



RUN FOR THE WALL

Quarterly Newsletter

“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”

January 2009

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THE EDITOR’S NOTES



The holidays are over; I hope everyone was blessed this year with loved ones close by and touched by the joys of the season. The New Year means it’s time to begin thinking about the Run again. Your Board of Directors have been at work since the 2008 Run ended, and details are almost ready to be given out. This year, however, the list of hotels was not posted until January 1, rather than December 1. This was not due to any foot-dragging by the BOD; it was because some of the hotels would not accept reservations until January 1. Now that the list is out, be sure to get your reservations right away. There’s no worse feeling than calling and learning that all the rooms are gone.

Do you ever wonder just how far-reaching Run For The Wall is? Do we have any kind of impact on anyone besides the people in the towns we travel through every year? A friend in England told me recently that more than 2,000 motorcycle-riding veterans over there recently put together the first ride to honor their troops killed in action since World War II. And, she told me, the idea came from Run For The Wall. I searched the Internet and found an article on the event, held in October. It was, indeed, modelled after Run For The Wall, although the UK ride was only 17 miles long. The ride will be held every year, and perhaps in the future it may be

expanded. Be sure to read about it under "Other Stories." This is truly a huge tribute to RFTW, and we can be very proud. The UK group has a little work ahead of them, though, to learn how to ride together safely. Watching them take off was a bit like watching the Keystone Cops. There are several YouTube videos of their first ride. Here's one to watch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=928aQvMKC8Y&NR=1>.

Unfortunately, I don't receive many stories for the newsletter, but a lot of riders post bits and pieces of their experiences on the Discussion Forum on the RFTW website. In this issue read some of the comments I collected from the Forum. It's good to know that FNGs are having positive experiences their first time on the Run.

I wish you a Happy New Year and hope that 2009 will be filled with things that will bring you joy.

They are not forgotten ...
Judy "Velcro" Lacey

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Mark "Straightarrow" Rittermeyer



First of all let me say **THANK YOU** to all of you who worked so long and hard to make this year's RUN a success. 2008 was a very good year for RFTW, as we endeavored to keep the Mission first. Thousands were touched, and educated, as well as being introduced to the healing process, and to the welcome home they never got. We are looking forward to 2009, and all that it will bring, as well as what we can do for those who can't.

I had the privilege as the President of RFTW on December 19th in Anaheim California to present a check on behalf of RFTW in the amount of \$2,500.00 to the Snowball Express Organization (www.snowballexpress.org). This organization invites over 1,500 family members of fallen Heroes annually (at no expense to them) to Anaheim for a week they will never forget including a free day at Universal Studios, Disneyland, and a special walk of gratitude that was awesome. I was honored to volunteer for the week as well as represent RFTW.

This photo is of Roy White Chairman of the Board of Snowball Express accepting a check. I wish all of you could have heard the roar of thanks that came from over 1,500 in attendance that evening.



As plans are in the final stages for the 2009 Run, please keep an eye on the website for all the latest information. If you are interested in serving in any capacity, please contact one of the Route Coordinators for information on positions that are available.

On a personal note, CH CPT Phillip "Gator" Rittermeyer will be returning to Fort Carson sometime in early spring as the 64th BSB will have completed their 15 month deployment. As to you, and all of our service persons WELCOME HOME, and THANK YOU!!!!

May all of you be blessed in the New Year!

Never Forget!!!
Mark "Straightarrow" Rittermeyer

► **RFTW 2009**

NEW IN 2009: ONLINE REGISTRATION

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

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

2009 HOTELS NOW POSTED

The list of hotels for the Run are usually posted on the RFTW website by December 1 each year, but this year, because some hotels will not accept reservations until January 1, it was decided not to post the list until January 1. Make your reservations right away, because the hotels fill up fast.

CALIFORNIA PRE-RUN EVENTS

By Jim "The Mayor" Frost, CA State Coordinator

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

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 9:30 a.m. | Run to Riverside National Cemetery and its Medal of Honor Memorial and POW/MIA Memorial. Meet at host hotel. |
| 4:30 p.m. | Blessing of the Bikes at Central Park, NW corner of Milliken Ave. and Base Line Rd. |
| 5:30-7:30 p.m. | Meet, Greet, & Mingle dinner at Central Park. This may be your only time to mingle with riders on both routes. |

2009 RFTW MERCHANDISE

All 2009 merchandise has been ordered and scheduled to arrive the first week in February. We will be ready to ship orders beginning February 15 or a little sooner. We will make all the appropriate changes to the website the first week in January so we can begin receiving orders anytime after the website changes have been made. Keep in mind we will not ship until the middle of February and we will not run your credit card or deposit your checks until the order is shipped.

Website ordering will end April 25 this year to allow us more time to get the trailers ready for the "Run." Please get your orders in early. We will not accept orders after April 25.

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

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

MEET THE 2009 CENTRAL ROUTE COORDINATOR

Russ (Sheep Dog) Cockrum



I consider it an honor to be asked to serve as Central Route Coordinator for 2009 Run For The Wall. When Judy (Sugar Bear) and I did our first Run 7 years ago, we thought we had made a big mistake. By the end of the first day we were ready to pack it in. But, we kept going, one day at a time, till we reached The Wall ten days later. I never thought I'd finish my first Run, let alone stay involved all these years, volunteering for different positions each year.

Judy and I have been married 41 years and have two sons and five grandchildren. Judy rides a Yamaha FJR and I a BMW 1200LT. We ride to support the mission statement of RFTW: "To promote healing among ALL veterans and their families and friends, to call for an accounting of all Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action (POW/MIA), to honor the memory of those Killed in Action (KIA) from all wars, and to support our military personnel all over the world."

I served in the U.S. Army Security Agency from 1968 - 1972. As a SPC 5 Signal Intelligence Traffic Analyst, I was attached to the 7th Infantry Division on the DMZ in Korea 1969-1970. Many of us who served during the Viet Nam era remember the less than warm reception we received when returning home to the States. Our personal cause for continuing to stay involved in RFTW is to show support for the young men and women who currently serve. It's our purpose to see that never again do politics and negative public opinion show disrespect to those who wear the uniform of our country.



I look forward to serving as Central Route Coordinator for 2009 RFTW. It is an awesome and humbling responsibility to be asked to direct the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, returning RFTW veterans and FNGs. Let me be the first to say to all 2009 FNG veterans, "Thank you for your service," and "welcome home."

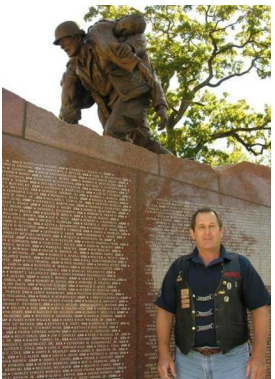
Russ "Sheep Dog" Cockrum

rftwsheepdog@gmail.com

765 342-1582

MEET THE 2009 SOUTHERN ROUTE COORDINATOR

Greg (Pied Piper) Smith



Greetings RFTW Family and Friends!

I would never have dreamed that when Frank "Tadpole" Perry talked me into going along on a cross-country motorcycle event a few years ago it would bring me to where we are today. The event, to honor and support veterans and demand accountability for POWs and MIAs, was, of course, RFTW. And where we are today is my having the honor and privilege of being the Southern Route Coordinator for 2009. Which now I suppose means I should tell you a little about myself.

I do safety consulting for a living; volunteer both in my profession, and other areas such as RFTW and a new local non-profit organization treating substance abuse, and put miles on my Harley Road Glide every chance I get (which includes the occasional business trip). Hailing from Southeast Missouri originally, I have proudly claimed Texas as home since 1979 (I visited Texas in 1974 after my discharge from the Navy and thought it was a pretty cool place), and plan to stay put in West Point, Texas from now on if the good Lord is willing and the creeks don't rise too much.

RFTW has become to me much more than the sum of its parts. The Mission, the focus, and the people constantly interact to build and rebuild the process of paying honor to the men and women that have served their country in all conflicts. Whether they came home, are lost to us for the moment in some faraway land, or are actively engaging the enemy as you read this, they deserve our respect and support. To me they all epitomize the maxim of SR 2009: "Service Beyond Self." It is my hope that in my role as Southern Route Coordinator I can further the efforts of all to heal, to seek accountability, and to promote awareness. I look forward to the trip ahead and to seeing you in May – the time grows nigh. Thank you all for your support.

Greg "Pied Piper" Smith
SR Coordinator 2009
"Service Beyond Self"
piedpiperrftw@gmail.com
512-694-3335

CENTRAL ROUTE HOTEL CHANGE

By Roger "Grizzly" Ingram, Missouri State Coordinator

There are some changes for the stops in Missouri. The gas stop in western Missouri is being changed to Concordia. The same good people that have been serving us lunch are still going to be there again. I'm very grateful for their support. At Wentzville, the host hotel is the same, but it is now a Motel 6 instead of Holiday Inn.

This is my first year as the Missouri state coordinator. If I can be of help to anyone with questions about Missouri, please let me know 573-470-4994 or rlisdi@sbcglobal.net). Also, let us never forget that we ride for those that cannot!

CENTRAL ROUTE VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED

Preparations for 2009 Run For The Wall Central Route are well underway. Russ "Sheepdog" Cockrum has been receiving requests from those who want to volunteer for 2009. Following is the contact information for five leaders looking for Volunteers.

Road Guard Captain
Bob "Gunny" Tharp
404 SW 7th Terrace
Blue Springs, MO 64015
Home: 816-220-1892 Cell: 816-805-1946
email: rptgunny@sbcglobal.net

Fuel Crew Leader
Stan "Ironfish" Handley
903 Laury Road
Colville, WA 99114
Home: 509-685-9395 Cell: 509-690-1638
email: handley@eltopia.com

Staging Crew Leader
Dave "Trunks" Gladwill
8576 Live Oak Road

Stockton, CA 95212
Home: 209-369-0879 Cell: 209 329-9367
email: gladwills@sbcglobal.net or dgladwill@slakey.com

Missing Man Coordinator

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

Registration

Harry and Martha Steelman
31982 Paseo Amante
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675
Home: 949-493-4327 Cell: 213-305-6373
email: hsteelman@aol.com

SOUTHERN ROUTE

GREG "Pied Piper" Smith reports that all Southern Route positions are filled, but if you want to volunteer give him a call in case he has openings. PiedPiperRFTW@gmail.com or 512-694-3335

► POW/MIA UPDATES

TWO FORMER LEGISLATORS PUSH FOR POW INVESTIGATION

Former Republican Congressmen Bill Hendon (R-NC) and John LeBoutillier (R-NY), long active in the Vietnam War POW debate, told radio host Don Imus in an interview recently that U.S. POWs are still alive in communist prisons in Southeast Asia and that the U.S. must honor its commitments under the Paris Peace Accords to gain the men's release.

The two former lawmakers discussed the intelligence the U.S. government has received on these POWs and the steps the new administration should take to get them home.

Congressman Hendon is the author of the 2007 *New York Times* bestseller, AN ENORMOUS CRIME: The Definitive Account of American POWs Abandoned in Southeast Asia now out in paperback (the hardcover debuted at #34 on the hardcover, nonfiction, *New York Times* bestseller list last year).

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLiN-rlJBBU> to see the interview with Bill Hendon and John LeBoutillier.

► OUR STORIES

MESSAGE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

By Michael "Enigma" Mendell

Although this is a Christmas message, it applies to the New Year as well, and all year around.

Sitting in the audience of the Trans-Siberian Orchestra last evening, I heard the band leader thanking different groups of people for their support throughout the year. At the end he said, "And I most want to thank our service people around the world who are protecting the freedoms we enjoy here at home." Although the crowd roared and clapped in support, I lost my hearing.

I found myself back in Viet Nam, in a hooch with my gunner, Marc Lamphere, in the midst of a seventy-hour Christmas stand-down for our Ranger company. Next door, "Che," my chunker man, and Xinh, my scout, were arguing about Vietnamese gamelan music versus country wailing. From elsewhere I could hear someone making a tape to send home, while still others were playing cards, or just talking, mostly about the two most popular subjects: women and time left before DEROS.

Someone had hooked up a transistor radio to the company speaker system and Armed Forces Radio was playing Christmas songs and dedications to various soldiers and units throughout the country. Everyone just continued with what they were doing until a song came on, with no dedication, and one by one everyone stopped talking and whatever else they were doing and listened. I stepped out of my hooch and could see everyone else was standing out there, looking toward the orderly room speaker and listening as the words wafted over us.

Soldier boy
Oh, my little soldier boy
I'll be true to you

You were my first love
And you'll be my last love
I will never make you blue
I'll be true to you

In the whole world
You can love but one girl
Let me be that one girl
For I'll be true to you

Wherever you go
My heart will follow
I love you so I'll be true to you

Take my love with you
To any port or foreign shore
Darling you must feel for sure
For I'll be true to you
Soldier boy
Oh, my little soldier boy
I'll be true to you

This Christmas, please take a moment and send your thoughts to our children and grandchildren who are serving all around the world and remember that they are our Soldier Boys and Girls.

RFTW 2008 FROM THE EYES OF FNG'S

(Editor's note: these entries were posted in the RFTW Discussion Forum following the 2008 RFTW. I invite future FNGs to send their thoughts and experiences on their first RFTW to me for the next newsletter after the

Run. Those riding with us for the first time can give us invaluable insight; you can tell us what we're doing right and what we can improve.)

After departing Rancho Cucamonga our first lunch stop was the fairgrounds in Blythe, California. As we approached Blythe we left the I-10 for a frontage road that would take us to the fairgrounds and lunch. Along the north side of the frontage road were supporters, a few in the beginning and more as we proceeded to the fairgrounds, all waving flags or just waving. I'm starting to be very impressed with the ride and my decision to go "all the way." After about a mile or so, up ahead I noticed 10 or 12 men in orange, prisoner-type coveralls working along the road being supervised by guards. As with all the supporters on the roadside, these prisoners also waved and celebrated our purpose and arrival. But one prisoner stood out. He was thin, black and ramrod straight saluting, in the finest way, all the riders. Saluting, I am sure, as he did a few or a lot of years before when he was a member of the armed forces. I saluted back, give him a thumbs-up and to myself wished him much better fortunes after he served his time.

Jack Maxwell

My first big eye opener as an FNG came before we left RC. I took the ride out to March AFB to go to the POW Memorial and the Medal of Honor Memorial. Prior to going on the ride to the AFB I had a chance to look at the itinerary. One of the names on the itinerary for the Medal of Honor Memorial was a John Baca. Mr. Baca's name was familiar to me. When I met John at the memorial I asked him if he had ever been to the Naval Hospital in San Diego. John replied that he had. In 1970 I was a hospital corpsman at the Naval Hospital. John was one of my patients. I was off for a couple of days and when I came back he was gone. I had not seen John for 38 years. To see that he was alive and well was totally overwhelming.

There is absolutely nothing I could have done to prepare myself for what the RFTW would reveal to me as a veteran and an American. I encourage anyone who is a veteran, a family member of a veteran, or any individual, to participate in this MISSION. As long as you live you will never forget the experience, and especially the people of RFTW.

I would like to say "Thank You" to the RFTW family, and my friend and mentor Stan "Iron Fish" Handley, for showing this FNG that Patriotism is alive and well in the USA!

Bubba

I was on the central route, and 2008 was my 4th year on the run. I always marvel at the support we get from the communities. 2008 was historic as it was the 20th run. It was also a great ride this year. A lot of changes have been made, and some of the old hands had to admit that by the time we left Angel Fire the formation was pretty awesome. There was some rubberbanding, and for you FNGs in 08 you did great, it was a lot better than I have ever experienced. (That could be cause I finally figured out how to ride.) I had a lot of work to do so I did not get to talk to everyone that I would have liked to. I just want to thank everyone who participated for making the riding safe and a lot easier than the three previous years. Part of my job was to talk to trucks on channel 19 and I want to thank all of the riders who had radios that allowed Krazy Karl, Trike, and Grumpy and myself to do this job as we needed to. Looking forward to next year. The sheer amount of organization that goes into this event is breathtaking, and for all the griping the fact that we get it done safely is great. JR has said it well "just ride your motorcycle" and "This wonder is run by a bunch of volunteers." Both paraphrases but you all should get the drift. Thanks everyone for a good run.

Dave Talley

General and I were FNGs this year and would also like to say Thank You to the Fuel Crew, the Road Guards, the Platoon Leaders, the Chase Vehicles, the Leadership, the Patriots along the way, the Townspeople, the Local LEOs and anyone else that makes it possible for such a successful Mission. I followed threads for the past year reading and asking questions from some of you before joining up in Weatherford, Texas. At first I was a little apprehensive about the journey. Those went away the first day. I am still in awe of how well the group

moves across the USA. One of the items touched on at the morning meeting in Weatherford was that not one of us was more important than the others; it is the Mission that is priority. I rode with that thought all the way to DC. What a great Family I have been Honored to be in the presence of. Again, thank you to everyone.

General's Driver

I guess this is as good a place as any to tell everyone on the ride thanks for all the help and support for this FNG, and thanks for the re-awakening. I've wanted to make the ride for years, but never made the serious effort until this year. I purchased a POW/MIA bracelet when I returned home in 1972, wore it for several years then put it away when my wife and I started raising our family. I dug it out shortly before the ride, and now wear it again with the conviction I had 36 years ago. I won't leave the house without it again. I've seen a few complaints in other discussion threads, but through an FNG's eyes the riders and other people I met on the ride as well as the hosts at all of our stops really showed support and respect for our veterans, welcomed home the Viet Nam veterans and showed support for the POW/MIA cause. The leaders and volunteers who make this ride happen every year have my utmost respect for what they do and I only pray that we continue to keep this cause alive. I'm now a promoter for RFTW and looking forward to next year's ride.

Terry Sharp

I was an FNG this year and rode a day to get to Hurricane WV to join up. During one of the rider meetings I think it was Hammer who said (especially to the FNGs) that the first year you ride for yourself and after that you ride for all the ones on the wall. Although an FNG, I had been to The Wall a couple of times before and I know that the first visit was for me. My RFTW, however, was for the following people:

My uncle Warren Hayse Houck, MSgt (Ret), USMC whose funeral I went to less than a month before the run. He served one tour in the Korean War and two tours in Vietnam before retiring in 1968.

My uncle Baxter McLyndon Houck, Cpl, USMC who served in the South Pacific in WW II.

My uncle Henry Alexander Houck, SSgt, USMC who served in the South Pacific in WW II and a charter member of the 1st MarDiv.

My uncle Mason Dixon Houck, SSgt (Ret), USMC who served in WW II, Korea, and ran a dozer in the construction of DaNang Air Base.

These were all of the uncles on my Mother's side of the family.

Also for my grandmother Virginia Elizabeth Houck who had a poem published in the 'Leatherneck' magazine during WW II. God rest your soul Grandma and Semper Fi!

Next year I hope to ride for my father and his six brothers who were all in military uniform during WW II.

Lonzo

I had the pleasure of speaking to some of the riders during their stop here in Las Cruces, New Mexico this year. I had attended the ceremony at our Veteran's Park in the past but this was my first time at the Thursday arrival.

It was an honor to stand on the bridge Friday morning and bid you Vaya Con Dios.

During my time in Northern Virginia, I watched Rolling Thunder each year. From 2000 to 2004, I watched as your ranks swelled on the road and the crowds grew to greet you from the sidewalk. I can't explain to you the emotions that come up when I think back to those days.

I thank you for riding for the man whose bracelet I've worn since I learned about the POW/MIA issues in 1983 when I was a sophomore in high school in El Paso, TX. His name is SFC Michael Burns, MIA 7/31/69 Laos. Thank you for keep his—and all others'—memories alive.

God Bless each of you and I look forward to seeing you again in Las Cruces next year.

NMGIRL98

This is my third year to be involved with RFTW in some capacity. The first year, I attended the wreath ceremony in Monroe as a civilian. The second year, my unit provided humvee escort to Jackson. This year I rode on the back of a bike with one of my platoon sergeants from Monroe to Meridian. I experienced it not as an observer or a worker but as a participant. Other than joining the military and raising my daughter, this is one of my most treasured accomplishments. It broke my heart to see the formation ride by, leaving Meridian without me in it. I can assure you that SSG Pee and myself will accompany the formation to Washington, D.C. next year! That ride will be especially emotional for me, as I will deploy to Iraq toward the end of next year. I look forward to that deployment with pride knowing that there are people at home, like all of you, taking care of business. Today is the Saturday before Memorial Day. I am still wearing my arm band and my RFTW dog tag. I can't seem to take them off. I continue to think about all of you....mad at myself that I am not there. I wish all of you a safe return home and hope you know what an impact you have made on my life. I feel like I have a huge mission now. I have been a walking advertising campaign for the RFTW since my return home. I WILL see all of you next year!

Angela Fry

I've been trying to make the run since 2004. I made it this year. I was so humbled and touched to be a part of a brotherhood of veterans. I have not been moved this way since I left Vietnam. I joined the run in Monroe and it took two days to get my heart out of my throat. I was so proud to be a part of such a great group of people. I'm proud to be a veteran again. I would like to thank Pete Nolan (Baron) for introducing me to RFTW. I would also like to thank 2nd platoon leader Jeff (Breeze) Starks for the fine job and great time. Looking forward to next year. I will be going all the way next year. I would like to thank all the leadership, road guards, and the advanced team. I'll see you in Kerrville. Have a safe and wonderful year.

Vail (Freebird) Hebert.

MAKE SOME NOISE!

By Bill "No-Chute" Hanlon

We have become too civilized. When we like something we put our hands together and clap ever so polite. Our mothers are proud of us at our civilized way. To me it rates along with advanced napkin folding.

Is this who we are on the RFTW Mission? It is certainly "politically correct" and acceptable for all events. I have ridden across country with you all and clapped at lunches and dinners when it is called for just as we are told in such language as "lets give a round of applaud for XXXX" or "put your hands together for XXXXX" or "lets give a thanks to XXXX" while we are eating lunch/dinner draining a community of all the food they gladly lay before us. It is totally civilized. Their memory of us is that of polite men and women coming and clapping.

What is different about us on this mission from every day? Too many things! First and foremost we have a real mission that no one takes up especially our lawmakers unless we stand. We leave none behind. No war is ended until all are accounted. This is all to us.

We have countless other things marking us as different on the mission, like leathers, street names (that we earn), we don't shake hands "politely" and "politically correctly"; we give a bear hug when we meet a brother. No one can see us as a doctor, lawyer, accountant, or anyone else—we are riders. We salute as we roar by. We smile wider and laugh more and louder than anyone else. Our vest speaks to our military life and our missions with philosophy and well wishes to Hanoi Jane. Most of all . . .

. . . WE MAKE NOISE! The iron horses roar as we ride and somehow get louder as we enter a town with folks lining the streets. We are riders, knights, and warriors of old. Our flags fly ahead of us big as we can get, showing our pride in our country. We make a LOT of NOISE to show the world we are alive and we are still here! When we have a lunch or dinner on the way to THE WALL, we listen to the ride leader and should we clap as he gives a speech thanking those folks around us or, should we MAKE SOME NOISE to thank those who feed us, who honor us like few do? Should we leave them all with a memory of RFTW so profound to know that we are absolute in our mission and appreciation of their efforts? HUH? What and how?

How did warriors act to show appreciation sitting at tables during a meal? The best way I can picture it is in a scene from the movie "Excalibur," the 1981 film where the warriors/knights are sitting at a long table and a dancer entertains them and they reward her with loud pounding on the table, fists and mugs slamming on the table making a thunderous noise, louder and louder in appreciation with voices hailing loudly to honor the host or personage deserving. Those were warriors and did not care about "polite," "cute," or "politically correct" clapping that our wives would like from us but LOUD NOISE of APPRECIATION from warriors. Do we owe those who feed us with polite clapping or noise so loud that they laugh as we do in the making of it?

Do we see ourselves as warriors riding iron horses ready and willing to stand by a brother, some after 40+ years, and in some small way a fantasy picture of knights riding the roads? Is our cause right! Our resolve absolute! We know our mission and will not be stopped. To me, we are knightly in all respects! What say you?

As for me, I am so proud to be a part of RFTW. I have met true men. After 40 years of corporate bull where veterans mean nothing, and pushing paper is everything, I now hope never again to wear a tie. I went to face THE WALL after 40 years of fear and trepidation, and it changed me in ways only a few can know. Not even my wife understands me at times.

I stand by you all and I hope I can be more and more deserving of the gift of life I have and serve our troops to the last day of my life.

I stand as . . .

No-Chute

Proud Life Member of Viet Nam Vets #785

Proud to work the Third Year on the Run For The Wall in California.

Proud Member of American Legion Riders #777 and American Legion Post 262

Proud Life Member of the VFW Post 9148 same as my dad, uncle, and cousin.

Proud Son of a WWII Combat Veteran

Proud Nephew of a WWII Combat Veteran

Proud Cousin to a Viet Nam Combat Veteran

All of them waiting for me!

PATO PATO'S RFTW MEMORIES

By Judy "Velcro" Lacey



If you were on the 2008 Run, you may have signed a leather strip that Pato Pato was planning to attach to a display he was making. His RFTW vest was pretty worn out—actually it was downright ragged—but he didn't want to throw it out. So he took some of the patches off the vest and put them on a hide that he stretched onto a frame to make a wall display—a sort of personal RFTW memorial. All of the leather strips that friends signed on the Run were tied around the frame.

What a beautiful way to preserve RFTW memories. Great work, Pato!

DUSTIN'S ESSAY

(Ryan Dustin Bird is the 14-year-old grandson of Missouri State Coordinator Roger "Grizzly" Ingram. Dustin wrote an essay that was entered in the local VFW and Ladies Auxiliary Post 8177 Patriot's Pen Contest. Dustin's essay won at the local level and is now going to be presented at the District #17 level. Dustin is an eighth grader at South Shelby Middle School in Bowling Green, Missouri.)

HONOR OUR VETERANS

Today with our busy lives it is easy to forget the sacrifices that our soldiers have made and that America did not just magically become a free country. When you talk to people today many of them question why we should honor soldiers who fight for what they call "unjust causes." I believe that our veterans should be honored because they have risked more than anyone else to protect our values and freedom. Every day they put their lives on the line to protect people they never met and never will meet. Thousands of young soldiers come home missing limbs, in bandages, and all too often in bodybags—just so we could continue to live free and happy lives in America.

Not honoring these brave men and women who have served us so bravely would be like spitting on the Declaration of Independence or burning the US Constitution. The anguish and hatred they had to suffer is appalling. They all should be honored and respected for the service they gave. A friend of my family, Billy Pfeister, served in Vietnam. His camp was attacked. After being shot in the leg, he learned that his twin brother had been killed during the same attack. He now suffers mentally and physically because of the shock that gave him. Another man I met, Gordon Ward, was among the first Marines to land on the beaches of Iwo Jima, and a mortar blew up near him. After dragging himself back to the shore, a medic tied a tourniquet to his leg. As he did this another mortar blew up and killed the medic. The medic's body was all that kept Gordon from being killed.

Not honoring these men and others like them is despicable. Post-traumatic stress disorder still plagues our men today. Men who saw things in battle that they can never tell their families about suffer from flashbacks and paranoia. We need to do everything we can to show them that we care and are grateful for their service. These men and women should be honored for risking their life, limb, mind, and family to protect us. So to those of

you who would do so, put on that anti war shirt and go to your protest. But remember who fought for your right to wear that shirt.

“LIL BIT” SPEAKS OUT FOR VETS

(Editor's note: You may have read about the man in Albertlea, Minnesota who recently wrote a letter to the editor after he encountered Rolling Thunder while he was in Washington, D.C.. This is the letter as it appeared in the Albertlea Tribune.)

Three hundred thousand bikers spent Memorial Day weekend roaring around Washington in tribute to our war dead, and I stood on Constitution Avenue Sunday afternoon watching a river of them go by, waiting for a gap in the procession so I could cross over to the Mall and look at pictures. The street had been closed off for them and they motored on by, some flying the Stars and Stripes and the black MIA-POW flag, honking, revving their engines, an endless celebration of internal combustion.

A patriotic bike rally is sort of like a patriotic toilet-papering or patriotic graffiti--the patriotism somehow gets lost in the sheer irritation of the thing. Somehow a person associates Memorial Day with long moments of silence when you summon up mental images of men huddled together on amphibious assault vehicles and pilots revving up B-24s and infantrymen crouched behind piles of rubble steeling themselves for the next push.

You don't quite see the connection between that and these fat men with ponytails on Harleys. After hearing a few thousand bikes go by, you think maybe we could airlift these gentlemen to Baghdad to show their support of the troops in a more tangible way. It took 20 minutes until a gap appeared and then a mob of us pedestrians flooded across the street and the parade of bikes had to stop for us, and on we went to show our patriotism by looking at exhibits at the Smithsonian or, in my case, hiking around the National Gallery, which, after you've watched a few thousand Harleys pass, seems like an outpost of civilization.

There stood Renoir's ballerina in pale blue chiffon and Monet's children in the garden of sunflowers. And Mary Cassatt's "The Boating Party," which I stood and stared at for a long time. A lady in a white bonnet sits in a green sailboat, holding a contented baby in pink, as a man rows the boat toward a distant shore. (Perhaps the boat is becalmed.) The man wears a navy blue shirt, he is preoccupied with his rowing, and the lady looks wan and mildly anxious, as well a mother should be. The baby is looking dreamily over the gunwales. Is the man a hired hand or is he the husband and father?

A work of art can lift you up from the mishmash of life, the weight of the unintelligible world, and the situations where vulgarity squats on you like an enormous toad and won't get off. You stroll down past the World War II Memorial, which looks like something ordered out of a catalog, a bland insult to the memory of all who served, and thousands of motorcycles roar by disturbing the Sabbath, and it depresses you for hours.

If anyone cared about the war dead, they could go read David Halberstam's "The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War" or Stephen Ambrose's "Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944 to May 7, 1945," or any of a hundred other books, and they would get a vision of what it was like to face death for your country, but the bikers riding in formation are more interested in being seen than in learning anything. They are grown men playing soldier, making a great hullabaloo without exposing themselves to danger, other than getting drunk and falling off a bike.

No wonder the Current Occupant welcomed them with open arms at the White House, put on a black leather vest, and gave a manly speech about how he'd just "chopped in" and saw the horde "cranking up their machines," and he thanked them for being so patriotic. They are his kind of guys, full of bluster, giving off noxious fumes, and when they leave town, nobody misses them.

Meanwhile, the man pulls at the oars, the lady wonders if this trip was a good idea or if some disaster is at hand, and the child lolls on her lap, dazed by the sun. They started this trip in 1894 and haven't advanced an inch, meanwhile half the people who ever stood and watched them have reached that distant shore and the rest of us are getting closer every day.

I am the boatman and maybe you are too--it is quiet on the water, we lean on the oars, and we are suspended in time, united with every other man, woman and child who ever voyaged afar.

Garrison Keiller

(Danica "Lil Bit" Henzel, a 17-year-old from Oregon, has participated in RFTW since she was 12 years old. She is fiercely patriotic and protective of our soldiers and veterans. She could not stand by while Keiller vilified "her veterans," so she wrote this response to the newspaper. We are proud of this young lady; her words and wisdom belie her tender years.)

The phrase "paying tribute" can be taken and put into action in many ways, shapes, and forms. Such as the sculpture of Mary Cassatt's "The Boating Party," of which you claim to have been standing in remembrance for a long time this past May either giving your time as tribute to the artist themselves, the art and its form and beauty, or simply just the meaning of art and why it was made exactly how it was. How the lady with her bonnet sits in the green sailboat (why couldn't the boat have been red?), holding her baby (or was it even hers?), and how the man wears his navy blue shirt (why couldn't he have worn a regular blue shirt?), and the lady who you said looked mildly anxious as she sits (or maybe she is just worried that the blanket wrapped baby is looking oh so dreamily over the gunwales possibly enough for her to just jump right into the calm waters). All the while I am sure it is an amazing piece of work. I will have to see it some time in May next year when I will be in DC paying my tribute (motorcycle and all) to all of the men and women who have not only been killed, captured, or imprisoned, but to those whom have been disrespected for many years and have been threatened to be "forgotten" by society and people just like you.

Do not get the wrong impression of me based off that last line. Because if you judge me at first glance like you judged all the other 300,000 riders (including me) last May you will sadly be over looking who I really am. So here it is, I AM DANICA "LIL BIT" HENZEL! I am a mere 17 years of age and I live in Oregon with my mother. All of this information you can undoubtedly find on Google hence the reason I am not hesitant of this "confidential" information being shared. Now I am not a silly little teenager who is more interested in being seen (or in this case heard) rather than in learning anything, so I will not keep going on about myself. I will be, however, sharing a wee bit of a background in an organization, or more of a family that I have been a part of for the last 5 years (keep in mind I would have been 12 when I began).

It or rather WE are a dedicated rolling memorial of which expresses physically the meaning of "paying tribute" across this great land. The idea was thought up in 1989 as an effort by James Gregory and Bill Evans to bring recognition to our many missing KIA's, POW's, and MIA's. Now today by specifically riding through 17 of our nations states, we hope to one day bring all our nations attention to our missing, so they are never to be forgotten. (Sounds sincere, patriotic, and tangible to me) To travel nearly 3,000 miles from LA to DC with planned itineraries of day to day travels we are a very organized group. We are in fact NOT just a bunch of "fat men with ponytails on Harleys, full of bluster, giving off noxious fumes traveling randomly cross country for attention."

In truth we place wreaths at many monuments honoring all of our brave and our fallen. We stop at VA hospitals sometimes to simply eat lunch and visit with the patients, or to listen to all their individual stories (which in some cases have been begging to be told to an ear willing to listen) while enjoying a breeze on tattered wooden bench. Also we stop at schools to educate and share stories with the children, because our adult and elderly populations are not the only ones who are capable of grasping the concept of "paying tribute". Look at me, I'm still considered a kid and I think I understand the meaning quite well, along with the many other kids from these

schools ranging from ages 6 to about 14 who put on their own presentations to thank us, and keep us motivated. By the way when we leave a town, many miss us and they show their appreciation by simply showing up the year after.

Even with all of that, the point is, is that this rebuttal is not about this organization, or about me, or even to prove you wrong. It is in fact to let you (and the others who read what you wrote) to have a chance to see what is behind the entire “hullabaloo” of a show you saw in DC last May. Rolling Thunder is a dedicated organization built upon many of the same values as does my motorcycle family. Although Rolling Thunder is a year older and a much larger event (if you count by #'s and not distance) than the run I and many others make, but they are both ways that riders and patriots alike can show their gratitude without the fear of being outcast.

As the phrases go “There is strength in numbers” and “Come strength, is great responsibility” you can only begin to imagine what it would take to have 100% order with a group the size of Rolling Thunder. Yes there are rules and guild lines that are enforced as greatly as possible, but unfortunately every year there are those few participants who manage to turn Constitution Avenue into a drag race strip.

I know this, I admit to this, and I am not trying to deny that the beliefs and dedication of which these two groups were built upon is crumbling more and more each year. As it gets swept away in the obnoxious roar of revving engines, the sight of baby blonds riding with daisy dukes on daddy’s Harley’s, and the thought in every outsiders minds that this is just a freak parade with lots of chrome. The fact of the matter is, is that it is not a parade. It is a mission. One with riders who have been captured themselves, passengers who can no longer be free to walk another day from a mortar injury 40 years old, and spectators with hope that their brothers and comrades will one day forgive them for not pulling them back quite fast enough to dodge the enemy’s assaults’. A mission of which is believed in by many more than you gave credit to. A mission that has united many families with the closure of their long been gone loved ones return home. A mission that has been and will continue to put pressure on our national governments to make sure we get 100% accountability of all our POW’s of all our wars and conflicts.

You are a sailor, and I am a child. You sail on water, and I ride over asphalt. You sail free with the ocean, and I with the wind. You guide with your oars, and I with my tires. You are suspended in time, and I with my youth. You unite with other voyagers, and I with my family. You call yourself a patriot, and as do I. You mourn your dead your way, and I do mine. We are one in the same yet nothing alike.

Danica “Lil Bit” Henzel

► OTHER STORIES

UK RIDE TO THE WALL

(Editor’s note: The first Ride to the Wall was held in Staffordshire, England October 11, 2008. It was estimated that up to 3,000 motorcycles participated. The following article describing the Ride is from the UK Ministry of Defence website.)

Thousands of motorcycles descended on the Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire in the UK's first 'Ride to the Wall' on Saturday 11 October 2008 in commemoration of all troops killed in the line of duty since the Second World War.

Modelled on the huge American 'Run for the Wall', where thousands upon thousands of bikers take part, the UK event gave people in this country the opportunity to show the respect that the members of the Armed Forces deserve, as well as raising funds for the upkeep of the stunning stone memorial.

The idea for the event, which attracted around 3,000 bikers, stemmed from the first Remembrance Day service at the Armed Forces Memorial in November 2007, when a small contingent of Harley Davidson riders and a surprising number of young people who attended the service were particularly moved by the event.

The Nene Valley Harley Owners Group is behind the event and Director Martin Dickinson said:

"The initial response to the idea of a ride and service was overwhelming with many offers of assistance to help with the planning and promotion of the event. This is an excellent way to show our gratitude and remember the members of the Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice."

The 'Parade of Flags' bikes formed a 'Guard of Honour' with bikes parking up either side of Millennium Avenue, which runs through the Arboretum, and a short memorial service took place with a piper and a bugler playing the Last Post.

The Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum features the names of 16,000 servicemen and women killed on duty or by terrorist action since the end of the Second World War engraved around its walls.

Located in the heart of the country, the Arboretum comprises 150 acres of trees and memorials devoted to the concept of Remembrance. Set within the National Forest of Staffordshire, it was established in 1997 on former gravel and sand pits gifted from Lafarge Aggregates.

The Armed Forces Memorial, which was opened in October 2007, is a striking and emotive memorial and is quickly assuming national significance.



► VETERAN AND VA NEWS

HELP FOR AGENT ORANGE SUFFERERS

Many of us suffer from various problems related to Agent Orange. For many years I have been to many places looking for help in that regard and the pain/damage to the nervous system and neuropathy (including diabetes related neuropathy) to no avail. Mayo, Baylor, etc. – no relief found. In the last SIX months I have found, locally no less, that USC Medical specialist Dr. King Engel, depending on the damage that a person may have suffered, can treat some of the serious aspects of the neuropathy related to Agent Orange.

I am not normally one to talk out and I usually remain rather silent; but given the amount of pain and the lack of treatment by the VA on these matters I felt that I should tell people about the USC program. Since, for the first time, I know the problem and what can and cannot be done, I can take helpful steps to reduce the pain. The doctor will not see a patient without a referral from a treating physician and there is a wait. But, for me, the wait

paid off. Hopefully this information will help you or someone that you know. You can get more information about this doctor at

http://www.usc.edu/schools/medicine/departments/neurology/about/profile.php?PersonIs_ID=292.

If you have looked in vain for pain relief, I hope this helps.

God bless and welcome home.

Greg

gpetersen@petersenlawfirm.com

VA RAMPS UP JOB SEARCH FOR INJURED VETS

WASHINGTON (Dec. 30, 2008) - Thirty percent of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are veterans—the second highest ranking among cabinet departments after the Department of Defense—and nearly 8 percent of VA employees are service-connected disabled veterans. But the VA intends to increase the number of disabled veterans who obtain employment in its work force. "I am proud of this effort," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "VA knows the true quality of our men and women, and we should be a leader in employing them." Peake said all severely injured veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be contacted by VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service to determine their interest in—and qualifications for—VA jobs. So far, that office has identified 2,300 severely injured veterans of those wars, of whom 600 expressed interest in VA employment. The coordination service was established a year ago to recruit veterans into VA, especially those seriously injured in the current wars. It has nine regional coordinators working with local facility human resources offices across the country not only to reach out to potential job candidates but to ensure that local managers know about special authorities available to hire veterans. For example, qualified disabled veterans rated by the Defense Department or VA as having a 30 percent or more service-connected disability can be hired non-competitively. "Our team is spreading the message that VA is hiring, and we want to hire disabled veterans," said Dennis O. May, director of VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service.

VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION UPDATE

The Veterans Affairs Department has been wrongfully recovering money from widows of deceased veterans over the last 12 years by demanding reimbursement for final benefits checks in violation of federal law. Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, (D-HI), the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, confronted the department last week about the problem, which has resulted in hundreds of thousands of senior citizens losing pension and disability money received during the month of their spouse's death. "This flawed practice has caused serious hardship for many widows," Akaka said. "I suspect that the improper procedures have harmed thousands of widows and widowers over the last 12 years." Congress granted veterans' spouses the right to keep their partner's last month's worth of benefits when it passed the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1996 (PL 104-275). The law instructed the department to treat disability and pension checks issued during the month of a veteran's death "as being payable to a surviving spouse." But the department never adjusted its systems to follow the law. As a result, the department has routinely either refused to send checks or taken active measures to retrieve money already sent, including collection actions. Akaka brought up the issue in a 5 DEC letter to Secretary James B. Peake, asking him to immediately take steps to identify all the spouses affected, pay them their missing benefits, and fix the system.

Akaka's press secretary, Jesse Broder Van Dyke, said there was no evidence officials intentionally withheld any money. "It was something that slipped through the cracks," he said. "They're using an automated system, so they needed to go and change the program, but they never did." Peake responded 11 DEC with a tentative action plan to fix the benefits problem over the coming months, saying "I agree that this problem must be fixed." A department spokesman did not immediately respond to requests for comment, but a committee aide

said solving the problem likely would take some time, partly because the department does not keep track of all spouses. The aide estimated that up to 50,000 spouses could have been affected each year since the law was passed. Each spouse could be entitled to anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on their situation. Repayments could cost the government hundreds of millions dollars, the aide said. The department should have enough money in its budget to cover the costs, but "they might have to come back to Congress for some additional money," the staffer said. Akaka became aware of the problem last month when contacted by Ruby Maile Sasaoka, a Hawaii resident whose veteran husband died in 2007. After using her husband's final benefit check for funeral expenses, the Treasury department took an equal amount of money directly from her bank account without her knowledge. As a result, she unwittingly bounced checks and now faces credit issues.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT INCREASE

WASHINGTON (Dec. 29, 2008) - Service-disabled and low-income veterans who are reimbursed for travel expenses while receiving care at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities will see an increase in their payments beginning January 9. A recently passed law allows VA to cut the amount it must withhold from their mileage reimbursement. The deductible amount will be \$3 for each one-way trip and \$6 for each round trip—with a calendar cap of \$18, or six one-way trips or three round trips, whichever comes first. The previous deductible was \$7.77 for a one-way trip, and \$15.54 for a roundtrip, with a calendar cap of \$46.62. "I'm pleased that we can help veterans living far from VA facilities to access the medical and counseling help they deserve, especially in the current economic climate," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Together with the increased mileage rate approved last month, we can further reduce the financial hardship some veterans undergo to use our superior health care. "In November, Peake announced VA's second increase in the mileage reimbursement rate during 2008, from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents a mile. Service-disabled and low-income veterans are eligible to be reimbursed by VA for the travel costs of receiving health care or counseling at VA facilities. Veterans traveling for Compensation and Pension examinations also qualify for mileage reimbursement. VA can waive deductibles if they cause financial hardship.

BURIAL IN ARLINGTON

Starting in early 2009, the Army will allow full military funeral honors at Arlington for all soldiers killed in action. Full military honors include a caisson, band, colors team, and an escort platoon in addition to the standard honors of a firing party, bugler, and chaplain. In the past, the caisson was available only for officers killed in action because of limited availability. The persons specified below are eligible for ground burial in Arlington National Cemetery. The last period of active duty of former members of the Armed Forces must have ended honorably. Interment may be casketed or cremated remains.

- Any active duty member of the Armed Forces (except those members serving on active duty for training only).
- Any veteran who is retired from active military service with the Armed Forces.
- Any veteran who is retired from the Reserves is eligible upon reaching age 60 and drawing retired pay; and who served a period of active duty (other than for training).
- Any former member of the Armed Forces separated honorably prior to 1 OCT 49 for medical reasons and who was rated at 30% or greater disabled effective on the day of discharge.
- Any former member of the Armed Forces who has been awarded one of the following decorations: Medal of Honor; Distinguished Service Cross (Navy Cross or Air Force Cross); Distinguished Service Medal; Silver Star; Purple Heart.
- The President of the United States or any former President of the United States.
- Any former member of the Armed Forces who served on active duty (other than for training) and who held any of the following positions:

- a. An elective office of the U.S. Government
 - b. Office of the Chief Justice of the United States or of an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.
 - c. An office listed, at the time the person held the position, in 5 USC 5312 or 5313 (Levels I and II of the Executive Schedule).
 - d. The chief of a mission who was at any time during his/her tenure classified in Class I under the provisions of Section 411, Act of 13 AUG 46, 60 Stat. 1002, as amended (22 USC 866) or as listed in State Department memorandum dated 21 MAR 88.
- Any former prisoner of war who, while a prisoner of war, served honorably in the active military, naval, or air service, whose last period of military, naval or air service terminated honorably and who died on or after 30 NOV 93
 - The spouse, widow or widower, minor child, or permanently dependent child, and certain unmarried adult children of any of the above eligible veterans.
 - The surviving spouse, minor child, or permanently dependent child of any person already buried in ANC.
 - The parents of a minor child, or permanently dependent child whose remains, based on the eligibility of a parent, are already buried in ANC.
 - The widow or widower of:
 - a. A member of the Armed Forces who was lost or buried at sea or officially determined to be missing in action.
 - b. A member of the Armed Forces who is interred in a US military cemetery overseas that is maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission.
 - c. A member of the Armed Forces who is interred in Arlington National Cemetery as part of a group burial.

Note: A spouse divorced from the primary eligible, or widowed and remarried, is not eligible for interment. Provided certain conditions are met, a former member of the Armed Forces may be buried in the same grave with a close relative who is already buried and is the primary eligible

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWNNS UPDATE

Despite an economic crisis that has organizations from small-town mom-and-pop shops to local and national governments tightening their belts, the Department of the Army still refuses to accept a donation from a Glenwood Springs, Colorado man that could save it millions of dollars. The donation in question is an 118,000-pound slab of marble, valued at just over \$31,000, from "the Yule Quarry in Marble, Colorado." Retired Glenwood car dealer John Haines has been trying to donate the marble since 2003. It would replace the cracked Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery, but procedure dictates that all government jobs must go through a pricey bidding process, thereby disqualifying Haines' donation.

VA SECRETARY UPDATE

President-elect Barack Obama has chosen retired Gen. Eric K. Shinseki to be the next Veterans Affairs secretary, turning to a former Army chief of staff once vilified by the Bush administration for questioning its Iraq war strategy. He will be the first Asian-American to hold the post of Veterans Affairs secretary, adding to the growing diversity of Obama's Cabinet. "I think that General Shinseki is exactly the right person who is going to be able to make sure that we honor our troops when they come home," Obama said in an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press." Shinseki's tenure as Army chief of staff from 1999 to 2003 was marked by constant tensions with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, which boiled over in 2003 when Shinseki testified to Congress that it might take several hundred thousand U.S. troops to control Iraq after the invasion. Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, belittled the estimate as "wildly off the mark" and the general was marginalized and later retired from the Army. But Shinseki's words proved prophetic after President George W.

Bush in early 2007 announced a “surge” of additional troops to Iraq after miscalculating the numbers needed to stem sectarian violence. Obama said he chose Shinseki for the VA post because he “was right” in predicting that the U.S. will need more troops in Iraq than Rumsfeld believed at the time.

Shinseki, 66, is slated to take the helm of the government’s second largest agency, which was roundly criticized during the Bush administration for underestimating the amount of funding needed to treat thousands of injured veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Thousands of veterans currently endure six-month waits for disability benefits, despite promises by current VA Secretary James Peake and his predecessor, Jim Nicholson, to reduce delays. The department also is scrambling to upgrade government technology systems before new legislation providing for millions of dollars in new GI benefits takes effect next August. Sen. Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii, and chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, praised Shinseki as a “great choice” who will make an excellent VA secretary. “I have great respect for General Shinseki’s judgment and abilities,” Akaka said in a statement. “I am confident that he will use his wisdom and experience to ensure that our veterans receive the respect and care they have earned in defense of our nation. President-elect Obama is selecting a team that reflects our nation’s greatest strength, its diversity, and I applaud him.” Veterans groups also cheered the decision. “General Shinseki has a record of courage and honesty, and is a bold choice to lead the VA into the future,” said Paul Rieckhoff, executive director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “He is a man that has always put patriotism ahead of politics, and is held in high regard by veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.”

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY UPDATE

The National Guard is developing a method to track soldiers who have been exposed to blasts in Iraq or Afghanistan. The effort will allow soldiers who might develop problems years later to show how many times they were in the vicinity of a mortar round explosion, improvised explosive device detonation or other blast. “A lot of soldiers don’t show symptoms right away,” said Lt. Col. Maureen Weigl, project officer for the Army Guard program. However, she said, if they show symptoms down the road, there has not been a way to link them to exposure to blasts during their service in the war zones. “Documenting this information ensures quality of care if they develop symptoms,” she said. “Having the documentation available to providers will give them the opportunity to treat the issues.” Weigl said she was asked by Lt. Gen. Clyde Vaughn, Army Guard director, to visit Iraq and review the current method of recording soldiers who are exposed to a blast. If nothing was available, something was to be created. The database simply records the names of all personnel in the vicinity of a blast—even if they are not injured—and how close they were. Weigl said inclusion in the database should not be interpreted to suggest something is wrong with the soldier. “It merely just links you to a significant activity,” she said. The new system debuted in OCT 098 and is now being briefed to surgeons and sergeant majors. It is possible the data included will help with the future research of traumatic brain injuries and their treatment. For the service member, it could help prove that problems suffered years later are related to his or her service, which could result in VA benefits that otherwise would go unclaimed.

► BRINGING THEM HOME

SERVICEMEN MIA FROM VIETNAM WAR ARE IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced on December 15, 2008 that the group remains of six U.S. servicemen, missing from the Vietnam War, are soon to be buried with full military honors.

They are Maj. Bernard L. Bucher, of Eureka, Ill.; Maj. John L. McElroy, of Eminence, Ky.; 1st Lt. Stephen C. Moreland, of Los Angeles; and Staff Sgt. Frank M. Hepler, of Glenside, Pa., all U.S. Air Force. These men will be buried as a group on Dec. 18 in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

Two other servicemen, who were individually identified in October 2007, are also represented in this group. They are Capt. Warren R. Orr Jr., U.S. Army, of Kewanee, Ill., and Airman 1st Class George W. Long, U.S. Air Force, of Medicine, Kan.

Representatives from the Air Force and the Army mortuary offices met with the next-of-kin of these men to explain the recovery and identification process and to coordinate interment with military honors on behalf of the secretary of the Air Force and the secretary of the Army.

On May 12, 1968, these men were on board a C-130 Hercules evacuating Vietnamese citizens from the Kham Duc Special Forces Camp near Da Nang, South Vietnam. While taking off, the crew reported taking heavy enemy ground fire. A forward air controller flying in the area reported seeing the plane explode in mid-air soon after leaving the runway.

In 1986 and 1991, U.S. officials received remains and identification tags from sources claiming they belonged to men from this incident. Scientific analysis revealed they were not American remains, but it was believed the Vietnamese sources knew where the crash site was located.

In 1993, a joint/U.S.-Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) team, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), traveled to Kham Duc and interviewed four local citizens concerning the incident. They led the team to the crash site and turned over remains and identification tags they had recovered in 1983 while looking for scrap metal. During this visit, the team recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage at the site. In 1994, another joint team excavated the crash site and recovered remains, pieces of life-support equipment, crew-related gear and personal effects.

As of December 15, 2008, there are now 1,742 US personnel listed by the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) as missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. There have been 841 US personnel accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. You may check for updates at the National League of POW-MIA Families web site: www.pow-miafamilies.org.

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF POW-MIA FAMILIES NEEDS HELP

The League originated on the west coast in the late 1960s. The wife of a ranking POW, believing that the U.S. Government's policy of keeping a low profile on the POW/MIA issue and encouraging the families to refrain from publicly discussing the problem was unjustified, initiated a loosely organized movement which evolved into the National League of POW/MIA Families. The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia was incorporated in the District of Columbia on May 28, 1970. Voting membership is comprised of the wives, children, parents, siblings and other close relatives of Americans who were or are listed as prisoners of war, missing in action, killed in action/body not recovered and returned Vietnam War U.S. POWs. Associate membership is comprised of extended family relatives of POW/MIAs who do not meet voting membership requirements, veterans and other concerned citizens. The League is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501[c]3 humanitarian organization, financed by contributions from the families, veterans and other concerned Americans. The League's sole purpose is to obtain the release of all prisoners, the fullest possible accounting for the missing and repatriation of all recoverable remains of those who died serving our nation during the Vietnam War in Southeast Asia.

On October 16, 2008, the National League of POW-MIA Families wrote to their members, and posted on their website, an appeal for donations. The League may be forced to close its doors if they do not raise enough funds to sustain their office in Washington, D.C. Contrary to what some may think, the League is not a government-subsidized agency; it is run completely on donations.

Although the League originated the POW/MIA flag, it receives no royalties for its distribution. Sadly, no flag manufacturers donate any of their profits to the League.

It would be a tragedy to lose the League of Families; they have done so much to bring awareness to the country of the need to bring home the remains of our POWs and MIAs. If you are in a position to help a worthy organization, please consider the League. Visit www.pow-miafamilies.org for more information.

► EVENTS

WELCOME HOME DEFENDERS OF FREEDOM

January 17, 2009

Rose Bowl, Pasadena, CA

On January 17, there will a tribute to our war veterans returning from overseas. The tribute will take place at the Rose Bowl and include the traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall. Kid Rock and others will perform. Motorcyclists from all over Southern California will gather to escort these American Heroes into the Rose Bowl. Come out and ride for freedom and show your Patriotism. The whole thing is free.

Event Name: Welcome Home Defenders of Freedom

Event Date(s): January 17, 2009

Event Time(s): 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Event Location: Rose Bowl, Pasadena, CA

Event Contact Info: welcomhome137@yahoo.com

Comments/Other Info: This event is to encourage Americans to Welcome Home all of our brave military personnel, not only from the current War on Terror, but also from prior wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm. Free admission, parking, & entertainment.

TRAVELING WALL IN LAKE HAVASU

March 26-29, 2009

Lake Havasu City, AZ

The American Veterans Traveling Tribute and Traveling Wall will be in Lake Havasu, Arizona Thursday, March 26 through Sunday, March 29. On Sunday there will be a "Ride to the Wall"; details will be posted on RFTW "Related Events" when finalized. March 29 will be an especially meaningful day at the Traveling Wall, as it is recognized as Vietnam Veterans Day in most of the U.S., and has been proclaimed as such by the city of Lake Havasu. Volunteers are needed to provide security for the Wall and exhibits, man computers to help visitors locate names, help people with rubbings, read names of Arizona's fallen soldiers from all wars and conflicts, and to participate in escorting the AVTT into and out of Lake Havasu. If you plan to visit the Wall in Havasu and would like to volunteer, contact Judy Lacey (928-855-8470 or judylacey@aol.com).

► TAPS

Greg "Ebay" Hansen, Patriot Guard Co-Founder

Our American Legion Rider Brother, Greg "Ebay" Hansen, left this world on his 56th birthday, 22 December 2008, after an extended illness. Greg was very active in the American Legion and American Legion Rider organizations, serving for the past few years as an American Legion Rider Area Director for Kansas, and as past Director of ALR 406 Chapter Andover, and held other offices within his ALR Chapter. He was a past member

of ALR 136 Mulvane, and left to start the new ALR 406 Chapter in Andover. Greg was one of the American Legion Riders who co-founded the Patriot Guard and served as a Patriot Guard Co-Captain in Kansas. Greg was a SGT in the US Army 26th Airborne Pathfinder Platoon, and many of the Airborne Jumpers that he served with attended the services.

► CLOSING THOUGHTS

CHANGE, TWO THOUSAND NINE

This year is about to end
And a New, about to start
The past, just memories
Some, that hurt the heart.

Our brave Troops are still dying
Far too many Families grieve
And those wounded coming home
Deserve more, than they receive.

Some of them are coming back
With wounds that do not show
Without any help, or support
Nowhere to turn, nowhere to go.

We've two wars we're waging
One, brought about by lies
Told, they want us over there
While the truth shows in their eyes.

Our schools are failing our kids
Our infrastructure is shot
Healthcare costs, outrageous
For those who can pay, most
cannot!

Our economy is in shambles
As the poor bail out the rich
Our leaders (?) have all fallen
For the con men and their pitch.

Families put out, on the street
By those orders of evictions
While those who did the crime
Not indicted, no convictions.

Some folks have lost everything
They had saved, for their old age
While we let it, go on and on
Where's our anger, and outrage?

Our middle class may be doomed
To join the classes of the poor
While we buy those foreign goods
And send our good jobs out the
door.

We leave our borders wide open
They come and go as they may
They get free healthcare and
welfare

While we pay, and pay, and pay!

We still depend on fossil fuels
Shipped here from across the seas
Where we spend our treasure
In some, unfriendly, countries.

Oil companies here at home
Want to "Drill, baby, drill!"
Instead of trying other ways
(It looks like, they never, will!)

Some Rights from our Constitution
Taken away, without a fight
To protect us all, they tell us
That, only they know, what is right!

Torturing is on the table
And, renditions in secrecy
People imprisoned without charges
By, the Land of the Free!

One day, it just may be you
Should you choose, to speak out
Say something, which you believe
They don't want to hear about.

But, we have a New Year coming
A new President, for change
Let's hope, for the good of the
People
Are the things, he'll rearrange.

He can't do it all by himself
He needs us, each and every one
If we hope to change our Country
We must all help, to get it, done!

Just maybe, "Auld Lang Syne"
(Translated, "days gone by")
Will just be, a bad memory
As we tell the past, "Goodbye!"

*Del "Abe" Jones
12-30-2008*

WHEN A VETERAN RETIRES

When a good Veteran leaves the "job" and retires to a better life, many are jealous, some are pleased and yet others, who may have already retired, wonder. We wonder if he knows what they are leaving behind, because we already know. We know, for example, that after a lifetime of camaraderie that few experience, it will remain as a longing for those past times. We know in the Military life there is a fellowship which lasts long after the uniforms are hung up in the back of the closet. We know even if he throws them away, they will be on him with every step and breath that remains in his life. We also know how the very bearing of the man speaks of what he was and in his heart still is.

These are the burdens of the job. You will still look at people suspiciously, still see what others do not see or choose to ignore and always will look at the rest of the Military world with a respect for what they do; only grown in a lifetime of knowing.

Never think for one moment you are escaping from that life. You are only escaping the “job” and merely being allowed to leave “active” duty.

So what I wish for you is that whenever you ease into retirement, in your heart you never forget for one moment that “Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called children of God,” and you are still a member of the greatest fraternity the world has ever known.

(From the Internet)

You Are Not Forgotten



TO SUBSCRIBE TO A MAILED COPY OF THE NEWSLETTER:

APPLICATION FOR NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION

The RFTW newsletter is published in January, April, July, and October. If you would like to have printed copies of the newsletter mailed to you, a one-year subscription is \$10, which covers the cost of printing and mailing. If you subscribe or renew by October 31 you will receive all four issues for that year. If you renew between October 31 and January 1, your subscription will begin with the January issue of the next year.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____
2008

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CITY, STATE, ZIP:

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____ FOR 1 YEAR _____ 2 YEARS

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

RUN FOR THE WALL



WE RIDE FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T

**To promote healing among Vietnam veterans and their families and friends
To call for an accounting of all Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action (POW/MIA)
To honor the memory of those Killed in Action (KIA)**