



RUN FOR THE WALL

Quarterly Newsletter

“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”

October 2013

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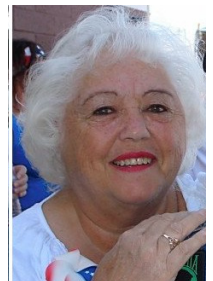
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THE EDITOR’S NOTES

Hello RFTW Family:

This issue is very late because we had to wait to include our annual Financial Report, and also because I’ve had some medical problems. I fell and broke my cheekbone and eye socket and had surgery to repair them, then a month later I developed several blood clots in both lungs. I was in the hospital for 8 days and will have to have my blood monitored for a while.

I’m telling you this not because I’m looking for attention or sympathy, but because it’s at times like this that we find out just how much of a family RFTW is. While I was sick, of course my children and family were right there for me and were very concerned and attentive, and my longtime friends were also. But I was really touched by the concern shown me by my RFTW family. When I wasn’t able to be on the RFTW Forum someone asked if anyone had heard from me. When they learned I was in the hospital, I got phone calls from our RFTW family all over the U.S. Pegger and Ruthie, who live in Havasu, came to visit me every day and brought me things they thought I might need or want. Pegger knew it was important for me to start walking, and he escorted me up and down the halls almost every day. Dirt also came to visit and walked me through the halls.



This was truly a wonderful feeling to be so cared about, and I want to thank everyone for their prayers and concern and tell you how much my RFTW family means to me.

I wear a pin on my vest that says WE ARE FAMILY. It's true: RFTW is a wonderful family!
Judy "Velcro" Lacey

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Hello again.

Well, we now have the three reunions behind us and I was able to attend all three. It was really good to be able to visit with so many friends and have more time to visit than we sometimes get on the Run. I took the opportunity, or more accurately I took advantage of the opportunity, to address the riders present at all three. This was in a more or less formal way in Colorado Springs and Angel Fire and somewhat less so in Kerrville. My focus was to promote, first-hand, the fact the BOD does not work in a vacuum, addressing issues that we and only we find significant and then approving only measures which we feel meets the needs of our particular interests.

My two years on the BOD have been very rewarding and have given me a tremendous insight into the workings of RFTW. The BOD has truly been in existence to serve you, the riders. Issues are raised and the BOD addresses ALL of them. We read the After Action Reports and discuss the good and the not so good contained therein. We celebrate our successes and take our lumps when necessary, following through with appropriate action to correct our deficiencies. That corrective action does not always have the results that we intended, so we sometimes have to adjust again. At the reunions I presented the activities of the Board in an attempt to show our transparency. I suppose that some thought it an infringement on the opportunity of the riders to express their concerns and ask questions at the Rider's Meeting; however, we did our best to allow time for that.

So, what have we accomplished? We elected new leadership as detailed in the July Newsletter. Again, please join me in welcoming Greg "Pied Piper" Smith and Harlan "Whitebirch" Olson to the Board. We approved new Route Leadership. Congratulations to John "Hardcharger" Barker, Ken "Catfish" Ward, and now Reid "Pops" Choate. (Since our initial meetings, Phil "First gear" Sloan, for personal reasons, has stepped down as Route Coordinator for the Southern Route and Reid Choate has been approved to carry on in that capacity.) We have approved the Midway Route as a new "Standard" Route. We have amended the Bylaws and SOPs to more clearly define the RC/BOD roles and responsibilities.

Effective immediately, ALL Routes will offer a minimum of two staggered platoons. This issue has been a subject of discussion at nearly all BOD meetings for the past eight years and is now resolved. Order of March out of Rancho has been set for 2014: MR first, followed by SR, then CR at ten-minute intervals. The Central Route will be first through Front Royal in 2014, but if LEO escort is desired, they will have to arrange for their own, assisted by the new Virginia State Coordinator. Responsibilities have been assigned to each route for activities in D.C./Arlington. We intend to put together an all-volunteer emergency response team at the rear of each pack to work with the Road Guards in the handling of any emergencies that may arise. This follows a pilot program that worked well on the CR this past year.

ALL Reunions are now “unofficial.” The Colorado contingent has put together a “Reunion Team” and will host the BOD Annual Face-to-Face meeting at a reunion to be held again in Co. Springs next July. The BOD will announce where they intend to meet in 2015 well in advance in order to provide riders in that area an opportunity to develop a reunion if they so desire.

Other notable actions include the continuing support of “Run For Them All” through the establishment of a Committee reporting to the BOD and chaired by Harlan Olson, Director of PR & Communications and staffed by Barbara “Rocky” Bell; and the continued development of the Archives by a Committee chaired by Daryl “Top” Neil/Harlan Olson and staffed by Jennifer “Flame” Connors.

Still in development: We are considering a recommendation to put bikes/trikes with trailers at the front of the pack when toll booths are anticipated. This is pretty much a RC decision, but we are looking at it along with all three RCs. We are also looking for incentives to encourage riders to utilize the on-line registration option, preferably WITHOUT again raising the registration fee.

There you pretty much have it. How did we fare in 2013? Well, we registered a total of 1,981 participants, split pretty well down the middle for CR/SR, and Merchandise sales yielded \$155k in revenue.

As we move toward RFTW XXVI, I need to issue a small word of caution regarding our headquarters and activities in Rancho Cucamonga. Be aware that there will be significant changes there. The details have not yet been worked out and we are pushing to have things pretty well nailed down by January 1, our usual deadline for coordination issues to be settled. But due to circumstances beyond our control, (there have been some management changes at some of our standard hotels in the area) the developments have been a little late this year and our State Coordinator is working frantically to get things put together. There will be detailed postings in my President’s Latest News on the website, so keep looking there. I know, I know, I have yet to make a posting there, but that will be corrected this week.

If anyone has any questions, comments, or concerns, I encourage them to contact a Board Member so that these concerns can be put on our agenda and discussed at our monthly meetings. Contact info for the Directors is listed on the website. My email is rftwattitude@gmail.com and my cell phone is 949-422-8325, but email is by far the best as I do still have a “real” job and can’t always take a call. Our monthly meetings are by conference call and are held in closed session. Our next Face-to-Face meeting will be in Phoenix in February, which will also be a closed session. I will report on what we discuss.

Again, I want to reiterate to all what an honor I consider it to be to be asked to serve you all in this capacity. I have taken last year’s president’s (Ray “Too Tall” McDowell) parting comments to heart: We (expressly the BOD) need to always remember “Why we do this” and that “Providing a healing experience for the Riders should be our paramount concern.” In fact, EVERYONE should strive to remember this as we prepare for next year’s journey.

BE SAFE!

Harry "Attitude" Steelman

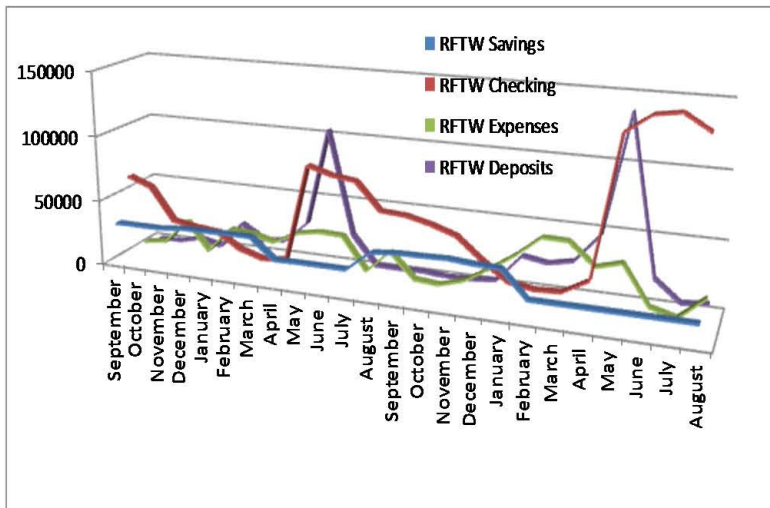
► RFTW UPDATES

Run For The Wall Abbreviated statement of Financial Position			
As of August 31, 2013			

(relative to FY2012)				
Fiscal Year 2013	Category	Fiscal Year 2012	Delta FY'12 v. FY'13	Comments
\$ 267,281.97	Total Expenses	\$ 182,700.20	\$ 84,581.77	2013 now includes all Route specific enroute expenses
\$ 344,890.92	Total Revenues	\$ 187,289.68	\$ 157,601.24	2013 includes RFTA funds as revenue and all Route Donations as revenue
\$ 77,621.00	Revenues in excess of expenses	\$ 4,612.76	\$ 73,008.24	(see above)
\$ 197,830.50	Total Assets	\$ 117,243.51	\$ 80,586.99	(see Breakdown)
Fiscal Year 2013	Breakdown	Fiscal Year 2012		
\$ 136,694.01	RFTW Checking	\$ 56,671.13	\$ 80,022.88	\$8,107.00 in previously 'unk' funds, \$19,182.98 moved from 'Savings'
\$ 15,081.97	RFTW Savings	\$ 34,252.90	\$ (19,170.93)	(see above) plus \$12.05 interest
\$ 20,407.97	Individual Route Checking Accounts	unk	\$ 20,407.97	accounted for in Route records
\$ 8,107.00	RFTA Funds	unk	\$ 8,107.00	accounted for in RFTA records

Treasurer's Comments:

Chart below is Apples to Apples RFTW accounts and expenses 2012 vs. 2013 with above comments exceptions



The red Checking graph is elevated by \$27,289.98 as noted in comments.

This past Run Year we drew dangerously close to nil in checking prior to Run so transferred \$19K+ to Checking from Savings

Our major expenses remain Run Operating expenses (\$120K), Merchandise Cost of Goods(\$98K) and Donations to Causes(\$42K).

BIKE BUILD PROJECT

This year before the Run, Ray Too Tall, Sgt. Major, and John Hardcharger Barker helped a triple amputee get his bike build finished. As a result, the BOD shortly after the Run authorized Hardcharger and Too Tall to pursue the possibility of building a bike for a wounded warrior. Well, it started gaining ground when Ray visited the Medal of Honor Meeting in VA, where he met with the Wounded Warrior project. When they found out what RFTW was doing, they donated a bike. About the same time, Hardcharger located a Staff Sgt, Charlie Linville of Boise, Idaho, a Marine Corps veteran who lost the lower part of his right leg while in Afganistan. So Hardcharger met up with Too Tall in Albuquerque. and Ray passed the bike off to John. Then Ray went to work trying to raise some funds to help build the bike while John headed to Medford , OR where the builder, Mark Daley of Thunderstruck Customs, is located as well as Jerimiah Custom Paints. The bike is now being modified for Sgt Linville. Sgt. Linville and his wife are to fly to Medford where John will transport them and house them while they check out the bike. then they will fly back home. In May in Rancho the bike will be unveiled for Sgt. Linville before the RFTW family on Tuesday before we leave out.

This bike build is the first of many to come. The guidelines are that the veteran must have been injured in combat. He\she does not have to make the Run. Since this has gone to the RFTW family, funds are being raised to cover the flight cost and transportation cost to Rancho and back home. While Ray is doing the heavy fundraising, RFTW needs all the funds that the RFTW riders and friends can help out with. All funds collected will go to the bike build or to future bike builds. Ken Hargrove, RFTW Treasurer, is the BOD leader on this project. Anyone wishing to contribute to this project may send a check to Ken at 1713 N. 3rd Ave., Upland, CA 91784. Please indicate that funds are for the bike build.

This a major undertaking by RFTW and a great chance for RFTW to continue its mission of "We Ride For Those That Can't"

► OUR STORIES

FAITH RESTORED

By John Filonowich

I want to share with everyone a story about a young woman who helped us to safety from the rain storm in Wentzville, MO on the evening of May 20 2013. Her name is: Vicki Clark, and her daughter's name is Abigail and son's name is Coleman. They live in Lake St. Louis, MO.

On that evening my wife Ruth and I pulled into Wentzville VFW around 6 p.m. After parking, Janelle Olson told us there was a huge storm coming in, so we decided to leave and go to our hotel. We left the VFW and retraced the route we came in on. We did not have a clue where our hotel was, as it was located in O'Fallon, MO. We made it back to I-70 and stopped for directions to O'Fallon. The rain was now coming down in buckets and the wind was blowing at around 40 to 50 mph. We then went up on the overpass of I-70 and waited at the light and while there I realized my helmet was not fastened. I let go of the handlebars and a gust of wind hit us and blew us over. My wife and I picked ourselves up off the street and managed to upright our Goldwing. All the while Vicki was three cars back, watching all that is going on. We managed to get remounted on the bike and got down onto I-70 and it was raining so hard I had to raise the visor on my helmet, because it was fogging so bad, to just see the road. I could not make out where the white lines were on the road. I then went off the road onto the shoulder into the rumble strips, which were full of water and the splashback filled my boots

and my wife's. We thought we were going to go down. We managed to keep it upright and got back on the road and were traveling at around 15 to 20 mph with our flashers on and I was looking for an overpass to get under.

At that time, a car pulled up beside us and would not go around. I looked over at the car and a lady, with her window down, was yelling for us to follow her to her house. We got in behind her and after about 5 minutes we arrived at her house. She stopped at the curb and told us to pull our bike into her garage. She then pulled in beside us. We all introduced ourselves and then we told her she saved our lives. She then took us into her home and fed us, dried our rain gear, and introduced us to her children. Abigail is her daughter and a sophomore in high school. Coleman is her son and is 12 years of age. Coleman kept tabs on the weather situation on the



computer for us. At around 10:30 p.m. the family needed to go to bed because of work and school the next day. I told Vicki we would then leave, but she said she could not let us go out into the rain and severe lightning. She then said she knew where our hotel was located and would drive us there as well as pick us up the next morning at 5:45 am. She did both of these, as well as direct us how to get back to the VFW for breakfast and Staging. She would not accept any money whatsoever. We offered her, a single mother of two, \$100.00, but she flatly refused. So we gave her and her two great children each a 25th Anniversary RFTW Pin. We indeed did make it to breakfast and the morning meetings and on time.

Wife Ruth, John Filonowich, Vicki Clark

MY NEW RFTW FAMILY

Several of the guys that I ride with are vets, my dad served in WWII and Korea, and my son is a Commander in the Navy, so when I was told that I needed to go on the Run, it was a no brainer. I signed up and started reading posts on the forum hoping to get a heads up on what I needed to take and do. Went to meetings, talked to friends who had been on the run, did everything that one thinks might help. I am not a military vet, but served 32 years in Law Enforcement, so I wore a patch that identified me as a LEO, because I felt that I didn't deserve the Thank You's and Welcome Home that the military vets deserve.

Boy was I wrong!!! I was welcomed with open arms by everyone that I spoke to or rode with. Vets were calling me brother and thanking me for my service because as they said "You protected our families while we were deployed." One vet told me something that I will never forget. He said that "I was deployed every day that I went to work." Never thought of it that way before! I was welcomed to the RFTW family. WOW what a family!!!

Two life-changing moments happened to me on this mission, not that the whole mission wasn't life changing, but these two stand out.

I went ATW on Central Route and at a fuel stop in a town whose name I can't remember, I met an elderly couple who had lost their only son in Vietnam. They asked if I was with the RFTW group outside, and with a humble voice I replied yes. I asked if anyone was riding in honor of their son and they replied "No." I ask if I might honor him for his sacrifice by riding in his honor and with tears in their eyes they said "YES." In all the hustle and confusion I didn't get their names, but I rode in honor of their son, and was PROUD to do so.

In Charleston, West Virginia, I met an elderly gentleman who had such an impact on my life, I get tears in my eyes every time I look at his picture. He was introduced at the ceremonies and I learned he was a POW in

Korea. After the ceremonies were over, my wife and I made our way over to where this gentleman and his wife were sitting. We introduced ourselves and I started talking to him about being a POW. After a few questions, I lost it. The tears were streaming down my face, and his face. My wife had tears, his wife was crying ... he had been a POW in the prison that my dad's company liberated. Unbelievable!!

RFTW has changed my life and I will ride the mission every year, God willing. To all my new brothers and sisters; THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE AND WELCOME HOME!!! I will honor you always and I will never forget you!!

Eric Mescher
2013 ATW FNG
LEO (Retired)
Idaho State Police

ANGEL FIRE REUNION

From Arnie's Journal

Greetings from Eagle's Nest!

SATURDAY: Remember last night, the meet and greet? Well they mentioned something about starting work at 0700 hours. Really was hoping for the standard 0900 call but because of the amount of work that needed to be done they had to start earlier. Guess what? There is a glitch in this as none of the hotels serve breakfast early enough so we eat breakfast at the hotel at 7 and then we head to the Memorial.

It is about a ten-mile drive and it is a picture perfect morning. We reach the Memorial and find there are people everywhere moving sand, replacing bricks, and setting up tents and sound systems. It is going to be a very special day and a very long one. Oh yeah the bricks, 459 regular and eight MOH, (Medal of Honor).



Well, all schedules have flaws and this one was no different. Things went well till the celebration as it ran longer than expected, but I have to say it was worth every minute. So many dignitaries, including a 1 star General and even Sam Donaldson. I have never been a real fan of Sam and his reporting, but I have to say I was very impressed with his speech. Doc's son shared his dad's vision. It was indeed the highlight of the day.

1300 begins the MOH bricks with an honor guard of eight men to lay eight bricks. It is an amazing ceremony to watch and even more awesome to be a part of it. When you listen to what these men did to earn the medals you can't help but be overwhelmed with emotions. I was caught off guard as they began to read the story of a young Lt. from WWII. It did not take long to realize they were reading the story of Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of WWII.

The ceremony finally ends and the task of the last 300 or so bricks begins. For over three and a half hours Cindy and I and others received the bricks and delivered them to their appointed places. Up and down the walkways, breathing a little hard because of the altitude. Watching family members receiving the bricks for their loved ones became very emotional at times. The tears and the pride at the same time. Before the day is over my dear friend Gallupe has ordered me one for next year with my name on it. Really don't have any way of thanking him that would come close to being enough.

We finish with about thirty minutes to spare as the Riders' meeting starts at 1700 hours and dinner is to follow with a bonfire after that. We take a short drive down to the Angel Fire Resort so Gallupe can show his wife where he stayed before. Then we head back to the Senior Center for the activities. We stay for the meeting but quickly leave the dinner as Cindy can't eat it, I don't want it, and neither does Penny. So it is back to the same saloon as last night. The meal is good as I just have fries and Cindy just has something to drink.

It is a very short ride back to the Lodge. It has been an amazing day. Only thing that maybe could have made it more special is if we could have done the renewal vows. So sleep well as we are on watch.

SUNDAY: Morning comes for us at around 0700 hours. That gives us about an hour and a half to get ready to be at the Chapel at Angel fire for the church service. I am honored to once again be able to do the service. There is something about holding church in the Chapel. I really think that Doc would be happy. We have a quick breakfast and then head out. It is another beautiful day and it is so peaceful at the Memorial when we get there.

There are only a few people there when we get there. It is Tanker and Girlfriend and their friends. It is not long before others show. Looks like there will be a pretty good crowd again. Unfortunately, before the service starts several people have to leave as they have catch a plane for home. My friend John King and his wife have made it. I have used John for reading the scriptures and he does a beautiful job this morning. It is standing room only again and there is an awesome spirit in the Chapel and the service is great.

After the service we say our goodbyes. There are hugs and shaking of hands. It is hard at times to say goodbye knowing that for many we will not see them till May. It has been an amazing day.

Maybe someday we can actually have a Rider's meeting where people can actually get along. But when it comes to giving back to the Memorial, NOBODY gives more than RFTW. You made me proud once again to have been a part of it. Cruzer, you did it again. Rocket and Barbara, job well done. To all of the rest, which is way too many to mention, thank you for making the weekend a success.

KERRVILLE TX REUNION

By Roger "Cowboy" Mead

The Kerrville Reunion.2013.had about 125 attendees at the host YO resort. There were a lot of first-timers as well as old heads—I won't even attempt to name them all, but suffice to say it was a GREAT bunch. Early arrivals on Thursday spent the afternoon and evening visiting and eating at our favorite Mexican Restaurant Acapulco's. Friday found a few riding to Llano for BBQ at Coopers and to meet up with the Outlaws from the DFW area; others took side trips to Fredricksburg and Luckenbach. Back at the YO for more visiting prior to some heading out for an Italian dinner, back to YO for more visiting and rehashing RFTW 2013.



For a number of riders who wanted to, Raven and Sapper led a great ride through the countryside on Saturday. Stops varied from a biker sandwich shop in Leakey to a pie shop in Utopia that was to die for, then to a cowboy/biker bar in Bandera. Sapper even threw in some road construction—minus road, just caliche. Lucky the little rain showers happened after that stretch of road :) Thanks you two. Other riders just went on their own to explore and ladies to shop.

Saturday evening was the catered dinner and roast. Janice Wentworth once again outdid herself in the giveaways as well as the roasting. Among the roasties were Airborne, Wookiee, Cajun and various Road Guards, Randy Kiehl and wife Jane (our Gold Star parents), Sam, and this year our lady of ceremonies Janice was even roasted. Airborne

was presented with a collage of photos and an album of family (RFTW) photos from her two years as SRRC. Wookiee was roasted twice—once by Janice for looking so much like he belonged on Duck Dynasty and once by Sam for collecting ladies' room keys, but I'm not going there. Cajun was honored for his time as an awesome RG Captain, and then he and a few RG's were presented with their own PINK tutu's—don't ask. Randy and Jane got new road names: Randy got "Grouchy" for being a lousy patient and Jane "Patience" for putting up with him. Glad you're on the mend, brother, and we'll see you riding with us in May. Sam was surprised with her very own princess tiara to help her celebrate a birthday.



Our Mistress of ceremonies was also surprised with a birthday cake (AWESOME job Raven), and various gifts to commemorate her birthday. I REFUSE to disclose which birthdays these ladies celebrated, but will just say they lied somewhere along the line on their drivers licenses. I fear I am forgetting some, and apologize for that, but as always the roast was all about good family fun. After the dinner and roast, most attendees adjourned to the bar for a final evening of visiting, although later some of the braver souls went for karaoke.

Sunday saw some teary farewells until the FAMILY once again gets together for RFTW 2014.

POETIC TRIBUTE TO RFTW

A short disclaimer: I do not claim to be a Vietnam Veteran. I honor those who are. I did not go "all the way." I took some poetic license here.

Dave Beckmann
Army '76-'80

RUN FOR THE WALL

In the middle of May, we left the west coast,
on two wheels and three, too humble to boast.
A 10-day journey, thinking back in time,
600-strong with one mission in mind.

To honor the fallen and those needing to heal,
we rode in formation, the memories so real.
Our final objective, the Vietnam Wall,
to ensure today's soldier is remembered by all.

Each morning we'd rise, salute the flag, pledge our all,
another picture, more history, to be taken to The Wall.
Our ride was long, most unlike any others,
we remembered our mission, to honor sisters and brothers.

They gathered on highways with hands over their hearts,
waving flags and saluting, they did their part.
One lone man stood his post, midst lightning and hail,
we knew he remembered, we knew we'd prevail.

We visited the sick, the wounded, the bold,
memories were shared by warriors of old.
Their numbers are dwindling, some a little downtrodden,
a tear in their eye, pleading they not be forgotten.

For the students, the children, so precious to behold,
history must be accurate, the truth must be told.
We were needed by others, we answered the call,
we fought with honor, all gave some, some gave all.

We visited the Tomb, that most sacred place,
as we laid a wreath, we asked for His grace.
When we stood at The Wall, this year's mission completed,
“We remember,” we said, and begged history not be repeated.

As we put down our kickstands and shed one final tear,
we uttered this prayer for the good Lord to hear:
“Please, God Almighty, we’ll make you a deal,
we’ll stay in the saddle, if You’ll steer the wheel.”

August 25, 2013

► OTHER STORIES

DOOLITTLE RAIDERS GATHERED FOR THE LAST TIME

Last April, in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, the surviving Doolittle Raiders gathered publicly for the last time.

They once were among the most universally admired and revered men in the United States. There were 80 of the Raiders in April 1942, when they carried out one of the most courageous and heart-stirring military operations in this nation's history. The mere mention of their unit's name, in those years, would bring tears to the eyes of grateful Americans.

Now only four survive.

*Surviving Doolittle's Raiders Dick Cole
(Doolittle's co-pilot on the Tokyo raid),
Robert Hite, Edward Saylor and David
Thatcher*

After Japan's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, with the United States reeling and wounded, something dramatic was needed to turn the war effort around.



Even though there were no friendly airfields close enough to Japan for the United States to launch a retaliation, a daring plan was devised. Sixteen B-25s were modified so that they could take off from the deck of an aircraft carrier. This had never before been tried -- sending such big, heavy bombers from a carrier.

The 16 five-man crews, under the command of Lt. Col. James Doolittle, who himself flew the lead plane off the USS Hornet, knew that they would not be able to return to the carrier. They would have to hit Japan and then hope to make it to China for a safe landing.

But on the day of the raid, the Japanese military caught wind of the plan. The Raiders were told that they would have to take off from much farther out in the Pacific Ocean than they had counted on. They were told that because of this they would not have enough fuel to make it to safety.

And those men went anyway.

They bombed Tokyo, and then flew as far as they could. Four planes crash-landed, eleven more crews bailed out, and three of the Raiders died. Eight more were captured; three were executed. Another died of starvation in a Japanese prison camp. One crew made it to Russia.

The Doolittle Raid sent a message from the United States to its enemies, and to the rest of the world: We will fight. And, no matter what it takes, we will win.

Of the 80 Raiders, 62 survived the war. They were celebrated as national heroes, models of bravery. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produced a motion picture based on the raid; "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo," starring Spencer Tracy and Van Johnson, was a patriotic and emotional box-office hit, and the phrase became part of the national lexicon. In the movie-theater previews for the film, MGM proclaimed that it was presenting the story "with supreme pride."

Beginning in 1946, the surviving Raiders have held a reunion each April, to commemorate the mission. The reunion is in a different city each year. In 1959, the city of Tucson, Arizona, as a gesture of respect and gratitude, presented the Doolittle Raiders with a set of 80 silver goblets. Each goblet was engraved with the name of a Raider.



Every year, a wooden display case bearing all 80 goblets is transported to the reunion city. Each time a Raider passes away, his goblet is turned upside down in the case at the next reunion, as his old friends bear solemn witness.

Also in the wooden case is a bottle of 1896 Hennessy Very Special cognac. The year is not happenstance: 1896 was when Jimmy Doolittle was born.

There has always been a plan: When there are only two surviving Raiders, they would open the bottle, at last drink from it, and toast their comrades who preceded them in death.

As 2013 began, there were five living Raiders; then, in February, Tom Griffin passed away at age 96.

What a man he was. After bailing out of his plane over a mountainous Chinese forest after the Tokyo raid, he became ill with malaria, and almost died. When he recovered, he was sent to Europe to fly more combat missions. He was shot down, captured, and spent 22 months in a German prisoner of war camp.

The selflessness of these men, the sheer guts ... there was a passage in the Cincinnati Enquirer obituary for Mr. Griffin that, on the surface, had nothing to do with the war, but that emblemizes the depth of his sense of duty and devotion:

"When his wife became ill and needed to go into a nursing home, he visited her every day. He walked from his house to the nursing home, fed his wife and at the end of the day brought home her clothes. At night, he washed and ironed her clothes. Then he walked them up to her room the next morning. He did that for three years until her death in 2005."

So now, out of the original 80, only **four Raiders remain:** Dick Cole (Doolittle's co-pilot on the Tokyo raid), Robert Hite, Edward Saylor and David Thatcher. All are in their 90s. **They have decided that there are too few of them for the public reunions to continue.**

The events in Fort Walton Beach in April week marked the end. It has come full circle; Florida's nearby Eglin Field was where the Raiders trained in secrecy for the Tokyo mission. The town planned to do all it could to honor the men: a six-day celebration of their valor, including luncheons, a dinner, and a parade.

The men have decided that after this final public reunion they will wait until a later date -- sometime this year -- to get together once more, informally and in absolute privacy. That is when they will open the bottle of brandy. The years are flowing by too swiftly now; they are not going to wait until there are only two of them.

They will fill the four remaining upturned goblets.

And raise them in a toast to those who are gone.

NAVY GUNNER SHOT DOWN TWICE

Michael "Mike" Nagy, was flying one of the last planes shot down in WWII. He was a gunner in the Navy, had just flown his last mission, and was returning home. His route home crossed the path of the aircraft carrier USS Independence en-route to Japan, which was short two torpedo bombers. Mike and his crew volunteered to fly in the place of one of the missing TBM's, and join them for "one last mission." Mike never returned from that mission.

The Navy notified Mike's family he was Missing In Action on the very same day it was announced the war was over.

Mike's photo hung on the wall of the Nagy family-owned restaurant in Oakland, California. One day, a serviceman came in and saw Mike's picture proudly framed on that wall. Recognizing the face in the photo, he asked about it. Informed that it was Mike Nagy, son of the proprietors, he contacted Mrs. Nagy and told her he had recently seen Mike in the South Pacific.

The visiting serviceman had been a member of a patrol crew that had pulled Mike out of the water a few months earlier. Mike had survived being shot down and was returned to an island in the South Pacific. However, this was not the incident that was the cause of Mike being reported as missing. A check of dates indicated the first incident had occurred a couple of months before the mission from which Mike did not return.

Some years later, Mike's youngest brother John, stationed overseas, searched for his brother. He knew approximately where Mike's plane had gone down in Maizuro Harbor, Japan. Inquiring about his brother, he was fortunate enough to meet a news reporter who led him to an elder of the village. That man remembered the day Michael Nagy was shot down. It was the only plane that had gone down in that harbor. The elder took him out in a fishing boat to the spot where Mike's plane went down. He was able to tell the story in great detail, as he recalled that day vividly.

Michael Nagy, an American hero shot down twice in the Pacific. The second time he made the ultimate sacrifice.

WORLD WAR II BEACH SAND COLLECTION

By John Pope, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

When John Rebstock strode up to the bar in The American Sector on Friday, the bartender, his longtime friend Billy Vincent, knew exactly what he wanted. But it wasn't in any of the bottles of Scotch, bourbon, brandy and other potables lined up on the glass shelves behind Vincent in the National World War II Museum's restaurant.

Instead, Vincent reached for a gray tin, about the size of a small shoe-polish container, and unscrewed the top, revealing a few handfuls of black sand. Working as carefully as if he were handling radioactive material, Vincent dipped a soup spoon inside, removed two spoonfuls of sand and poured the sand into a small glass jar, the kind that usually holds condiments.

Rebstock, 56, couldn't have been more pleased, because the sand came from the beach at Iwo Jima, where his father, a Marine, had fought in World War II. The elder Rebstock had brought home some Iwo Jima sand, but it was swept away when Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters inundated his Lakeview South home.

"It means everything because it brings back memories of his sand sitting on the mantel of his house," said Rebstock, his eyes bright. "As a kid, I could pick it up and think, who would want dirt from another part of the world? I couldn't make that connection. Now I can embrace it."

Vincent, 56, collects sand from beaches that were invasion sites in World War II. The 20 specimens, housed in a variety of labeled glass containers both plain and fancy, share shelf space behind the bar alongside glass containers bearing such familiar labels as Johnnie Walker, Southern Comfort, Seagram's and Cutty Sark. Vincent, a Marine veteran who has tended bar at The American Sector for 3½ years, started his collection with sand from Omaha Beach – one of the landing sites on D-Day – that a cousin had brought back from a trip overseas.



More samples have come from a wide variety of sources. Tom Blakey, a World War II veteran, didn't land on a beach, because he was a paratrooper who jumped behind German lines on D-Day. But when he was shipped back to England, he left from Utah Beach – another D-Day landing site – and he scooped a handful of sand into his pocket as a souvenir.

That sand found its way into Vincent's unusual collection because Blakey, a museum volunteer, "thought it was nice for him to start a collection like that."

Museum personnel have contributed, too. When Gordon "Nick" Mueller, the museum's president and chief executive officer, made a swing through what had been the Pacific Theater, he brought back, at Vincent's request, sand in separate, labeled containers from Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan and Tinian. The Victory Belles, the museum's singing trio, have brought sand to Vincent from USO trips to Okinawa and Guam.

Mandi Ridgdell, who sings the group's high soprano parts, said the Victory Belles received an escort to the Okinawa landing site from Marines who, she said, didn't snicker at her request "because we told them exactly what it was for."

Ridgdell, who also works at The American Sector, said she enjoys watching customers react when seeing sand from beaches where they or their family members fought. “The first time I saw it was a woman whose father was in the war,” she said. “Being able to touch the sand that her dad stepped on was just incredible to watch.”

Vincent sensed the sands' evocative potential early on when a veteran of the first wave of troops to land at Omaha Beach came into the bar. “I walked over to the table and poured some sand into a container,” he said. “He went home. His wife wrote me a letter saying it was the highlight of the trip. He went home and showed it to everybody and put it on the mantel.”

Vincent’s second sample came from Iwo Jima, the site of one of the war’s bloodiest battles, in which more than 28,000 Americans and Japanese were killed.

He lets veterans of that conflict and their families touch the sand. One of the most recent to do so, he said, was Hershel “Woody” Williams, a Marine who received the Medal of Honor for his actions there.

“One time, 70 Iwo survivors showed up,” Vincent said. “They sat around this bar with their significant others in their VFW hats, and we passed this Iwo Jima sand around. It was like getting your rosary blessed by the pope.”

One sample isn’t from World War II, but from Inchon, where Marines landed during the Korean War. It was a gift from a veteran who saw the collection and told Vincent, “I have some Inchon sand. You want some?”

Three weeks later, the sand arrived – in a jar that is the centerpiece of a small red Korean prayer altar the man had built.

Even though it isn’t from World War II, “I’m very fond of this,” Vincent said, adding that it is the only piece in his collection that will go with him whenever he moves on. The rest, he said, will stay at the museum.

The display of bottles fills the small platform at the bar, but it’s nowhere near complete.

“There were 121 Pacific invasion sites,” he said, “but I’m really looking for sand from the North Africa and Italy campaigns.”

Yet, not everybody waxes nostalgic about the collection. “It makes me feel that I never want to go back there,” said Bert Stoller, 94, a Marine veteran who fought at Iwo Jima. “It brings back memories of what went on,” said Stoller, a museum volunteer. “Most of all, it brings back memories of the guys we lost.”

POW RECALLS HORRORS OF BURMA RAILWAY

On the 70th anniversary of the completion of the 'Death Railway,' a British prisoner of war, now 95, spoke for the first time about the 'appalling' conditions he worked in.

In the Burmese town of Thanbyuzayat, the railway men can rest at last. The tombstones of 3,149 Commonwealth soldiers are laid out in a semi-circle, beginning with the A's: Luke Abbott, Royal Engineer, 23; Leonard Abbott, infantryman, 21; Rai Achal, Ghurka rifleman, 27.

At the other end of the line, in Thailand, another 4,946 men are buried in the cemetery at Kanchanaburi. In between lies the “Death Railway,” the line devised by Japan's Imperial Army at the height of the Second World War to transport troops and supplies from Bangkok to Burma.

As chronicled in the 1950s classic *Bridge On The River Kwai*, they found a ready supply of labour in British prisoners-of-war captured when Singapore fell in February 1942. The line was completed in just a year, but it cost the lives of around 13,000 POWs and 100,000 native labourers. One man died for every sleeper laid.

Yet Burma became a “forgotten war,” eclipsed by the heroics of the western front and the gruesome discovery of the gas chambers. The POWs’ homecomings were quiet affairs and, until the Government introduced a new compensation scheme in 2000, they received just £76 each for their ordeal.

The railway, under construction, crosses the River Kwai. Today, however, on the 70th anniversary of the railway’s completion, the handful of remaining British survivors are at last beginning to tell their stories. Many have been interviewed for a documentary, *Moving Half the Mountain*, which is due to be televised next year. The story of one POW, Eric Lomax, who died last year, is being dramatised in a new film, *The Railway Man*, starring Colin Firth and Nicole Kidman.

Among these last survivors is Sir Harold Atcherley, a 95-year-old who has finally published the diary he kept throughout his imprisonment. During his three years as a POW, he wrote his entries in pencil on scraps of paper, chronicling daily life in camp.

He has not spoken about the war to anyone other than his family for seven decades. “There are certain things I know that I have never talked about and never would,” he explains as we share a pot of tea in his Lancaster Gate flat, overlooking Hyde Park. “It was only a few years ago that my son suggested it would be a good idea to publish it.”

Sir Harold found the Army shambolic from the moment he was told to defend Essex during the invasion scare of 1940. “It was a juvenile Dad’s Army. There were 120 of us guarding seven miles of coastline, with one Bren gun, our 1917 rifles and vests that felt as though they’d been run up by a rope-maker. There were no Army greatcoats so we were given London Passenger Transport Board drivers’ coats.”

He hardly felt prepared for Singapore. As an intelligence officer in the 18th Infantry Division, he was due to be sent to Iraq in January 1942 for training in desert warfare before fighting in the Middle East. At the last moment, however, the division was asked to help defend the British colony from Japanese invasion.

The Allied force of around 85,000 easily outnumbered the 30,000 Japanese soldiers, but the Imperial Army was far better prepared. “The Japanese were constantly outflanking us and used bicycles wherever they could. Of our whole Army, only 800 people actually had any training in jungle warfare.” The Allies were forced to surrender in mid-February, leaving Winston Churchill smarting at “the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history”.

The Japanese appeared equally surprised, and they soon ran out of supplies for their newly-captured POWs. Sir Harold and his division were taken to a prison camp at Changi, in the east of the island, but were forced to forage for their own food.

Conditions deteriorated further, however, when they were sent up to Thailand to begin work on the railway in March 1943. Their captors initially told the men to pack for a “rest camp.” “They told us we should take one-third sick and that it would be much easier to feed us there. That was the last time we ever believed anything they said to us.”

Sir Harold’s diary entries chart their grueling train journey to Ban Pong in Thailand. “Five days and nights, allowed to get out of train for 30 minutes a day,” he wrote. “No latrine arrangements; we had to urinate out of the wagon door, being held by others as we did so. Little or no sleep at night, very hot by day in all-metal box wagons, too many in each to allow all to lie down at the same time.”

From Ban Pong, they were made to march 200 miles through the jungle to Three Pagodas Pass, where they could begin work. “Monsoon rains had already started in earnest, 24 hours a day,” he wrote. “No roofing on huts where we lived in constant pouring rain.”

They worked for up to 18 hours a day, hacking a path through the jungle and then lugging hefty planks of wood to build a double-decker bridge, so cars could travel underneath the railway line.

Their captors gave them only 250 grams of rice to eat, as well as any greenery they could find themselves. Weakened by work and malnutrition, they quickly succumbed to tropical ulcers, beriberi – a Vitamin B deficiency that causes wasting and paralysis – and dengue, a fever spread by mosquitoes.

“Cholera rife and men dying at the rate of 20 per day,” Sir Harold wrote. “Appalling state of tropical ulcers – cases seen myself of legs bared to the bone from ankle to knee. No sleep for the wretched patients, who moan all night long – their only hope for the morning to look forward to a repetition of all the previous day’s agonies. No man deserves such a death.”

The work on the bridge took them only eight months but of the 1,700 men sent with Sir Harold to Three Pagodas Pass, only 400 were alive by October. The survivors were sent back to Changi, where another 200 died of disease as they endured another year and a half in the camp, building an airfield.

On 5 August 1945, the day before American airmen dropped the first of the two Atom bombs that forced Japan to surrender, Sir Harold had no inkling of the breakthrough to come. “All feel that things cannot go on much longer as they are,” he wrote. “Yet there is no sign of anything significant happening to bring about our freedom.”

Just ten days later, after the second bomb was dropped, Sir Harold wrote again. “The delight and shock of sudden incredible, wonderful news. 3 ½ years to the day and the war appears to be as good as over. It is difficult to believe that in a week or two we might be free.”

He sailed back to Britain with the rest of the division, where they were received by the Mayor of Bootle (he wrote they “were worth at least the Mayor of Liverpool”). He quickly got a job, travelling the world for Shell, and did his best to avoid talking about the war: “I’ve never been someone who likes looking back.”

Even so, seven decades have done little to erase the raw emotion he feels recalling his time on the railway. He attended a preview screening of the new documentary and admits to spending “quite a lot of it with tears running down my cheeks”.

“It brought back the people I knew who didn’t make it,” he says. “At the back of my mind I have this guilty feeling: I survived, but others didn’t.”

► VA NEWS

VA ON THE NEW HEALTH CARE LAW

The Department of Veterans Affairs has launched an awareness campaign and a new website, www.va.gov/aca, to let Veterans know what the Affordable Care Act means for them and their families. Veterans receiving health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs will see no change in their benefits or out-of-pocket costs when portions of the Affordable Care Act take effect next year.

“VA wants all Veterans to receive health care that improves their health and well-being,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “If you are enrolled in VA health care, you do not need to take any additional steps to meet the health care law coverage standards. If you are not enrolled in VA health care, you can apply at any time.”

“VA encourages eligible Veterans who are not enrolled in VA’s health care system to take advantage of the world-class care we provide to the men and women who have served this Nation in uniform,” Shinseki added.

Veterans can apply for VA health care at any time by visiting www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or visiting their local VA health care facility. Full details on eligibility are available at www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book

VA’s health care system for Veterans has no enrollment fee, no monthly premiums and no deductibles. Most Veterans also have no out-of-pocket costs, though some may have small copayments for some health care or prescription drugs.

“VA will continue to provide Veterans with high quality, comprehensive health care and other benefits they have earned through their service,” said Dr. Robert Petzel, VA’s chief physician and undersecretary for health.

The Affordable Care Act was created to expand access to coverage, reduce rising health care costs, and improve health care quality and care coordination. The Affordable Care Act creates new opportunities for coverage for uninsured Veterans and their families.

There are more than 1.3 million Veterans and more than 950,000 spouses and children of Veterans without health insurance. Most uninsured Veterans are eligible for VA health care. For those who are not eligible for VA care – such as Veterans’ family members – the law created a new Health Insurance Marketplace.

In 2014, the Marketplace will be a new way to shop for and purchase private health insurance. People who purchase insurance through the Marketplace may be able to lower the costs of health insurance coverage by paying lower monthly premiums. For more information, visit www.healthcare.gov.

For information about VA health care and the Affordable Care Act, VA encourages Veterans and family members to visit the new website at www.va.gov/aca, or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387), Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. or Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Eastern time. The new website includes a Health Benefits Explorer, where Veterans can learn about the benefits they can receive if they enroll in VA care.

VA OFFERS DENTAL INSURANCE PROGRAM

The VA is partnering with Delta Dental and MetLife to allow eligible Veterans, plus family members receiving care under the Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA), to purchase affordable dental insurance.

There are no eligibility limitations based on service-connected disability rating or enrollment priority assignment.

More than 8 million Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care can choose to purchase one of the offered dental plans. This three-year pilot has been designed for Veterans with no dental coverage, or those eligible for VA dental care who would like to purchase additional coverage. Participation will not affect entitlement to VA dental services and treatment.

Also eligible for the new benefits are nearly 400,000 spouses and dependent children who are reimbursed for most medical expenses under VA’s CHAMPVA program. Generally, CHAMPVA participants are spouses,

survivors or dependent children of Veterans officially rated as “permanently and totally” disabled by a service-connected condition.

Dental services under the new program vary by plan and include diagnostic, preventive, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. Enrollment in the VA Dental Insurance Plan (VADIP) is voluntary. Participants are responsible for all premiums, which range from \$8.65 to \$52.90 per month for individual plans. Copayments and other charges may apply.

Historically VA’s free dental services have gone to Veterans with dental problems connected to a medical condition that’s officially certified as “service connected.” Free dental services will continue for those Veterans.

Coverage for this new dental insurance will begin January 1, 2014, and will be available throughout the United States and its territories.

For more information on VADIP, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vadip, or contact Delta Dental at 1-855-370-3303 or <http://bit.ly/17Gc8gy>; or MetLife at 1-888-310-1681 or <http://bit.ly/1aBGIpA>.

MOAA PAY AND RETIREMENT

MOAA’s Director of Government Relations, Col. Mike Hayden, USAF (Ret.), testified on military pay, compensation, retirement and healthcare issues at a hearing held by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) on November 5.

The MCRMC was authorized by Congress in the 2013 defense authorization act to examine all forms of military compensation. The commission is required to report its findings to the President by May 1, 2014 and provide legislative recommendations to Congress.

In his statement, Hayden stated that the current compensation and healthcare systems are designed to help offset the unique sacrifice that the men and women and their families of our armed forces face. He also stressed that Congress worked hard over the past decade to fix the deficiencies in compensation and retirement programs created by budget-driven decisions in the 1980s and 90s that resulted in a recruiting and retention crisis by the late 1990s.

He emphasized that before making any changes to the current system the commission must understand how past readiness and retention problems arose after years of cutbacks depressed military pay and cut the value of retirement by 25 percent for post-1986 entrants. More importantly, he stressed that the commission must fully understand how any changes to the compensation and retirement systems can impact future retention and readiness.

During the two days of public hearings held by the commission, other members of The Military Coalition (TMC) – a consortium of military and veterans associations representing more than 5.5 million active duty, Guard and Reserve, and retired members and veterans of the seven uniformed services and their families and survivors – addressed issues and concerns to the commissioners in each of their areas of expertise. Topics covered in the public hearings and testimony included: pay and benefits, retirement, health care, veterans’ benefits, and family and quality of life issues.

This was the first in a series of public hearings that the MCRMC will hold across the country and on select military installations around the world. In addition to public hearings, the commission is also accepting and strongly encourages comments and other submissions on its website.

MOAA will remain engaged with the commission providing perspectives and analysis on the critical issues it is studying.

MEDICARE/TRICARE FIX COMING?

The House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees are working together on bipartisan legislation that aims to finally repeal and replace the flawed Medicare/TRICARE physician reimbursement rate.

Current law calls for a 24 percent cut in Medicare/TRICARE reimbursement rates to doctors on January 1. Allowing such a large cut to take place would devastate access to care for beneficiaries.

For years Congress has passed patchwork legislation to block these cuts, kicking the can from one year to the next year. The annual cycle of uncertainty wreaks havoc on physicians participating in Medicare and TRICARE, and threatens access to care for millions of beneficiaries.

The proposed permanent fix would repeal the Sustainable Growth Rate that drives the annual cuts. It would replace it with a ten year freeze of physician reimbursement rates at current levels. It would also seek to boost efficiency in the health care system by incentivizing physicians to use alternative payment models that focus more on value than volume.

Starting in 2024 doctors participating in fee for service plans would see a negative 1 percent annual adjustment, and those using more efficient alternative payment methods would see a 2 percent increase.

The plan would also offer payments for care coordination, value-based reporting systems and meaningful use of electronic health records. Under the proposal doctors would be held to accountability standards for quality and resource utilization.

Physician stakeholder groups have until November 12th to respond to the draft proposal.

The total cost of the legislation is roughly \$139 billion. Although it's far less expensive than previous proposals, the challenge for Congress is coming up with the offsets to pay for it and convincing physicians to agree to a ten-year pay freeze.

► OTHER NEWS

GALLUP WINS MOST PATRIOTIC CITY CONTEST



Gallup, New Mexico entered Rand McNally's Best of the Road contest for Most Patriotic City—and won!

Honoring veterans is big here. So is honoring indigenous culture. The town is near both Zuni and Navajo reservations, and it hosts one of the country's oldest and largest annual Native American gatherings. It's also the place to learn about the Navajo Code Talkers who played a critical role in secure communications during WW II.

Judges' Take:

“Gallup’s poignant submissions showed us a place that acknowledges the heroic contributions of diverse cultures; that sees patriotism in small, everyday acts as well as in monumental, historic deeds; and that has an overall patriotic philosophy of its very own—Gallup Strong.”

RFTW’s own Jackie McKinney is Mayor of Gallup, and we congratulate his city on being named the 2013 Most Patriotic City in America.

Watch Gallup’s video submission: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wieKhyH1WwA&feature=youtu.be>

MEDAL OF HONOR AWARDED TO CAPTAIN WILLIAM D. SWENSON



The sixth living recipient to be awarded the Medal of Honor for actions in Iraq or Afghanistan was honored on October 15, 2013.

President Obama awarded William D. Swenson, a former U.S. Army captain, the Medal of Honor for his bravery in a fierce firefight in Afghanistan in 2009. Swenson helped Afghanistan forces during a battle against the Taliban in the Ganjgal Valley. The fight claimed five American lives and 10 Afghan army troops, along with an interpreter.

On Sept. 8, 2009, Swenson was serving as embedded advisor to the Afghan National Border Police, Task Force Phoenix, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan in support of 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kunar Province, Afghanistan on September 8, 2009. On that morning, more than 60 well-armed, well-positioned enemy fighters ambushed Captain Swenson's combat team as it moved on foot into the village of Ganjgal for a meeting with village elders. As the enemy unleashed a barrage of rocket-propelled grenade, mortar and machine gun fire, Captain Swenson immediately returned fire and coordinated and directed the response of his Afghan Border Police, while simultaneously calling in suppressive artillery fire and aviation support. After the enemy effectively flanked Coalition Forces, Captain Swenson repeatedly called for smoke to cover the withdrawal of the forward elements. Surrounded on three sides by enemy forces inflicting effective and accurate fire, Captain Swenson coordinated air assets, indirect fire support and medical evacuation helicopter support to allow for the evacuation of the wounded. Captain Swenson ignored enemy radio transmissions demanding surrender and maneuvered uncovered to render medical aid to a wounded fellow soldier. Captain Swenson stopped administering aid long enough to throw a grenade at approaching enemy forces, before assisting with moving the soldier for air evacuation. With complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Swenson unhesitatingly led a team in an unarmored vehicle into the kill zone, exposing himself to enemy fire on at least two occasions, to recover the wounded and search for four missing comrades. After using aviation support to mark locations of fallen and wounded comrades, it became clear that ground recovery of the fallen was required due to heavy enemy fire on helicopter landing zones. Captain Swenson's team returned to the kill zone another time in a Humvee. Captain Swenson voluntarily exited the vehicle, exposing himself to enemy fire, to locate and recover three fallen Marines and one fallen Navy corpsman.

The Seattle native risked his life during the battle to help save troops, officials said. He repeatedly ran back into the line of fire to retrieve fallen soldiers.

Swenson complained to military leaders after the fight that many of his calls for help were rejected by superior officers. Eventually, two Army officers were reprimanded for “contributing directly to the loss of life.”

Four Americans died in the ambush: 1st Lt. Michael Johnson, a 25-year-old from Virginia Beach, Va.; Staff Sgt. Aaron Kenefick, 30, of Roswell, Ga.; Corpsman James Layton, 22, of Riverbank, Calif.; and Edwin Wayne Johnson Jr., a 31-year-old gunnery sergeant from Columbus, Ga.

A fifth man, Army Sgt. Kenneth W. Westbrook, 41, of Shiprock, N.M., later died from his wounds.

Another man who fought in the battle, Marine Cpl. Dakota Meyer, was awarded the Medal of Honor in 2011.

Swenson, 34, retired from the military in February 2011. He has a Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal.

Swenson had asked to return to active duty more than two years after he left the service. His request is being reviewed. A return to active service would be a remarkable turnabout.

Swenson's path to the White House ceremony was a rocky one. After he criticized his Army superiors, saying they failed to provide enough air and artillery support during the 2009 engagement, his medal nomination was delayed for years. Army officials said his nomination packet was lost in a computer system for 19 months.

A video captured by a soldier's helmet camera showed Swenson carrying another soldier to safety aboard a helicopter. Then he did something unexpected — he leaned in and kissed the wounded soldier on the head, Obama said it was "A simple act of compassion and loyalty to a brother-in-arms. As the door closes and the helicopter takes off, he turns and goes back the way he came, back into the heat of battle."

Obama said that in the history of the awarding of nearly 3,500 Medals of Honor, "this may be the first time that we can actually bear witness to a small fraction of those actions for ourselves."

Swenson said of the video: "To see him and to see me in that situation gives me comfort. . . . I would trade anything for that not to be our last moment, but that was our last moment, and I'll always have that now."

MEDAL OF HONOR AWARDED TO SPEC. TY M. CARTER

The Medal of Honor was issued to Spec. Ty M. Carter on August 26, 2013. Carter served in the U.S. Army, Battle Company, B Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Specialist Ty M. Carter distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Scout with Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan on October 3, 2009. On that morning, Specialist Carter and his comrades awakened to an attack of an estimated 300 enemy fighters occupying the high ground on all four sides of Combat Outpost Keating, employing concentrated fire from recoilless rifles, rocket propelled grenades, anti-aircraft machine guns, mortars and small arms fire. Specialist Carter reinforced a forward battle position, ran twice through a 100 meter gauntlet of enemy fire to resupply ammunition and voluntarily remained there to defend the isolated position. Armed with only an M4 carbine rifle, Specialist Carter placed accurate, deadly fire on the enemy, beating back the assault force and preventing the position from being overrun, over the course of several hours. With complete disregard for his own safety and in spite of his own wounds, he ran through a hail of enemy rocket propelled grenade and machine gun fire to rescue a critically wounded comrade who had been pinned down in an exposed position. Specialist Carter rendered life extending first aid and carried the Soldier to cover. On his own initiative, Specialist Carter again maneuvered



through enemy fire to check on a fallen Soldier and recovered the squad's radio, which allowed them to coordinate their evacuation with fellow Soldiers. With teammates providing covering fire, Specialist Carter assisted in moving the wounded Soldier 100 meters through withering enemy fire to the aid station and before returning to the fight. Specialist Carter's heroic actions and tactical skill were critical to the defense of Combat Outpost Keating, preventing the enemy from capturing the position and saving the lives of his fellow Soldiers. Specialist Ty M. Carter's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Bravo Troop, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division and the United States Army.

9,000 FALLEN SOLDIERS ETCHED IN SAND ON NORMANDY BEACH

To commemorate Peace Day on September 25, 2013, British artists Jamie Wardley and Andy Moss, accompanied by numerous volunteers, took to the beaches of Normandy with rakes and stencils in hand to etch 9,000 silhouettes representing fallen soldiers into the sand. Titled *The Fallen 9000*, the piece is meant as a stark visual reminder of the civilians, Germans, and allied forces who died during the D-Day beach landings at Arromanches on June 6th, 1944 during WWII.

The original team consisted of 60 volunteers, but as word spread nearly 500 additional local residents arrived to help with the temporary installation that lasted only a few hours before being washed away by the tide.



You Are Not Forgotten

TRIBUTE TO AMERICA'S VIETNAM POW'S

On May 23, 2013, nearly 200 Vietnam POWs and their families gathered at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in what was their largest reunion in years, and perhaps their last.

The reunion took place 40 years to the date when President and Mrs. Nixon hosted these American heroes for the largest dinner ever held at the White House, on May 24, 1973, on the South Lawn.

Watch this very moving video of our brave POWs—and NEVER FORGET.

http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=LemllfcAY8A&sns=em

SAILING OFFERED FOR DISABLED VETS

Sailing Fascination (www.sailingfascination.org) is reaching out to disabled veterans who are no longer on active duty, live within driving distance of Newport Harbor, and would like to learn to sail. Individuals would need to be available for two hours (noon – 2 pm) on Tuesdays for four consecutive weeks.

Tom Tolbert, president of Sailing Fascination, said learning to sail was great therapy when he was recovering from his brain aneurysm and they would like to share the joy of sailing with folks who could use a little joy in their lives.

For more information, please contact Tom Tolbert, President Sailing Fascination tomornina@cox.net ,

► BRINGING THEM HOME

SAILOR MISSING FROM VIETNAM WAR IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of a serviceman, missing from the Vietnam War, have been identified and have been returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Navy Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Michael B. Judd of Cleveland was buried on July 15 in Arlington National Cemetery. On June 30, 1967, Judd was aboard a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter that was attempting to insert a U.S. Marine Corps reconnaissance team into hostile territory in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam. As the helicopter approached the landing zone, it was struck by enemy fire from the surrounding tree line, causing the aircraft to catch fire. The aircraft crash landed. Although most of the reconnaissance team to survived, Judd and four other crew members of the team died in the crash.

In 1993, joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams investigated the case in Thua Thien-Hue Province. The team interviewed local villagers who claimed to have discovered an aircraft crash site in the nearby forest while searching for firewood in 1991. The team surveyed the location finding aircraft wreckage that could not be associated with a CH-46A.

During the 1990s, joint U.S./ S.R.V. teams continued to investigated the loss in Thua Thien-Hue Province. In 1999, the team interviewed the same local villagers who provide relevant case information and the joint team surveyed the crash site again, this time uncovering aircraft wreckage consistent with a U.S. military helicopter.

In 2012, joint U.S./ S.R.V. recovery teams began excavating the crash site and recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage from the CH-46A helicopter that Judd was aboard. Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, including dental comparisons in the identification of Judd's remains.

VIETNAM PILOT'S REMAINS RETURNED

Air Force pilot Maj. James E. Sizemore of San Diego was killed when his aircraft crashed in Laos in 1969. His remains were not identified until last April. He was buried with full military honors on September 23 at Arlington National Cemetery.

Sizemore was assigned to the 609th Special Operations Squadron in Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand, but made his home in San Diego.

Sizemore was a few months shy of his 40th birthday when his A-26A Invader crashed during a night armed reconnaissance mission over Laos on July 8, 1969. Maj. Howard V. Andre Jr., of Memphis, Tennessee, was also killed in the crash.

A U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic team investigating an aircraft crash site in Laos discovered aircraft wreckage from an A-26A Invader. A more complete investigation was conducted two different times in 2010: [J]oint U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic teams conducted excavations of the crash site recovering human remains, aircraft wreckage, personal effects and military equipment associated with Sizemore and Andre.

Scientists from JPAC were able to positively identify the remains as belonging to Sizemore and Andre by using the circumstantial evidence from the crash site, as well as forensic identification tools like matching dental records.

MAJ. HOWARD V. ANDRE JR., VIETNAM PILOT

The remains of Maj. Howard V. Andre Jr., of Memphis, Tenn., were identified and he was buried with full military honors on September 23 at Arlington National Cemetery.

Maj. James E. Sizemore and Maj. Howard V. Andre Jr. comprised an A26 team stationed at Nakhon Phanom, assigned a mission over the Plain of Jars region of Xiangkhoang Province, Laos on July 8, 1969. Sizemore was the pilot and Andre the navigator on the flight.

When the aircraft was about 12 miles south of the city of Ban Na Mai, it was downed by hostile fire. A ground team subsequently furnished unspecified information that Sizemore and Andre could not have survived. Both were classified Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

Scientists from JPAC were able to positively identify the remains as belonging to Sizemore and Andre by using the circumstantial evidence from the crash site, as well as forensic identification tools like matching dental records.

KOREAN WAR KIA RETURNS HOME

Private First Class Norman Dufresne returned home to a hero's welcome 63 years after he left his 11 siblings for South Korea.

The remains of the Leominster, Mass. soldier killed during the Korean War returned home October 16. Norman Dufresne's body was found in 1951, but only recently identified.

"This is the answer to 63 years of prayers," said nephew Al Guillemette, adding his mother "would say the rosary every night and then look out the window to see if he was coming home."

Dufresne joined the Army in 1948, the same year he graduated from the former Saxton Trade School in Leominster. He was discharged in January 1950 but reenlisted that May because he believed he might be assigned to West Germany, where another brother in the military was stationed. Instead, as tensions mounted between North and South Korea, Dufresne found himself in a country that would be at war almost immediately.

Dufresne went missing during a battle in South Korea in July 1950. Although he fell in battle, there are no other details of his death. The soldier's nephew, Al Guilmette, said his body appeared to have been riddled by machine-gun fire.

The Army officially labeled Dufresne "presumed dead" on Dec. 31, 1953.

Dufresne's sister Claire Weber said the day was both happy and sad for the family. "My parents never stopped hoping he would come home, but he never did," she said. "He was a typical boy. Very, very handsome."

REMAINS OF WW II SOLDIER IDENTIFIED

The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to Army Technician Fifth Grade Oneal Rush, 24, of Galivants Ferry, S.C. He was buried Oct. 26 in his hometown.

In August 1944, Rush, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers soldier, and six other service members were aboard an C-47A Skytrain aircraft that departed from Shingbwiyang, Burma to Myitkyina, Burma, on an air supply mission. Rush and the six service members were reported missing in action when the airplane failed to reach its destination.

WWII SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIER RETURNED

Staff Sgt. Woods was a soldier in the 5th Special Forces Group. He was one of a crew of eight — five Air Force crew members and three soldiers from the Army — aboard a Fairchild C-123 "Provider," which took off from Na Trang on Oct. 24, 1964, to conduct a resupply mission for ground forces operating near the border between what was then South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The aircraft was hit by enemy fire and crashed near the resupply point as soldiers on the ground looked on. No parachutes were seen leaving the plane, which was destroyed by fire except for the tail section.

Subsequent searches located seven bodies, but Woods was not found. Details of how his remains ultimately were located were not immediately available, though Szymanski was told identification hinged on DNA evidence obtained previously from other family members.

MIA FROM KOREA COMES HOME

The 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, and part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team, was reported missing on Dec. 13, 1950, when deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir near Sinhung-ri, South

Hamgyong Province, North Korea. Cpl. Evans was accounted for on Sept. 26, 2013. He was buried with full military honors October 12 in Thief River Falls, Minn.

Harold Axel Evans, 22, was a soldier with Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, when he was sent to North Korea in 1950, shortly after the war began. The family learned some of the circumstances in a letter, dated Oct. 27, 1952, written by his commanding officer, 1st. Lt. Henry Trawick to Glenn Evans:

“Your brother drove jeep for me. Driving a jeep is not a very easy or pleasant job. It is a particularly unpleasant job in a country like Korea where a driver constantly fights the bad roads, mountains and weather elements in addition to fighting the enemy that is everywhere.

“On the 25th of November, 1950, we left the Fusan Reservoir and drove for three days and nights with our rifles in our laps. We rode over mountains and roads that were indescribable. We stopped only for short cat naps and to eat cold “c” rations. After the three days of hard driving we arrived on the Chosin Reservoir to relieve the Marines. We were worn out.

“We moved into the Marine area during the early part of the night and went to bed. I cannot recall seeing your brother Harold again after that day, 27 November 1950. The following morning at 0300 hours, a Division of Chinese hit our small Battalion. We were completely surrounded and cut off from the nearest friendly outfit, the Marines, who were 12 miles south of our position.

“We remained in this area awaiting reinforcements for three days. When it was discovered reinforcements could not reach our positions we were ordered out.

“The area we left was littered with unburied dead, both Chinese and our own troops, for as far as the eye could see. We loaded all wounded personnel on all the trucks that could still move and started the 12 mile trip toward the Marine area.

“We fought for 9 miles. Every hill top and every valley of that 9 miles was littered with dead or wounded. Three miles from the Marines the trucks were stopped cold. We were out of ammunition and only a handful of troops able to fight were left. The Chinese had a strong road block we could not penetrate. That is as far as the trucks, loaded with wounded, ever got.

“The Chinese took many prisoners and treated them well. Only a very few got out. Many were dead. It was extremely cold, 40 degrees below zero, so that most of the wounded froze to death.

JPAC ARRIVAL CEREMONIES PHONY

The Department of Defense unit charged with recovering servicemembers’ remains abroad has been holding phony “arrival ceremonies” for seven years, with an honor guard carrying flag-draped coffins off of a cargo plane as though they held the remains returning that day from old battlefields.

The Pentagon has acknowledged that no honored dead were in fact arriving, and that the planes used in the ceremonies often couldn’t even fly, and were towed into position.

The ceremonies at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii are held up as a sign of the nation’s commitment to its fallen warriors. They have been attended by veterans and families of MIAs, led to believe that they were witnessing the return of Americans killed in World War II, Vietnam and Korea.

In a statement sent to NBC News, the Pentagon wrote: “Part of the ceremony involves symbolically transferring the recovered remains from an aircraft to a vehicle for follow-on transportation to the lab. Many times, static aircraft are used for the ceremonies, as operational requirements dictate flight schedules and aircraft availability. This transfer symbolizes the arrival of our fallen servicemembers.

“It is important to note that recovered remains ceremoniously transferred from the aircraft to the have been in the lab undergoing forensic analysis to determine identity. When remains first arrive in Hawaii, JPAC cannot confirm if the remains are those of an American servicemember.”

NBC writes that the ceremonies have been known among some of the military and civilian staff at the base as The Big Lie.

The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, or JPAC, has come under intense scrutiny in recent months after two scathing reports were released this summer. In July, The Associated Press ran a story exposing a 2012 internal JPAC report that found the agency to be “acutely dysfunctional” with some missions that amounted to little more than paid vacations for staffers.

A second investigation released weeks later by the Government Accountability Office found that Pentagon efforts to account for fallen troops missing overseas were inefficient and in need of overhaul, according to congressional sources.

In 2010, lawmakers mandated JPAC to reach an annual goal of recovering at least 200 fallen troops from overseas battlefields by 2015, but it had failed to build the capacity to do so, the GAO found. Currently the Hawaii-based command averages less than 70 individuals per year.

Much of the inefficiency found by the GAO researchers comes down to a turf war between JPAC and the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, which shares some of the same responsibilities, Congressional sources said.

According to the NBC report, here’s what the audience was shown: A C-17 military transport aircraft was parked, its ramp down, outside a hangar at the base. After generals and dignitaries were introduced, a military chaplain said a prayer, the audience sang “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and “Taps” was played. Then an honor guard carried flag-draped transfer cases, which look like coffins, down the ramp and placed them in the back of blue buses, which were driven away.

The emcee thanked the audience for “welcoming them home.” The script continued, “After removal from the aircraft, the remains will be taken to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command’s Central Identification Laboratory. There, JPAC scientists will begin the identification process.”

Citing eyewitnesses and photographs taken behind the scenes, NBC wrote that what actually happened is very different:

Before 6 a.m., the honor guard assembled behind the JPAC headquarters on the base. They loaded transfer cases onto the buses and drove to the hangar. The honor guard loaded the transfer cases into the pre-positioned C-17, then rehearsed for the ceremony. They then returned to the plane, and waited.

The public was allowed in for the 9 a.m. ceremony: invited politicians, media, families of the missing and veterans. Employees from JPAC were bused over to fill out the crowd.

Then the show began, with tears and salutes as the remains were marched to the buses, then driven off to the lab to “begin the identification process.”

Jesse Baker, an 81-year-old Air Force veteran of World War II and Korea living in Honolulu, told NBC News that he has been to more than 50 of these ceremonies. He said he's always been under the impression that the plane had just arrived carrying recovered remains.

Baker tried to make sense of why the DOD would work so hard to trick him and other veterans. "That's disturbing. I don't know when they stopped being honest and switched over to this Mickey Mouse, but whoever did it, I hope they find him a new job somewhere."

The American Legion is demanding reforms at the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in the wake of reports the agency conducted fake ceremonies for the arrival of the remains of missing troops, something known among participants as the "Big Lie."

"Symbolic honors are one thing, but deception is quite another," American Legion National Commander Daniel Dellinger said. "The so-called 'Big Lie' does not honor our war dead. Instead, it misleads and insults the living. It is especially egregious during a most sensitive and vulnerable time for families."

The Pentagon acknowledged last week the ceremonies held at the Hawaiian military base do not include the remains of soldiers returning that day and often use planes that can't fly and have to be towed into position. The ceremonies are attended by veterans and family members who believe they are witnessing the return of Americans killed in the wars.

The events have been known as "arrival ceremonies." The Pentagon has announced they will now be known as "honor ceremonies."

JPAC conducts recovery operations to identify all unaccounted for U.S. military personnel. There are currently 83,000 missing service men and women from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command identifies less than 80 remain a year, at a cost of \$1 million per case and bodies wait in the JPAC lab an average of 11 years before being identified.

Dellinger said he believes JPAC's remains committed to its mission, but should have been honest about the nature of the ceremonies.

"Though I am certain these deceptions were not meant to be cruel, this revelation shines a bad light on JPAC, whose mission The American Legion strongly supports, and the Pentagon. Honesty, from the beginning, would have served the Pentagon, JPAC and, most importantly, the families of our fallen heroes much more honorably," Dellinger said.

UPDATE: October 16, 2013

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED-FOR: There are still 1,643 personnel listed by the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. The number of Americans announced by DPMO as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 940. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and ID'd before the end of the war, bring the official total of US personnel accounted-for from the Vietnam War to 1,003. Of the 1,643 unaccounted-for personnel, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,275 (VN-469, VS-806); Laos-308; Cambodia-53; PRC territorial waters-7; over-water losses on DPMO's list of No Further Pursuit cases number well over 600.

► TAPS

Nelson Draper Sr., Code Talker

Code Talker Nelson Draper Sr. died September 22, 2013 at his home in Barstow, Calif. He was 96.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly ordered flags to be lowered across the reservation in Draper's honor. Shelly calls Draper a modern-day hero whose deeds brought great pride to the Navajo Nation. Hundreds of Navajos used a code developed from their native language that confounded the Japanese during World War II.

Draper was 25 years old and living in Chinle when World War II started. After joining the U.S. Marines, he was trained as a Code Talker and participated in a number of battles in the Pacific, including Iwo Jima and Okinawa.



Draper later became a civilian employee of the Marine Corps Logistics Base for 30-plus years.

In 2001, Draper, nicknamed “Chief,” was honored for his service as one of 228 code talkers to receive the Congressional Silver Medal. The medal is one of the highest awards bestowed by Congress. Each time it is presented, it is redesigned for the recipient.

Nelson Draper Jr. said his father spoke little about what he accomplished during World War II, even after the program was declassified by the military in 1968 — protective of the code until the end.

“We’re very proud of what he did,” Draper Jr. said.

Draper is survived by eight children, 29 grandchildren and 53 great-grandchildren.

John Filonowich

John Filonowich of Kiowa, Colorado was riding his new trike home from the shop near Elbert, Colorado when he apparently had a heart attack and just rolled off the road. His wife Ruthie was following him home, but had lost sight of him. He wasn’t found until midnight.

John was a Colorado PGR Ride Captain and he and his wife Ruthie were FNGs in RFTW 2012. They were looking forward to riding with CR Staging in 2014. RFTW extends our deepest sympathies to Ruthie and the family.

Father Stephen Foppiano

Fr. Stephen Foppiano, pastor of St. Clare Parish in Roseville, California since 2010, passed away at the age of 57 on Oct. 29 after a battle with cancer. Fr. Stephen loved his RFTW family and was a great friend and supporter of all Veterans. Several of his parishioners mentioned how proud he was to be a member of our family. The Diocese Bishop also said RFTW was so loved by Fr. Stephen. His bike was prominently displayed at the front of the church during his funeral mass.

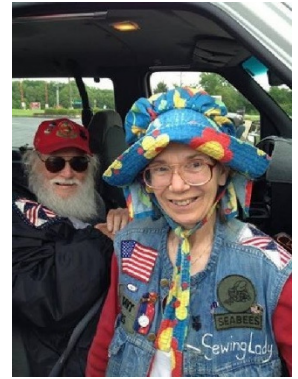
When Fr. Stephen was put to rest Nov. 4, he was escorted by 11 members of RFTW.

Joe Gomez

Joe Gomez of Mission Hills, California passed away Sept. 25 of a heart attack. Joe was an assistant platoon leader with the CR. He was a retired LAPD motor cop and a Vietnam veteran. Condolences to his family

Joyce Huggins

Joyce passed away November 2, just five months after her beloved husband Jim passed. Joyce and Jim were very special people, always taking care of others and volunteering to do whatever was needed. They regularly visited with veterans at VA hospitals. They were members of Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 785, Orange County, CA and very active for many years. They will both be missed for their “can-do” spirit and passion and love for veterans.



Don McKinney

SFC Don J. McKinney, father of RFTW Jackie McKinney passed away. Don was a WWII Army veteran, 87 years old. He was buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona in Phoenix on Nov. 11. RFTW sends its heartfelt condolences to Jackie on the loss of his dad.

► CLOSING THOUGHTS

HAPPY VETERANS DAY to all who have served and are still serving our great nation. These men and women are our national treasure and deserve to be honored every day, for without them we would not have our freedoms. They protect our country, and for that we should always be grateful. Today, and every day, when you see a veteran please shake his hand or give him or her a hug and thank them for their service.



This poem says it best:

A VETERAN DIED TODAY

By A. Lawrence Vaincourt

He was getting old and paunchy
And his hair was falling fast,
And he sat around the Legion,
Telling stories of the past.

Of a war that he once fought in
And the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his buddies;
They were heroes, every one.

And 'tho sometimes to his neighbors
His tales became a joke,
All his buddies listened quietly
For they knew where of he spoke.

But we'll hear his tales no longer,
For ol' Joe has passed away,
And the world's a little poorer
For a Veteran died today.

He won't be mourned by many,

The politician's stipend
And the style in which he lives,
Are often disproportionate,
To the service that he gives.

While the ordinary Veteran,
Who offered up his all,
Is paid off with a medal
And perhaps a pension, small.

It is not the politicians
With their compromise and ploys,
Who won for us the freedom
That our country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger,
With your enemies at hand,
Would you really want some cop-out,
With his ever-waffling stand?

Or would you want a Veteran
His home, his country, his kin,

Just his children and his wife.
For he lived an ordinary,
Very quiet sort of life.

He held a job and raised a family,
Going quietly on his way;
And the world won't note his passing,
'Tho a Veteran died today.

When politicians leave this earth,
Their bodies lie in state,
While thousands note their passing,
And proclaim that they were great.

Papers tell of their life stories
From the time that they were young,
But the passing of a Veteran
Goes unnoticed, and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution
To the welfare of our land,
Some jerk who breaks his promise
And cons his fellow man?

Or the ordinary fellow
Who in times of war and strife,
Goes off to serve his country
And offers up his life?

Just a common Veteran,
Who would fight until the end.

He was just a common Veteran,
And his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us
We may need his likes again.

For when countries are in conflict,
We find the Veteran's part,
Is to clean up all the troubles
That the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor
While he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let's give him homage
At the ending of his days.

Perhaps just a simple headline
In the paper that might say:
"OUR COUNTRY IS IN MOURNING,
A VETERAN DIED TODAY."

You Are Not Forgotten

