



**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 2005**

**Quarterly Newsletter  
" We Ride For Those Who Can't "  
July 2005**

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**TAKING THE EDITORIAL REINS**

**By Judy "Velcro" Lacey**

First on my mind is to say that our outgoing newsletter editor, Sandra McKinney, besides doing a fantastic job as Editor for RFTW, is one of the nicest, most sincere people I've have ever met. When I went on my first RFTW in 2003, I felt a little out of place; after all, I wasn't a vet and thought perhaps those who had served, especially in Vietnam, might resent my presence on their journey. But Sandra was the first to assure me that civilians who cared deeply about vets, and especially the POW/MIA issues, were needed and important. You don't need to be a vet to provide support for them, she told me. And because of her words, I felt welcome. Thank you so much for that, Sandra.

When Sandra asked if I would be interested in taking over the newsletter from her, I wondered how in the world I could possibly fill her shoes. She has done such a fantastic job with the newsletter for so long that the prospect of

following in her footsteps was daunting. But, as is her nature, she convinced me that I could do it and offered to help me along the way. So with Sandra's help and the abundance of writing talent among RFTW participants, here is the July issue. I hope you enjoy it.

We have a lot of skilled essayists and poets in RFTW. You'll want to read every single item—there are some great memories of our just-completed 2005 Run For The Wall, as well as past rides, and some thought-provoking articles.

I DO care deeply about our vets, and I DO want to do whatever I can to help them and to help raise awareness of POW/MIA issues. I noticed something a little different this year on the Run, and I don't think it was my imagination. I saw many more POW flags on cars and trucks than ever before. It seemed like many more people are approaching us with "Thank you for what you're doing," not just on the Run, but all through the year. I have the POW emblem on my car all the time, and I'm amazed at how many people come up to me, wanting to talk about it and thanking me for being involved. At home I see POW flags flying on many homes and businesses for the first time. In my own neighborhood stands a shrine to POWs/MIAs in a front yard. There are more and more events being planned to give a long-overdue welcome home to Vietnam Vets. Read in this issue about "Operation Welcome Home," a three-day event in Las Vegas in November planned by Nellis Air Force Base and the city of Las Vegas. It's being billed as the world's largest Welcome Home Parade. Hope to see you there!

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## **FROM THE HEAD SHED**

**By Milo (Nayber) Gordon  
President, Run For The Wall**

Here it is mid-July and we're already addressing another RFTW newsletter. I hope that every participant in RFTW has had a safe trip home. I realize that some of the riders are not home yet and probably won't be until the Reunion.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and participants of RFTW XVII, I wish to express our condolences to the family and friends of Kate Kintzele. Kate died as the result of a motorcycle crash in Nebraska while participating in the independent Northern Run to the Run. It is our wish that we all keep her family in our prayers.

For those of you trying to figure it out. RFTW XVIII will take place between May 17th and May 26th, 2006. Rolling Thunder should be on May 28, 2006. If you need to schedule vacation, you can start now. I know that I have my calendar blocked off for that time. It is never too early to start planning to participate. You might need to save a few extra shekels to pay for fuel next year.

The BOD has made the coordinator selections for RFTW XVIII. The Central Route Coordinator will be Ed "Butcherman" Grinde. Ed is from Hemet, CA. He has ridden on the Central Route for the past five years. Our Southern Route Coordinator will be Don (9-ball) Morris. Don is from Phoenix, AZ. He has ridden on the Southern Route for the past six years. I personally think that we have two excellent men to lead RFTW XVIII. I look forward to another successful ride come next May.

I have had numerous inquires about a Northern Route. Let me state it again, as I did last January. RFTW has not authorized anyone to represent us in developing a Northern route. It continues to be an item on our agenda. This past May, several people represented themselves as part of Run For The Wall because they were doing a "run to the run." Participating in a "run to the run" does not make one a participant in RFTW. If the BOD decides to establish a Northern Route, we will appoint a coordinator with appropriate staff and financial support to recon and develop another route. As a result of the incident that happened in Nebraska, legal counsel has advised the BOD to wait at least two to three years before making any type of decision about a route in that area. The BOD is now considering what it wants to do with this issue.

There are two reunions in the works for this year. Rock and RC have the Wickenburg Reunion under control. It is scheduled for October 7, 8 & 9. There is also an unofficial Texas Reunion scheduled for the weekend of October 14, 15 & 16 at Fredericksburg, TX. Non-Texans can also attend. Mojo has set up motels for that weekend. Information will be posted on the website as it becomes available. I plan on making both reunions. It will be fall and my last chance to ride. Up in this country, by the end of October we put away our scoots and start to get the snowmobiles tuned.

That's it for now. See you at the reunions.

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## **CENTRAL ROUTE WRAP-UP**

**By J. R. Franklin, Central Route Coordinator**

Hello folks, I hope this finds all of you home and safe, or at least safe wherever you may be. We had a good Run this year even with all the changes I had asked the State Coordinators to make on the Central Route. There have been lots of compliments about how well the Run went and that is because of the hard work everyone did. I would like to take this time to thank all the State Coordinators for making the changes that I asked for happen. I think we have some work to do to fine-tune these changes, but that was expected. You did a great job!

I cannot thank Peaches and the Road Guard crew enough for the great job they did. Even when I took the wrong road, they would scramble ahead of us and get me on the right track; thank you one and all! Pace Setters, you were my eyes and controlling hand on the pack. Without you I could not have known what was happening with the pack as we traveled. This info was very important so that the needed speed was maintained at the front. The CB radios worked well for passing information and controlling your groups; thank you. This brings us to the Gas Crew: a little shaky the first day, but the Crew came together and made a hard thing much easier and faster. You all rode well in a tight formation and should look toward moving on to other places of service to the Run. You now have a good idea of how things work and what is needed of you and others; thank you one and all.

This is also a thank you to all you riders out there. The Road Guards came to me the first night and told me the pack was riding like we had been on the road three days. It usually takes three days for the pack to ride tight and smooth. We ask you to ride like a drill team and this is something most of us have not done even if we have ridden for years. You did very well and you did it quickly; thank you. Remember what you have learned and share it with new riders to the Run next year. This brings me to another point. Those of you with CBs heard how the Run was managed as we traveled down the road. Now that you know how it is done, I hope you'll think about volunteering to the BOD or Run Coordinators to be of service to the Run next year. It is only with all of us working together that our Mission Statement info gets spread across this great nation.

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## **A LETTER OF APOLOGY**

**By J.R. Franklin**

I wish to apologize to the Southern Route participants of Run For The Wall and explain what happened in Washington, D.C. as we were handing out awards for service to RFTW. When I got on the trailer I thought we had 30 minutes for Central Route and 30 minutes for Southern Route. As I was wrapping up the CR awards Sandra received a phone call from one of our Road Guards who had a police officer with him explaining that if RFTW didn't leave the hotel in the next few minutes we wouldn't be able to leave for quite some time. It seems there was a bicycle race going on and the police were closing the street for the race.

Up to that point RFTW had no idea there was a race or that any streets were going to be closed. Sandra handed the phone to me and said it was important. I listened to what the officer was telling Road Guard Wayne and handed the phone to the D.C. Coordinator, Dragonrider, and got back on the mic and started to alert everyone to the situation. At this time Dragonrider told me we needed to leave quickly if we were going to get out of the hotel parking area. Rather than tell everyone we needed to leave right then, I should have called for a head shed with Slammer, Milo, and Dragonrider, but I did not. I reacted to the situation and all I COULD think of was that RFTW was about to get trapped at the hotel and we would not make it to Arlington. Milo had enough straight thought to give the mic to Slammer as I tried to figure out where we were going to go since we were too early for Arlington and could not arrive there yet because they would not be ready for us. This left Slammer with only a few minutes to thank all those who had served RFTW on the Southern Route when much more time was needed to recognize all the hard work that had been done. As RFTW rode out of the parking lot I asked Dragonrider what we were going to do with the pack to get them off the street. On the fly he came up with the Pentagon parking lot and was I ever grateful he could think ‘on the move.’

As soon as we arrived at Arlington I found Slammer and explained what had happened. My concern was that this could drive the wedge in further between the two routes and this was not what I wanted to see. Those who oppose us concerning the POW/MIA issue want us to be divided. If we do not present a united front, our message is weakened. If we let our mistakes get in the way of presenting a united front, we have failed the Mission Statement of Run For The Wall. I made a mistake in D.C.; let’s not make another mistake and think it was done intentionally.

Respectfully,  
J. R. Franklin

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## **SOUTHERN ROUTE WRAP-UP**

**by John “Slammer” Gebhards, Southern Route Coordinator**

My thanks to all who supported and participated in Run For The Wall Southern Route 2005. 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 and educate younger generations to the importance of this issue. Our first experience with students was the Colorado City Middle School who turned out in force on a “hot” Saturday to feed us and share with our veterans and their veterans a memorable “Salute to Veterans.” The generosity of my fellow veterans and RFTW participants never ceases to astound me. We donated to Wytheville and Montvale Middle Schools for special projects and students with special requirements.

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 “North Dallas” Flieschman, Snuffy Robles, Abe “NuGuy” Duran, John “Ice Scout” King, Jr., Bob Rogers, Rick “Spook” Hayden, Ray “Rayman” Huston, Warren “Bigfoot” Cummins, Vance “Old Fart” Scott, Rich “Longhair” Dunaway, Mickey “Indian Mick” Dominique, Paul Fiala, Russ Fechner, Chris Hall, Tom “Ghost” Titus, Jesse “Chief” Aguilar, Diann “Mojo Red” Perkins, Bob Rogers, Gaye Eckert, Jim Banks, Jan Banks, Carl Cutter, Judy Todaro, Mike Balcombe, Tony “Half Tank” D’Acquisto, Rich “Poncho” Pontious; Missing Man Coordinator, Della “Pocket” Morris; our Chaplain, Richard Perkins with the assistance of Jeff Lilley and Jenette Lilley; our Sign-in Administrator, Shirley “Top Sarge” Scott, Sharann “Sam” Tuinhout, Rich “Glassman” Barido, Carol Barido; our Financial Manager Tambria Huston ( great job and my special thanks); our Medical Team Dan “OkieDan” Smith, Valetta Smith and Dr.

Tom "Terrible Tom" Turlington; our Merchandise Coordinator, Steve "Hawgwash" Hill and Carol Condit; our Press Coordinator, Anne "Miss Anne" Perry; our Ceremonies Coordinator, John E. King, Jr.; our Chase Vehicle Operators Buck Rogers, Fernando Aguilar, Gary Swope and "Just Fred"; our Platoon Leaders, First Platoon Ron "Plum Crazy" Berg, Second Platoon Frank "Tadpole" Perry, Third Platoon Roger "Cowboy" Mead, Fourth Platoon Kenneth "Gunny" Lenington and Fifth Platoon David "Double D" David; our Pacers, John Duffy, Greg Smith, Glenn Scott, Dick Jacobs and Jim David. All of our appreciation to the State Coordinators who work the hardest to put concept into relativity: J. Braga CA, Bob Rogers and Ray "Rayman" Huston AZ, Doug "Blinky" Beckman NM, Roger "Cowboy" Mead TX-W, Diann "Mojo Red" Perkins TX-C, Janice Wentworth-TX-E, Mike Cappel LA, Don "Pappa Bear" Stringer MS, Richard "Dixie" Atkinson AL, Kelly Gaddy TN, Laurie "Airborne" Clay VA, and Pat "Dragon Rider" McCarthy DC. A special thanks to Lou "Maps" Mulsand for the outstanding set of maps.

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 for the second time.

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 2006. I salute and thank you for a job well done.

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## **CENTRAL ROUTE RAFFLE**

A unique knife was raffled off this year to benefit RFTW. Donated by Ken "SSG Walrus" Sabo, the belt buckle knife, accessible even with chaps on, was made of 440 steel and had "RFTW" in raised silver on the front. It was handcrafted by J.R. Wilson of J.R.'s Cutting Edge. Congratulations to Brad, who won the raffle and is now the proud owner of the one-of-a-kind knife. All proceeds from this raffle were donated to RFTW by Ken Sabo and Audra Sabo. Thanks so much!

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## **SOUTHERN ROUTE RAFFLE**

**By Shirley Scott**

Southern Route's raffle was held at the RFTW after-run party and winning tickets were drawn by hotel staff. All monies raised were donated to our school projects.

A Run for the Wall afghan donated by Sharon Harmon was won by Jim Nonnemaker of Highland, CA. Jim is the person responsible for the Highland American Legion's BBQ fund-raiser for RFTW. His poor health prevented him from joining us this year. A red, white, and blue quilt donated by Doris Brammeier was won by Kay McDowell of Odessa, TX. Kay and her husband are long-time participants of RFTW and were present for the drawing. A Run for the Wall mirror was donated by Vance Scott and won by Karolyn Davis of Odessa, TX. Karolyn was a local supporter who came out to serve us dinner and was ecstatic when notified she had won.

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## **BENEFITS RAISED FOR ACTIVE SERVICEMEMBERS**

**Courtesy American Forces Press Service**

Compensation for the survivors of servicemembers who die in combat zones and insurance coverage for

servicemembers will both increase significantly this year, a military pay official announced on July 7.

An increase in death gratuity benefits from \$12,500 to \$100,000 already has taken effect, and Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance maximum coverage will increase to \$400,000 starting September 1, said Air Force Col. Virginia Penrod, director of military compensation.

The increase in death benefits took effect May 11 and is dated retroactively to October 7, 2001, Penrod said. This means that survivors of servicemembers who died between October 7, 2001, and May 11, 2005, will receive the increased benefits, as will survivors of servicemembers who die from May 11 on, she said.

The increased benefits are for survivors of servicemembers who die in combat zones, combat operations, and combat-related situations, she said. Combat-related situations can include airborne duty, combat training, demolition duty and training exercises, among other things, she said. A policy designating combat areas and situations was given to the individual services in June, and each service is now reviewing cases. Payments already have begun, but the process of identifying and paying all eligible survivors could take several months, she said.

When the increase in SGLI coverage takes effect September 1, it also will be dated retroactively to October 7, 2001, she said. Survivors of servicemembers who died in a combat zone, combat operations or combat-related situations between the October date and September 1 will receive \$150,000 in transitional insurance, which will bring them to the \$400,000 level, she said.

In addition to the increased coverage, DoD will pay premiums of \$150,000 for servicemembers involved in combat operations or deployed to a combat zone, Penrod said.

The increase of these two benefits came about as a result of a 2004 study evaluating the adequacy of death benefits for servicemembers, she said. The study found that benefits were adequate, but didn't recognize the unique sacrifice made by servicemembers who die in combat situations, she said.

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## **NEW BOARD MEMBERS**

At the June 14 meeting of the RFTW Board of Directors, elections were held for two board members. J.R. Franklin was elected to a three-year term, and Sally "Sizzmo" Down, after filling a vacant one-year term, was re-elected to a new three-year term. Congratulations to both.

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## **RETURNING HEROES**

**By Sgt. Matt Courtney  
2nd Platoon, Echo Company,  
2nd Battalion, 24th Marines  
Al Mahmudiyah, Iraq  
Operation Iraqi Freedom II**

*(Editor's Note: This email is from a Marine who, with two other Marines, visited with RFTW this year in D.C.)*

I just want to pass on our thanks. The time we spent with the RFTW crew was awesome. We were brought in like returning heros ... something I know the Vietnam Vets never felt. I told as many people that I could and whenever I was asked what the support was like while we were "over there." The men and women who served in Vietnam that

are out there for us today have ensured that U.S. troops would never again be treated in that way. The support for our service members is outstanding while away and upon return home!



In the Pentagon parking lot: (L-R)  
Lance Cpl. Clint Westphalen,  
RFTW Central Route Coordinator J.R. Franklin,  
Sgt. Matthew Courtney, and Sgt. Brad Bustin.  
The three Marines are all active duty, recently back from Iraq.

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## **DISABLED?**

**By Tom Lockett**  
**RFTW 2005**

Have you ever watched a soldier  
When Old Glory passes by  
As they stand in silent honor  
With teardrops in their eyes.

Do you ever stop to wonder  
What they're feeling deep inside  
As they stand there at attention  
With their memories and their pride.

Have you ever watched a veteran  
Sitting in a wheelchair  
And know by his demeanor  
Just how much he cares.

Do you see the mangled bodies  
Of those wounded in their war  
Have you felt the desperation  
And wondered God what for.

What battles must be raging  
In the darkness of their minds  
And we can only wonder  
Why peace seems so hard to find.

Some wounds are only in the mind  
They are wounds that we can't see  
So they fight the foe inside them  
With silent dignity.

Do you know of whom I'm speaking  
Maybe married to a vet  
You know in their minds they're still not home  
They haven't made it yet.

They left too much behind them  
On some distant battlefield  
They won't give in, there is no quit  
You will never see them yield.

I know those men and women  
And I can share their pain  
Their memories are my memories  
And that takes me back again.

These memories have a name you know  
It's post traumatic stress  
And we do try hard to understand  
Why our lives were such a mess.

Little Big Mike rides a Harley  
With a side car for his chair.  
He walks on pads worn on his knees  
Because his legs aren't even there

And Sgt. Rock he rides his trike  
He only has one arm  
It's not a disability  
To him it's just the norm.

So when we ride the highways  
From LA to DC  
It's men like these that touch our hearts  
And they inspire me.

Disabled is not a word we use  
When we think of these two men  
We're just thankful to the Lord above  
That we can call them friend.

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## **2005 RUN FOR THE WALL** **By Sheila White**

The mission of Run For The Wall (RFTW) is to ensure our MIA's and POW's will never be forgotten. RFTW is dedicated to achieving an accounting of all those listed as MIA since WWI. Support teams are involved in an ongoing effort to locate remains of our service personnel in foreign lands. Our group's mission was to "Ride For Those Who Can't." We were reminded, "This Is a Mission, Not a Party" and "Freedom Isn't Free."

There was no doubt after riding the RFTW with the Central Route group last year that Allen and I would ride again



this year. We decided to ride the Southern Route this time in order to experience different terrain and since Chattanooga, TN was close to home, and the group's prescheduled stopover, we opted to join them there.

Mike McCoy joined us in Madison and we rode to Chattanooga where we were among those who welcomed the RFTW riders as they arrived. The three of us registered the next morning and what a memorable registration it was. "Top Sarge" and "Sam" processed our sign-up paperwork, gave us our FNG pins, and welcomed us with the most generous hugs imaginable. These two women were available to help everyone with all their concerns the entire trip.

Something we especially appreciated was that the Southern Route's riding formation was divided into platoons. Gunny Lenington, leader of Platoon 4, invited us to ride with his platoon. Each platoon was spaced a good distance apart while traveling, which allowed other traffic to maneuver around us safely. At each stop, a tall sign displaying each platoon's number was posted.



There was never a doubt where your platoon was located or where you should be. With our having 344 riders, it was just great! Before long, we were able to identify our own platoon members and a bond of unity developed.

There were hundreds of contributors in support of RFTW. During the three days we rode there were three free gas stops, free dinner every night, two free breakfasts, and free coffee with doughnuts at a gas stop. The many donors involved were various veterans' organizations, civilian groups, and individuals who care and appreciate the message this ride conveys. Wytheville, Va.'s town council voted unanimously in favor of using funds from the town's treasury to buy gas for all the riders. So in essence, this entire town participated in RFTW. Well-wishers at various points all along the route waved us on our way. Seeing the American flag draped over a highway overpass with supporters signaling from overhead was awe-inspiring.

One group in particular overwhelmed us with their generosity and fantastic patriotic enthusiasm. There were 312 children attending Montvale Elementary School in Montvale, VA. Every student bought his or her own lunch and in addition, bought one for a RFTW rider. When the school learned the day of our arrival that there were 344 of us and they had only 312 guest lunches they hurriedly prepared enough lunches for everyone. Each rider received handmade greeting cards expressing thanks and well wishes from the students and we were invited to eat our delicious lunches with the kids in their classrooms which were decorated with patriotic symbols and hand written heart warming messages of love on the blackboard. After lunch, each grade performed in a wonderful patriotic program nearly professional enough to compete with Broadway pros.



They earned many standing ovations and literally brought tears to many of the eyes of a very appreciative audience. It was marvelous to witness that at least some youth in this country are being taught to appreciate love of country and the price paid by so very many to preserve our way of life. It was especially reassuring to hear the youngsters recite "under God" in the pledge of allegiance to our flag.

Some people seem to be of the impression that only military veterans ride in the RFTW, but such is not the case. Anyone who shares in the mission's goals is welcome. A non-vet made his first ride this trip to honor a close friend who was killed in Vietnam. His goal was to trace his friend's name etched into the wall. He expressed being amazed at how this journey had affected him emotionally.



Allen and I weren't yet home from this 1,654-mile trip when we were making plans for next year. We look forward to seeing Top Sarge, Sam, F-Troop, Mike, and new acquaintances from this year in 2006 when we plan to join the Southern Route in Monroe, LA.

Perhaps next year you can ride with us “For Those Who Can’t.”

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## **THE LONG RIDE HOME: A HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM VET**

We’ve received word from Randall Wilson, a producer for Guerrilla Docs, Inc., that the documentary mini-series “The Long Ride Home: A History of the Vietnam Vet” is currently in production. Randall and a second photographer traveled with RFTW this year to Washington, D.C. to film the journey. The documentary will chronicle the history of the Vietnam Veteran through their eyes, their stories, their memories, and, more importantly, their words. The film will feature interviews with historians, politicians, authors, and Vietnam Vets from all over America.

Randall told us that some of the stills and film clips are now on the website:  
<http://www.guerrilladocs.com/longride.htm>; click on “The Long Ride Home.”

The producers are looking for a vet who is planning a trip back to Vietnam. They would like to document your story and accompany you on your journey. Please contact them at [centaurrw@aol.com](mailto:centaurrw@aol.com) or (818) 783-8020.

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## **POWELL ACCEPTS HONORARY CHAIRMANSHIP**

Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret) has agreed to serve as Honorary Chair of the national fundraising campaign to build the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center near The Wall in Washington, D.C.

General Powell was one of the first to lend his support of the Memorial Center, which took three years to win legislative authorization for construction.

“This is an important project of national significance which will enable our young people to gain a better understanding of the Memorial and its impact on our nation’s history,” said Powell. “It is fitting that America should have such a place to reflect on stories of courage and heroism. When it is completed, I am confident the Memorial Center will serve as a poignant reminder that the freedoms Americans enjoy are bought with a price.”

Among the jurors to select the design of the Memorial Center is renowned artist Maya Lin, who designed the Vietnam Wall. After the winner is chosen, it is expected that the building of the Center will take three years.

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## **APOLOGIES TO THE RFTW FAMILY**

**By Pat "Dragonrider" McCarthy**  
**RFTW—D.C. Coordinator**

It takes a lot of dedicated people to plan, organize, and move hundreds of motorcycles across this great nation. John Gebhards assembled an outstanding team to accomplish this incredible task. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond my control, the Saturday morning departure for Arlington National Cemetery was abruptly changed and the staff of the Southern Route did not receive the recognition they so highly deserved. I know anything I say here cannot make up for their moment in the glow of a round of applause from their RFTW Family, but I sincerely apologize that my unintentional interruption prevented the Southern Route Coordinator from presenting the plaques and awards to

his staff.

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## **REMAINS OF VIETNAM AND KOREAN MIA'S RETURNED**

The families of four U.S. servicemen missing in action from the Vietnam and Korean conflicts laid to rest their loved ones' remains in June and July. The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) reported finding and identifying the servicemen in separate announcements in recent days. Two of them, Air Force Lt. Col. Darel D. Leetun of Hettinger, ND, and Air Force Capt. David J. Phillips Jr. of Miami Beach, FL, served in Vietnam. Two others, Army Cpl. John O. Strom of Fergus Falls, MN, and Pfc. Lowell W. Bellar of Gary, IN, fought in Korea.

Leetun was lost when his F-105D Thunderchief fighter jet was shot down over North Vietnam on September 17, 1966. At the time, Leetun was leading a mission over Lang Son province.

Phillips, another pilot whose aircraft was downed by enemy fire, was attacking enemy targets over Kien Gian province in South Vietnam when his F-5 Freedom Fighter jet was hit.

Strom was reported missing in action after his unit, the 1st Battalion, 8th Calvary Regiment, came under attack by Chinese communist forces near Unsan, North Korea.

Bellar's unit, Company M, 31st Infantry Regiment, was surrounded and overrun in November–December 1950 by Chinese Communist forces near the Chosin Reservoir in northeast North Korea. Joint U.S.-North Korean recovery teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), excavated a site in north Korea in September 2001, and again in October, that was believed to be the location where American soldiers were buried. They recovered remains believed to be those of 12 individuals, some of which were later identified as those of Bellar.

The command's investigations are painstaking processes to recover and identify human remains and artifacts of the war, and its Central Identification laboratory is the largest forensic anthropology lab in the world.

Of the 88,000 Americans unaccounted for from all conflicts, approximately 8,100 are from the Korean War. Remains believed to be those of more than 220 American servicemen have been recovered in joint operations in North Korea since 1996. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO website at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-11690.

At a June 17 gathering of the families of servicemen still missing in Southeast Asia, Army Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the U.S. Government is dedicated to the fullest possible accounting of the fallen and missing. "This is a quest that we must pursue relentlessly, wherever it takes us, for as long as it takes us, until all are accounted for," he said.

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## **I FINALLY FELT LIKE A VETERAN**

**By Jeff Brown "Twister"**

**Broken Arrow, OK**

This being my first run, I'm still trying to process a lot of the information and experiences. People told me this would be a life-changing event. For many of us who served during the Vietnam era, things are very muddled. The America then was a completely different country than it is now. The only pride we felt had to come from within. We certainly didn't get any from our fellow countrymen. For those of us who were fortunate enough not to have to serve "in

country” there are feelings of guilt over friends and comrades lost as well as an emptiness of spirit.

Somewhere during the middle of the Run I was trying to sort through some of my feelings when it dawned on me. I spent four years in the Air Force, went where I was sent and did what I was told to do. I was discharged, and started my life over again. This Run was the first time in thirty-odd years that I ever felt like a veteran. Thank you for the experience.

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## **THOUGHTS ON THE WALL**

**by Jeff Brown**

Black granite slabs split the mound  
And hold back the earth where heroes are found.  
The walk is long from end to end  
To search for father, brother, son or friend.

The names seem endless in their scope.  
All lives so young and full of hope.  
The silence is heavy as if to tell  
Of reverence earned for those who fell.

Old warriors pause and their sad eyes fall  
As they trace their comrades on the Wall.  
They stretch and kneel to touch and rub  
And try to capture the one they love.

Strangers reach out as their paths cross.  
Each one feeling the others loss.  
The pain, though real, is healing for some.  
As one hugs another, whispering “Welcome home.”



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## **THE BROTHERHOOD OF RUN FOR THE WALL**

**By Dave “Smoot” Klemme**

I met Mike during our stopover in Salina. It was a chance meeting. Just a handful of vets standing around in the dark getting acquainted and sharing our stories and experiences, with others joining in from time to time and then moving on. If not for an off-handed comment about Mike’s plan to take U.S. Route 50 home, one or the other of us would have drifted away from that group and that would have been it. We would have nodded to one another in passing during the remainder of the run, each trying to remember where and when we met, but we probably wouldn’t have followed up. So many folks to meet and so little time.

But I wanted to take Route 50, too, so we exchanged cell phone numbers and stayed in touch during the rest of the week. By Sunday, our plans were firm. On Monday morning, Mike rode down to my motel in Woodbridge, VA and we launched from there on what was to be a leisurely, scenic trip home. Breakfast in Winchester, VA, hoping to make our first overnight in Chillicothe, OH. Unfortunately, my ride came to a sudden end in the middle of a left-hand curve. A tight turn, a little gravel and grit, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I was med-evac'd to the hospital in Cumberland, MA with a compound fracture of the left elbow. Later that evening, they transferred me to the regional trauma center in Morgantown, WV, where I had initial surgery to stabilize the arm with external fixation in preparation for my return to Colorado and follow-up reconstructive surgery.

We don't leave fallen comrades on the battlefield. Or on a curve in West Virginia. Mike understands this. Once the ambulance arrived on the scene, he could have said "OK, Dave's in good hands," and pushed on. No one could have criticized him for that. We all have lives that need tending to, after all. But instead, Mike stayed with me. He stayed with me in Cumberland. He followed me to Morgantown. When I awoke from surgery, he was there. He helped the medical folks at both places contact my wife and daughter, and he stayed in touch with them during their trip back east. He made sure that my bike was taken care of, and that my personal belongings were accounted for and safeguarded. Mike understands the bonds of brotherhood. For two days, Mike left his plans on hold and stayed with me. It was only after my wife and daughter arrived that Mike accepted relief of his "post." Even then, he stayed in contact by phone as he continued his journey, and I continued mine.

We talk a lot about the brotherhood of vets. Mike lives it. A week before, we were complete strangers. Even though we shared a common bond of service and experiences, we knew nothing of each other. But that's not the "Run For The Wall" way. I found myself in trouble, and in Mike I found a brother. His selflessness is a tribute to him, but more than that, it is the essence of the RFTW spirit. Thanks, Mike. And thanks, RFTW, for bringing Mike into my life. "All the way!"

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## **RFTW BANNER TRAVELS TO JAPAN**

**By Sandra "Socks" O'Rear**

My daughter, Holly, has been in the Navy for just over two years; she just turned 21. She is on the deck crew of the Harpers Ferry (LSD 49), an amphibious assault ship that basically hauls Marines. She is stationed in Sasebo, Japan. In August '04 they received short-notice deployment orders to the Persian Gulf. The Harpers Ferry, along with the Essex and the Juno, took the 31st EMU into Iraq, which they loaded in Okinawa. While the Marines were doing what they needed to do, the Harpers Ferry provided meals and security to the troops guarding the oil terminals at Al Basrah. They were stuck on the ship and had little contact with the locals, and the only news they got was what our media showed (we know how that is). The Marines, in the meantime, were the ones that were in Falujah during the heavy fighting there. If I remember right, they lost 37 Marines and 2 Corpsman. What was supposed to be a short deployment turned into 8 months; they returned to Sasebo in March '05. She got to come home in February; we hadn't seen her for 17 months.



Holly really wanted to go on the Run For The Wall this year, but as is often the case in the military, it just didn't work out that way. She and I have made a promise that in two years we are going together! In the meantime, I wanted to do something to make her feel a part of the Run, so I had a banner made for her and her shipmates. It was inscribed: "To the Sailors and Marines of the USS Harpers Ferry." I started with the banner here in Albuquerque. I pulled it out at Ontario and then at any stop long enough to get some signatures. When I left the run in Cimarron, F-Troop took it with them. They continued getting it signed for me. Then Bill Riser took it from Sharp (David Lish) in West Virginia (see photo), and had more signatures added to it. They are the ones you can see on the front, but the back also has lots of signatures—I think probably over 200 RFTW participants. I was really overwhelmed when I saw it. I sent it to Holly; she emailed me as soon as she got it, and told me how awesome it was. It is now hanging in the deck office; she said that's where the most people would see it.

There is a second part to this story. Because Holly couldn't go on the run, she asked me to get one of her Harpers Ferry on it for her. I carried it from Albuquerque to Ontario to Cimarron, and then left that with F-Troop also. The guys carried the Wall for her. It says:



In Honor of Those  
Who Served Me  
Welcome Home  
SN Holly Richins  
USS Harpers Ferry  
Operation Iraqi Freedom

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## **A WONDERFUL TIME—AND WITH A LOT OF HELP!**

**By Roland ( Pegleg) Marchand**

Pegleg here! This year I rode with the Southern Route. As you know I have a lot of medical problems from the war, and because I have a problem asking for help (it's a pride thing). Well, people like Slammer, Sarge, Pastor Perkins, some of not least the two Brothers I roomed with, Alton Larson and Gary (Gator), helped me so much that I will be eternally grateful. I was very concerned.

I know they are busy and sometimes it's hard to make provisions for everyone with a medical problem. Like Brothers in Arms. As Marines, we sometimes feel we are above everyone else, but let me clear that up. We are all Brothers going through good to know people do care. Carl, head of the strike team, Linda and Joe, Anne, and so many others I can't remember who they are.

Coming home I rode with Jumper, and Lee from Santa Barbara. I had passed four more kidney stones, yet these two were with me at the V.A. in Memphis until the doctor and staff could get me back on the road.

I guess I am telling you this because I feel like I was treated so special that last year being my first trip across the U.S. I lost track of why I was on this Mission. Well, with everything and everyone who took a few minutes out of their day to be more thankful for why we are all in this Run together.

Again a big THANK YOU to all those Brothers and Sisters who gave me some of their time to make sure my experience was good.

Thank God he put me in this family of heart-filled people.

SEMPER-FI-----ALWAYS FAITHFUL-----NEVER FORGET-----

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## **I JUST DIDN'T GET IT**

**By Daemien "Deacon" O'Keeffe**  
**Senior Investigator, RollingGuard**  
**Excutio progenitor**

My name is Daemien, road name "Deacon." I have been with the RFTW in some aspect for the past four years. I just wish Franklin did an incredible job as Central Route Coordinator. I was impressed to the point of tears at his enthusiasm and

I also have to tell you that the previous experience I had with J.R. was less than cordial. You see, he was one of those c

spewing road guards that yelled at me my first year. Up until this year, I just didn't get it; I didn't understand why these men drove between semi-trucks and on the shoulder to perform a highly dangerous job. I know now. I have quit my bitching. I get it.

You might ask what has changed; was it me or them? They have stayed the same; I'm the one who changed. I saw the Run from the point this year that stopped me dead in my tracks. I saw the run from the view of a chase car at the end of the Run. You see the whole line of riders and then you see "them"—you see the road guards rifling through the pack, running to the next intersection, blocking cars, sometimes TRUCKS with nothing more than 900 lbs of Harley or Honda. I saw the road guards defy gravity, laws of physics, and sometimes what we would think was common sense, to perform a very difficult and sometimes thankless job. I saw just how much they have to do, how many tasks they have to perform. I wonder if every single rider on the Run knows that the road guards probably average two to three times the mileage as an average RFTW rider? They fly from the front to the back, side to side like angry hornets protecting a nest. Please excuse the unusual description, but in a sense it's the world's loudest, most impressive ballet, with sort of ugly, hairy ballerinas (LOL).

I would like to publicly apologize to the road guards; I see them in a different light. I will give them even more respect than I ever have in the past. I am saving for a used 80's Gold Wing this year because next year, for the first time, I am going all the way.

I would also like to thank the Central Route Chaplin, Mark Rittermeyer, who asked the group to pray for me. I am undergoing major surgery in 15 days to remove a tumor from my head; wish me luck. I WILL be there next year on a bike and ready to carry on the mission. And I will bring the Jane Fonda punching bag again!

*(Editor's note: We're happy to report that Deacon recovered quickly from his surgery and is back at work.)*

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## **BEGINNING TO END**

**by Jack W. Hutson**

**Vietnam Vet.**

**1965/1966**

**Written on June 25, 2005**

Life is a hotel and check out time is noon  
No baggage to pack, the maid has cleaned the room  
No sign of me being here except a name on a ledger  
My deeds, good and bad, no way to measure.

In a far away place of dirt and sand  
In a place called Viet Nam  
I struggled and fought and became a man

I don't understand, ideas formed all wrong  
No music or parade just a jeering throng  
Came home to spit and scorn  
Some times I wish I had never been born

Said piss on them, it don't mean nothin'  
Crawled inside, my thoughts my own  
Time has passed and seasons sewn

Withdrawn and troubled thoughts and reoccurring dreams  
Toss and turn, eyes closed, but I can't sleep  
Lay there in the dark and weep, pray to God my soul to keep  
Life is a hotel and check out time is noon

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## **CHASING GHOSTS ON A RUN FOR THE WALL**

**By Kevin Widdison, City Editor, Daily Courier**

*This article on Wally New was written after he returned from the Run (Southern Route) this year.*

When Walter New and his wife, Sue, pulled out of Grants pass on his three-wheeled motorcycle, they were alone. By the time the couple roared into Washington, D.C., they had plenty of company: 700 motorcycles.

It was the 17th annual Run For The Wall. The event's name is a reference to the Vietnam War memorial's black granite wall, which is inscribed with the names of more than 58,000 U.S. soldiers who died in the war. Each year, the event brings together hundreds of Vietnam veterans—most on motorcycles, but some in cars, pickups, and, this year, even an 18-wheeler.

“In the military, it's what we call a mission,” Walter says. “We want to remind the government there are people who care about the Vietnam veterans who are still missing. They're not all accounted for and we don't believe they're all dead.”

Walter—his friends call him Wally—admits it's unlikely the United States will press the Vietnamese to search for soldiers missing in a war that ended 30 years ago. But, just maybe, the Run For The Wall will influence how our government treats today's soldiers.

“We can't expect our young people to lay their lives on the line unless we promise to bring them home,” he says, softly adding, “one way or the other.”

Walter and Sue rode solo from Grants Pass to Ontario, Calif., which was the official starting point for The Run. At the beginning, there were 176 motorcycles. The group steadily grew, with other bikers joining in as the herd stampeded eastward along Interstate 10. It was very organized, very much laid out,” he explained. After all, you can't just wing it when you need to feed hundreds of hungry vets and their gas-thirsty bikes every day. “It was planned right down to where we'd stop for gas four times a day.”

The camaraderie among the veterans was a big part of the event, but they never lost sight of their mission. “At night, we'd stay in motels. We drank a little beer ... did what you'd expect a bunch of old G.I.'s to do,” he said. “But we were on our best behavior during the day. We knew people were watching.”

Along the way, they ate many a meal provided by local American Legion and VFW groups. Some station owners refused to accept payment after pumping gas into hundreds of bikes. Police escorts were common.

“Much of the time, police escorted us out of respect for what we were doing” Walter says. But, he admits there may have been other motives. “You've got 200 or more motorcycles pulling into town. They figure let's get 'em in to where they're going, then get 'em out. You don't want 200 bikes lost in town.”

Sitting in the living room of his tidy mobile home at Rogue Lea Estates just west of Grants Pass, Walter New looks like a Vietnam veteran from a Hollywood movie. His shaved head and tightly-cropped graying beard combine with thick arms and a barrel chest to give him an almost menacing quality.



Until he starts to talk.

Then you realize you are dealing with a reflective and thoughtful man, who did not take his cross-country mission lightly.

“Part of this is to help the vets get rid of some ghosts,” Walter says.

“We were invited to stop and talk to kids at three schools along the way. They’d sing songs, read poems, and tell us about people in their community who had been in the military,” he continues. “It was very moving, very touching. You have 300 hard-ass veterans, and 299 of them are crying.”

Walter was in the Air Force from 1959 to 1982. “Twenty-two years, eight months, and 23 days, but who’s counting.” He served in Vietnam for a year beginning in November 1970. He was an aircraft mechanic assigned to a downed aircraft, where they’d fix it and then fly back to their base in the plane they’d just repaired.

“We had some excitement in those missions,” Walter says with a chuckle—it’s easier to find the humor 35 years later. “More than once we came under fire.”

He came home to a country that was rapidly going sour on the war. Too often, people took out their frustration on the returning soldiers, and he hopes our nation learned a lesson that can be applied to the war in Iraq.

“I believe people regret what happened when we came home,” he says. “Whether or not you support the war, you need to support the troops.”

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## ABOUT THOSE MOTORCYCLES

By Alton Larson

“At 8 a.m. on Wednesday, May 18, 2005, veterans from all wars and their supporters will leave the T&A truck stop at the junction of I-10 and I-15 in Ontario, California. They will begin their annual pilgrimage across the heartland of America. Most will be riding motorcycles. Their purpose is to create a groundswell of support for ALL AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR and MISSING IN ACTION from all wars and to help those injured by war, to heal. This 10-day cross-country journey will include ceremonies with veterans and civil organizations, visits to war memorials, visits with VA hospital patients, and appropriate stops to make sure our POW/MIAs are remembered.

“Anyone can join the group anywhere along the route. Everyone and all brands of motorcycles are welcome.

“In Washington, D.C. on Memorial Day, the group will unite with other riders from all over this country to form Rolling Thunder’s Ride for Freedom XVIII, a Welcome Home and We Have Not Forgotten demonstration from the Pentagon to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—The Wall. Last year over 500,000 bikes participated. People expected us to go away after Rolling Thunder X. We will not go away until everyone is **HOME! COME SHOW YOUR SUPPORT!**”



The above was taken from the Run For The Wall website. Last year, I made this run from Kansas City to D.C., a total of about 4,000 miles. During this ride I met some of the most caring and dedicated people in this country, not only on the ride but in small rural towns across our nation. When we came into towns there would be flags for miles along the road before entering the town. At one gas stop a man told the attendant that he would pay for the gas for all the motorcycles and their support group. His only words

were “I was there.” Schools were let out and the students would line the overpasses and wave to us as we passed below. Truck drivers would pull over and let us pass, and we had police escorts through major towns. VFWs, Harley Davidson dealers, and organizations would feed us.

In West Virginia we stopped by a school that fed us supper and opened up the entire school building for us to sleep and shower in. The kids made flags for us to sew on our vests, and mine is over my heart, a fitting place. On every stop a collection of change would be taken to be given to the kids of that school, to be used for a playground.

For eight days we rode, six of which were in the rain, two abreast, with 50 feet between you and the bike in front of you. One day I rode alongside of a middle-aged lady whose plates said “Bitch,” the next alongside a man with hair pinned in a ponytail, with rings on every finger. We had one purpose, to say “thank you” for those who served their country. One Canadian veteran I met said he came down the U.S. to join the army and they would not let him join. He later joined in Canada and fought in Vietnam. I slept alongside a fireman from Detroit who had two Purple Hearts. A Native American cut his ponytail off to be left at the Wall, a gesture that is sacred. I carried a vest from a Vietnam vet who never got it together after serving in Vietnam, which I laid at the foot of the Wall.

One thing we must remember, whether a war is just or not, we must always support our troops, which is something we forgot about for the Korean and Vietnam vets. They came back to a country that spurned them and as a result, they said “screw it” and bought motorcycles and tents, and rode the countryside.

Down in the basement of the VFW in Britton, there is a list of the veterans who served; some came home, others didn't. One who comes to mind is Dirk Abbas. The reason I remember him is that his mother gave me a lot of his clothes.

Back in the late forties I remember our heroes coming home because there was always something going on at the VFW or the Legion halls. They would get married, hold a shivaree, and the whole town would come and see the bridegroom push his bride down the middle of main street in a wheelbarrow or his buddies would steal her for the evening. Then there would be a Wedding Dance at some small town dance hall. A lot of them would take over the farm or the business, some would go on to college using the G.I. bill, others who had no future in town would try their luck in “God knows where,” only to return for class reunions. The old saying holds true: “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy.”

This is the way I see it. I am sure there are people who have different views, but that is why this country is so great: we can have different views. In our family three out of four men served in the military. I served four years in the Navy—Submarine Force, and we were in the Gulf of Tonka in 1959.

If you are interested in making this trip, go to Run For the Wall website for more information ([www.rftw.org](http://www.rftw.org)). For life aboard a submarine, go to the after Battery website ( <http://www.olgoat.com/substuff/abr.htm> ).

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## **THE JOURNEY – RUN FOR THE WALL**

### **By Arnie Swift**

This is the story of the ultimate motorcycle ride and yet it is the story of so much more. It is the journey across America to keep the POW-MIA issue alive and let America know we will not rest until they are all home or accounted for. There is, however, another issue at hand for the men and women who find themselves on this journey. It is called Healing.

My healing began nine years ago when in 1997 I once again became an FNG. For the sake of all, FNG stands for Fine Nice Guy or Fine Nice Girl. The Run begins each year in Ontario, California, and travels along a route that ends in

Washington, D.C. I would join them in Kansas City as they come through on I-70. On this date I would be riding with my good friends Cliff Estes and Terry Brown, both Vietnam vets. There was nothing that could have prepared us for what we were about to experience. In a matter of minutes I am confronted by some guy standing at attention shouting First Cav. at me. I turn and return his salute and am greeted by him and welcomed home for the very first time in my life. The pattern is set for the rest of the journey: a massive dose of emotions, ones that I am not prepared for because I thought I had dealt with Vietnam, but like so many other Vietnam vets everything was just buried inside and kept in that secret place of the heart. The man who was shouting at me was Joe “Dragon” Lozano. Joe over the next eight years would become one of my dearest friends, and it would be almost five years before he even knew my name.

Our first night out would be spent in Wentzville, Missouri. We stopped in a parking lot long enough to pick up a police escort to the VFW there. As we got back on the road toward the VFW, we are greeted by hundreds of men, women, and children lining both sides of the road for nearly a quarter of a mile. They are waving flags, holding banners, and shouting at the top of their lungs. The tears begin to flow like they never have and the thought comes: it only took 27 years to be welcomed home. This was the way that it should have been, not like the way it was. I nearly miss the turn as I am crying by now. There is a program, there is food, and there is fellowship—not quite like we have in church, but it is a fellowship that only vets can understand. It is AWESOME!

The next morning we are greeted by dew-covered tents and a beautiful sunrise. We are on the road again, only stopping long enough to take a group picture at the Vietnam Memorial in Wentzville, and then it’s off to East St. Louis to make a stop at the VA hospital there. More emotions and wonderful conversations with the patients there. The rest of the day would be spent on the road and our night stop would be in Corydon, Indiana. It is there that I find out that the Canadians were in Nam with us and that they were all volunteers. Next morning we are up and headed for Jefferson Barracks VA hospital. This time we can go up to the rooms and visit. More tears and more wonderful conversations. We leave there and head for Huntington, West Virginia. The next morning we would head for the Kentucky Vietnam Memorial, which is designed like a sun dial with names on it. After a short visit there we are off to Rainelle, West Virginia. Next to the Wall itself, this will probably be the most emotional stop of the journey.



Rainelle is a coal mining town that has basically played out and there is no longer any major source of income for the town. As we enter the town we stop long enough once again to regroup and then we parade through the town and back to the school. We park in the football field and are greeted by all of the students there. They put on a presentation just for us and we are joined by Rolling Thunder of Kentucky. There are now nearly 500 motorcycles on this field, and the kids are let loose after the presentation. I am approached by one and then another and another. They are asking for my autograph. I sign the little books, I sign their shirts. It’s incredible. They just keep

coming. We are heroes; we are their heroes. Since the Run began 17 years ago we have raised over \$75,000 for the school there. We have given two playgrounds and filled a library with books. That evening in the park I would spend more than three hours giving kids rides on my bike. What a feeling.

Morning would come and find us covered in ice but ready to go again. Today we would find ourselves at the Wall. First stop would be at the Iwo Jima II Memorial for another group picture and then the escort to the Wall. We arrive at the Wall and are greeted by a Park Ranger. She asks how many had never been to the Wall and more than half raise their hands. She tells us there are only two reasons why. One, we just didn’t have the time or the money to get there, and two, we were scared of the Wall. Of course we are all hard core vets and we aren’t scared of anything. She is right, the second reason is the biggie. We are terrified of that Wall with its 54,000 plus names on it. We cross the street and head toward “The Healing.” Cliff cannot make the turn to go down and so I hold him in my arms for nearly twenty minutes as he cries. The tears flow and then I lead him to the Lincoln Memorial to catch his breath. It will take us nearly two and a half hours to finally make it to the Wall. Once there we find the names we are looking for and we make the etchings and then we stand by another vet as he weeps and asks questions that only God can answer.

There is more that takes place in D.C. while we are there, but they pale in comparison to what has taken place. The journey home would find us sharing the love of Jesus to a man name Boyd. I would see Boyd years later and know

him as “Gunns” with the Vietnam Vets M/C. Three years ago I would have the pleasure of taking my honeymoon trip with my second wife Cindy. We again would do the second half. Since 1997 I have made two complete trips, 6,200 miles, two trips halfway to D.C. and two trips halfway from California. The other years I have just done partial runs. As I continue to ride with the Run, my involvement has changed and grown each year. Last year I was the guy who ran the sound system for the morning meetings. This year I was one of six chaplains. Next year I have been offered the part of the Missing Man formation coordinator. The last two years we have held church services in Limon, CO. This year nine people accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The whole purpose of the Run is to let people know that there are men and women who are still missing from all the wars and that we want them accounted for and their remains returned. But the underlying purpose is to bring healing and closure to so many of the Vietnam vets who are still fighting the war or are dealing with PTSD. That has been my mission for the last nine years: to share the love of Jesus with them and let them know that there is a way out of all the pain. That way out is only found in Jesus.

If you would like more information about the Run For the Wall you can go to the website at [www.RFTW.org](http://www.RFTW.org). If you are a vet dealing with some of these issues you can reach me at our email address: [firebaseamerica@juno.com](mailto:firebaseamerica@juno.com). If you want to be a part of next year’s Run, start saving now.

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## **THANKS TO MY FELLOW RIDERS**

**By Dwight “Dutch” Stevens  
Richardson, Texas**

The word “Odyssey” is defined in dictionaries as “a spiritual or intellectual quest.” In no small part that definition fits the Run For The Wall for 2005.

I began preparing for the run back in mid-2004. All that time was spent on my bike, doing the necessary maintenance to ensure a worry free adventure. Then in April of 2005 it suddenly dawned on me that I had done nothing to prepare myself. But then, I am not convinced I had to. The RFTW participants did that for me, and helped me in ways that were tangible, intangible, and spiritually meaningful. You have to forgive me; it is so very hard to explain.

It may have been my “healing trip,” but it was certainly their hands, and the grace of God that got me there and back.

**GOD BLESS YOU ALL AND THANK YOU !!!!!!!**

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## **2005 RFTW PARTICIPANT**

**by Wayne Nicholls**

Having gone “all the way” with the RFTW Central Route in 2004, I thought being a “participant” traveling to Raton, New Mexico, would be easier emotionally. How wrong could I be? From my first hug with Sandra McKinney, to saluting from an overpass on the New Mexico/Colorado border, our trip was filled with emotions.

On Tuesday, I arrived in the early afternoon at the Fairfield Inn in Ontario, CA. The parking lot was already filled with Run For The Wall participants. I was pleased to see Mark Rittermeyer, J.R. Franklin, Jim “Jumper” Braga, “Butcherman,” “Top,” and others. I found Jackie McKinney and he promptly introduced me to Sandra for a long-promised hug. It was like a family reunion. Hard to believe it had been a year already.

While walking around the parking lot I found old friends and made some new ones. There was “Sgt. Rock” grinning ear-to-ear with his new trike. It would be Sgt. Rock’s ninth year with Run For The Wall and his first time riding his own motorcycle. Rock’s one of the great guys on the Run who is always there to offer his shoulder at the same time collecting donations for the kids at Rainelle. He was WIA in Vietnam while serving with the 25th Infantry Division.

“HarleyRodg” was busy sewing patches. He had to update this year with his old “Singer” sewing machine giving out. Seems he even got an upgrade in comfort with a relative lending him and “Becca” a nice motorhome to use.

I met a couple of FNGs from Hollister, CA and introduced them to J.R.. One served in Vietnam with the Air Force. Manny (an American Indian) served in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne. I knew Manny would be in for something special in New Mexico. “Jumper” would see to it that these guys would be okay on their journey all the way to the Wall.

I was riding again this year with my childhood friend and Vietnam veteran Steven Neal, my brother-in-law Terry Byrnes, and Steven’s brother-in-law “FNG Fred.” We gathered at 0630 on Wednesday before heading over to the T/A Truck Stop. There were plenty of hugs and excitement at the staging area. Kate Halpin and “Mac” from VVA Chapter 756 were there to see us all off. I was also able to find Roland “Peg Leg” Marchand riding his new Honda trike with the Southern Route. I was happy to see the arrival of “Fingers” and Lil Lisa,” Danny Lopresto, “Nacho,” and others who rode to Ontario that morning, starting at “o-darkthirty” from Torrance, CA. “Nacho” would be a “Pacesetter” while “Fingers” would be his “Wingman.”

After a brief “Riders Meeting” with an awesome prayer by the Southern Route Chaplin, we scrambled to our bikes and readied to begin the 2005 Run For The Wall—Riding in Freedom for those who can’t. The Southern Route was first to depart, and then it was our turn.

The first day, with a 400-mile ride to Williams, AZ, went well. Most new riders rode like they were “old hands” at riding in formation. A few riders were a bit leery and provided a little more space between themselves and the next bike. One of the riders had a rear tire blowout but managed to pull over without any additional problems. We made the day’s destination without any major incident and received a heartfelt welcome through town to the American Legion for dinner. It was a great day with the only disappointment being the Jacuzzi not working at the motel we were staying at (but that’s a minor thing).

The second day we awoke to beautiful clear skies. At our “Rider’s Meeting” we met the guy with the “blowout.” Steven gave some money to help him out. The money was provided by VVA Chapter 756 for Vietnam vets who needed a little help during the Run. The guy was most appreciative and we all got a little choked-up. At the meeting, J.R. informed us there was a car accident up the road and to keep moving. It was much more serious than most anticipated, with a car under the back of a tractor/trailer. It reminded us to be careful during our journey to Gallup, New Mexico.

We had “outgrown” Window Rock,” but that didn’t stop the people from lining both sides of the street in Gallup as the police escorted us to “Church Rock.” People waving, holding flags, and some with pictures of loved ones who had served in the Armed Forces. These were the people of Navajo Nation. They treat their warriors with love and admiration. They honor all Veterans as great warriors. The ride through Gallup is an emotional ride for us.



Church Rock proved to be a great facility for the Run For The Wall. Plenty of parking and restrooms were available. The arena is nestled within a beautiful backdrop of rock formations. This is a special place and the Navajo Nation provided us with a gathering of Navajo, Hopi, Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni tribes to honor the warriors. The highlight for me and countless others was listening to Gold Star Mother Mrs. Eddy. Her son, Sgt. Eddy, went Missing in Action in Vietnam over 36 years ago. Although many of us could not understand the language, we all could understand her emotions in her voice as it bounced off the rock walls. She wants her

son home. We want her son home. And we wept for her.

The next morning we re-grouped at Red Rock Park and were treated to a breakfast burrito, compliments of Navajo Nation. J.R. passed out certificates of appreciation to the Sundance Riders and others who did a great job of organizing the events in New Mexico. As we were ready to pull out, a hot-air balloon lifted from the ground displaying a POW-MIA flag. It was a beautiful start of our journey on Day 3.

Our final destination for the day would be Raton, New Mexico. But I found myself thinking of our arrival at Angel Fire. Those who have been there before know it's a "spiritual" place for most Vietnam veterans. Last year I noticed the little movie theater in the museum. It was "packed" and I didn't get to go in. This year, I went directly there. I didn't know what to expect, but could only last a few minutes viewing some of the old footage of Vietnam. I love Angel Fire, but watching the films is not for me. When I left the museum, I walked by the "rock monument" and left my small rock I brought from Long Beach, CA. Then it was up to the parking lot to get ready for the final leg of the day to Raton. I "lucked out" this time and got in the First Platoon directly behind our leaders in the "Missing Man Formation." I felt privileged to ride close to the "Missing Man," and it was a comfortable ride to Raton.



The folks in Raton, NM outdid themselves. We paraded through the town and arrived at the Elks Club to a wonderful welcoming and an excellent dinner. People were thanking us for coming to their town and provided us with handshakes and hugs. The Independent Riders Group manned the gas pumps and provided us with free gas. A major computer problem at our motel caused a delay in checking into our rooms. After we were settled in, it was off to the Dairy Queen for a little ice cream before turning in.

We awoke to another beautiful morning and headed over to the staging area next to the Elks Club. This was our chance to say "so long" to our friends with Run For The Wall. Limited vacation time kept us from continuing on. I kept reminding myself to hold back the tears as I said goodbye and wished the riders well. We rode ahead of the group to the first overpass near the Colorado/New Mexico border. There we hung our POW-MIA and our Vietnam Veterans flags and waited for our family of Run For The Wall. As they came around the curve, we came to attention and rendered our hand salute. It was an impressive view watching RFTW in side-by-side formation. I prayed for their safe journey to the Wall.

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**SINCE THE FALL**  
**by Del "Abe" Jones**  
**April 29, 2005**

It's been thirty years ago  
Since the Fall of Saigon  
But for so many who were there  
That War still rages on.

Some things have gotten better  
And for some time has healed  
But there are some memories  
That will never be revealed.

We turned our back to those  
Who went off to wage our fight  
And we blamed our soldiers

When we decided, it's not right.

We must never let our nation  
Blame it on the fighting man  
Who goes off to do the bidding  
Of our leaders' wartime plan.

The years may ease the pain  
And blur memories, but yet  
That shame of our country  
We must not ever forget.

More than fifty-eight thousand  
Etched in that Mourning Wall  
With more added all the time  
Until the last of those souls fall.

A small monument to heroes  
From that war of yesterday  
Where we honor our soldiers  
In the true, American way.

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## **EFFORT GAINING STEAM TO HONOR IRISH VICTIMS OF VIETNAM WAR** **By Niall Stange, Irish Echo**

*(Ed. note: Declan Hughes came from Ireland and went All The Way with RFTW in '99. His journal of experiences on the Run is posted on the RFTW website.)*

The sights Mick Coyne saw in Vietnam will never leave him—a soldier killed just feet in front of him whose legs stayed standing though the top half of his body had been vaporized; the officer blown to smithereens by a mine, leaving only the heel of a boot intact. Coyne, a native of County Galway, won five Purple Hearts and two Bronze Stars. He is one of a select band: Irish citizens who served in U.S. forces during the Vietnam War. Now he has lent his support to a project aimed at memorializing those who lost their lives in similar situations. "It's important," he said.

The memorial is the brainchild of Declan Hughes, coordinator of the Irish Veterans Historical Research Center, a registered charity based in Dublin. He has helped identify a site in County Roscommon, near Ireland's central point, where such a memorial could be situated. The memorial would not just commemorate those who had fought in Vietnam for the U.S., but would be dedicated to all those Irish men and women who lost their lives fighting for other nations since the beginning of the 20th century.

Hughes is not himself a veteran. A former human rights worker, he got involved in the issue after a colleague journeyed to Vietnam. During her trip, Hughes's co-worker was given a ring by a former Vietcong fighter. The man explained that he had taken it from the finger of a dead American and he wanted to return it to the man's family. Hughes agreed to take the ring with him on a trip to Washington in spring 1998. The attempt to return the ring proved fruitless—there was no way of identifying who it had originally belonged to. While in the U.S. capital, however, Hughes became aware of the Traveling Memorial Wall—a replica version of the Vietnam Memorial Wall that is taken to locations around the U.S. and beyond.

Hughes's suggestion that the memorial be taken to Ireland was initially met with skepticism by veterans who questioned whether there were any Irish-born casualties. At the time, Hughes discovered, one Irish-born victim of Vietnam had been identified—a man named John Driver who hailed from Dublin. Hughes, struck by how many Irish names appeared on the Memorial Wall, was convinced there had to be more. When he returned to Ireland, he says, he "began to do some more digging." Soon, more names were uncovered. By the time the Traveling Memorial came to Ireland in April and May 1999, 15 Irish-born people had been confirmed among the Vietnam War dead.

"Most of those families believed they were the sole Irish family to have had a son killed in Vietnam," Hughes recalls. "And that, in itself, tells you something about the way they brought their sons back to be buried—almost as if it were in secret."

Now, 19 Irishmen and one Irishwoman are known to have been among U.S. military deaths in Vietnam. An additional four Irishmen died serving with Australian forces. Hughes believes there are still more waiting to be discovered.

Mick Coyne was one of the lucky ones. He got out of Vietnam alive. Coyne spent his first years in tiny Cornamona in the Connemara region. His family moved to Meath when he was about eight. There, they owned a small dairy. When Coyne was 16, his mother was diagnosed with cancer. One of Coyne's uncles, John Casey, lived in Chicago and offered to bring the young boy across the Atlantic. Coyne went, working first as an elevator operator, and later for an Irish furrier, Jerome C. McCarthy. He was drafted in 1966. After training at Fort Campbell in Kentucky and Georgia's Fort Stewart, he volunteered to go to Vietnam.

"There was a big push on everywhere to try to get people to volunteer for Vietnam. And I had met other people who had been in Vietnam and told me it was a piece of cake," he recalled ruefully.

His first impression of Vietnam was the heat. "It was stifling," he said. "My first morning there I could hardly get up out of bed."

Coyne was part of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, which was then based about 70 miles northeast of Saigon. He initially got a job as a driver, but was soon moved onto one of the regiment's tanks. He spent most of his tour of duty as a machine gunner. He and his colleagues were charged with keeping the highways clear, but they were also often ordered to the aid of other troops when a firefight broke out.

"Any kind of major battle at all, we'd be called in," he said.

Four of Coyne's Purple Hearts were awarded because of shrapnel wounds incurred whenever his tank was hit. Much of the shrapnel is still in his body—one piece worked its way out only two weeks ago. His other Purple Heart, along with a Bronze Star, was awarded for his part in rescuing comrades who had been wounded and were stuck in armored personnel carriers. Coyne was shot in the arm during the men's rescue.

Coyne's tour of duty was almost up when he caught malaria. He was evacuated, first to a hospital in Vietnam and then back to the U.S. He was released in 1968 and immediately returned to Chicago. He arrived to find the Windy City convulsed by the now-infamous riots that surrounded the Democratic National Convention. Coyne, in uniform, was beaten up by anti-war protesters. "Battered," he said, recalling the event. "Punched on the ground and everything."

Though he was officially still in the Army Reserves, the U.S. army never called on Coyne again. He returned to Ireland for good in 1970. Now 60, he said he continues to suffer flashbacks from his Vietnam days. A loud noise or even the turning of a light switch can transport him back to the horrors of the war. He isn't looking for sympathy, though. "With me, it's a lot milder than the things other people seem to experience," he said.

Coyne is one of four Irish Vietnam veterans who have thrown themselves in to support for the memorial project.

"It would mean a lot to a lot of people," he said.



(The Irish Veterans Historical Research Center would like to hear from anyone who knows of Irish-born people who served in American or other non-Irish forces during any war from the beginning of the 20th Century onwards. The director of the Center, Declan Hughes, can be contacted at: [dectwth@eircom.net](mailto:dectwth@eircom.net). Please use the subject line "Veterans" when emailing.)

For an article about Declan & Vietnam Vets, go to: <http://www.irishecho.com/newspaper/story.cfm?id=16363>

Declan's / Irish Veterans Historical Research Centre website: [www.irishveteransresearch.com](http://www.irishveteransresearch.com).

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## **HUGE SUCCESS: FIRST ANNUAL WV VETERANS REUNION**

**By Jeff "Mario" Smith, Guerilla Reporter**

**Task Force Omega of KY, Inc.**

**Infantry Sgt. Vietnam 68-69**

**D Troop 7th Sqdn. 1st Air Cav.**

*(Ed. note: These are excerpts from Jeff's report)*

The weather was perfect, the ceremony was well done, the food, campsites, and showers were plentiful and free, and the townspeople of Rainelle, WV, led by coordinator Monica Venable, welcomed us with open arms...again. Again? What do you mean again? Wasn't this the First annual WV Veteran's reunion you say? Yes, it was, but the good people of Rainelle, WV have been hosting the KY Run For The Wall group for the past 17 years on the Thursday before Memorial Day Weekend, as we traveled to DC for Rolling Thunder.



This special relationship between the people of Rainelle and the two-wheeled veterans on their way to The Wall in DC began in 1988. Purple Heart Veteran Danny "Greasy" Belcher, CMH Recipient Gary Wetzel, and a host of others from KY joined with James Gregory and his Run For The Wall (RFTW) group in Mt. Sterling, KY and headed to The Wall. When they reached the interstate toll road outside of Charlestown, WV, and the state employees would not allow the first in the group to pay the tolls for the rest of the group, James Gregory and Gary Wetzel decided they would take US Route 60 to bypass the toll road. As fate would have it, Rainelle, WV is on US Route 60.

As the motorcycling veterans approached Rainelle, word of their impending arrival had reached the town before they did. The forward thinking Police Chief of Rainelle arranged with the principal of the local school to allow the school children out of school to wave flags and greet the vets as they entered the town. Greasy often says laughingly, when reminiscing about it, that at first, the vets looked at each other and thought they had accidentally invaded someone's parade. When they realized the patriotic display was for them, they stopped and the rest is history. Rainelle, WV is now on the map as one of the premier patriotic towns in America.

OK, so what is so different about this year that makes this the first annual WV Veterans Reunion, you say? Well, this year, we did not continue on to The Wall, and remained in Rainelle for the entire weekend. It was a hard decision to make and it took Greasy a couple of years to come around to making the change. We now ride under the banner of Task Force Omega of Kentucky and remain dedicated to the POW MIA rescue mission. Rainelle has provided the perfect location, the local support necessary to pull off such an event, and the townspeople are very supportive. It is our desire to make this event bigger and bigger, and next year one of the moving Wall replicas will be in Rainelle for the entire weekend.

For all of these past 18 years, the Rainelle Moose Club has provided a free supper on Thursday and a free breakfast on Friday morning before we pulled out for The Wall. This year, the local VFW Post, local churches, and the Rainelle School joined in the effort to keep us fed and our plates runneth over. This vet didn't spend a dime all weekend, to eat or to sleep. My tent, now known as "Chateau Mario," was staked out beside the city hall, which allowed me to be close to all the activities as the city hall front lawn was the center of the speaking events. Several of my heroes were present besides Greasy and the other Vietnam vets I am honored to ride with, including CSM John "Top" Holland (retired) a three-war Infantry Veteran, an original founder of Rolling Thunder, and the father of the original Missing Service Personnel Act; Colonel Earl P. Hopper (retired), also a three-war veteran and father of POW MIA LTC Earl P. Hopper, Jr. missing in North Vietnam since January 10, 1968; Patty Hopper, Research Director of Task Force Omega, Inc., a freedom fighter to the end; Colonel Ted Bitner (retired), Bronze Star Recipient, and Bosnia and two tour Gulf War Vet; John Malloy, Vietnam Veteran, Release Foundation founder, Chairman of the National Vietnam and Gulf War Veteran's Coalition, and survivor of both World Trade Center attacks; Michael J. Martin, Americal Division Vietnam Veteran Infantryman, Silver Star Recipient, and entertainer extraordinaire; and my personal favorite, the Reverend John Steer, a paratrooper with the famed 173rd Airborne Infantry during the Vietnam War.

Our group arrived in Rainelle on Thursday after our annual Wednesday night ceremony in Owingsville, KY at the Lion's Club Park. We had our annual reunion with the good people of Rainelle at 1400 hours on the school football field, as we always do, and the donation bucket was passed, as it always is, so we can contribute to these children who appreciate their Veterans so much. Small town America is the "Real America." From there we dispersed to free showers in several locations around town, to reassemble later at the Moose for a free supper and entertainment by the singing Reverend John Steer, and singer/guitar player Michael J. Martin. Both are great entertainers for those of us who appreciate God and Country first, and also enjoy humor.

On Friday, a group of Combat Veterans went to the Rainelle School to speak with the children while several of us went on a special "Run To Summersville" to participate in a Veteran's Memorial Service by the Summersville VFW Post 6106. They have a wonderful monument to the fallen there. My heart was broken as we added a name to the memorial. Marine Corporal Brian James Richardson, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, already a free American, but killed in Iraq in Al Anbar Province for the freedoms of others on March 5, 2005, was remembered. Brian's mother, wife, and mother-in-law were present. After the 21-gun salute I gathered three empty M1 Garand shells and presented one to each family member and told them emphatically that Brian James Richardson will NOT be forgotten.



Saturday morning yet another free breakfast was provided, this time by the Rainelle Lions Club at the Rainelle School. We joined in the annual Rainelle Memorial Day Parade and after that, the main ceremony took place at the Rainelle City Hall. Speakers included Danny "Greasy" Belcher, State Director of Task Force Omega of KY and Purple Heart Veteran of the Vietnam War; Sovannara Lim, co-founder of United Khom Foundation; CSM John "Top" Holland, three war Infantry Veteran; Patty Hopper, TFO Research Director, Hal and Maddy Laffin, dedicated workers for Canadian Vietnam Veterans; Brothers John Steer and Michael J. Martin, both decorated Vietnam Veterans; and Master of Ceremonies, Colonel Ted Bitner (retired).

Saturday evening saw yet more free meals and the entertainment of John Steer and Michael J. Martin at the Moose Club. I wish every weekend could be so packed with God and Country, food, fun, rides through the winding hills under shade trees, and the camaraderie seen only in the company of proud Americans who outwardly appreciate their veterans.

On Sunday morning before we left, Reverend John Steer gave a church service on the lawn of the town hall. I cannot think of a better way to spend the Memorial Day weekend than in Rainelle, WV, one of the most patriotic towns in America. While many Americans think that Memorial Day is about sales at the malls, cookouts, and swimming, this American Veteran was celebrating freedom with other veterans and non-veterans who appreciate God and Country

and aren't embarrassed to show it. Getting to know John Steer, Michael J. Martin, John Malloy, Hal and Maddy Laffin, and others is a bonus that has me fired up for the 2006 Rainelle WV Veterans Reunion.

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## **A REPORTER TALKS WITH RFTW** **By Sam Richardson, TERLINGUA/TAOS**

This article was published in Terlingua/Taos, New Mexico during 2005 RFTW.

“This run is the 'welcome home' a lot of these guys never got. When they came back from 'Nam a lot of them weren't even welcomed by their families,” said Jim Braga of Highland, California. Braga, called “Jumper” by his fellow bikers, was one of 200 motorcyclists just arrived at the Vietnam Memorial in Angel Fire, New Mexico, May 20. With a view of the Moreno Valley below, the memorial sits on the side of a hill 8,500 feet high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

The riders, most of them Vietnam vets, were part of the 17th annual Run For The Wall which started in Los Angeles May 18 and is winding its way across the United States. It is due to arrive in Washington D.C. at the Vietnam Wall by Memorial Day. More bikers will join in along the way and an estimated 200,000 will ride through the nation's capitol in a parade called Rolling Thunder. At stops along their route, the riders have been cheered and honored as heroes. The night before their arrival in Angel Fire, the bikers were honored at Church Rock in Gallup, New Mexico. A special gathering of Navajo, Hopi, Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni peoples honored them as warriors. After being served Navajo tacos for dinner, they were treated to a presentation of gourd dancing, which they were invited to participate in. A very special guest was a native Gold Star Mother whose son went MIA during the Vietnam War and has never been accounted for. One of the reasons the ride was organized was to focus on MIAs from all of the country's wars and to encourage the government not to give up the search for them. After the ceremonies in Gallup, the riders continued east. At 4:30 p.m., on the afternoon of the 20th, the highway that led to Angel Fire seemed to growl as the bikes emerged from a mountain pass and descended into the valley below the memorial. Their procession was led by Patrick Armstrong, a retired motor traffic officer from Santa Monica, California who had a huge American flag mounted on his bike. Directly behind him there was a gap in the formation, left there for the missing man. Then, strung out along the road, the bikers, most of them over 50, came as low thunder, wearing leather and gloves, brightly colored head rags and helmets, and all the protective gear needed for a trip across the nation and back. The line stretched more than a mile. As they drove up the hill, a crowd, and more local bikers, just arrived, stood and saluted them. When the riders disembarked, they joined the staff at the memorial in dedicating two trees, which had just been planted at the grave of Dr. Victor Westfall, the gentleman who founded the memorial as a tribute to fallen Vietnam veterans. His son David is among them. Dr. Westfall actually visited the place in Vietnam where his son was killed during an ambush. He placed some soil from Angel Fire there and brought Vietnamese soil back to New Mexico, which he scattered at the memorial. Most of the bikers agree that a lot of healing has come from the annual ride. Standing in front of a Vietnam-era helicopter at the memorial, Braga, a member of an airborne brigade in the First Cav. during the war, said, “After I did my first ride, I underwent a complete metamorphosis. It helped me deal with a lot of issues.”

David “Pegger” McDonald, a former Marine who served in Vietnam, is making his third run and said, “That first ride was a real tear-jerker for me. But I got in touch. It helped me deal with some stuff that just kept popping up. It still pops up but this ride helps put it in perspective.” McDonald, who served in the latter stages of the war, said part of his frustration was that few records exist of what his company did. They were assigned to protect a Marine air wing but as peace talks were being conducted the government didn't acknowledge that operations continued in their area. One of McDonald's buddies who suffered from delayed stress syndrome after the war filed for medical help, but since the record wasn't clear on what that company of Marines did, he had trouble proving he was in combat. McDonald was able to provide pictures of his fellow Marine in the war zone that were taken while hostilities still existed.

One of McDonald's riding partners on the Run this year is former Marine Mike "Little Big Mike" Hodge of North Bend, Washington. Hodge, a double amputee who lost both legs in 1968 during a mortar attack, rides what he calls a "full dress Harley Davidson." His bike is equipped with a sidecar where he carries a wheelchair. After the dedication, one of the road guards escorting the Run yelled, "Thirty minutes"—the amount of time the group had to visit the memorial, then form up and hit the road. Their destination that night was Raton, NM, about 60 miles across the mountains. On the way they would be welcomed by people lining the highways that ran through Eagles Nest and Cimarron. By the next day, those taking the southern route had to be in Weatherford, Texas, a full day's ride from Raton. There have been problems along the way. As the riders left Angel Fire, a truck carrying several bikers followed them out of the parking lot. Their bikes, broken down, were on a trailer being pulled behind. And there have been accidents and casualties. "That many bikes close together. You've got to be careful," said McDonald.

As the parade left Angel Fire, Jim Braga said, "This is family. I get calls from all over the country, now that I participate in these rides." Cyclist Dan Lopresto of Torrance, CA, who is not a vet but whose dad served in [WWII], said, "I have my freedom because of these guys. It's an honor to ride with them."

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## **THANK YOU RFTW FAMILY**

**By Jim 'Stogie' Glasgow**

[jglasgow@kc.rr.com](mailto:jglasgow@kc.rr.com)

**(816)356-0985**



I am not able, in words, to express how I feel about the help, care, and concern so many of the RFTW Family have provided and shown me after I went down in Arizona. It's like the first time you get the 'Welcome Home' hug—or see the people on the overpass with the flags, your breath catches in your chest and tears edge out at the corner of your eyes. I'm sorry that I don't remember all that helped me, as the last I remember is brake lights and sliding tires in front of me. I believe I tried to take evasive action but don't remember.

I have received many calls and emails from the RFTW Family checking on me and my bike so I wanted to provide an update. I am well and mobile. That being said, I'm still a little stiff and sore, but that will pass. I suffered five cracked ribs (5-9), cracked collar bone, and cracked shoulder. No road-rash, no scars. I am very thankful for coming out of this as well as I did and to all who helped me. The insurance company totaled the bike and I agreed with that as it seemed the easiest thing to do. Al Larson sent some pictures and it looks like I made the right decision (how often can we say that). I have phone numbers of some others who took pictures and I will contact them to make arrangements for copies. My wife and son arrived in Tucson on Friday the 20th and brought me home on Sunday the 22nd.

Another extremely really big help is those who picked up my belongings (road-trash) and put them together. I have been in contact with Shirley 'Top Sarge' Vance and she has said that my belongings will be mailed to me. This means a lot to me as I remember two years ago when I was working to get Craig 'Mudbug' Mathews' (Road Guard) bike and belongings back to Kansas City.

So again, a really big THANK YOU and HUG to the RFTW Family. As of now, I'm looking at a Gold Wing and planning to see you all next year.

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## **REFLECTIONS ON ROLLING THUNDER XVIII**

## **(OR WHY DID I/WE RIDE TO THE WALL?)**

**By Bart (a.k.a. Soap Box)**

**(Honorably Discharged US Army Vietnam Era Vet)**

**Rolling Thunder, NC Chapter 2**

**31 May 2005**

While riding southwest through the hills of Virginia last Monday, I found myself becoming more and more aggravated. What should have been a time of blissful reflection on the events of the past weekend became the source of questions, doubt, and even anger. At some point each of us must take a stand and damn the consequences. That point has arrived in my life.

What had I truly accomplished just 24 hours earlier? Had I made even one person care or even made one aware of our stated mission? That would make this journey worth my time, right? What did I accomplish? Maybe nothing. How very sad.

It has become painfully obvious that many “Run To The Wall” for reasons that have little or nothing to do with our goal of protesting the government’s lack of action over the POW/MIA issue. While many, and I pray, most, are pure in their desire to support said mission, all too many are completely clueless. Would you believe that one rider was actually heard to say she couldn’t believe how many bikers had gotten together to protest the war in Iraq?!?!?! While this example is certainly extreme, maybe it’s time to ask yourself, as I have, why did I ride to The Wall? If you don’t know why you are somewhere, maybe you don’t belong there. If you don’t have at least some level of commitment to the POW/MIA issue, then you have no business at Rolling Thunder’s “Run To The Wall” and certainly no right to wear the Rolling Thunder patch. That is my opinion, of course.

“I just had to see it.” “It’s the biggest one day bike event there is.” “400,000 scooters, what a party.” And on and on and on. All are valid reasons to attend a run or event at Daytona or Sturgis, but not this weekend, people. This weekend is supposed to be special; a time of purpose and reflection—a time that should be almost sacred.

People line the streets and bridges to watch the “parade.” At the end of the day my guess is that less than half know why we are actually in D.C. Some are simply there to see all the “crazy bikers.” Some hold signs saying “Support Our Troops” or “Welcome Home” or “September 11th Never Forget.” They offer “high fives.” All are outstanding, but wrong. We need to make the public and the media aware of our true mission. They must be reminded of the goal. Some of us need to be reminded too! THIS AIN’T NO DAMN PARADE, IT’S A PROTEST! This is a sad and solemn time.

If just half of those who line our route would write, call, or email their Representatives on Capitol Hill and demand answers and action, would that get those left behind the attention they are owed? Unfortunately I believe the sad truth is that the bystanders who do know why we ride are there by and large to do the “right thing” to make themselves feel a bit more patriotic or to be politically correct on this one day. Do they truly care or is a five-point drop in the Dow of more importance to them than living, breathing countrymen left behind? Unfortunately, I think we all know the answer to that one.

While I accept the bystanders for what they are, bystanders, I will never understand them. They, however, are not my concern. Each of us finds a way to justify and live with ourselves. Perhaps, however, we need to make more of an effort to inform the citizens as to the reason we are “invading” their space and “inconveniencing” them.

My concern lies with what each of us does. How we show our respect for those we are supposedly committed to bringing home. The name that is on the bracelet around your wrist—what do you know about him or his family? Have you ever contacted his son or daughter? Have you ever touched his name on The Wall? Do you even know the panel number on which it is chiseled?

When was the last time each of us sent a letter to a local newspaper? When was the last time each of us contacted our

Representatives on Capitol Hill? For me, I'm ashamed to say it has been more than a year. Can you even begin to imagine the impact that a single letter from each of us who rode to the Wall would have on our elected officials once every quarter? That's an average of over 820 letters in each and every Congressman's and Senator's office every quarter—more than 13 every working day. We can get their attention. Perhaps I am naïve, but I believe that each of us can make the politicians take notice, but if and only if we make an honest effort. We are at least 400,000 strong and we can make a difference. But we must do something now!

Politicians speak of their own legacy. The politician who brings forward the truth will not only assure that legacy, but may well be honored with statues not unlike those of the true men who forged the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Men of truth and principle, not men of PACs.

When the truth is told, and it always is, the American citizen will, in time, forgive and accept and heal. We are after all an inherently forgiving species. But time is short, very short. Our Senators and Congressmen have an opportunity to do something great and prove once and for all that they do care. Then close this chapter for not only those who served, who never returned, and indeed for America as a whole. But first we must demand action, not empty words. Action begins with each and every one of us. Search your heart. Have you done enough? Where is the POW/MIA issue on your priority list? I hope that you can live with the answers.

Time is growing short. It may already be too late for all but truth itself to be released from captivity. Our mission seems to have been evolving recently. Not so much in words as in tone. We began by screaming, "BRING THEM HOME OR SEND US BACK." We moved to whispering, "for an accounting of those listed as POW/MIA." How much further down the government's priority list are we going to allow our heroes to fall? Do the names Matt Maupin or Scott Speicher mean anything to you? While I believe with every fiber of my being that it *is possible* that live American fighting men are still held captive in Southeast Asia, I am certain each passing day and even hour dims the light of hope just that much more. If we do not do something, who will? If not now, when? Time, my friends, is short. The government marks time just waiting, I'm afraid, for you and me to tire or die. They are winning and unless we do something now, our "leaders" in Washington will have succeeded in sweeping this ugly chapter in our history under the oval office carpet.

I have no right, nor is it my intent, to preach to those of you, many of whom I respect more than words can express. I have not and by the grace of God will never have to experience the path many of you have walked. I am honored and humbled when you call me brother and I understand the responsibility that goes with it. Part of that responsibility is to seek, speak, and write the truth.

Please do not read into my ranting any more than there is. I am certainly not in a position to question anyone's motives—how could I be when I am not even sure of my own. All I ask is that we each look inside ourselves and ask, if it were a crime to be a member of Rolling Thunder or an advocate for POW/MIAs, would there be enough evidence to convict or would I walk free, head hung low and asking could I have done more? For me, today, the answer makes me feel ashamed.

Thanks for your time and for considering one man's opinion. Here's hoping that next year we all feel as though we have earned the privilege of riding in Rolling Thunder XIX.

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**CRIPPLE CREEK 2005**  
**Salute to American Veterans Rally and Festival**  
**August 18–21, 2005, Cripple Creek, Colorado**  
**The oldest Veterans' Ride/Rally in the west**

Join thousands of Veterans and Patriots Saturday, August 20, 2005 when the 18th POW/MIA Recognition Ride rolls

through the mountains and into Cripple Creek for the Salute to American Veterans Rally. FREE 18th Anniversary Ride Pin for all POW/MIA ride participants! Join Colorado's **LARGEST** procession of motorcycles.

For camping and lodging information, call 1-(877)-858-4653.

Camping is available at Cripple Creek KOA; Information: (719) 689-3376 or [cripplecreekkoa@hotmail.com](mailto:cripplecreekkoa@hotmail.com).

Reserve online or by phone: (800) 562-9125.

For more info, see [http://www.pro-promotions.com/cripple\\_creek\\_rally.php](http://www.pro-promotions.com/cripple_creek_rally.php).

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## **RFTW REUNION IN WICKENBURG, AZ**

**October 7-9, 2005**

Start making your plans now for the RFTW Reunion in October. R.C. and Rock report that it will be October 7, 8, and 9 (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) in Wickenburg, Arizona. Our motels will again be the Best Western (928-684-5445) and the Super 8 (928-684-0808).

Dinner on Friday evening will be at 1800 hours (6 p.m.) at Anita's Cocina. It's pay your own, same as last year. On Saturday afternoon there will be a BBQ at the park; dinner TBA. There will be no official, sponsored ride this year, but we will have biker games, 50/50, and other great things--including some surprises. See you there!

If you have any questions, contact Rock at [boonierat7@hotmail.com](mailto:boonierat7@hotmail.com) or R.C. at (928) 684-2646.

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## **RFTW REUNION IN TEXAS HILL COUNTRY**

**October 14-16, 2005**

Mark your calendar for the weekend of October 14-16, for a get-together in Fredericksburg, TX. Come for some great Hill Country riding and for catching up with our RFTW family. The motels are the Frontier Inn & RV Park, and The Country Inn. Frontier Inn is already booked on rooms and cottages. The Country Inn has a great website [www.mycountryinn.com](http://www.mycountryinn.com) and has both rooms and cottages. When making reservations, be sure to mention it's under RFTW Reunion.

Schedule:

Friday evening is open.

Saturday offers a choice of 3 different rides through the Hill Country, led by local bikers (RFTW participants) who know the country backroads and will make the ride very enjoyable.

Saturday evening is supper at a local restaurant.

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

The Country Inn #'s:

Phone # (830) 997-2185

Jeff & Amy, motel owners & great people.

Website: [www.mycountryinn.com](http://www.mycountryinn.com)

The hot summer days will be over, and fall will be in the air. There's no big local event scheduled in the town for that weekend, so make your plans and come join us.

For more information, contact Mojo at [mojoRFTW@aol.com](mailto:mojoRFTW@aol.com).

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## **LONG BEACH VETERANS DAY PARADE AND BBQ** **November 5, 2005**

Mark your calendars for the 2005 Long Beach Veterans Day Parade followed by the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 756 Barbeque. Staging for the parade begins at 0830, Saturday, November 5, on Atlantic Avenue, south of Artesia St. (adjacent to Houghton Park, home of the Long Beach Vietnam Veterans Memorial). The parade begins at 0945 hours.

This year we will be parading (on motorcycles) along with our brothers and sisters of the VVA, Chapter 756 (this Chapter has a long history of support of RFTW). After the parade, the Chapter will be hosting a "Welcome Home" barbecue at the local VFW (2805 South St.). All RFTW participants and their guests are welcome.

The Long Beach Veterans Day Parade has been a long-time favorite of RFTW and is mentioned in the movie "Homecoming." Please join us in this parade and experience a true "Welcome Home" and "Thank You" from our citizens of Long Beach and Surrounding areas.

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## **DIGNITY MEMORIAL WALL IN ONTARIO** **November 4-6 at Bellevue Memorial Park**

The Dignity Memorial® Vietnam Wall Experience™ is a traveling, three-quarter-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Dignity Memorial® funeral, cremation and cemetery providers created this powerful memorial as a service to those who may never visit the nation's capital to see "The Wall" firsthand. The exhibit crisscrosses the country each year, allowing millions of visitors to see and touch the black, mirror-like surface inscribed with the names of more than 58,000 Americans who died or are missing in Vietnam. Honoring all U.S. veterans and dedicated to Vietnam veterans, the faux-granite replica is 240 feet long and eight feet high. Admission is free.

The wall will be at Bellevue Memorial Park, 1240 W. G. St., Ontario, a few blocks south of the I-10 Mountain Ave. exit. Volunteers are needed to help during the three-day exhibition. You can volunteer to help in any of these categories: Publicity, Programs and Ceremonies, Ground Site & Construction, Safety, Motorcycle Escort, Hospitality, Accounting & Administration, Email Communications Coordinator. Also needed are a number of Name Readers, as all names on the wall will be read throughout the exhibition.

If you would like to volunteer, call Bellevue at (909) 986-1131 or visit the website at <http://www.vietnamwallexperience.com/>.

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## **OPERATION WELCOME HOME** **November 11-13, 2005, Las Vegas**

During Aviation Nation 2005, Nellis Air Force Base and Las Vegas will roll out the red carpet for a rousing patriotic tribute to all our Vietnam veterans November 11-13, 2005. Operation Welcome Home is a tribute to our Vietnam Veterans and the welcome home they have never received.



Operation Welcome Home is part of Aviation Nation this year, the 30th anniversary of the fall of Saigon and the end of “the Vietnam era.” On November 11, Vietnam veterans will be given the Welcome Home parade that they never got when they returned home. It will celebrate the service and legacy of the courageous young men and women who answered America's call during an especially volatile time in our nation’s history. Las Vegas, Nevada has generously agreed to act as host city for this long-overdue celebration. But the festivities shouldn't be limited to Las Vegas. OWH organizers would like cities and towns throughout the country to follow the Vegas lead and hold Vietnam veterans parade at the same time, making it the “World’s Largest Welcome Home Parade.”

With 2005 marking the 30th anniversary of the end of America's involvement in Vietnam, there has never been a better time to heal the wounds of that turbulent era. America’s Vietnam veterans are still young enough to participate and appreciate the significance of such an event. We need to embrace this vital mission not as one city or state, but as an entire nation. It will only serve to reinforce our appreciation for the challenges faced by today’s young men and women in uniform!

For more info on this event, see: <http://www.vietnamwelcomehome.org/05/about/>

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## **GET AN AGENT ORANGE EXAM From VFW, May 2005**

All Vietnam veterans are eligible for Agent Orange exams. Please pass this important information to all Vietnam vets you know.

Any and all Vietnam veterans who have not had an Agent Orange exam should do so immediately, according to VFW, especially if they have cancer.

“If a Vietnam veteran has recorded documentation of a cancer that VA considers to be caused by Agent Orange exposure—such as prostate cancer—he will more than likely have a disability rating within two weeks,” says John McNeill, deputy director of VFW’s National Veterans Service.

Before visiting VA for an exam, McNeill says veterans should see a service officer for guidance. The service officer can explain the 12 conditions that VA presumes to have been caused by Agent Orange exposure and that make a vet eligible for VA compensation.

Agent Orange exams are free. The 12 diseases linked to Agent Orange exposure are chronic lymphatic leukemia, chloracne, diabetes, Hodgkin’s disease, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, peripheral neuropathy, pophyria cutanea tarda, prostate cancer, respiratory cancers, soft tissue sarcoma, and spina bifida. As required by law, VA reviews research on herbicide exposure every two years and adds any diseases that may have been caused by Agent Orange.

For more info on Agent Orange and VA benefits, go to <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/Herbicide/AOno3.htm>.

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## **DEAR VIETNAM VETERAN By Jack Cunningham, [www.CAPveterans.com](http://www.CAPveterans.com)**

I know I should have written much sooner.

I can't say why I did not. Out of fear of admitting to myself, you were there, fighting a war. Or maybe ashamed. Ashamed that I never accepted the things you felt you had to do. Whatever it was, I know how it must hurt. Believe me when I say it hurts me more. I have the burden of your hurt plus that of my own. The pain of not being able to show my true feeling towards you. I am not writing this for the months you served in Vietnam, but for the many years you were left alone with only your brother Veterans. You served proudly and it went unmentioned. For a long time, I've wanted to express the words. The words an honorable Veteran needs to hear. For a long time, I've wanted to hold you during your times of pain. God knows I wanted to. And only He knows why I never found the courage. I do not remember what I used to say; maybe I do not want to remember. All I know is I hope that it is not too late to give you those things now. For years you tried to be part of my world. Doing everything to please me, just to be noticed and given a little time and understanding ... I look back and see the demands I placed on your shoulders when you were young. "Fight your weakness, and always show strength to others around you." Who was I to make such a demand? I sit here with tears in my heart; finally admitting to myself the one weakness you must have seen in me and never questioned. My inability to say the words that I know would have meant so much to you. "Welcome Home." You served your country honorably. Please hear these words now from my heart. Please give me a chance to be part of your world now. The world I should have been part of long ago.

Love,  
America

"Honor never grows old, and honor rejoices the heart of age. It does so because honor is, finally, about defending those noble and worthy things that deserve defending, even if it comes at a high cost. In our time, that may mean social disapproval, public scorn, hardship, persecution, or as always, even death itself. The question remains: What is worth defending? What is worth dying for? What is worth living for?"

—William J. Bennett, in a lecture to the United States Naval Academy November 24, 1997.

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