

RUN FOR THE WALL

Quarterly Newsletter

“We Ride For Those Who Can’t”

July 2015

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In This Issue:

- The Editor’s Notes
- Outgoing President’s Message
- Incoming President’s Message
- 2015-2016 Board of Directors
- 2015 Run Wrap-Up
- Reunions
- Combat Hero Bike Build
- It’s the Little Things
- An FNG’s SitRep
- Challenge Coin From the Past
- My FNG Year
- Nashville to D.C. and Back
- First Visit to The Wall
- My Total Experience
- First Woman in Afghanistan to Receive Silver Star
- Vietnam War Turning Point
- Medal of Honor Awarded
- Oldest Living WWII Veteran
- C-123 Vets to Get Benefits
- VA to Offer More Burial Options
- Homeless Vets Update
- Traumatic Brain Injury Myths
- More Stolen Valor Bills
- Mobile App for Vets
- Pending Legislation
- Bringing Them Home
- About DPAA
- Sick Call
- Taps
- Closing Thoughts

THE EDITOR’S NOTES

Some good things are happening for veterans, but only after many more years than they should have taken. Blue water and C-123 vets are now on the Agent Orange presumptive list, with other diseases sure to be added. Read about the C-123 vets in this issue.

There is so much pressure on the VA to improve health care, that many veterans now can get treatment from a civilian doctor if the vet can’t get an appointment with the VA within 30 days.



Also in this issue, read about additional burial benefits the VA is offering, and the VA's new homeless program for which more than 150 employment specialists will be hired.

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.

OUTGOING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



It is not without hesitation that I step down as President of RFTW, although I am excited to watch the continuing attention to Mission that the new President, Greg "Pied Piper" Smith, will bring to bear. I am just as confident that the RFTW family will embrace him and benefit from his leadership. I have been honored to represent for RFTW in the many logistical and strategic decisions that have hopefully made this past year's Run (2015) flow smoothly and safely, and allowed us to accomplish our Mission with respect.

All of the Board of Directors this past year have given of themselves to align all resources in order to accomplish this Mission. The riders (you) have always stepped up when requested to assist in these efforts. The riders (you) ride the ride, honor the memorials, show respect to our supporters, and Ride for Those Who Cannot. I could not be more proud of the Run or the Generals we placed at your forefront: EZ, Tumbleweed, and Stoney will forever be in their Rider's hearts and minds, embodying the leadership and commitment all should aspire to.

God Bless and Ride Safe

All Gave Some, Some Gave All

Ken "Wish" Hargrove

INCOMING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings RFTW!

Welcome to the start of the planning cycle for Run for the Wall 2016! In fact, planning for the next Run is underway before the previous one is completed. Much like the planning of the Route Coordinators and their leadership teams, the Board of Directors also tries to plan for the future. While the Route Leadership is more focused on the upcoming year and the execution of a safe and healing Run, the BOD focuses on not only the mechanics of the next year but the next two, three, and five years. Our goal is to ensure the viability of RFTW, Inc., the corporation, so the corporation in turn can continue the execution of the the Mission



Statement.

An organization, like people, grows through communication. We on the BOD welcome your comments and input. All of our contact info is listed on the RFTW website. If you have thoughts or concerns, feel free to reach out to us.

In subsequent columns and in the President's Message, I will keep you apprised of our efforts in areas such as Safety, Outreach, the Archive Project, and many others. As of now I will just close this brief commentary with the thought that we are all working to the same end - continuing what RFTW was created to do.

Ride Safe!

Greg "Pied Piper" Smith
President RFTW 2015-2016

► 2015-2016 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Office	Name	Contact Info	Term Expires
President	Greg "Pied Piper" Smith	2233 Makinson Rd. West Point, Texas 78963 Cell: (512) 694-3335 piedpiperrftw@gmail.com	June 30, 2016
Chairman/Vice President	Harry "Attitude" Steelman	31982 Paseo Amante San Juan Capistrano 92675 Cell: (949) 422-8325 rftwattitude@gmail.com	June 30, 2017
Treasurer	Ken "Catfish" Ward	1766 S. Erie Hwy Hamilton, OH 45011 Cell: (513) 252-7980 kenward.1976@gmail.com	June 30, 2017
Director of Operations & Training	Doug "Sgt Major" Lyvere	645 W Emerald Lake Dr, Sumter, SC 29153 Cell: (415) 309-2510 doug@lyvere.com	June 30, 2017
Director of Merchandise	Ray "ZZ" Brammer	1744 Summer St Longmont, CO 80501 (303) 908-8902 zz.rftw@gmail.com	June 30, 2017

Director of Public Relations/Communications	Harlan "Whitebirch" Olson	1531 Hilltop Drive Longmont, CO 80504 Cell: (303) 717-4514 harlanolson@me.com	June 30, 2016
Director of Risk Management	John "Wicked" McKee	4632 Conley Odessa, TX, 79762 (432) 288-1958 jfcmckee@att.net	June 30, 2018
Secretary	Les "Easy" Williams	PO Box 2132 Grand Lake CO 80447 Cell:(970) 744-8624 easy.rftw@gmail.com	June 30, 2018
Director of Purchasing	Don "EZ" Burns	PO Box 429 Folsom, CA, 95763 (916) 849-5112 doncburns@gmail.com	June 30, 2018

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

DON —EZ BURNS

Director of Purchasing

It is my honor to continue service to RFTW as the newest appointed BOD member. I have been involved with RFTW for (5) years and look forward to 2016. My participation in Leadership and RFTW is as follows:

RFTW BOD – Director of Purchasing 2015- 2018
RFTW Central Route Coordinator 2015
RFTW Central Route Asst. Route Coordinator 2014
RFTW Central Route Platoon Leader 2013
RFTW Central Route Assistant Platoon Leader 2012
RFTW Central Route (FNG) –all the way” 2011



I am a Vietnam Veteran serving active duty 1969 – 1973. It has been a continued honor to participate in the RFTW event with my Brothers and Sisters each year and continue the –MISSION.”

Please feel free to contact me to find out more about our Northern Calif. monthly meetings and rides. I will look forward as always, to hear from those who have never participated (FNG's) with us before. I will post times and dates on the Forum for each month. Please come and join us.

LES —EAS” WILLIAMS

Secretary



I am honored to be selected as a board member to continue my service to RFTW.

I entered the Marine Corps in 1965, was commissioned Lieutenant in 1967, and retired as a Colonel in June 1998.

I am a Vietnam veteran, having served two combat tours with the 1st Marine Airwing from 69-71 and a ground tour in '72 with the 1st Marine Division. My three combat tours were and continue to be my most memorable tours as a Marine. My later work as a Colonel was focused on improving war fighting skills and better use of

technology.

I was on active duty during Desert Storm at National Air War College and National War College Naval Air Training Command Flight School, Pensacola.

After I retired from the Marine Corps I joined the Lakewood, Colorado Police Department as Division chief and Commander of the SWAT team.

I moved to Grand Lake, Colorado and began my own business, Williams Tree Service, which I have been operating from 2007 to the present.

I have been riding with RFTW since 2012, first as a participant on the Central Route, then as a CR tail gunner in 2013. In 2014 I was a Midway Route platoon leader, and again this year. I am honored to have the opportunity to serve you on the RFTW Board of Directors, and I invite you to contact me if there is anything I can help you with.

► 2015 RUN WRAP-UP

CENTRAL ROUTE WRAP-UP:

By Don —EZ” Burns

2015 Central Route Coordinator

Greetings!

By now most of you are home where it all started for you in May. Some may be still on the road, touring, visiting or just enjoying this beautiful country of ours. I have to report that I am already home, having to ship my bike back and fly home myself do to medical issues, missing my own schedule of stops on my way back to California.

Let me say it was an honor this year to lead this MISSION and once again be a part of Central Route Leadership, RFTW XXVII, and our 2015 Team. I do hope all FNGs did have a memorable and healing experience. As I have said before, —this is (was) for you. It is important to me that you were able to

complete ~~your~~ Mission as an FNG and hopefully understand that you are now a part of the RFTW Family. I would like to think most of you will return and look forward to seeing you next year, or at the Colorado Springs or Angel Fire reunions. For those who continue to ride year after year in support of RFTW, it was good to be with you as family once again. Thank you for ~~your~~ support and riding again ~~For Those Who Cannot.~~

I will look back on 2015 with no regret. Yes, the last few days of the Run for me were trying and sometimes painfully disappointing. I did everything I could to hang in there until the end and greet you in DC. It only takes a moment to realize that this was not about me, but the MISSION itself. I am proud to say that our Leadership this year, led by ARC Dave ~~Papa Smurf~~ Klemme, stepped up without a hitch and completed the Mission. That is why we have the ~~Central Route Leadership~~ we do, experienced, dedicated and qualified individuals working as a team to step up to any circumstance that comes our way. I am proud of each one of you who served this year. Thank you for your Leadership.

In closing, I hope to continue building a Nor- Cal monthly meeting for all RFTW participants. I will post on the forum and expect the first such meeting to be in July. Any help for organizing this would be appreciated. Just give me a call or email me. I look forward to 2016 already. To all of our Veterans, ~~Thank You for Your Service~~ and ~~WELCOME HOME.~~

SOUTHERN ROUTE WRAP-UP:

By Stoney, RC

2015 Southern Route Coordinator

WOW!

One short month ago after riding 5,818 miles in 18 days I pulled into my home here in Ft. Worth from Run for The Wall XXVII! What an incredible experience!

It has taken this long for me to collect my thoughts and understand the emotions related to leading the Southern Route.

When we began preparing in June of 2014, I had no idea of the task that lay ahead! We worked from June through August to recruit our leadership team, and the team we ultimately fielded on 13 May 2015 was nothing short of incredible! Along the way we were faced with more than a few challenges and even emergencies, but in every case they rose to that challenge. We left Ontario with 303 riders and we arrived in DC with 427, nearly one third of whom were FNGs.

In one of my earlier RC notes I mentioned we would do our best to remain true to the Founders' original purpose of The Run: To bring America's attention to the fate of our Missing in Action, our Prisoners of War, and our Veterans. We chose ~~Continue the Mission~~ as the theme for the Southern Route to remind each of us to remember the purpose of The Run. I believe we were very successful in reminding America of this Mission.

Thank you Run For The Wall! Thank you for the honor of leading the Southern Route across America, and thank you for the opportunity to work with such a fine group of people. From our State Coordinators and our local Volunteers, to our riders and the Leadership cadre that helped us Continue the Mission, I am

humbled by your enthusiasm, engagement, and your praise. We did this together, and WE made a difference!

MIDWAY ROUTE WRAP-UP:

By Tom "Fwotone" Lystrup

2015 Midway Route Coordinator

Seems like I just left yesterday, but as of now I am home. A quick return trip. Everything is okay. Health is great, the Harley ran flawlessly the whole trip, weather cooperated well enough and like the other years I have done Run For The Wall, I was humbled and now feel physically and emotionally drained. As Hawk of the Road Warriors used to say, "What a Rush!"

This was my fourth year going all the way from Ontario to Washington, DC. At the host hotel (surrounded by road construction), I met up with my friend Ken "Navy Buff" Munro who I would be rooming with. Ken volunteered to be the photographer for the Midway Route this year. There were several great events going on that we shared in, like the Marine Corps Band from Camp Pendleton, the Bike Build where a disabled vet received a new motorcycle with sidecar, another disabled veteran received a new Honda trike that was totally unexpected and there was a new KIA delivered to three worthy veterans, donated by the KIA motor company. What a show! What an outpouring of charity and patriotism!

Earlier in the month Ken and I had collected several items from work friends, Facebook associates and military recruiters to give away. I received a box full of stuff from a friend of mine that works for the Naval Air Warfare Center, Weapons Division at China Lake, CA. Navy recruiters came through with a box of stuff. From the Marine Corps, a few stickers and nothing at all from the Air Force. However, the US Army outshined all the other services combined. God bless the US Army! They came through in a very big way. Box after box and bag after bag of everything from caps and t-shirts to lanyards, stickers, pins, cups, frisbees, pens, pencils and other items. My car was filled with US Army stuff. They indicated their desire to continue to support Run For The Wall in the future. Also, I received from a friend of mine a monetary donation of \$100 and I directed it toward our route's charity which includes veterans and their families in need. We distributed all our items to the merchandise trailers to hand out all the boxes of "swag" as it is called by some. The intention was these items would find their way into the hands of patriots, veterans and children along the way.

Tuesday is the day that Jim "The Mayor" Frost leads a ride into Riverside National Cemetery (RNC). There many of the memorials are viewed and typically the designers are on hand to discuss the concepts behind the design of the memorials, including the Killed in Action (KIA) Memorial, The POW/MIA Memorial and colors retirement and signing, and the Medal of Honor Memorial.

This year I signed on to be an Ambassador and met up with the rest of our group to go over details of our job. The day's events were spectacular. Hundreds of riders showed up! The place was packed to see all the activities. Looks like I will be riding with a great bunch of men and women. I've been wanting to do this since I heard of the ambassadors and what they do.

Just across the border in Arizona, at Exit 9 for Lake Havasu City, we stopped for gas. There were many people on hand to welcome us. Arizona is more patriotic than California in my opinion. We handed out pins and beads to each of them. As I was doing so, one of the men said, "Tom Lystrup" and I looked up. Then he said, "Ron McIntyre." My mouth about hit the ground. I hadn't seen Ron for 40+ years (high

school). He said he'd been following me on Facebook and knew that Run For The Wall would be coming through, so he and his wife showed up to welcome the group. Ron and his bride live in Lake Havasu now.

The kindness of the people that served us and welcomed us and took time to set up and clean up after us is such a blessing. It's amazing the amount of love I have felt in each city, in each community, from each server and all who turn out to welcome us and thank us for our service. I continually want to thank them, but they continually thank me instead. We stand in lines humbled by the outpouring of love and gratitude for being there in their city. Just for being there they are grateful. We receive cards and letters from children thanking us for our service. These bring emotions that cannot be held back by the toughest of veterans and bikers amongst us. There is patriotism out there. There are real Americans out there. We see them all the time, all along the way on Run For The Wall.

There are a lot of wonderful people along the highways of rural America and still a lot of patriots in every city we stopped in along the way. That night Shanna and I gave thanks to God for my safety, for the love that we share for each other, for our great country and for the many patriots that can be found all across America.

Run For The Wall is so many things to so many people, not just the riders. To all who have helped make this Run For The Wall event so memorable, and so rewarding for so many, my thanks and appreciation. To all veterans who have served and continue to serve in their own capacities and to all our servicemen and women who are still going into harm's way today, my undying gratitude and respect. To all who have sacrificed to make this country the greatest nation in the world, my dedication and all my love to each of you. To those that detract from this nation's greatness, may God grant you swift justice.

I'm already looking forward to Run For The Wall XXVIII in 2016. Is it May yet?

REGISTRATION STATS

By Wicked, Director of Risk Management

Here are the registration numbers for RFTW XXVII 2015 (pre-registered, walk-ins, and who did not show up).

		Central	Midway	Southern
Pre-Registered	1144	461	258	425
No-Shows	-139	-51	-24	-64
Walk-ins	523	236	99	188
Total Riders	1528	646	333	549
FNG's	537	218	99	220
FNG's to DC	407	174	79	154
FNG's ATW	187	72	37	78
All The Way	778	286	208	284
Start Ontario	851	321	227	303
End DC	1191	481	283	427

► REUNIONS

Angel Fire, NM

September 4-6, 2015 - Labor Day weekend

For the past several years, RFTW Riders from the Central Route have reunited in Angel Fire-Eagle Nest, NM for a RFTW reunion and service project. In addition to reuniting and reminiscing, RFTW Riders lay individual bricks, unit bricks, and Medal of Honor recipient bricks on the grounds of the Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Saturday of the reunion. This is a project that RFTW has adopted and is welcomed by the David Westphall Veterans Foundation. Riders from all routes are welcome to attend.

The host hotel is the Laguna Vista Lodge, 51 Therma Dr, EagleNest in Eagle Nest (575-377-6522). Other motels: Cottonwood (575-377-3382), Gold Pan (575-377-2286), or Econo Lodge (575-377-6813). See CR Itinerary/hotel list for more hotels.

FRIDAY:

- Meet & Greet at Laguna Vista Saloon Courtyard at 4 p.m, with light hors d'oeuvres.

SATURDAY:

- 7:30 a.m. - Need help moving the bricks from storage to the walkway at the Memorial.
- Brick laying along the pathways at the Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We may lay 300 bricks, including 8 MOH bricks.
- Lunch at amphitheater, provided by the David Westphall Veterans Foundation.
- 5 p.m. Riders Forum at the Senior Center.
- Dinner at the Senior Center 6 p.m. Deadline for reservations is August 21. Cost with a reservation is \$20, without a reservation \$30, and includes Reunion ride patch and 2015 bar. Make reservations with Barbara "Happy Feet" Montoya, as she needs to know how many people to expect leobjm@aol.com (no phone calls, please). She will need the name of each person in your party, and each person's meal choice.

Meal Choices:

- Friday Meet & Greet: 5pm Laguna Vista Courtyard, light refreshments. We will have someone grilling burgers so we can eat in the courtyard area. Cost: \$7.00.
- Saturday morning: 100 burritos will be available @ \$3.00 with coffee; first come first served.
- There are two choices for Saturday dinner:

Beef Tips & Noodles	Taco Bar/Enchiladas
Salad	Beans & Rice
Hot Vegetable	Lettuce & Tomato
Dinner Roll	Chips & Salsa
Dessert	Fruit Melons

SUNDAY:

- 9 a.m. Chapel service

KERRVILLE, TX

Place: YO Ranch Resort Hotel, Kerrville TX

Dates: September 24-27, 2015

Room rates per night:

Single/double rate \$92.00

Triple/quad rate \$92.00

Online code for making reservations: **RUNWALL15**

Ask for the RFTW – Veterans group rate

Block of rooms will be held until 12 noon 8/25/15

Phone: 877-967-3767

Address: 2033 Sidney Baker

Kerrville, TX 78028

The YO Ranch Resort is located off Interstate 10; take exit 508. Hotel is south of I-10, approximately 1/2 mile on the left.

To check out the hotel amenities and accommodations go to **www.yoresort.com**

Group banquet and –special” awards on Saturday evening.

For additional information, Contact Sam Mead or email: rwmead@hotmail.com

For those needing RV accommodations:

•Kerrville-Schreiner Park 830-257-5392 (closest to the hotel, city park, call for reservations)

•Buckhorn off I-10 800-568-6458

Friday – Arrival day is open for those interested in the Friday rides or catching up with friends. Dinner at VFW post 1480 reasonably priced

Saturday morning /afternoon –Breakfast at VFW post 1480 (reasonable) various rides and meetings are being planned.

More details later.

Saturday evening - A buffet dinner is being served in a private room for the group. The dinner will include coffee and tea service. Adult beverages will be available from the lounge.

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

Saturday’s dinner and a RFTW 2015 Reunion rocker are included in the non-refundable registration fee. For first-timers to YO RFTW Reunion, a reunion patch is included.

Registration cost: Now until September 7 - \$35.00

Registration cost: September 8 – September 19 - \$50.00

Deadline for the registration is September 19th paid in advance. The deadline is required by the hotel to confirm head count for Saturday’s dinner. Prior registration and payment is required.

(Please print clearly)

Name(s) _____

Road name(s) _____

Number of Attendees: _____

Full Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

First time attendee Yes _____ No _____

Friday evening dinner at VFW Yes _____ No _____

Saturday Breakfast VFW Yes _____ No _____

Send checks payable to: R.W. Mead 120 Ridge Grove Rd Kerrville TX 78028 For more info, contact Sam or Cowboy at: rwmead@hotmail.com cell: 830-928-6634 or 915-422-5547

An email receipt will be set upon payment. The email receipt will be your dinner ticket/confirmation.

► RFTW 2016

2016 COMBAT HERO BIKE BUILD—JOEY JONES



Joey Jones is a retired United States Marine. Joey's eight-year career in the Marines has brought him to the forefront of advocacy for active duty and veteran wounded warriors. Joey's career was brought to an end after he was severely injured in August 2010 where he lost his legs above the knee in Afghanistan.

Joey was assigned to the U.S.S. Rushmore for sea service in 2006. Joey served in combat in 2007 and 2008 in the Al Anbar province of Iraq. In 2010 Joey deployed to Helmand Province of Afghanistan to disarm the Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's) used by the Taliban. While in Afghanistan Joey disarmed over 85 IEDs and disposed of several thousands of pounds of unknown

bulk explosives. Joey's deployment was abruptly ended when he stepped on an IED while conducting EOD procedures.

Joey recovered from his injuries at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at Bethesda, MD. During his recovery Joey started a Peer Visit Program, which allowed him and other wounded warriors to visit with, encourage and mentor more recently wounded warriors in the in-patient wards. This gained Joey the attention of many VIPs in DC and provided opportunities for Joey to speak on behalf of the immediate physical and emotional support needed for our countries most severely wounded heroes. Joey was personally invited to have dinner with the President of the United States for this achievement.

After completing the immediate stages of his own recovery Joey began attending classes at University of Maryland University College and working as the first enlisted Congressional Fellow for the House Veterans Affairs Committee. There, Joey was able to share his experiences with the Congressional Committee members, Staff, and various interest groups to better serve wounded warriors. Joey's deployment and recovery experiences were featured on CBS evening news and ABC nightline. Joey continues to meet with members of Congress and Congressional staff to help foster and promote the most effective legislation and initiatives to serve and represent our veteran community.

Joey lost his own childhood best friend to PTSD related suicide and drug addiction in 2012. This tragic event has solidified a desire in him to dedicate his life to elevating the appreciation and support of our veterans among all Americans here at home. Joey administers an annual wounded warrior/veteran hunt in his home state of Georgia in memory of Sgt Christopher McDonald.

Joey retired from the Marine Corps in Oct 2012 and began attending Georgetown full-time the fall semester of 2012 where he graduated with a BA in Liberal Studies concentrated in Law. While at GU Joey became the Vice President of his student body and helped create the first Student Veteran's Organization specific to his school.

Upon Graduation Joey accepted a full-time position at Boot Campaign in Georgetown, TX as the Executive Director of Marketing and Promotions.



Joey has continued to be in front of issues concerning our military and veteran communities appearing on multiple media outlets in TV, radio, print and online. Joey has become a regular political analyst for The Real Story with Gretchen Carlson, On The Record with Greta Van Sustren and Huckabee.

He has been awarded the Purple Heart, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with combat Valor device, Combat Action Ribbon and Outstanding Military Community Service Medal along with various campaign and unit awards.

Joey was the Guest of Honor and Keynote speaker at the 2012 Commandant of the Marine Corps' Birthday Ball. Joey humbly accepts most invitations to share his experiences and provide a motivational message.

Joey is a spokesperson for the following service member and veteran causes: Boot Campaign, Sentinels of Freedom, The Armed Forces Foundation-Help Save Our Troops initiative, EOD Warrior Foundation, and Boulder Crest Retreat for Wounded Warriors.

NOTE: We have raffle tickets and T-shirts to sell and are looking for help in doing so. Anyone who wants to help just needs to contact Ray TooTall at atraysequip@aol.com, Sgt.Maj Doug Lyvere at doug@lyvere.com, or John Hardcharger at hardchargerrftw@gmail.com. We need folks to talk to the different VFWs in their area and try to get them to do a fundraiser or a poker run to raise funds. We will provide the info and packet for them to complete the mission. All funds received go to the Build. All other expenses come out of our pocket. The Builds that we have done so far have brought the thrill of riding to veterans who couldn't ride before. RFTW has teamed up with Eagles Up, another 501(c)3 non-profit, so all donations are tax deductible. —John Barker

► OUR STORIES

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

By Harry –Attitude” Steelman

Central Route stopped in Holbrook, AZ as usual again this year and the reception was, again as usual, overwhelming, especially from the numerous schools that we passed. Lunch was fantastic, as usual, but always appreciated.

But I was totally taken by surprise by something not "as usual." After we had finished our great meal and as "EZ" was winding up the presentation ceremonies, he was approached by a lady who asked if she could say something. Now "EZ" didn't get his road name for nothing and his response was "Why, of course you can."

The young lady explained that she had driven some 3 1/2 hours from her home in a small Native American village in Utah to speak and offer some insight into how others view our Run. She went on to say that she was a Blue Star Mother whose son had actually returned home a few months ago. She had made numerous friends in the Blue Star community and still identified with their fears. She said that it is through the roar of our "hundreds of motorcycles" that she (they) are reminded that they are not alone.

I don't know how anyone else felt about her expression of gratitude for what we do, but I was very humbled. I had never considered that anyone would take our journey so personally.

Sometimes it is the little things that make this Run so worthwhile.

AN FNG'S SITREP

By Jim –Doc” Driscoll

Well where do I start—I have no idea. I have some special thanks for Stoney and Flame: I was totally apprehensive about the emotions involved in this epic Mission, though NONE were going to stop me. I so looked forward to every experience this would bring.

Along the way I was looking forward to finally letting go of all this baggage that has burdened me for the last 46 years. For me the highlight of this Mission was definitely "The Missing Man" ride. All the bottled up fears, emotions, and apprehensions at some point had to go to allow me to fully enjoy "The Mission."

After my leg of –The Missing Man,” the doors opened and the flood gates began to slowly flow into an absolute flood. The idea that this truly is a Family is just that—a Family.

Thank you Flame for the once in a lifetime opportunity to be a part of this Special Journey. And to Stoney, I can only say THANK YOU Brother for being there to hold me and let me empty out some of the heavy baggage.

So as I was told, next year it is my place to be there for the next FNG. So here it is Brothers—Charlie Mike.”

CHALLENGE COIN FROM THE PAST

By Flame, Southern Route SitReps

During our morning Rider's meeting on Day 3, one of the local police officers asked if he could say a few words, while we waited on the morning rush hour to pass.

He took the mic and asked one of our Road Guards to join him on the sound trailer. Dutch has his name custom painted on the back of his helmet and last night as we were staging for our last leg after fueling – that name caught the officer's eye. He pulled up next to him and said, in his most stern law-enforcement-voice, I need to talk to you when we get to the hotel. Nobody wants to hear that. Dutch, a former LEO himself, just said yes sir.

Challenge coins are tokens of esteem that are presented among military types, and others. They are discreetly passed to the recipient through a handshake. It's a special way of saying thank you. At a bar, when a challenge coin is brought out – others bring out theirs, comparing them to see who's got what. The lowest ranking coin buys the next round.



This police officer had been stationed in DC when he was a Marine and has quite a large coin collection, including one from the White House. Sixteen years ago he went into an Outback Steakhouse in Washington DC with his son. He found a bronze coin in a booth as they were seated for dinner. The Marine did not recognize the unit on the coin, only that it was something Air Force related, with a name. For some reason he put it in his pocket and has been carrying it everyday for sixteen years. Every day. Sixteen Years.

When he and Dutch pulled into the hotel in Phoenix last night, the Police Officer asked Dutch what unit he served in – Dutch told him, and then the officer asked if he ever had a challenge coin?

Dutch, looked puzzled and asked, how'd you know that? The officer pulled the coin from his pocket and said –it had your name on it, didn't it?" Today, that coin is back in Dutch's pocket. Sometimes it just feels like God said, —today— you two need to meet."

MY FNG YEAR

Van –Charlie Mike" Robinson

There are some moments in life that have a great impact and change your life from that point forward. I experienced several of those moments on the Run for the Wall 2015.

I have only been riding motorcycles since March of 2014. My dad rode years ago, and got back into it about three years ago. He did part of the 2014 Run last year. Afterwards, he began planning to go ATW on the 2015 Run. After thinking about it, and reading a lot of the forum posts, I decided to go with him. I had no special reason to do this. I was not in the Armed Forces. I suffered no emotional distress that needed the healing that this Run was reported to bring. I did not personally know anyone on The Wall, nor do I think I have any family on The Wall. But still, as I read more about the Run, I began to realize what it was about. I read over and over that The Run is not a joy ride, a bucket list item, or a fun road trip. The more I realized the depth and scope of The Run, and its purpose, the more anxious I became about being on The Run. Little

of me did not deserve to be riding amongst the heroes that would surely be on this Run. In fact, I almost talked myself out of it several times. Something unknown kept pushing me along...

Finally, the day of departure for us to head to Ontario, CA was upon me. I met up with my dad in Tallulah, LA, and headed west. We took three days to get to CA (could have done it in 2, but we had time). We arrived to the campsite Monday afternoon. We sat around the fire with others who were already there, until nap time came. Tuesday morning, we saddled up and headed to Flo's Airport Diner (it came highly recommended, and I also highly recommend it). There I met an old fella who goes by the name Santa Ed. My dad had met him last year, and had talked highly of him on several occasions. After breakfast, we headed to the host hotel to register. We met several people, including a very commanding individual, known as The General. He even had his Driver carrying him around (for those who don't know The General and General's Driver, General is a small dog, General's Driver is the owner of said dog. General and General's Driver have gone all the way on The Run seven or eight times together.)

It was at the hotel, with hundreds of other bikers around, that one began to feel the excitement in the air. The constant "brag" of Hello's, Welcome Home's, and Thanks for Your Service, was astounding. But it wasn't until the morning the Run actually began that I realized just how awesome a trip this was to be. Of all bikes staged, across all three routes, my dad was the first bike to be staged that morning, and I was the second. He was running Platoon 1 Southern Route, I was Platoon 3, SR. I ride an Indian, and another Indian was staged right beside me. I got to pull out of the staging area with another Indian beside me. I liked that.

The first event that had a great impact on me was at our first stop. A box was presented, and in it was a short biography and photo of a person who is on The Wall that we were going to visit. We were asked to take one if we wished, and carry it with us to The Wall, and place it there under this person's name. I walked forward, and received the bio and picture of SSGT. Rudy Becerra, US Army. I read the bio, noting how he came to be one of the 58,000+ men and women on The Wall (went missing March, 1970, just over 10 years before I was born). After reading, I said a short prayer, asking for safe travels as me and SSGT. Becerra traveled across the U.S.A. to our destination. Then, I said, "Mr. Becerra, if you will agree to ride with me to DC, I'll agree to take you there." Little did I know, he was actually listening and agreed to the deal. I mention this because he reminded me of this deal twice before I made it to DC. The reason this had such an impact on me will be discussed later.

The second event that impacted me was on an outreach mission I was asked to go on in Pecos TX. We went to the home of Chief Warrant Officer Johnny Mata, US Army. He was a POW in Iraq, and killed in action on March 23, 2003. The outreach was requested and set up by his friend and fellow biker to us, Gump. Gump told us the story of CWO Mata, and heralded him as a capable and willing leader. The kind of man you wanted by your side, come hell or high water. The outreach was going to his family's house, where the family had constructed a memorial to CWO Mata. We were escorted parade-style by the sheriff's department and fire department through Pecos, to the home of CWO Mata's sister and other family. There, they had a banner flying with CWO Mata's picture on it, and a four foot high wall in their yard constructed to memorialize their fallen family member. Up until this point, I have not had any direct dealings with someone who had lost a family member to combat. Not in such a surreal, intimate way as we had with this family. Listening to them tell of how they waited, day after day, for news of their brother/son/cousin, etc. Waiting for word if he was alive or dead—until the news did come, that Johnny Mata was KIA. Seeing the pain on their faces as they recounted that period in their lives; one cannot help but be moved and somehow changed on a deep, personal level. It is something that I can't fully convey to those who have not had a similar experience. Upon our departure from such an amazing family, hugs and thank you's and well

wishes were given and received. The sheriff's deputy gave everyone small, tin sheriff's badges (toy badges with Pecos Co Sheriff on them), and declared each rider an honorary deputy of Pecos County. I've been an outlaw on a couple of occasions, and now, in Pecos Co. TX, I am the Law!! Thank you, Gump, for directing us to this family.

Now, about the reminders of the mission I was on from SSGT Becerra. The first time was in Arizona. I was having problems riding the way we were being told to ride, and the manner in which we were told. I had decided I had had enough of this and was going to drop out of the Run and head for home. When I came to that decision, I heard an almost audible voice say "Hey, what do you think you're doing?" It was loud enough to me that I looked around to see if someone actually said that. Then I heard, "They left me in Vietnam years ago, you're not leaving me here in Arizona." It was then that I realized who was speaking to me. SSGT. Becerra. I had changed my mind about the Run, but not his. How do you argue with that? Answer, you don't. I agreed with the SSGT, and rode out with my platoon. The second time was in MS. I live 15 minutes from the Harley shop we stopped at in Jackson MS. The morning we left Grand Prairie TX, I ran ahead of the group and rode all the way home that day. The past few days of little sleep (found out I'm not the tent type person I was a few years ago) and relentless physical and mental drain that one experiences on this Run had gotten to me. I had made several 600-700 mile day trips, so I figured a few days of less than 500 (mostly) would not be too difficult. Obviously, I was mistaken. In any case, when the group arrived at Monroe, LA, I was arriving home in Madison, MS. I had again changed my mind about going all the way. Again, I had not changed SSGT Becerra's mind. I remember hearing, as I slept in my comfy bed that night, Mr. Becerra saying to me "Our mission is not complete, we still have a ways to go. We are not quitting. We made a deal, and a deal we are going to keep." This was the second time SSGT Becerra helped me to finish our Mission. The morning came, and so did the rain that we had run through in TX. It was storming, but I had a mission and a promise to keep. I backed my bike out of the garage, and headed to the Harley shop in Jackson, to await the arrival of the rest of the group. As we left Jackson, it stormed all the way to Meridian, but it mattered not. I had renewed energy and was ready to take on anything the road could throw at me. I enjoyed the ride to Meridian, storms and all.

Leaving Meridian the next morning was awesome. The storms had moved on ahead of us, and we were greeted with a beautiful sunrise. An outreach mission was preparing to head out, and Dad and I were asked if we wanted to go. Of course, we said yes, and off we went. The outreach took all day, and we met up with the main pack in Chattanooga TN later that day. Finally, a couple of days later, we arrived in DC. The mission was nearing completion. We made it to Arlington Assembly of God, where we were camping out while staying in DC. The next morning was Arlington National Cemetery, and our trip to The Wall, and the declaration of Mission Complete for RFTW 2015. You can feel the solemnness as you enter ANC. Entering ANC, on my motorcycle, with 400 other brothers and sisters on steel horses, after having driven across the country for the reason we did so made it even more special. We all made our way to the Tomb of the Unknown. To see the precision of those who guarded the Tomb, the dedication in their faces and unwavering attention to detail was nothing short of breathtaking and inspiring. From the pacing back and forth of the guards, to the Changing of the Guard, everything was in perfect sync, PERFECT sync. This is truly a sight to behold.

Of all the things, people, and events that took place, the actual walking to The Wall, and the event that took place there, had the most profound impact on me. I wanted a certain person to turn my FNG pin over. I happened to find him as he made his way to The Wall. Santa Ed had turned my dad's pin over at The Wall in 2014. I thought it fitting that he should do mine in 2015. He then turned toward me, and began removing my FNG pin. He said, "You will need to get that changed (while tapping the name tag on my vest)." I said "Yes, sir. What shall I change it to?" He said "You are to be called Charlie Mike. You, and those like you,

are the future of this Run, this Wall. You are our Charlie Mike. People like me won't be around forever. It is people like you who will need to remind people out there (meaning general public) of the sacrifice people like these (those on The Wall) made. To make sure those on this Wall are never forgotten, and those who are still missing, are never forgotten. And to make sure soldiers don't have to return to the things we had to come home to back then." With that said, my pin was put back on my vest, upside down. I was no longer an FNG. We embraced in a hug, and I thanked him for his service to our country, his service to me, sharing his story with me, and offered a tearful "Welcome Home." An event such as that leaves an indelible impression, on that will not ever be forgotten.

Overall, the Run is an experience that one should participate in, if even just once. I've been asked while on The Run if I would do it again. At the time, I was unsure. After I made it to DC, walked to The Wall, shared a moment with Santa Ed and SSGT. Becerra, I decided that I would do it again, and again, and again if at all possible. I look forward to seeing some of the people I met again, to riding in the company of heroes, to hearing their stories, to laughing and crying with them, all while making our way to The Wall, and another completed mission.

Editor's note: This is a condensed version; see the full story on the Forum under "RFTW 2015 Stories."

NASHVILLE TO DC AND BACK

By Turtle

I have tried for three years to make this Run happen for me, but wasn't able to go in 2013 or 2014. This was to be my year and was it ever. On my solo ride from Nashville, TN to Cookeville, TN where I met up with the Midway Route, I was apprehensive. No, scared is more accurate. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to ride in the pack, that I'd be an outsider, that it would be another "them and me." Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

I was there to meet the group when they pulled in for dinner that Monday night and joined the locals to cheer them on. I had dinner with them and talked to a couple of people, but stayed pretty much to myself. That was my first of many mistakes. People were willing to accept me and make me feel welcome if I just allowed them to do so. It was a wonderful feeling when I discovered I was part of this family.

On Tuesday, my first day, I was honored by starting out right up front and got to see everything that went on. When we left Knoxville I was again honored by riding the Missing Man Formation. Any veteran who chooses not to do so will miss a tremendous healing opportunity. For the next 60 miles I talked with one of the ghosts who has haunted me since 1969. He was a good man who died too young and senselessly. I've always felt he died in my place. Well, he and I came to an agreement during that Missing Man ride. He forgave me for his death, told me it wasn't my fault and that I should live my life free of any guilt. I never expected anything like this and am still overwhelmed a week later. Right now my eyes are leaking and there's no handle for the faucet. I am ever so grateful for this relief after 46 years.

I thought my healing was done. Another mistake. During the four days it took to get to DC there was a seemingly endless parade of veterans and non-veterans, heroes all. They thanked, they hugged, they encouraged, they cheered, they sacrificed, they fulfilled, and they wanted nothing in return. I wish I could go back and thank every volunteer at every stop and tell them how much they contributed to my healing.

When we got to DC I was scared again. I had anticipated the walk to the wall and, even though I had been there many times, this visit was different. It was different from the moment I rode out of Nashville and

despite the family who had warmly welcomed me, my apprehension grew minute by minute throughout those four days. A warm and wonderful man walked to the wall with me. He never left my side. It felt like his only purpose in life at that moment was to help me make that emotional connection to my comrades and work through it. And he did so with great expertise. Kind, considerate, a listener. He hugged me, told me —Welcome Home,” and I felt a huge level of peace I hadn’t known for 45 years. Thank you Ho Jo. Thank you also to the wonderful lady who stopped and hugged me for as long as I needed. (You did a great job with the pictures.) I stayed pretty much to myself for the remainder of that Saturday, just enjoying a new peace and freedom. I’m sure those ghosts will return from time to time but I don’t think they will have the power they once had. I can’t erase the memories, but I can resolve the anger I’ve harbored over so many senseless deaths, a thing which continues, just in a different place.

This Run For The Wall was a huge thing for me. I thank all the hundreds of people who gave of their time to make it happen. Thank you to all of those volunteers who shepherded us across the country. Thank you to those who drove the chase vehicles, kept us hydrated, sold us merchandise, ran the raffle and many, many others. Thanks to the Platoon Leaders, the Road Guards, the Tail Gunners, especially the Nashville Tail Gunner who kept me straight. Many thanks to the Chaplain who blessed my bike. You must have done a great job since it got me safely home. Thanks to the planners, the amazing fuel crew, those who worked throughout the year to make this happen. I am eternally grateful to all of you as well as the 3d Platoon Midway Route for tolerating me. You are all amazing.

Is it May yet?

FIRST VISIT TO THE WALL

By Gary John Vallone

In 2005 I was riding with The VietNam Vets MC/Hells Angels. For reasons I will not go into, we were encouraged to make RFTW 2005 in numbers. To support our club I decided to make the run. Being a public school teacher, this was not easy but I told my school administrator that I 'was' going—and not asking.

The morning of the Run I discovered four VNVMC members in Ontario's parking lot. I am a well-traveled man (35 foreign countries) and in retrospect, this ride proved to be 'life-changing' and gratifying on many, many levels.

I served up at the DMZ with the 3rd Marine Division operating with the 12th Marines. For those of us who made the trip, we all know it has never left us. This ride opened a floodgate of tears, memories, pain, joy, laughter, pride, and a general poignant state of existence that had laid dormant over the decades. The ride and the boys have a way of bringing it out of you ... and one discovers that you're not alone.

The 10 day ride proved cathartic, curing, and a major step forward to self-realization or rather reaffirmation of who I am as a man. In many ways the United States Marine Corps and my experiences in Viet Nam were the defining moments of who I was. For better or for worse, I had carried this with me all my life. One hour into the trip no amount of 'sucking it up' could assuage the fact that I was in serious pain. Four months before I had gone down on my wide glide doing 60 mph. Walked away from the accident and did not get a checkup. Now I was experiencing the effects of the wreck. Severe pain in both wrists, back, and legs. Hurling along, in formation, I had to face the possibility of not completing the ride. Each day was a challenge minute-by-minute whether or not I was going to reach the Wall. The thought repeating itself through my head, not unlike a meditational mantra, was —just want to lay my head on the wall and cry my heart out.”

Day one ... became day two ... and the experiences along the road and within the group carried me to day ten. The events I experienced had carried the day or days. That scared seventeen-year-old running for the yellow footprints. That Marine in the field ... under those conditions whereby you 'just did it,' I was there.

My first visit to The Wall proved to be all I had anticipated. The ride with the boys certainly underscored the experience. I approached 'our' Wall in a type of tunnel vision. I got to my knees and slowly pressed my face against the cool granite ... and cried as I had never done before. At that moment a syndicated photographer with the J. Paul Getty Museum snapped a picture that appeared throughout the country as around the world. When you put my name "Gary Vallone" in the search bar it will come up. The following year I convinced my best friend in high school and the buddy I joined the Marine Corps with to make the ride. He has done this the last nine years and this year he is the president of our 2015 board of directors- Ken Hargrove. Ken asked me last night to ride assistant platoon leader with him on the midway route as it will be his last year with RFTW. I am still working out details but it is my hope to make this ride with my lifelong friend.



Editor's note: While looking for Gary's Getty image, I came across a photo on their website of another long-time RFTW rider: Chaplain "RC" Busha.

MY TOTAL EXPERIENCE

By Rondo

The following is my personal opinion/view of the Run For The Wall mission in 2015.

I joined the ride in Shawnee, OK along with my wife J (Blu J), where several riders came up to me and introduced themselves (Pelican, Topper, and Bud to name a few). My wife introduced me to a rider that was at the same base camp I was at the same period of time and that made me feel like I belonged.

I was asked to ride with The Missing Man Formation on the first leg out of Shawnee. It was an unbelievable experience and Dee helped me tremendously (for that I will be forever grateful). I talked to one of my ghosts the entire ride and I felt that it started a part of my healing. Yes, I broke down after the leg and cried like a baby, to my embarrassment. The support that appeared was something that I thought I would never experience and I felt like I was part of a family. The rest of the ride to Forrest City, AR was awesome and several riders came up to me to express their support.

From Forrest City, AR to Cookeville, TN I was torn between should I stop the ride or should I continue as events were entering my mind that I really didn't want to think about and, to be honest, I was afraid of my thoughts and possible actions. Again, riders approached and asked me if I was okay. The chaplain of our route made it a point to come up to me several times a day to check on me and I don't really know how to say "thank you" because he did not know me from Adam. Again, I had my ups and downs on the ride and, truth be known, I was flat out scared because I didn't know what to expect. I had a slight confrontation at one of the stops and I think about that until this day and I probably will until I resolve the event in my mind. If I am to be honest with myself, this is the point where I seriously thought about leaving the mission and saying the hell with it. Again, riders approached me and one rider told me not to do anything until I talked to him. In an effort not to show my ghosts or my fear of having the ghosts released, I decided to continue and keep to myself.

The ride to Asheville, NC was a good ride as I reflected on the mission, my ghosts, and yes, I was still thinking about my confrontation the day before. I thought about who I was riding for and why I was riding and those thoughts brought me back to myself and my decision to stay by myself. I kept thinking about a rider I had not met and was supposed to meet in Cookeville, but just couldn't "hook up" I thought about how I failed that gentleman by not meeting him and wondering how in the hell I would find him.

I missed the leg to Fayetteville and to Ashland due to an event that was unfortunate but was real. My wife and I rode most of the night to Ashland to "catch up" with the group and we arrived in Ashland about 0130 hrs., time enough to get a few hours of sleep and get to the staging area. It was at this point that, for one reason or another, I had mixed emotions about the ride and the mission. The ride from Ashland to Arlington, although short, was the longest ride I have ever been on because thoughts kept entering my mind and those thoughts have been with me for a long time. I could not make the walk to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for reasons which I still can't figure out but again, several riders approached me and offered their assistance. We walked to The Wall and the only thing I can recall is that my wife and Sidwalk were with me. I don't remember walking to the panel where my cousin's name is, but I do remember crying like a newborn once I reached the panel. To Sidwalk, who I had just met, I am eternally grateful because he never left my side.

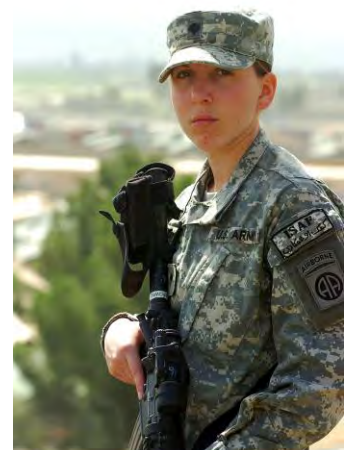
Overall, the ride and the mission were, hopefully, the start of a healing that I definitely need and will continue. The feeling of being a family "came and went" but there was a feeling of family.

To all the riders that I met I want to say "thank you" and yes, I did finally meet the gentleman that I was to meet in Cookeville, TN.

► OTHER STORIES

FIRST WOMAN IN AFGHANISTAN TO RECEIVE SILVER STAR

A 19-year-old medic from Texas is the first woman in Afghanistan and only the second woman since World War II to receive the Silver Star, the nation's third-highest medal for valor. Army After an explosion on April 25, 2007 that wounded five soldiers in her unit, Spc. Monica Lin Brown, of the 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, ran through insurgent gunfire and



used her body to shield wounded comrades as mortars fell less than 100 yards away, the military said. Medical aid rendered under fire saved all five of her comrades.

Pentagon policy prohibits women from serving in frontline combat roles — in the infantry, armor or artillery, for example. But the nature of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with no real front lines, has seen women soldiers take part in close-quarters combat more than previous conflicts. Four Army nurses in World War II were the first women to receive the Silver Star, though three nurses serving in World War I were awarded the medal posthumously last year, according to the Army's Web site.

Spc. Brown was presented with the Silver Star on March 20, 2008 at Bagram Air Base by then-Vice President Richard Cheney.

VIETNAM WAR TURNING POINT

From *Together We Served*, by Mike Christy, March 2015

Most military historians and analysts agree the 1968 Tet Offensive was the turning point in the war in Vietnam. They reason that many Americans, seeing the bitter fighting raging up and down South Vietnam on the evening news, fostered a psychological impact that further generated an increased anti-war sentiment. Although the Tet Offensive began on Jan. 31, 1968 when the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launched massive, well-coordinate surprise attacks on major cities, towns and military bases throughout South Vietnam, its planning began in early 1967.

The plan's architect was General Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam's most brilliant military mind. He also engineered the Viet Minh's decisive victory over French forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. His overall plan for the Tet Offensive was somewhat similar: to ignite a general uprising among the South Vietnamese people; shatter the South Vietnamese military forces; and topple the Saigon regime. At the same time he wanted to increase the level of pain for the Americans by inflicting more casualties on U.S. Forces. At the very least, he and the decision-makers in Hanoi hoped to position themselves more favorably in any peace negotiations they hoped would take place in the wake of the offensive. Much in the same way the April 1954 Geneva Agreements forced France to abandon its colonies on the Indochinese peninsula. The first step in Giap's plan was to draw U.S. and Allied attention away from the population centers, which would be their ultimate objectives for the 1968 Tet Offensive. This phase began in the summer months of 1967 when NVA forces engaged the Marines in a series of sharp battles in the hills surrounding Khe Sanh, a base in western Thua Thien Province, south of the DMZ near the Laotian border.

Further to the east, additional NVA forces besieged the Marine base at Con Thien just south of the Demilitarized Zone. Further south, Communist forces attacked Loc Ninh and Song Be, both in III Corps Tactical Zone, and in November they struck U.S. forces at Dak To in the Central Highlands. In purely tactical terms, these "border battles" were costly failures for the Communists and they no doubt lost some of their best troops; three enemy regiments were mauled so badly that they were unavailable for the January 1968 Tet Offensive. In the intense bloody battle of Dak To alone, Communist fatalities were estimated at 1,455 enemy killed. However, at the operational level, these battles achieved the intent of Giap's plan by diverting General Westmoreland's attention to the outlying areas and away from the urban target areas that would be struck during the Tet attacks.

In late December 1967, intelligence indicate a significant enemy built-up in the Khe Sanh area. Westmoreland, his staff and the White House decided that this build-up signified that the enemy's main

effort would take place at Khe Sanh. In anticipation of the big battle, Westmoreland began ordering large numbers of American units north leaving urban areas vulnerable to attack. On January 21, 1968, North Vietnamese artillery began large-scale shelling of Khe Sanh followed by renewed heavy fighting in the hills surrounding the Marine base. This surge of enemy attacks confirmed Westmoreland's assumption that Khe Sanh was the focal point of a new Communist offensive. But he was mistaken. It was a ruse planned by Giap. In the early morning hours of January 31, when the combined forces of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army, a total of over 84,000 troops, struck with a fury that was breathtaking in both its scope and suddenness. In attacks that ranged from the DMZ all the way south to the tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula, the NVA and VC struck 36 of South Vietnam's 44 province capitals, 5 of its 6 largest cities, 71 of 242 district capitals, and virtually every allied airfield and key military installation in the country. In one of the most spectacular attacks, 19 VC sappers conducted a daring raid on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, holding it for hours. Elsewhere in Saigon, VC units hit Tan Son Nhut Air Base, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff headquarters, and a number of other key installations across the city. Of all the battles, the longest, bloodiest and most destructive was fought over Hue, in central Vietnam. Hue was also a battle where the Communist troops massacred many South Vietnamese civilians. Many were found in mass graves, the victims of what one former Vietcong official called "revolutionary justice." Marines, Army and ARVN soldiers had to be sent in to retake the city in almost a month of bitter house-to-house fighting.

By mid-February, or two weeks into the offensive, the Pentagon was estimating that enemy casualties had risen to almost 39,000, including 33,249 killed. Allied casualties were placed at 3,470 dead, one-third of them Americans, and 12,062 wounded, almost half of them Americans. The images and news stories of the bitter fighting seemed to put the lie to the administration's claims of progress in the war and stretched the credibility gap to the breaking point. The tactical victory thus became a strategic defeat for the United States, convincing many Americans that the war was a lost cause. CBS television news anchor Walter Cronkite, who had witnessed firsthand the vicious fighting at Hue, no doubt voiced the sentiment of many Americans when he exclaimed, "What the hell is going on? - I thought we were winning the war."

But perhaps nothing captured the horror of the Tet Offensive and the war itself more than the photograph of South Vietnam's national police chief, pistol in outstretched hand, executing a suspected Vietcong guerrilla with a bullet through the head on a Saigon street as fighting raged in the city. In truth, the Tet Offensive, as it unfolded during the next weeks and months, turned out to be a disaster for the Communists, at least at the tactical level. While the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong enjoyed initial successes with their surprise attacks, allied forces quickly overcame their initial shock and responded rapidly and forcefully, driving back the enemy in most areas. The first surge of the initial phase of the offensive was over by the end of February and most of these battles were over in a few days. There were, however, a few notable exceptions - fighting continued to rage in the Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon, at Hue, and also at Khe Sanh - battles in which the allies eventually prevailed as well. In the end, allied forces used superior mobility and firepower to rout the enemy troops, who failed to hold any of their military objectives. Additionally, the South Vietnamese troops, rather than fold, as the North Vietnamese had expected, performed reasonably well. As for the much anticipated general uprising of the South Vietnamese populace, it never materialized.

During the bitter fighting that extended into the fall, the Communists sustained staggering casualties. Conservative estimates put their losses at more than 40,000 killed in action with an additional 7,000 captured. By September, when the subsequent phases of the offensive had run their course, the Viet Cong, who had borne the brunt of the heaviest fighting in the cities, had been dealt a significant blow from which they never really recovered. The major fighting for the rest of the war would be done by the North Vietnamese Army from late 1969 until the end of the war. The casualty figures during Tet for the allied forces were much lower, but they were still high. On February 18, MACV posted the highest US casualty

figure for a single week during the entire war - 543 killed and 2,500 wounded. Total U.S. killed in action figures for the period February to March, 1968, were over a thousand. These casualty figures continued to mount as subsequent phases of the offensive extended into the fall. By the end of the year, U.S. killed in action for 1968 totaled more than 15,000. Allied losses combined with the sheer scope and ferocity of the offensive and the vivid images of the savage fighting on the nightly TV news stunned the American people, who were astonished that the enemy was capable of such an effort. President Lyndon Johnson and Gen. Westmoreland had told them only two months before that the enemy was on its last legs and that the war was near an end. The intense and disturbing scenes depicted in the media told a different story - a situation which added greatly to the growing credibility gap between the people and the administration. Having accepted the administration's optimistic reports, but now confronted with a different reality, many Americans concluded that we were losing or at best locked in bloody stalemate with no end in sight.

The Tet Offensive is generally considered to have ended Feb. 25, when the last Communist units were dislodged from the ancient imperial citadel at Hue. But the struggle in Vietnam was to continue for another seven years. Eventually, a frustrated and war-weary United States withdrew and, at the end, Communist North Vietnam's army rolled over the demoralized forces of South Vietnam.

MEDAL OF HONOR AWARDED

Bruce Alan Grandstaff — Vietnam

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor Posthumously to Bruce Alan Grandstaff

Rank and organization: Platoon Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry

Place and date: Pleiku Province, Republic of Vietnam, 18 May 1967

Entered service at: Spokane, Washington 1954

Born: June 2, 1934 Spokane, Washington, USA

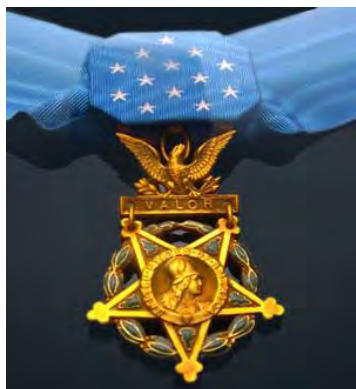


Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. P/Sgt. Grandstaff distinguished himself while leading the Weapons Platoon, Company B, on a reconnaissance mission near the Cambodian border. His platoon was advancing through intermittent enemy contact when it was struck by heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire from 3 sides. As he established a defensive perimeter, P/Sgt. Grandstaff noted that several of his men had been struck down. He raced 30 meters through the intense fire to aid them but could only save 1. Denied freedom to maneuver his unit by the intensity of the enemy onslaught, he adjusted artillery to within 45 meters of his position. When helicopter gunships arrived, he crawled outside the defensive position to mark the location with smoke grenades. Realizing his first marker was probably ineffective, he crawled to another location and threw his last smoke grenade but the smoke did not penetrate the jungle foliage. Seriously wounded in the leg during this effort he returned to his radio and, refusing medical aid, adjusted the artillery even closer as the enemy advanced on his position. Recognizing the need for additional firepower, he again braved the enemy fusillade, crawled to the edge of his position and fired several magazines of tracer ammunition through the jungle canopy. He succeeded in designating the location to the gunships but this action again drew the enemy fire and he was wounded in the other leg. Now enduring intense pain and bleeding profusely, he

crawled to within 10 meters of an enemy machine gun which had caused many casualties among his men. He destroyed the position with hand grenades but received additional wounds. Rallying his remaining men to withstand the enemy assaults, he realized his position was being overrun and asked for artillery directly on his location. He fought until mortally wounded by an enemy rocket.

Although every man in the platoon was a casualty, survivors attest to the indomitable spirit and exceptional courage of this outstanding combat leader who inspired his men to fight courageously against overwhelming odds and cost the enemy heavy casualties. P/Sgt. Grandstaff's selfless gallantry, above and beyond the call of duty, are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.



Grandstaff joined the Army from his birth city of Spokane, Washington in 1954 and by May 18, 1967 was a Sergeant First Class serving as a platoon sergeant in Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was awarded the Silver Star for actions on March 22, 1967 at Polei Duc in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. B Company, 1/8, 4th ID, was conducting a joint operation with A Co, 1/8, 4 ID, and the two companies were about 300-400 meters apart. They were in single file lines when NVA machine guns opened up on A Co, and in the opening minutes of the ambush, Company Commander Captain Bill Sands and the Artillery Forward Observer (2LT Thomas E Shannon) were killed in action and two of the platoon leaders were severely wounded. First Sergeant David McNerney pulled the defense together and prevented the company from being over-run. B Company, under Captain Bob Sholly, turned 90 degrees on line trying to link up and make the rescue ... walking (or running) toward the sound of the battle. As B Company tried to close the gap that separated the two units, they also walked into an ambush by NVA regulars. Bruce rescued a wounded man and was given credit for destroying an enemy MG in the action.

Grandstaff, aged 32 at his death, was buried at Greenwood Memorial Terrace in his hometown of Spokane, Washington Those who have the privilege of serving at or visiting Fort Lewis, Washington, have the opportunity to visit the Grandstaff Memorial Library named for this outstanding, heroic American soldier.

OLDEST LIVING WWII VET

Source: Associated Press, March 23, 2015

A 107-year-old World War II veteran has been living at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center Community Living Center since November and has pretty much seen it all. Charles P. Clark is the oldest living confirmed WWII veteran receiving health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Administration. Living WWII Veterans experienced the most widespread war in the nation's history and are among the steadily declining veteran population in the world. WWII African-American veterans fought a global war when segregation was still among the ranks in the United States.

Clark was born in August 1907 in Hamilton, Va. He is one of seven children of a sharecropper and a housemaid. At 32 years old, Clark was drafted into the U.S. Army, and on Dec. 12, 1944, he was called to serve in WWII after graduating from basic training in Fort Lee, Va. “When I left, I was on a big ship with about 5,000 men of different cultures and backgrounds,” said Clark. “There were 53 ships in the convoy and we landed in Liverpool, England, at about quarter to seven in the evening. It was a month after D-Day.” Clark’s unit was the 3238 Quartermaster Service Company, an all-Black unit of the 9th Armored Division. Clark and his unit were part of the over 2.5 million African-American men registered for the draft during WWII and among the 125,000 African-American men who served overseas during WWII. The unit delivered, supported and served food to the troops, but was not allowed to fight upfront in combat.



Samantha Nuttall, a community nurse assistant who takes care of Clark, Charles Clark, and President Obama

“My main duty was kitchen patrol,” said Clark. “I furnished food to the men and guarded food and supplies when we traveled on convoys. I remember one time we got a little too close to the front while we were serving food, and a Colonel came over and told us to get back; they didn’t allow us to serve up front.” Clark’s commanding officer and two lieutenants were white, but his first sergeant and the rest of his unit were Black. Clark said he wasn’t mistreated while serving in WWII and most people were nice to him. “It didn’t bother me too much,” said Clark. “My commander was a nice guy; he was from Baltimore, Md., and his brother was captured by the Germans before we even got there.

We were all there fighting the war.” Clark provided food service support in England, France, Germany, Belgium and Poland under the most hostile conditions. One night he thought he was going to fight because he could hear the Germans getting closer. “I was on guard duty one night and I told my buddy that we’re going to fight tonight because I felt the Germans were right on us,” said Clark. “My commander told us to get ready, but we never did.”

Clark served 22 months during WWII and returned to Purcellville, Va., after his military discharge. Once home, he worked on an apple orchard, became a neighborhood barber and drove a county school bus for 25 years. On 16 MAR, the Martinsburg VAMC director presented Clark with a certificate of appreciation and a coin for his military service and contributions during WWII. “Mr. Clark’s service and contributions during the world’s largest conflict are nothing less than extraordinary,” said Timothy Cooke, medical center director. “Just like so many other men and women, he served our country with great honor and distinction and it’s a privilege to have him at our medical center.”

Clark’s daughter-in-law, Della Clark attended the presentation. “I believe Pop’s longevity secret is that he never gets angry and he loves to graze all day long,” said Clark. “I’ve known him since 1964 and have never seen him raise his voice nor get upset.”

According to the VA's population analysis and statistics, by 2038, WWII veterans will be no longer available to share their story. Roughly 16 million Americans served during WWII and a little over a million WWII veterans are still living. "It is important that we thank and listen to the stories of all men and women, especially those who served during World War II, while they are alive, because soon we will only hear their story in our history books," said Cooke. "Preserving their history is up to all of us." Clark said he believes his service in WWII helped him to become a better man. When Clark was asked his secret to living a long life he smiled and simply said, "Eat good food and not a lot of junk food"

► VA NEWS

C-123 VETS TO GET BENEFITS

Ending years of wait, the government agreed Thursday to provide millions of dollars in disability benefits to as many as 2,100 Air Force reservists and active-duty forces exposed to Agent Orange residue on airplanes used in the Vietnam War.

The new federal rule, approved by the White House Office of Management and Budget, takes effect Friday. It adds to an Agent Orange-related caseload that already makes up 1 out of 6 disability checks issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The expected cost over 10 years is \$47.5 million, with separate health care coverage adding to the price tag.

"Opening up eligibility for this deserving group of Air Force veterans and reservists is the right thing to do," VA Secretary Bob McDonald said in a statement. He planned to announce the decision in private meetings with veterans' organizations.

The new federal rule covers an expanded group of military personnel who flew or worked on Fairchild C-123 aircraft in the U.S. from 1969 to 1986 and were believed to have been exposed to Agent Orange residue. The planes had been used to spray millions of gallons of the chemical herbicide during the Vietnam War.

An Institute of Medicine study released in January concluded that some C-123 reservists stationed in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts had been exposed to Agent Orange residues in the planes and suffered higher risks of health problems as a result.

Undertaking a review of military records, the VA said it subsequently determined that pilots, mechanics and medical personnel who served at seven other locations in the U.S. and abroad also were potentially affected — Florida, Virginia, and Arizona, as well as Taiwan, Panama, South Korea and the Philippines.

Those affected individuals under the new rule will now be eligible to receive disability aid including survivor benefits and medical care. The veterans must show they worked on a contaminated plane and later developed any of 14 medical conditions such as prostate cancer, diabetes and leukemia that the VA has determined to be connected to Agent Orange.

Affected veterans may begin to submit applications for benefits immediately, with VA processing to begin Friday. Pending C-123 claims to the VA do not need to be resubmitted.

VA TO OFFER MORE BURIAL OPTIONS

—From Vantage Point

VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is bringing burial options closer to Veterans by developing columbarium-only sites in five urban areas across the country. The project, called the Urban Initiative, will provide burial options for Veterans and their families who choose cremation close to the city core. The initiative seeks to establish columbarium-only national cemeteries in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Indianapolis and San Francisco/Oakland (Alameda).

NCA chose these cities for a variety of reasons to include surveys that indicate Veterans choose not to use national cemeteries because of travel and distance barriers. Another reason to build columbarium-only facilities is because it is virtually impossible to find sufficient sites large enough to accommodate casketed burial services in these major metropolitan cities.

VA contracted an independent study in 2008 to look at VA's burial benefits program and evaluate several aspects to ensure VA continued to meet Veterans' burial needs. A part of this study examined cremations and whether or not cremation-only cemeteries would serve the needs of Veterans.

The study found that Veterans were receptive to cremation burials at the nearest national or state Veterans cemetery. NCA's data shows that cremation burials are increasing throughout the country. In 2005, 38.6 percent of NCA burials were cremations and that number increased to 51.8 percent in 2014. These findings and the actual increase in families choosing cremation burials opened the possibility for VA to explore and implement the columbarium-only Urban Initiative.

NCA chose VA's St. Albans Community Living Center as the site for the New York Urban Initiative project. St. Albans is located in Jamaica, Queens, outside of Manhattan.

In addition to the Urban Initiative, VA developed a Rural Initiative to address barriers for Veterans who lack reasonable access to VA national, state or tribal Veterans cemeteries in rural areas. The initiative will develop three to five acre parcels located in existing public or private cemeteries managed by NCA as National Veterans Burial Grounds for populations of 25,000 or less.

VA dedicated the first burial ground, Yellowstone National Cemetery, in Laurel, Montana, May 26, 2014, and plans to open seven more burial grounds in North Dakota, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Maine and Nevada over the next six years.

The Urban and Rural Initiatives, combined with NCA's projects to extend the life of current cemeteries and build five new national cemeteries, will help to increase access and provide a burial option to 96 percent of Veterans within a 75-mile radius of their homes.

HOMELESS VETS UPDATE—COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT COORDINATORS

As its self-imposed deadline to end veteran homelessness approaches, the Department of Veterans Affairs has launched a new program to hire more than 150 employment specialists across the country. The new community employment coordinators are meant to connect —job-ready” homeless veterans with potential employers, according to VA officials speaking on a media conference call 10 JUN. The \$15 million program aims to put a coordinator at each of the VA’s more than 150 medical centers, and officials said the department has filled all but about 20 positions.

Getting veterans back to work is an important step in making them feel like they are part of society again, VA Director of Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services Carma Heitzmann said. —Community integration is obviously a critical component of ending veteran homelessness,” she said.

Kelly Matthew, the community employment coordinator for the Greater Los Angeles VA Medical Center and a former U.S. Army medic, said many of her clients need to work through problems such as gaps in employment history, criminal records and concerns about loss of benefits if they resume work. Often, Matthews says, her first visit with homeless veterans may not lead directly to employment but pave the way for a longer-term goal. —A big piece of what we’re doing is working on education,” she said. —You don’t have to be ready to go back to work today, but maybe in a few months that might be something you want to look into.” Community employment coordinators will be General Schedule 11 employees, meaning a base salary of \$51,000 to \$66,000, depending on location. A list of the current community employment coordinators, organized by state, can be found at <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/cec-contacts.asp>. If the entry has no name, it means the VA has not yet hired for that position.

► OTHER NEWS

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MYTHS

Traumatic brain injury is pervasive in both civilian and military populations. In fact, TBI in the civilian population is eight times as frequent as breast cancer, AIDS, spinal-cord injury, and multiple sclerosis combined. According to the Center for Deployment Psychology, an estimated 10–20% of all service members who served in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom sustained a TBI, with most being concussions, or mild TBIs — mild TBIs are also sometimes called concussions. As such, TBI is a “hot topic” in the military community. However, TBI and its causes, symptoms, and treatment are often misunderstood, and this misunderstanding can lead to a mistreatment of the individuals with TBI and a mishandling of the issues surrounding TBI. Several myths about TBI appear to contribute to this misunderstanding. Below, several such myths are addressed.

1. You cannot have a TBI without loss of consciousness. Historically, there has been some disagreement about the need for loss of consciousness to be able to diagnose TBI. However, with recent advances in TBI assessment and treatment, both medical and mental health communities are moving in the same direction by acknowledging that TBIs can present differently, and that one does not have to lose consciousness in order to be diagnosed with a TBI.

2. My Kevlar will prevent the worst head injuries. There have been many changes in modern warfare that are impacting today's warfighter. For example, enemy tactics have changed, exposing service members to increased blast injuries, all of which can cause TBI during combat. There have also been advances in both personal body armor and armored combat vehicles as well as emergency medical care, resulting in service members surviving blasts and attacks that would have been fatal in previous wars. However, while the body is protected, the brain remains vulnerable, resulting in increasing TBI rates among this generation of veterans. For example, a Kevlar helmet might be able to prevent objects from penetrating the brain, but it is not always useful in preventing closed head wounds, such as concussions, which brings us to the next myth.

3. If there is no bleeding, you do not have to worry about having a TBI. There are different types of traumatic brain injuries, particularly open (penetrating) and closed (blunt) head wounds. Open head wounds occur when the skull and the brain's dura mater, or outermost protective membrane, is penetrated, perhaps by a gunshot or missile. This type of head trauma will likely result in some visible, external bleeding, demonstrating outward signs of injury. Other complications of open head wounds include direct tissue damage, contusions, and axonal shearing, with secondary complications of anoxia (lack of oxygen), hemorrhaging (excessive bleeding), infection, and swelling. However, simply because one cannot see external bleeding, does not mean there is no cranial bleeding or damage. The skull does not have to be penetrated in order for there to be significant damage to the brain. In fact, most head wounds are closed or blunt traumas. With closed head wounds, there is no skull compromise. Closed head wounds can result from bruising at the impact site, bruising opposite the impact site when the brain —bounces” to the other side of the skull, microscopic lesions, damaged fiber tracts, hemorrhaging, hematoma (internal bleeding that exerts pressure in the skull), edema (swelling which exerts pressure on brain tissue), and intracranial pressure. These brain injuries may not result in any external or visible bleeding, but will still result in some very serious damage to the brain, which can have a lasting and pervasive impact.

4. If the person looks fine after a blast or impact, then they are fine. While a person could be fine after a blast, it is also possible for a person with a TBI to be walking, talking, and conscious after the blast or impact. As indicated above, the individual could have a closed head injury with no outward signs of damage. These injuries are often overlooked as the most severe and life-threatening injuries are addressed first after a blast. However, individuals with a concussion or mild TBI could still have internal damage with pervasive and lasting neurological and psychological issues. What is particularly important to consider is that symptoms of TBI are often so pervasive and subtle that the individual experiencing the symptoms may not even recognize them as symptoms of TBI. They may just feel like something is —off” or they are just different somehow after the blast.

5. Mild TBIs are not that debilitating. TBIs, including mild TBIs, can have subtle, but long-lasting and pervasive consequences for neurological and psychological functioning. This means that a TBI can have cognitive and social consequences, ranging in severity. Some effects of the TBI can be coped with easier than others, which may continue to have a very real impact on the individual's life for a long time. Physical symptoms of mild TBI include loss of consciousness, amnesia, headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, balance problems, sensitivity to light or noise, changes in vision and hearing, fatigue, and sleep difficulties. Cognitive symptoms of mild TBI include confusion, forgetting, poor concentration, changes in speech, slowed thinking and behavior, poor organization, lack of awareness, problems with information processing speed, and efficiency. Emotional and behavioral symptoms of mild TBI include personality changes, mood swings, apathy, little motivation, irritability, aggression, agitation, impulsivity, dependency, passivity, loss of sensitivity and concern, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, symptoms can interact with and exacerbate one another. For example, sleep deficits impact concentration and increase irritability.

6. If a TBI does not show up in brain imaging, then it does not exist. Neuroimaging can be helpful, particularly with moderate or severe cases of TBI. However, in the majority of mild TBI cases, neuroimaging is not able to detect structural differences. As such, structural scans, such as MRI and CT scans, often appear “normal.” This sometimes happens when slight structural differences, such as axonal shearing, are too subtle to detect in these scans. However, a TBI may still result in functional changes to the brain. That is to say, an injury does not have to make large, visible changes to the brain’s structure to result in functional changes in how the brain operates. Some neuroimaging scans are better than others at detecting differences in function of the brain. Functional imaging — such as functional MRIs and PET scans — has been demonstrated to show the effects of concussion and mild TBI, however, it appears to be most often used within a research context, and not within the clinical settings. More typically, neuropsychological testing is used in clinical practice to document the functional impact of these types of injuries and develop treatment recommendations.

7. Recovery from TBI is a straightforward, quick process. While most individuals with a concussion or mild TBI achieve full recovery within a couple of days to a month, there are individual differences in recovery rates and trajectories. These individual differences vary based on the injury itself, the co-occurrence of other physical injuries or mental health conditions (such as post-traumatic stress disorder), and how the individual responds following the injury. Recovery focuses on the symptoms of TBI that can be treated and managed using an interdisciplinary approach tailored to the individual. Recovery is more variable for individuals with a moderate or severe TBI, however, most improvement occurs within one to two years, facilitated through more intensive treatment and rehabilitation. In sum, recovery trajectories for TBI vary from individual to individual. For many, recovery can be an ongoing process characterized by setbacks and frustrations.

8. If you have a TBI, then you have PTSD, too. PTSD and TBI have a lot of overlapping symptoms, and frequently co-occur with one another. This is likely because blasts and other incidents that result in TBI are frequently traumatic in nature. It is often difficult to tease apart the two diagnoses and symptoms that are caused by physical damage due to the blast itself, psychological distress due to the trauma of the blast, or both. However, there are distinctive symptoms that can help confirm if an individual has either or both diagnoses. Symptoms that are common of both TBI and PTSD include sleep difficulties, fatigue, irritability, anger, aggression, thinking and memory difficulties, changes in personality, mood swings, hypersensitivity to noise, and withdrawal from school, work, and family activities. Symptoms distinct to PTSD include avoidance, intrusive memories, hypervigilance, physiological arousal, increase startle response, flashbacks, and nightmares. Symptoms distinct to mild TBI include headaches, dizziness, vertigo, reduced alcohol tolerance, and sensitivity to light. TBI and PTSD have similar neurobiological foundations, and their symptoms have been found to be mutually exacerbating. As such, distinguishing one from the other and providing an accurate diagnosis and helpful treatment plan is sometimes challenging, however, the two diagnoses are, in fact, distinct from one another.

9. Neuropsychological testing will not be that helpful for someone who has a TBI. Neuropsychological testing can provide individuals with information about changes in their cognitive functioning, their strengths and weakness, and information about strategies to help offset their weaknesses. It can also provide extremely valuable information to assist recovery from a TBI, including measuring intelligence, attention, memory, language, processing speed, visuospatial skills, and executive functioning. However, it is usually best to wait to complete a full, comprehensive assessment until recovery has tapered off and improvements are stabilized to get the most accurate picture of post-injury functioning.

10. Individuals with TBI can no longer work, or would at least require lots of expensive accommodations. Individuals with TBI can still work and be effective employees in a wide variety of different jobs, including military jobs. Work accommodations are often in the best interest of both the employee and employer. Accommodations are often simple to emplace, and do not cost much time or effort on the part of the employer. For example, an employee might dim the lights, use larger fonts, remove distractions, take regular breaks, implement organizational skills, or take notes in meetings, among many other potentially helpful changes. In fact, many of these accommodations are tools utilized by many employees without a TBI to optimize their work performance in the same way.

In conclusion, there are many misconceptions about traumatic brain injury that contribute to misunderstanding of both the injury and individuals with the injury. Becoming aware of these myths may help friends and employers to better understand what is going on for someone who experienced a TBI. [Source: <http://taskandpurpose.com> | Pamela Holtz | June 09, 2015 ++]

MORE STOLEN VALOR BILLS

Source: The Times-Union, Michigan

In March 2015, Massachusetts State Representative John Velis introduced a new Stolen Valor bill in that state. Velis' bill would make it a criminal offense subject to up to 2½ years in prison to wear a military uniform, awards or decorations that one has not earned, or to use fake military identification for purposes of financial gain. If passed, it would be the strongest in the nation, he says.

New Jersey is moving forward on its own bill. The Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee voted 4-0 to approve the "New Jersey Stolen Valor Act" (S2704) which would make it a third degree crime impersonate a veteran or member of the military by wearing a uniform, medal or insignia "for the purpose of obtaining money, property or another benefit." The bill also would levy a \$1,000 fine on anyone who falsely claims to be the recipient of a decoration or medal "with intent to deceive for the purpose of obtaining money, property, or other tangible benefit."

There are more Stolen Valor cases than we can imagine. The Florida Times Union posted a story in January about a "poser"—a 21-year veteran who shamelessly embellished his service records.

Though the retired master sergeant never stepped foot on Vietnamese soil, he had a solid service record of which he could be proud. So why Lavoie frequently and publicly sported a slew of medals he never earned — including the Silver Star, Bronze Star with Valor and Purple Heart — is anyone's guess.

When Bob Adelhelm first noticed Lavoie, the first thing that struck him was the stack of awards and badges bristling on the retired Marine's chest. The two were at a ceremony, and Lavoie was there representing the American Legion.

Adelhelm didn't think much of it. He knew, from his own 23-year career as a Marine officer, that many Marines returned from Vietnam highly decorated and all the ribbons and badges were correctly placed — almost. A few weeks later, the two met again. "When I got closer to him, I thought I saw a 'V' on his Silver Star," Adelhelm said. "So I snapped a picture."

The Silver Star, as the retired lieutenant colonel knew, is already an award for valor. A "V" device, signifying a particular act of valor on lesser awards like the Bronze Star, isn't attached to a Silver Star.

For months, Adelhelm festered and stewed over what he saw. He finally told Lavoie —“You know you don’t wear a —V” device on a Silver Star.” Lavoie told him that was the way it was awarded to him. But when Lavoie walked away, he saw him pull the —V” off the award.

Adelhelm notified Lavoie’s American Legion Post 88 about their suspicions. As is standard practice, the post denied the men’s request to provide Lavoie’s military records and didn’t investigate the matter any further. The commander said he doesn’t question a member’s honor if there is only suspicion involved and no evidence.

Lavoie was a former commander of the post and often represented it at ceremonies across the city.

Adelhelm decided to pursue the matter on his own. He obtained Lavoie’s records from the U.S. National Personnel Records Center. The records lay out a career that spanned 1972 to 1993. Lavoie’s time was spent mostly with maintenance battalions. His highest awards were three Navy commendation medals.

Contacted for comment by The Times-Union, Lavoie hung up his phone.

After receiving the records, the American Legion instituted a full investigation.

As for Adelhelm, he said he takes no pleasure finding out Lavoie’s medals were phonies.

—“We have to police our own,” he said. —“If we don’t, then we are undeserving of the admiration of our country.

—“We have to set the example and let all see that we can police our own and, equally important, we expect strict adherence to values like honor, integrity and courage.”

MOBILE APP FOR VETERANS

Introducing the MobileMi\$\$ion app for veterans

Brought to you by the Better Business Bureau Institute and made possible by a grant from American Express, MobileMi\$\$ion is a new mobile app designed specifically for transitioning servicemembers, veterans, and their families to help them navigate their finances during the transition from active duty to civilian life. This app gives you access to learning activities and a financial counselor via any connected Android device.* The mobile experience allows you to practice new financial behaviors on the go and the virtual connection to mentors and veteran peers provides community support no matter where you are.

This program can help you meet your financial goals—from saving to paying down debt, improving your credit, being prepared for emergencies, planning for the future, and accessing government benefits. All mentors provided through the app are trained military spouses actively earning an Accredited Financial Counselor certification from the Association for Financial Counseling, Planning and Education. They understand your situation because they have lived it.

Educational —missions” will challenge you to learn new financial behaviors, provide a forum to share goals and ask questions, and give you access to the experience of other veterans who have faced similar

challenges. All personal information is protected as our data is encrypted and secure. Only you control how much you share.

MobileMi\$\$ion is currently running a pilot with limited spaces** to test the first version of the app and we want you to join!

Who can participate in the pilot?

- Active duty servicemembers from any branch planning to transition in the coming year
- Currently transitioning servicemembers from any branch
- Veterans from any branch who have transitioned in the past five years

What else do I need to know?

- You must have an Android smartphone or tablet with a data plan or access to wifi
- You must be willing to share feedback about your experience at the end of the pilot period via a confidential online or phone survey for the purposes of improving the app

Secure your spot by filling out the application now.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1YXJdruFu6tkZF6h_IpzzdudhWU7v9OoiLV3OF3N5gFM/viewform#start=invite

*Data rates may apply.

**The offer to participate in this pilot is limited to the first 500 applicants who qualify; not all applicants will be eligible for participation in the pilot. There is no purchase necessary to participate in this program.

► PENDING LEGISLATION

To follow these bills, go to

<http://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%22legislation%22%7D#>

HOUSE BILLS:

H.R.294 : **Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act**. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into contracts and agreements for the transfer of veterans to non-Department medical foster homes for certain veterans who are unable to live independently.

Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 1/13/2015)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/13/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

H.R.474 : **Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015**. This bill passed in the House on May 18, 2015 and goes to the Senate next for consideration. The bill will amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for a five-year extension to the homeless veterans reintegration programs and to provide clarification regarding eligibility for services under such programs. (Those programs provide job training, counseling, and placement services to homeless veterans to expedite their reintegration into the labor force.) The bill makes eligible for participation in those programs: (1) homeless veterans, (2) veterans who are participating in the VA supported housing program for which rental assistance is provided under the United States Housing Act of 1937, and (3) veterans who are transitioning from being incarcerated.

Sponsor: Rep Wenstrup, Brad R. [OH-2] (introduced 1/22/2015)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

H.R.1170 : **Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act**. A bill to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001 and title 38, United States Code, to require the provision of chiropractic care and services to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and to expand access to such care and services.

Sponsor: Rep Grayson, Alan [FL-9] (introduced 2/27/2015)

Committees: House Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 2/27/2015 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

SENATE BILLS:

S.223 : **Homeless Vet VA Pilot Program**. A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program on awarding grants for provision of furniture, household items, and other assistance to homeless veterans to facilitate their transition into permanent housing, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Sen Boxer, Barbara [CA] (introduced 1/21/2015)

Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/21/2015 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

► BRINGING THEM HOME

REMAINS OF THREE RETURNED FROM VIETNAM

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 11 JUN that the remains of three servicemen, missing from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be buried with full military honors.

Army Chief Warrant Officers 3 **James L. Phipps** of Mattoon, Illinois, and **Rainer S. Ramos** of Wiesbaden, Germany, were the pilots of a UH-1C Iroquois (Huey) helicopter gunship that was shot down in Quang Tin Province, South Vietnam. Also aboard the aircraft were door gunners **Staff Sgt. Warren Newton** of Eugene, Oregon, and **Spc. Fred J. Secrist** of Eugene, Oregon. The crew was assigned to Troop

C, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, 14th Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade. The crew was buried as a group on June 17 at Arlington.

On Jan. 9, 1968, the crew was on a mission over Quang Tin Province (now part of Quang Nam Province), South Vietnam, when the Huey was struck by ground fire, causing it to crash and explode in a North Vietnamese bunker and trench system. The crew was declared missing in action. On Jan. 20, 1968, a U.S. led team recovered the body of Secrist and he was returned to his family for burial. Between August 1993 and August 2011, U.S.-Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams surveyed and/or excavated the site three times. From Aug. 6-21, 2011, a joint US-S.R.V. team recovered human remains and personal effects. In the identification of the recovered remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) analyzed circumstantial evidence and used forensic identification tools, to include mitochondrial DNA, which matched Secrist's sister and brother. Remains not individually identified represent the entire crew and were buried as a group.

WORLD WAR II

DPAA announced 11 JUN that a U.S. serviceman, missing from World War II, was identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Army Air Force **2nd Lt. Jimmie D. Collins III**, 22, of Sylacauga, Ala., was buried June 29 in his hometown. On June 21, 1944, Collins was the co-pilot of a B-24H Liberator that crashed near Hoofddorp, Netherlands, while returning from a bombing mission against German forces near Berlin. Also aboard the aircraft were nine other servicemen. During the crash one of the servicemen was able to parachute from the Liberator, was captured by German forces, and later returned to U.S. custody. All other servicemen, including Collins, were reported as killed in action.

After the war, analysis of captured German records revealed the remains of seven American servicemen were recovered from the crash site and buried in a cemetery in Hoofddorp. The U.S. Army Graves Registration Services (AGRS) personnel exhumed the remains, and identified the seven servicemen, leaving only Collins and the one other serviceman unaccounted for. Between February 1946 and July 1947, the AGRS conducted investigations in the vicinity of the crash. No additional remains were recovered at that time. On Sept. 20, 1950, an Army Graves Registration Command (AGRC) review board declared the remains to be non-recoverable.

In September 1992, a brother of one of the crew visited the Netherlands to learn more about the crash, where he spoke to a third party researcher who believed remains of the missing crew men may still be present at the site. A grave registration team from the United States Army Memorial Affairs Activity-Europe visited the possible crash site near a village in Vijfhuizen, Haarlemmermeer, Netherlands, and located large metal objects underground using metal detectors. Due to policy within the Netherlands, a Royal Netherlands Air Force Recovery Service (RNLAf) salvage team carried out the excavation of the site in April 1997 with oversight from the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. They were able to recover remains and personal effects. To identify Collins' remains, scientists from the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools including mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which matched his aunt and uncle.

36 MARINES FROM TARAWA BATTLE RECOVERED

The remains of 36 U.S. Marine heroes of a bloody World War II battle were found on an isolated island in the Pacific more than 70 years after they died, various news outlets report.

Mark Noah, director of Florida-based non-profit History Flight Inc., reportedly told Radio New Zealand that a four-month excavation on Betio Island in Kiribati resulted in the discovery of the warriors' bodies.

The U.S. Marines were killed during the fierce Battle of Tarawa in November 1943, said Noah, whose organization worked in coordination with the U.S. Defense Department on the recovery efforts.

“(They) had an expectation that if they were to die in the line of duty defending their country they would be brought home... that was a promise made 70 years ago that we felt should be kept,” Noah reportedly said on Tuesday.

He added that the remains, although they have not been officially identified, almost indubitably include those of 1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, America's highest military accolade, for conspicuous gallantry.

“Bonnyman's citation says he led a series of assaults when Marines stormed the island, finally falling when he attacked a bombproof installation that was hampering the advance,” notes Agence France-Presse (AFP).

“Overall, more than 1,000 Americans died at Tarawa, while the entire Japanese garrison of 4,800 was wiped out,” it adds.

Bonnyman was presumed buried at sea.

“The archaeological team found the mass grave using magnetometry, radar scans, cadaver dogs, and interviews with surviving veterans of the battle,” notes The Associated Press (AP).

Several hundred U.S. troops were buried in make-shift, unrecorded graves after the Tarawa battle where they still lay, according to Noah.

The late Lt. Bonnyman's tale begins on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Sandy Bonnyman was a miner near Santa Fe, N.M. He had already served a stint in the Army and was now 31 years old. But when he heard the news, he reenlisted, this time in the Marines.

By the time he landed on Tarawa Atoll, a string of strategically important islands in the middle of the Pacific, Bonnyman was the executive officer of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines' Shore Party. For three days in late November 1943, the Marines tried to take Betio from the Japanese. Bonnyman led his party across the island, destroying enemy outposts as he went.

Clay Bonnyman Evans was present when the lieutenant's body was uncovered, according to The Post. Evans, a former Daily Camera reporter and editor, is the war hero's grandson.

“Bonnyman's remains will be flown to a military lab in Hawaii in July, and returned to the family by the end of August,” reports Daily Camera. “He will then be buried at the family plot in Knoxville in late

September, in one of the empty plots underneath that large marble monument bearing those false words about his final resting place.”

The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,852), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1).

ABOUT DPAA

By Judy Lacey

The DPAA (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) is the agency replacing the previous JPAC (Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command) organization that was dissolved amid charges of inefficiency.

Michael Lumpkin, undersecretary to Chuck Hagel, Secretary of Defense, recently said, —The agency will also move toward a more productive scientific approach of identifying remains, led by testing and comparing samples of DNA.”

"We can clearly do better as a department. We have found that we are structurally flawed to do the mission as it sits today," Lumpkin said. "We need to break away from the way of traditionally doing business and fully embrace progressive science and streamline processes and practices."

Shortly after the fall of Saigon in 1975, DoD established a Hanoi-based POW/MIA office that became the forerunner of the current organization.

Gary Shaw, regional coordination branch chief at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, recently said, "That office in Hanoi predated the presence of the U.S. Embassy, which didn't happen until later in the Clinton administration. By getting that footprint, we were able to establish a relationship with the various host nations and have some confidence-building measures where we could learn a little bit more about them and they could learn a little bit more about us."

Shaw also praised as a recent success the current U.S. relationship with Burma, a relationship he said is building "step by step." The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has been in Burma for the last three fiscal years to conduct investigations on additional U.S. POW/MIA service members, Shaw explained. "When we resumed diplomatic relations with Burma, our mission is one of the first we could do."

Until about 10 years ago, recovery missions were one of the few actions the United States conducted with North Korea, Shaw said. Forensic and excavation teams estimate that about 5,500 Americans' remains have yet to be recovered in an area about 60 miles north of Pyongyang near the Chosin-Jangjin reservoir.

Studies indicate that about 8,000 U.S. soldiers and Marines went missing during the Korean War from 1950-1953. "There's a good example of a place where we don't have very good relations at all, but what little we can do will go back to this mission," Shaw said. "When we resume any kind of relations with North Korea, I'm confident that our mission will be the one that gets our foot in the door." Similarly, Shaw said the agency's mission continues unimpeded in China, even if the relationship gets somewhat tense on occasion.

► SICK CALL

We wish our following RFTW family members good recoveries. Our prayers are with you.

Harry —Mistang” Parmer

Harry was taken to a medical center in San Diego after suffering a very rare spinal stroke that left him partially paralyzed. He is in good spirits and was transferred to the La Jolla VA Spinal Cord Injury center.

Roland —Pegleg” Marchand

Pegleg had colon cancer surgery in May. No spread of cancer and lymph nodes and liver are clean. He is cancer-free.

David —Pegger” McDonald

Pegger was hit by a car and a semi as he neared Ontario for the start of RFTW. He’s had four surgeries and will also need skin grafts. He may be released in another month or more. Despite his serious injuries, he’s as positive as ever and in good spirits.

Bill —Monsoon” Mimiaga

Monsoon had a serious fall at the school where he teaches. He tore a hamstring, but with physical therapy he’s improving and is out and about. Monsoon is beloved by his students, so his students sorely missed him.

Penny Mescher

Please keep Penny in your prayers as she underwent surgery recently. We wish her a good recovery.

► CLOSING THOUGHTS

“Here in America we are descended in blood and in spirit from revolutionists and rebels - men and women who dare to dissent from accepted doctrine. As their heirs, may we never confuse honest dissent with disloyal subversion.” —Dwight D. Eisenhower

You Are Not Forgotten

