



# RUN FOR THE WALL

## Quarterly Newsletter

### *“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”*

#### October 2012

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#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- The Editor’s Notes
- President’s Message
- Financial Statement
- 2012-RFTW Statistics
- 2012 Group Photo Order Form
- 2013 RFTW News
- John Baca to Go ATW in 2013
- Getting Ready for Angel Fire
- Report From Afghanistan
- A New Attitude
- A Simple Flag
- Last U.S. Soldier Killed in Vietnam
- A Little Known Veterans Benefit
- Preventing Veteran Suicides
- Combat Stress and the Purple Heart Medal
- Vets Warned About More Scams
- Free Meals on Veterans Day
- Website for Poser Information
- Last Original Code Talker Is Grand Marshall
- Ruling Against Westboro
- U.S. Begins Packing Its Afghan War Gear
- Stolen Valor Act
- USMC Offering Cash to Get Out
- Silver Star Recipients Never Informed?
- Semper Ride Motorcycle Training
- Leave No Man Behind
- Veterans Win Right to Proceed With Suit
- Bringing Them Home
- Reunions
- Sick Call
- Taps

#### THE EDITOR’S NOTES



You’ll find a lot of good info in this month’s newsletter, beginning with a report that Medal of Honor recipient John Baca will be going all the way with RFTW in 2013. John is a truly amazing and humble person, and if you don’t already know him, I hope you will have the chance to spend a few minutes next May getting to know him.

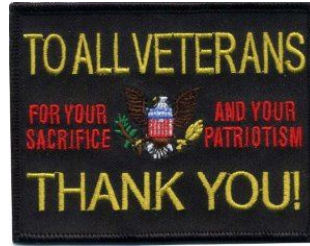
Suicides among veterans is a huge issue. Please read the story in this issue so you will recognize the warning signs and be able to help a fellow veteran in need. If you are a veteran with depression, consider taking the on-line quiz—a first step in seeking help. Our veterans are our most precious resource, and it is only right that we help them whenever we can.

I apologize for not having any report or photos of the Tulsa or Angel Fire reunions, but I did not receive any. I thank the one person who submitted some photos, but they were downsized to such a small size that I couldn’t use them. Please remember that when you send photos for the newsletter, send them to me in the original, full size and I will downsize them as needed. But there is no way I can make them larger.

Veterans, be sure to look through the list of restaurants and retailers that are giving out free meals and discounts to Vets on Veterans Day. And to all of our Veterans, thank you for your service.

Judy "Velcro" Lacey

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



## 2012 GROUP PHOTO ORDER FORM

### RFTW 2012 Group Photo by "KZ" Ric White

(One size only: 12"x 18")

\$15 each plus \$5 for S&H = \$20

Shipping to Canada, extra \$5; to Australia, extra \$7

(Up to 2 photos per shipping tube; for more than 2,  
add an extra \$5 for shipping.)

Name of group:   RUN FOR THE WALL   Date: \_\_\_\_\_

How many photos? \_\_\_\_\_ Shipping: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail photo to:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of payment: Personal check or U.S. Postal Money Order

Payable to: Ric White and mail to: P.O. Box 180789, Dallas, TX 75218

Questions: [pikzr@aol.com](mailto:pikzr@aol.com)



PLEASE ALLOW 4 TO 6 WEEKS FOR  
DELIVERY

God Bless America



Ric is caught up with all photo orders at this time. If you haven't received a photo you ordered, contact him to make sure he has your correct name and address.

## ► 2012 RFTW STATISTICS

Many have wondered what the demographics of the RUN are. Where do we come from? How many of us are there? What is the youngest and oldest? Well we now have some of that answered for those of you who wish to know. Thanks to John "Wicked" McKee and alot of number crunching, we now have it sorted out.

John compiled all the data from this year's RUN. Keep in mind, though, that the numbers only reflect the data that was submitted when folks signed up.

The data currently indicates that the Southern Route had 694 individuals pre-register and 317 individuals register during the Run. Additionally, of those who pre-registered, 118 failed to arrive. Therefore, the Southern Route had 893 participants.

The data currently indicates that the Central Route had 571 individuals pre-register and 474 individuals register during the Run. Additionally, of those that pre-registered, 86 failed to arrive. Therefore, the Central Route had 959 participants.

The ages of participants ranged from 10 to 88, with the average being 57.7 years. Riders from the ages of 50 to 75 comprised 81% of riders.

More than 50% of the riders came from these five states: California – 365; Texas – 260; Arizona – 139; Colorado – 123; Missouri – 107.

The data above shows that those of us who don't live in CA, TX, AZ, CO, or MO may need to do a little outreach to get Run For The Wall's Mission Statement out to those who are unaware of our mission. If you are interested, please contact Ironfish directly at [shandleley@hughes.net](mailto:shandleley@hughes.net) as RFTW has Route and State folks who can assist you with answers to your questions.

## ► RFTW 2012 Financial Statement

Financial Report and Treasurers Comments, Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 2012  
Submitted by Ken "Wish" Hargrove, RFTW BOD, Treasurer

RFTW Checking Account to start this new fiscal year is at \$56,671.13 and RFTW Savings Account is at \$34,252.90. To put this in context, please see the below graph that shows our account(s) trends throughout the past year. Note the Checking Account in the month prior to The Run (April 2012). The Checking Account which is used to procure all merchandise for the online store as well as stock the route merchandise trailers, Fund all start-up operations, contract with insurance provider, maintain and resource trailers and a host of other Run oriented expenditures, was nearly depleted. In fact it would have been depleted if the Board had not transferred a sum from the Savings Account into the Checking Account. You will see that reflected in the Savings Account trend on the same graph below.

In May, as The Run and the Routes started forming and merchandise sales, donations and registration fees began contributing, the Checking Account recovered. This summer before the fiscal year was over we transferred that same amount back into the Savings Account. See that the two accounts are nearly level with their 1 year prior account balances.

The RFTW Board maintains a basic level of funds in the Savings Account in order to insure the continuing viability of our Mission and to supplement the Checking Account (operations) as needed at identified weak revenue stream points throughout the fiscal cycle. To cover projected insurance costs and anticipated Route start-up costs; the \$30,000.00 level is prudent to expect as a target level in that account.

**Run for the Wall**  
**STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES**  
**For the Twelve Months Ended August 31, 2012**

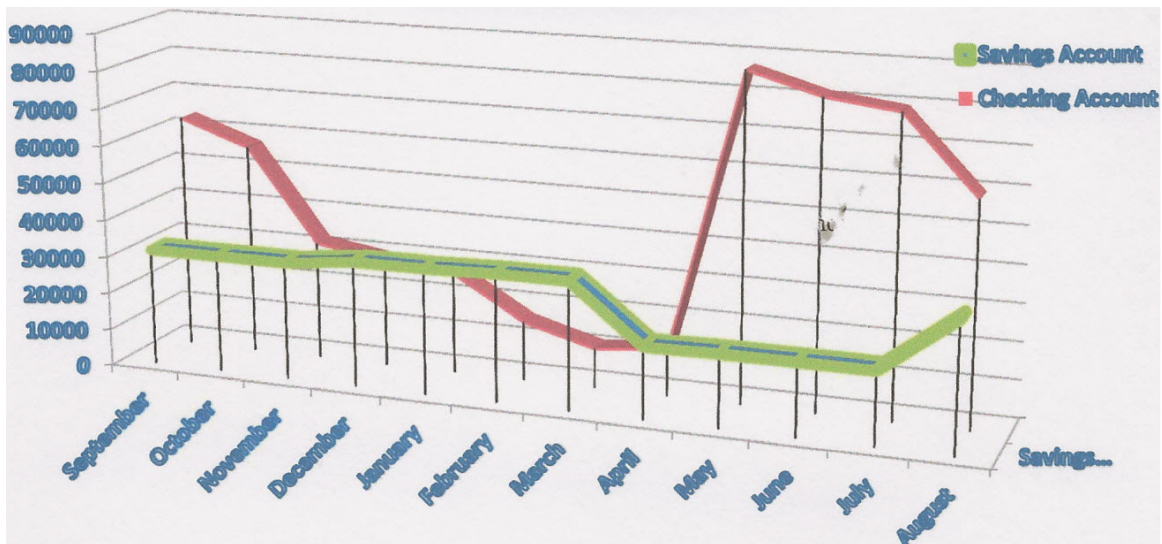
**Revenue**

Merchandise Sales	\$ 122,421.75	65.36
Donations	31,089.11	16.60
Registration Fees	33,653.82	17.97
Newsletter	125.00	0.07

<b>Total Revenue</b>	187,289.68	100.00
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**Expenses**

Program Services-COGS	\$ 84,387.81	45.06
Program Service-Operating	42,769.50	22.84
Management & General	55,542.89	29.66



<b>Total Expenses</b>	182,700.20	97.55
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**Other Income (Expense)**

Interest Income	23.28	(0.09)
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<b>Total Other Income (Expense)</b>	23.28	0.09
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<b>Revenue in Excess of Expenses</b>	\$ 4,612.76	17.19
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**Run for the Wall**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION**  
**As of August 31, 2012**

<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>	
Cash – Bank of America Checking	56,671.13
Cash – Savings	34,252.90
Inventory	26,319.48
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>117,243.51</b>
<b>PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT</b>	
Trailers	21,500.00
Less: Accumulated Depreciation	(21,500.00)
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 117,243.51</b>

**LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**

<b>FUND BALANCE</b>	
Unrestricted	112,630.75
Revenue in Excess of Expenses	4,612.76
<b>Total Fund Balance</b>	<b>117,243.51</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES</b>	<b>\$ 117,243.51</b>

**► 2013 RFTW NEWS**

**REGISTRATION FEES GOING UP**

It was decided at the Tulsa Board of Directors and Reunion to increase registration fees for RFTW 2013. Next year's registration fees have been increased to \$30.00 for on-line and \$40.00 for in-person registration. Pay Pal is being repaired for RFTW accounts, but they may also be replaced with another provider.

**ANIMALS ON RFTW**

There was a ruling by the Board of Directors about dogs on the Run, both Southern and Central Routes. Dogs must be on a leash and travel in a car (cage). Only service dogs or therapy dogs are allowed on bikes and in places that serve us food.

**THIRD ROUTE**

There will be a third route in 2013. The groups are getting too big and it was decided to try a recon and see if it is feasible. The new route will consist of participants from both Southern and Central Routes. The Recon Team

is already full, and no more applicants will be accepted. Contact Trunks at [rftwtrunks@gmail.com](mailto:rftwtrunks@gmail.com) if you have questions about the new route.

The new route will start in Rancho Cucamonga on Wednesday and arrive in DC on Friday, the same day as Central and Southern Routes.

The Recon Route will tentatively use I-40 East, NC 211 to I-95 North. This will not necessarily be a northern route. At this point it may be kind of a middle route.

Trunks will be evaluating all the aspects of the viability of each and every stop. There will be approximately 20 bikes, and 30 people. They will have hydration and a chase truck that M25 will provide. Please be aware that this will be a serious working mission. They will not only discuss every stop, they will also have a written check-off list to make sure that nothing is overlooked that will affect the mission.

### **CENTRAL ROUTE 2013**

Stan “Ironfish” Handley advises that RFTW 2013 Central Route will have 10 platoons starting in Rancho and there will be the PL APL and two TG's. This is for safety reasons. Each platoon will start out with about 20 bikes, not counting the PL, APL, and TG's. It is felt that the lower number of bikes will afford a better opportunity to assimilate into the RUN and then integrate new registers as they come in. It is our intent to make the RUN as safe as possible.

The Central Route Leadership is posted on the Central Route Contact link. If anyone is interested in being on the various Teams: Fuel, Staging, Ambassador, or in one of the Platoons Leadership positions, please contact the listed persons and discuss your options with them.

One of the subjects that was brought up during the riders forum was that of an “Old Geezers Platoon”—folks in the 60 and up category. But it was apparently voted down.

### **SOUTHERN ROUTE 2013**

If you are interested in a Road Guard position with the Southern Route and have never volunteered as a Road Guard with the Southern Route, contact Route Coordinator Airborne [rftwsr2013@hotmail.com](mailto:rftwsr2013@hotmail.com) ASAP and she will provide you with the necessary document to complete.

There are still other positions to be filled, and if you want to volunteer, email Airborne your name, the years you've ridden with RFTW, and the positions you have held in prior years.

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## **► OUR STORIES**

### **MOH RECIPIENT JOHN BACA TO GO ATW IN 2013**

Many of you know of or have had the honor of meeting John Baca, Medal of Honor recipient. John was introduced to RFTW some years ago and has been a part of the RFTW Family since 2007 when an FNG named Bruce "Bubba" Whittaker and John were reunited after 34 years. Bruce was John's attending corpsman while John was in Balboa Naval Hospital after returning from Vietnam, One of the great RFTW stories.

John is a very humble man, gentle in manner and quiet in conversation, sincere in his beliefs and full of life, for he is alive thanks to many medical personnel. John's greatest desire is to accompany RFTW and go All The Way. John still has several medical issues and doesn't travel far from his home without some medical attendant to help him should he need assistance. Additionally, there is the financial portion of the RUN that needs attention. He has participated in RFTW several times in the past; however, he has only been able to travel as far as Raton, NM. He has expressed many times that it would truly be a blessing if he could go All The Way just once.

VVA Chapter 785 of Orange County California, in conjunction with Greg Young, Bill "Monsoon" Mimiaga and others, has stepped up to the plate and donated the use of their chapter van to John for the 2013 RUN. The RFTW Board of Directors, along with both Routes and some private individuals, have made donations to help defray some of the costs for John to make this 25th Anniversary Run For The Wall as well as his return to California after the RUN.



2013, RFTW XXV, is the year that John will be able to go All The Way with your help. Let us all, the RFTW Family, help by making a donation, in whatever amount you can afford, to help John's dream of going All The Way with RFTW on our 25th Anniversary. VVA Chapter 785 has set up a 501(C)3 donation fund for those who wish to assist with this worthy cause. You can make your check out to VVA 785 and in the memo line annotate "John Baca." Mail donations to Greg Young, 5651 Via Ceresa, Yorba Linda, CA 92886.

A qualified medic has volunteered to accompany John should he need immediate medical attention during the RUN, and an escort detail has been arranged to attend to his needs. Additionally, JoJo, his service dog, will be accompanying John on his journey to the Wall.

## **GETTING READY FOR ANGEL FIRE**

By Arnie Swift

*From Rknee's journal as he got ready for the Reunion at Angel Fire. He said his hotel room in Eagles Nest was definitely going to be a "Man Cave," with the likes of Grizz, Jess, Kevin, Curtis and himself. "No shortage of strange guys in that crowd. But truth be told, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I would go anywhere with those guys and have."*

T'was the night before Angel Fire, and all through the house,  
Grizzly was snoring and me and my spouse.  
The bikes were loaded by the garage with care,  
in hopes that morning would soon be there.

We were all nestled and snug in our beds,  
while visions of carrying bricks danced in our heads.  
My wife in her PJ's and me in my CPAP,  
had just settled our brains for a short night's nap.

When out of the dark there rose such a clatter,  
I turned on the light to see what was the matter.  
Shutting off the alarm in a mad dash,  
away to the bathroom I flew like a flash.

The moon on the breast of the brown grass below,  
Thanking God it wasn't snow.

When to my foggy eyes appear,  
the dawning sun, morning is here.

Now two old riders, not so lively and quick,  
we both knew a day's ride would do the trick.  
More rapid than sunrise the morning came,  
a quick kiss and a prayer in Jesus's name.

Now Grizz, now Arnie, and soon Jess,  
a hug from my wife is still the best.  
Mount our bikes and head to the street,  
oh my goodness, forgot to get something to eat.

## REPORT FROM AFGHANISTAN

To my RFTW family,

Well it's been a while since I've given everyone an update on how things are going, so I thought I'd take a couple OF minutes and catchup with everyone. As always I have to start with my personal thanks and appreciation to everyone for their continued support and prayers of all of our deployed forces...it truly makes a difference to know you are behind us.

All is going as well as can be expected as we've been extremely busy preparing ourselves for the drawdown that has been going on all summer. We are reducing our uniformed footprint here in Afghanistan significantly as the President has directed we'll be under 68k total US forces before 1 Oct. That has caused a huge reduction here in Helmand Province, but we are continuing to operate the best we can. I'm personally sending home 13 more Marines from the 35 I brought out here...but of course the work load hasn't changed...it's the old adage do more with less. Regardless, everyone who is staying for the year has been getting home for their R&R and I will as well next month too. To be honest I am ready for the rest and to re-charge the batteries.

By the time I get back I'll have about 4 1/2 months left and then I'll be home for good...I don't see any more deployments in my future...so I'll end on a round number of 10 deployments over my career. However, not to worry as I re-enlisted last week as I've been asked to take the senior enlisted billet at the Marine Corps' Intelligence Schools in Virginia Beach, VA when I return.

Well that's about all for now. I hope everyone is well and making progress toward recruiting for next year's RFTW. Take care RFTW and as always thanks again for all your support.

Semper Fi  
MGySgt Tim "SixShooter" Gerdes  
USMC Active Duty  
Desert Storm, Restore Hope, United shield & OIF/OEF Vet





## **A NEW ATTITUDE**

I had just joined the group in Goodland and we were in Junction City. I was busy watching the goings on when a young (in years but had that look in his eyes) Troop walked up and said "excuse me sir, can I bother you for a minute?" I replied sure what do you need, thinking he was going to ask something about the Run For The Wall. He started to hand me something and he said "Sir this belonged to one of my good friends.

Would you please take it and leave it at the wall?" I looked in my hand and saw a dog tag. I didn't know what to say for a few seconds so I just grabbed him and gave him a hug, then gathered my strength and said, "Young warrior, it would be my honor to carry this to the wall and leave it right at the apex, right where the two wings come together, right in the center. Would that be OK? Why don't you take it?"

And he replied "Sir, I'm being deployed again and I don't know if I will be able to. I wanted it to go someplace where it ... er, he would be respected."

I didn't get the young warrior's name, but I rode the rest of the way with a new purpose. It wasn't just for me and my guilt feelings for being alive any longer; now I had an obligation and I gave my word. Mission accomplished.

Terry RotorHead McCollum, from the RFTW Forum  
2 tour Army Helicopter Pilot

## **A SIMPLE FLAG**

By Lensman, from the RFTW Forum

Upon arriving in Hurricane with the staging crew, there was a fantastic reception for the entire group. As we rode in, the street was lined for miles with smiling, waving, cheering, flag toting people. I saw one man, who by contrast, stood out from the rest. He was standing, very solemn, holding a three-pointed American flag. You know; the kind they give to survivors at a veteran's funeral. I wondered, as I rode by, what his story was.

We got parked and set up for the main group's arrival. There was a marching band, hundreds of people, and even a Huey helicopter flew right over my head and landed in the parking lot. When we got all of the bikes parked and some of the hubbub died down we were invited to dinner at several locations around the lot. I made my way over to one spot and got a hamburger and some coleslaw. As I turned around I was surprised to see the same solemn faced man standing in front of me with the same three-pointed flag in his arms.

I told him I was sorry for his loss and asked him if I could help him. He told me that his father, a Navy veteran, had passed away some 17 years ago. When his father died, some of the people at the home where his father lived folded the flag and presented it to him but they really didn't know how to do it. As tears rolled down his cheek he told me he would really like for someone who knew what they were doing to fold it properly. He had been coming out to the Run for several years but had yet to find anyone.

I saw Harlan, the staging crew boss nearby, and together we were able to find someone who not only was an expert on flags but who also found two former Marines to fold it. It made my day knowing that not only a Navy veteran was properly honored but that we made his memory last a little bit longer in the form of a simple three pointed flag.

## ► OTHER STORIES

### LAST U.S. SOLDIER KILLED IN VIETNAM

Almost 40 years after the death of her son—the last American soldier killed in Vietnam—an East Texas woman finally met her granddaughter this past week. Tia McConnell, the Asian-born daughter of John O’Neal Rucker, tracked down her father’s family through DNA testing, driving across the country with her husband and children to meet them.

She said it was an emotional experience visiting Rucker’s gravesite and placing a flag at the courthouse where a monument recognizes him as the last U.S. soldier killed in Vietnam.

Born March 17, 1951, in Kilgore, Rucker was raised in Linden. He was assigned to the 366 Combat Support Group, 366th Tactical Fighter Wing, at Da Nang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. On Jan. 27, 1973, at the age of 22, Rucker was killed in a rocket attack just hours before the signing of the Paris Peace Accords that ended the Vietnam War.

His daughter was born an orphan in Da Nang. She was evacuated before the fall of Saigon and adopted and raised by Jack and Karen Whittier of Colorado. But McConnell said she has always yearned to know her father and his family.

After many years of wondering, she attended the first reunion of Vietnamese adoptees, Operation Reunite in Ho Chi’ Minh City, Vietnam in April 2010. There, organizers collected DNA samples and sent them to Family Tree DNA in Houston. In 2011, McConnell got her results. But it took a year more of searching through databases to realize her father might not be alive. Her search led her to the Vietnam Memorial website, where she could search by last name. Not knowing the exact date of her birth, McConnell began searching by date of death based on approximately when she thought she was born. She felt her father must have been alive past November 1972. Then, she entered the death dates listings from December 1972 through 1975. By process of elimination, she looked at every name, where the soldier was killed and the proximity of the location from where she was born.

Then she began looking for soldiers who came from the South, where the DNA tests indicated she should look.

“When I came upon O’Neal’s name, before I clicked on the link to see where he was stationed, I began to cry,” McConnell said. “When I saw he was in Da Nang and from Texas, I just knew.”

McConnell said she went over every route, and they all led her to Linden. Once she located Rucker’s mother’s phone number, she waited 10 hours before her husband convinced her to call. She made the first call Jan. 25, just two days before the anniversary of Rucker’s death.

When she spoke to Rucker’s mother, Mae Rucker, McConnell told her, “I am not trying to sell you anything.” “Good, I am not buying anything,” Rucker said, laughing.

McConnell said, “I think I am your granddaughter.”

“I have always had a feeling that someone was going to come along someday,” Rucker said. “I just had that feeling.”

But when McConnell and Rucker performed a DNA test, the results were negative. McConnell said she was “just devastated,” but the two continued to stay in touch. After several months, her mother and Rucker persisted and convinced McConnell to have the test run a second time. Rucker said she told her, “This means just as much to me as it does to you.” This time they submitted DNA from Rucker’s sisters, Marsha and Margie, along with Mae Rucker’s for a comparison.

On July 5, McConnell said she received the results, and it was a 91 percent match, “the best you can get with relatives not your parents.”

She said she was so excited when she found out. As soon as she could get time off from work, McConnell said she came to visit. McConnell said she was scared before she arrived. Before meeting her father’s family, she was worried whether they would like her. But after meeting them she realized she had nothing to fear.

“They all were just wonderful. I couldn’t ask for anything better,” McConnell said. “And, I have already told them I am not going to let them throw me back either,” McConnell said, laughing.

“It is so special and so wonderful,” McConnell said about finding her family. “I really would encourage people, especially with the amount of time that has passed since Vietnam, that if they think they might have fathered a child to find out, to put the pieces back together because time is short.

“I didn’t get to know my dad, but I got to know him through all of (his family).”

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## ► VA NEWS

### **A LITTLE-KNOWN VETERANS BENEFIT**

Few veterans seem to know about a government benefit that pays for caregivers, assisted living, and a nursing home.

The VA benefit is called the Aid and Attendance and Housebound Improved Pension benefit, known as A&A, which can cover the costs of caregivers in the home (including sons and daughters who are paid to be caregivers, though not spouses) or be used for assisted living or a nursing home.

The benefit is not insignificant: up to \$2,019 monthly for a veteran and spouse, and up to \$1,094 for the widow of a veteran.

"It's probably one of the lesser-known benefits," said Randal Noller, a Veterans Affairs spokesman in Washington. Of the 1.7 million World War II veterans alive as of 2011, who were in need of caregiving assistance and thus eligible, only 38,076 veterans and 38,685 surviving spouses were granted the A&A benefit that year, according to Mr. Noller.

"The sad thing is, it's been an entitlement for 61 years, but it's sat idle - the V.A. employees just haven't been educated about it," said Debbie Burak of Midlothian, Va. She said she repeatedly called department offices on behalf of her father, a World War II veteran, and her mother, who became homeless after their house caught fire and their injuries required extensive care. She was told there were no benefits they were entitled to. (Indeed, when I called two Baltimore-area Veterans Affairs offices for my father, a World War II veteran, no one had heard of this benefit or any benefit that paid for caregivers or assisted living or nursing homes.)

"My parents' end of life was so difficult. They lost everything, were living in a terrible hotel, ran up every credit card we had," Ms. Burak said. "My mother begged us not to cremate her, but there was no money for a burial; we had no choice."

It was only after her father died that Ms. Burak discovered her parents would have been entitled to as much as \$160,000 over the last decade through the Aid and Attendance benefit. She applied, but no money arrived before her mother died.

Mr. Noller said the program's low visibility might be an effect of the size of the department. "The V.A. is the second-largest agency in the federal government, and you can't expect everybody to know everything," he said, referring to the agency's work force.

To qualify, a veteran need not have suffered a service-related injury. He or she only had to have clocked at least one day of his or her 90-day minimum military service during a time of war and need caregiving for activities of daily living.

Applying can be confusing and arduous. If you know the program's name and search the Veterans Affairs Web site for Aid and Attendance, the first page states, among other things, that you are not eligible for A&A unless you already qualify for a basic Veterans Affairs pension - for which you have to be "totally disabled." That's more than a little misleading.

"What people don't know is that when wartime veterans turn 65, the V.A. automatically classifies them as 'totally disabled,' " Ms. Burak said. And if they meet income and asset criteria, they are eligible for a basic pension.

The A&A benefit can be more than 50 percent higher than the basic veteran's pension (\$24,239 annually for a veteran and spouse with A&A, versus \$16,051 for a basic pension). The income and asset cutoffs are also higher than for A&A benefits. Payments seem to begin between six and nine months.

Marcia Hruska's mother, 85, had run through all her savings after seven years of worsening Alzheimer's and round-the-clock care in her apartment in Coconut Creek, Fla. Assisted living was the next step, but Ms. Hruska didn't know how they would pay for it, with Social Security her only income.

"One of the assisted living facilities we visited asked if my dad had been in the service," and mentioned A&A, Ms. Hruska recalled. So she filled out the 26-page Veterans Affairs application—which used to be only four pages—and on Sept. 1, six months after applying, she received the first monthly check for \$1,019. "This relieves a lot of tension," Ms. Hruska said.

One warning note: Scams abound. The department forbids anyone to charge to help veterans fill out these challenging forms, yet a growing number of companies—many of which, on a Web search for "Aid and Attendance," pop up with waving flags and red-white-and-blue banners—offer to "help" veterans fill out the forms free, then charge thousands of dollars for financial consultation.

And, Ms. Burak warns: "Financial planners at assisted living facilities are putting on seminars about the A&A benefit - but it isn't out of the goodness of their hearts. They are trolling for residents who have too much money to qualify, to get them to move assets into annuity products that don't count as income or assets and yield big commissions." (This is possible because, unlike Medicaid, with its five-year lookback, Veterans Affairs has no lookback on asset transfers.)

The department does not reveal maximum allowable assets. But \$80,000 (the house and a car are exempt from this total) seems to be in the ballpark, though someone with more assets could still qualify if expenses were very high, according to Ms. Burak.

Income limits are not set in stone either. But the maximum is around \$20,000 to \$23,000 after deducting costs for medical expenses, caregivers, assisted living or nursing home fees.

Some people are taking advantage of A&A to protect assets for their heirs, Ms. McCarty said. Still, she said, "it's a wonderful benefit."

## **PREVENTING VETERAN SUICIDES**

Today's suicide rate is higher than the Vietnam veteran after they came home. September was Suicide Prevention Month, a time to remind America about the crisis too many of our wounded warriors face.

VA's Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis, and their families and friends, with qualified, caring responders through a confidential toll-free hotline and online chat.

Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 or chat online to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

According to Jan Kemp, VA's Suicide Prevention Center Director, "The caring professionals at the Veterans Crisis Line are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans of all ages and circumstances. Many of the responders are Veterans and understand what Veterans and their families and friends have been through and the challenges Veterans of all ages and service eras face."

Call them and tell them about anything that has been particularly stressful for you lately — the death of a loved one, relationship break-up, loss of job or unemployment, money problems, losing your home, or anything else that might be contributing to how you are feeling.

Since its launch in 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered more than 650,000 calls and made more than 23,000 life-saving rescues. In 2009, the Veterans Crisis Line added an anonymous online chat service, which has helped more than 65,000 people.

### **Help at Every VA Medical Center**

People who know a Veteran best may be the first to recognize emotional distress and reach out for support when issues reach a crisis point — well before a Veteran is at risk of suicide.

To make sure all Veterans and their loved ones are aware of the Veterans Crisis Line, VA is coordinating with communities and partners nationwide to let Veterans and their loved ones know that support is available whenever, if ever, they need it.

There is a Suicide Prevention Coordinator at every VA Medical Center. They work with community supporters to coordinate special outreach events including seminars, health fairs, training and information sessions, community events and events at many VA Medical Centers.

It is not unusual to face disappointments, frustrations, loss, and the wear and tear of daily stress. People experience emotional and mental health crises in response to a wide range of situations — from difficulties in their personal relationships to the loss of a job. For Veterans, these crises can be heightened by their experiences during military service. When emotional issues reach a crisis point, it's time to call on the Veterans Crisis Line for support.

## **Recognize the Signs**

Sometimes a crisis may involve thoughts of suicide. Learn to recognize these warning signs:

Hopelessness, feeling like there's no way out. Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings. Feeling like there is no reason to live. Rage or anger. Engaging in risky activities without thinking. Increasing alcohol or drug abuse. Withdrawing from family and friends.

The following signs require immediate attention: Thinking about hurting or killing yourself. Looking for ways to kill yourself. Talking about death, dying, or suicide. Self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse, weapons, etc.

If you are a Veteran or know a Veteran who is experiencing any of these signs, call the Veterans Crisis Line immediately. Responders are standing by to help.

## **Anonymous On-Line Quiz That Will Help**

Crisis, stress, depression, and other issues affect people in different ways. Maybe you're having trouble sleeping or feel out of control. Maybe your energy level is down or you feel anxious all the time. If these issues and others seem to be leading to a crisis, treatment can help.

On the Crisis Line website you can take a confidential, anonymous, risk assessment to see how you might benefit from VA or community-based services.

You don't have to give your name. You just answer some questions that may be very familiar, such as: During the last four weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following? Feeling nervous or worrying a lot? Having arguments or fights? Feeling out of control? Director Kemp stresses that, "Suicide is one of the top priorities in VA right now. Prevention goes beyond a month, or a week, or a day. With VA, prevention is constant and we do that by making sure Vets and their families are aware of the signs and symptoms and that they know where to go for help when they need it. Call the crisis line. It's the first step you can take to get the help you need to get your life back on track. People are here to help you."

## **COMBAT STRESS AND THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL**

Washington, D.C. (July 12, 2011) - A study led by VA researchers found that aging veterans who earned the Purple Heart show decreased mortality compared with those who had not earned the medal. Additionally, those war-wounded Veterans who survive into later life—especially those who do not develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—may provide valuable clues as to the factors that lead to resilience to combat stress.

A team of VA researchers who studied more than 10,000 Veterans of World War II and the Korean War produced these findings, which appear online in the journal "Depression and Anxiety." "Among the older Veterans we studied, those with Purple Heart citations had half the mortality rate of those without Purple Heart citations," said lead author Tim Kimbrell, MD, a physician-researcher with the Center for Mental Health and Outcomes Research, based at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System.

Whether the Purple Heart holders had chronic PTSD or not, they were about twice as likely to still be alive after some 10 years of follow-up, compared with those with no Purple Heart and no PTSD. The study included Veterans who were 65 and or older in the late 1990s. It tracked their survival through 2008.

It is estimated that more than a million servicemembers received a Purple Heart in World War II, and nearly 119,000 in the Korean War. In recent years, researchers with VA and the Department of Defense have sought insight into the psychological and neurobiological factors that enable some servicemembers to not develop PTSD after traumatic events.

The authors of the new VA study say Purple Heart holders who survive long past their war experience without PTSD may be the ideal population on which to focus such research.

"Our theory was that there are many factors that contribute to resilience to PTSD, and these same factors may increase survival," said Kimbrell.

The researchers were surprised to find that among Purple Heart recipients, those with PTSD had slightly lower mortality than those without PTSD. This is a contradiction to several studies that have shown a link between chronic stress conditions such as PTSD and worse survival. Kimbrell and colleagues suggest this finding is due to what they term "early attrition." Those who had been physically injured in World War II or Korea and suffered PTSD may have been less likely to survive until age 65 in the first place; the PTSD-Purple Heart group included in their study may have been an exceptionally healthy and hearty cohort of veterans.

The researchers say further studies involving these veterans, as well as those who were wounded in combat but did not develop PTSD, may lead to new insights to help prepare future servicemembers to cope with the stress and trauma of war.

## **VETS WARNED ABOUT MORE SCAMS**

Veterans need to be aware of scams involving companies that require payments for processing pension and benefits forms. According to the report, the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs has become aware of 'pension poachers' targeting veterans through seminars and other veteran outreach events. It is important for all veterans to know that there is no reason for a qualified veteran to pay anyone to process their benefit claims. The VA and several Veterans Service Organizations, like the American Legion, VFW, and AMVETS offer these services at no cost to the veteran through accredited district service officers. DSOs are available nationwide to assist veterans with necessary paperwork.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has a website listing the accredited services available to veterans.

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## **► OTHER NEWS**

### **FREE MEALS ON VETERANS DAY:**

Most companies require some form of military ID. These include: a Military ID Card (active/reserve/retired), Current Leave and Earnings Statement (LES), Drivers License with Veterans Designation, Photograph in uniform, be wearing uniform (if your service permits), Veterans Organization Card (e.g., American Legion and VFW), DD214, discharge paperwork, or other form of identification. Other restaurants and companies may go by the honor system.

The list of restaurants giving free meals is too huge to reprint here, but here are the best-known ones. Visit <http://themilitarywallet.com/veterans-day-free-meals-and-discounts/> for the whole list, times, and restrictions. Some are offering the free meals on a day near Veterans Day, but not on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Applebee's  
BJ's  
Chili's  
Denny's  
Golden Corral  
Hooter's

Little Caesar's  
Outback Steakhouse  
Subway  
T.G.I. Friday's  
Olive Garden  
Sizzler's

Also, Knott's annual tribute to our Military, past and present, starts November 1st. FREE admission for Veterans or current serving military personnel and one guest with proper I.D. presented at turnstile. Plus purchase up to six additional tickets for just \$19 each from November 1-21 and for \$25 each November 22 through January 6. Military personnel may also purchase additional tickets at their local MWR ticket office.

Home Depot and Lowe's are giving 10% discounts on Veterans Day. There are also many retail stores/parks/National Parks that are giving discounts. See the above website for details

## **WEBSITE FOR POSER INFO**

The Pentagon went live July 25 with a website intended to thwart phony or wannabe heroes by listing recipients of the nation's highest awards for valor.

Starting with Medal of Honor recipients since 9/11, the Military Awards for Valor—Top3 site will eventually expand to include the names of those who earned the Distinguished Service Cross—awarded by the Army—the Navy Cross and Air Force Cross, and the Silver Star, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told lawmakers during a joint session of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs committees.

The Pentagon decided to launch the site after the Supreme Court Struck down the Stolen Valor Act, a law that made it a crime to falsely claim military service or military awards.

"Free speech is one thing, but dishonoring those who were honored for service on the battlefield is another," Panetta said.

## **LAST ORIGINAL CODE TALKER IS GRAND MARSHALL**



Chester Nez, the last of the original 29 Code Talkers, will be the Grand Marshall of Gallup's 66th Annual Navajo Nation Fair Parade, which will incorporate the theme "Appreciating Tradition." The Navajo Nation Fair is the "Largest American Indian Fair" in North America.

For the first time in the fair's history, the public was invited to submit nominations for the parade grand marshal.

90-year-old Nez is from Jones Ranch, New Mexico. He is the only living member left of the original 29 U.S. Marine Corps 382nd Platoon who used the Navajo language to develop an unbreakable secret code in World War II to defeat the Japanese.



## **RULING AGAINST WESTBORO**

Congress took action where the Supreme Court didn't to curb Westboro Baptist Church's followers from protesting the funerals of fallen troops and veterans.

President Obama signed into law on August 6 the *Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act* that includes language aimed at protecting service members' funerals. The church based in Kansas is best known for staging protests at service members' funerals because they believe God is allowing soldiers to be killed because America tolerates homosexuality.

In 2011, the Supreme Court ruled the First Amendment protected Westboro's right to protest the funerals. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in the majority opinion that "as a nation we have chosen ... to protect even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate."

The new law extends bans on picketing funeral services of troops and veterans from 150 feet to 300 feet, and prohibits protests from being conducted up to two hours before and after a funeral. Previously the ban was for an hour before and after. Sen. Olympia Snow, R-Maine, introduced legislation three months following the Court's ruling that gives the government the right to further protect the funerals. The act argues that ensuring fallen troops have respectful burials is important to maintaining a strong military and protecting national security.

Violations are punishable by a fine and up to a year in jail.

The other half of the law dictates the medical care for the thousands of service members and families afflicted with illnesses from ingesting contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, N.C. between 1957 and 1987.

## **U.S. BEGINS PACKING ITS AFGHAN WAR GEAR**

By Graham Bowley

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - It has taken the United States years to amass the mountains of gear piled up at huge bases like Camp Leatherneck in southern Afghanistan. It is the job of logistics experts like First Lt. Rachel Opperman, 23, to bring it all back home. As the war here draws to a close and the American military begins to reduce its forces, it also has to send back most of its equipment, an immense logistics effort already under way and spanning half the globe.

Lieutenant Opperman, a Marine from Pittsburgh who is known here as the Queen of the Sort Lot, runs one of the big receiving yards, a dusty, 12-acre lot that is taking in superfluous equipment as bases shrink, close or are transferred to the Afghan forces all over the southwest of the country. One recent morning here, Marines ranged slowly in the 100-degree heat under her direction, packing piles of supplies into 5-foot-by-5-foot boxes. Forklifts shifted the boxes onto pallets electronically tagged so their journeys could be tracked to Marine bases or depots in the United States and Japan, bringing order to the chaos of a staggeringly complex 24-hour reverse supply chain operation. There were stenciled racks for axles, fax paper, filters, hoses, sheets of ballistic glass and fenders off mine-protected vehicles. A wooden sign at the gate kept score: "Recovered to date: \$160,937,622. Pallets built: 805. Containers built: 613."

"We will take almost anything," Lieutenant Opperman said. "We take it, and we figure out where it has to go." The international military mission here still has almost two and a half years before the 2014 withdrawal deadline, and commanders hesitate to discuss openly the details of what is known as the "retrograde" of equipment back to the United States. The issue is freighted with sensitivities about the United States' commitment to Afghan security. American commanders do not want to give the Taliban any sense they are

already giving up on the fight. Officials admit that imagery is also a factor. Even as they make decisions about what to pack up, what to leave behind for Afghan forces, or what to abandon or destroy, they want to avoid any echo of the Soviets' headlong rush out of Afghanistan in the late 1980s, which left the countryside strewn with rusting tanks and guns. In any case, though, troops are already departing, and military planners are carefully calculating how to extricate the equipment smoothly. In all, officials estimate, they will have to wrangle 100,000 shipping containers of material and 45,000 to 50,000 vehicles like tanks and Humvees from all across Afghanistan. That is all complicated by the greater expense, and security risk, of shipping things out of Afghanistan, given that fighting is still expected even as the withdrawal takes place. Col. Jeff Hooks, the senior Marine logistics officer in southwest Afghanistan, said budgetary concerns demanded that the Marines take as much functional equipment back with them as possible. "We have a very, very detailed plan," he said, slapping a three-inch-thick white binder on his desk called the "Reset Playbook." He noted that the Marines' Afghan withdrawal would be more complicated than their Iraq pullout, even though they had collected less equipment in Afghanistan. The extra difficulty comes largely because of Afghanistan's special geography: In Iraq, supply routes ran south to Kuwait and the Persian Gulf, but Afghanistan is a landlocked country, and the nearest port—Karachi, in Pakistan—is 600 miles away.

After Pakistan closed its border in November to protest a coalition airstrike that killed 24 of its soldiers, the Marines have mostly flown excess equipment out at a rate of 18 to 24 flights a day. These went directly to the United States or to ports in Kuwait, Oman or elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, from which they continued by ship. Since Pakistan reopened its borders last month, roads south to Karachi are likely to take the greatest weight of future outbound traffic. Once a backlog of supplies on the route clears north into Afghanistan, about 100 trucks carrying excess equipment are expected to leave Camp Leatherneck daily for Pakistan. Land routes north through Central Asia and Russia, called the northern distribution network, are likely to be another important exit route for American forces stationed farther north in Afghanistan and for European coalition partners. But the winding road routes, the complicated rail gauges and the greater potential for attack and logjam make them less attractive than the Pakistani route. In the receiving yards at Leatherneck, other issues involved in the withdrawal were evident. Not far from Lieutenant Opperman's lot, at the Marine Air Ground Task Force Marshaling Yard, Marines assiduously disassembled a Humvee, cleaning individual parts with rags, air and water so that the vehicle could clear the border agricultural inspection for re-entry into the United States. Nearby, inside a large tent, green and red folders on tables documented the 30 or so radios stacked across the floor, while outside, mortar tubes and shells were carefully packed into containers.

The Afghan government's Base Closure Commission takes recommendations from NATO and the Afghan Army to determine which bases to shutter and which the Afghans can run for themselves. According to a timetable set by President Obama, the United States is to withdraw about 23,000 troops from Afghanistan by October, leaving about 68,000 American troops. There are about 13,000 Marines, down from about 20,000, and the United States has said publicly that this number should fall to around 7,000 by October. Coalition levels in the southwest will be bolstered by the arrival of a second battalion from the Georgian Army. In the southwest, the number of coalition bases is falling to about 70 from 214 in March. Out at Delaram II, one of the district bases the United States is shrinking and turning over to the Afghans, troops were pulling up the airfield. The Afghans said they did not want the base's airstrip, so First Lt. Carolyn Aranha, a 32-year-old Marine from Oregon, took out about 50 Marines to rip up the 5,412-foot-long area of hard matting, working at night under floodlights to avoid the pounding heat of the day. Piles of ripped-up mats dotted the camp, and around its edges, bulldozers built a smaller perimeter inside the old four-mile-long fence. "This all has to go," Lieutenant Aranha said, pointing to the spot where a big air control tower used to stand. "This will go back to Leatherneck, and back to the U.S."

A group of Army engineers from Florida was busy dismantling one of the main base headquarters buildings. Corrugated iron roofing was collected in one pile; another comprised mattresses destined to be burned. On the base, there was now only one fire truck left, and most of the camp's four-wheel-drive trucks had been handed in, so getting around the base was hard. Supplies were such that the Marines even recently had to borrow a bulldozer from the Afghans. Some of the roughly 2,000 Afghan troops stationed on the base sat in the shade

under a tarp, patiently watching the deconstruction going on around them. There have been other observers, as well. In June, apparently testing to see if anyone was still at home, four insurgents crawled up to the outer perimeter to cut the wire. They were shot. The security situation in the area is still not stable. Farther out from the base, insurgent cells are active, especially along the main east-west highway nearby, where they tend to target commercial convoys, officials said.

The drawdown affects not only the troops, but also the army of civilians who come from all over to find livelihoods at Western bases. Among them is Caleb Amasa, 38, a Kenyan from Nairobi who was emptying the trash near a row of tents at Leatherneck. "If it closes, we will miss it," Mr. Amasa said. "We want work." Though many local Afghan civilians have the same concern, not all will be sad to see the Americans go. A few miles away in the bazaar in Delaram, a town the Marines once patrolled, Islam Gul, 28, a shopkeeper, said he was glad the Americans were leaving. About a week earlier, a close relative, an engineer, was wounded in the neck by a mine explosion aimed at a joint American-Afghan patrol. "They are foreigners and infidels," Mr. Gul said by telephone. "It is good if they hand over the base to Afghan forces. They were not bothering us much, but we are happy to hear they are leaving the area."

## **STOLEN VALOR ACT**

In June the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Stolen Valor Act on first amendment rights. On September 13 the U.S. House passed a new Stolen Valor Act, which was passed on a vote of 410 to 3. The new Act, called the Military Service Integrity Act and sponsored by Rep. Joe Heck, R-NV, makes it a crime to fraudulently claim to be a medal recipient "with intent to obtain money, property or other tangible benefit."

Proponents of the Act say it would withstand constitutional challenge. Penalties would include a fine and up to a year in prison.

Others claim the Act could still run into constitutional challenge depending on how prosecutors define "other tangible benefit."

Sen. Jim Webb, D-VA, said that lying about a medal to improve one's credibility in a political campaign or to burnish a job resume would qualify as tangible benefit.

## **USMC OFFERING CASH TO GET OUT**

By James K. Sanborn, The Marine Corps Times

The Marine Corps will offer select officers and enlisted personnel lump-sum buyouts—calculated at 20 percent of an individual's base annual pay—to voluntarily leave the service ahead of schedule during the coming fiscal year. The Voluntary Separation Pay program is among the most highly anticipated aspects of the service's comprehensive effort to reshape the active-duty force and cut authorized end strength from 202,100 to 182,100 by 2017. However, these buyouts will be available to Marines only in select overmanned ranks and career fields, and to those who have served in the Corps between six and 20 years, Pete Stenner, the deputy branch head for the Manpower Plans, Programs and Budget Branch, told attendees of the 2012 Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Symposium on July 30 in Potomac, Md. That means, for example, an eligible staff sergeant with 10 years in the Corps can shelve his career and walk away with nearly \$78,000—before taxes. For a major with 10 years, the pre-tax amount would be about \$154,000. Precise details of the VSP program, to include which ranks and MOSs will be targeted, continue to be finalized, said Maj. Shawn Haney, a spokeswoman for Manpower and Reserve Affairs in Quantico, Va.

A forthcoming Marine administrative message, expected to be published this month, will outline specific instructions for Marines interested in applying. Since first disclosing plans to offer VSP as part of the service's

drawdown strategy, Marine officials have cautioned that buyouts will be carefully targeted to ranks and MOSs perceived to have surplus personnel. Manpower officials declined to provide those specifics for this story, citing the forthcoming MARADMIN that continues to undergo revisions. However, in April, when the drawdown strategy was first announced, officials did provide Marine Corps Times with draft lists of the areas that were ripe for reductions over the next four years. The primary focus appears to be staff sergeants, gunnery sergeants and majors in nearly three dozen career tracks. By law, the service is authorized to offer VSP based on up to 40 percent of annual pay. Although the Marine Corps decided to set the formula at 20 percent, it still is a comparatively generous offer.

The Army, which is poised to slash its active-duty ranks by some 80,000 soldiers as part of its personnel drawdown, has shown no indication it will offer VSP in fiscal 2013. Instead, Army officials intend to rely on involuntary separation measures. They are bringing those measures to bear primarily on soldiers with checkered personnel records and those in overstrength MOSs who have little to no chance for promotion, according to Army officials. Gen. Raymond Odierno, the Army's chief of staff, told Congress earlier this year that voluntary outs, through programs like VSP, would be a last resort. He said the last time the Army used voluntary separation incentives back in the 1990s, many of its best soldiers snatched financial incentives to exit early, leaving subpar troops to fill the ranks.

The Corps' top general, Commandant Gen. Jim Amos, has been adamant that he intends to "keep faith with Marines" as the drawdown plays out, resorting to few involuntary separation measures and ensuring that Marines who have made staff sergeant and major, and who want to serve a full 20 years to retirement, are allowed to do so, provided they keep their records clean. In July, Marine officials published details for the fiscal 2013 Voluntary Enlisted Early Release Program, which will allow select Marines to leave the service up to a year before the end of their current contracts. Some 41,000 are eligible for the VEERP, but officials expect the Corps' 25,000 first-term Marines are most likely to apply. Commanders are being instructed to carefully assess their units' needs and avoid creating shortfalls that could jeopardize readiness.

Other programs on the horizon or already available: The Temporary Early Retirement Authority. This incentive will allow select officers and enlisted Marines who have served between 15 and 20 years to retire early with full benefits but a reduced pension. Another highly anticipated program, TERA's specifics are being finalized. A MARADMIN is expected this month. Time-in-grade waivers: These will allow some lieutenant colonels and colonels with just two years' time in grade to retire with benefits commensurate with their rank at slightly reduced pay. Officers in those ranks are usually required to serve three years to retire with full pay. Involuntary Separation Pay. Marines who are twice passed over for promotion or denied re-enlistment, but have served more than six years, may qualify for a significant chunk of cash equal to 10 percent of their annual basic pay times their years of service. Manpower officials have said that could equal \$75,343 for a captain who has served 11 years, \$27,314 for sergeants who have served 10 years or \$22,686 for corporals who have served eight years. Selective Early Retirement Boards: These will push out some twice-passed-over lieutenant colonels and colonels with four years' time in grade. The first SERB for 2013, for lieutenant colonels, is scheduled to convene Sept. 17, Marine officials told Marine Corps Times. The date of the colonel SERB will be announced in a forthcoming MARADMIN. There are no plans to hold SERBs for enlisted Marines, Stenner said during the symposium.

## **SILVER STAR RECIPIENTS NEVER INFORMED?**

The accidental posting of personal information online about top Army combat award recipients has created confusion over whether some soldiers were ever told that they had earned Silver Stars for heroism. At issue is the recent discovery of a document inadvertently published on the Web by a contractor that listed hundreds of valor award recipients beginning in 2001.

The list includes the names and Social Security numbers of Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross recipients from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also includes the names of hundreds of Silver Star recipients from the same conflicts, but does not note their Social Security information.

Never intended for public view, the database contained nine names of Silver Star recipients not included on the Department of Defense's official list of soldiers who received that award – the third highest for valor, according to a combat award historian who discovered the apparent error.

Historian Doug Sterner, who has been researching U.S. military valor awards for almost 15 years, was doing online research last week when he stumbled upon the database and noticed discrepancies when comparing lists. One of the men on the list Sterner found was retired Army Special Forces Master Sgt. Ronnie Raikes. In the early days of the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, Raikes and his team were tasked with bringing Hamid Karzai into Afghanistan from Pakistan. The mission was to build a fighting force of Afghan rebels, led by Karzai, who would help the United States fight the Taliban. Karzai is now president of Afghanistan.

Raikes and his team fought the Taliban on a march toward Kandahar but were caught in a friendly fire bomb strike, that killed one. Raikes and several other members of his team were wounded, he told Security Clearance. Raikes said he received the Bronze Star for actions against the Taliban in 2001. He said he and eight other members of his unit, Operational Detachment – Alpha 574, were recommended for the Silver Star. But they were later told by superiors the award was downgraded to a Bronze Star.

When asked by Security Clearance how he felt that he may have been awarded the Silver Star but never told, Raikes said, "It hurt a little bit."

"I gave 25 years to the Army ... and for the actions we did in a short time and to be a contributing factor in Kandahar falling but just falling short of getting there is pretty significant," Raikes said.

"People now get them (Silver Stars) for sitting behind a desk in an office in Afghanistan," he said.

The Army Times, which initially reported the story, informed Raikes that he was on a list of Silver Star recipients. When Security Clearance asked him how he felt about that news, Raikes seemed not to flinch, "This means the military stepped up and took care of its people and it is well deserved," he said.

Raikes seemed a bit unsure of how the Army could possibly mix things up.

"I met President (George W.) Bush, I was invited to sit and watch him at his first State of the Union address and sat next to Mr. Karzai," he said.

Raikes has heard nothing from the Army on the status of his award and said he will ask contacts for information.

Raikes said two other members of his team who were killed in fighting prior to the friendly fire incident did receive the Silver Star. Sgt. 1st Class Daniel H. Petithory and Master Sgt. Jefferson D. Davis are on the website recently created by the Pentagon to allow the public to search award records. Sterner said he tracked down two others on the list of nine and discovered they had received their medals, but were still not officially recognized on the Defense Department website. He said he cannot find enough information to find answers about the other six names on his list.

Sterner is critical of the Army's lack of accountability in properly recording the names of major valor awards.

"Why give an award if the person does not know it and the Army does not keep track of it," Sterner said.

The Army Times initially reported on the posting of the list. Its parent company employs Sterner.

In a letter to Secretary of the Army John McHugh on Wednesday, Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-California) – a veteran of both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a member of the House Armed Services Committee – voiced his concern and demanded a review.

"It is the obligation of the Army to maintain an awards process that is devoid of lapses in communication, transparency and most importantly, ensuring America's military heroes are honored with the combat decorations they deserve," Hunter said.

"I'm also concerned that this issue could be representative of a larger problem and I would encourage the Army to undertake a review of its awards process," Hunter said.

Army officials said an investigation of how the publication of the Social Security numbers online occurred has begun.

"We take this matter very seriously," according to Army spokesman Col. Jonathan Withington, who said the service took "immediate corrective action" once the soldiers' information was discovered on the Web. "The contractor was notified immediately and removed the unofficial file."

Withington said the Army was notifying "affected persons to make them aware of the circumstances" in accordance with military policy.

## **SEMPER RIDE MOTORCYCLE TRAINING**

In 2008 more United States Marines died on motorcycles than in Operation Iraqi Freedom. In order to stem the tide of soldiers losing their lives back home on American soil, the Marine Corps Safety Board instituted a program that requires training for all active duty personnel that participate in motorcycling whether on- or off-road. One of the ways to satisfy those requirements is through the Semper Ride program. Thanks to required training guidelines and Semper Ride the fatality rate for Marine motorcycle fatalities has been reduced by 44%.

Yamaha TT-R125LE dirt bikes are the perfect machines for Danny Walker's intensive two-day training camp. The Semper Ride program allows Marines to attend action packed riding schools taught by some of the best riding instructors in the industry along with professional racers as guest coaches. MotoUSA was recently invited to attend a Semper Ride event at Camp Pendleton located in Southern California.

The newest addition to the MotoUSA crew has been part of the industry for well over 15 years. Equal parts writer, photographer, and rider, Justin Dawes—"JDawg"—is a jack of all trades and even a master of some.

There are several trackday schools and off-road training courses offered by Semper Ride throughout the United States, but we got the joy of attending a training session taught by American Supercamp. If you aren't familiar with American Supercamp, you really should be. Former pro dirt track racer and AMA road racer Danny Walker and his enthusiastic and talented crew run what is arguably the best two days of motorcycle schooling you can receive. Within the motorcycle industry the camp is legendary, and just the mention of it will set off hours of bench racing and discussion about how cool the class is. Danny has been known to crush seasoned pros egos, tearing them down to build them back up into even better bike handlers. Not one person has ever left without learning something new, and if someone says they didn't - call them a liar.

The concept behind the Supercamp is using flat track-style training to learn balance, braking and throttle control by pushing the limits of traction while in a controlled environment. Danny explained that 90% of street riders don't experience a loss of control or traction until they are crashing. Spending two days sliding around with the

American Supercamp crew familiarizes riders with the feel of tires losing traction, control loss and how to get that control back. A fleet of Yamaha TT-R125LE dirt bikes is used on the specially built oval and TT courses. Using these smaller machines allows seven-time Grand National Champ Chris Carr was on hand to give instruction at the American Supercamp presented by Semper Ride. After two days of training the riders learned how to control and recover from a slide. Riders to test the limits of their skills without the speed and consequence of full sized bikes. Riders will fall down often but rarely do injuries surpass bruises and scrapes.

The Marine Corps has recognized the need for motorcycle training of its service men and women, and Semper Ride and American Supercamp have created a program that makes that training the best it can possibly be. The numbers reflect that. This proves the point that camps and trackdays will improve any rider's skill set and safety. If it's good enough for those that defend our county, it's probably good enough for you.

*A book for your consideration:*

## **LEAVE NO MAN BEHIND**

by Garnett Bill Bell

"No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic." (Nixon)

This book is an eyewitness account of the Vietnam War from its early stages through the last day of the Republic, 30 April 1975. A startling new look at the postwar era and the issue of America's unreturned veterans listed as POW/MIA, an issue that has haunted America since the beginning of American involvement. Shrouded in controversy, a subject of great emotion amid charges of governmental conspiracy and Communist deceit, the possibility of American servicemen being held in secret captivity after the war's end has influenced U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia for three decades.

Now, the first chief of the U.S. Government's only official office in postwar Vietnam provides an insider's account of that effort. The challenges he faced in dealing with U.S. politicians, including Vietnam veterans, Senators John McCain and John Kerry, are an ardent reminder of the many similarities in the bloody wars fought by American troops in both Vietnam and Iraq-Afghanistan. In an illuminating and deeply personal memoir, the government's top missing persons investigator in Southeast Asia, who later became a member of the U.S. Congressional Staff, discusses the history of the search for missing Americans, reveals how the Communist Vietnamese stonewalled U.S. efforts to discover the truth, and how the standards for MIA case investigations were gradually lowered while pressure for expanded commercial and economic ties with communist Vietnam increased. *Leave No Man Behind* is the compelling story of a dedicated group of professionals who, against great odds, were able to uphold the proud military traditions of duty, honor and country.

"As the US Marine Corps helicopter lifted from the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon at daybreak on April 30, 1975, I thought about the carnage that would result from a heat-seeking missile fired by Vietnamese Communist forces gradually encircling the besieged capital of the dying Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Exhausted by a lack of sleep for the previous several days, I no longer felt fear, only curiosity. Tears welled up in my eyes, perhaps due in part to the anguish of witnessing the tragic events unfolding before me, but also from caustic smoke belched out of rooftop incinerators glowing cherry-red from reams of frantically burned secret US Government documents. Feeling a sense of relief, I nevertheless harbored an even stronger sense of guilt. On the Republic of Vietnam's final day, as I looked down into the gradually diminishing compound and into the terrified eyes in the upturned faces of hundreds of Vietnamese nationals and citizens of other countries friendly to the United States, who were being left behind, I knew that I would be haunted for many years to come. As the venerable 'Sea Stallion' throbbed its way through the damp morning air toward a helicopter carrier anchored

off the coast at Vung Tau, blazing multicolored tracers rising from the dark-canopied jungle below bade farewell to America and to an era known as the Vietnam War.

“During the more than 30 minute flight into the future I sat angry and confused after some 10 years of involvement with a faraway place called Vietnam. I wondered whether the sacrifices in lives and national treasure made by America had been worthwhile or in vain. After contemplating the issue for many years, I believe it is now time to take stock of the American War in Vietnam so that Americans, especially those of us who served there, can finally decide whether or not we now have cause for a celebration or the lingering agony of defeat. “

“With the fall of the RVN, as many analysts had predicted, jubilant communist forces quickly invaded and occupied the populated areas. Hundreds of thousands of former military and civilian officials were required to be screened, classified and registered as enemies of the revolution to be detained in remote, isolated concentration camps under horrific conditions. Thousands died due to disease and malnutrition, many never to be heard from again by family members. At the same time, the communist leadership insisted that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and the Provisional Revolutionary Government in the south be united as one.

“From that day forward, according to the constitution, only one political party, the Vietnam Communist Party, would be allowed to exist. On official letterheads of government stationery the three previously used terms comprising the national motto of the communist north: 'Freedom, Independence and Democracy' were changed forever to read 'Freedom, Independence and Happiness.' To the Vietnamese people this change in terminology, especially the reference to happiness, would provide one of the few sources of humor during a desperate time. To add insult to injury, the graves of fallen RVN military personnel were razed by bulldozers in cemeteries across the country. Typewriters, radios, televisions and anything that could be used for propagation or communication were required to be registered with the 'Military Management Committee' responsible for political security under the new 'Socialist Republic of Vietnam.' As interest began to wane, occasional references to the Vietnam War coined phrases such as 'a noble cause' or 'an unnecessary war.' The question as to whether the Vietnam War was or was not necessary was just as divisive in postwar debate as it was during the days following the 1968 'Tet' Offensive. In my own assessment of both the necessity for and the outcome of the Vietnam War two primary considerations were the U.S. national interest at the time and the mission of the U.S. Military Forces that fought in Southeast Asia.

“The overall mission of U.S. military forces for the latter part of the 20th century began to take shape shortly after the conclusion of World War II. At that time the policy of the United States was one of containment of Communism. I believed that this policy was fully justified, because it was obvious that the Communist International, especially Russia and China, sought to 'liberate' the entire world. This policy of containment became known as the 'Cold War.' Although there were numerous clashes involving air crews during missions involving special operations and reconnaissance, the first major battlefield of that war erupted in 1950 on the Korean Peninsula, where the successful accomplishment of the mission of containing communism there was dubbed by the media as a 'stalemate.'

“At the beginning of the War in Vietnam, the basic mission of American soldier worldwide was to kill, destroy, or capture the enemy, or repel his assault by fire. Over one million men and women answered their nation's call, and they did their level best to carry out their mission in Southeast Asia. As a result, some 58,000 Americans and some 225,000 allied personnel made the ultimate sacrifice, while by comparison, communist Vietnam suffered the loss of over 1,300,000 personnel, including 150,000 personnel who were killed-in-action but never recovered. I personally witnessed the strongest blow struck at communist forces by hard-fighting American and South Vietnamese troops that occurred during the January 31, 1968, 'Tet' offensive. The bodies of thousands of communist personnel were stacked in piles around installations throughout South Vietnam, and losses were so heavy for the communist side that the entire military rank structure was temporarily abandoned and cadre selected to command and control units were assigned based on position or job title only, rather than actual



military rank. The loss of life to the communist side was nothing less than staggering, and any U.S. military commander whose losses approached even a small percentage of actual communist fatalities at that time would most likely have been relieved of command.

“Even though America's servicemen and women fought valiantly during the 1968 'Tet' offensive, the U.S. and international media nevertheless managed to reshape their hard-earned victory into a political defeat. Vietnamese communist propaganda experts were so skillful that they were able to convince many members of the media and even some military analysts that two separate governments, the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North, existed side by side and that both were involved in a 'civil war.' It has since been proven that both the NLF and the DRV were tightly controlled by the Vietnam Communist Party and both governments were actually one and the same. Moreover, personnel of the two purported military organizations of both illusionary governments, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong (VC), were in reality members of the Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN).

“Admittedly, in terms of national treasure the Vietnam War was not cheap. Depending on which expert's figures are used, the total cost of the Vietnam War to America was somewhere in the neighborhood of 250 billion dollars. By comparison the overall U.S. defense budget during postwar, peacetime years exceeded that amount annually. In reality one million men could not have been trained at U.S.-based training centers for a 10 year period, even using blank ammunition, for a lesser amount. While the Vietnam War was certainly a drain on the U.S. economy, during the decade of our of engagement there the former Soviet Union also provided significant amounts of financial and material support to communist forces deployed throughout Southeast Asia. Support by the USSR to Vietnam, the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and a badly managed, centrally controlled economy all combined to bring the former Soviet Union to its knees and bring about the collapse of the Communist Party. Ultimately this collapse led to the end of the Cold War. Veterans of the Cold War, especially those who fought in Korea and Vietnam, now enjoy the gratitude of the peoples of many European, East Asian and Southeast Asian nations. It is now clear that as a result of the sacrifices made by American and allied veterans, today the people of Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia are living under freely elected governments. This accounts for one quarter of the earth's population. Radical Muslims bent on Jihad should pause to remember that the citizens of the two largest Islamic nations, Malaysia and Indonesia, are able to freely worship Islam due in large to the sacrifices made on their behalf by Americans fighting against Communism throughout Southeast Asia.

“Obviously, the true losers of the Vietnam War are the Vietnamese people, not just the people of the former Republic of Vietnam, but citizens from all areas of the country, including the north. Although millions of Vietnamese 'voted with their feet' by escaping on small boats across dangerous ocean currents, resulting in staggering losses to mankind, today millions more freedom-loving Vietnamese still yearn to be free. I believe that the two most important bilateral issues remaining between the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam are an accounting for the almost 1,800 Americans still missing from the Vietnam War and democracy for the Vietnamese people.

“Successive administrations in Washington, D.C. have pressed for democracy in many countries around the world, including Russia, Haiti, South Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. But there has been very little interest shown in gaining democracy for Asians, and this double standard is difficult to understand. It is almost as though we Americans have a collective mentality whereby we believe that peoples with yellow skin cannot manage freedom, and that tight control is the only option available.

“The American business community, aggressively buying up cheap products manufactured in Asia for resale on the U.S. market, is blinded by the lack of labor unions, cheap wages and fear of violent reprisals against labor strikes. It is ironic that after some 58,000 fine young Americans died in Vietnam while fighting for democracy the American business community is now steadily developing the economy of communist controlled Vietnam, insuring that the Vietnam Communist Party will not only remain in power, but that it will increasingly have the ability to maintain an even larger and more powerful military force. Concerning the plight of the families of

Vietnam War POWs and MIAs, democracy can also go a long way to help in this regard. I believe that most Americans, especially Vietnam veterans, will agree that for the most part the Vietnamese people are honest and hardworking. Like our people right here at home, I can't imagine a situation where the people of Vietnam would be willing to hide the remains of anyone's loved one in order to extort money from them. Although during the past 30 years the ruling communists have gradually doled out bits and pieces of skeletal remains and personal effects in return for large monetary sums, once the Vietnam Communist Party has collapsed the Vietnamese people will rise to the occasion and provide whatever assistance is necessary to resolve the issue of our missing men. We should all be doing everything we can to make sure that day comes.”

“Garnett 'Bill' Bell, a native of Texas and a retired GM-14, DoD, went to Vietnam as an infantryman in 1965 and served four tours there. Bell was awarded 20 individual decorations and numerous unit awards. Bell later served as an instructor in the Department of Exploitation and Counterintelligence, U.S. Army Intelligence Center and school. During his career Bell served in the 327th Airborne Battle Group, 101st Airborne Division, the 1/35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, the 2/506th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, the 101st MI Company, the 525th Military Intelligence Group, the Defense Language Institute, the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command, the 6th Special Forces Group, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC), the Four Party Joint Military Team (FPJMT) and the Joint Task Force Full-Accounting (JTFFA). Bell's wife and son were killed and a daughter critically injured in April 1975, when the families of U.S. officials assigned to the American Embassy in Saigon were evacuated in conjunction with the 'Operation Babylift' program. After being evacuated by helicopter from the roof of the American Embassy on the final day of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) (30 April 1975), Bell returned to postwar Vietnam as the first official U.S. representative after the war ended when he was assigned as the Chief of the U.S. Office for POW/MIA Affairs in Hanoi. He served more than 12 years on the POW/MIA Search Teams. An Airborne-Ranger and Jumpmaster, Bell eventually became a member of the Congressional Staff, U.S. House of Representatives. Fluent in Vietnamese, Thai and Laotian, Bell is a graduate of Chaminade University and the author of 'Leave No Man Behind.' Bell is a life member of the VFW, Combat Infantrymen's Association (CIA) and the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH). Bell is employed as an investigator in the 12th Judicial District western Arkansas.

This book is one of the most accurate and detailed accounts of the Vietnam War from beginning to end. It is arguably the very best book ever written concerning the important POW/MIA issue. No one, military, civilian, or private citizen, has contributed as much as Bill Bell to the national effort to recover and repatriate America's unreturned veterans from the Vietnam War. Every veteran of any war definitely needs to read this important work, which is destined to become an icon that will withstand the test of time. Bill Bell certainly deserves the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his courageous efforts.”

Michael De Paulo, Vietnam Vet, USMC and National Service Officer, Rolling Thunder Inc.

## **VETERANS WIN RIGHT TO PROCEED WITH SUIT**

About 100,000 military veterans who were exposed to chemicals during decades of secret weapons experiments by the armed services and the CIA have won the right to proceed with a class-action suit that seeks to learn what substances they were given and to obtain any medical care they need. The lawsuit, filed in San Francisco in 2009, contends the veterans' rights were violated by a system under which the government has denied 97 to 99 percent of their claims for disability and death benefits. "The Department of Defense has taken the position that none of these people have had health effects, that there are no long-term health effects associated even with such things as mustard gas," said the veterans' lead attorney, Gordon Erspamer.

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## ► BRINGING THEM HOME

### REMAINS FROM LAST VIETNAM BATTLE RECOVERED

The remains of Marine PFC Richard Rivenburgh were buried 37 years after his helicopter was shot down during the attempt to rescue the crew of the U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez, which had been taken hostage by Cambodia's Khmer Rouge. He was buried with full military honors August 6 at Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego, CA.

The May 15, 1975 rescue is considered the last battle of the Vietnam War. Rivenburgh's name was one of the last placed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington.

Others killed in the same incident were Lynn Blessing, Walter Boyd, Gregory S. Copenhaver, Andres Garcia, Bernard Gause Jr., James J. Jacques, Ronald J. Manning, James R. Maxwell, Daniel A. Benedett, Antonio R. Sandoval, Kelton R. Turner, Richard Van de Geer (all missing on CH53A); Gary L. Hall, Joseph N. Hargrove, Danny G. Marshall (missing on Koah Tang Island); Ashton N. Loney (missing from Koah Tang Island); Elwood E. Rumbaugh (missing from CH53A)

When U.S. troops were pulled out of Southeast Asia in early 1975, Vietnamese communist troops began capturing one city after another, with Hue, Da Nang and Ban Me Thuot in March, Xuan Loc in April, and finally on April 30, Saigon. In Cambodia, communist Khmer Rouge had captured the capital city of Phnom Penh on April 17. The last Americans were evacuated from Saigon during "Option IV", with U.S. Ambassador Martin departing on April 29. The war, according to President Ford, "was finished."

2Lt. Richard Van de Geer, assigned to the 21st Special Ops Squadron at NKP, had participated in the evacuation of Saigon, where helicopter pilots were required to fly from the decks of the 7th Fleet carriers stationed some 500 miles offshore, fly over armed enemy-held territory, collect American and allied personnel and return to the carriers via the same hazardous route, heavily loaded with passengers. Van de Geer wrote to a friend, "We pulled out close to 2,000 people. We couldn't pull out any more because it was beyond human endurance to go any more..."

At 11:21 a.m. on May 12, the U.S. merchant ship MAYAGUEZ was seized by the Khmer Rouge in the Gulf of Siam about 60 miles from the Cambodian coastline and eight miles from Poulo Wai island. The ship, owned by Sea-Land Corporation, was en route to Sattahip, Thailand from Hong Kong, carrying a non-arms cargo for military bases in Thailand.

Capt. Charles T. Miller, a veteran of more than 40 years at sea, was on the bridge. He had steered the ship within the boundaries of international waters, but the Cambodians had recently claimed territorial waters 90 miles from the coast of Cambodia. The thirty-nine seamen aboard were taken prisoner.

The vessel was taken to Koh Tang Island, and on May 15, 1975, the Air Force sent in 11 helicopters with troops to secure the island and rescue the Mayaguez crew.

President Ford ordered the aircraft carrier USS CORAL SEA, the guided missile destroyer USS HENRY B. WILSON and the USS HOLT to the area of seizure. By night, a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft located the MAYAGUEZ at anchor off Poulo Wai island. Plans were made to rescue the crew. A battalion landing team of 1,100 Marines was ordered flown from bases in Okinawa and the Philippines to assemble at Utapao, Thailand in preparation for the assault.

As the helicopter carrying Rivenburgh neared the island, it was shot down with 26 men on board. Half were rescued at sea, leaving 13 missing. In 1995, all but four of the missing were recovered.

In 1988, the communist government of Kampuchea (Cambodia) announced that it wished to return the remains of several dozen Americans to the United States. (In fact, the number was higher than the official number of Americans missing in Cambodia.) Because the U.S. did not officially recognize the Cambodian government, it refused to respond directly to the Cambodians regarding the remains. Cambodia, wanting a direct acknowledgment from the U.S. Government, held the remains until 2008. Rivenburgh's remains could not be positively identified until January 2012.

## **AF PILOT IDENTIFIED AND BURIED**

Air Force Lt. Col. Charles Walling, of Phoenix, AZ, was shot down August 8, 1966 in Vietnam, about 35 miles northwest of Saigon. He's been listed as missing in action ever since.

Air Force Lt. Col. Charles M. Walling, of Phoenix, AZ, was flying his F-4C over Vietnam 46 years ago when he disappeared over Song Be Province, leaving behind a pregnant wife and a 22-month-old son. He's been listed as missing in action ever since.

Walling was deployed to Vietnam in June 1966, and was on his 40th mission when he died. Other Americans in the area said they saw the plane crash but did not see any parachutes. Search-and-rescue efforts in the days after the Phantom's crash were unsuccessful.

In 1992, a joint U.S.-Socialist Republic of Vietnam team investigated the area near the crash, the Pentagon said, and interviewed a local citizen who had recovered aircraft pieces from the site.

The Pentagon said the team went back in 1994 and excavated the site, recovering military equipment and a metal ID tag with Walling's name on it.

In 2010, the site was excavated once again and additional evidence was found, including enough human remains to try DNA testing. Scientists later used circumstantial and material evidence to identify some of the remains as Walling's. Eighteen months later, the remains were positively identified as Walling's.

He was buried in Arlington June 15, 2012.

## **SOLDIERS MISSING FROM VIETNAM WAR IDENTIFIED**

The DPMO announced on August 27 that the remains of three servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, were recently identified and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class William T. Brown of La Habra, Calif., Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Donald M. Shue of Kannapolis, N.C., and Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Gunther H. Wald of Palisades Park, N.J., will be buried as a group on Aug. 30, in a single casket representing the three soldiers, in Arlington National Cemetery. Brown and Shue were each individually buried on Sept. 26, 2011, at Arlington and May 1 in Kannapolis, N.C.

On Nov. 3, 1969, the men and six Vietnamese soldiers were part of a Special Forces reconnaissance patrol operating in Quang Tri Province, near the Vietnam-Laos border. The patrol was ambushed by enemy forces and all three Americans were wounded. Brown was reported to have suffered a gunshot wound to his side. Due to heavy enemy presence and poor weather conditions, the search-and-rescue team was not able to reach the site until eight days later. At that time, they found military equipment belonging to Shue, but no other signs of the men.

Between 1993 and 2010, joint United States/Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted multiple interviews on nine different occasions in

QuangTri Province. Additionally, the S.R.V. teams unilaterally investigated this case, but were unable to develop new leads. Among those interviewed by the joint teams were former Vietnamese militiamen who claimed in 1969 they ambushed three Americans in the area near the Laos-Vietnam border. In 2007, a Vietnamese citizen led investigators to human remains that he had discovered and buried near the site of the ambush. In 2008, a military identification tag for Brown was turned over to the U.S. Government from a U.S. citizen with ties to Vietnam. Finally, in April 2010, joint teams excavated a hilltop area near Huong Lap Village, recovering additional human remains, military equipment, another military identification tag for Brown, and a "Zippo" lighter bearing the name "Donald M. Shue" and the date "1969."

Scientists from the JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial and material evidence, along with mitochondrial DNA - which matched that of some of the soldiers' family members - in the identification of the remains.

### **AIRMEN MISSING FROM VIETNAM WAR IDENTIFIED**

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced August 6 that the remains of two servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

Air Force Lt. Col. Charles M. Walling of Phoenix, Ariz., and Maj. AadoKommendant of Lakewood, N.J., will be buried as a group at Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 8 -- the 46th anniversary of the crash that took their lives. Walling was individually buried on June 15, at Arlington National Cemetery.

On Aug. 8, 1966, Walling and Kommendant were the crew of an F-4C aircraft that crashed while on a close air support mission over Song Be Province, Vietnam. Other Americans in the area reported seeing the aircraft crash and no parachutes being deployed. Search and rescue efforts were not successful in the days following the crash.

In 1992, a joint U.S.-Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) team investigated the crash site and interviewed a local Vietnamese citizen who had recovered aircraft pieces from the site. In 1994, a joint U.S.-S.R.V. team excavated the site and recovered a metal identification tag bearing Walling's name, and other military equipment. In 2010, the site was excavated again, and additional evidence was recovered, including human remains.

Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial and material evidence, along with forensic identification tools including mitochondrial DNA in the identification of the remains.

### **AIRMAN MISSING FROM WWII IDENTIFIED**

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced that the remains of a serviceman missing in action from World War II were identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Samuel E. Lunday, of Marianna, Fla., was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. On April 24, 1943, Lunday and four other U.S. servicemen were flying a C-87 Liberator Express aircraft over the Himalayan Mountains, from Yangkai, China, to their home base in Chabua, India. After losing radio communications following take-off, the crew was never heard from again. Eleven aerial search missions were

unable to locate the aircraft or crew due to intense snows on the mountains at high altitudes, and dense jungle growth at lower altitudes.

As part of the war effort against the Japanese, U.S. Army Air Forces cargo planes based in India continually airlifted critical supplies over the high mountain ranges that comprise the Himalayas—known as “The Hump”—in support of American airbases in China. The amount of materiel flown over the Himalayas was a logistical achievement unparalleled at the time.

Almost 60 years later, in 2003, an American citizen discovered the wreckage of the C-87 aircraft while trekking in the mountains, approximately 100 miles from Chabua, near the Burmese border. He recovered the aircraft’s identification plate, military equipment and human remains. The artifacts and remains were turned over to U.S. officials for analysis. Attempts to excavate the site are being negotiated with the Indian government.

To determine the identity of the remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and mitochondrial DNA—which matched that of Lunday’s nephews.

## **MARINE MISSING SINCE 1975 FINALLY LAID TO REST**

SAN DIEGO, Aug 5, 2012 – A Marine who had been reported missing in action for more than three decades has been put to rest at Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego.

The Marine Corps held a funeral service with military honors Monday for Pfc. Richard W. Rivenburgh, who was on a rescue mission when the helicopter he was in was shot down off the coast of Cambodia in 1975. The military says his remains were recovered in March 2008 and were identified last January. Rivenburgh was 21.

His younger brother, Robert Rivenburgh, was among nearly a dozen relatives who attended the service. More than two dozen others, mostly Vietnam veterans, also attended. Robert Rivenburgh said his brother's burial finally gives his family peace.

## **CAMP PENDLETON MARINE MIA MORE THAN 60 YEARS IDENTIFIED**

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office has identified the remains of Marine Pfc. Richard S. Gzik, who was stationed at Camp Pendleton and served in the Korean War. Gzik was killed in action in North Korea in 1952, but his remains were only identified this year, according to a Pentagon news release.

Gzik was a member of the M Battery, 11th Artillery Regiment, 1st Marine Division when it came under attack December 2, 1950 near the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. After Gzik was killed, his body was buried in the area, and was unable to be retrieved until four years later:

In 1954, United Nations and Communist Forces exchanged the remains of war dead in what came to be called “Operation Glory.” All remains recovered in Operation Glory were turned over to the Army Central Identification Unit for analysis. Those which were unable to be identified, given the technology of that time, were interred as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii -- the “Punchbowl.”

This year, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command analysts were able to positively identify Gzik's remains through circumstantial evidence, dental records, and radiographs.

Gzik's remains were returned to his family in Toledo, Ohio, and he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors on September 28.

## **PENTAGON DEDICATED TO BERGDAHL'S RETURN, SPOKESMAN SAYS**

By Karen Parrish American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Oct. 4, 2012 – The safe return of the only U.S. service member known to be in Taliban captivity remains a top Defense Department priority, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said today.

Pentagon Press Secretary George E. Little briefs reporters at the Pentagon, Oct. 4, 2012. DOD photo by Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo (Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

Army Sgt. Bowe R. Bergdahl is someone Pentagon leaders “remember every day,” Little told reporters at a news conference.

“We are taking steps on a regular basis to try to determine precisely where he is, and to secure his freedom,” he added.

Reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan government remains an Afghan-led process, Little said in response to a reporter’s question, and is not linked to the department’s efforts to secure Bergdahl’s release.

“We are strongly dedicated to getting Bowe Bergdahl home to his family in Idaho,” he said. “We want to see that happen as quickly as possible. ... We never forget those who remain in the custody of those who should not be holding our soldiers.”

Bergdahl, 26, from Hailey, Idaho, has been missing since June 30, 2009, when his unit in Afghanistan noted his absence from roll call. He is assigned to 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, based at Fort Richardson, Alaska.

## **MARINES MISSING IN ACTION FROM WWII IDENTIFIED**

The remains of seven servicemen missing in action from World War II have been identified and are being buried with full military honors.

Marine Corps 1st Lt. Laverne A. Lallathin of Raymond, Wash.; 2nd Lt. Dwight D. Ekstam of Moline, Ill.; 2nd Lt. Walter B. Vincent, Jr. of Tulsa, Okla.; Tech. Sgt. James A. Sisney of Redwood City, Calif.; Cpl. Wayne R. Erickson of Minneapolis; Cpl. John D. Yeager of Pittsburgh, Pa.; and Pfc. John A. Donovan of Plymouth, Mich., were buried as a group in a single casket representing the crew on Oct. 4, in Arlington National Cemetery. Six of the Marines were identified and buried as individuals previously this year. Lallathin, also individually identified, will be interred individually at Arlington on the same day as the group interment.

On April 22, 1944, the Marines were aboard a PBJ-1 aircraft that failed to return from a night training mission over the island of Espiritu Santo, in what is known today as Vanuatu. None of the seven crew members were recovered at that time, and in 1945 they were officially presumed deceased.

In 1994, a group of private citizens notified the U.S. that aircraft wreckage had been found on the island of Espiritu Santo. Human remains were recovered from the site at that time and turned over to the Department of Defense.

In 1999, a Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) survey team traveled to the location. The crash site was located at an elevation of 2,600 ft., in extremely rugged terrain, and the team determined that specialized mountain training would be necessary to safely complete a recovery mission. From 2000 to 2011, multiple JPAC recovery teams excavated the site and recovered human remains, aircraft parts and military equipment.

To identify the remains, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) evaluated circumstantial evidence and mitochondrial DNA -- which matched that of the Marines' family members.

## **POW/MIA DIVE TEAM SEARCHING FOR REMAINS OFF COAST OF FRANCE**

Stars and Stripes

October 2, 2012

An underwater recovery team from the U.S. Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command arrived off the coast of France this week to search for an American servicemember missing since World War II.

The 25-person team of JPAC specialists, civilian mariners from the USNS Grapple and divers from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two will excavate off the coast of Calvi, Corsica, for an American lost in a B-17 crash in February 1944, according to a JPAC statement Tuesday.

JPAC officials did not identify the servicemember they will be seeking during the five-week operation.

JPAC, based out of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, has asked the local community to limit traffic in the ship's vicinity, the statement said. The area will be marked with buoys to maintain the integrity of the site and keep divers safe.

## **KOREAN WAR SOLDIER'S REMAINS COME HOME**

**Oct 3, 2012 |**

**by Kyle Daly Gannett Wisconsin**

APPLETON — More than 60 years after Pfc. Arthur Hopfensperger went off to war, the U.S. Army soldier is finally coming home.

His burial will be held Monday at Appleton Highland Memorial Park. Hopfensperger, 18, was killed on a bitter-cold battlefield near the Chosin Reservoir, deep inside what is now North Korea. During the early months of the Korean War, Chinese soldiers launched a surprise attack on his regiment in the late hours of Nov. 27, 1950. The military concluded he died the next day, but no one can say definitively when and how. Interviews with members of Baker Company — a group of soldiers including Hopfensperger who were part of a larger infantry unit — have failed to uncover the circumstances surrounding the soldier's death. But now that his body is coming home, Hopfensperger's cousin Elayne Lastofka, 80, says the family will be able to find some peace. "I think most of them probably feel like I do," Lastofka said. "We're very sad that he left us so young. He was only 18 when he was killed, but we're glad that he's back because we've got some closure now on the case."

Hopfensperger's remains were flown from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, to a Milwaukee airport on Saturday. Hopfensperger will be taken by hearse to an Appleton funeral home. In a strange twist of this story, another Arthur Hopfensperger — a cousin of the Korean War soldier — will drive the hearse from the airport to the funeral home. This Arthur Hopfensperger — a 71-year-old retired part-time worker at Appleton's Valley Funeral Home — was 10 years old when his cousin was reported missing.



## **STRENGTHENING TIES WITH VIETNAM**

In June, the Vietnamese government turned over archival documents the U.S. has been requesting for several years. Later that month, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta traveled to Vietnam, where he learned the Vietnamese government opened three previously restricted sites for investigations. Also in June, DPMO participated in the U.S./Vietnam Political, Security, Defense dialogue in Hanoi, which is the principal bilateral policy forum between the U.S. and Vietnam.

To continue to build on this progress, JPAC launched an initiative to accelerate operations, called the Vietnam Recovery Team — an excavation team composed primarily of Vietnamese personnel and several Americans, including an anthropologist, linguist, medic, and explosive ordnance specialist. All of these actions support the mission of bringing home Americans who are still unaccounted for in Vietnam.

## **U.S.-LAOS RELATIONS**

In June, DPMO participated in the fourth U.S.-Laos Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue, hosted by the Department of State. DPMO addressed the use of helicopters versus ground transportation, permission for U.S. teams to camp at excavation sites, permission for ethnic Lao-American and Thai-American JPAC linguists to participate in operations in Laos, and additional access for Stony Beach representatives at the U.S. Embassy.

In July, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to Laos. She was the first U.S. Secretary of State to visit Laos in more than five decades. In her discussions there, she raised the issue of the more than 300 Americans still unaccounted-for in that country, along with the issues that had been raised in the June talks between the two governments.

In August, representatives from DPMO and JPAC participated in semi-annual consultative talks with representatives of the Lao government in Vientiane, Laos. The Lao reaffirmed commitments, to allow the use of ground transportation, where appropriate and safe, and permit the use of remote base camping near excavation sites on a case-by-case basis, which were made to Secretary Clinton during her visit.

## **REMAINS RECOVERIES IN INDIA**

In June, the United States and India agreed to resume remains recovery activities in parts of Northeastern India. There are approximately 400 unaccounted-for Americans in India from some 90 aircraft crashes during WWII.

During his visit in June, Secretary Panetta said, "This is a critical step toward bringing home our service members lost during WWII. The United States and India, working together, can help provide comfort to the families of Americans who were lost during the war."

## **REMAINS RECOVERIES IN BURMA**

JPAC recently led technical meetings with the Burmese Ministry of Defense and Office of the Chief of Military Security Affairs to discuss resuming investigations and remains recovery activities for WWII missing. Both ministries were supportive of the proposal to resume operations in Burma, and they agreed to continue talks to refine the details in the near future. More than 700 Americans are unaccounted for in Burma from WWII.

*Today, 1,655 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. The U.S. government continues to work closely with the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to recover Americans lost during the Vietnam War.*

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## ► REUNIONS

### KERRVILLE

We had a record number come to Kerrville and many that had never been. One of our guests was Joe Hudson, former POW. Joe has a road name of GUMP and he told the story of how he got that name! We also had several Gold Star Parents attending.

It was rainy so we were not able to ride but it did give us all time to visit more. Sapper took a vehicle lot over to the Nimetz WWII Pacific Theater in Fredericksburg and a few rode the bikes over. The Road Guard meeting was held as well as an Advance Team and Platoon meeting. As usual Janice (Wentworth) went above and beyond putting this year's unofficial reunion together. — Raven



Unfortunately, I didn't receive any reports or usable photos on the Tulsa or Angel Fire reunions. I heard that they went very well, with all three having good attendance. The Central Route reunion laid almost 400 bricks at the Angel Fire Memorial, including some Medal of Honor ones. And this year for the first time there was a reunion patch, which was designed by Barbara and Fernando Montoya and Monte and Linda Apodaca.

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## ► SICK CALL

### **SSGT Tim Chambers**

Tim was in the VA hospital in San Diego in September for an unknown reason, but he apparently is OK. He was welcomed October 7 by the PGR when he arrived at a Tennessee airport to Tennessee's Helping Hearts' Annual Remembrance and Service Ball.

### **Mil & Christy Thornton**

Sept. from Mil: Hello Everyone. Well by now most of you are aware that Christy and I, after 45 years of motorcycle riding, had the odds catch up with us. On Wednesday evening here in Portland Oregon, we were crossing the I-5 bridge over the Columbia River returning from a beautiful ride seeing Mt. Saint Helen's volcano. We were less than a mile from reaching our campground where we are staying.

Traffic over the bridge was flowing normally around 45 to 50 mph. As we reached the middle of the bridge in the outside lane the traffic literally stopped in front of us. A few days before this, there was a large abandoned hotel that had burned to the ground and all the traffic was stopping to look at the remains. I hit the brakes and the bike was in the center of the lane. As any motorcycle rider knows, this is not the position to be in for a panic stop. The bike started to slide out on the road grime in the middle of the lane. I recovered it by getting off the brakes which put us in the middle lane but the bike switched sides and we high sided on the left side as the bike was skidding down the freeway on its side. Christy and I both were thrown to the ground with very heavy force. She must have hit her head and went unconscious immediately as her helmet was destroyed but it saved her life. She was unconscious for about five minutes and finally gained consciousness but had a concussion which she is recovering from pretty well. She also broke her left arm just about the wrist, which they will be operating on the coming Monday the 10th. She did some what has been described as minor but long recovery injury to her pelvis. She has a broken rib, chipped L5 vertebrae but is minor. She is very sore but has a good outlook.

Many of you have been trying to contact us or have left messages. I have not been ignoring you as I was released last night from hospital with minor injuries. Our son Bret is flying up on Sunday to help us get home with our camping rig etc. They suspect Christy will be able to travel on Wednesday of next week. Our good friends Tom and Carol have been here with us the whole time and have been just a God's angels for us. We have been out on the road for a month on our first real bucket list trip since we retired. It's unfortunate that this has happened, but God spared our lives and we trust in Him that we will be able to move on from this.

Thank you all for the nice notes. Please keep the prayers moving as we still need to get back to our home in Arizona to be able to really start the healing process.

## ► TAPS

### **George Smith, Navajo Code Talker**

George Smith, one of the more than 400 Navajo who were trained as code talkers, died on October 30 at the age of 90. He was born on June 15, 1922 in Mariano



Lake, New Mexico. He enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 1943 to be trained as a Code Talker after earning his credentials in diesel mechanics. He earned the rank of Corporal while he served in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He served in Okinawa, Hawaii, and Japan and fought in battles at Saipan, Tinian, and the Ryuku Islands. He received the Victory Medal as well as the Congressional Silver Medal for his role.

After he served as a Navajo Code Talker, Smith worked at Fort Wingate Army Depot destroying old ammunition, then worked as a mechanic at Fort Wingate Trading Post. He later moved to Fort Defiance where he became a shop foreman and finished his career in Shiprock working for the Navajo Engineering Construction Authority as a heavy equipment mechanic before retiring to Sundance.

Smith has been described as a humble, generous man, always smiling, and dedicated to his work.

Smith died at Gallup Indian Medical Center and his cause of death was not immediately known. He is survived by his brothers Albert Smith of Gallup, Donald Smith of Blue Water, Leonard Smith of Sundance, and Phillip Lee Smith of Kayenta, Ariz.; sisters Yvonne Denetclaw of Fruitland, Florence Dick and Phyllis King of Iyanbito, and Diane Smith of Sundance; sons Raymond Smith of Farmington, and Gilbert A. Smith Sr. and Irvin E. Smith of Sundance; daughters Patsy A. Tommy, Julie A. Livingston, and Mary Ann Smith, all of Sundance. He also is survived by more than 20 grandchildren and more than 31 great-grandchildren.

*There are fewer than 10 of the 400 or so Code Talkers left, and only one of the original 29. Chester Nez is 90, hard of hearing, and lost both legs to diabetes, but is still active. He spoke on Nov. 2 to a packed audience at San Juan College in New Mexico.*

**Paka Weinstein** of Hawaii passed away July 25 of a heart attack. He was loved by many and will be missed. He was a First Lt. in the Air Force, an aviator in Vietnam from 1962-67, in the 84<sup>th</sup> Military Airlift Command,

Paka's best friend, PatoPato, said he rode ALW with RFTW from 1999 to 2002, and was a road guard in 2002. In 2006 he lost a leg in a motorcycle accident in Hawaii, but was back on RFTW on a trike in 2008. His last year with RFTW was 2009. Pato said Paka was a PGR Road Captain in Maui and also a member of a HOG chapter, In Country Vets, and Koapuna MC in Maui.

**Chrystal Leigh Mullins**, daughter of Shirley "Top Sarge" Scott died of cancer July 25. Our hearts go out to Top Sarge for first the loss of her husband, Vance, then the loss of her daughter. No one should have to bear such loss.

**Dr. Joseph Lee Parker Jr.**, the last surviving Navy doctor who landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy during the D-Day invasion of World War II, has died.

Dr. Joseph Lee Parker Jr., of Greensboro, Ga., died Sept. 27 at St. Mary's Good Samaritan Hospital in Greensboro. He was 95.

Parker was a member of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion. Parker's obituary from McCommons Funeral Home says he treated the wounded, including Allied and German troops, for 21 days on the beach.

Parker was awarded the French Legion of Honor medal in 2011, according to the 6th Naval Beach Battalion website. Parker and 16 other veterans were honored for their service during the war. According to a 1999 interview with a historian that was posted on the website, Parker attended the University of Georgia. He went on to medical school in Augusta, and went in the service as an intern at the University Hospital in Augusta. In 1943, Parker was assigned for temporary duty at Parris Island, S.C., then to Camp Bradford to the 6th Amphibious Forces, and later to the 6th Beach Battalion.

Parker said there was no training or orientation into the Navy when he joined. He said duties initially involved mundane tasks such as checking swimming pools for the chlorine content and looking for safety problems there.

"The main thing we did down in Parris Island was looking at the blisters on the GI's feet that were marching on those hot paved parade grounds," Parker said in the interview.

**Wendall A. Phillips** was a 21-year-old radio operator for the U.S. Army Air Forces when he was shot down in 1944 and captured by the Germans. Then, after escaping, he was sent to fight in the Pacific and landed in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, where he was tortured.

Phillips, chaplain of local and national veterans groups, died September 27 at 88.

But friends say Phillips always believed God would bring him home during those dark days. He spent a lifetime helping others — both with his words as a chaplain of a veterans post, and with acts such as the time in 2008 when he shared a stage with a German prisoner of war.



"There was Wendall Phillips and just four feet away from him was this man who was a German officer in Hitler's army, talking about their respective experiences. The audience was spellbound," said Joseph Garrera, executive director of the Lehigh Valley Heritage Museum.

"In the end, true to form, Wendall stood up and said to this German officer, 'Let me give you a hug, son.' It was such a moving moment of reconciliation. That was Wendall Phillips."

Phillips, who lived with his wife of 64 years, Frances, in Hanover Township, Northampton County, is perhaps best remembered for the work he did for veterans. Phillips was the national chaplain of the China-Burma-India Organization, speaking at the funerals of many of his fellow veterans.

Phillips' military story started in 1942 when, at 19, he left college at the Crane Institute of Music in Potsdam, N.Y. Trained as a radio operator, he flew 2,500 hours with the Air Transport Command. Stationed on the southern coast of England, Phillips' crew took emergency supplies and equipment to France and brought the walking wounded back to British hospitals. He flew many missions in icy conditions and survived five crashes, including one in 1944 near the French-Belgian border. After it, he was captured and imprisoned in a German camp near Leuze, Belgium.

Zeller, who heard the story several times, said Phillips had been in a hospital-like portion of the camp and sneaked out with two other prisoners one night when the guards weren't on lookout. He had been there 33 days. At community forums over the years, Phillips described how they escaped through an opening in the electrified barbed-wire fence and, hiding during the day, walked for three nights. While Phillips was hiding with goats in a barn, a farming family discovered him and hid him in their cellar until a Catholic priest came. The priest connected Phillips with the French Underground, which helped him return to the American lines.

By the following year, Phillips was in the Pacific Theater flying "The Hump" between China and India or Burma. His unit used C-47 and C-46 aircraft, loaded with thousands of 55-gallon drums of fuel. "There were a great many accidents with loss of aircraft and personnel," Phillips wrote in a typed, four-page essay from 2011 that Zeller shared. "I am a survivor of a couple of those, personally."

On one of those crashes, Phillips was taken as a prisoner a second time.

"He said that the Germans treated him fairly well and fed him more than he expected, but he suffered excruciating, agonizing pain — torture by the Japanese," said Garrera, who heard the story during the Lehigh

Valley Heritage Museum forum. "They removed all his fingernails, trying to get information that he didn't have."

When Phillips returned home after the war, he finished college and married Frances, his college sweetheart, in 1948. They had three children and he became ordained as a Presbyterian elder. He worked as a manufacturer's representative, a municipal manager and a statistician.



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