grounds to gas up, shine up, clean up and get ready for tomorrow and the Ride we all came here for.

The Pentagon Parking Lot

4 o'clock in the morning comes early as we drag out of bed to shower and dress for this special day. Vests, do-rags, caps, chaps, medals, 25 year old cavalry campaign hats, POW/MIA T-shirts, camo, boots, beads, even surf shorts from Hawaii, as all the women danced on the muscles of his arms. We staged before dawn and waited for departure to the Pentagon parking lot and six hours of waiting in an overcast, comfortable, beautiful day. The Orange County Chopper boys were there, enclosed in a high fence so the people couldn't overrun their base camp, even though we noticed that women and girls with low cut tops and big tits somehow managed to slip through their perimeter wire unharmed. The \$9 sandwiches, the free coffee and medical checks, the incredible bikes of all makes, sizes, colors and configurations. The customized, the spit and polished, the modified, the down and dirty, the little bright red Honda Spree 50cc....and the flags. We all had flags, big and small. U.S. on the right, POW/MIA on the left. We were all there, watching as the bikes keep coming in, even though there was no more room in the North lot. For the first time, they opened the South lot and it filled to capacity, with 4 miles of riders waiting in the street to get in. They never did. Even the President of the United State was curious enough to fly over in his chopper to see us from above. It had to be a hell of a sight looking down at over 400,000 (does anyone ever make an official count?) motorcycles and their riders looking up waving, or giving the closed fist power salute. I did not see one single-digit salute given. Even

though I never saw him again, I was pretty sure the guy from Hurricane *with issues* defiantly gave one back.

Quang Tri, Binh Duong, Pleiku, Darlac, Vinh Binh, Kien How, Long Khanh, Tay Ninh, Phuoc Tuy, Quang Nam. You hear all the names as you walk around waiting, and a thousand other places we died that had no names, just mud, jungle, and blood all running together and disappearing with the lives of our buddies, comrades, our friends...our brothers. We crawled, ran, screamed in fear and pain as they blew our legs off, our arms, our faces or just shot us in the ass. But we were the lucky ones. We didn't go back to base camp in a black bag on a Huey or dumped on the back ramp at some out-of-the-way airport so no one would see. We came home. We're here today, sitting on our bikes, waiting to crank up and roll through Washington, D.C. to make our statement once again. Hear us, by God! We're coming. And we will keep coming until they bring us all home.

Rolling Thunder

We fired up at noon and Rolling Thunder, the demonstration started by two Vietnam vets in 1989, was on. Across the bridge and past the first group of the spectators. I know people riding double were filming all the way or shooting stills. I hope they got what I saw. I hope they saw what I saw and heard what I heard. *"Thanks, welcome home, we're proud of you, thanks, welcome home, applause, welcome home, welcome home, applause, welcome home."* Two-by-two and side-by-side, I hadn't even gotten across the bridge when I choked back my first tears. They stood on both sides of the road, two and three deep. There were little girls with their best dresses with black shiny Mary Jane's, waving flags; pregnant mothers with babies in their arms, fathers standing behind their young sons, hands on their shoulders, looking hard but with soft wrinkled smiles on their faces just the same. Their eyes told the story. They were not the eyes we saw when we came back a long time ago. These eyes had tears, mixed with smiles, with tenderness, with caring, with understanding. They didn't see a motorcycle gang. They didn't see us as a threat. They didn't see us as trouble. They didn't see a bunch of belligerent Vietnam vets trying to shove a statement up their ass. They applauded the reason we were there. They couldn't see the ghosts that rode with us, and in us. They applauded the gesture of our feelings toward the brothers and friends we were riding with and far, and the feelings we all felt but didn't share with them as we roared by. Not all, but most understood why we were there that day. A father in a too-small uniform the closet monsters shrunk, holding a baby and trying to salute at the same time, tears streaming down his face, a mother holding out flowers that we eagerly reached out for and took, a mother and dad holding the folded burial flag they got from a long ago funeral, probably a son or daughter we hear singing on the Wall as we ride past. Five Vietnam vets standing at rigid attention saluting, sailors in full uniform saluting, the little John F. Kennedy's of today saluting. World War II vets in wheel chairs being pushed by their sons or daughters or grandsons perilously close to the bikes, holding out feeble hands to be gently slapped by passing riders. We went out of our way to touch them. Some could still wear their uniforms and did so proudly, even leaning on canes, sucking air from green portable tanks attached to their little electric carts Wives and widows of vets from a lot of different wars, dressed in red, white and blue, blowing kisses and being proud; people of all colors reaching out to try and touch us as we pass, holding cameras, scrap books, flags and pushing baby carriages. Tourists just trying to cross the street wondering what the hell they had gotten themselves into as the D.C. police screamed them back to the curb and out of our way. A Marine in full dress uniform, standing dead still and at rigid attention in the middle of the road, not flinching an inch when riders came perilously close to running him over. He held his position and his salute for every one of us as we passed and saluted back. The police left him alone. The honor and respect shown and given by all those who rode before us, as they parked their bikes on the street and saluted and waved, as the rest of us finished the ride and did the same for those who followed behind us. It was a glorious, incredible, fantastic, marvelously, emotional day. We laughed and cried all the way. It was the best day of my life and I will be back. Not just to feel the highs and lows of the trip or the fear of driving 80 in the rain, or the time it took to get there, but to reverently touch my fingers against that Wall. We came for us, the adventure and the camaraderie of the Run....but we really came for them. We will be back..... You are not forgotten.

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By Roger "Cowboy" Mead

My 13 year old granddaughter, Danica, joined me in Ontario for the run. Her aunt Donna had left her senior year of high school a week early to ride her own bike cross country and join RFTW in Kentucky with me in 1989. Danica had heard about the experiences her aunt had on the Run and wanted to join my wife Karen and me. So Donna, Karen and I convinced her parents to let her get out of school 3 weeks early.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, on the 26th Slammer called her up during the riders meeting and advised all that it was common for everybody to have a road name. So after taking suggestions from the crowd a vote was taken and Danica became "Little Bit".

Then on the 28th at Woodstock during the Southern Route meeting Slammer again called her forward and announced that due to her performance, participation and involvement, he was making her a member of the RFTW family and was giving her a complete set of patches.

"Little Bit" did go All The Way with the Southern Route and she is trying to talk her parents into letting her ride at least some of the Run next year. I want to thank my RFTW family for giving a 13 year old a trip and memories of a life time that neither money nor school could supply. THANK YOU family.

Needless to say, I was one proud grandpa.

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IN HONOR OF A FATHER

By John King, Jr.

I'm John King and I'm from St. Michaels, Arizona. 2004 was my fifth year on the Run and the second time I've gone all the way with the Southern Route.

This year, I rode in honor of my father, who passed away a week before we began the Run in Ontario. He was a WWII bomber pilot, flying 36 combat missions in B-17s over France and Germany in the summer and autumn of 1944. Along the route and in Washington, we met quite a few WWII veterans, shook their hands and thanked them for what they did.

There were lots of good feelings among the Southern Route participants; a lot of friendship and encouragement. In Texas, a young soldier who had just returned from Afghanistan came and found us. Welcoming him home and thanking him for his service was a very good thing to do.

I worked as a rookie Road Guard and had a lot to learn about the Run and what it takes to get everyone safely across the country. It boils down to a lot of planning, hard work and hard riding.

The reward is trust with other riders and people riding smart and working together. We had good communications with all our Southern Route riders and support people and things worked out pretty well.

We conducted eight wreath-laying services at different Vietnam Memorials and Veteran's Cemeteries and visited patients at VA hospitals in Arizona, Alabama, Tennessee, and Virginia. School kids in Texas and Virginia put on fantastic programs that had us all laughing and crying. In so many towns, lots of proud Americans turned out to thank us for what we were doing and to cheer us on our way.

The ride itself was a great adventure. Nobody else rides in the kind of organized formation with scheduled routes the

way RFTW does. It requires commitment and discipline and, I think, makes you a better rider for having done it.

I rode 6,203 miles over 18 days. My bike, a 2002 FLHRI Road King, ran strong, had no problems, and did everything I asked of it, especially bringing me home safely.

Thanks to everyone who was a part of it all.

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WITHDRAWAL SPELLS

by Karen Spears Zacharias

OREGON -- Kate Halpin called me from Los Angeles in early June. She was sitting in a Starbucks, drinking coffee without me.

"I found this great Starbucks only 10 minutes from my house," Kate said. "It's in a neighborhood with Asian markets all around. I love these Asian stores and all their wonderful trinkets."

One of the more distasteful disadvantages to living in rural Oregon, "The nearest Starbucks to me is 30 minutes away, across the Columbia River, in Washington," I whined. We were both having withdrawal spells, and they weren't all caffeine-induced.

"I keep thinking I'll hear the roar of motorcycles in my drive," I said.

"Some of the riders haven't even gotten back home yet," Kate replied.

Little Big Mike got into Torrance, Calif., late Saturday. Tom arrived in Arkansas over the weekend. Ken is due to arrive in Oregon sometime Wednesday, maybe. What about Danny, Tim and Lou? Who knows? They were taking different routes.

"You're not going to believe what happened on Monday," Kate said, her voice a whisper. "My brother got a call from San Antonio. Do you know what that means?"

"No."

"San Antonio is where all the information for the MIA families comes from," Kate explained. "Whenever we get a call from San Antonio we know it has something to do with Richard."

"But wasn't Richard's body already returned for burial?" I asked.

"Yes," Kate replied. "18 years ago. But there were a dozen crew members on the plane, five remain unaccounted for.

"The Joint Task Force fellow called to tell us that they have done further excavation of the site and that they've recovered 10,000 more bone fragments."

"Ten-thousand?" I asked.

"Yes," Kate said. "Ten-thousand. And now they need blood and hair samples from us, Richard's siblings, because some of the bone fragments might actually belong to him."

During our trip across country, Kate and I had taped pictures of her brother and my father in the window of a pickup, next to a red KIA flag. Motorists throughout New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia had noticed those pictures as we drove past them.

Overwhelmed, Kate continued through her sobs, "Can you believe that call came on Monday?"

"It's incredible, isn't it?" I replied. "Like God's poetry or something. The whole mission behind Run for the Wall is to promote awareness of those Missing-in-Action and POWs. Here we just finished the Run and you get a phone call that could mean five more families will have their loved ones returned."

"I'm praying that they find something in all this for those five families," Kate said.

"Me, too," I replied. "I can't imagine waiting all those years for my father's remains to be returned home."

During the Run, I'd had a discussion with a guy who works with the Joint Task Force. He said one of the most difficult parts of his job is calling families who've already buried their loved ones and having to inform them that it appears more remains have been discovered. I told Kate about that conversation.

"I don't know what we'll do if some of the fragments turn out to be Richard's," Kate said. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. The important thing is helping the families who are still waiting for their MIAs."

#

Kate Halpin is only one of the hundreds of friends I encountered during my first ever Run for the Wall. We met that first morning, in Ontario, California, shortly before Central Route Coordinator Mark "StraightArrow" Rittermeyer offered up a send-off.

"We are just a bunch of old soldiers on another mission, riding for those who can't. The recruit in camp. The soldier, who, God forbid, might be at this very moment under fire in Baghdad. Those missing-in-action. Those killed-in-action."

Men like Kate's brother and my father.

#

I guess it was a given that I would love motorbikes. A genetic thing, really. Or perhaps it was learned. I was in second-grade when I rode one for the first time. It was a blue moped. Daddy had found it lying in the ditch on his way home from Schofield Barracks one afternoon. He'd pulled off the roadway, tossed the broken bike into the trunk, and brought it home.

"What the hell is that thing?" Mama asked. Daddy had taken the bike from the trunk and was trying to crank it up.

"Found it alongside the road. I'm gonna fix it up," he said.

And he did just that. In no time at all he'd transformed that moped into a dirt bike and was racing me and my sister, Linda, through the red dirt gulleys of the nearby pineapple fields.

That memory, of racing through those fields, is one that Linda and I grew to cherish most after Daddy was killed in Vietnam. I think it's because of the laughter the three of us shared as Daddy revved the engine on the bike and admonished us girls to not tell Mama how fast we were going. Never over 30 miles per hour, I'm sure.

It was this memory, the one of my father that I turned over and over in my mind during the 2004 Run for the Wall. I knew if Daddy could peek over Heaven's edge, he was undoubtedly tickled with what he saw.

#

Jackie McKinney, New Mexico State Coordinator had asked me to ride with him to Window Rock, capital of the Navajo Nation. We were at the head of the pack. Miles of lamplights strung out two-by-two behind us. The last time I was in such a procession, under police escort, was August 3, 1966. The day we buried Daddy at Andrew Johnson National Cemetery in Greeneville, Tennessee. McKinney didn't have a clue what I was thinking as he snaked along the S-curves, but our spirits seemed to meld there among the sacred.

That was the first of many such moments for me. Because I travel often in veteran circles, I had long heard about that holy of holies known as Angel Fire. I knew the story of Dr. Westphall. But nothing prepared me for the redeeming power of his memorial to his dead son, David, and the thousands of other Vietnam veterans who had left their country as brave young boys and returned home as brave but broken men. Surely, Dr. Westphall knew when he began building the memorial with his own hands that the magnificent Sangre De Cristo Mountains would provide the protection and healing that our Vietnam veterans longed for. As J. R. Franklin noted, "Dr. Westphall gave me a safe place to come to." Sangre De Cristo, the blood of Jesus. There's always redemption in the sacrifice of the innocent. Sometimes, we just need help finding it. Thank you, Dr. Westphall for helping so many rediscover their own souls.

#

Did I tell you about the people? They way they turned out in droves to cheer the Run along? They stood on street corners, waving flags the size of a napkin. And on overpasses, at full attention, in the noonday heat and again as an amber sun melted into a lavender dusk. They clapped from the back of pickups and honked and waved from the bucket seats of their BMWs. Some wore old uniforms or hats, replete with golden medals. Some held up posters with the names of loved ones long gone, but never forgotten.

When they weren't cheering us on, they were feeding us. Spaghetti, roast beef, turkey, chili burgers, mashed potatoes, potato salad, potato chips, green salad, bean salad, fruit salad, chocolate cake, banana pudding, sugar cookies, and black coffee, always plenty of black coffee.

Not that sissy stuff they serve at Starbucks for high-maintenance girls like Kate Halpin and me, a/k/a Sister Goldenhair. Nope. The coffee they served was pure-tee diesel fuel. Designed to keep a motor running, for hours. Or at least keep us running to the bathrooms.

The Run is the only time a woman gets to see a man wait in line for a urinal. Sometimes the line stretched out the doors of the convenience stores. During one such stop in Colorado, or was it Kansas, I earned the title as "Pee Guard" because I helped sneak men with stressed bladders in and out of the "ladies" room. I don't mind the moniker. I look for every opportunity I can to honor the veterans who served in Vietnam. I'm proud to have been the honorary "Pee Guard."

#

I found myself worrying about the riders, as if they were my own fathers, uncles, brothers, sons, or boyfriends. Kate and I prayed often as we passed over bad roads and through bad weather. Now I know why Elvis sounded so woeful when he sang "Kentucky Rain." The thunderous rain made me feel like howling too. I couldn't imagine how the bikers would push on through such blinding conditions, but they did so, and safely, too.

It was in Kentucky that I came to understand why people referred to the Run as a mission. And it was in Kentucky that I understood the depth, breath, and scope of how much Vietnam had changed things. Not just for my family

personally, but for our entire nation.

It was the sheer power of the Kentucky Vietnam Memorial, a gigantic sundial that moved me in ways I wasn't prepared for.

The shadow of the dial falls on the name of those killed in Vietnam on the anniversary date of their death, but the shadow never falls on those still missing-in-action. The Run's mission is the same as that of the Kentucky Vietnam Memorial – to pay honor to those who have died and to bring a glaring light to the men still missing-in-action.

Soldiers like those whose five families await word on whether it was their loved ones that were found at the crash site of Pilot Richard Halpin.

How long must these families endure the glare of such a loss? That's the question that drives each dedicated Run for the Wall member.

No matter how many years they travel from Los Angeles to D.C., Run for the Wall's mission will not be complete until every father, husband, son, brother and friend is returned home for a soldier's burial and a hero's welcome.

Karen Spears Zacharias is author of the forthcoming Hero Mama, William Morrow Co., Winter, 2005. She can be reached at www.heromama.org or by phone at 541.379.8572

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WHY?

By Anne Perry

Why would a group of veterans with their family members, friends, and supporters drive motorcycles all the way across the United States every May? We ride for those who can't, drawing attention to the fact that there continues to be many, many American soldiers from many conflicts who are POW/MIA. We want 100% accountability for those soldiers, and we want them brought home to America. We pray that their families find peace.

We also ride for ourselves...for the inspirations and healing we find along the route. In one of the RFTW newsletters of the past, my Vietnam vet husband, Frank, and I read that ALL of us who lived during the Vietnam War were affected by the conflict and the controversy surrounding it. "Gator" also wrote that ALL of us (veterans and non-veterans) need to deal with those times, how they affected (affect) us, and healing.

During the 2004 RFTW-SR, several of our observations gave credence to Gator's words. The gamut of emotions and feelings of friendship, mutual love and respect, and healing on the run amazed us daily. We would think, "WOW, those folks were so wonderful to welcome us like that!" It was true...they were! Then, after the next ride segment, there was more gracious hospitality. As with the RFTW-SR last year, inspirations occurred all the way across the United States for our veterans and riders. The healing was for ALL of us of ALL ages.

We were inspired by so many people and events; however, there is only space to mention a few here:

- the Young Marine in Phoenix who lead us all in singing and the Pledge of Allegiance;
- the veterans in the VA care centers all along the route;
- the Leathernecks' banners and flags on overpasses in AZ;
- two wreath layings in TX at the Permian Basin Memorial and the Big Spring Vietnam Veterans' Memorial (the granite map of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos is a favorite spot for RFTW vets to show others where they served);

- the Colorado City Middle School program with students, faculty, and local veterans hosting us on a Saturday for lunch;
- the young soldier, just returned from Afghanistan, who came out to meet us in Weatherford, TX;
- the traditional Mississippi hospitality with helicopter and escorts meeting us just after we crossed into the state; at Jackson Harley-Davidson, the Black Daggers parachuting and carrying the POW flag, as well as a beautiful POW table ceremony and the Trail of Honor;
- the Native American Dancers and their beautiful flute rendition of taps (thanks especially to Michael Serna) at Thunder Creek Harley-Davidson in Chattanooga, TN;
- the children and citizens of Wytheville and Montvale Elementary in Virginia;
- and single veterans and civilians along the way who came out to salute and greet us.

Among our favorites were chance meetings with people along the way who had come out to greet us. One WW II vet in Jackson, MS spoke quietly to grab our attention. In his wallet, he carried two photos of himself on his Harley-Davidson military motorcycle. What a privilege it was to meet him!

Also, there was Buster, a veteran we met last year at the Salem VAMC. Because I was driving a chase vehicle, I was one of the last RFTW participants into the VAMC. Buster was waiting outside the door for me with the same, beautiful smile and his communications device in his lap. He wheeled his chair out to walk with me and look at the bikes, and then we went back in to the lobby where we found Frank visiting with Sarge (and enjoying the conversation immensely). Buster looked at Frank and pushed a button on his device which announced that his name was Buster. Then he pushed another button which said, "I love you." Just as quickly, he turned away with his eyes glistening. We barely had time to call after him with our mutual, "We love you, too, Buster."

I watched three professional photographers working with our group during our run. One was a Vietnam Vet who rode with us, one might have lived during those times, but one was definitely younger. All of them struggled with the gamut of emotions on the trip and personally experienced the warmth and love of our welcoming, inspiring communities.

We all became acutely aware that many, many riders had relatives and/or friends currently on active duty in Iraq or Afghanistan. These active duty personnel were mentioned frequently and kept in our prayers. Frank carried a home-made flag representing Sgt. Tom Neal and his unit (3200 men and women in the 81st Brigade Combat Team currently stationed near Baghdad). We were honored to be able to support our troops in such a manner. This flag, along with the Rolling Guard flag of POW/MIAs from Texas went all the way to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial with Frank.

We continue to hope that our active American service men and women KNOW that we care about them. Our mission to be sure that 100% of American soldiers are accounted for and that no one is left behind is true for today's soldiers, also. We shall NEVER forget that freedom is NOT free. We owe ALL veterans, past and current, our gratitude for our freedom and our continuing support for the RFTW mission. Our hope is that we can inspire younger riders, their families, their friends, and more supporters to join us, taking up the Run For The Wall mission, and finding inspiration along the route.

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PERMA-GRIN

by Jil Echols

"Perma- grin", that is how one Road Guard described the feeling in Rainelle. That one word actually described my entire Run For The Wall experience. I was an FNG this year and joined the Run in Colorado Springs, not sure if my rear or my emotions would make it all the way to the Wall. My father, who had done the Run four times before 2004, had warned me about the emotional roller coaster. I cry at the drop of a hat under normal circumstances, so I fully expected to sob the entire way to D.C. I could not have been more wrong.

I did cry. How could I not? Soldiers missing, captured, wounded, broken, and killed, these things are a mother's worst nightmare. I hugged the mother of a young soldier who served in Iraq. She was standing beside his bed at the VA hospital in St. Louis. Words were inadequate to express my gratitude for her sacrifice, and certainly his. However, most of my tears were shed watching the healing of men and women who were facing their demons with others who understood. I have always hated to see others in pain. But what a bittersweet joy it was to see the healing in process, to see the 'once broken' rely on each other for a tender touch and reassuring hug. Watching gray-haired, leather-clad, motorcycle riding veterans reach out to each other with understanding and open hearts was certainly a life changing experience. Not something that can even be put into words.



I did smile, almost constantly. I was so warmly accepted into the Run family. At every stop someone would go out of their way to make sure I was doing okay and had everything I needed to continue. And the Run family is warmly supported by everyone it encounters, even a hotel manager who let us use the hotel dryers after a thunderstorm ride and opened the conference room so the tent campers could sleep on dry ground. I was in awe of the number of people who waited on overpasses and at corners to let the soldiers of wars long over, know that they were loved and appreciated. I smiled because I was able to see the heart of America. A heart that is broken for those who are still missing, bleeding for those who are gone forever, mindful of those who are healing, and thankful for those still protecting us to this day. I was smiling through the tears, in a way I never knew existed. *I will never forget.*

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THE CARE AND FEEDING OF VETERANS RETURNING FROM A COMBAT ZONE

Submitted by Omaha Mike

(This is geared toward the returning Vietnam Vet, but the thoughts certainly pertain to the return of our Iraqi Freedom Veterans of today.)

For those who love returning veterans:

- Never wake them up without staying out of reach and giving them ten seconds to get oriented.
- When you go to a restaurant, choose a table or booth where they can sit with their backs to the wall if they want to. Don't make a big deal about it, just do it. If they always pick the seat against the wall, then make it a point to do this always.
- Don't complain about small things. Small things are broken appliances and minor car crashes. If you don't believe this, try comparing that to seeing ten or twenty people burned under a napalm drop. Bitching about the price of gas pales in comparison.
- Don't sneak up behind them and surprise or scare them. In addition to the fact that it's rude, you won't like their response. Remember - they spent time in a place where a lot of the population wanted them dead. If you surprise them, you're asking for more than you can handle.
- Never say 'Don't you even care?' They do care, but it may take years for them to express it. First they have to deal with the emotional impact of that napalm drop.
- If they wake up in the middle of the night soaked in sweat, it isn't your fault and it's OK. It's just part of what they carry with them from the combat zone. They're remembering in their dreams. You can be sure the dreams are nightmares.
- Don't ask them what they were dreaming. They probably won't remember when they're awake, and, if they do remember, they won't want to tell you. Trust a veteran who's been there - you don't want to know what they were dreaming.
- If they wake up in the middle of the night and go around the house checking door locks and window locks, that's OK. They're just checking the perimeter.
- If you're upset about something, and try to talk about it with them, and they seem not to care, refer to the item above about the price of gas compared to a napalm drop. Find someone else to tell your story to. Don't pick a

member of the opposite sex. Pick a priest, minister, or same-sex friend (unless you're gay).

- If they sit and stare at the walls or TV for hours every day, go talk to (in this order) the people at your local Vet Center, then the local VA Hospital. Tell them what you're worried about (sitting and staring, or other unusual stuff). Don't talk to their commanders.
- Don't expect that the person who left is the same person who came home. War changes you. Get to know them again.
- If a car backfires and they hit the ground screaming "INCOMING!", don't laugh. They're embarrassed enough as it is. You can ask them if they'd like to go to their local Vet Center, etc., but don't press it.
- If they want to talk about the war, they will. If they start talking, PAY ATTENTION! If you can't handle it when they tell a funny thing that happened where someone died, toughen up and LISTEN TO THE REST OF WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY ANYWAY! They're opening up, and if you are repulsed by what they have to say and let them know it, that'll be the last time they ever talk to you about it.
- Don't take them into crowds unless they want to go and ask to go. If they get uncomfortable in a crowd and say something about leaving, leave without question, even if it's your favorite musical group playing. They may not know why they're uncomfortable in a crowd, and it might be unexpected to them, but you need to know that if they ask to leave, they're in agony. Appreciate that they've spent time in a place where many people around them were actively trying to kill them. Crowds of strangers get tough to be in after an experience like that.
- Don't talk politics, and don't talk against the war. Their friends are still over there, and anyone who speaks against their war or any war is attacking their friends. Forget politics - if you don't, you're choosing to throw your relationship away.
- Don't be surprised if they forget birthdays and anniversaries. Coming home from a combat zone means there are dates you need to forget, and sometimes the civilian dates get mixed in with the ones they need to forget, and all dates just go away.
- Don't fault them; they're carrying a burden you can't understand. They don't want you to understand it, because to understand, you would need to go through what they've been through, and they don't want that to happen to you. If you'd like to get an idea of what it is, watch a movie named "Fearless" starring Jeff Bridges. Watch it alone - they don't need to see anything like that until they're ready. (I cried and told my wife 'that's it - that's close to what it feels like' - and that was 20 years later - it takes TIME).
- Don't manipulate them. If you were able to manipulate them before the war, and try to do the same now, you're headed for a divorce. The phrase "Wouldn't you really like to..." no longer has a place in their relationships. If you want something, say it straight and make it yours.
- Don't think you have a better definition of words like HONESTY, or LOVE, or TRUST. They have experienced honesty, love, and trust coming from the innermost souls of those around them. They may not be able to describe what those words mean to them now, but you can bet they understand them.
- Don't be surprised if they no longer want to see old friends, but instead find (or have) new ones when they get home. They're different, and the things and people they liked before may not fit anymore.
- If they ever talk about someone who died, listen carefully. Ask what kind of person the lost friend was; find out what you can. Don't be surprised if they want to visit the friend's gravesite or family. This is a good sign, and you need to be prepared to support them. Help them honor the fallen in every way you can. (Hint - it took me twenty-five years to even acknowledge my friend's death... IT TAKES TIME!)
- Imagine this for yourself. You are next to someone; both of you hold rifles. You both see a tracer round coming straight toward you. You learn what love is then. God reaches down between you and your friend and removes the separation from between you, and you are spiritually joined in a physical way you have never experienced. You feel your friend's feelings completely. It is as if you are one person. Every one of your senses is heightened. For example, you can smell his fear - not figuratively, but really - it has a distinct and real smell. You are one person in two - not like in the marriage vows, but in reality. That is the kind of love experienced in war. It has a physical weight to it. Any question you ever had about love is gone - you now know exactly what it is.
- Last, remember this. Anyone who has experienced that kind of love knows better than millions of others what real love is. You have a returned soldier, sailor, or airman who has been given a gift of knowledge of love, and once they've worked through the horror that brought them that knowledge, you will have someone with a wisdom others can only dream of, and a capacity for loving that goes beyond anything you have ever

experienced. Welcome them home.

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AN FNG'S STORY

by Bruce Ullom

What the hell am I thinking? That's what I was saying to myself my first day on the road. I was heading west from Colorado Springs to Ontario, California. I was going to ride the Run For The Wall and if I was going to do it, I had to do, this first time, go All The Way. For me that meant starting in California.

I had just gone over the LaVeta pass and was dropping down to the little town of Ft. Garland before turning south to Taos, New Mexico. I had left Colorado Springs just ahead of a light snow storm and was hoping I wouldn't hit snow or rain in the pass. My luck held. No rain or snow, but it was plenty cold. I was riding by myself and was a half day and a couple of hundred miles into what would turn out to be a nineteen day, 6,000 mile journey. And here I was thinking, what the hell am I doing? I don't know anyone on this ride. I really don't know much about the ride or what to expect. I'm not even sure why I feel I need to make this ride, except something inside tells me I need to make it.

I arrive in Ontario Monday evening and make my first recon of the T/A truck stop. No sign of the RFTW, but I get my bearings. Tuesday I locate the motel where the most, if not all, the RFTW organizers are staying. As I walking from the parking lot to the hotel entrance, some guy, I don't remember who, comes up to me, welcomes me home and gives me a hug. I'm stunned and thinking, OK, how am I going to get through this. I wasn't prepared for this. (You need a little explanation on a personal level to understand this. First of all, the only time a man every hugged me was my dad and he only did it once. That was the day I came home from Vietnam. Understand he was a lifer Marine, a Mustang who served in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. At the time I didn't understand or appreciate what that hug meant. I do now. Secondly, the only time anyone welcomed me home as a Vietnam vet, it was a complete stranger. I stopped to talk to him in a parking lot because he had a bumper sticker of my Vietnam army unit. As I turned to walk away he called back to me and said, "Welcome home". That was in 1986, 17 years after I came home.) Anyway, I hadn't even started the run and the emotions came flooding out and again I'm saying to myself, "I'm not sure I'm ready for this". Anyway, I go into the hotel and sign-up and get my FNG pin. It's pink, but that's OK. I'm sure there's symbolism in there somewhere. Oh yeah, I get my second hug and welcome home. I haven't been there fifteen minutes. They tell me to be sure to wear the pin so it can be seen, it helps us know who the new guys are and, I didn't know why then, but I do now. It's special.

Wednesday morning comes. Day one. I'm up early and at the truck stop by 6:00am. What there was no sign of Monday evening is now there, bikes, trucks, trailers, signs, road guards and lots of people. They ask me what route I'm on. Central. They direct me where to line-up. I pull up side by side with what turns out to be one of the many and what I hope will be life-long friends I made on this ride. His name is Mike. He's from Ventura. He's an FNG and going All The Way. The bikes keep rolling in. The total I'm told was somewhere around four hundred. A TV helicopter is flying overhead. TV crews on the ground interviewing riders. It's quite a spectacle. Prior to leaving, our first riders meeting is held. Honor guards, speeches, instructions and prayers. We are reminded of why we ride. Something I remember and repeated many times while I rode. We ride for those who can't. Account. Honor. Heal. It's a mission. There are times on the run when the stress and frustration of riding side by side with one to one and a half second intervals gets to be too much. Remember the mission. Riding in the rain and hail of a thunderstorm outside Topeka. Remember the mission. And me without a windshield. Remember the mission.

You meet all kinds of people on the run, special people. In Barstow, at our first gas stop, I met Sizzmo, all FNG's need to meet Sizzmo. Those that have know why. And everyday, at gas stops, VFW and American Legion Halls, small rural towns and especially in Rainelle, you'll meet special people. Not just other veterans, but plain ordinary people, complete strangers who feed you a meal or a cup of coffee, stand in the pouring rain to wave or salute or just say welcome home and thank you.

I could go on for some time about my experiences on the run, but there's neither the time nor the space. At the beginning I said I wasn't exactly sure why I needed to make this ride, just that I needed to make it. Now I know why. It's the healing part of the mission, especially for an FNG. Like most Vietnam veterans, there was a huge void, a hole, inside us that we were unable to understand. Some of it has to do with our experiences over there, what we did, what we didn't do. Some is the sorrow of comrades lost or the weight of having made it home when others didn't. And some is the guilt when people blamed the GI's for the war, our service and our comrade's sacrifice not being recognized or a nation that never welcomed its soldier's home. For some of our brothers that was more than they could bear. For some of us it was a pain and disappointment we push deep down inside, never ashamed to be a Vietnam veteran, but not overtly proud either. Our nation has slowly come to recognize, appreciate and honor the men and women who serve this country. And with that recognition they have, almost sheepishly, but sincerely, begun to thank Vietnam veterans for their service.

For me the run was a 3,000 mile welcome home, one I never received thirty-five years ago. It made me proud to be a Vietnam veteran. It made me more proud our country learned a lesson which I hope they never forget. That the freedom we enjoy as a nation is a result of the service and sacrifice of its soldiers.

To anyone considering doing this run for the first time, all I have to say is, "Do It". Get on that bike and join us. I promise you will near regret and you will never forget. Wear your FNG pin with pride.

I would like to say to everyone on the run, thank you. It was an experience of a lifetime. You can only be an RFTW FNG once. To the organizers, leaders, road guards, pace setters, volunteers and supporters, thank you is not enough. Simply put, the ride would not exist without your dedication, hard work and support. It is appreciated. To all the veterans, welcome home, thank you for your service and for my freedom. It was a privilege and honor to serve with you.

(Bruce actually wrote this article about his first trip with RFTW in 2003. I am very happy to say that he was back for his second experience with RFTW XVI in 2004! – Sandra)

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BITS AND PIECES:

WORDS OF WISDOM

by Richard "Skeater" Skeate

Here is the great quote that Steve "Two Lane" Paszek came up with as we rode into Arlington this year. As we viewed the "Gardens of Stone", he said:

"YOU PLANT AMERICAN HEARTS, WATER WITH AMERICAN BLOOD, AND YOU GROW FREEDOM".

I get goose-bumps remembering the feeling we both had right after he said it. You can't tell me that places like Arlington and The Wall don't have the presence of the Spirit with them.

SEMPER FI

OUR PRAYERS FOR AMY RUSSELL

Amy Russell was injured while she and her husband, Tim, were on their way home from Pikes Peak Harley-Davidson. Their motorcycle was hit by a truck at a cross-road. Amy is no longer in the hospital, having been "stabilized" as best as possible. She was transferred to a rehab facility in the Denver metro area a short time ago and although she is no longer under a drug induced coma, she continues to be "semi-comatose". I don't know all the daily details of this, what I do know is that the prognosis for her is unknown. Her doctor's are cautiously optimistic, but won't say much more than that. She experiences some periods of being aware of her surroundings, and then at other times "slips back into the fog". It is a day-by-day thing. Prayers are encouraged for God to continue to work His ways as He continues to reveal His purpose and will in all of this. Tim was not seriously injured and is doing well. We pray for Tim, also, for strength to help Amy throughout her healing.

SOUTHERN ROUTE PICTORIAL REVIEW OF 2004 RUN

Check out this great web-site for a fantastic pictorial review of the Southern Route 2004 Run.

<http://www.rftwsr-2004.us> . Anne Perry has done a great job here. Kudos to Anne for the fine work.

ARTICLE IN AMERICAN RIDER MAGAZINE

Mark Langello, the professional photographer who traveled with the Southern Route in Jackson, Wytheville, Montvale and on to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, has notified us that he will have an article published in the issue of *American Rider* which will be on the newsstands August 24, 2004.

VETERINARIAN

Kathy Simpson is a school teacher, so she was overwhelmed with emotions as we made our stop at the Rainelle Elementary School. She got a moment of levity as she overheard a young student at Rainelle looking up at a burly biker and ask: "Are you a Veterinarian?"

10 MILLION PINS

Jackie "BestMan" McKinney was sharing a moment with a young student at Rainelle School. The child asked many questions about motorcycles and riding with RFTW. After a few moments, he looked up and touched Jackie's vest and said: "Wow, you must have 10 million pins on your vest!"

GREAT NEWS FROM JPAC

The RFTW Central Route participants were wowed by the program that was presented by SFC. Robert Bryson, of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. Many were not aware of the repatriation work being done by JPAC. Right after our return from the Run, we received this fantastic news from SFC. Bryson:

Col. James Louis CARTER,

Maj. Wilbur Ronald BROWN,
CMSgt. Edward Milton PARSLEY, and
CMSgt Therman Morris WALLER, REFNO 248, U.S. Air Force,

All lost in South Vietnam, were identified June 7, 2004.

MANY MAHALOS FROM PATO PATO

Fred "Pato Pato" Pepper would like you all to know that he is home in Honolulu and healing from his mishap on the Run. He certainly appreciates the fast help he received after the accident and a BIG THANKS to all of the people who did stop to help him out....many mahalos for that from Pato. The Barbarian Bitch (as he so fondly calls his motorcycle) has also arrived back in Honolulu and it is receiving the attention it needs for healing, too!

JOHN FINN, MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT, FALLS AT WWII MEMORIAL DEDICATION

John Finn, MOH recipient and guest speaker at the RFTW BBQ in April, 2003, had fallen during the WWII Memorial dedication. The information came from Martha Ussery, sister of Fohn Finn. Further details indicated he fell and was assisted to his feet by George H. Bush and Bill Clinton. He suffered a broken pelvis and is recovering at:

Veterans Home of California
Room 1309
700 E. Naples Court
Chula Vista, CA 91911
Room phone: (619) 205-1159

His nephew Vance, who was with Mr. Finn at the Highland BBQ in April, 2003 and now lives in Oregon, said he was in good spirits and would welcome visits and calls.

Please give him a call or send a note, he would appreciate that very much.

SOUTHERN ROUTE D-DAY MEMORIAL, BEDFORD, VA., PICTURES.

From Jeff East

Here is the website for the pictures taken at the D-Day Memorial. <http://www.theimagemill.net>

You may access the photos of this year's event through the "proofs" link at the bottom of the page. Your site is listed and password protected for your privacy, the password is RFTW. It was a pleasure and

privilege to meet all of you and I hope to see you again next year.

RFTW CENTRAL ROUTE 2004 JOURNAL FROM KAREN ZACHARIAS

Check out this great journal from Karen Zacharias. It is beautifully written and peppered with awesome pictures of the Central Route Run. Sign on to <http://www.heromama.org/rftw2004/>.

STEAK ON THE RUN!

From Buddy "aloha" Haskell
Chaplain, Southern Route 2004

Some do not realize it, but Southern Route this year was served free, yes free steak at their first night's dinner. That would have been in Phoenix where the meal was provided at the VAMC by the Church of the Son. This connection was made some years ago by now deceased WWII POW Don Weaver. Pastor Ruth, who as always, served up a great meal, said "You folks are eating STEAK, rather than hamburgers and hot dogs, tonight because the local VVA gave me \$500 for this meal yesterday!"

Oorah and Praise the Lord, may He bless Pastor Ruth and the local VVA. It was mighty good chow and I'll bet Don was standing up there at the "Pearly Gates" just looking down and smiling from ear to ear.

GOD BLESS THE CHILDREN

From Don "9 Ball" and Della "Pocket" Morris

This was Della's and my fourth "Run" and what a "Run" it was. The enthusiasm of the children in Colorado City, Wytheville and Montvale brought out all the emotions: exhilaration, pride, joy, tears and the awareness that there are young people in this country that understand the costs of freedom. They know and understand the sacrifices that have been made by veterans from all the branches of the military including those presently serving. And, they really know how to "Welcome Us Home". We look forward to seeing the future of our country in 2005 and beyond.

God Bless Them and God Bless America!

LOOKING FOR THE 2005 T-SHIRT DESIGN

Is your artistic ability aching to bust out?? RFTW is now searching for a design for the 2005 T-Shirt. Put your idea down on paper and send it to:

John "Slammer" Gebhards
881 Innsbrook Dr.
Innsbrook, MO 63390
(636)745-2458
jeg1576@onemain.com

This will be Run For The Wall XVII. Our shirts just keep getting better and better every year, and I know there is the best design ever just waiting to be printed. Your deadline for submitting your entry to "Slammer" is September 1, 2004.

The designs are reviewed by the Board of Directors and the choice is made by them. What an honor it would be if your design were chosen to be worn by hundreds as we ride across the country in 2005. So, get your thinking cap on

and get your artist's pen in gear. We look forward to something new and creative for 2005!

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NEW BOARD MEMBERS AND 2005 ROUTE COORDINATORS CHOSEN

At a recent Board of Directors meeting, three new Board Members were chosen. John "Slammer" Gebhards and Sandra "LittleBit" McKinney were elected to three-year terms. Sally Marie "SizzMo" Down was chosen to complete a vacated one-year term. Congratulations to John, Sandra and Sally. We know they will do a great job on the Board.

The Board of Director Officers were elected as follows:

Milo "Nayber" Gordon.....President
John "Slammer" Gebhards.....Chairman of the Board
Sandra "LittleBit" McKinney...Secretary/Treasurer

Also, Route Coordinators for 2005 were chosen:

J. R. "Cleaner" Franklin - Central Route Coordinator for 2005
E-mail: jrfe6@aol.com

John "Slammer" Gebhards Southern Route Coordinator for 2005
Email: jeg1576@onemain.com

Congratulations to J.R. and John on their appointments. Please give them all the help and respect they deserve.

The date for Run For The Wall XVII was also set: We will depart Ontario, California on Wednesday, May 18, 2005 and arrive in Washington, D.C. on Friday, May 27, 2005.

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THE MAGIC OF RFTW

by SFC. Steve Squires

My name is Steve Squires and I live in O'Fallon, MO. I am a soldier serving on active duty. Currently my wife, Missy, is also on active duty, and is deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I did the Run For The Wall in '02 and it was a very rewarding experience. I was not able to participate in '03 due to her leaving during the time frame of the Run. This year I really wanted to participate, but I also wanted to have my 10 year old son, David, witness some of the magic that happens on the Run.

We went to Salina, KS to meet the riders. This year I drove a support vehicle. We got to the campground a day earlier than the riders arrived and we set up camp. Later in the evening a couple rode in on their bikes and we started talking. His name is Eric and goes by 'Easy' and her name is Terry. During the conversation I introduced David to them. I also told them about my wife, David's mother, Missy, who is currently deployed. At that point Easy made it a point to shake David's hand, show him around the area and even teach him how to use a divining rod. When they were ready to leave later that evening, Easy made it a point to, again, shake David's hand and tell him goodbye. The next day, Sunday, after the riders came in, David had hurt his knee. Nothing bad, just a little pain. Easy and Terry showed up later and made it a point to say hello to David. Terry saw that he was hurting a little and directed Easy to go and get him an Ace bandage and some aspirin. Easy did this and Terry applied the bandage and made sure David was okay. The kindness these people showed was just overwhelming! Easy and Terry did not have to do what they did, but they did it out of sheer kindness. They left a little later and David asked me, "Does this always happen on the Run For The

Wall?" I told him that this is a mission and a lot of wonderful things happen that makes the Veterans cope a little better with things that have happened in the past. He then asked me if his Mom would have to do something like this to feel better. All I could tell him at that point was, "I don't know, she will have some frustration and mixed feelings when she returns. If she needs to, an event like this would definitely help her."

David is a very bright and loving child. When I first told him that he was going to go with me on this Run, he asked me why he should go. I told him that it was to help out some men who fought bravely for our country and who are having some problems stemming from serving their country. He told me that he would like to help in any way he could. I had to look away so he would not see my tears welling up. Before he hurt his knee on Sunday and right after all of the riders made it in, I saw him going around and helping some of the guys set up their campsite. I was so proud of him.

While we were riding down the highway, we were passed by a group of the Road Guards. David saw them and was totally impressed. When they passed us they waved and nodded. David told me that when he gets older he wants to do that. He said it was totally cool.

We got to Wentzville the following Monday and David got to ride into the VFW on the lead bike ridden by the Missouri State Coordinator Jim 'Sidecar' David. My son later told me that it was an awesome feeling riding in and seeing all of the people out there.

Next year we will ride once again, this time I will be on my bike and my wife has already agreed to drive the support vehicle with David. I can hardly wait.

Thanks for what you do, thanks to our Veterans, and may God bless them all.

(Post-script – I received a note from Steve that his wife Missy will be home on leave starting May 15. They have not seen each other since May 14, 2003. We pray their time together will be blessed. -Sandra)

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REFLECTIONS ON THE RUN

by Richie Rich, 1st Cav. 5/7 (1970)

Hello my name is Richard Cole, a/k/a "Richie Rich" or "Point Man". RFTW 2004 was my first. I linked up with you in Knoxville, TN on the Southern Route. Like most things that are first in our lives they tend to be the best. Time will tell, but if the Runs get better than this one was, I will not need my bike, I will just fly along beside you all. It was great! I was blessed with the task of riding Missing Man. Words have not yet been found to praise what took place within me. Almost the full year of Vietnam passed by in that two hour ride. Faces and things I thought were buried long ago came flying by at a speed much faster than we were running. It helped me most when I got to the Wall. Most all the ghosts I had locked away were left at the Wall...Maybe not all, but a lot of them. Anyway I thank God for the opportunity of riding Missing Man. I made new friends on this trip like Aloha & Debbie, what good people they all are. They asked me to share this poem. While I was praying, I asked God to give me something to help someone on this trip, this is the answer I got:

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WHO ARE HEROES

I sit here on the lawn for the first time,

although my thoughts have been here many times before,
Looking at this Wall wondering why, how come, what for,
Heroes one and all.

Not just these, but those before and yet to come,
Heroes one and all.

Heroes are not just those with medals on their chest,
but those who have given and are yet to give their very best,
Heroes one and all.

Time will not recall the names of them that burned the flag
and yelled hell no, we won't go. It will only recall
Heroes one and all.

Heroes are not just those who fell but those who carry the memories as well,
Heroes one and all.

Now my eyes are dim and my hands are weak, but yet I hear a child speak
Who are heroes? Out came the answer so strong and true, those in front of you....
Heroes one and all.

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“WHEN THE LORD WAS CREATING VIETNAM VETS”

Reprinted with permission by David L. Griffith

When the Lord was creating Vietnam Veterans, He was into His 6th day of overtime when an angel appeared.

“You’re certainly doing a lot of fiddling around on this one.”

And God said, “Have you seen the specs on this order? A Nam vet has to be able to run 5 miles through the bush with a full pack on, endure with barely any sleep for days, enter tunnels his higher ups wouldn’t consider doing, and keep his weapons clean and operable. He has to be able to sit in his hole all night during an attack, hold his buddies as they die, walk point in unfamiliar territory known to be VC infested, and somehow keep his senses alert for danger. He has to be in top physical condition existing on c-rats and very little rest. And he has to have 6 pairs of hands.”

The angel shook his head slowly and said, “6 pair of hands....no way.”

The Lord says “It’s not the hands that are causing me problems....It’s the 3 pair of eyes a Nam vet has to have.”

That’s on the standard model?” asked the angel.

The Lord nodded. “One pair that sees through elephant grass, another pair here in the side of his head for his buddies, another pair here in front that can look reassuringly at his bleeding, fellow soldier and say, “You’ll make it”.....when he knows he won’t.

Lord, rest, and work on this tomorrow.”

“I can’t,” said the Lord. “I already have a model that can carry a wounded soldier 1,000 yards during a firefight, calm

the fears of the latest FNG, and feed a family of 4 on a grunt's paycheck."

The angel walked around the model and said, "Can it think?"

"You bet," said the Lord. "It can quote much of the UCMJ, recite all his general orders, and engage in a search and destroy mission in less time than it takes for his fellow Americans back home to discuss the morality of the War, and still keep his sense of humor."

"This Nam vet also has phenomenal personal control, He can deal with ambushes from hell, comfort a fallen soldier's family, and then read in his hometown paper how Nam vets are baby killers, psychos, addicts, killers of innocent civilians."

The Lord gazed into the future and said, "He will also endure being vilified and spit on when he returns home, rejected and crucified by the very ones he fought for."

Finally, the angel slowly ran his finger across the vet's cheek, and said, "There's a leak...I told you that you were trying to put too much into this model."

"That's not a leak", said the Lord. "That's a tear."

"What's the tear for?" asked the angel.

"It's for bottled up emotions, for holding fallen soldiers as they die, for commitment to that funny piece of cloth called the American flag, for the terror of living with PTSD for decades after the war, alone with it's demons with no one to care or help.

You're a genius, said the angel, casting a gaze at the tear.

The Lord looked very somber, as if seeing down eternity's distant shores..."I didn't put it there," He said.

The angel paused for reflection.....God Bless Nam Vets!

(You can see more of David L. Griffith's work at www.palletmastersworkshop.com)

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RFTW – SATISFYING AND ENJOYABLE

by Don Morris and Della Morris

WOW, What a ride this year. You are all to be commended for your efforts. State Coordinators, we could not do this without you. All the planning and organization of the stops was incredible. The only problem I see is I think we are about maxed out for time each day. Wish the ride was twice as long so we could make more stops along the way. Leadership Team, it just goes to show that planning works. I feel we all did a good job at dealing with minor challenges along the way. Especially with the numbers that joined us this year. Shirley "Top Sarge, what can I say. We love you. Over 800 registered and many, like Terrell, in a short amount of time to keep us as close to schedule as possible. Della and I have never been involved with such an extraordinary group of people as RFTW. I thought we were going to take a little break before starting on next year, however, I am getting at least a dozen e-mails a day and they are talking about minor changes and improvements that will make RFTW 2005 even better.

Della and I along with Ron (1st Platoon Leader), Bob and Joyce (helped with merchandise) and Rayman (left us in

Lebanon, MO) got home about 9:00 am Friday morning before it got too warm. We had a pleasant ride home with very little rain. Dodged some tornado warnings in Amarillo and woke up to mostly clear skies. Della was back grooming dogs on Saturday morning and I was back on the range training folks to ride Saturday and Sunday morning. This is our fourth ride and it seems like each year is unique, however, they just keep getting better and better. Like most of you we will be back next year ready to keep the POW/MIA issue at the forefront, help with the healing process for Veterans and their families and look forward to keeping the youth informed. After this year I think we are all realizing that many of them are not only informed but are very appreciative of their freedom and the price that many paid for that freedom. If I started talking about each of the incredible stops I would end up writing a book so I will just say thank you all for making this another successful journey.

Much Love and Blessings, Don "9-Ball" and Della "Li'l 9-Ball"

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BIG DOG MOTORCYCLE WINNER

By Frederick "Rick" Little

Thank you to Run For The Wall, Sky Pilot, John Scott, Big Dog Motorcycles, and all the people who participated in and supported this year's Run For The Wall.



I am still in awe that one of the tickets I purchased in support of RFTW was drawn as the winner of the POW/MIA, Big Dog, Pitbull, Motorcycle. Of course, I had hopes of being the lucky one to win such a beautiful machine, but more important was the support of the cause and goals of RFTW. Since being declared the winner I have wondered why I was the chosen one and what my role should be in further support of RFTW and all POW's and MIA's. With the honor I have been bestowed, I would like to offer my services for next year's Run For The Wall. I have been with the start of RFTW since 1995, but it took me until 1999 to go all the way. In 2000 I rode as far as Angel Fire when I had to turn back because of a friend's bike problems. I very much enjoy riding motorcycles, and if I am needed as a Road Guard or Pace Setter for next year's Run, I would be honored to serve.

I would also like to thank everybody who supported and participated in making this year's Run For The Wall an enjoyable and successful mission. It is quite a feeling to see and feel the support we get as RFTW travels across this wonderful country.

Thank You and God Bless,
"Bugler"
Frederick Richard (Rick) Little

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VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL TO BE CLOSED FOR LIGHTING REPLACEMENTS

June 23, 2004

A \$1 Million Lighting Replacement Construction is underway for the next five months.

A Press Conference was held to discuss Wall closings at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial through October due to \$1 million replacement of a 19-year-old lighting system. The East Wall was closed to visitors on Friday, June 11 and will remain closed through mid-August. When it reopens, the West Wall will close and be under construction through October. The contractor will conduct a media tour of the construction site.

While closing of the most visited monument in Washington will prevent friends, loved ones and the general public from visiting some of the more than 58,000 names on The Wall for the next five months, a new lighting system is needed. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is paying for the renovations that will illuminate the entire 144 panels of the black granite memorial; and apologizes for any inconvenience the project may cause to visitors.

BACKGROUND: Established in 1979, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is the non-profit organization authorized by Congress to build the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Today, through a series of outreach programs, the organization works to preserve the legacy of The Wall, to promote healing and to educate about the impact of the Vietnam War. The Memorial Fund and the National Park Service have been working together on maintenance issues and special events at the Memorial for more than 20 years. The National Park Service provides visitor services and maintains the Memorial on the two-acre grounds; however, the Memorial Fund underwrites the costs of annual ceremonies, special events and long-term maintenance projects.

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**RUN FOR THE WALL
POW/MIA**

By Debbie "Faith" Haskell
January 2004

(For my husband "Aloha")

There are rows and rows of men riding,
You go all the way, facing the pain, no longer hiding,
I look into your eyes and it's plain to see,
The horrors you survived, the war you fought
You fought for me,
Tears stream down your face for all the pain,
You hold inside your comrade's name,
Your friend, your brother the ones
Who fought but no longer remain,
It's in your heart the safest place,
You store the memory of his face,
It is honor and respect our veterans deserve,
For it was **OUR COUNTRY YOU SO PROUDLY SERVED,**
We must **NEVER** forget, and raise the Colors high,
And ride forever to keep POW/MIA memory alive.



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"VETERANS, WHO DO THEY THINK THEY ARE?"

by Laurel A. Olmsted

Wife of a Veteran, Proud Mother of two Veterans.

They are the men and women who live every day in pain.

Physical pain from their wounds, lost limbs, or maybe it's the shrapnel they still carry.

Emotional pain from being separated from their families for long periods of time.

For missing the birth of their child, or death of a parent.

Mental pain for what they have seen and what they had to do.

Pain from knowing that they would have died for you and you are not wise enough to know you should care.

They are the ones who make life-long friends.

They know how precious life is and they never forget the ones who didn't make it back. Never.

That is why you will see Veteran's at the cemetery on Memorial Day walking around and silently thanking the ones who are buried there.

They don't have to know them personally to know the sacrifice each one made.

They are the ones who are loud and boisterous.

They are the ones who are quiet.

They are the ones who shivered in the foxhole, trying to keep the enemy at bay.

They are the ones who crawled through sand when the temperature was 126 degrees.

They are the ones who carried their buddy to safety.

They are the ones who sometimes drink too much, trying to keep the memories from haunting them.

They are the ones who carry the flag with the honor and respect it deserves.

They are the ones who wear their military uniform with pride and still have it in their closet 30 some years later.

They are the ones who don't ask you to go out of your way for them.

They are the ones who have gone out of their way for you.

They are the ones who spent many nights awake on guard duty so you didn't have to.

They are the ones who helped keep our shores safe while you played video games.

They are the ones who missed their birthdays, anniversaries, and other important dates.

They are the ones who got shot and got sent home, but felt guilty because their buddies were still there.

They are the ones who followed orders even when they didn't want to.

They are the ones who had enough love and pride in their country to do a job many others couldn't do.

They are the ones who stepped up when the call went out.
They are the ones who ate MRE's till they were sick of them.
They are the ones who cried "Medic" at the top of their lungs though they couldn't even hear their own voice.
They are the ones who cried when they were alone in their tent.
They are the ones who flew planes, drove tanks, worked a ship, and armed the missiles.
They are the ones who had moms at homes praying for them every minute of every day.
They are the ones who made it safe for you so you could go to school or work.
They are the ones who missed ordering pizza, the movies, the shopping trips, and all that you take for granted.
They are the ones who asked to take a friend's deployment because that friend had a family.
They are the ones who gave their girlfriends a lock of their hair to keep as a promise of their return.
They are the ones who wanted to come home
They are the ones who didn't return.
They are the ones who waited months for a letter.
How can you not wait one day?

God Bless Our Veterans! Amen

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NO GREATER LOVE

By Chaplain Russ Cockrum

"There is no greater love than this - that a man should lay down his life for his friends." That's a direct quote from the Bible. Jesus himself spoke those very words recorded in The Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 13. I was honored and blessed this May 2004 to spend 10 days with a group of men and women who probably understand those words better than any Bible scholar, theologian, priest or pastor. They understand it because they've lived it. Continuing to mourn for friends who laid down their lives for them, they seldom speak about the times they placed themselves in harms way for others.

As Chaplain for the 2004 Run For The Wall Central Route, I would like one more opportunity to leave the riders of this years RFTW with one last prayer and challenge. I know there are many of you who continue to struggle with things that took place during your time in the military. The Whys?? will probably never be answered. The wrongs never righted. The memories never forgotten. And, obviously the lessons never learned. Like our fathers in WWII and now our sons and daughters in Iraq and Afghanistan, we know there will always be some enemy somewhere to threaten peace and freedom in the world. And, as a result, there will always be friends laying down lives for friends, unanswered questions, un-righted wrongs and memories that cannot be forgotten.

God's word warns that there will always be "wars and rumors of wars". That's not how He planned it, but, since man thought he knew better, that's how it is. Even though the world seems completely out of control and unable to learn from mistakes made over and over again, God promises a "peace that's unimaginable" for those who would trust in Him. He offers forgiveness so complete that God, himself, says he won't be able to remember the mistakes we made. Trust Him. Give God a chance. He loves you so much that he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to lay down his life, not just for a few close friends, but for the world, if only they will receive.

Use this prayer if you like to ask God for His peace and forgiveness.

"Heavenly Father, I need your peace in my life. I've made more mistakes than I can ever remember to ask for your forgiveness. But, if you say you love me, and forgive me the way I am, than I accept your offer. Thank you for sending your Son into the world. I accept him as a friend who has willingly laid down his life for me. I just want to be who you want me to be. With your help, I know I can be. Amen

Chaplain Russ
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RALLY OF A LIFE TIME

From Capt. Moon

We departed HHC with 22 bikes, and three wives rode with their spouses. Once we arrived at the Tomahawk Truck Stop we linked up with ten more soldiers, and over 200 other riders that were waiting for the RFTW main body. Meanwhile, at Pikes Peak Harley-Davidson, my wife, Chantelle said that there were so many riders, bikes were overflowed to the church parking lot across the main road.

At the truck stop, CSM Cheesebrew took charge of the troops and tucked us away from the main group. I started to make contact with the Road Guards (Advance Guard) who were 30 minutes ahead of the main body and I was told to sit and wait. They initially wanted nothing to do with anyone. After a brief 15 minute break, the Road Guard Captain came to me and expressed his appreciation for our service and they warmed up to us a little. By that time, CSM Cheesebrew had moved the soldiers three times to the final staging area, near the exit of the truck stop.

A few minutes later, the main body came thundering in. There were over 300 riders! They fueled up and positioned themselves next to our formation. Once the riders saw the DCUs waiting at their bikes, the emotions began to flow. Riders dismounted and began hugging all of the soldiers. Jim Jones, the Colorado area coordinator rolled passed our formation asking for CPT Moon and found me. We embraced and finalized our much talked about plan. The 4 ID soldiers were to ride behind the “Pacesetters,” who were 50 meters from the group leaders. We were to lead this 3 to 5 mile monster into Colorado Springs for lunch, and then to Hugo for dinner. The one way trip would take us over 100 miles.

I – 25 was blocked off to north bound traffic, as the flags and banners were uncased for the rolling parade. HHC’s guidon was proudly secured by CSM Cheesebrew’s wife. We started our way north on I-25, and as soon as we began rolling, people were on the side of the interstate and positioned on the overpasses waving flags and saluting the precession.

We approached the North Nevada exit towards the entrance of Pikes Peak Harley Davidson. The crowd formed a corridor for the pilgrims, the band was playing, and Marine detachment presented the Colors. The event staff guided the riders to the next intermediate staging area. Once we stopped our engines, more veterans walked to the soldiers and embraced them. They welcomed us home, as they wish they would have been welcomed. As soon as we were ready, Jim Wear, the event promoter, began the ceremony. At Jim’s request, a delegation of soldiers in DCUs formed an impromptu formation of 40 men and women. CSM Cheesebrew conducted the roll call, and the crowd of 3,000 stood silent, as many shed tears for the eight Striker Soldiers that would not be able to share this day.

Once the ceremony was complete, the 40 soldiers were placed in front of the group which grew to nearly 400 riders. The 3 mile column, two riders abreast, was staged parallel to I – 25. The formation made its way to Woodman Road and drove east towards Highway 24, as Colorado Springs Police Department stopped all traffic upto the city limit. At every intersection either an MIA/POW Flag was being waved or a veteran was standing attention with a hard solid salute. Every posted police officer rendered proper courtesy as he ensured our safe, uninterrupted passage. The group reached the city limits and their road guards took charge, with their own emergency flashing lights. Outside the confines of the city the buildings gave way to rolling hills. Yet, the flags still waved and a different veteran still stood along side the road, saluting.

We rode through the small towns of Peyton, Ramah, Calhan, and finally Limon where its residents waited for the rolling parade. The citizens lined Highway 24 with lawn chairs and flags. Some had motorcycles ready to fall in the rear of this thundering dragon. But the patriotism, honor and dignity of our nation shined brighter through these small towns than the glimmering lights of any big city. The emotional excitement was too much for many of the soldier to handle. The tears rolled from their eyes, under their helmets and into the wind, as they each waved or honked their horns at their newly found brothers and sisters.

The one way journey ended in Hugo, a small town 15 to 20 miles east of Limon. The members of the local VFW conducted the empty table ceremony in memory of the soldiers that would not be dining with the group that evening. Afterwards, the soldiers were treated as kings, when a corridor of veterans and citizens alike was formed in order to allow them entry into the VFW hall. The center tables of this hall were set aside for the new found heroes. They were to be welcomed home the way their older brothers and sisters should have been welcomed 35 years earlier.

Once the evening was over, all that remained were 15 of the formation of 40. The seniors of the Run for the Wall group said that there was room for the 15 of us to go all the way to D.C. But, we reluctantly declined to be a part of yet another experience of a lifetime. They mounted up their steeds of iron and road off into the early evening. Half of the group retraced the previous route while seven decided to ride 100 miles to Denver and back south 70 miles to Colorado Springs. By 10:00 pm the soldiers were exhausted as if they walked the 25 mile "Bayonet" Basic Training graduation foot march on the back roads of Fort Benning, Ga. Their hearts were just as emotionally overwhelmed from the experience that only a veteran can fully comprehend and appreciate.

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A SACRED GIFT

By Jim "Jumper" Braga



On the Run last year in 2003 when we arrived at Window Rock, Arizona I met up with Earl Milford who is Navajo and lives on the Navajo reservation. Earl and I served together in Vietnam. That was the first time I had seen him since 1966. This year Earl was waiting for me at Window Rock and presented me with an incredible gift that I am wearing in this photo. This is the Navajo warrior's battle sash. In old times the Navajo wore this sash into battle. Earl is a warrior that served his country in Vietnam, which is the reason for the battle sash being in the former colors of the South Vietnam flag. This was his battle sash. I was informed by his daughter that

this is very spiritual and sacred to the Navajo warrior. I was very honored and humbled by this gift and was told to treat the gift with reverence. The photo is of Earl Milford and me wearing the sash.

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A WIFE'S PERSPECTIVE

By Janet S. Wells

I am the wife of a Viet-Nam veteran and this was my first year to participate in the Run For The Wall. I worried for weeks about what to wear, what to pack, and how I would fit into the group. Then I arrived in Ontario and realized that none of my worries mattered. The camaraderie and support that the group showed to each other was phenomenal.

Terry protected our three daughters and me from what he went through in VietNam, so I was not able to help him over the pain that he experienced when he returned home. That is what made this trip so important. He was able to get with his comrades and vent the things that he needed to get out of his system and I was waiting in the wings, so to

speaking, to give support to him when it was needed.

The greatest enlightenment was to our extended family. They were unaware that we might still have men held captive from previous wars and that we need to keep people aware and get them home. The support that they showed gave us such a lift. And who could not feel pride riding at the end of a column that stretched to the horizon and beyond.

To go through small town America and see a flag on almost every house, business, and flagpole; made it seem like all that we went through was worthwhile. Nothing could seem more patriotic than being in Washington DC on Memorial Day. And the honor of laying a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier is something that I will never forget.

As the threat of terrorist hitting our country makes us more aware of what we have to lose; it is so important that we keep putting out the word to support our country and our troops that have to endure such Hells to keep us free.



We returned home on our own with stops to visit other family members and various sights across the country. From the rush of Niagara Falls to the grandeur of the Grand Canyon, we were very aware of what we have to lose. What a thrill to come back to our bike after looking at the sights and finding a note tucked on the dash that read, "We don't forget them either". It was not signed but made us proud to know that others out there know what the LA to DC stickers and flags on our bike meant. It truly makes you feel how small man is and yet how important that each one of us are.

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FROM THE HEAD SHED

By Milo "Nayber" Gordon

I congratulate all RFTW XVI participant for another excellent event. I rode the Southern Route this year. It was the same rewarding experience in a very different way. I realized that this event facilitates a very important emotional experience for all participants. It does not make any difference how we participate, we are touched and enriched by our involvement. Having participated in both experiences, I can honestly report that there is no experience like the stop at Window Rock, the evenings at Hugo, Salina or Wentzville or any of the other stops made by the Central Route. Rainelle is an experience all its own. I can also tell those of you who have never experienced the Southern Route, you will never experience anything like the kids in Colorado City, TX, lunch in Longview, TX or Jackson, MS, the kids at Wytheville or Montvale Elementary, the D-Day Memorial or the old soldiers at Roanoke, and the many other experiences that make up the Southern Route, unless you take that journey.

We have reorganized for RFTW XVII. We said goodbye to old BOD members and welcomed new members. We have chosen the Route Coordinators. We have figured out the dates. Now all we need to do is get it put together before May 18, 2005, the day that we leave Ontario, CA. We will arrive in Washington DC on May 27, 2005. Rolling Thunder will be on Sunday, May 29.

We need to thank our three departing board members. Dave (Wally) Wallenfelsz, Larry (Skypilot) Flenniken who have served this event faithfully for the last 3 years on the BOD and since the mid-90's on the runs. A special thanks

to Lynda (Bandit) Papaioanu, who has been riding with RFTW since 1994 and acting as Treasurer, Organizational Consultant and Mother Hen since we started to formalize the structure of RFTW in 1998/1999. She has agreed to stay on as our bookkeeper and Organizational Consultant. Wally will be handling our merchandise for the next year. Larry will move on to other areas but still maintain contact with RFTW.

A LARGE AND HEART FELT THANKS AND A BIG HAND TO EACH OF THESE PEOPLE FOR THEIR EXTREMELY IMPORTANT EFFORTS OVER THE PAST YEARS!!!! The next time you see them, tell them directly.

We are currently re-supplying our merchandise shelves. We sold out of just about everything. I ask you to be patient; we hope to have ourselves functional again around the first of August.

We have three new board members who will work with us three old hands to keep RFTW the premiere motorcycle event that we have come to expect. I'm looking forward to meeting you all again next May.

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VET FRIENDS

Are you, a friend, or the owner of your company a Veteran? If so, please visit the Veterans Business Directory, a nationwide directory of Veteran services, products and Veteran owned companies, located at www.vetfriends.com/biz1

People love to support Veteran professionals and Veteran owned businesses. Over 150,000 people per month visit the website and companies listed in the directory are included in our monthly business newsletter that is emailed to over 80,000 registered subscribers.

To learn more about registering your company and services, visit <https://www.vetfriends.com/directory/register/index.cfm> and click on the "Add your Business Listing" link. For information on the different listing options visit <http://www.vetfriends.com/directory/information.cfm>

www.VetFriends.com is a website for reuniting current military and veterans with a membership of over 430,000 veterans, families and friends.

Thank you for your time and service to our country.

Best Regards,
The Veterans at VetFriends.com
Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard
Vet Friends.com
8639 B 16th Street #298
Silver Spring, MD 20910

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RFTW FALL REUNION UPDATED 8/29/04

Well, the City of Prescott decided to remodel the Watson Lake Campground and they had to cancel our reservation for the Reunion in October. So, we have moved the Reunion to the City of Wickenburg, Arizona. The dates remain

the same: October 8, 9 & 10, 2004.

We will gather on Friday evening, October 8, at Anita's Mexican Restaurant in downtown Wickenburg from 6:00pm to 9:00pm. This will be a pay-your-own dinner. Maps will be handed out Friday evening and Saturday for the directions you will need.

On Saturday, October 9, we will gather during the day at the Rodeo Grounds. Camping will be available with shower facilities offered at the Wickenburg High School Gym. There is also camping available at the Community Center of Wickenburg. There will be a fee of \$4.00 per night for Motor Homes. There will be three meals provided for a total of \$20.00 - this will include a sack lunch on Saturday, dinner on Saturday evening and breakfast on Sunday. The sack lunch and Sunday breakfast will be served at the Rodeo Grounds. The Saturday evening dinner will be at the Country Club.

There will be a ride on Saturday from Wickenburg to Prescott, AZ to visit the Veterans Memorial and the VA Hospital. You can get your sack lunch to take on the ride.

Sunday morning from 8:00am to 10:00am, we will have breakfast burritos and say our good-byes as everyone heads back home.

Listed are three motels in Wickenburg:

Super 8
Phone: 928-684-0808
10% off - Ref: RFTW

Los Vierjos Motel
Phone: 928-684-7099

Best Western
Phone: 928-684-5445

Please contact Steve "Rock" Walker to confirm your attendance so that we can get a heads up on food preparation:
Home: 928-684-8726 (answering machine available)
Cell : 928-231-1107
E-Mail: boonierat7@hotmail.com

We apologize for the inconvenience and confusion, but sometimes, things are just beyond our control. If you are planning on flying into Phoenix, this will now be a shorter drive for you to Wickenburg.

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FACE TO FACE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING SCHEDULED

The Board of Directors will hold the Annual Face to Face meeting on October 10 & 11, 2004 in conjunction with the Fall Reunion. The meeting will be held in Prescott, Arizona at the home of Joe "Firefly" Cappel. If the directors are planning on flying to the event, you will be flying into Phoenix, Arizona to Sky Harbor International Airport. The drive then to Prescott is about 90 miles. We look forward to seeing all the Board members at the Reunion, with an opportunity to share our thoughts and ideas on RFTW XVII – 2005.

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CRIPPLE CREEK, COLORADO 2004

Salute to American Veterans Rally and Festival

A salute to veterans who have fought for, suffered for or have been killed while fighting for our country and freedoms. A four-day event with military marching bands, aircraft fly-overs, tattoo competition, beer garden with live bands and food and a huge vendor show all set in an old west gambling town in beautiful Cripple Creek, Colorado.

This annual event will be held August 19-22, 2004. There will be many of the RFTW Family attending this rally. It is a great opportunity to see old friends and to make new ones.

Check out the web-site for more information on this great Veterans gathering.

http://www.pro-promotions.com/cripple_creek_rally.php

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