

BIG THUNDER RUN

October 4th 2009



8th Annual



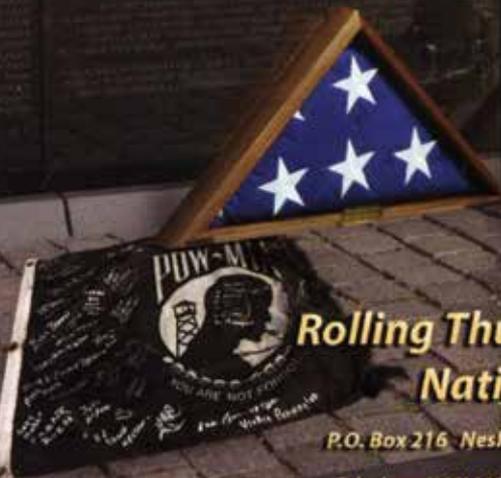
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Gold Star Pin



Just a tiny gold pin. A token from this country in return for the life given for our freedom. This pin is sent to the widow, parents and other next of kin of a military person killed in action or serving during a military conflict.

It began with WWI, from April 6, 1917 to March 3, 1921; WWII, from September 8, 1939 to July 25, 1947; Korea, from June 27, 1950 to July 27, 1954; military conflict from June 30, 1958 'till the Vietnam War July 1, 1958 to the present.

What is a Gold Star Mother?

What is a Gold Star Mother?

- A Mother whose grieving heart reaches out to comfort another.
- A Mother who feels compassion when casualty lists are read.
- A Mother who suffered the heartache of hearing her son was dead.
- A Mother whose dreams were shattered on a battlefield afar.
- A Mother who has the privilege of wearing the little gold star.
- A Mother who walks so bravely to a fallen hero's grave.
- A Mother who loves the nation her son gave his life to save.
- This is a Gold Star Mother —
- A Mother with courage and pride, whose son went forth to battle and in line of duty died.

Author unknown



ROLLING THUNDER'S SECRET WEAPON

—Laura Bzezinski

Ted Shpak has been working on the "Hill" for over 25 years but you can't call him a lobbyist. Lobbyists are paid to work the Hill; but Ted Shpak has devoted his own time and money to work on issues close to his heart.

Ted has been involved with Veterans issues since the advent of Rolling Thunder and worked with John Holland (now retired but often touted as "Ole' Man Rolling Thunder") in writing the "Missing Service Person's Act". In fact, Ted can boast to having written and passed seven Bills all related to the POW/MIA and veterans issues, Agent Orange and correct funding for the troops.

For years, this rugged Army Vet pounded the pavement in a three-piece suit, but after the Senate gutted the "Missing Service Person's Act" in the 1990's, in an act of protest Ted decided to don his biker regalia and work the Hill in his jeans and Rolling Thunder vest. Quite to his surprise, his new look gave him added respect and exposure and he still wears it today.



Ted Shpak, Legislative Director for Rolling Thunder

"It is the Soldier"

***It is the soldier,
not the reporter
Who has given us
freedom of press.***

***It is the soldier,
not the poet
Who has given us
freedom of speech.***

***It is the soldier,
not the campus organizer
Who has given us the
freedom to demonstrate.***

***It is the soldier,
not the lawyer
Who has given us
the right to a fair trial.***



***It is the soldier
Who salutes the flag,
Who serves under the flag,
Whose coffin is draped in the flag,
Who allows the protester to burn
the flag.***

- Charles M. Province



CAPs IN VIETNAM

One of the most imaginative strategies to come out of the Vietnam War was the U.S. Marine pacification effort known as the Combined Action Platoon (CAP).

by Al Hemingway

During the Vietnam War, in addition to their traditional combat role, the Marines were heavily involved in pacification through the Combined Action Platoon (CAP).

The plan was simple but effective: the Leathernecks would place a squad of men in certain villages to teach the local militia, known as the Popular Forces (PFs) or Regional Forces (RFs), things such as tactics, small arms and patrolling. In return, the PFs and RFs would provide the Marines with intelligence on the whereabouts of the Viet Cong (VC).

Lt. Gen. Victor H. "Brute" Krulak, commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, and Maj. Gen. Lewis W.

Walt, commanding general, III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF), were enthusiastic about the idea and gave it their wholehearted support.

The Marines were not keen on sending battalions into the jungles and mountains searching for an elusive enemy. The Communists needed the food, intelligence and recruits that the villages provided. Even Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of the North Vietnamese Army, wrote: "Without the people we have no information... They hide us, protect us, feed us and tend our wounded."

CAP Organization

CAP began modestly. In August 1965, the first platoon, from the 3rd Bn., 4th Marines, was established in the Hue/Phu Bai area and led by 1st Lt. Paul Ek. That summer, four platoons were organized into a company. By 1966, there were 57 platoons.

At the program's peak in 1970, there were four Combined Action Groups (CAG): 1st CAG near Chu Lai; 2nd CAG situated at Da Nang; 3rd CAG at Hue/Phu Bai; and 4th CAG located in Quang Tri.

The largest was 2nd CAG, which patrolled the Da Nang area, while the 4th CAG, covering the sparsely populated northern I Corps region, was the smallest.

In the beginning, CAP platoons were designated Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, and so on, depending on what CAG a Marine was in. Later, that was changed. For example, CAP 1-1-7 stood for 1st CAG, 1st Company, 1st Platoon; 4-2-5 was 4th CAG, 2nd Company, 5th Platoon, etc.

In 1970, the Combined Action Force (CAF) was set up to consolidate all four CAGs. Headquartered in Da Nang, CAF screened all incoming applicants. Screening officers looked for a certain kind of Marine who could work well with the Vietnamese.

Lt. Col. William R. Corson, USMC (Ret.), CAP's first director, remarked: "They (Marines) had to know what it meant to take another human being's life, and how to shoot, move, and communicate. I (wasn't) looking for kill-crazy types...or bleeding heart liberals either. I needed Marines that (could) empathize with the Vietnamese people. And they had to have open minds to a new experience."

Real Life Training

Prospective CAP Marines attended a two-week school in Da Nang. Daily classes included: small unit tactics, first aid, map and compass reading, calling in air and artillery missions, Vietnamese language,

continued on page 36

Above: Members of Combined Action Platoon 2-3-7 near Phong Nhu, Vietnam, in November 1970. Art Falco is the third Marine from the left. Photo courtesy of Art Falco

culture, VC organization and weapons. Art Falco, who served in CAP platoons 1-2-1 and 2-3-7, recalled: "At CAP School graduation they played the theme song from the *Magnificent Seven*, which seemed like an appropriate song because, just like the movie, we had to teach the villagers to defend themselves..."

In reality, two weeks was not enough training to prepare CAP Marines for the rigors of village life. They clearly understood the wisdom of a CAF fact sheet: "(the) classroom was in the bush where the VC provided the necessary training aids."

During daylight hours, some CAP Marines engaged in civic action projects such as repairing roads, paddy dikes and schools. Lance Cpl. Skip Freeman remembered: "While I was assigned to CAP 1-1-7, we got some tools for the farmers and dug two concrete water wells. It was a very poor village and they had terrible drinking water. They really appreciated the well."

Yet combat operations were the primary concern. Col. Louis Metzger, CAF commander, said that "to survive in many CAP TAORs (Tactical Area of Responsibility), CAPs had to patrol aggressively."

By the end of 1969, CAP patrols numbered 145,000, with 73% of them at night. CAP Marines initiated two-thirds of the firefights, which meant they were surprising the enemy.

Marine-PF Relations

Generally, CAP Marines and their Vietnamese counterparts got along, but occasionally difficulties arose. Many PFs were reluctant to attend day classes; others had to be coerced into patrolling, especially outside the boundaries of their own village.

PFs, however, were under constant pressure from village chiefs and the populace to protect them from the ever-present VC threat.

Tom Krusewski, with 3rd CAG, related how one PF saved his life the night his village was overrun by a major NVA regiment just prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive.

"We had very, very good PFs," Krusewski said. "This one guy had a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), and it kept us alive. I can still hear that rifle chattering."

Gary Kovach, a Navy corpsman with 1st CAG, recalls a similar incident the night his village was nearly overrun: "The Vietnamese (PFs) had taken the worst of it; the VC had to break through their lines before hitting ours. One young Vietnamese boy got a round through his gut that drew the intestines up over his chest like a bouquet of flowers.

"Another lost his arm to a grenade... Still another had been hit in the face but was conscious enough to ask about the condition of the Marines. I (was) amazed by the resilience and fortitude of these people."

Other CAP platoons were not so fortunate. Rocky Jay used a slingshot with shotgun pellets to keep his PFs from falling asleep on an ambush patrol. Navy corpsman Jack Broz of 1st CAG had to keep a watchful eye on his medical supplies or he would find some items missing.

At times, the results could be tragic. Lance Cpl. Paul Hernandez, USMC (Ret.), of 2nd CAG was shot in the back when one of the PFs fell asleep. "The VC shot me three times in the back...I was immediately paralyzed," he said.

Despite the severity of his wound, Hernandez has gotten involved with civic affairs in his hometown of Brady, Texas, and was appointed to the Texas State Council by former Gov. Ann Richards.

He was also elected commander of the first VFW Post in Brady, Texas, Burton Kyle McCord Post 3234, when it was established in 1989. (It was named in honor of McCord, the first Vietnam vet to die from Brady.)

Perhaps the biggest fear was PF cooperation with the enemy. While accompanying a patrol from the 4th CAG, Maj. Gene Duncan, USMC (Ret.), stated: "(We) had reliable information telling (us) the VC had positions in a particular location...the PF platoon sergeant got increasingly nervous the closer we got. (We) stayed on our original course. The PFs...finally broke off...and returned to the day site. This told me that the PFs did have an accommodation with the enemy."

In the End

As U.S. troops departed South Vietnam, CAP was slowly phased out.

In July 1970, 4th CAG was deactivated. Two months later, on Sept. 7, 3rd CAG was dissolved. The following week 1st CAG followed suit. The 2nd CAG continued operations in the Da Nang area until May 17, 1971, when, it too, ceased to exist. The Combined Action Program was now history.

Could CAP have made a greater impact if it were allowed to "bear full fruit," as one Marine officer put it? Some CAP Marines think so. "I really believed in the CAPs," said Warren V. Smith, an interrogator and interpreter with 4th CAG. "(It was) more beneficial than sending battalions and regiments all over the place looking for the enemy."

In the end, some 2,000 enemy soldiers were killed, 425 suspected VC agents captured and 932 weapons confiscated.

But the price was high. Rocky Jay, a 4th CAG Marine, revealed that "out of the 5,000 Marines in CAG, we took 30% fatalities, had an 80-85% chance of getting wounded once and a 50% chance of getting wounded twice." Despite the risks, 60% of the Marines volunteered to extend their time in Vietnam to stay with the CAP.

For some it was an easy decision. "A CAP Marine participated in a part of the war where he got to know the people," said VFW Adjutant General Larry W. Rivers. Operating around Hue in 1969-70, Rivers was commander of Combined Action Company (CACO 3-5).

"We were really helping villagers. I'm convinced we left a positive legacy because of the one-on-one relationships established with the Vietnamese people."

In Vietnam, the awesome responsibility entrusted to the CAP Marines can never be overstated. These young men were tasked with winning the confidence of a foreign people who distrusted and, at times, hated them. The Combined Action Platoon program was certainly the most imaginative strategy to emerge from the Vietnam War. ☐

Al Hemingway is the author of *Our War Was Different: U.S. Marine Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam* (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1994). Hemingway served with the 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Div. in Vietnam during 1969. He is a member of VFW Post 7790 in Waterbury, Conn.

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POW★MIA



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History of the National League of POW/MIA Families' POW/MIA Flag

In 1971, Mrs. Michael Hoff, an MIA wife and member of the National League of Families, recognized the need for a symbol of our POW/MIAs. Prompted by an article in the Jacksonville, Florida Times-Union, Mrs. Hoff contacted Norman Rivkees, Vice President of Annin & Company which had made a banner for the newest member of the United Nations, the People's Republic of China, as a part of their policy to provide flags to all United Nations members states. Mrs. Hoff found Mr. Rivkees very sympathetic to the POW/MIA issue, and he, along with Annin's advertising agency, designed a flag to represent our missing men. Following League approval, the flags were manufactured for distribution.

On March 9, 1989, an official League flag, which flew over the White House on 1988 National POW/MIA Recognition Day, was installed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda as a result of legislation passed overwhelmingly during the 100th Congress. In a demonstration of bipartisan Congressional support, the leadership of both Houses hosted the installation ceremony.

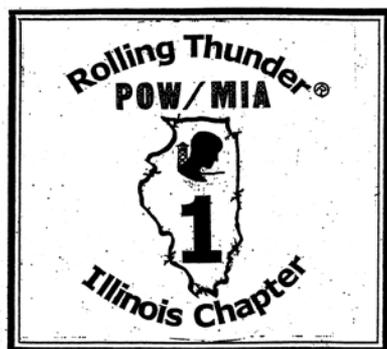
The League's POW/MIA flag is the only flag ever displayed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda where it will stand as a powerful symbol of national commitment to America's POW/MIAs until the fullest possible accounting has been achieved for U.S. personnel still missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

On August 10, 1990, the 101st Congress passed U.S. Public Law 101-355, which recognized the League's POW/MIA flag and designated it *"as the symbol of our Nation's concern and commitment to resolving as fully as possible the fates of Americans still prisoner, missing and unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, thus ending the uncertainty for their families and the Nation"*.

The importance of the League's POW/MIA flag lies in its continued visibility, a constant reminder of the plight of America's POW/MIAs. Other than "Old Glory", the League's POW/MIA flag is the only flag ever to fly over the White House, having been displayed in this place of honor on National POW/MIA Recognition Day since 1982. With passage of Section 1082 of the 1998 Defense Authorization Act during the first term of the 105th Congress, the League's POW/MIA flag will fly each year on Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day, National POW/MIA Recognition Day and Veterans Day on the grounds or in the public lobbies of major military installations as designated by the Secretary of the Defense, all Federal national cemeteries, the national Korean War Veterans Memorial, the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the White House, the United States Postal Service post offices and at the official offices of the Secretaries of State, Defense and Veteran's Affairs, and Director of the Selective Service System.

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For more information visit www.pow-miafamilies.org



Rolling Thunder

by Marsha Burks Megehee

**A thundering vigil of truth, trust and honor
Of brothers chained, forgotten and denied
Thank God the sounds of Rolling Thunder
Grow louder than the presidents who lied.**

**Forgotten heroes, made to be remembered
By a nation that sacrificed their souls to war
This roaring fire of freedom, from just an ember
A brother's promise - brought from near and far.**

**A parade of truth, Memorial Bridge is sighted
Old Glory's promise flying in the wind
Tattooed Angels, CEO's, GI Joes united
Cry "Freedom! We have not forgotten them!"**

**The Run to The Wall where many secrets slumber
Names, roses, gifts and loved one's tears
On Capitol Hill they're only just a number
Lost names no politician ever hears.**

**They thunder past the bridge at Arlington
Phantom soldier coffins, row on row
False tombs holding paper fathers, sons
While secret sins of betrayal rest below.**

**Past the White House, flag of POW/MIAs
Somber Black, head bowed, a prisoner of the past
Rolling Thunder's promise will never go away
Until their missing brothers - come home at last. . .**

youngvets in focus

Piloting is a Family Affair

The three Smith sisters have all had a turn flying the Afghan skies.

By Janie Blankenship

When Lacey Smith was just a teenager, her oldest sister, Kelly, told her to take the controls of the plane in which they were flying.

"I said, 'No, it's too windy,'" Lacey told ABC News. "And of course you know the big sister says all. And it was, 'Do it or no one's going to be on the controls.'"

Today, Lacey serves in the Army as a chief warrant officer flying a Black Hawk helicopter in Afghanistan. Serving with A Co., 7th Bn., 159th Aviation Brigade, Lacey is the third Smith sister to fly over Afghanistan.

Hailing from White Salmon, Wash., the Smith sisters—Kelly, Amber and Lacey—come by their love of the skies naturally. Their grandfather was a pilot with the Army Air Corps during WWII and a commercial pilot following his service. Their father and an uncle also were commercial pilots and their grandmother and mother were both flight attendants.

"Just growing up around it so much, I think we all loved airplanes," Kelly told an Air Force reporter. "We loved being around airplanes, going up in airplanes and hearing about them all the time."

All the same, when Kelly went to college at the University of Arizona, she studied English and journalism, while Amber became a cheerleader at the University of Washington. Neither had any intention of flying, and Lacey was still in high school.

But during her freshman year, Kelly noticed the C-130 transports flying into Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.

"It looked interesting and at that point I decided I didn't want a desk job," she said. "So I started flying my dad's little Cessna 150 when I was home the summer after my freshman year. After I soloed, I decided this is really fun."

She transferred to Embry-Riddle Aero-



Army Chief Warrant Officer Amber Smith and Air Force Capt. Kelly Smith celebrate at a graduation for their younger sister, Army Chief Warrant Officer Lacey Smith. All three Smith sisters have served in Afghanistan.

nautical University and later became a flight instructor.

It took Amber two years of college before she decided she wanted to fly.

"It came to the point where I had to declare my major, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do," she said. "Flying had always interested me so I went and got my private pilot's license in a fixed wing."

Serving in Afghanistan

It was Kelly who first enlisted in the military right after the Sept. 11, 2001, Islamic terrorist attacks. She joined the California Air National Guard and became a C-130 pilot for the 146th Airlift Wing based at Channel Islands, Calif.

Amber followed suit in 2003 enlisting in the Army, where she would fly the OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopter. She is based at Ft. Campbell, Ky., with the 2nd Sqdn., 17th Cav Regt., 101st Combat Aviation Brigade. In late 2007, her unit deployed to Forward Operating Base

Jalalabad in Afghanistan.

Kelly's unit also deployed to Afghanistan not long after that. She was based at Bagram Air Field. She said her job was to do a lot of airdrops to get the "beans and bullets" to the guys on the ground.

While they were based at two different locations in Afghanistan, Kelly and Amber did have a chance to see each other a couple of times because their tours overlapped.

"I loved the day that Amber came to visit," Kelly said. "She came and got me up in the morning, and we walked to the PX and got coffee, pizza and massages. When you're back home, you can have a girls' day—it was kind of like that, but Bagram style."

In July 2008, Amber's unit relocated to Bagram so she got to spend a few weeks with her sister before Kelly went back to California.

"Just knowing that you have that other person who is here for you—not just a friend, but family—is really nice," Kelly said before returning home.

Amber, who had deployed to Iraq in 2005, said her parents handled the second deployment better, even though all three daughters were serving in Afghanistan (overlapping tours).

"Last time, none of us had ever deployed before, so it was their first deployment, too," Amber said. "They are doing better with it, but they'll be excited when we are all home. They always say, 'Be safe, and we can't wait to see you,' but they are very supportive about it and very practical."

Lacey's unit replaced Amber's unit late last fall. It was her first deployment, but her sisters prepared her.

"Amber and Kelly gave me great information about what all the different places are like," she said. "I love being able to meet and help soldiers." ❦

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young vets in focus

Wounded Vet Gadson Inspires NY Giants

A double amputee of the Iraq War motivated professional football players to go on and win the Super Bowl in 2008.

By Janie Blankenship

On Jan. 20, 2008, Army Lt. Col. Greg Gadson was on the sidelines at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wis., wearing the number 98 New York Giants football jersey. He was there as an honorary co-captain for the Giants as they played the Green Bay Packers.

Gadson had come a long way in less than a year. Serving with the 2nd Bn., 32nd Field Artillery Regt., 4th Inf. BCT, 1st Inf. Div., on May 7, 2007, he was returning from a memorial service for two soldiers in Baghdad when the vehicle he was riding in hit an improvised explosive device.

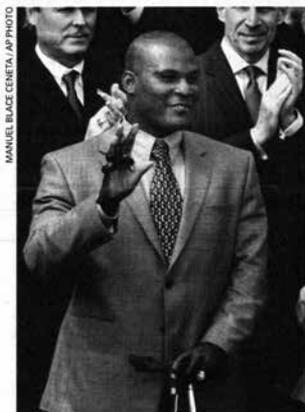
Both of Gadson's legs were amputated above the knees due to arterial infections. He recovered at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. That's where he got a visit from his friend, Mike Sullivan, who had played football with Gadson for the Army at West Point.

"This man had suffered so much, yet he was so happy to see me," Sullivan told *Reader's Digest*. "To see the impact he had on the other patients and how they responded to him was overwhelming and inspirational."

Sullivan, the Giants' wide receivers coach, presented Gadson with the number 98 Giants jersey (that was Gadson's number at West Point) and wanted to know if there was anything he could do for him. The wounded warrior said he would like to take his family to a Giants game.

It was arranged that Gadson's family would go to the game against the Washington Redskins on Sept. 23. The night before the game, he was asked to address the team, whose record was 0-2.

"I told them about all the soldiers around the world who would get up in the middle of the night just to be able to watch them," he told the *Washington Post*. "I told them when I got hurt, my



Army Lt. Col. Greg Gadson is recognized at the White House during the Giants visit there following their Super Bowl win in 2008.

own teammate came to my rescue. I had trained my guys for the kind of situation I found myself in and that training actually saved my life."

Gadson's inspirational speech affected the players, who invited him to sit on the sideline at the game the following day.

"He is such an inspiration," Sullivan said. "He told them to fight for every yard, to fight for every inch. It was just so powerful, so moving and so touching."

The next day after the Giants winning touchdown, the football was presented to Gadson. The once-losing Giants went on to win the next 10 road games and Gadson was on the sidelines at many of those games.

When the Giants made it to Super Bowl XLII in Phoenix, Gadson, his wife and two children were flown out for the big game. The night before the game, he was once again asked to talk to the players.

Name: Army Lt. Col. Greg Gadson
Service: Iraq, 2007
Unit: 2nd Bn., 32nd Field Artillery Regt., 4th Inf. BCT, 1st Inf. Div.
Married: Yes
Children: Two

The Giants defeated the New England Patriots in their first Super Bowl victory in more than 10 years.

"He is a powerful man with a powerful spirit," Giants head coach Tom Coughlin told *Reader's Digest*. "And that is really what he gave us: the idea that the spirit rises above all these adverse conditions."

'Unbelievably Humble'

Gadson began his football career at Indian River High School in Chesapeake, Va. He later became the starting linebacker for West Point from 1986 to 1988. He had planned on serving in the Army for five years and then getting out. But he found that he loved it and decided to stay in.

"Serving my country is important," Gadson told *Reader's Digest*. "For me, it's about being a soldier, being there for each other in the biggest sense of the word. I love being part of that team."

Despite his wounds, Gadson is staying in the Army. He does physical therapy each day. His prosthetic legs are equipped with Bluetooth technology, which allows computer chips in each leg to send signals to motors in his artificial joints so his knees and ankles move in coordination.

"He is unbelievably humble," Sullivan told the *Washington Post*. "We made him an honorary captain for the Green Bay game, but he said if he could have his dream come true, it would be to go back and be with his unit in Iraq. That's the kind of guy we're talking about." ☐

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Milan (Moe) Kondich
Owner

Rolling Thunder[®], Inc. Mission Statement

Rolling Thunder[®], Inc.'s major function is to publicize the POW/MIA issue. To educate the public of the fact that many American prisoners of war were left behind after all past wars. To help correct the past and to protect the future veterans from being left behind should they become Prisoners Of War/ Missing In Action. We are committed to helping American veterans from all wars. Rolling Thunder is a non-profit organization and everyone donates his or her time because they believe in the POW/MIA issue.

The Rolling Thunder Story

In the fall of 1987 in a little diner in Somerville, New Jersey, two Vietnam veterans met to discuss their personal concerns about the prisoners of war (POW) and missing in action (MIA) from the Vietnam War. Having honorably served their country, and having taken an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies..." and to "bear true faith and allegiance to same," they were deeply troubled by the abhorrent neglect of attention given to those who did not make it out with their lives or their freedom. These two veterans discussed the more than 10,000 reported sightings of live Americans living in dismal captivity. Intelligence reports of these sightings were generally ignored by the government and mainstream press. These two veterans were Artie Muller and Ray Manzo.

The First Rolling Thunder Demonstration

Artie and Ray were ordinary men who understood that they had a right to have their voices heard and proceeded to lay down the plans for a gathering in Washington, D.C., during the 1988 Memorial Day weekend. They reached out to their families, fellow veterans and veteran's advocates to unify and form a march and demonstration in our nation's Capital. Their arrival would be announced by the roar of their motorcycles, a sound not unlike the 1965 bombing campaign against North Vietnam dubbed *Operation Rolling Thunder*. Hence, they would call themselves "Rolling Thunder" a title that would endure time and be trademarked in 1990. Word spread quickly and by Memorial Day weekend in 1988, approximately 2,500 motorcycles from all over the country converged on Washington, D.C. to demand from our leaders a full accounting of all POW/MIA's. As they made their stand that day in front of the Capitol, Artie and Ray reflected thankfully for the people who came in support of the POW/MIA issue, and for the unity that was felt. This was Rolling Thunder's first demonstration. Only until ALL POW/MIA's ARE ACCOUNTED FOR, it will not be their last. On that day, the foundation was laid for the annual "Ride for Freedom" to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall (also referred to as the "Ride to the Wall").

Rolling Thunder Today

Please visit the National website at: www.rollingthunder1.com

The number of participants/spectators in the Memorial Day weekend Ride for Freedom has grown from 2,500 to an estimated 850,000. Incorporated in 1995, Rolling Thunder, Inc. is a class 501(c)(4) non-profit organization with over 88 chartered chapters throughout the United States and members abroad. While many members of Rolling Thunder are veterans, and many ride motorcycles, neither qualification is a prerequisite. Rolling Thunder members are old and young, men and women, veterans and non-veterans. All are united in the cause to bring full accountability for POWs and MIAs of all wars, reminding the government, the media and the public by our watchwords: "We Will Not Forget." No officers or members of Rolling Thunder receive compensation; we all donate our time.

Supporting Local Veterans & Community Involvement

In 2007, Rolling Thunder Charities®, Inc. was established as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt non-profit organization which enables individuals and corporations to receive a tax deduction for funds donated to Rolling Thunder Charities, Inc. Funds are used for veterans, active military and their families in need of help. No officers of Rolling Thunder Charities, Inc. receive compensation; we all donate our time.

Rolling Thunder, Inc. spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in financial support, food, clothing and other essentials to veterans, homeless veterans and veterans' families in need, womens' crisis centers and toys for children.

In 2005, Rolling Thunder, Inc. united with the National Alliance of POW/MIA Families to petition the U.S. Government to use the designation "Prisoner of War/Missing In Action" (POW/MIA) – a designation recognized by the Geneva Conventions - not "Missing/Captured." This will ensure that prisoners' rights and protections remain consistent under the Geneva Conventions.

Expenditures exceed over half a million dollars a year, nationwide, to educate the public and increase awareness about the POW/MIA issue and other injustices suffered by veterans. The organization regularly donates POW/MIA flags to local area schools, youth groups, non-profit organizations and special interest groups, and organizes flag-raising ceremonies. Veterans speak to youth groups about the honor of serving their country and educating them about the POW/MIA issue.

Rolling Thunder, Inc. sponsors search missions into Southeast Asia for POW/MIAs, and the remains of those killed in action.

Thousands of hours are logged in by Rolling Thunder, Inc. members at local VA hospitals nationwide. Members visit and provide moral support to nursing home veterans and patients suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Rolling Thunder, Inc. helped facilitate the publishing of a POW/MIA U.S. postage stamp through the U.S. Postal Service that displayed dog tags with the declaration, "**POW & MIA-NEVER FORGOTTEN.**"

Rolling Thunder, Inc. National is on the Board of Directors of the Ride to the Wall Foundation, a veterans' fund established through the sales of the musical CD, "Ride to the Wall" produced for Rolling Thunder XIV by Paul Revere and the Raiders in cooperation with Rolling Thunder.

Rolling Thunder, Inc. participated in the dedication of the World War II Memorial in 2004 and assisted with organizing the World War II parade that took place on that historic date.

Laws Passed Through Rolling Thunder Endeavors

Rolling Thunder, Inc. has advocated and co-authored legislation to improve the POW/MIA issue, veterans' benefits, concerns and interests. Please visit the National website: www.rollingthunder1.com then click on *About Us* for information on the following Legislation.

- Establishing a Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs (House Res. 111)
- Encourage the designation of "Hire a Veteran Week" (H.Con.Res 125)
- Respect for Fallen Heroes Act of 2006 (H.R. 5037)
- Veteran's Housing Opportunity and Benefits Improvement Act of 2006 (S.1235)
- Veterans Benefits, Health Care and Information Technology Act of 2006 (S.3421-Public Law 109-461)
- Veteran-Owned Small Business Promotion Act of 2005 (H.R. 3082)
- Persian Gulf War POW/MIA Accountability Act of 2002 (S.1339)
- The POW/MIA Memorial Flag Act of 2001 (S.1226)
- Displaying the POW/MIA Flag over Federal Buildings & Military Facilities
- Bring Them Home Alive Act of 2000
- Missing Service Personnel Act of 1997

Number of Americans Missing & Unaccounted for from Each State

as of 9-Aug-05

Alabama	34	Maryland	26	South Carolina	29
Alaska	2	Massachusetts	41	South Dakota	7
Arizona	18	Michigan	55	Tennessee	33
Arkansas	20	Minnesota	37	Texas	120
California	183	Mississippi	12	Utah	16
Colorado	29	Missouri	38	Vermont	5
Connecticut	28	Montana	19	Virginia	48
Delaware	4	Nebraska	19	Washington	45
D.C.	9	Nevada	8	West Virginia	17
Florida	60	New Hampshire	6	Wisconsin	30
Georgia	35	New Jersey	51	Wyoming	5
Hawaii	7	New Mexico	12	Canada	2
Idaho	10	New York	118	Panama	1
Illinois	73	North Carolina	44	Philippines	4
Indiana	58	North Dakota	10	Puerto Rico	1
Iowa	28	Ohio	83	Virgin Islands	0
Kansas	30	Oklahoma	40	Civilians*	8
Kentucky	14	Oregon	39		
Louisiana	24	Pennsylvania	98	TOTAL	1,815
Maine	14	Rhode Island	8		

*These 8 civilians do not have a listed home of record.

For more information about Rolling Thunder, or to learn how to become a member or supporter, please contact Rolling Thunder National headquarters at (908) 369-5439.



“ 13 FOLDS OF THE AMERICAN FLAG. “

First fold of our flag is a symbol of life.

Second fold is a symbol of our belief in the eternal life.

Third fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks who gave a portion of life for the defense of our country to attain a peace throughout the world.

Fourth fold represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in times of war for His divine guidance.

Fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right; but it is still our country, right or wrong."

Sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Seventh fold is a tribute to our Armed Forces, for it is through the Armed Forces that we protect our country and our flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.

Eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered in to the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor mother, for whom it flies on mother's day.

Ninth fold is a tribute to womanhood; for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great have been molded.

Tenth fold is a tribute to father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since they were first born.

Eleventh fold, in the eyes of a Hebrew citizen, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon, and glorifies, in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Twelfth fold, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost.

When the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, "In God we Trust."

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington and the sailors and marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges, and freedoms we enjoy today.



POW/MIA

Remembrance Table

Rolling Thunder Illinois Chapter 1 performs our Remembrance Table ceremony at many events.

Our Remembrance Table is set for (5). This place setting symbolizes all Prisoners of War and those men and women still listed as Missing in Action from all wars from the (5) branches of service.

The chairs are empty.

They are not with us today.

Remember

*The tablecloth is white,
symbolizing the purity of the
soldiers as they went off
to serve their country.*

Remember

*The bread plates are sprinkled
with salt, symbolizing the tears shed
by the families as they await
the fate of their loved ones.*

Remember

*There is a lemon on each plate,
indicative of the bitterness
these soldiers must feel at
being left behind by
their country.*

Remember

*The glasses are inverted.
They cannot toast with us
this season.*

Remember

*The red rose, symbolizes the love the
families and their fellow comrades
have for these soldiers.*

Remember

*The red ribbon on the vase, symbolizes
the hope we all have. That someday
these brave men and women will
be returned to their families
and their country.*

Remember. . . .



Schedule of Events

8 AM – 10:00 AM	Registration and Breakfast (Available by VFW)
10:30 AM	Vendors set up
11:00 AM	Last Bike Out
1:00 PM	Bikes return/Parking in rear
1:00 PM – Close	Band – Blue Dog
4:00 PM	Last Poker Hand In
4:30 PM	Remembrance Table Ceremony
5:00 PM	Poker Hand Results
5:10 PM	Bike Show Winners Announced
5:20 PM	Mystery Raffle Results
5:30 PM	Bike Raffle Announced

8th Annual



“Big Thunder” Run

October 4th 2009

Rolling Thunder® Illinois Chapter #1
would like to thank our friends at

Batavia Overseas Post 1197 Veterans of Foreign Wars

for allowing us the use of their facilities and
their kindness to us.

Please support their efforts.

**Batavia VFW
645 S. River Rd (Rte. 25)
Batavia, IL 60561**

He was a civilian but Gen. Omar Bradley said there was "no finer soldier than he." He never fired a shot or killed an enemy soldier, yet saw more death than most men. In the deadliest war the world has ever seen, his only weapon was a portable typewriter.

Though he never wore a uniform, he was awarded the Purple Heart. If he had worn a uniform, with 29 months overseas — 12 of them in actual combat — he would have qualified for eight campaign stars.

He was Ernie Pyle, America's most beloved war correspondent.

No chronicler of men in battle — before or since — has ever struck such a responsive chord with his readers. Pyle spoke for the men who did the fighting so eloquently because he was one of them. "I've become their mouthpiece — the only one they have," he said.

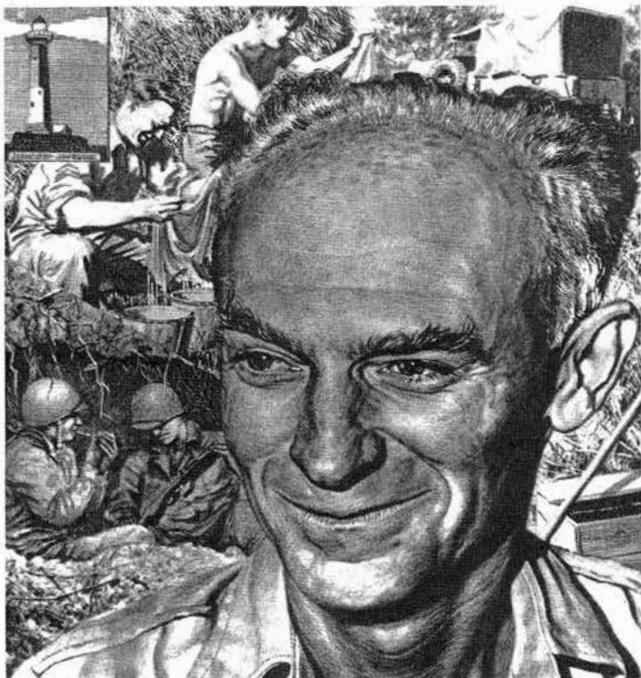
His motto was simple: "You can't play safe and do your job." His goal was to cover "the tiny percentage of our vast Army who are actually up there doing the dying." He once remarked: "I just cover the backwash of the war."

To accomplish this task, one had to get close. "War to an individual," he wrote, "is hardly ever bigger than a hundred yards on each side of him." That was Ernie's beat for the entire war.

He was more than willing to share the hardships and perils. "He blended in like a member of the unit," remembered WWII Army veteran Leonard Bessman, "and soldiers responded as if he were one of us. He made the invasions with combat troops, risking his life with us as if it were his duty."

His greatest gift to the American fighting man was something intangible, a vital factor in the survival of any armed force: morale. Bradley put it most succinctly: "My men always fought better when Ernie was around."

He developed a personal obsession, and that was to report what happens to men in war. He recognized that GIs fought not for an ideological cause, but for their own private moral obligations. They would die, if for no other reason, "at



Ernie Pyle

by Richard K. Kolb

'Infantry Soldier's Ambassador to America'

**On this, the 50th anniversary of his death,
VFW Magazine pays tribute to one of the nation's
greatest sons and the best friend
the American fighting man ever knew bar none.**

Illustration by Boris Chaliopin.
Courtesy of Indiana University, School of Journalism

least for each other."

Still, a theme he constantly hit home was that the nation had an unwritten contract with its defenders. He never let the public forget that GIs were living a "semi-barbarian life" on its collective behalf. The American people, even though they could never understand the suffering, had a sacred obligation to keep faith.

In an unpublished draft found on his body the day he was killed, Pyle had wrote of the bond only men in combat can comprehend: "For the companionship of 2-1/2 years of death and misery is a spouse that tolerates no divorce. Such companionship finally becomes part of one's soul, and it cannot be obliterated."

Although he soon became "sick of living in misery and fright," Pyle readily admitted he was "no longer content unless I am with soldiers in the field." At home, he felt "like a deserter and a heel — not so much to the war effort, but to my friends who are still over there freezing and getting shot at."

But Pyle was not a thrill-seeker. "I never hated to do anything as badly in my life as I hate to go back to the front," he confided. "I dread it and I'm afraid of it. But what can a guy do? I know millions of others who are reluctant too, and they can't even get home."

Precisely because of this devotion to the men, Pyle was not only admired by them, but became the most successful and best-read journalist of his era. He wrote six times every week. His readership peaked at 393 daily and 297 weekly newspapers with a combined circulation of 13,390,144.

His winning formula was simple — descriptive writing. Pyle's trademark was the individual names and hometowns of everyone he quoted. Stories were spiced with descriptions of treacherous terrain and exotic peoples, infinite detail about infantry life and observations on the characteristics of average GIs.

Ernie Pyle: Missing in Action From Korea and Vietnam?

If any one thing was absent from the battlefields of Korea and Vietnam, it was a source to bolster morale. With rare exception, there were no Ernie Pyles on the line in these two wars, and none of the few who wished to emulate his writing style or objectives ever attained his national notoriety.

This was truly unfortunate. For despite the emergence of the electronic media, a print journalist of Pyle's caliber was sorely needed. Television soundbites can never replace the permanence of the written word.

Some years back, Paul Lancaster, a former *Wall Street Journal* editor, wrote on the pages of *American Heritage*: "Ernie Pyle gave Americans a coherent view of the war as seen through the eyes of someone they knew and trusted. His success suggests that television, with all its electronic wonders, sometimes still may be no match for one man with a fresh eye, a capacity for feeling and a battered portable."

Pyle epitomized the now missing link between soldier and correspondent — the morale-boosting connection with the folks back home — on the fighting front. His absent spirit has been felt by all Americans who found themselves on the "sharp end" since WWII.

All this personalized the war for the distant public like nothing else could. Pecking with two fingers on his Underwood portable typewriter, he told the truth "about the realities of war," as President Franklin D. Roosevelt phrased it, like none of his peers.

"Little Guy" From Indiana

"The Little Guy," as he was affectionately known, stood 5 ft., 8 in. tall and weighed only 110 lbs. A Hoosier farmboy, he had enlisted in the Naval Reserve during WWI, but the war ended before he finished training. He greatly admired his peers who had fought in France, nurturing an abiding appreciation for their service.

Pyle was painfully shy, apolitical and an agnostic. Yet he honed his pre-war writing skills by seeking out people around the country as his subjects for stories as a roving reporter for the Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance. His self-effacing and down-to-earth manner won immediate acceptance.

In September 1939, he wrote his best friend and WWI veteran Paige Cavanaugh: "Pacifism is fine as long as there ain't no war around. But when they start shooting I want to

get close enough just a couple of times to get good and scared."

When the draft was implemented, Pyle was classified 1-A, but he was granted a six-month deferment. Another exemption extension took him past the maximum draft age. He also tried to join the Navy, but was too old. Meanwhile, he was covering the "Battle of Britain" complete with the London Blitz while his wife awaited him.

Love of the Infantry

At one time or another, Pyle covered every type of combat unit at the front. He wrote about tankers, hospital outfits, airmen, sailors, artillerymen, engineers and even mule pack trains.

But it was the dogface for whom Pyle held the most affection. "I love the infantry because they are the underdogs. They are the mud-rain-frost-and-wind boys," he wrote. And "in the end they are the guys that wars can't be won without."

From his first stint with the infantry in January 1943 in Tunisia, he grasped the primitiveness of life on the line. "There are only four essentials — clothes, food, cigarettes, and whatever portion of safety you can manage to arrange for yourself," he wrote.

Not only was he a dogface disciple, he was one of them in spirit and practice. "I'm a one-man movement bent on tracking down and stamping out everybody in the world who doesn't fully appreciate the common front-line soldier," he said.

Though he had brushes with death three times and was slightly wounded at Anzio, Pyle never pretended that a correspondent's lot was comparable to that of a soldier's. As he made clear, a correspondent could always leave the front — a GI was there for the duration.

His undying admiration for the infantry went far beyond his columns. He actively lobbied Congress to further recognize them. Combat

continued on page 31

ERNIE PYLE

continued from page 29

pay legislation (\$10 extra a month) became known as the "Ernie Pyle bill." Award of overseas bars, as well as the Combat Infantryman Badge, came about partly because of his publicity efforts.

No wonder he was called "the infantry soldier's ambassador to America."

Everlasting Symbol

By the time he reached the Pacific in January 1945, Pyle had already witnessed the dying in Tunisia, Sicily, Italy and France. He had chronicled combat among the Army's most famous divisions — 1st, 4th, 9th, 29th, 34th, and 45th, to name a few.

After spending some time aboard ship and with air crews, he made himself part of the Okinawa operation. Landing on Ie Shima in the Ryukyus, he spent his last days, most appropriately, with the 305th Infantry Regiment, 77th Infantry Division.

On the 18th, near Tegusngu, he took two bullets, fired from a Japanese .31 caliber Nambu machine gun, in the temple. He died instantly in a ditch.

He died practicing what he had always preached. "I only know what we see from our worm's-eye," he once wrote, "and our segment of the picture consists only of tired and dirty soldiers who are alive and don't want to die..."

President Harry S Truman paid him the ultimate tribute: "...No man in this war has so well told the story of the American fighting man as American fighting men wanted it told."

David Nichols, in his excellent work, *Ernie's War*, said it equally well. Pyle was "a living, high-profile symbol of the fighting man's displacement from ordinary life and his sacrifice."

Information on the Ernie Pyle commemoration on April 18, 1995, in Dana, Ind., is available from Susan Ham at (317) 232-0069 or Evelyn Hobson at (317) 665-3633. ☆

LOCAL VOICES

Honoring heroes

After serving in the Pacific during World War II, my dad was discharged from the Army at Ft. Bragg in North Carolina at 9 p.m. on Dec. 5, 1945.

He had to find his own way to the bus station, took a bus to his hometown in Virginia and then a taxi home, arriving at 4 a.m. The next day he resumed his life without fanfare.

As was the case with most WW II vets, there were no parties, no parades and no public recognition of his service in defense of freedom and democracy.

On Wednesday, July 15, 2009—66 years to the day after he was inducted into the Army—thanks to Honor Flight Chicago, my dad and 79 other WW II vets received their much-deserved and long-overdue recognition. It was my privilege to accompany them as an Honor Flight Chicago volunteer. The day focused on a trip to their memorial, the WW II Memorial in Washington. They were saluted and feted everywhere we went.

But the reception they received at Midway Airport upon our return was awesome, incredible, inspiring and very, very moving. It is impossible to describe the scene, which included many members of the U.S. armed forces, the Chicago Fire Department and Rolling Thunder as well as countless friends and family members. The airport was filled with people saluting, clapping, cheering, shaking hands, hugging and thanking these heroes for their service to America.

I am grateful to Honor Flight Chicago for making this day possible and for allowing me to help them in their mission.

—James Liljegen, *Lisle*



Liljegen

BY JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY

Twenty-five years ago, the fight for Hill 937 in Vietnam proved to be one of the most controversial battles of the war. Better known as "Hamburger Hill," it was also a tactical turning point.



HEROES OF HAMBURGER HILL

**"You may
not be able to read this.
I am writing it in a hurry.
I see death coming up the hill."**

—From a letter home by a 101st Airborne Division trooper fighting on Hamburger Hill in May 1969.

It was 25 years ago, May 10-20, 1969, that the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division collided with the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) elite 29th Regiment in a bitter struggle for one of the hills overlooking the Ashau Valley along the Laotian border.

On Vietnamese maps, the peak was dubbed *Dong Ap Bia*, or *Ap Bia Mountain*. On U.S. maps it was Hill 937. Before the fighting was over, the grunts christened it Hamburger Hill — in token of the slaughter done there.

Cleaning Out a Sanctuary

On May 10, 1969, *Operation Apache Snow*, an ambitious 10-bat-

alion Airborne/Marine/ARVN sweep intended to clean out the Ashau and open it up with an all-weather highway that would permit allied operations even during the mountain monsoons, was launched.

Shortly after daybreak, Huey slicks began lifting Col. Joe Conny's 3rd Bde. and two battalions of the ARVN 1st Division into the Ashau. The 3rd Bn., 187th Airborne, was tasked to take Hill 937. The *Rakhasans* were led by Lt. Col. Weldon Honeycutt, a Korean War veteran.

Alpha and Charlie companies were sent off on sweeps toward the Trung Pham River and mapped out a route up Ap Bia. Bravo Co. later headed up a steep, narrow trail into dim light of double and then triple canopy jungle, clogged with fallen trees, tangles of bamboo and vines.

Second Platoon led off, up and down the saddles until the enemy struck with a shower of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and the flat

crack of AK-47 rifles from the first line of bunkers and spider holes.

Artillery and the Air Force hammered at the jungle, but with darkness approaching, Honeycutt ordered Bravo Company's 107 men to dig in and wait for the morning.

"Pride of Ho Chi Minh"

The next morning, May 11, B Co.'s 1st Platoon took the lead. On point, Sp. 4 Phil Nelson gestured at the littered (including three NVA bodies) trail: "Something's wrong here, lieutenant." Sensing imminent danger, the advance slowed to a crawl.

Meanwhile, down below at battalion HQ, a clearly shaken Kit Carson scout translated the documents and letters taken off the three dead NVA.

"Those men we killed were mem-

Above: A grunt of the 101st Airborne Div. is helped through a blinding rainstorm by two medics after being evacuated from Dong Ap Bia. AP/Wide World photo

bers of the 29th NVA Regiment. It's called 'The Pride of Ho Chi Minh'...one of the best regiments in the entire North Vietnamese Army. Many, many soldiers everywhere. Hundreds of soldiers."

When the advance resumed, 4th Platoon was leading. Pfc. Aaron Rosenstreich was on point, followed by Sp. 4 John McCarrell. After a pause to inspect a fat enemy commo wire running straight up the mountain, the company was moving again, under occasional sniper fire.

Then suddenly, an NVA soldier popped up in a spider hole and fired an AK burst into Rosenstreich's chest, even as another NVA jumped out of a bunker and fired an RPG round that hit McCarrell in the chest, touching off a claymore mine he was carrying.

The explosion blew Lt. Charles Denholm 10 feet into the air. Now machine gun fire hosed down the trees and RPGs were exploding among the tree branches overhead, spewing shrapnel on the Americans below.

Denholm crawled to Rosenstreich and held him as he died. Other Americans, trying to maneuver against the hidden enemy, were dying. The survivors staggered back down the trail even as B Company's forward observer called a 15-minute artillery barrage down, and summoned two Cobra gunships as a followup, which tragically rocketed battalion HQ, killing two Americans and wounding 35.

Simultaneously, an NVA 120mm mortar across the border in Laos opened up on the headquarters LZ and five NVA soldiers burst out of a draw to the south, charging the position until they were cut down by the stunned Americans.

Endless Assaults

Honeycutt's battered and disbelieving companies, however, would not let up. They took turns assaulting Ap Bia. They faced snipers tied in the tree tops and other snipers dug into camouflaged spider holes.

Then there were the deep-dug fortified machine gun bunkers vulnerable only to a direct hit by one of the 1,000-pound bombs the Air Force was dropping, or a carefully aimed recoilless rifle round in a firing aperture. Worst of all were the RPGs: Every

overhead burst took its toll of unprotected Americans, and the NVA were firing them by the hundreds.

It was not until the seventh day of battle that flak jackets were passed out, to provide some protection for those who could bear to wear them in the stifling 100-degree heat.

NVA were quick to maneuver against U.S. flanks once a company had been driven to ground by the machine guns and had dead and wounded to care for. At the first sight of an American withdrawal, they poured out of bunkers and holes in hot pursuit.

Reinforcements Arrive

By the fourth day, Col. Conny ordered another battalion, the 1/506, to join the attack. Its mission was to seal off the 29th Regiment's resupply routes to Laos and attack the mountain from the western slopes.

A combination of rugged terrain, high elephant grass and stiffening enemy resistance combined to prevent 1/506 from getting into position until late on May 17.

The next morning both battalions launched a coordinated assault. Mines, claymores and RPGs took a heavy toll of Americans, but by afternoon they were within easy reach of the summit and victory, when nature itself turned against them.

For a full week, U.S. artillery and

bombs had lashed at the slopes and crest of the mountain, stripping it of all vegetation and literally pulverizing the earth.

Now came a monsoon deluge that turned it all into mud three feet deep in places. Mudslides and flash floods a foot deep roared down the slopes, carrying helpless Americans with them. Men clung to tree stumps, and dug their toes and rifle butts into the goo to hang on. Victory was in sight but out of reach.

The 3/187 had that day, the eighth of the campaign, lost 14 killed and 64 wounded, and again was forced to withdraw. The 1/506 dug in for the night about half a mile from the crest.

The high command now ordered two additional battalions, the 101st Airborne's 2/501 and the ARVN 2nd Bn., 3rd Infantry, to reinforce the attack. On May 19, 2/501 was airlifted to the northeast slopes and 2/3 ARVN to the east-southeast. The 1/506 took advantage of the lull to move to within 200 meters of the crest.

Presidential Unit Citation

On the morning of May 20 a four-battalion attack was launched, and shortly before noon the first troops of 3/187 shot their way onto the summit.

The division reported 630 enemy killed by count; U.S. trail-watchers operating across the line in Laos said they counted more than 1,200 NVA dead and wounded carried out. The 101st had lost 70 men killed and 372 wounded in taking Hill 937.

On June 5, 1969, the last Americans were pulled off the mountain. Twelve days later, U.S. intelligence confirmed that some 1,000 NVA had reoccupied Ap Bia.

New tactical limitations were imposed on commanders in the battle's aftermath. There would be no more Hamburger Hills for the U.S. Army in Vietnam.

Yet the courageous men of the 101st Airborne had done all that was asked of them, and more. In token of their bravery and suffering, the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne, was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation. ☐

Joe Galloway is a senior writer for *U.S. News & World Report* and its co-author of *We Were Soldiers Once... And Young* (story of the Battle of Ia Drang, 1965). The book is available from Harper Perennial, 1-800-222-0400.



AMERICANS

To commemorate National POW/MIA Recognition Day — Sept. 16 — this year, *VFW Magazine* presents the story of Americans held prisoner — in pictures — during wartime. It's a story that dates back to the Revolution, spanning 217 years, and ends with Somalia.

Through six major wars, 561,538 Americans have been placed behind bars and barbed-wire: 79,884 died in captivity. Sadly, the largest number perished in the hands of their fellow countrymen during the Civil War.

While we most readily remember those held in Vietnam, it must not be forgotten that thousands before them endured long-term deprivation of freedom and human dignity. It is to all dead and living POWs, then, that we dedicate these pages.

The Editor

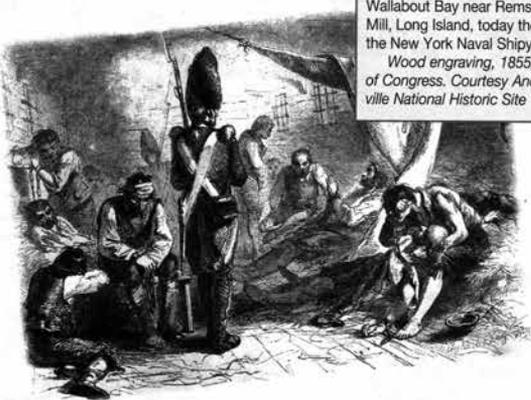
POW

IN ENEMY HANDS: POWs FROM THE REVOLUTION TO SOMALIA

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

The infamous prison ship *Jersey*, an ugly, somber hulk, was one of 26 vessels used by the British to confine Patriots. Conditions were abhorrent, and death was commonplace. These floating coffins were anchored in Wallabout Bay near Remsen's Mill, Long Island, today the site of the New York Naval Shipyard.

Wood engraving, 1855, *Library of Congress*. Courtesy *Andersonville National Historic Site*



CIVIL WAR

Andersonville Prison, the Confederacy's notorious hell hole in Georgia, held 45,000 Union POWs — nearly 13,000 of whom died from overcrowding, starvation, disease and poor sanitation. Rations are being issued here on Aug. 17, 1864.

Courtesy Andersonville National Historic Site





The Prisoner of War Medal was authorized by Public Law 99-145 on Nov. 8, 1985. It is awarded to military personnel captured during an operation involving action with an enemy force. The U.S. does not have to be officially at war with the country in question.

Proven misconduct while a POW or documented actions contrary to the Code of Conduct make a service member ineligible for the medal.

National Prisoner of War Recognition Day is commemorated each April 9. It was first officially recognized by Congress in 1985. This day honors returned American POWs, but also pays homage to those who perished in the camps. April 9, 1942, was the day Bataan fell and 12,000 Americans were captured and forced on the infamous "Bataan Death March."



KOREAN WAR

GIs of the U.S. Army's 2nd Infantry Division in a North Korean camp in March 1951. Some 93% of U.S. POWs in Korea were Army personnel, captured mostly when the South was overrun in the war's early stages.

AP/Wide World photo



VIETNAM WAR

Three U.S. pilots (Maj. Fred Thompson, Maj. James Low and Capt. Joe Carpenter) released by Hanoi in July 1968. Airmen comprised nearly half of Americans held by the Communists in Indochina.

AP/Wide World photo

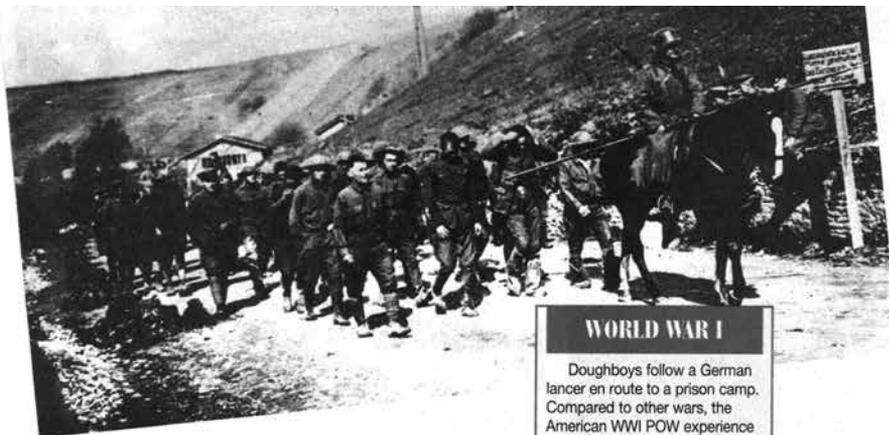
ARTIST REVISION



National POW Museum Soon a Reality

When it's dedicated in 1996, the National Prisoner of War Museum, located at the Andersonville National Historic Site in Georgia, will be a lasting tribute to America's POWs, from the Revolutionary War to present-day conflicts. The museum is a joint effort of the National Park Service, several veterans groups and private citizens.

Every facet of the memorial, from the stark exterior, which depicts the bleakness of a



WORLD WAR I

Doughboys follow a German lancer en route to a prison camp. Compared to other wars, the American WWI POW experience was relatively short-term.

From the collection of a former German officer



PACIFIC

EUROPE

WORLD WAR II

EUROPE: Allied prisoners in the POW camp at Moosburg, Germany. Though airmen filled many of the prisons, some 23,554 GIs were captured during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.

U.S. Army Air Forces photo

PACIFIC: Americans return to a Japanese camp in the Philippines with a consignment of rice. More than 90% of American POWs in the Pacific were taken in early 1942 in the Bataan-Corregidor combat zone.

Harold Payne Collection

AMERICANS IN ENEMY HANDS

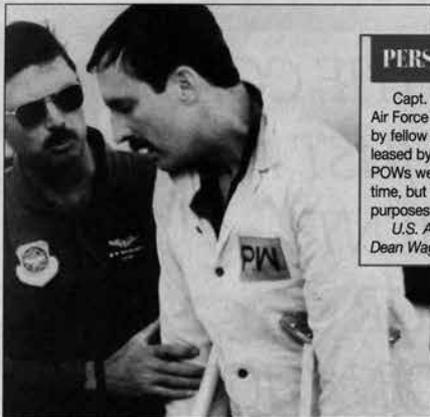
War	Years	Prisoners of War	Died in Captivity	Death Rate
Revolutionary	1775-83	20,000 ¹	8,500 ²	?
Civil	1861-65	194,000 (Union)	30,218 ³	15.5%
		214,000 (Confederate)	25,976	12.1%
WWI	1917-18	4,120	147	3.6%
WWII	1941-45	93,941 (Europe)	1,1214	1%
		27,465 (Pacific)	11,107	40%
Korean	1950-53	7,141	2,701	38%
Vietnam	1964-73	766	114	15%
Persian Gulf	1991	23	0	0%
Somalia	1993	1	0	0%

¹ VFW guesstimate based on data in *Captive Americans: Prisoners During the American Revolution* (Ohio Univ. Press, 1976) by Larry G. Bowman. See pp. 27-31; 61. Many of those captured were seamen.

² Estimate from *The Toll of Independence* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976) edited by Howard H. Peckham. See p. 132.

³ "Iron Bars A Prison Make" in *Rebels and Yankees: The Fighting Men of the Civil War* by William C. Davis. See p. 183.

⁴ WWII, Korea and Vietnam figures are from the American Ex-Prisoners of War in Arlington, Texas.



PERSIAN GULF WAR

Capt. William Andrews, an Air Force F-16 pilot, is greeted by fellow pilots after being released by the Iraqis in 1991. U.S. POWs were confined for a short time, but used for propaganda purposes effectively.

U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt. Dean Wagner

PUEBLO CRISIS

After a two-year effort, led by the VFW, the POW Medal was awarded to the 81 former crewmen who served aboard the USS *Pueblo* and were held captive for 11 months in North Korea during 1968.

SOMALIA

Chief Warrant Officer/3 Michael Durant had the dubious distinction of being the only American POW during the Somalia intervention. The helicopter pilot was originally classified as a "detainee," initially denying him the POW Medal.

AP/Wide World photo

COLD WAR

From 1946 to 1977, 40 U.S. aircraft were shot down, most by the Soviets. 135 crew members were classified as "fate unknown." Some were reportedly captured.

Also, 28,662 U.S. POWs liberated from WWII German prisoner camps by the Soviets were released before May 28, 1945. 191 Americans were never accounted for.

Source: POW/MIA Issues: Vol. 2, *World War II and the Early Cold War* by Paul Cole. RAND/National Defense Research Institute, 1994, pp. 36, 4-5, 28-31.



WWII camp, to graphic exhibits and oral histories, will give the visitor a sense of what POWs endured. Their initial capture, imprisonment, torture, escape attempts, isolation and liberation will all be depicted.

Even a simple drink of water will be conveyed by a bronze statue of a POW quenching his thirst at a stream in the museum's courtyard. "The museum will provide a truly interactive experience in which visitors will learn to appreciate their own freedom even more," says Alan Marsh, lead park ranger. Like other recent national sites, the museum will have a computer database listing all American POWs.

Anyone with information, especially personal experiences as a POW, is encouraged to contact the museum.

Groundbreaking for the project was held on April 9, 1992 — National POW Recognition Day and the 50th anniversary of the fall of Bataan and the death march.

Initial roadwork and parking lot construction is currently in progress. Once the museum is built in late 1995, the exhibits will be moved on location. Opening is planned prior to the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Primary funding for the \$9 million project comes from the sale of a POW/

MIA Commemorative Coin available through the U.S. Mint. American Ex-Prisoners of War, NAM-POWS and Friends of Andersonville are also engaged in raising another \$2.5 million, which will be matched by federal and state funds.

Anyone interested in contacting the museum should write to:

Fred Boyles, Superintendent
National Park Service
Andersonville National Historic Site
Route 1, Box 800
Andersonville, GA 31711
Phone: 912-924-0343

WASHINGTON (CNN) – The remains of the first American shot down in the 1991 Persian Gulf War have been uncovered, the U.S. Department of Defense announced Sunday.



Navy Capt. Michael Speicher's remains have been identified, the U.S. military announced Sunday.

U.S. Navy Capt. Michael "Scott" Speicher was shot down in an F/A-18 Hornet on January 17, 1991, the first night of the war.

The announcement early Sunday of the discovery of Speicher's remains ends more than 18 years of speculation about whether Speicher may have survived the crash and been held captive, or died in captivity in the ensuing years.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with Capt. Speicher's family for the ultimate sacrifice he made for his country," Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said in a statement. "I am also extremely grateful to all those who have worked so tirelessly over the last 18 years to bring Capt. Speicher home."

The captain's family thanked the military in a statement Sunday, saying Speicher "was a brave and wonderful father, husband, and naval officer who responded without hesitation when his country needed him. ... We thank the active duty men and women whose diligence has made this happen, and hope that this process has prevented another of our service men and women from being left behind.

"We will miss him, and will never forget. Thank you for your thoughts and prayers. "

An Iraqi civilian told [U.S. forces](#) in Iraq in early July about the location of the crash that killed Speicher, according to the statement. U.S. Marines in Anbar province went to the site and spoke to another Iraqi who told them he witnessed Bedouins burying Speicher's remains in the desert after the crash, the statement said.

Don't Miss

- Gates sees chance for quicker withdrawal from Iraq
- Britain's legacy in Iraq: Basra
- Death toll reaches 12 in Iraqi refugee camp violence

A search uncovered the remains, which were flown to Dover Air Base last week and positively identified as Speicher's by the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, the statement said.

The remains included bones and skeletal fragments, and positive identification was made by comparing Speicher's dental records with a jawbone recovered at the site, the statement said.

"We send our deepest condolences to the Speicher family for the sacrifice Captain Speicher made in the service of his country," the top U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, said in a statement. "Although we cannot fully understand the sense of loss, or the pain his family has shouldered throughout the years of waiting, we hope they can find solace in his dignified and honorable return home."

Speicher was a lieutenant commander when shot down, but because his status remained uncertain, he received promotions during the past 18 years, reaching the rank of captain.

He was originally listed as "Killed-in-Action/Body-Not-Recovered" in May 1991. That status changed in 2001 to "Missing in Action," and then to "Missing/Captured" in 2002, based on sighting reports in [Iraq](#). Those sightings have since been discredited.

His status was changed back to MIA earlier this year.

"All the evidence that we were getting seemed to suggest that Scott was alive and being held against his will," Nels Jensen of Little Rock, Arkansas, a high school friend of Speicher's, told CNN. "And you know, we never sent out a search and rescue party, and if we had ... none of this mess would probably have been necessary."

In the six years that the United States has been in Iraq for its second war, all of the many leads and alleged sightings of Speicher have been investigated and found to be false.

The Speicher family has worked closely with the Navy to ensure the hunt for him would not stop.

"We reiterate our commitment to find and account for all military members and civilians who have gone missing in the service of our nation," Odierno said in Sunday's statement. "We will not stop until all are found."

Honoring the Legacy of the Four Chaplains



Lt. A.D. Goode



Lt. G.L. Fox



Lt. C.V. Poling



Lt. J.P. Washington

Feb. 3, 1943, marks a special date in the annals of World War II. Though what happened on this long-forgotten day rarely rates comparison with the war's big battles, it was nonetheless significant in the greater scheme of human events.

The U.S. Army transport *Dorchester* left Pier 11 on Staten Island with 902 passengers aboard. It was torpedoed by a German submarine in the icy waters 100 miles off Greenland at 12:55 a.m.

Having given their life jackets to soldiers who had left theirs below, four Army chaplains — a priest, a rabbi and two ministers — went down with the ship. They were last seen standing with locked arms, each uttering his own prayer.

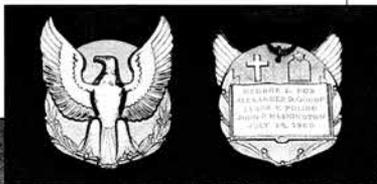
The four chaplains, portrayed on this page, were among the 672 persons (404 soldiers, 111 civilians, 104 merchant mariners, 26 Coast

Guardsmen, 14 Navy Armed Guards and 13 Danish citizens) who perished, and will never be forgotten by the VFW. Each year at the VFW's national convention they are memorialized.

For more information, contact: **The Rev. Archie Roberts, the Chapel of the Four Chaplains, P.O. Box 1943, Valley Forge, Pa. 19482. (215) 933-3599.**



U.S. Army transport *Dorchester*.



Congress struck a special medal for valor on July 14, 1960, to honor the four chaplains.



Painting by Dudley Sumner hangs in the Chapel of the Four Chaplains in Philadelphia.



Item: U.S. Army boots
Conflict: World War II
Location: Germany
Case status: In progress

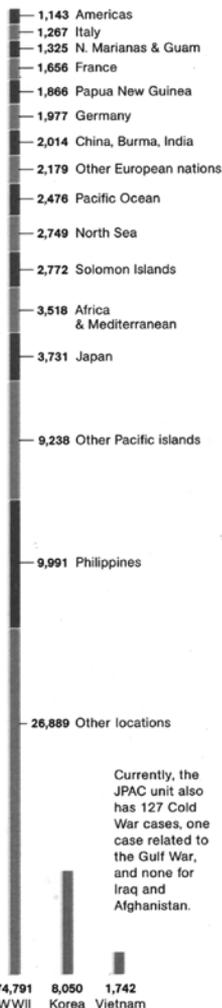
Finding the Fallen A mud-caked pair of size nine combat boots (above) is among the latest World War II artifacts to emerge from Germany's Hürtgen Forest, scene of a bloody battle that saw some 31,000 U.S. casualties. Found with the boots last summer were the bones of two soldiers. The task of identifying the men falls to the Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), established in 2003 to consolidate Pentagon efforts to find missing military personnel, including 84,711 soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines from World War II onward whose fates remain uncertain.

Every year JPAC dispatches forensic teams to long-quiet battlefields throughout Europe, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific as well as sites of plane crashes and sunken vessels. When remains are recovered, they are sent to JPAC's laboratory in Hawaii, the world's largest forensic anthropology lab. There scientists analyze bones, teeth, and DNA, which can be compared with samples from relatives of the missing. They also search for clues among personal effects. A wallet was found with the boots.

A case ends with family notification. Sharon Bannister was five years old in 1972 when the jet carrying her father, Stephen A. Rusch, crashed in Laos. At JPAC, 35 years later, she was shown two fragments of his teeth and presented with her father's dog tag, found at the crash site by a JPAC team. She accompanied his flag-draped coffin to Arlington National Cemetery. "It was just two tiny teeth," she said. "But they answered so many questions." —Peter Gwin

THE MISSING

Since 1941 nearly 85,000 men and women from the U.S. military have been declared missing in action. The Pentagon works on some 700 active cases at any given time, solving about seven each month.



GRAPHIC



PHOTO: JONATHAN KINGSTON
 GRAPHIC SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, MARCH 2009

DAV & Harley-Davidson RALLY for a Disabled Veteran

By Jim Hall

Machine gun at the ready, U.S. Army Pfc. David A. Straza moved along the path that snaked through a flooded area known as "pineapple grove." It was late morning on Oct. 30, 1968, and quiet, as his squad patrolled alongside a brush line. Suddenly, gunfire erupted. Straza was about to become a casualty of the Vietnam War.

"The point man went down, and my sergeant got hit and killed in front of me," Straza said. "I started firing and my machine gun jammed. I knelt thinking the M60 may have been hit. When I opened the breach, my leg was knocked from under me, and I went down. I pulled my .45 and fired from the prone position."

According to Straza, the firefight lasted about five minutes. Within a half hour, he was on a helicopter on his way back to a field hospital. He had suffered a gunshot wound through his lower left leg, just above the ankle. The wound was treated, and he spent two days in the field hospital before he was transferred to an Army hospital in Japan for a week. Then he was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Illinois. He spent approximately four and a half months in treatment at Great Lakes before returning to duty at Ft. Benning, Ga., where he remained until his honorable discharge at the rank of sergeant on Oct. 7, 1970. He left the military with a service-connected disability rating of 10 percent and an injury that became worse over time.

In 2001, Straza contacted the DAV, and a National Service Officer reviewed his file and submitted a claim for reconsideration of a clear and unmistakable error to establish a

(Continued on page 33)



Above, David A. Straza U.S. Army, 1968, Vietnam. At left, NSO John Rodriguez speaks with David A. Straza about elements of the VA disability compensation claim the DAV successfully represented on his behalf.



DAV PHOTO: TYP HAZEN

DAV Service

(Continued from page 10)

service-connected disability rating of 30 percent retroactive to Oct. 8, 1970. However, a VA rating decision of March 27, 2002, assigned a 20 percent evaluation for a moderately severe muscle disability, not 30 percent for a severe injury based on the information furnished by the DAV.

Straza's wife, Colleen, died in 2003, and the claim went uncontested as he worked through grief and put his life back together.

In 2008, Straza attended a reunion of the 82nd Airborne Division in Texas. During the reunion he got into a conversation with a DAV member from Maryland. When he recounted the story about his disability claim, the DAV member strongly advised him to have an NSO look into the matter. Straza decided to take the advice, after he and his new bride, Lana, returned from their honeymoon.

"We had just returned from our honeymoon, when I read a notice that a DAV Mobile Service Office (MSO) would be visiting at a local Harley-Davidson dealership," Straza said. "So, I went and talked with NSO John Rodriguez. I told him I was having difficulty walking, had lost feeling in my foot and leg and was experiencing pain in the area. I also told him it was getting progressively worse."

"We were on site at the Zylstra Harley-Davidson/Buell, when Mr. Straza came by to discuss his claim," NSO Rodriguez said. "He wanted to discuss his claim which had previously sought to establish a clear and unmistakable error for failure to establish service-connected compensation at 30 percent for the gunshot wound he had suffered in the Vietnam War. Mr. Straza felt the VA did not properly address his injuries and requested a review of his file."

In reviewing the claim, Rodriguez, a Senior NSO at the DAV National Service office in Chicago, discovered that the VA had, in fact, granted service-connected disability compensation for the gunshot wound to the lower left leg retroactive to Oct. 8, 1970, but only for 20 percent.

NSO Rodriguez was convinced a further error had been made.

"Based on my review, on July 25, 2008, I submitted a request for corrective action based on the clear and unmistakable error made by the Rating Board Decision on April 2, 2002," Rodriguez said. "Our memorandum dated Aug. 16, 2001, argued that Mr. Straza warranted a higher rating based on the severity of his injury. The rating board did not comply with the request, which was correct. Since the error was still in effect, we wanted it corrected."

In a letter dated Oct. 9, 2008, Straza received the VA decision stating that a clear and unmistakable error was found in the evaluation and a retroactive increased evaluation to

30 percent disabling was established from Oct. 8, 1970. His claim had been corrected.

NSO Rodriguez views the success of Straza's claim as an example of the effectiveness of the MSO outreach program and the partnership between the DAV and Harley-Davidson.

"The Mobile Service Office program is a great way to bring service to veterans nearly anywhere," Rodriguez said. "The combined partnership of the DAV and Harley-Davidson is cemented in service to our disabled veterans through the MSO program. Reaching out to veterans at Harley-Davidson dealerships provides an opportunity to expand our contact with veterans beyond a typical MSO stop. Many of the veterans who visit us at Harley-Davidson dealerships don't know they are eligible for membership or services from the DAV."

"NSOs are litigators, mediators, technicians and detectives all in one," National Service Director Randy Reese said. "The goal of an NSO is to provide superior, quality representation to disabled veterans and their families to ensure they receive all of their benefits. Whether the disability compensation is rated at 10 percent or 100 percent, every veteran is important."

David Straza couldn't agree more.

"The service the DAV provided was exemplary," Straza said. "NSO Rodriguez paid attention to what I was saying and was genuinely concerned. He followed up on the claim in a timely fashion and accurate manner. And he got results."

"From their own experience as disabled veterans, they know the rules and regulations and can help without you having to go it on your own," he said.

"I was talking to one of the guys I served with recently, when he brought up an issue he was having difficulty with. Like the DAV member at my reunion in Texas, I recommended that he contact the DAV — I strongly recommended it," Straza added. ©



David A. Straza, at home in Illinois.

God and the Soldier

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All men adore
In time of trouble,
And no more;
For when war is over
And all things righted,
God is neglected -
And the old soldier
slighted!!!*

*P-body (recovered)
Author Unknown*



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A Letter from a Farm Kid,
(Now a San Diego Marine Corps Recruit)

Dear Ma and Pa,

I am well. Hope you are. Tell Brother Walt and Brother Elmer the Marine Corps beats working for old man Minch by a mile. Tell them to join up quick before all of the places are filled. I was restless at first because you got to stay in bed till nearly 6 a.m. but I am getting so I like to sleep late. Tell Walt and Elmer all you do before breakfast is smooth your cot and shine some things. No hogs to slop, feed to pitch, mash to mix, wood to split, fire to lay. Practically nothing. Men got to shave but it is not to bad, there's warm water. Breakfast is strong on trimmings like fruit juice, cereal, eggs, bacon, etc. but kind of weak on chops, potatoes, ham, steak, fried eggplant, pie and other regular food, but tell Walt and Elmer you can always sit by the two city boys that live on coffee. Their food plus yours holds you till noon when you get feed again.

It's no wonder these city boys can't walk much. We go on "route marches", which the platoon sergeant says are long walks to harden us. If he thinks so, it's not my place to tell him different. A "route march" is about as far as to our mailbox at home. Then the city guys get sore feet and we all ride back in trucks. The country is nice but awful flat. The sergeant is like a school teacher. He nags a lot. The Captain is like the school board. Majors and Colonels just ride around and frown. They don't bother you none. This next will kill Walt and Elmer with laughing. I keep getting medals for shooting. I don't know why. The bulls-eye is nearly as big as a chipmunk head and don't move, and it ain't shooting at you like the Higgett boys at home. All you got to do is lie there all comfortable and hit it. You don't even load your own cartridges, they come in boxes.

Then we have what they call hand-to-hand combat training. You get to wrestle with them city boys. I have to be real careful though, they break real easy. It ain't like fighting that ole bull at home. I'm about the best they got in this except for that Tug Jordan from over in Silver Lake. I only beat him once. He joined up the same time as me, but I'm only 5'6" and 130 pounds and he's 6'8" and nearly 300 pounds dry. Be sure to tell Walt and Elmer to hurry and join before other fellers get onto this setup and come stampeding in.

Your loving daughter,

Gail

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WW I soldier's remains identified

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Eighty-eight years after he fell in battle near the Marne River east of Paris, the remains of U.S. Army Pvt. Francis Lupo have been recovered and identified by the Pentagon.

Lupo, of Cincinnati, was killed on July 21, 1918, during an attack on German forces near Soissons, France. His remains were discovered by a French archaeologist in 2003 and identified by scientists from the Pentagon's Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory.

He is the first World War I casualty to be recovered and identified by the special command.

The Pentagon said Friday that Lupo will be buried Tues-

day at Arlington National Cemetery.

Larry Greer, a Pentagon spokesman on POW-MIA issues, said government records do not indicate when or whether World War I remains had been recovered and identified prior to the 1960s.

Lupo was a 23-year-old member of Company E, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division when his unit fought as part of a French-American attack on German forces near Soissons in what came to be known as the Second Battle of the Marne.

Of the 1st Infantry Division's 12,228 infantry officers and enlisted soldiers who fought in the battle, 8,305 were killed, wounded, taken prisoner or listed as missing, according to Pentagon records. The United States had 53,402 battle deaths in the war.



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A fitting tribute: 'They call this place America'

By Jim Noles

Five years ago, four unlikely friends stood on the wooded fringe of a Czech meadow. Behind them, misty hills rising into the forested foothills of the White Carpathian Mountains, ancient footpaths wound through fragrant fir forests to link white-washed, red-roofed villages with one another.

The friends, however, were not interested in the scenic vista. Instead, their attention focused on a simple metal plaque affixed to a sturdy tree trunk. "29 August 1944," the plaque read. "2LT Russel [sic] Myrick [sic], Bombardier, B17 Flying Fortress, Tail End Charlie, 15th U.S. Army Air Force."

"They call this place 'America'," Jana Turchinkova said quietly. Turchinkova's grandfather, Mojmir Baca, first sheltered Russell Meyrick's navigator, Loy Dickinson, when the young teenager from Berkeley, Calif., parachuted onto Baca's family farm on that August day in 1944.

Sixty years after that fateful summer day, Turchinkova escorted Dickinson through the countryside of Moravia, stitching together the string of crash sites that marked the demise of Dickinson's and Meyrick's squadron of Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses. Seven of the bombers had left an airfield in Italy in 1944 to bomb the industrial city of Moravska Ostrava. Ambushed by a swarm of German fighters, none returned.

Michael Zitnick, a local historian, was the third member of the group. He stepped forward and explained that here, near the small village of Rudice, Dickinson's bomber crashed and burned. Dickinson and seven comrades managed to bail out. Bombardier Russell Meyrick of Springfield, Mass., and ball turret gunner Joseph Marinello a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., were not so lucky.

Later that day, the Germans pulled Meyrick's and Marinello's bodies from the wreckage and buried them in Rudice's village cemetery. A propeller blade from Tail End Charlie, jutting up from the dark soil, marked the grave site. The bodies remained there until Sept. 4, 1946, when U.S. military personnel exhumed the bodies with full military honors and transported them home.

"They call this place 'America'," Zitnick

repeated, nodding at the plaque.

My father rounded out the quartet standing before the plaque. He had accompanied Dickinson to the Czech Republic to research the forgotten air battle of Aug. 29, 1944, that claimed Meyrick's and Marinello's—and nearly four dozen fellow aviators'—lives. Elsewhere in eastern Moravia there are other places one could call "America." In the cemetery at Sanov, a tall rectangular pillar commemorates the nine men who did not make it out of the B-17 Wichita Belle alive. Outside of town, a sculpted "aerial heart" marks the bomber's crash site. Another monument, engraved with an airman's iconic face and a plunging B-17, stands in an open field near Krhov. It honors the nine men that Ball of Fire, the bomber piloted by Jim Weiler, of Burlington, Wis., took to the grave.

Yet another monument, this one of luminous black granite, sits in Slavcin's cemetery. It marks the original burial location of 28 of the American airmen who lost their lives in the raid on Moravska Ostrava. Each engraved name bears silent witness to the sacrifices of Aug. 29, 1944.

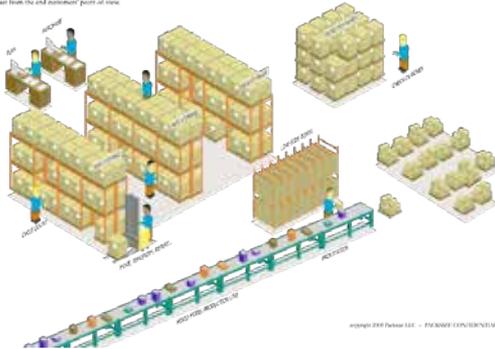
A memorial stronger than granite, however, exists in the bonds of friendship that grew among the survivors of the mission against Moravska Ostrava's refineries and marshaling yards. Dickinson, for example, stayed in close contact with the Baca family, even helping to sponsor Turchinkova on a Rotary Youth Exchange visit to his hometown of Denver. Today, those bonds even extend to their children and grandchildren. Several will make the pilgrimage to the Czech Republic to mark the battle's 65th anniversary where each year the Catholic priest in Slavcin offers a special mass for the 28 airmen once interred in his town's cemetery. Their bodies are no longer there. The same team that recovered Meyrick's and Marinello's bodies recovered theirs as well. Now, only the mass, the memorial and the memories remain. Nevertheless, it is enough to ensure that such places are still called America.

Jim Noles, an attorney in Birmingham, Ala., co-authored "Mighty by Sacrifice: The Destruction of an American Bomber Squadron, August 29, 1944," with his father.

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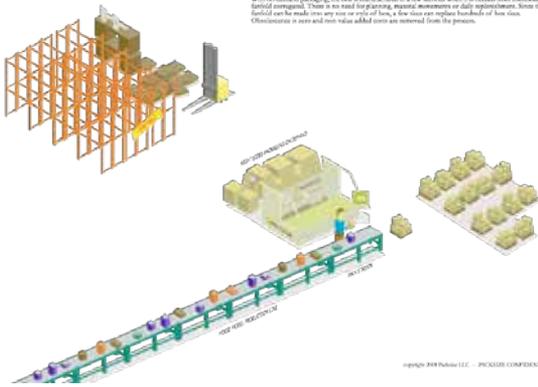
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