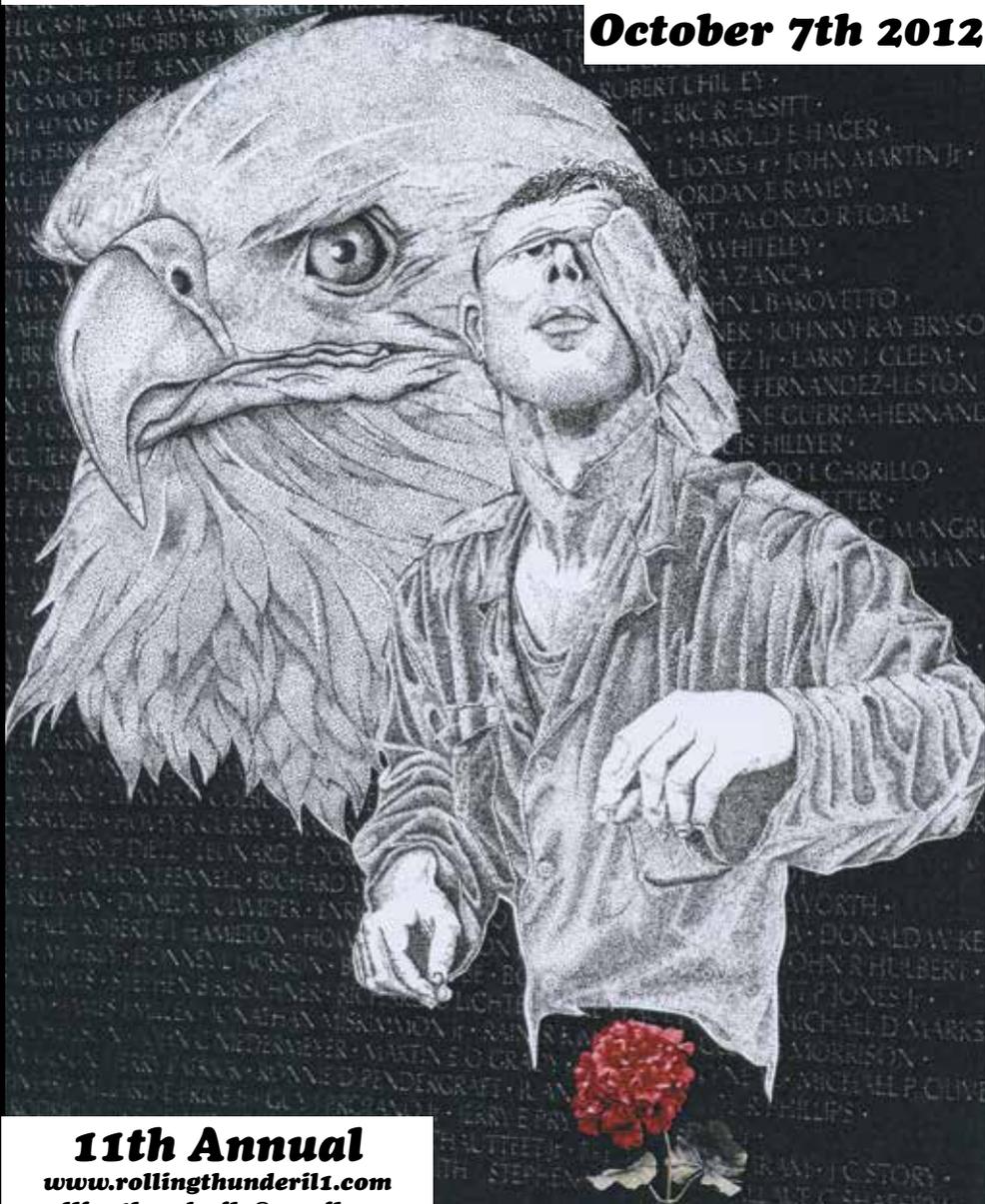


BIG THUNDER RUN

October 7th 2012



11th Annual

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Until they are home

National POW/MIA Recognition Day
September 21, 2012

www.dtic.mil/dpmo

Illinois Soldiers Still Wait

Illinois POW/MIAs

WWII	1510
Korean War	417
Vietnam War	60

Rolling Thunder® Mission Statement
"To Correct The Past and Protect The Future"

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 so protect future Veterans from being left behind should they become Prisoners of War/Missing in Action. We are committed to helping Disabled Veterans from All Wars.

I KNEW I COULD FIGHT,
I HOPED I WOULDN'T DIE,
I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD STILL
BE HERE AFTER EVERYONE ELSE
HAS GONE HOME

Above from a plaque at the National Vietnam Veterans
Art Museum, Chicago, IL.

**Thank you for your
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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

Vietnam War Memorial

There are 58,267 names now listed on that polished black wall, including those added in 2010.

The names are arranged in the order in which they were taken from us by date and within each date the names are alphabetized. It is hard to believe it is 36 years since the last casualties.

Beginning at the apex on panel 1E and going out to the end of the East wall, appearing to recede into the earth (numbered 70E- May 25, 1968); then resuming at the end of the West wall, as the wall emerges from the earth (numbered 70W - continuing May 25, 1968) and ending with a date in 1975. Thus the war's beginning and end meet. The war is complete, coming full circle, yet broken by the earth that bounds the angle's open side and contained within the earth itself.

The first known casualty was Richard B. Fitzgibbon, of the North Weymouth, Mass. listed by the U.S. Department of defense as having been killed on June 8, 1956. His name is listed on the Wall with that of his son, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Richard B. Fitzgibbon III, who was killed on Sept. 7, 1965.

There are three sets of fathers and sons on the Wall. 39,996 on the Wall were just 22 or younger. The largest age group, 8,283 were just 19 years old. 3,103 were 18 years old. 12 soldiers on the Wall were 17 years old. On soldier, PFC Dan Bullock was 15 years old. 997 soldiers were killed on their first day in Vietnam. 1,448 soldiers were killed on their last day in Vietnam. 31 sets of brothers are on the Wall. Thirty one sets of parents lost two of their sons. 54 soldiers on the Wall attended Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia. I wonder why so many from one school. 8 Women are on the Wall. Nursing the wounded.

244 soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War; 153 of them are on the Wall. Beallsville, Ohio with a population of 475 lost 6 of her sons. West Virginia had the highest casualty rate per capita in the nation. there are 711 West Virginians on the Wall. The Marines of Morenci - They led some of the scrappiest high school football and basketball teams that the little Arizona copper town of Morenci (pop. 5,058) had ever known and cheered. They enjoyed roaring beer busts. In quieter moments, they rode horses on the Coronado Trail, stalked deer in the Apache National Forest. And in the patriotic camaraderie typical of Morenci's mining families, the nine graduates of Morenci High enlisted as a group in the Marine Corps. Their service began on Independence Day, 1966. Only 3 returned home.

The Buddies of Midvale - LeRoy Tafoya, Jimmy Martinez, Tom Gonzales were all boyhood friends and lived on three consecutive streets in Midvale, Utah on Fifth, Sixth and Seventh avenues. they lived only a few yards apart. They played ball at the adjacent sandlot ball field. And they all went to Vietnam. In a span of 16 dark days in late 1967, all three would be killed. LeRoy was killed on Wednesday, Nov. 22, the fourth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Jimmy died less than 24 hours later on Thanksgiving Day. Tom was shot dead assaulting the enemy on Dec. 7 Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.

The most casualty deaths for a single day was on January 31, 1968 - 245 deaths. The most casualty deaths for a single month was May 1968 - 2,415 casualties were incurred. That's 2,415 dead in a single month.

"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



A Quarter Century of Thunder

A feisty group of veterans known for their antics in Washington spawned what has become the nation's largest event to honor POWs and MIAs.

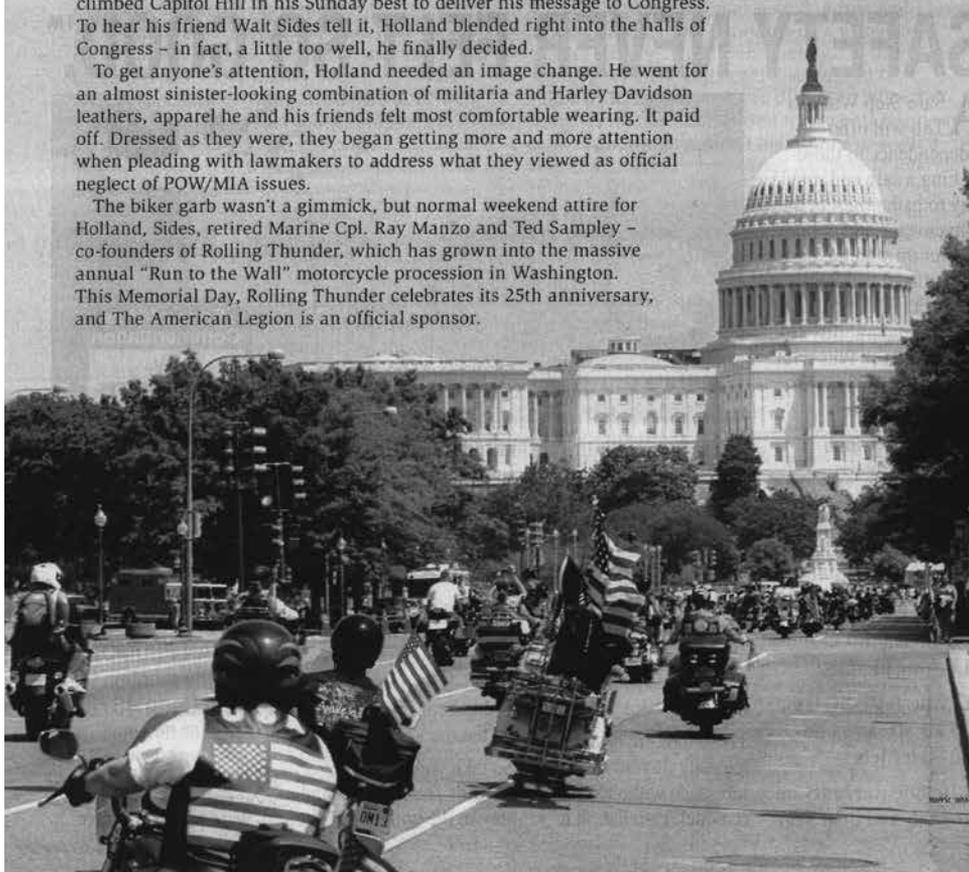
BY CRAIG ROBERTS

Nobody on Capitol Hill paid much attention to John "Top" Holland until he changed his wardrobe. In his earliest days of lobbying, when the Vietnam generation was young, a gentleman would never visit a place or person of importance dressed in anything other than a well-pressed business suit.

And so it was that Holland, a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, climbed Capitol Hill in his Sunday best to deliver his message to Congress. To hear his friend Walt Sides tell it, Holland blended right into the halls of Congress – in fact, a little too well, he finally decided.

To get anyone's attention, Holland needed an image change. He went for an almost sinister-looking combination of militaria and Harley Davidson leathers, apparel he and his friends felt most comfortable wearing. It paid off. Dressed as they were, they began getting more and more attention when pleading with lawmakers to address what they viewed as official neglect of POW/MIA issues.

The biker garb wasn't a gimmick, but normal weekend attire for Holland, Sides, retired Marine Cpl. Ray Manzo and Ted Sampley – co-founders of Rolling Thunder, which has grown into the massive annual "Run to the Wall" motorcycle procession in Washington. This Memorial Day, Rolling Thunder celebrates its 25th anniversary, and The American Legion is an official sponsor.



Continues on page 7



Holland, a Legionnaire, was born in 1927. He left his family's farm in southern Indiana just before his 15th birthday, a month after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He lied about his age to a Marine Corps recruiter and got in. He was in the Marines for the duration of World War II, then joined the Army in 1947. He saw action in Korea and later with the Special Forces in Vietnam, pulling four tours as one of the original Green Berets. He retired from the service in 1970, but took up the POW/MIA cause with a vengeance. It would be his calling for the rest of his life.

Prior to Holland's funeral in July 2010, Rolling Thunder colleague Danny "Greasy" Belcher wrote on various websites, "EVERYONE with a POW/MIA patch or who claims to care about the POW/MIA issue should attend John's funeral. He was the first to get the POW/MIA issue moving by trying to change the 1942 Missing Service Personnel Act, which let a POW/MIA be declared dead after one year ... John Holland was the one who got us off our complaining asses and calling and visiting our congressmen and senators ... He made us accountable for our fellow abandoned Americans and showed us that we could do something besides complain."

Manzo, the man credited with actually conceiving the now-famous motorcycle run, was not much different. Sides recalls that the idea was first advanced by Manzo on a "nice, warm, sunny day in June 1987" on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Sides and Holland were sitting there, thinking back on their years in the service, when they were approached by fellow vet Bob Schmidt, who was leading a stranger, Manzo.

"Ray come walkin' up there with Bob, and Ray said he wanted to do a motorcycle run, and we talked about it a few minutes. John said, 'Whaddya think?' And I said, 'Man, I don't know.' So that's how it started."

Despite doubts about the run's viability, the veterans went to work on the National Park Service and local authorities to gain permission for a motorcycle parade. Initially, public-safety officials resisted the idea of a horde of leather-clad bikers invading the broad avenues and green expanses of the capital. "They didn't wanna hear 'boom,'" Sides says.

Sampley, a former Green Beret, has a history of activism on behalf of Vietnam War veterans dating to the early 1980s. His public demonstrations for the POW/MIA cause were legendary. He once chained himself to the White House gates, waged highly charged public attacks on Sens. John McCain and John Kerry, displayed bamboo cages housing mock POWs, and spent more than one night behind bars himself for his actions.

In 1994, Sampley – to make a point about the importance of identifying MIAs – announced his belief that the remains in the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery were not unknown at all. After much research, he concluded that the allegedly anonymous warrior sealed in the tomb was actually an Air Force pilot reported as MIA: Lt. Michael Blassie, who had been shot down in 1972. The theory was confirmed by DNA analysis in 1998. Sampley died in 2009 at 62. Blassie's sister gave a eulogy at the funeral.

In 1956, at 16, Walt Sides joined the Marines after "getting in a little trouble." Like Holland a decade and a half before, Sides lied about his age to get in. After his hitch, he took advantage of the GI Bill and enrolled at the University of Oklahoma, where he played football. There, he explains, he soon found himself "in a little more trouble" and headed back to the Marines. This time, he stayed in for 21 years.

Sides worked as a sniper-scout platoon leader in Vietnam. After retiring from the service, he took up the POW/MIA cause and remains vocal about the issue today.

"We know damn well there's people left over there," he says. "There's over 1,200 still not accounted for. We just bought our way back in North Korea, and they just brought remains out of there ... In 2010, I think, we brought out 19 and in 2011 we brought out 22. There's still people over there."

Sides concedes that there is little chance any vanished warriors from Korea or Vietnam are still alive. But the Rolling Thunder Run to the Wall



Veterans salute during Taps after placing a plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. »



grows each year, raising awareness about those whose fates remain unknown.

In 1988, with a turnout of about 2,500 bikes, Rolling Thunder was born. This year, the event is expected to attract approximately 1 million people – bikers and spectators alike – for the annual procession from the Pentagon’s parking lot to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

In recent years, the Run to the Wall has become something of a national sensation. Those who cannot participate say they follow the run online and in social media. A YouTube video of Marine Staff Sgt. Tim Chambers – known as “the lone Marine” – saluting Rolling Thunder riders

during the 2011 run has been viewed more than 2.7 million times.

The event has now outlived many of those who created it. In a sense, that was their mission: to create greater awareness of missing servicemembers for as long as they remain unaccounted for.

Sides, now 72, says he never really thought about how long the ride would last. “After about eight (years), I knew that we weren’t going to quit, and we’ve been kind of hustling along ever since. It’s been a great run – a really great run.”

Craig Roberts is a multimedia specialist for The American Legion.

American Legion Riders to posse up for Run to the Wall

For the first time in Rolling Thunder’s 25-year history, a large contingent of American Legion Riders will join the parade on Memorial Day. As many as 500 biking Legionnaires are expected to meet in the Washington area to join the annual Run to the Wall, starting at the Pentagon and proceeding to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Nick Nicholas, treasurer at Fairfax, Va., Post 177, says the idea came from a group of Treasure Island, Fla., Legion Riders at last year’s run. “They asked, ‘Why don’t we ride as a group?’” Nicholas says. “A lot of guys had thought of that, so we decided to try to make it happen.”

Nicholas, a West Point graduate and civilian Pentagon worker, put together a 12-member committee to plan a rally. Brad Watkins, Post 177’s first vice commander, assisted in coordinating the planned Legion Riders ride-in.

“John Sommer and Bob Spanogle really helped with the effort, too,” Nicholas says. “They gave terrific support.”

Rolling Thunder has been close to Harley aficionado Sommer’s heart since its founding. As a decorated Vietnam War combat medic, he made the POW/MIA issue one of his signature causes during his long tenure at the Legion. Sommer spent 35 years at the Legion’s D.C. headquarters, starting as a claims representative and eventually serving as executive director. He has traveled to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos several times to promote the POW/MIA cause.

Spanogle, a past national commander and past national adjutant, is no stranger to Rolling Thunder and the Legion Riders, either. His enthusiasm and encouragement played a big part in the Legion’s decision to be an official sponsor of the 2012 run.

Spanogle says he’s noticed an increase in younger riders participating in veterans’ motorcycle rallies.

“Vietnam veterans, who now make up most of our membership and leadership, made up their minds that the new generation of soldiers, from the Persian Gulf on, would not have happen to them what happened to us,” he says.



Past National Commander Robert Spanogle and former executive director John Sommer, above, encouraged the Legion to sponsor the 25th anniversary of Rolling Thunder.

“The youngest riders today are riding alongside Vietnam vets, and they love it. I don’t see a real generation gap. In my experience, vets want to serve their fellow vets. They have a cause bigger than themselves.”

Several American Legion posts in the D.C. area will serve as meeting points for Legion Riders planning to join the herd, Nicholas says. His Fairfax post will host an open house the day before the Rolling Thunder run, with patch sewing, bike detailing, maintenance and other vendors.

“We’ll have a barbecue in the afternoon, and we’ve designed a unique patch and pin to commemorate the event, which we will be selling,” he says.

Any money raised by the Legion Riders during Rolling Thunder weekend will be donated to The American Legion Legacy Run in August.

Read about custom-made military bikes that will be displayed at Rolling Thunder:

www.legion.org/magazine



Tim Chambers

Staff sergeant, U.S. Marine Corps

Chambers is called the "Lone Marine" for his hours-long salute to motorcycle-riding veterans during the annual Rolling Thunder run in Washington. On 9/11, Chambers was at the Pentagon and spent three days bringing out the dead and injured. He has received numerous awards for his volunteer service, and seeks to improve the quality of life of youth, the less fortunate and veterans "through mentoring, compassion and education." He is currently writing a book about what his salute has meant to veterans.

Watch a video of Chambers' salute at YouTube. Search "Rolling Thunder - A Marine's Vigil."

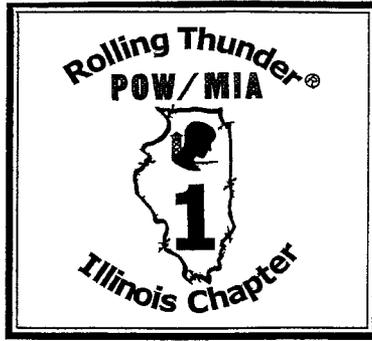


U.S. Marine Corps photo



"Patriotism can be found on every street corner if you look for any simple act of compassion one American does for another. When citizens exercise their rights as Americans and live their lives to the fullest, they honor the service and sacrifice of all veterans. Some say they have never served in the ranks. I beg to differ. There are many different trenches in life that call for acts of heroism by ordinary citizens every day."





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. . .**

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



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Left, Liz Feeny, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command along with JPAC Deputy Director of Public Affairs Michelle Lee Thomas update attendees at the POW/MIA Seminar at National Convention. A comprehensive presentation of identification and repatriation of U.S. servicemen was illustrated to those delegates attending.

Missing Americans Remembered



By Thom Wilborn

September 17, the national day of remembrance for those missing from our nation's wars, is marked with ceremonies and military salutes at the Pentagon, across the Potomac River from Washington.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department POW/Missing Personnel Affairs Office (DPMO) holds out hope that Russia will reconstitute its membership in the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. The commission was founded in 1992 and idled by the Russians in 2004.

U.S. officials say they hope for greater cooperation with the Russians concerning POW/MIA issues. But it may take White House talks with Russian leaders to get commission members appointed.

"We've seen the impact that veterans service organizations like the DAV and family organizations have had in opening up the files of foreign governments concerning our POWs and MIAs," said Na-

tional Legislative Director Joseph A. Violante. "The United States has led the way in the fullest possible accounting of our POWs and MIAs, and it remains one of our most important initiatives."

Those records, along with many others currently withheld by Russia, could shed light on the fates of American servicemembers who were held in the former Soviet Union during World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War.

The United States has been forthcoming with information concerning Russian MIAs — resolving 455 cases for next-of-kin, releasing more than 55,000 pages of information and clarifying the fates of 450,000 Russian and Soviet citizens. The United States is also offering to respond to inquiries about former Soviet troops missing in Afghanistan.

The United States hopes to get topographic maps used by Soviet forces during the Korean War, interview Russian Korean War veterans, and gain access to KGB files. Also

on the U.S. wish list are reports on ten downings of American aircraft and accounting of MIAs during the Cold War. The World War II items the United States seeks include the total U.S. losses in the Russian Far East and reported aircraft crash sites on the Kamchatka Peninsula.

As POW/MIA ceremonies are conducted, the families of those missing look to Washington and Moscow for support in learning the fates of their loved ones. Relations between the two countries remain unsettled at best, but the support of veterans in both countries is lending strength to the fullest possible accounting of those missing in action.

With the recent congressional mandate to implement a comprehensive program to account for those missing from World War II through Desert Storm, the DPMO has expanded its efforts to focus on accounting for the more than 70,000 Americans missing from World War II. The U.S.-Russia Joint Commission could be a major contributor to that effort.

"We look to our government in hopes that any dispute with Russia can be resolved to the point that the U.S.-Russia commission returns to work," said Violante. "As we remember our POWs and MIAs, it would be a significant milestone to see Washington and Moscow work together to bring our servicemembers home." ©

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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.

God and the Soldier

*God and the soldier
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!!!*

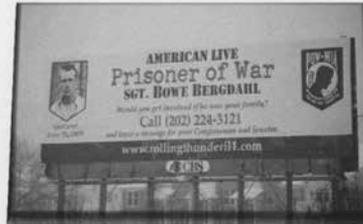
*P-body (recovered)
Author Unknown*





POW/MIA "WE WILL NEVER FORGET"	
WWI	3,344
WWII	78,537
Cold War	120
Korea	8,099
Vietnam	1,702
Afghanistan	1

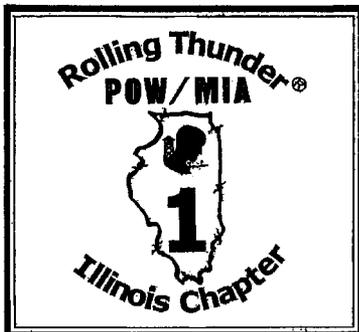
Numbers supplied by National Rolling Thunder@Inc.



*"A man who is good enough to shed his blood for the country is good enough to be given a square deal afterwards."
Theodore Roosevelt*

If You Think the Way We Do?

AND - You want to learn more,



come and Ride with a Purpose!

We meet on the First Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm.

AT

The V.F.W. in Warrenville, IL



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	Back Country Roads
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

11th Annual



“Big Thunder” Run

October 7th 2012

**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**



Bowe Bergdahl: Born in Idaho, a Prisoner of War in Afghanistan



CHRISTOPHER MORRIS / VII FOR TIME

Robert and Jani Bergdahl, parents of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, in Hailey, Idaho, May 12, 2012. Bowe Bergdahl is America's only known current prisoner of war.

In this week's issue of *TIME*, Aryn Baker and Nate Rawlings report on the attempts to win freedom for U.S. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who has been held by the Taliban since mid-2009. His parents, Bob and Jani Bergdahl, have been keeping a quiet but anxious vigil for him in their hometown of Hailey, Idaho.

Now, Bob Bergdahl is speaking out on their ordeal, what the family knows of Bowe's situation and why it is urgent that talks between the U.S. and the Taliban continue for his release. As Baker and Rawlings write, the situation has been aggravated by "a recent split in the Taliban movement that, in a cruel twist, was precipitated by the very negotiations that were meant to secure the release of their son." The story cites Taliban sources on Bowe Bergdahl's condition—and the consequences of an escape attempt last fall.

In the magazine and on *TIME.com*, Rawlings reports on the town of Hailey and how its residents are pulling for the Bergdahls. Rawlings describes his visit to Hailey and meeting with Bob Bergdahl in a *TIME.com* video. Clearly, the people of Hailey consider Bowe Bergdahl a Prisoner of War, but the Pentagon does not officially classify him that way. Mark Thompson explains why in a post in our *Battleland* blog. The military, however, has a strong tradition of leaving no soldier behind. Rawlings, a former U.S. Army Captain, describes his unsuccessful 2006 search for the missing Army Specialist Matt Maupin in Iraq—and how the soldier's remains were finally found two years later.

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-57434268-503543/bowe-bergdahl-prisoner-of-war-politics-and-diplomacy/

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/world/asia/us-trying-to-locate-captured-soldier-pentagon-says.html>

<http://battleland.blogs.time.com/2012/05/17/bowe-bergdahl-born-in-idaho-a-prisoner-of-war-in-afghanistan/?xid=gonewsedit>

Continues on page 21



Bob Bergdahl was halfway through his UPS delivery route on the evening of June 30, 2009, when he received an urgent message from his dispatcher, requesting that he return

immediately to headquarters. Bergdahl had spent the afternoon the same way he spent most afternoons, delivering packages to the far-flung mountain settlements outside Hailey, Idaho, where he lives with his wife Jani and where they had brought up their two children Sky and Bowe. By the time Bergdahl turned in to the graveled parking lot of the UPS hub, it was 7 p.m. Standing there, next to his wife, were two American soldiers in dress uniform. Alongside them was an Army chaplain. For the father of an American infantryman serving in Afghanistan, that could mean only one thing: his beloved son was dead. "How is Jani going to take this?" he wondered. But the two soldiers had something else to tell him. Twenty-three-year-old Private First Class Bowe Bergdahl had gone missing from his base in eastern Afghanistan, near the Pakistani border. He was, they explained, DUSTWUN—a military acronym that means "Duty Status Whereabouts Unknown." Bob and Jani stood in the parking lot, and together with the chaplain, they prayed.

They did not yet know it, but their son was a prisoner of the Taliban, the only American soldier ever to be taken alive and held by the militant group that the U.S. has been fighting since the war began in October 2001.

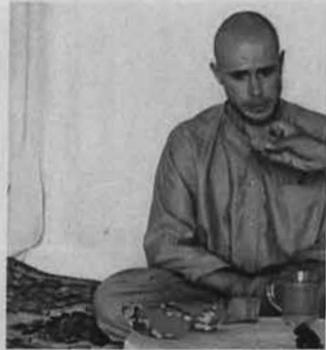
Some families would have gone public with the news immediately, telling the world that their son must be brought home—now. The Bergdahls, though, are quiet people. The close-knit family—Jani had homeschooled Bowe and his older sister—retreated into silence. They preferred to work behind the scenes, lobbying the State Department and the Department of Defense to pursue Bowe's release. They worried that too much exposure might

make things worse. Other than some carefully scripted official statements and a single self-made YouTube video, in which Bob Bergdahl addressed Bowe's captors and asked for his only son's safe return home, Bob and Jani had never spoken in public about their son.

But on May 9, just weeks after Bowe's 26th birthday, the Bergdahls emerged from their self-imposed silence with an unexpected interview in a local newspaper, saying they believed the U.S. should negotiate a prisoner exchange for their son with the Taliban and that "everybody is frustrated with how slowly the process has evolved." After a flurry of interviews with the national media, in which they revealed that Bowe had in fact been the subject of a failed deal involving the transfer of five Taliban

prisoners from the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo, they retreated to the sanctuary of their family home, located in the shadow of Idaho's Smoky Mountains, a range of peaks so wild and raw they wouldn't look out of place on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. But in an interview at a local coffee shop after most of the reporters had left town, Bob Bergdahl,

52, described the agonizing journey his family has undertaken, how the pressure has built with the passing years and why he felt he could stay silent no longer. Pained but reflective, Bergdahl spoke for more than two hours, never becoming truly emotional and deflecting any question about his inner life to focus on what he could do, must do, to get his son back. "We do not want to pressure the White House. We do not want to pressure Congress," Bergdahl said. "They're going to have to come to terms the way they always do, through hardcore politics, especially in an election year. But at the same time, we have a window of opportunity in Afghanistan,



and that window is not going to wait for a national election to come to an end. I don't think we can count on the dynamics on the ground in Afghanistan to be the same in November as they necessarily are now. This is a war, and war doesn't wait on politics."

TIME has learned that the urgency the Bergdahls feel is rooted in a recent split in the Taliban movement that, in a cruel twist, was precipitated by the very negotiations that were meant to secure the release of their son. People close to the Taliban and the particular faction that is holding Bergdahl say the once secret talks with the Americans sparked a furor among hard-line Taliban fighters who felt they were being sold out by some of their leaders. Those hard-line Taliban are now—according to Taliban, other Afghan and American sources—in no mood to restart talks over Bergdahl, or anything else for that matter.

But Bowe Bergdahl remains a unique





In the enemy's hands Clockwise from top left: Bergdahl with his identity tag in 2009; a poster on the wall of Zaney's coffee shop; Bergdahl at 16; a 2010 screen grab of Bergdahl and a captor

and valuable bargaining chip for the Taliban, and that gives his parents hope. To the U.S. government, he also presents an opportunity for much broader political gains. His release might push the fitful peace talks with the Taliban further along. "The onus is on the Taliban to come back to the negotiations if they want to move this process forward," says an Obama Administration official.

These three disparate entities—the Bergdahls and their Hailey community, the U.S. government, and the Taliban—have mobilized assets at hand to achieve the oddly shared goal of bringing the crisis over the young U.S. soldier to a close, even as they pursue very different endgames. At the heart of it all is a young captive who has declared in one of the five hostage videos released by the Taliban, "I am a prisoner. I want to go home. The Afghanistan men who are in our prisons, they want to go home too."

In Custody of the Taliban

AT THE BEGINNING, ROWE BERGDahl refused to make life easy for his captors. "He was not cooperating," one Taliban commander tells a TIME special correspondent based in Peshawar, Pakistan. Initially, Bergdahl refused to eat as he was moved rapidly around the border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. After his capture, he was taken first to the Pakistani town of Angoor Adda, which borders the Afghan province of Paktika, where Bergdahl's Army unit was based. Soon after, he was shifted to the thickly forested mountains of North Waziristan's Shawal Valley, where the network of the Taliban-aligned

militant leader Sirajuddin Haqqani is headquartered. North Waziristan is a forbidding, xenophobic land of suspicious clans where no stranger goes unnoticed and where perilous terrain makes infiltration by even the most dedicated intelligence agencies extremely difficult. Another militant who, like the others, requested not to be identified, in deference to Taliban rules against speaking to the media, said that once Bergdahl was in Pakistan he was almost entirely beyond the reach of the U.S. military. "We had been waiting for years and years to hunt down such an important bird. Once one fell into our hands, then we knew how to keep it safe and sound."

How Bergdahl fell into the hands of the Haqqani network remains unclear. Within days of his disappearance on June 30, a Taliban commander crowed to the media that his group had captured a drunken American soldier outside his base. Two and a half weeks later, they released a video. Bergdahl, dressed in local garb and showing the beginnings of a wispy beard, said he had been captured after falling behind on a routine foot patrol. Unnamed soldiers from his base, however, told international media outlets that he had wandered into the scrub-covered mountains on his own with his journal and a supply of water, leaving his weapons and armor behind. An unidentified U.S. official told the Associated Press at the time that he had "just walked off" after his guard shift was over.

Whatever the truth, Bergdahl was in the custody of one of the most violent factions of the Taliban. After his initial rebelliousness, Bergdahl started cooperating a little more, militants say. At times he was looked after by a group of English-speaking fighters, "so he does not feel bored," says the commander. He drank mineral water and boxed juices and was eventually allowed the foods of his choice, within reason. "Under the rules of *melmastia*, 'Pashtun hospitality,' he will eat the same foods his captors eat," says Jere Van Dyk, a CBS news consultant who was captured and held for 45 days in 2008 by the same group. "There will be dal, rice, and meat when they can afford it." In the right season, they might offer spinach or eggplant cooked in oil. "They will provide him with soap and toothpaste, all the amenities they can to

show that they are taking care of him. He will have a cot and a quilt."

Even though Bergdahl is the only American service member the Taliban have successfully captured, kidnapping and hostage taking have long been tactics of the militant group. Since 2001, fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan have seized hundreds of aid workers, journalists, wealthy Pakistanis and other people the Taliban considers worthy of ransom or negotiation.

The cultural code of hospitality extended to captives appears—deliberately—evident in the first video, which became public in July 2009. While the off-camera interrogator asks questions of Bergdahl in accented but fairly fluent English, the shaved-headed soldier mops up a plate of stew with pieces of bread. He finishes his meal with a glass mug of the pale yellow tea popular among the Pashtun population.

The worst part of being a captive, say Van Dyk and British journalist Sean Langan, who was held hostage by the Haqqanis for four months in 2008, is the state of perpetual fear. "No matter how nice they are—and usually they are—you know that they could kill you at any minute," says Langan. "That can break a person over time."

In a third video, released in April 2010, Bergdahl sports a thick beard and wears an army sweatshirt that looks fresh out of the package. Bergdahl says he is being treated well and is allowed to exercise. His captors tell TIME that by that stage he had started learning basic Pashtu, "words such as *bread, water, How are you?, I am fine, Who are you?*" Bergdahl, who was raised a devout Presbyterian, even started thinking about converting to Islam, says one commander. Suspicious at first, they asked if it was out of fear or frustration that he wanted to convert. "He told us, 'Your way of life has impressed me, and I want to live like you.'"

And then, last fall, Bowe Bergdahl escaped.

Learning Pashtu in Idaho

BACK IN HAILEY, BOB BERGDAHL WAS ALSO learning Pashtu. He scoured websites and militant chat rooms looking for information. He kept delivering packages for UPS, as familiar and warm a face around Hailey as ever, but getting Bowe back had become his mission in life. He read up on

the border region's history and politics and culture, information that he then used in his own video directed at Bowe's captors.

"Idaho is so much like Afghanistan," Bob Bergdahl says, speaking of the wild mountainous environment that both places share and that Bowe loved. "The similarities will help him. We hope that will be what sustains him."

Friends and neighbors in Hailey say the videos of Bowe have been both comforting and torturous to the Bergdahl family. They prove that Bowe is alive, but they are also a visceral reminder of just how far away he is. Sherry Horton, one of Bowe's closest friends, says she takes comfort in seeing Bowe's beard grow. "It's nice to look and to be able to see in the different videos the beard growth that tells you the passage of time." Bob Bergdahl has started growing his own beard in solidarity. "His faith seems to be intact," says Bergdahl of his son. "In his videos, he's mentioned his faith in God, and that means a lot to us. We think the Taliban and these Pashtun people can identify with that. And I hope they can respect him for that. I hope they continue to treat him humanely."

Hailey's support for Bowe Bergdahl has never wavered during his nearly three years in captivity. Zaney's River Street Coffee House, where he once worked as a barista, has become ground zero for the campaign to get him back. The cheerful, flower-bedecked clapboard building boasts signs in the window that read **STANDING WITH BOWE** and **GET BOWE BACK**. That solidarity and respect for the Bergdahls' decision to stay quiet until now partly explains why their story has remained largely out of the public eye. The Departments of State and Defense lobbied news outlets not to report that Bergdahl was the subject of negotiations with the Taliban, arguing that news stories about him might hurt his chances of being released or even imperil his life.

Behind the scenes, the Bergdahls and the government worked in tandem. "We've been in very close contact with the Bergdahls," says senior Administration official. "I visited with them quite a lot. They're very aware of what we have been doing, and I very much have appreciated their support." The Pentagon has been working to lo-

cate Bergdahl since he went missing. "I can assure you that we are doing everything in our power, using our intelligence resources across the government, to try to locate him," General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters on May 10. "If you go to the Centcom command center, there's about a 4-by-6-ft. poster of Bowe Bergdahl sitting in front of the podium to remind them, and therefore us, every day that he remains missing in action," he said. But in a region as vast and unforgiving as North Waziristan, looking for one American soldier held hostage by a group that has long experience with captives is a humbling reminder of the limits of even the world's most powerful military.

Art Keller, a former CIA officer who took part in the agency's hunt for terrorists in Pakistan, says the few CIA agents who worked in the tribal regions when he was there in 2006 could not even leave the Pakistani army bases that hosted them. "I had a local person who worked in that area who I could only communicate with via computer," he



PHOTO BY AP/WIDEWORLD (PHOTOGRAPHED)

Continues on page 24





Father courage
Bob Bergstehl outside Zaney's café, the hub of support for his son in their hometown of Halley

that they wanted five senior Taliban officials released from Guantánamo, a senior Administration official says. The U.S. then raised the possibility of including Bergdahl in the process. Soon the two sides had a tentative agreement.

American officials insist it was never a direct exchange. "This wasn't negotiating with terrorists," says the senior Administration official. "This wasn't a swap." Instead, they describe each step as a confidence-building measure designed to keep everyone at the negotiating table at an office in Qatar, where both sides had agreed that Taliban envoys could safely set up residence. The offer to the Taliban from the Americans, with Qatar's approval, was this: The Guantánamo detainees would be given jobs, reunited with their families and permitted to move around Qatar with some monitoring. They would not, however, be allowed to go back to Afghanistan, and they would have to complete a deradicalization program. The Americans hoped the agreement would lead to more-comprehensive talks about the role of the insurgent group in Afghanistan after most foreign troops pull out in 2014.

In January, a delegation from the Afghan Taliban approached the Haqqani network with the proposal, members of both groups say, and asked that it hand over its prisoner. The Haqqanis agreed, pledging loyalty to the mainstream Taliban group, and Bergdahl was moved across the border, back into Afghanistan. In order to prove that they were serious, the Taliban produced another, yet unseen and previously unreported video of Bergdahl, says Hekmat Karzai, director of the Afghanistan-based Centre for Conflict & Peace Studies, who has stayed abreast of the negotiations through his extensive contacts with current and former Taliban members. "It was given to the Americans to say, 'Look, this guy is alive. He is in our custody, and we are willing to talk. We are willing to potentially swap Bergdahl for those detainees.'" Administration officials refused to confirm or deny the existence of a proof-of-life video.

In early January, the Taliban for the first time publicly revealed to individual journalists that they were interested in negotiating with Washington. It was a significant departure for a group that has

says. "So I couldn't even meet with them."

The Haqqanis "are so conscious of the use to which we put drones that if they're going to move anyone, they'll do it in a way that we don't pick up visual traces," Keller says. "Are they going to move [Bergdahl] with a bag over his head? Even that would raise suspicion."

Another former CIA case officer in Afghanistan and Iraq, Patrick Skinner, also doubts that either local intelligence or technology is of much help in finding Bergdahl. And if he were located, sending in a SEAL team or Special Forces to rescue him in such an environment—and in Pakistani territory—would be both practically and politically hazardous. "Outside of an incredible intelligence break, or luck," says Skinner, "the way it's going to happen is that it's going to be done through back channels where everybody involved will get something."

Talking with the Enemy

THREE DAYS AFTER HIS ESCAPE, THE HAQQANIS recaptured Bergdahl in the mountains. "It was a brief escape, and he was easily

recovered from the same area. He was not familiar with the area and route, and then the whole area was controlled by Taliban, and therefore escaping was not possible," one of the network's commanders says. The Haqqanis were angry. Bergdahl had exploited the honesty, poverty and illiteracy of the men assigned to guard him, promising them that he would take them to the U.S. if they helped him escape, the militant leader says. Bergdahl was physically punished for misguiding the fighters who had tried to escape with him, says the commander, adding that the fighters had been "paralyzed," his grim euphemism for execution.

Since his recapture, says the commander, Bergdahl no longer has the freedom to walk around and exercise that he once enjoyed. He is still properly looked after, he says, but "we don't trust him anymore and keep him in lockup most of the time."

Late last fall, the U.S. government initiated talks with the Taliban in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar in the hope of bringing an end to the war. In the course of the discussions, the Taliban told the Americans



The way home
Yellow ribbons
reminding passersby
of Bergdahl's ordeal
adorn a fence just
outside the American
soldier's hometown

consistently refused to negotiate as long as foreign troops remained in Afghanistan.

But there was a problem. As the talks in Qatar proceeded, discussions inside the Taliban movement got heated at times, says Karzai, particularly between the older, more experienced members who were part of the Taliban government toppled in 2001 and the younger recruits who know nothing but battle. One senior commander says leaks about the talks had undermined morale. "Most of our fighters had stopped fighting, and the battlefields became a standstill due to talks with the Americans."

But by early March, it looked as though everything was set to go. Many members of the detainees' families were already in Qatar, preparing for long-anticipated reunions with fathers and husbands they hadn't seen in a decade.

And then it all fell apart.

On March 15, the Taliban suspended the talks, citing the Americans' "unacceptable" conditions. Taliban members say the U.S. tacked on a last-minute stipulation that the Taliban announce a cease-fire and lay down arms first. "We told them we are willing to announce a cease-fire, but you should start pulling out all foreign forces and tell the world that invading Afghanistan and removing the Taliban from power was your mistake, but they did not agree," a Taliban leader says. "Thus the talks failed." Not surprisingly, the U.S.

sees it differently. "The Taliban refused to agree to the terms we require for a transfer, so they walked away," the Obama Administration official says. "This proposal ... is still very much on the table."

But Taliban members say the time for talking may be over. They are contending with a split in their ranks that threatens the whole idea of a peace deal with the American and Afghan governments. "Had we continued talks for a few more weeks with the U.S. in Qatar, our movement would have died a natural death," says a senior Taliban commander operating in Kandahar. "Infighting had started among various factions." While an imploding Taliban might appear to be a good thing for the American and Afghan governments, a fragmented and more radical Taliban would not be. The commander tells *TIME* that since the talks fell apart, there has been a

purge in the Taliban leadership. Younger and more violent field commanders have been promoted over the more peace-ready old guard, and a strict warning has been delivered that any Taliban caught freelance negotiating with the Afghan government or the Americans will be killed. On May 12, a Taliban splinter group assassinated Maulvi Arsala Rahmani, a former Taliban minister and a member of the government's High Peace Council, in Kabul. In a subsequent phone call, the group's spokesman, Qari Hamza, took responsibility for the attack

and declared that its ranks were swelling with Taliban opposed to "the so-called peace talks with the U.S. We formed a separate group that comprises all those genuine Taliban fighters who shed their blood in jihad against the U.S.-led foreign forces for the liberation of Afghanistan." Just a few weeks before he died, Rahmani told *TIME* he was confident that the talks would resume shortly. "We are tired of war. The Taliban are tired of war, and the Americans are tired too. Talks are the only solution."

In spite of the hardening of the Taliban's position, the Bergdahls and the Obama Administration have not given up hope of negotiating the young Idahoan's release. Although the U.S. government believed that going public about the talks over Bergdahl would be a mistake, "You have to have great sympathy for the Bergdahls," says the senior Administration official, "and they've made their decision here."

For the Bergdahls and the Hailey community, Bowe's return would mark the end of a long journey. But for Bowe, who has been criticized by many for the circumstances surrounding his capture and his appearance in propaganda videos, it would be just the start. "He will always be separate from everyone else—not an outcast, but isolated," says Van Dyk, who is still haunted by his own experience. "And it won't be right, but he will be called a traitor. He has a long road ahead."

Back in Hailey, where yellow ribbons symbolizing solidarity with Bowe still flutter in the cool mountain breezes, Bob and Jani Bergdahl have committed now to pressing their son's case in public and will appear at a veterans' rally in Washington on May 27. That event may spark a new round of interest in the U.S.'s only missing soldier in Afghanistan, but it is unlikely that it will create enough pressure on any of the key players to bring Bowe home. The White House waits for a signal from the Taliban that talks can begin again, and the town of Hailey for news of a miraculous release. And somewhere in the mountains near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, a young man waits to go home to his family. —WITH REPORTING BY MICHAEL SCHERRER, JAY NEWTON-SMALL AND MARK THOMPSON/WASHINGTON, WALID FAZLY/KABUL AND ISHAAN THAROOR/NEW YORK

FOR MORE ON THIS CASE, GO TO time.com/bergdahl



MARK BLACK/mblack@dailyherald.com

Members of Rolling Thunder Chapter 1 veterans group — including, from left, Jim Slenk of Batavia, Bill Sharpness of Kingston, Ronda Mahar of Wheaton and Bill Atkinson of Carol Stream — rented billboards, including one in Hanover Park, to call attention to the plight of the lone American POW, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl of Idaho.

Billboards served as yellow ribbons

BY CHRISTOPHER PLACEK
 cplacek@dailyherald.com

From the Vietnam War grew a movement among veterans groups and families to make sure no prisoners of war were forgotten.

That was a different time and a different type of conflict; POWs were not uncommon amid the jungle warfare and airstrikes.

Today, only one soldier is classified by the Department of Defense as "missing/captured" in current international

MORE ONLINE

- Watch a FOX News interview with Oliver North about Bowe Bergdahl's recapture by the Taliban.
- Visit the POW network site.

AT DAILYHERALD.COM

conflicts: Bowe Bergdahl, a 25-year-old Army sergeant from a small town in Idaho who has been in captivity in



A Taliban video released Dec. 25, 2009, showed U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl, who was captured more than five months earlier in eastern Afghanistan.

ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Continues on page 27

Billboard: 'People are definitely not forgetting' in soldier's hometown

Continued from Page 1

Afghanistan since June 30, 2009.

But the familiar refrain of "you are not forgotten" is as important as ever for members of a local veterans group, whose stated mission is to shed light on POW-MIA issues.

The 70 or so members of Rolling Thunder Chapter 1, who get together for monthly meetings at the VFW post in Warrenville, are trying to get the word out about Bergdahl's plight by putting up billboards and petitioning Congress.

They hope doing so will help secure Bergdahl's safe return home.

"We're requesting people call their senators and representatives and tell them that this country should do whatever necessary to bring him home," said Bill Atkinson, a Rolling Thunder member and Navy veteran from Carol Stream.

Last month, the group raised money to put up three billboards with Bergdahl's name and picture and a phone number for Congress. The billboards were located at the busy intersection of Lake Street and Barrington Road in Hanover Park and in Southwest suburban Justice and Stickney. They hope to raise the money to do so again.

Atkinson, who served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1969, said members of Rolling Thunder met with U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell and other members of Congress in Washington, D.C., last year.

"They say everything's being done that can be done," Atkinson said. "We just want to make sure it stays in the limelight."

Bergdahl, 25, is assigned to the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, based at Fort Richardson, Alaska.

He reportedly went missing in the Paktika province in eastern Afghanistan, an area infiltrated by the Haqqani network, which is connected to al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Since 2009, Bergdahl has appeared in five videos released online by the



AP FILE PHOTO

Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl worked as a barista at Zaney's River Street Coffee House in Hailey, Idaho, before he enlisted in the Army in 2008. After Bergdahl went missing in Afghanistan in June 2009, a sign was put up asking patrons to keep the missing soldier in their thoughts.

Taliban. During that time, the Army promoted Bergdahl in rank twice, from private first class to specialist to sergeant.

Cmdr. Bill Speaks, a Pentagon spokesman, wouldn't discuss specifics as to Bergdahl's capture but did say it "remains our highest priority to secure his safe return."

He also said the military has been providing periodic updates to Bergdahl's family

in Hailey, Idaho.

Bergdahl's parents also have been receiving hundreds of letters, cards and emails of support from across the country, said Col. Tim Marsano of the Idaho National Guard, who serves as the family's media liaison.

"They're doing as well as anybody could expect under extraordinary circumstances," Marsano said. "They're coping with the help of their family, their friends and the community in which they live."

Before enlisting in the Army in 2008, Bergdahl worked as a barista at a coffee shop in Hailey, a town of about 7,000 in the central part of the state. He also participated in a sport fencing club and ballet.

Marsano said Bergdahl was "a very well-liked guy."

Locals host an annual remembrance event for their hometown son on June 30. Posters with Bergdahl's image are in the windows of businesses. Bumper stickers are also on cars throughout town.

"All throughout Hailey, I don't think you'll see a tree without a yellow ribbon on it," Marsano said.

"People are definitely not forgetting, nor letting anyone else forget."

• Daily Herald news services contributed to this report.



Captive US soldier safe, says Haqqani commander

By KATHY GANNON
The Associated Press
Published: September 8, 2012

ISLAMABAD — A U.S. soldier held by Afghan militants will not be harmed despite the Obama administration's decision to declare his alleged captors a terrorist group, a senior member of the Pakistan-based Haqqani network told The Associated Press on Saturday. However, the United States and NATO can expect stepped up attacks, he said.

The commander, who spoke by telephone from an undisclosed location, denied that the Haqqanis held the only American prisoner of war of the Afghan conflict, Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, as the U.S. believes. He did however say that Bergdahl was a captive of another branch of the Taliban, and denied earlier reports that the 26-year-old soldier from Hailey, Idaho, was in danger.

"I deny the remarks . . . that this will endanger the life of the American soldier," the commander said, speaking on condition he not be identified because field commanders fear being targeted if their identities are known.

"We are not cowards and we consider it as coward to harm prisoners," he said.

The U.S. says that Bergdahl has been held by the Pakistan-based Haqqanis since 2009. However, the commander suggested he was with militants on the other side of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

"The American soldier is with the Emirate center (a reference to Taliban based inside Afghanistan) . . . The Americans also know it."



Pfc. Bowe R. Bergdahl of Ketchum, Idaho, will not be harmed, a senior member of the Pakistan-based Haqqani network said Saturday, Sept. 8, 2012. THE BERGDAHL FAMILY/AP

He said the Taliban leadership council previously issued instructions to its commanders, including those belonging to the Haqqani network, not to harm prisoners.

From his home in Idaho, the soldier's father Bob Bergdahl welcomed the assurances but was cautious.

"That's great news, but we're very careful about the information we digest," he told the AP. "I'll have to validate that and check that."

The elder Bergdahl said the commander's promise not to mistreat prisoners "was the position of the Emirate even before my son was taken prisoner."

Yet the Haqqani commander said the network is planning a series of retaliatory attacks against U.S. and NATO soldiers in Afghanistan.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, the organization's military commander, is seeking permission from Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar to stage a blitzkrieg of attacks against U.S. forces in Afghanistan, he said.

"He (Sirajuddin Haqqani) wants to carry out 80 to 100 attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan and 20 attacks on other NATO members," said the commander in retaliation for the designation. He repeated earlier statements that the Haqqani network answered to Mullah Omar and was not separate from the Taliban organization.

But once Mullah Omar signs off on the actions, the commander said, "we have our consultative and military council which plans attacks."

The commander claimed that the Obama administration had been in touch with the Haqqani network last year as part of its efforts to broker a peace deal ahead of the withdrawal of U.S. military troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

"(U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham) Clinton should have the courage to tell the Americans about their contacts and even talks with us," he said.

Congress insisted Clinton deliver a report on whether the Haqqanis should be designated a terrorist organization by Sunday after a string of high profile attacks on U.S. and NATO troops.

The U.S. had resisted the terrorist designation because of fears it could jeopardize reconciliation efforts between the U.S. government and insurgents in Afghanistan.



This file image provided by IntelCenter on Wednesday Dec. 8, 2010 shows a framegrab from a video released by the Taliban containing footage of a man believed to be Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, left. INTELCENTER/AP

Memories rekindled, 42 years later

A POW/MIA bracelet for a Bensenville Marine reported missing in action in 1969 turns up in Maine. His remains were identified in 2000.

BY ANNEMARIE MANNION
Tribune Reporter

The silver POW/MIA bracelet was found tucked away on a lost-and-found shelf in a hotel in York, Maine, and how long it had been there is anyone's guess.

Hotel worker Carlene LaFleche, who discovered it, noticed an inscription: Patrick R. Curran USMC Laos Sept. 29, 1969.

She became determined to find the story behind Patrick Curran and to find someone to whom the bracelet would have emotional value.

"I felt it shouldn't be up on that shelf," LaFleche said. "It should be with someone who was close to the him or to a family member."

The letters "ILL" also were inscribed on the bracelet, indicating Curran was from Illinois. After an Internet search yielded more information, including that he was from Bensenville, LaFleche last week posted an entry on the TribLocal website about the bracelet. An assist from the Tribune helped locate Curran's brother, Dan, who lives in Amana, Iowa.

LaFleche said she planned to contact Dan Curran, and Curran said he would welcome receiving the bracelet.

The discovery "brings back a whole lot of emotion, candidly," Dan Curran said. And it brought to light the story of Patrick Curran and his now-deceased mother's quest to learn what had happened to her son.

Curran was a Marine Corps bombardier navigator who was reported missing in action in Laos



Marine Corps bombardier navigator Patrick R. Curran, of Bensenville, was reported missing in action in Laos in 1969.

on Sept. 29, 1969. His remains were not identified until more than 30 years later. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

Before his remains were discovered, Curran was one of several Americans whose names were inscribed on multiple POW/MIA bracelets, which were first produced in the 1970s as a way to remember prisoners of war and those missing in action. It's unknown to whom the bracelet found in Maine belonged.

Dan Curran vividly recalls being 18 in 1969 and finding out his brother, nicknamed Corky, had been reported missing in action after his plane went down. "I was home alone," Dan said. "A Marine jeep pulled up, and two officers got out. They wanted to talk to my parents."

A few days later, Dan recalled, he received a birthday card that had been sent by Patrick from Vietnam. Dan Curran said his brother was married at the time and had a baby daughter whom he never met.

Dan's mother, Ann, a former schoolteacher, immersed herself in the effort to find out what had happened to her son and to others who were prisoners of war or missing in action. She became involved in VietNow, a group founded in the 1980s in Rockford with the motto of "Veterans Helping Veterans."

John Augustynowicz, a Navy veteran and member of the local chapter of VietNow, became good friends with Ann as they worked for more than 15 years to get the U.S. and Vietnamese governments to release information about those missing in action.

"She was so active. We veterans adopted her as our mother," said Augustynowicz. He noted Ann Curran participated in POW vigils, spoke before Congress, lobbied for changes in the Freedom of Information Act and even traveled to Hanoi in hope of learning the fate of her son and other MIAs.

In June 1996, a crash site was investigated and some human remains and pieces of aircraft were recovered. It was suspected that the wreckage was Curran's airplane, but it was not confirmed until 1997. His remains were identified in 2000.

But Ann Curran never got the

answers she worked so hard to find.

"Unfortunately she was killed in a car wreck, and about two months later they announced they found his remains. It was tragic," said Augustynowicz.

He said he has worn three POW/MIA bracelets over the years including one that bore Curran's name. "In each case, my bracelet had to be put on top of the caskets when they came back," he said.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense's POW/Missing Personnel office there are still 1,685 people listed as MIA from the Vietnam War. Maj. Carrie Parker, public affairs manager for the office, said it's not unusual for people to inquire what they should do with bracelets they find. The office advises people to write to the casualty office of the respective military branch and ask that the bracelet be forwarded to the family.

Augustynowicz, of Warrenville, said Ann Curran was an inspiration to local members of VietNow. Every year in her honor the group provides a scholarship to send a special needs child to summer camp. In addition, a trailer park in Oregon, Ill., which is a popular destination for Vietnam-era vets, has a pavilion named in her honor.

Dan Curran said he is touched to know his mother had such an impact on the veterans.

And, he said, the search to find out what happened to her Corky "was her red badge of courage."

amannion@tribune.com

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chicagotribune.com/bracelet

SPOTLIGHT CONGRESSIONAL TRIBUTE

First African-American Marines honored

WASHINGTON — The nation's first black Marines landed in the U.S. Capitol this week to receive the Congressional Gold Medal for their World War II service in the face of discrimination.

The Montford Point Marines, named after the segregated North Carolina camp where they trained, and their surviving family members received the honor during an emotional ceremony Wednesday in the

Capitol Visitor Center's Emancipation Hall.

"I don't think we imagined that anything like this would ever happen in our lifetimes," William McDowell, representing the Montford Point Marines, told the crowd, his voice breaking with emotion.

Lawmakers from both parties saluted the pioneers before a crowd that included current and former Marines, including Marine Corps Commandant Gen.

James Amos.

In supporting the legislation to award the medal, Amos earlier wrote Congress that the Montford Point Marines "served with distinction in three of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific — Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa," and that they "defended a society that enjoyed freedoms they did not share" and "contributed, in large measure, to President (Harry) Truman's decision to order the deseg-

regation of the Armed Forces in 1948."

The roughly 400 Montford Point Marines who attended the ceremony — out of about 20,000 African-Americans who trained at the camp — are among several groups of World War II veterans lawmakers have honored, including the Tuskegee Army and Navajo Code Talkers.

— Richard Simon, Tribune Newspapers



Andrew Miles, of Chicago, center, and Willis J. Woods, of Washington, D.C., right, were among the Montford Point Marines awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.



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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 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.

A hometown hero finally comes home

BROCKPORT – JULY 10, 2012 – BY: THOMAS MANGAN



Yesterday, after 46 years, Joe Christiano and five other Hometown Heroes finally came home.

At 7:28 a.m. (0728 hours) on December 24, 1965, an AC47D gunship, call sign Spooky 21, took off from Da Nang Air Base, South Vietnam on an armed reconnaissance mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.

But Spooky 21 never returned to base (RTB) on that Christmas Eve. The AC47D gunship was shot down just south of the village of Ban Bac in Saravane Province, in the panhandle of Laos.

Yesterday, the crew of Spooky 21 finally returned to base (RTB'd) at Arlington National Cemetery.

The navigator of that plane was Major Joseph Christiano from Rochester; and Joe Christiano is a Hometown Hero.

Some people in Brockport opposed hanging the Hometown Heroes banners on the lampposts along Main Street because it would glorify war. But it isn't about that at all; it's about the **incredible courage** of the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States.



Location: Main Street, Brockport, N.Y

Being a navigator is one of the most dangerous and underappreciated in the Air Force. The pilots get all the glory, and the almost all the generals are pilots, but the navigators face just as much danger, especially in an AC-47D.

The C-47 is the cargo version of the famous DC-3, which many aviators consider to be the greatest airplanes ever built. It was tough, simple, easy to fly, and it lasted forever. There are still C-47's flying today.

By flying an AC-47D Spooky gunship was an incredibly dangerous job.

According to the **P.O.W. Network**, the Spooky gunship introduced a new principle to air attack in Vietnam – airborne gunships. Captain Ronald Terry of the U.S. Air Force Aeronautical Systems Division remembered reading about flying missionaries in Latin America who lowered baskets of supplies

on a rope from an airplane flying a series of pylon turns. During the turns, the basket remained suspended over the same point on the ground. Terry applied this principle to firing automatic weapons from the air, and created an aircraft with the ability to concentrate a heavy dose of automatic weapons fire in a very small area.

The Spooky pilot used a mark (piper) on the window to the left of the pilot seat as a gun sight, as he circled slowly over the target while three 7-62mm mini-guns fired 18,000 rounds per minute from the door and two windows in the port (left) side of the cargo compartment.

However, while the AC-47D aircraft were remarkable successful defending positions at night in South Vietnam, they were incredibly vulnerable to the dense anti-aircraft defenses along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, especially in the daytime.

The mission was made even more dangerous because the AC-47's flew at very low altitudes, which meant the crew had almost no chance of getting out of the aircraft if it was hit.

Think about the courage it took to walk out to the flight line and climb into that aircraft everyday knowing that if you got hit, you would almost certainly go down with the aircraft.

That takes courage, real courage. And that kind of courage is why we hang Hometown Heroes banners in downtown Brockport.

The crew of Spooky 21 was Lt. Colonel Derrell B. Jeffords, pilot; Captain Dennis L. Eilers, co-pilot; Major Joseph Christiano, navigator; Technical Sergeant W. Kevin Colwell, flight engineer; Master Sergeant Larry C. Thornton, aerial gunner; and Staff Sergeant. Arden Hassenger, aerial gunner.

They were buried in a common grave yesterday in Arlington National Cemetery.

It is finally time to say, "Welcome Home!" to the crew of Spooky 21.



Thomas Mangan, Monroe County Elections 2010 Examiner

Thomas Mangan has forty years experience writing about everything under the sun - software, high tech equipment, politics, research papers, speeches, movie reviews, and obituaries. He's a Vietnam Veteran, who is passionate about politics and fiercely independent.

PROFILES

Jared Behee – Freedom Award Recipient

The 2012 Freedom Award was bestowed upon Jared Behee, a retired Army staff sergeant. Behee is one of the most familiar faces at the clinic, having attended five years in a row.

"The people here understand what I'm going through, and they don't look down on me," he explained. "I've made a lot of friends."

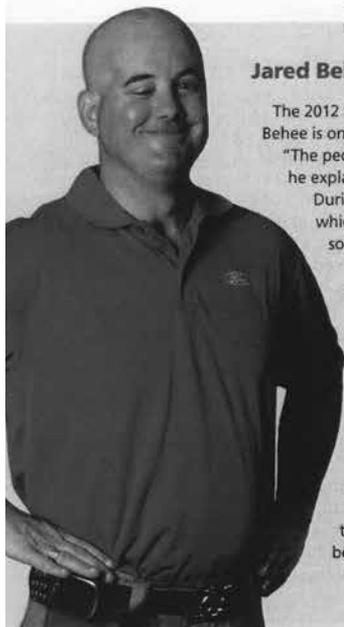
During Behee's second tour in Iraq in 2005, he volunteered for a security mission during which he sustained a gunshot wound through the head. It was the kind of wound soldiers are not expected to live through. But Behee is, as he puts it, "a survivor."

Usually known for sporting his trademark Superman cape, Behee sees the yearly clinic as a chance to come together with other wounded veterans and prove that limitations are merely a suggestion, not an absolute.

"I can be more positive, and it gives me a more positive outlook on life," he said. "I notice significant differences in my cognitive abilities every year I come back. And I'm more independent now, thanks to the good people at VA."

More importantly for Behee, it's about giving back. He volunteers his time at the VA hospital near his California home, where he also receives therapy. And how does he see himself, seven years after the event that changed the course of his life?

"Like I'm the old Jared Behee, before I was injured. I'm a little slower, I speak funny. But it's getting better thanks to the therapy," he said. "And I'm engaged to be married. I can't wait for next year to come around so we can get married, because she's a lovely woman."



Alexis Courneen

Alexis Courneen's family has what she calls "a different kind of normal." Her two daughters were born after her 1998 injury aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Katherine Walker*, which left her with severe nerve damage, TBI and spinal injuries.

"Sometimes I feel like my kids miss out on things, but they don't know any different because it's the way it's always been," said Courneen. "I've never taken a bike ride with my kids before. To have a six- and a nine-year-old...it's kind of a hard thing."

Courneen, her husband and two daughters attended a similar program in January near their Connecticut home, where they were able to, for the very first time, take to the slopes together as a family.

"I have a hard time because I feel like my girls don't know who I was before my injury," said Courneen. "But that day on the mountain, they got to see a little piece of me, and that was just so awesome. If it weren't for clinics like this, we wouldn't be able to do things like that."

Even with life's difficulties, Courneen contends she and her family are more resilient because of her injuries. The clinic, she explained, was another reminder of how strong they can be.

"There's no limits, none," she said. "You look around you and you see people. There's just total heart."



JULY/AUGUST 2012

SEALED IN BLOOD

Memorial Day at Belleau Wood highlights bonds forged on the battlefield.

As Marine Corps Commandant James Amos kneels, Belleau Wood is silent, save for scattered bird songs and the rustling of leaves overhead.

He sets a small token at the base of the Marine monument – a commemorative coin given to him from members of Task Force Belleau Wood serving in Afghanistan.

Soon, hundreds will fill the nearby cemetery for a Memorial Day ceremony. But here, now, in the heart of Belleau Wood, Amos and the Marines behind him are privately honoring those who died taking this forest in one of World War I's ugliest battles.

Lt. Gen. Hervé Charpentier, commander of the French Land Forces, joins Amos in placing a wreath and rendering a salute.

At the ceremony, the two officers talk of what the Americans did at Bois de la Brigade de Marine, or "Wood of the Marine Brigade," and what it meant.

"Their sacrifice for this morsel of French ground sealed in blood the bonds that unite our two countries," whose forces have fought side by side on battlefields since, Charpentier says.

Amos praises an alliance that "continues in the mountains and valleys of Afghanistan, and recently over the skies of Libya as French Rafales and MC Harriers flew in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn."

Though U.S. soldiers outnumber Marines buried at Aisne-Marne, the Marines have a special attachment to the cemetery and the woods beyond. This is where the modern Marine Corps was born – where on June 6, 1918, it lost more men than it had in its entire history up to that point.

On Memorial Day, they are remembered and celebrated. A bugler plays Taps. A French student reads a poem. The Marine Drum & Bugle Corps gives a rousing performance, and the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon wows the crowd with precision marching and rifle maneuvers.

After the ceremony, hundreds of Marines – from the 5th Regiment, the 6th Regiment, Marine Forces Europe in Stuttgart, Germany, and elsewhere – gather for a reception in the courtyard of a nearby chateau, where they take turns sipping from the famous "devil dog" fountain.

"This is my third visit, and every time I come back I get goose bumps," says Sgt. Maj. Jamie Deets of the 6th Marine Regiment. "In the United States



we're fighting to save our battlefields. Here at Belleau Wood, there's no commercialization, no buildup of housing – a fitting tribute to our Marines and soldiers who gave the ultimate measure here."

Lt. Col. Mark Sojourner, who is stationed at Stuttgart and works for AFRICOM, brought his wife, Lori, and their two daughters over on a USO tour. He calls the trip "a pilgrimage every Marine would like to make."

In Bouresches, a villager ran up to Sojourner with a bottle of wine and old photographs. "He just said 'thank you' over and over, that he loved Marines and appreciated that we're here," he says.

For Mike Miller, director of the Marine Corps archives, Memorial Day capped an incredible week of exploring Belleau Wood for the first time. He spent two days walking the battlefield, sometimes crawling on his hands and knees across ravines.

"You can see fighting holes, shell holes, trenches worn down," he says. "There's an uncomfortable quiet when you're in there. This is nasty terrain."

Years ago, Miller interviewed Gene Lee, who was the battle's last surviving combat veteran when he died at 105. Surrounded by Marine memorabilia, Lee recalled the terror of charging through a wheat field swept by German machine-gun fire. Then he broke down, grieving the buddies he'd lost.

Thinking of Lee, Miller stops at the headstone of every soldier, sailor and Marine in the cemetery to pay his respects. He's touched to see that beside each U.S. flag flies a French flag, placed by local schoolchildren.

"This is something every American should see," he says. ☪



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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 29, 2012

Presidential Proclamation -- Vietnam Veterans Day

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

On January 12, 1962, United States Army pilots lifted more than 1,000 South Vietnamese service members over jungle and underbrush to capture a National Liberation Front stronghold near Saigon. Operation Chopper marked America's first combat mission against the Viet Cong, and the beginning of one of our longest and most challenging wars. Through more than a decade of conflict that tested the fabric of our Nation, the service of our men and women in uniform stood true. Fifty years after that fateful mission, we honor the more than 3 million Americans who served, we pay tribute to those we have laid to rest, and we reaffirm our dedication to showing a generation of veterans the respect and support of a grateful Nation.

The Vietnam War is a story of service members of different backgrounds, colors, and creeds who came together to complete a daunting mission. It is a story of Americans from every corner of our Nation who left the warmth of family to serve the country they loved. It is a story of patriots who braved the line of fire, who cast themselves into harm's way to save a friend, who fought hour after hour, day after day to preserve the liberties we hold dear. From la Drang to Hue, they won every major battle of the war and upheld the highest traditions of our Armed Forces.

Eleven years of combat left their imprint on a generation. Thousands returned home bearing shrapnel and scars; still more were burdened by the invisible wounds of post-traumatic stress, of Agent Orange, of memories that would never fade. More than 58,000 laid down their lives in service to our Nation. Now and forever, their names are etched into two faces of black granite, a lasting memorial to those who bore conflict's greatest cost.

Our veterans answered our country's call and served with honor, and on March 29, 1973, the last of our troops left Vietnam. Yet, in one of the war's most profound tragedies, many of these men and women came home to be shunned or neglected — to face treatment unbefitting their courage and a welcome unworthy of their example. We must never let this happen again. Today, we reaffirm one of our most fundamental obligations: to show all who have worn the uniform of the United States the respect and dignity they deserve, and to honor their sacrifice by serving them as well as they served us. Half a century after those helicopters swept off the ground and into the annals of history, we pay tribute to the fallen, the missing, the wounded, the millions who served, and the millions more who awaited their return. Our Nation stands stronger for their service, and on Vietnam Veterans Day, we honor their proud legacy with our deepest gratitude.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 29, 2012, as Vietnam Veterans Day. I call upon all Americans to observe this day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities that commemorate the 50 year anniversary of the Vietnam War.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand twelve, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-sixth.

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