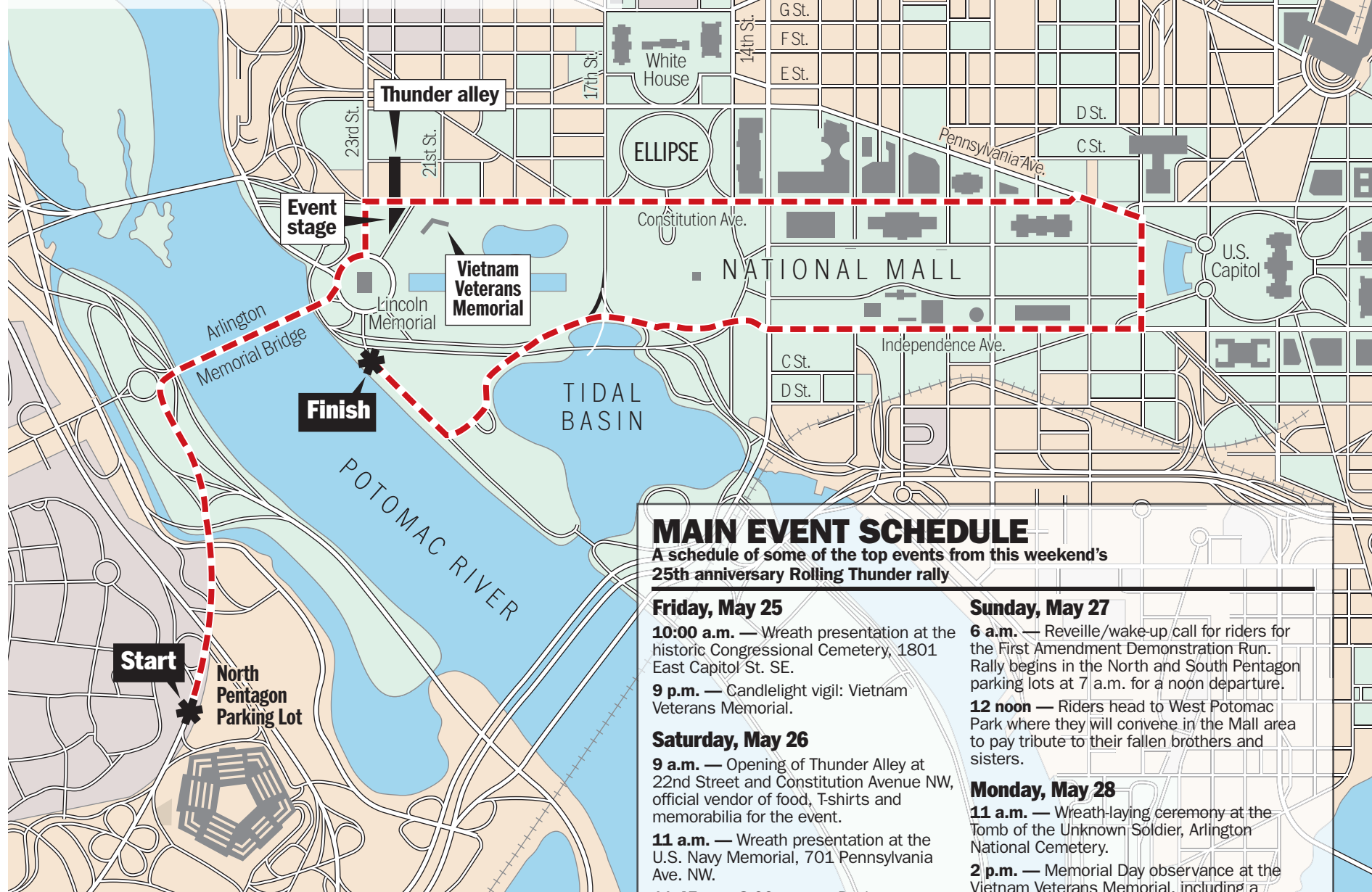


ROLLING THUNDER

25 years with one mission: Accounting for missing veterans

ROLLING THUNDER

Memorial Day weekend 2012



MAIN EVENT SCHEDULE

A schedule of some of the top events from this weekend's 25th anniversary Rolling Thunder rally

Friday, May 25

10:00 a.m. — Wreath presentation at the historic Congressional Cemetery, 1801 East Capitol St. SE.

9 p.m. — Candlelight vigil: Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Saturday, May 26

9 a.m. — Opening of Thunder Alley at 22nd Street and Constitution Avenue NW, official vendor of food, T-shirts and memorabilia for the event.

11 a.m. — Wreath presentation at the U.S. Navy Memorial, 701 Pennsylvania Ave. NW.

11:45 a.m.-8:00 p.m. — Daylong concerts on the main stage and Henry Bacon ballfield. Participants include Rolling Thunder founder Ray Manzo and actor Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band. The concert stages will also showcase custom-built "Tribute Bikes" honoring each branch of the U.S. armed forces.

Sunday, May 27

6 a.m. — Reveille/wake-up call for riders for the First Amendment Demonstration Run. Rally begins in the North and South Pentagon parking lots at 7 a.m. for a noon departure.

12 noon — Riders head to West Potomac Park where they will convene in the Mall area to pay tribute to their fallen brothers and sisters.

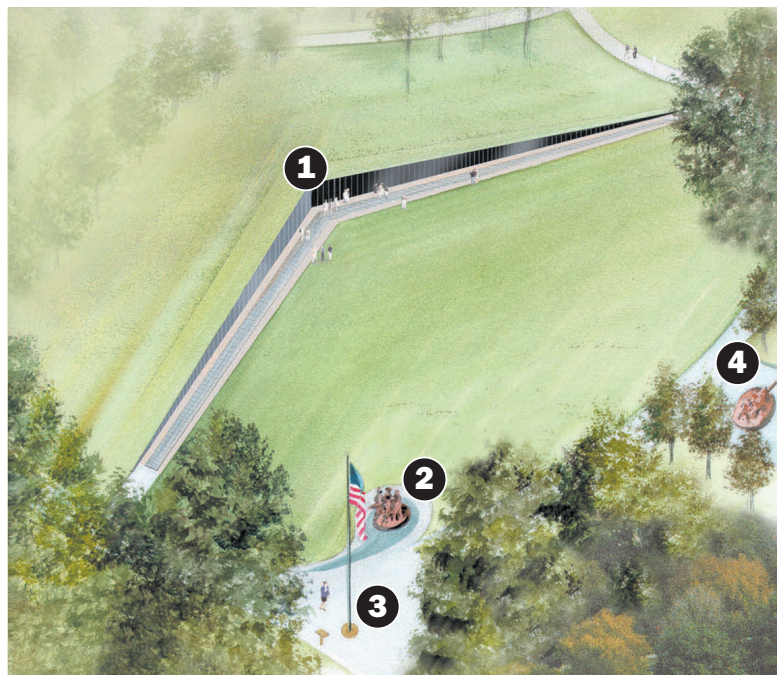
Monday, May 28

11 a.m. — Wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery.

2 p.m. — Memorial Day observance at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, including a special commencement ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War.

2 p.m. — National Memorial Day Parade begins.

3 p.m. — National Moment of Remembrance: a minute of silence in honor of those who have given their life for our country.



1. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall

Height: 10 ft. **Overall length:** 500 ft.

Names listed with these symbols:

◆ Confirmed dead

† Missing in action or prisoner of war

2. Three Servicemen Statue

Controversy over wall design led to compromise, expansion of memorial in 1984. Bronze 7-foot statue by Frederick Hart was erected near wall.

3. Bronze flagpole

60 feet tall, honors Vietnam veterans. Installed in 1983.

4. Vietnam Women's Memorial

Bronze 8-foot statue honors women who served in Vietnam. Eight yellowwood trees in memory of eight nurses killed in Vietnam. Dedicated 1993; designed by Glenna Goodacre.



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“I went to every office, and when I got done, I went back and started all over again. It took 10 years, but I got the bill passed. I’m glad I did it. I’ve had people tell me there are lobbyists who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year just to maybe get one bill passed.”

— Ted Shpak, 64-year-old Vietnam veteran and president of Rolling Thunder Washington, D.C.

Thunder makes itself heard for changes in law

Makes sure POWs, MIAs not forgotten

By BEN WOLFGANG

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

To get attention on Capitol Hill, Ted Shpak had to ditch the jacket and tie.

“I get more respect wearing jeans,” said the 64-year-old Vietnam veteran and president of Rolling Thunder Washington, D.C., which this weekend will hold its 25th annual motorcycle rally to bring attention to American service members still being held prisoner abroad or listed as missing in action.

But Rolling Thunder’s imprint on Washington goes far beyond the roar of hundreds of thousands of bikes on city streets each Memorial Day weekend. Led by Mr. Shpak, the organization has aggressively pushed a broad legislative agenda, with several of its priorities now the law of the land.

The first was 1993’s Missing Service Personnel Act, which states that missing soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen could not be declared dead without concrete proof.

“In the old days, they’d declare you dead after one day,” said Mr. Shpak, who began pushing the bill in 1984, three years before the first Rolling Thunder run. The measure received little attention until the organization began attracting larger and larger crowds to Washington each year, and Mr. Shpak decided that his previous approach of looking and talking like a politician — which included suits, pressed shirts and ties each day — wasn’t getting it done.

He began visiting every member of Congress’ office seeking support for the legislation, wearing his Rolling Thunder vest and a pair of jeans.

“I went to every office, and when I got done, I went back and started all over again. It took 10 years, but I got the bill passed,” he said. “I’m glad I did it. I’ve had people tell me there are lobbyists who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year just to maybe get one bill passed.”

Rolling Thunder also drove the effort to create POW/MIA postage stamps to raise awareness of the issue. It also backed legislation requiring government buildings to fly the black POW/MIA flag, emblazoned with the words “You are not forgotten.” It has backed laws to improve housing, health care and other benefits for veterans and their families.

Most recently, Rolling Thunder led the



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Bikers make their way across the Memorial Bridge from Virginia into Washington during the 18th annual Rolling Thunder ride on May 29, 2005. The message on the clipboard reads: “Love never loses its way home.” Seven years later and now marking its silver anniversary, Rolling Thunder is bigger than ever.

charge to enact the Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act, a measure designed to combat the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kan., and others who stage protests at military funerals.

Implemented in 2006, the law mandates that protesters be kept 300 feet from the entrance of a cemetery hosting a military funeral. The restriction goes into effect 60 minutes before the proceedings begin and

lasts for an hour after it concludes.

“Rolling Thunder helped bring awareness to the issue of disruptions at American military funerals. . . . This bill has arguably helped to preserve dignity at military funerals throughout the United States since Congress passed it,” said Rep. Mike Rogers, Michigan Republican and the measure’s prime sponsor. “Rolling Thunder gives military families the re-

spect they deserve by taking the initiative on their own to do what is right.”

While he’s thankful for the help and support of Mr. Rogers and others, Mr. Shpak views his work in Washington as something he needs to do, not something he wants to do.

“I don’t particularly like dealing with these people up here,” he said. “But what I do, I do from my heart.”



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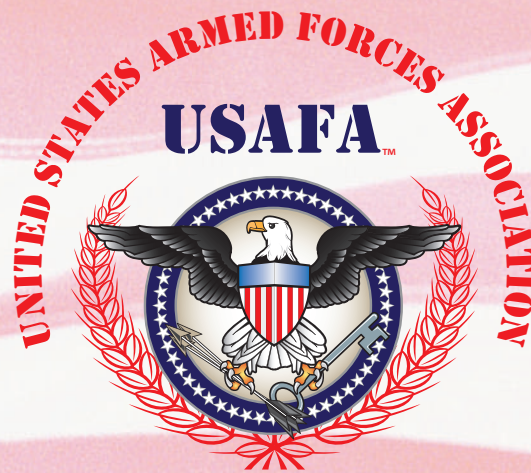
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Tens of thousands of motorcyclists wait in Pentagon parking lots to join the 20th Rolling Thunder parade in May 2007. Rolling Thunder's prime focus has been and continues to be those missing in action and known prisoners of war.

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Vets, supporters find solace, camaraderie in Rolling Thunder's roar

Motorcycle rally marks 25th year of taking D.C. by storm

By BEN WOLFGANG
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

For Walt Koren, it would be easier to know that his old friend is dead. Instead, he's lived with uncertainty for 41 years. Whether William Patrick Millner, an Army Air Cavalry pilot in Vietnam and high school classmate of Mr. Koren's, survived a crash landing in Laos in 1971, and whether he remains in captivity somewhere in Southeast Asia, are questions that haunt him to this day.

"I thought he'd been killed. Later, I learned he was missing in action, and it was easier to accept that he'd been killed," said Mr. Koren, a 63-year-old construction manager now living in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

"I still sit there constantly and think about him every Sunday at church. I think about him still being a prisoner of war, and hear rumors he's being held in Laos. I hope that's not the case. How would you feel about 41 years being held captive? Wouldn't you rather be dead?" he said.

Mr. Koren found some solace four years ago when he joined Rolling Thunder Inc., a 90-chapter organization launched in 1995 as an offshoot of the now-famous Rolling Thunder Washington, D.C., motorcycle rally held each Memorial Day weekend.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the rally began with a simple mission that remains unfulfilled: account for Mr. Millner and the thousands of other veterans still missing.



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Marine Cpl. Joe Coaxum whispers something to Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Daryl Web as Rolling Thunder's Maryland chapter holds a general membership meeting at the Harley-Davidson motorcycle shop in Fort Washington on May 12 to plan its Memorial Day weekend events.



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Brandon Lutzow of Waldorf, Md., helps scrub the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, along with other members of Rolling Thunder's Maryland Chapter 1 on May 13 as one way of honoring the sacrifices of those who died in the war.

Quarter-century of Thunder

The brainchild of Ray Manzo, John Holland and other Vietnam vets, the rally drew fewer than 1,000 bikes its first year. Organizers expect more than 500,000 motorcycles this year, with events kicking off Friday and lasting through Monday's Memorial Day observances. It begins with Friday night's candlelight vigil, includes the signature motorcycle ride on Sunday and concludes on Memorial Day with a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknowns, the national Memorial Day Parade and other events.

Mr. Manzo is credited with giving the rally its moniker, having told his fellow organizers that it would sound like thunder when the bikes rolled into the nation's capital. A reclusive figure who spent two years in Vietnam, Mr. Manzo stepped away from the Rolling Thunder rally in 1992.

"It wasn't something for me to do forever," the Marine veteran told Vietnam magazine in a rare interview earlier this month.

Coming out of retirement this year, Mr. Manzo will return to witness an event that's grown beyond its founders' wildest dreams. But beyond the sheer size and cachet that the Rolling Thunder rally now carries, there remains at the heart of the gathering a tight-knit community of veterans, family and friends of former POWs and those still missing.

"It's always a very rewarding weekend, not only because of what we do, but because of all the people that we meet," said 76-year-old Billy Parker, former state director of New Jersey's Rolling Thunder Inc. chapters and a Korean War veteran.

Mr. Parker, whose Army unit still has several members listed as missing, said he threw himself into Rolling Thunder after his

NEWS, VIDEOS, PHOTOS AND HISTORIC COVERAGE OF ROLLING THUNDER AT WWW.WASHINGTONTIMES.COM/ROLLINGTHUNDER

“The moving part for me is that [Rolling Thunder members] don’t always necessarily agree with the policies that got them into the wars in the first place, but they distinguish that and still support the troops.”

— Euripides L. Evriviades, Cyprus’ former ambassador to the U.S., who rode in the annual rallies during his time in Washington from 2003 to 2006

THUNDER

From page D7

wife passed away several years ago.

“The camaraderie between all of the members is fantastic,” he said. “You know just about every person by name. That’s how familiar you become with all of them.”

Since its inaugural run in 1987, the Rolling Thunder rally has driven the effort to focus attention on the nation’s missing heroes and prisoners of war. Its founders have successfully pushed legislation to keep missing soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen from being declared dead without concrete evidence.

The Rolling Thunder Inc. chapters, in more than 30 states across the nation, regularly hold fundraisers to aid veterans’ groups, visit war survivors in nursing homes and hospitals, help maintain memorial sites and do a variety of other charitable work.

Still searching

The POW/MIA issue is most commonly tied to the Vietnam War, but it’s also a part of ongoing conflicts. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl has been held in Afghanistan since June 2009 as a prisoner of the Haqqani terrorist network, an insurgent group with ties to the Taliban. With the U.S. still negotiating for his release, Sgt. Bergdahl’s imprisonment serves as a stark reminder of the costs of war.

“These kids volunteer to go to war, and we’re not supposed to abandon them. We left people behind in World War II, in Korea, in Vietnam, and now we’ve left one behind in Afghanistan,” said Vietnam veteran Ted Shpak, president of the Rolling Thunder D.C.’s board of directors.

Nearly 1,670 men and women who fought in Vietnam are still listed as missing. An additional 7,957 Korean War veterans remain unaccounted for, as are a staggering 73,681 veterans of World War II.

Thanks in large part to the work of Rolling Thunder, the National League of POW/MIA Families and other organizations, federal efforts to identify and recover the remains of missing servicemen have intensified over the past 20 years.

Just this year, the Defense Department announced the identification of 25 military personnel, ranging from an airman who went missing during World War II to Staff Sgt. Ahmed K.



Altaie, the final missing soldier and casualty of Operation Iraqi Freedom to be recovered and identified.

Veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars were also identified this year.

Family members and friends of the missing often assume the worst, but any trace of doubt — or spark of hope — can lead to many sleepless nights, said Ann Mills Griffith, chairman of the board at the League of POW/MIA Families.

“It’s been the core motivation since our league was formed, the uncertainty,” she said. “Uncertainty is always the worst thing to deal with. It’s the strongest motivation to get clarity, to get closure. What it really means is, you need to find answers.”

The public outcry to retrieve POWs such as Sgt. Bergdahl, Ms. Mills Griffith said, usually remains strong as long as there is proof they’re alive. But the desire to recover veterans of World War II or Korea, most of whom are almost certainly dead, wanes with time, she said.

“There’s just not that sense of urgency to rescue. Once you find out that the little kid who fell down the well is dead, the nation’s attention starts to turn away,” she said.

A chance to give back

While Rolling Thunder’s prime focus has been and continues to be the missing or known POWs, its members also relish the chance to interact and learn from veterans who made it home.

“It’s given me an opportunity to meet a lot of Vietnam veterans. You meet vets who are homeless, some who aren’t getting the care and support that they should,” said Wendell Wilson Jr., an Army veteran and member of Rolling Thunder Inc.’s Maryland Chapter 1. He and fellow members washed and rinsed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall at 6:30 a.m. on May 13, one of the ways participants seek to honor America’s heroes.

“You need to care about soldiers to be in Rolling Thunder,” Mr. Wilson said, as colleagues scrubbed the wall behind him. “You listen to conversations between husbands and wives, or you meet guys who have gotten ‘Dear John’ letters. ... When you’re in Rolling Thunder, you have the opportunity to give back to them, just a little bit.”

Maryland Chapter 1 is also one of the few chapters to include junior members, often teenagers. Its leaders are also quick to point out that riding a motorcycle isn’t a prerequisite to join. Neither is being a veteran.

It’s that cross-section of people, brought together by their gratitude

and concern for veterans, that gives Rolling Thunder an appeal that now extends beyond the borders of the U.S.

“It brings people from all walks of life together to honor America’s heroes. You have lawyers, diplomats, poor people, rich people, and it was Rolling Thunder that has brought them all together,” said Euripides L. Evriviades, Cyprus’ former ambassador to the U.S., who rode in the annual rallies during his time in Washington from 2003 to 2006.

“The moving part for me is that [Rolling Thunder members] don’t always necessarily agree with the policies that got them into the wars in the first place, but they distinguish that and still support the troops. I find that very moving,” he said.

As riders from across the country descend on D.C., the Rolling Thunder rally’s charter members aren’t basking in the glory of what they’ve built. Instead, they’re focused on using the influence they’ve built, along with their vast network of veterans, motorcycle lovers and others, for another 25 years.

“As Vietnam vets, we’ve stuck together over the years. It’s because we didn’t want what happened to us to ever happen again. We’re here, and we want people on Capitol Hill to know that we’re not going away,” said Mr. Shpak.

ANDREW HARNIK
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Cornell “Smokey” Langford of Clinton stares out into the pre-dawn sky as he and other members of Rolling Thunder’s Maryland chapter meet in the early-morning hours at the Harley-Davidson motorcycle shop in Fort Washington before heading to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington on May 13.

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SUNDAY,
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- Service Department opens at 7:00am, for out of town emergencies only, no appointment needed
- Police escorted ride leaves for Pentagon at 9:00 am

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ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Jerry Zickefoose of Prince Frederick, Md., seen here May 12, redid the artwork on his motorcycle as a tribute to Vietnam War veterans.



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Jeffrey Morton of Freehold, N.J., is overcome by emotion at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall after the May 2000 Rolling Thunder.

Rolling Thunder over the years



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Tens of thousands of motorcyclists are saluted during the 20th anniversary Rolling Thunder rally near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in May 2007. Many of the cyclists have served in the military.



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The 16th annual event, in May 2003, included a musical tribute to veterans. Performers included Nancy Sinatra.



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Steve Britton of Dillon, Colo., makes his way down the Mall to the Lincoln Memorial in May 2005 on his fourth ride.



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

From Florida, Vietnam vet Charles Campbell and wife Velma await the start of the 2007 Rolling Thunder procession.



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