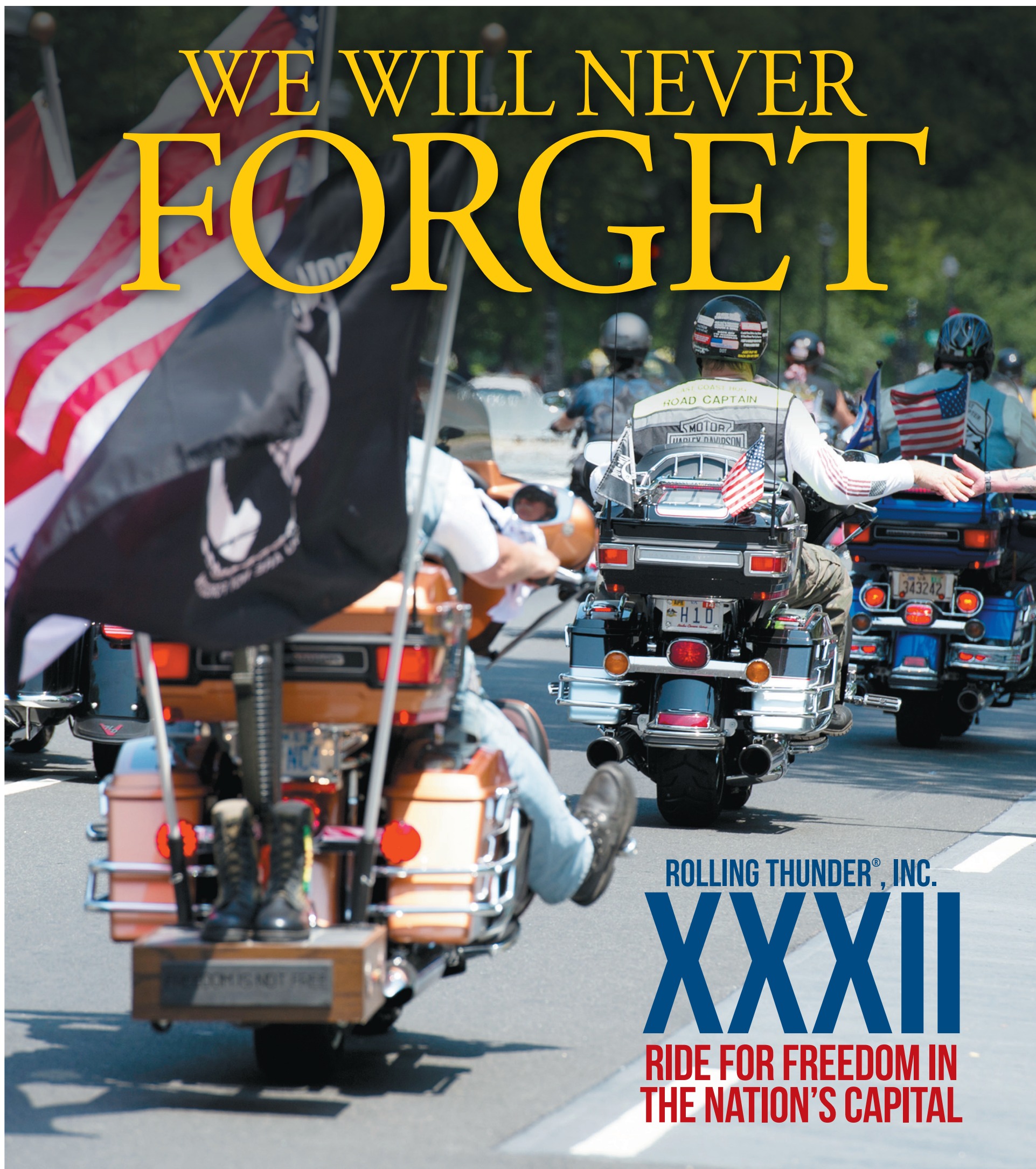


WE WILL NEVER FORGET



ROLLING THUNDER®, INC.

XXXII

**RIDE FOR FREEDOM IN
THE NATION'S CAPITAL**

Famed Rolling Thunder honors vets in DC for last time before going nationwide

By JENNIFER HARPER
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The stars and stripes rule the day, and a million chrome-spoked wheels turn with a single purpose. Rolling Thunder has arrived in the nation's capital for the 32nd annual "Ride for Freedom," a massive display of power, pride and patriotism meant to honor and acknowledge veterans who fought our wars, soldiers missing in action, and the POWs who never made it home.

It is the last massive demonstration to be staged in the nation's capital by U.S. Army veteran Artie Muller, the determined stalwart who organized the first ride in 1988 with fellow vet Ray Manzo. The pair named their demonstration after "Operation Rolling Thunder," the U.S. military code name for the long-term bombing of North Vietnamese targets in the mid-1960s. Across the decades, the event grew from a few thousand riders to some 500,000 devotees including lawmakers, military brass, politicians and famous faces — from Sarah Palin to "Terminator 2" star Robert Patrick, who has confirmed he'll be on ride No. 32 this weekend.

The occasion has become such a signature event that it has been featured in multiple travel guides — often deemed historic or uniquely American.

Contrary to media reports and rumor, this is not the "last" ride, however.

"We're not going anywhere. We're just going nationwide," Mr. Muller tells *The Washington Times*.

The shift in focus is a practical decision. The sheer size of the demonstration has become problematic for the all-volunteer staff. Production costs for the behemoth gathering have soared over \$200,000 while logistical challenges have multiplied. The combination has brought change — and a commonsense solution for the future.

Make it local.

"We will continue the POW/MIA mission through our 90 Rolling Thunder state chapters across America, coordinating demonstrations starting on the 2020 Memorial Day weekend," Mr. Muller said in a letter to his big flock after reaching the decision to curtail the massive ride in Washington in favor of smaller events.

He predicts that increased localized



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Rolling Thunder XXX Ride for Freedom, Memorial Weekend 2017.



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Actor Robert Patrick.

attendance and regionalized media coverage will draw more attention to the cause that is of visceral importance to him.

Mr. Muller served in the U.S. Army 4th Infantry Division in the jungles of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos at age 20. But he has never stopped wondering about the warriors who served with him or those who stepped up in another place, in another war.

"Even when I was in the infantry I always thought about those who got taken

prisoner, those who were left behind. I think of the live POWs. I felt that if I was ever captured, I would want people to fight to get me home again. I've never, ever forgotten how I felt back then," Mr. Muller said.

His passion and his mission has not changed since those days.

"Never forget all of our prisoners of war and those still missing in action from all wars. Never forget our veterans of all wars. That's our message, and that's our mission," said Mr. Muller, who had the foresight to trademark the Rolling Thunder name decades ago and establish an active charitable organization that continues to look after the welfare of vets, active duty military and their families.

More than 82,000 American service members are still missing, with 75% of them in the Indo-Pacific and 41,000 presumed lost at sea, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

Those with a similar cause have nothing but encouragement for Muller and his clan.

"The millions who've rode in this iconic demonstration over the past three decades were amazingly successful in keeping our missing on the minds of elected officials and the American people. But the job is not done. Clear signs surfaced this year that members of Congress are, once again,

forgetting the 80,000-plus American military men and women still missing in action," said Joe Chenelly, national executive director of AMVETS.

He publicly vowed this year to keep the "vital demonstration" in Washington.

"This needs to continue in some way. AMVETS is preparing to do whatever is necessary to ensure those who want to make the pilgrimage to Washington in 2020 and beyond find a meaningful, well-organized demonstration. It won't likely have the same name, but we aren't giving up the mission. AMVETS will work with Rolling Thunder to keep the promise that we will never forget," Mr. Chenelly said.

Meanwhile, the Rolling Thunder traditions continue. There will be a blessing of the bikes at the Washington National Cathedral, a candlelight vigil for the fallen, two solemn wreath layings, a free barbecue, plus a musical program to honor vets.

And the ultimate reality? The riders will gather at staging areas by the Pentagon Sunday at dawn — where it will take five hours to assemble the biker battalion into formations of four, rolling out one after another for the 20-minute ride across the Potomac River to the National Mall.

**The
Washington
Times**

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Tony Hill
DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING
& INTEGRATED SALES

Advertising Department:
202-636-3027

Larry T. Beasley
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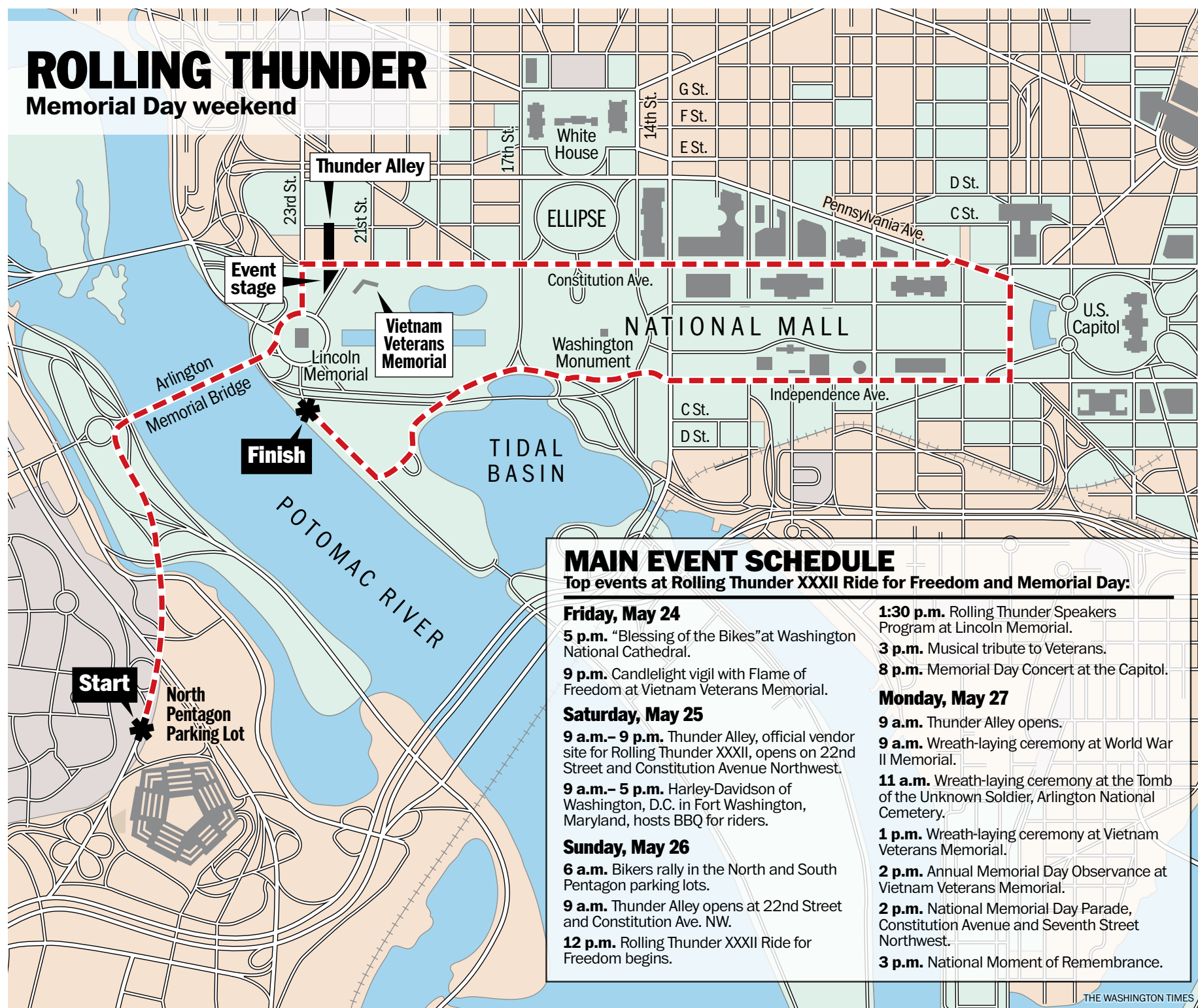
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Special Sections are multipage tabloid products that run in *The Washington Times* daily newspaper and are posted online and in PDF form on its website. Sponsors and advertisers collaborate with *The Times'* advertising and marketing departments to highlight a variety of issues and events, such as *The Power of Prayer*, *North Korea's Nuclear Threat*, *Gun Rights Policy Conference* and *Rolling Thunder Memorial Day Tribute to Veterans*. Unless otherwise identified, Special Sections are prepared separately and without involvement from the *Times'* newsroom and editorial staff.

ROLLING THUNDER

Memorial Day weekend



MAIN EVENT SCHEDULE

Top events at Rolling Thunder XXXII Ride for Freedom and Memorial Day:

Friday, May 24

- 5 p.m.** "Blessing of the Bikes" at Washington National Cathedral.
- 9 p.m.** Candlelight vigil with Flame of Freedom at Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Saturday, May 25

- 9 a.m. – 9 p.m.** Thunder Alley, official vendor site for Rolling Thunder XXXII, opens on 22nd Street and Constitution Avenue Northwest.
- 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.** Harley-Davidson of Washington, D.C. in Fort Washington, Maryland, hosts BBQ for riders.

Sunday, May 26

- 6 a.m.** Bikers rally in the North and South Pentagon parking lots.
- 9 a.m.** Thunder Alley opens at 22nd Street and Constitution Ave. NW.
- 12 p.m.** Rolling Thunder XXXII Ride for Freedom begins.

- 1:30 p.m.** Rolling Thunder Speakers Program at Lincoln Memorial.

- 3 p.m.** Musical tribute to Veterans.

- 8 p.m.** Memorial Day Concert at the Capitol.

Monday, May 27

- 9 a.m.** Thunder Alley opens.

- 9 a.m.** Wreath-laying ceremony at World War II Memorial.

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

- 1 p.m.** Wreath-laying ceremony at Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

- 2 p.m.** Annual Memorial Day Observance at Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

- 2 p.m.** National Memorial Day Parade, Constitution Avenue and Seventh Street Northwest.

- 3 p.m.** National Moment of Remembrance.

By THE WASHINGTON TIMES
SPECIAL SECTIONS DEPARTMENT

After Rolling Thunder®, Inc. XXXII Ride for Freedom, spectators and riders can gather near the Lincoln Memorial for a program featuring Rolling Thunder®, Inc. National Sgt. Artie Muller, Executive Director and Founder, and Joe Bean, President, along with the following speakers:

Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie. Prior to his July 2018 confirmation as the top official of the VA, Mr. Wilkie served more than 20 years in key legal, national security and advisor posts in the George W. Bush administration, Department of Defense and Congress. Born into a military family, he has served in the U.S. Navy Reserve and is currently a colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve assigned to the Office of the Chief of Staff.

USAF Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Tom McInerney. A decorated pilot who served in Vietnam

and has flown in 407 combat missions, Lt. Gen. McInerney's military career includes service in numerous countries; commander of Alaskan Air Command; assistant vice chief of staff of the Air Force; and director of the Defense Performance Review, reporting to the Secretary of Defense.

Jason Noel, Director of Sales, Midwest Market, Harley-Davidson Motor Corp. An Army veteran, Mr. Noel has been with Harley-Davidson for four years; the company has been a key corporate partner with Rolling Thunder®, Inc. for 18 years and is committed to unite riders in support of the men and women who serve America.

Sen. Michael Brown, District of Columbia. Michael Donald "Mike" Brown is a

After the Ride come the tributes



Noel



Wilkie

D.C. "shadow senator" since 2007.

Chris Noel. The model-turned-actress began entertaining troops in Vietnam in the 1960s and received the Distinguished Vietnam Veteran award in 1984 from the Veterans Network for her wartime service. She will share Master of Ceremonies duties with Nikki Mendicino, a member of Rolling

Thunder®, Inc. National.

Rockie Lynne. Rolling Thunder®, Inc., Chapter 2 NC. An Army veteran and co-founder of Tribute for the Troops, which raises money for families who have lost a parent in active duty, Mr. Lynne is a nationally known singer-songwriter; his album, "Songs for Soldiers," benefits charities that serve service members.

Gordon Painter. Rolling Thunder®, Inc. National. Mr. Painter has been performing his unique musical style at the Veteran's Center for nursing home patients every year on Saturday plus performing at the stage on Sunday.

Ben Mason, composer and pianist. A supporter of veterans, Mr. Mason has been performing in the D.C. area since the 1960s and played at venues such as the Birchmere, the old Cellar Door, Blues Alley, the Bayou, the Kennedy Center and the Baltimore Civic Center.

Supporting our military and their loved ones every day

By Giant Food

In 1988, Rolling Thunder held a demonstration in Washington, D.C., on Memorial Day Weekend. Some 2,500 motorcycles from across the country travelled into the city to demand from governmental leaders a full accounting of all POW/MIAs. Since that day, and for over 30 years, Rolling Thunder®, Inc., has kept our nation focused on fulfilling one of our most sacred promises — to never leave a service member behind. Millions of riders and spectators have brought to our attention the stories of those imprisoned or who have gone missing in action while serving overseas. For over three decades, Rolling Thunder®, Inc.'s trademark roar has served as an annual reminder that we each have a role to play in supporting those who wear a military uniform as well as their loved ones.

Like every person who calls Washington, D.C., home, our team at Giant Food eagerly awaits the unmistakable rumblings of Rolling Thunder®, Inc., every year. We are proud to see groups of riders from across the country rolling through our neighborhoods. We watch in awe at the endless stream of motorcycles that flood the District on Memorial Day weekend. Each year, we are left inspired to carry forward the spirit

of the event by joining our customers in supporting causes that benefit those who serve.

In our 83-year history, Giant Food has grown, evolved and changed with the Greater Washington, D.C., area. More than just a grocer, we strive to be a better neighbor by building bridges with our community to help address the needs of our customers in the areas we serve. One of the most important communities in the Greater Washington, D.C., region is our military. Supporting the military is one of Giant's four major charitable pillars, along with hunger relief; supporting health and wellness initiatives, such as pediatric cancer; and educating our youth. To us being a better neighbor means finding different ways to support our military members and their families. This integral support starts at home — in our communities, in our schools, and, we hope, at a Giant Food store.

Our commitment to supporting our nation's military begins with our associates. We are fortunate to have a team of associates across our operating region that makes supporting military members, their families, and veterans, a company priority. Members of Giant's internal Veterans Business Resource Group leverage Giant's competencies in education, assistance programs and

workforce development to provide a robust framework that supports our troops and their families, overcoming their challenging transition to civilian life.

This includes being an employer of choice for veterans who bring a wide variety of skills and a unique perspective to our team. We continuously look for opportunities to partner with organizations and supplement their work, and through those partnerships and collaborations, we are able to celebrate the work of others who support our military.

Since 2011, Giant has grown our partnership with the USO of Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore, the largest chapter of the USO, a nonprofit that has provided help to over 10 million military service members and their families. In 2018, Giant donated \$682,000 to the USO-Metro, and we are extremely proud to be a partner with an organization that provides services to the nearly 300,000 military members and their families living in the region and the 150,000 who travel through Washington D.C. The USO-Metro has created a critical bridge between Americans and their military service members — a mission that continues to be extremely important today as many service members are deployed overseas.

In December 2018, Giant presented a grant to the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) through Giant's Our Family Foundation. We were inspired by TAPS' mission to "offer compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in our Armed Forces." It is organizations like TAPS, dedicated to helping in the healing process and where family members and friends begin to rediscover peace and solace, that make our efforts even more important. We are honored to continue our partnership with TAPS because of the unyielding support it provides those who are grieving.

Since 1936, Giant Food has been the grocer of choice for many military members and their families. We realize that they are the backbone of the Washington, D.C., community and our entire nation, which is why we want to thank Rolling Thunder®, Inc., for their tremendous support for the military community. Rolling Thunder®, Inc., has not only become an institution but a symbol of military solidarity. Their roaring parade serves as a somber reminder of those we have lost in service, those who are protecting our freedoms today, and those who have not yet joined but who will one day represent this great nation through their military service.



IMAGE COURTESY OF GIANT FOOD.

Giant Food is pleased to donate a truckload of bottled water and snacks for participants of the Rolling Thunder®, Inc. Ride for Freedom.

'I hope we give them an education about POWs and MIAs'

By JENNIFER HARPER

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Q: What do you hope Americans learn from Rolling Thunder rides?

Artie Muller: I hope we give them an education about POWs and MIAs. I hope that they have more respect for our military and our veterans and understand what they've been through. It's not easy for those who fight the wars, no matter what they did or where they were. It's rough. I also hope that people see us differently now. Maybe they thought, oh, these bikers are bad, or outlaws — but bikers often do more to raise awareness and charity funds for vets and military than anyone else. They're good people.

Q: What message do you have for politicians?

A: We want the Congress and the Senate to get off their butts for a change and pass legislation which will truly help our vets, our military and their families.

Q: What kind of motorcycle do you have?

A: I ride a 1992 Harley-Davidson low rider with a 96-inch S&S motor. It's got a black finish and pinstripes.

Q: How many times have you been to the White House?

A: We've visited 12 times. When George W. Bush was in office, we brought him a Rolling Thunder vest and he put it on right away. He greeted us right in the White House driveway.

Q: How do you feel about the current administration?

A: I've supported President Trump for years. He even spoke at Rolling Thunder as a candidate. I believe he is the right person for the presidency right now. He's not a politician, he can't be bought. He stands by his guns, so to speak. He does what he says he's going to do. I respect him for that. And look, people are working, they're happy and there's some money coming in. That's how it should be.

Q: What was the best advice you ever got about the operations side of Rolling Thunder?

A: It came from Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell. He rode with us many times. He told me, 'Artie, you've got a real powerful force here. Start your own organization and go on the mission you want



(ASSOCIATED PRESS)

President Bush greets Artie Muller, executive director of Rolling Thunder, and singer Nancy Sinatra at the White House in 2004.



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Sgt. Artie Muller, Rolling Thunder®, Inc. co-founder and executive director.



to do. Keep it clean, keep it honest and you'll succeed.' So that's what we did."

Q: What's your advice for regional leaders who will organize Rolling Thunder rides around America?

A: If anybody asks you a question about the group, don't BS them. Don't lie. And stay strict about what people put on their vest or their jacket when they ride. Any military medals or patches must be authentic and documented on paper. There can't be any phonies in Rolling Thunder.

Q: What personal quality has helped you all these years as the Rolling Thunder chief?

A: I was born in Brooklyn, I grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Those places, you learn to be direct, to tell the truth. So I tell the truth. I'm direct. That way, you never have to worry about what you've said, what you told people. You're in the right.

Q: Name an accomplishment you're proud of.

A: Over 96% of the money we raise goes directly to our vets, our military and their families.

Q: Do you want family members to follow in your footsteps?

A: I hope, maybe, that my kids and grandkids would stay involved in Rolling Thunder. But I don't think they should take on what I took on, which was a whole lot, and it's gone on for 33 years. But I can tell you this, I have met incredible people along the way.

For commander of USS Cole, Rolling Thunder a chance to 'raise a glass'

By Christopher Vondracek

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Kirk Lippold sent his check to Harley-Davidson from Koper, Slovenia, in October 2000 while he was in port on the Adriatic Sea, planning to pick up his ride when he and the destroyer he commanded — the USS Cole — returned to port.

The homecoming would be delayed. Three weeks later, while refueling in Aden, on Yemen's coast, the third of three garbage barges lingered, and then came the explosion. Two suicide bombers — plus a small boat of explosives — blew a 40-by-60-foot hole in the rig's side, killing 17 sailors and setting off the first assault on the U.S. military in what would become the decades-long War on Terror.

"We experienced the 21st century version of a kamikaze attack," Cmdr. Lippold told The Washington Times. "My life was fundamentally changed."

With communications knocked out, the crew kept the ship afloat, dispatched security details and cared for the 37 wounded. By day's end, the ship was stable, but the news rocked the country and the world. Al-Qaeda and Jihad-linked militants had targeted embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the World Trade Center in 1993, and international peacekeepers, including U.S. service members, in Beirut barracks in 1983. But never U.S. defenders.

The last thing on the ship's commander's mind was on affairs back home. But five days later, after communications were fully restored, Cmdr. Lippold received an email from Harley-Davidson. His bike, they said, would be ready for him whenever he was — the company offering to forgo its normal no-refunds policy.

"I picked up the motorcycle a couple weeks after the Cole returned to the U.S." Cmdr. Lippold said. "I drove it home from the dealership, went around two blocks, and then parked it in my garage."

He still had months to go before a change-of-command for the USS Cole. He would be assigned to the Pentagon in 2001 and would see more dark days after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But during the summer of 2001 came his first Rolling Thunder, the annual parade of veterans on motorcycles, remembering prisoners-of-war and those missing-in-action, rumbling from the Pentagon to the U.S. Capitol and back down Constitution Avenue on the Sunday before Memorial Day.

"I've made every one since," said



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

U.S. Navy Cmdr. Kirk Lippold has addressed Rolling Thunder Ride for Freedom in previous years.

A lot of us know this isn't an ordinary motorcycle ride.

Cmdr. Lippold, who retired from the Navy in 2007 after a decorated 26-year career. "It's an event to reminisce, to raise a glass and toast those who went before us. A lot of us know this isn't an ordinary motorcycle ride."

This year's ride in the nation's capital is slated to be the last, following the

rising cost of cleanup at the Pentagon, which has reached \$80,000.

Cmdr. Lippold, whose mother was a teacher in Nevada, laments the news a little.

"Isn't \$80,000 a rounding error for the Department of Defense budget?" he asked, pointing out that in World

War II the Navy maintained more than 4,000 ships with 100 admirals and now maintains fewer than 300 ships with more than 400 admirals, "I call it the 'self-licking ice cream.' If they can afford all these admirals and their staff, they can afford one day for veterans in the parking lot."

Still, the esprit de corps will continue wherever the bikes roll. Next year, rides will scatter across the country. And for veterans such as Cmdr. Lippold, who grew up with the "Easy Rider" iconography of a motorcycle rider, he isn't buying headlines that say younger people (and veterans) aren't interested in motorcycles.

"Whether these people served four or 34 years, when they get out, they kind of miss out on the camaraderie and part of that can be joining an organization like Rolling Thunder," he aid.

Since retiring, Cmdr. Lippold has gone on the speaking circuit, appearing on CNN, Fox News and the BBC. He ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 2010 and has repeated calls for support for victims of the Cole blast.

But Cmdr. Lippold, who speaks often on leadership tested in the hours and days after the USS Cole attack, continues to ride his motorcycle when he finds the time. While he calls Carson City home, he still lives in Washington, too, and on weekends, he'll ride his bike to the Shenandoah, to Great Falls or the open country in Pennsylvania, harkening back to his early days in Nevada on his Honda Mini-Bike.

He definitely tries to steer clear of D.C. and the Capital Beltway.

"Only if you want to be an organ donor," Cmdr. Lippold said.

For a man with his own leadership program and busy speaking schedule, his ties to veterans remain strong.

On May 10, Cmdr. Lippold spoke to the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association in Frederick, Md., and spent the morning at the meeting escorting 101-year-old retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Bob Vaucher, who flew squadron commander of the show-of-force of 500-plus B-29 bombers that flew over the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay as Japan officially surrendered to Allied forces on Sept. 2, 1945.

"A guy like this," Cmdr. Lippold said, "You can't pass up an opportunity like that. What an incredible honor."

By air, by sea, or on the back of a Harley, the road keeps opening up for Cmdr. Lippold and the veterans who will be riding one last time down Constitution Avenue on Sunday.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day 2018



By President Donald J. Trump

Throughout American history, the men and women of our Armed Forces have selflessly served our country, making tremendous sacrifices to defend our liberty. On National POW/MIA Recognition Day, we honor all American prisoners of war and express our deep gratitude for the courage and determination they exemplified while enduring terrible hardships. We also pay tribute to those who never

returned from the battlefield and to their families, who live each day with uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. These families are entitled to the knowledge that their loved ones still missing and unaccounted for will never be forgotten.

As a Nation, it is our solemn obligation to account for the remains of our fallen American service members and civilians and to bring them home whenever possible. We owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to these patriots who gave their last full measure of devotion for our country. For this reason, I have pledged my Administration's best efforts to account for our country's missing heroes. We continue to work to account for the missing personnel from the Vietnam War. American and partner nation search teams are also working tirelessly in South Korea, Europe, the South Pacific, and elsewhere around the world to recover and identify those who served in World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, and other past conflicts.

During my meeting with Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in June, I raised my concern for the thousands

of grieving American families whose loved ones remain missing from the Korean War uncertainty. As a result, I secured a commitment from Chairman Kim to recover and repatriate the remains of those Americans who were prisoners of war or killed in action. Last month, we repatriated the remains of some of those courageous service members to American soil. As a result of this homecoming, two of our missing fallen have already been identified, renewing our hope for the fullest possible accounting of the Americans who have yet to be recovered from the Korean War. These recovery efforts are vital to fulfilling our Nation's promise to leave no fellow American behind.

On September 21, 2018, the stark black and white banner symbolizing America's Missing in Action and Prisoners of War will again be flown over the White House; the United States Capitol; the Departments of State, Defense, and Veterans Affairs; the Selective Service System Headquarters; the World War II Memorial; the Korean War Veterans Memorial; the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; United States post offices; national cemeteries; and other locations across the country.

We do this, each year, to recognize those who have suffered the horrors of enemy captivity, those who have still not returned from war, and the families who have yet to lay their loved ones to rest with the honor and dignity they deserve.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, 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 September 21, 2018, as National POW/MIA Recognition Day. I call upon the people of the United States to join me in saluting all American POWs and those missing in action who valiantly served our country. I call upon Federal, State, and local government officials and private organizations to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twentieth day of September, in the year of our Lord two thousand eighteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-third.



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

For 18 years, USMC Staff Sgt. Tim Chambers has stood for hours and saluted the Ride for Freedom to convey honor, respect and appreciation to Rolling Thunder participants and all veterans. "We owe nothing less than accountability and closure" to Americans who are still prisoners of war/missing in action, he says.



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Every year before the Ride for Freedom, Rolling Thunder riders have gone to Washington National Cathedral for the "Blessing of the Bikes."



By John Roberts

Camaraderie is a big part of the lives of service members. Spending time in uniform and away from uniform with fellow soldiers, Marines, sailors, or airmen helps build trust and reliance on each other. That bond is just as important as service members leave service and join the civilian world.

Organizations like Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) bring veterans together to not only rekindle that camaraderie but also create new layers of support. One way WWP goes about that: motorcycle rides.

“Sharing the open road with other warriors is definitely a form of therapy,” said Dozer Reed, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and Army National Guard. Dozer suffered a spinal cord injury in a vehicle crash in Iraq in 2005. Last summer, he joined a group of veterans to ride across the Great Plains toward South Dakota. Together, the group rode nearly 3,000 miles, starting in Texas, with stops along the way in New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming.

“We overcame challenges together, we rode through extreme heat and hail on the same day, we ate meals together, we camped together. The key to everything: we did it together.”

The group included serious motorcycle enthusiasts and some still new to the experience.

Kattathu Johnson is an Army National Guard veteran. She had limited time on a motorcycle before signing up for the cross-country ride.

“I was extremely nervous and excited at the same time. I had never rode my motorcycle longer than three hours, but I felt safe being around my military family. I knew they had my six, and I had full trust in them.”

Along the journey, she became close with her fellow veterans and leaned on them for support across the Great Plains.

“They made sure I had everything needed for the ride and treated me like a little sister. They were the ones who turned my nervousness into happiness.”

She also learned to open up about her encounters while deployed to Iraq — sharing some stories for the first time.

“The trip was very memorable, and I

Motorcycles bring veterans together

Cross-Country ride provided fellowship for warriors



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB LOUIS/WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT.

Veterans from Wounded Warrior Project enjoyed camaraderie on a ride to Mount Rushmore. The stop was part of a cross-country ride from Houston to South Dakota.

learned so much more about myself and how to deal with the things I was going through.”

In South Dakota, Kattathu, Dozer, and other warriors joined veterans from all eras in Sturgis. Motorcycles were lined up for several veteran motorcycle rides, including one to Mount Rushmore. Warriors had the chance to see the massive monument to some of the most influential leaders in American history.

Another warrior on the ride, Harvey Paige, watched as the group of veterans became closer throughout the ride.

“The ride was great. I met some great people who are struggling with the same issues that I am. The ride brought us together and allowed us to experience a journey together.”

Harvey, an Army veteran, knows firsthand the therapeutic benefits of being on a motorcycle.

“The sense of freedom. You can just ride, whether by yourself or in a group, preferably a group. But when you have the wind blowing in your face and the feel of the road under you, you crack

the throttle and you feel the power. It’s just the freedom you get.”

WWP knows the importance of bringing warriors together. There is an understanding combat veterans share that creates comfort and facilitates healing. Because warriors can relate, they also learn from one another about the transition to civilian life and the programs and services that can help. WWP’s free services in mental health, career counseling, and long-term rehabilitative care change lives.

Dozer is a great example of the impact WWP has. Through WWP outdoor mental health workshops, his journey found new meaning. Through connections with other veterans, his outlook became more positive.

“I don’t do this just for me,” Dozer said. “I know what it’s like to be by yourself. It takes an entire community to heal a warrior — family, friends, and all the people who are around on a daily basis. You’ve got to cling to that hope and move forward. If you share that contagious positivity with them, it’s much easier to move forward.”

Dozer now serves as a peer mentor to other warriors in his home state of Louisiana. The lessons he learned help countless warriors in their recoveries. We want warriors to live the logo — by becoming the warrior carrying their fellow veteran in their time of need. Dozer and other warriors did so to help Kattathu. Now she can help other veterans heal.

Learn about how WWP is transforming the way America’s injured veterans are empowered, employed, and engaged in our communities at <https://wwp.news/GetConnected>. Contact: Rob Louis – Public Relations, rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org, 904.627.0432

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About Wounded Warrior Project: Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. Learn more: <http://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/about-us>.



WOUNDED WARRIOR
SHANE PARSONS

**“WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
HELPED ME REALIZE THERE ARE NO LIMITS
TO WHAT I CAN ACHIEVE.”**

I AM LIVING PROOF

HELP MAKE AN IMPACT AT

iamlivingproofwwp.org



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‘We owe it to families, American history to do best by them’

By Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell

The following is a conversation between former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Colorado Republican, and Cheryl Wetzstein, former manager of special sections at The Washington Times, about Rolling Thunder, Inc. XXX Ride for Freedom in 2017. It is republished here with permission.

Q: You often rode with Rolling Thunder when you were in Congress?

A: Yes. I think I rode with them about a dozen times. ... Back then, I wouldn't ride clear across the country, but I would usually meet one of the groups outside D.C. somewhere and ride in with them. And then join some of the events around D.C. — the Harley-Davidson dealers have barbecues and events for them the day before.

Q: For this latest Rolling Thunder anniversary, if you were to share a message with the crowd, what would it be?

A: Well, I think the simple message would be: “Don't give up. What you started out to do and what you've been doing for the last 30 years is working.” Mainly, Rolling Thunder was trying to create a pressure group to inspire Congress to locate prisoners of war and missing in action from any war in the past ... They are concerned about all of them, making sure every American is accounted for. So the message is, don't give up, keep going.

Q: During your time in Congress, you worked on several laws regarding the POW/MIA issue, yes?

A: You know the POW/MIA black flag that you see flying? That was drawn on a cocktail napkin ... by a veteran years and years ago. And for some reason, that image sort of caught on with the motorcyclists, and they began to use it as their symbol and it became sort of a national symbol for POW/MIAs. And I introduced a bill several years ago that

would make that a national flag that must be flown over all national buildings and national monuments five times a year.

Q: An important step to keep the symbol visible and in front of people. Any thoughts on what else Congress can do today?

A: Try to work with China.

Years ago, I [and other members of Congress] went to Korea to get remains after the Korean War. When North Korea wanted better relations with the United States in trade, they offered to give back some of the thousands that were missing in Korea. ... So we went back to Korea ... and we helicoptered up to Panmunjom and received four caskets from North Korea. Which we inspected and signed for. (There were skeletons and dog tags and paperwork.) We took those remains back to Hickam Field and had DNA tests done on them to find out just who those four soldiers were. And it turned out, they were not four soldiers — they were a whole bunch of soldiers. What they had done was kill some Americans and just stuck them in a hole, and years later, when they wanted better relations with America, they dug up those bones ... No [respect] for human life.

I hope to heck that [President] Trump has enough influence on the president of China, that China recognizes that it's in their best interest to get some peaceful solution too. Because they will be in a world of hurt if [a conflict] starts over there.

Q: That leads to my last question: What can this White House do that you think would be good for the POW/MIA issue?

A: I think they need to work on better relations with China. I think China really holds the key because China is like the patron saint of North Korea — something like 80 percent of North Korea's exports go into China. And [China] has already cut off [North Korea's] coal as part of their first step towards reining them in a little bit. But I don't know if that's going

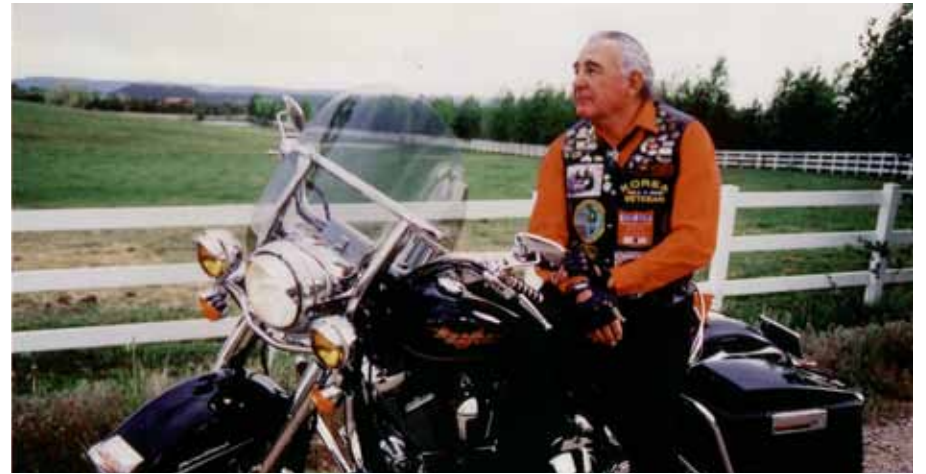


PHOTO COURTESY OF BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL.

An Air Force veteran and avid motorcyclist, Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell rode many times with Rolling Thunder during his years in Congress.

to work or not ... That Kim Jong-un ... I don't know of anybody who can actually try to reason with him. But I think China has a better chance of exerting pressure on him than any other nation, and China has an interest in this because if a war started over there, there's going to be a mass exodus into China by scared-to-death North Koreans. ... So it's in China's best interest to find some solution.

Q: Does China have influence over Laos, Cambodia or Vietnam?

A: I think they do, though trade. Many of the weapons in those three countries come from China (and Russia). But I think there's a direct connection with all the smaller countries around China. ... And the flip side of that coin is that China is reliant on the United States for a good portion of their economy ... and if something went wrong in the trade relations between the United States and China, there would be a hell of a bunch of Chinese factories closing ... China doesn't want that.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: People in Washington need to care about [the POW/MIA issue] and we

need to care about it because it could be your son. Or my brother. Or your dad. We need to personalize it and recognize that all those missing in action and all the POWs had a family and a future and a dream for their life as free Americans — and they're gone. And I think we owe it to the families and American history to do our best for them.

Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Colorado Republican, served in the U.S. House and Senate between 1987 and 2005, and became chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. Now on the Council of Chiefs for the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Mr. Campbell, 86, is an Air Force veteran who was stationed in Korea during the war and is assisting the effort to establish a National Native American Veterans Memorial. An avid motorcyclist, Mr. Campbell was inducted into the American Motorcyclist Association's Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 2001. He has a jewelry business, a consulting business, and he and wife Linda raise quarter horses on their Colorado ranch.



‘Hanoi Hilton’ veteran: ‘We must do all we can’ for POW/MIA

By Rep. Sam Johnson

This year marks the 32nd anniversary of Rolling Thunder. Each year, its Ride for Freedom is an inspiring reminder that we must do all we can to ensure a full accounting for American forces who remain missing in action (MIA). It is a call to action, and as a 29-year Air Force

veteran and former POW, I speak from personal experience when I say that taking action can change lives — it can even save them.

It was during the 25th combat mission of my second tour in Vietnam that my co-pilot and I were shot down over North Vietnam. We were flying low to the ground when we took on enemy fire,

but when we tried to shoot back, our guns jammed.

Our engine caught fire and we were forced to eject. The North Vietnamese quickly captured us and moved us to the Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi. Translated, it means “Hell's Hole,” and I can assure

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By Becky Christmas

Each Memorial Day weekend, American Gold Star Mothers look forward to being in Washington, D.C., with Rolling Thunder. We talk about the previous years we have been on the ride and how thrilling it is. We talk about the riders we have met and the friends we have made. This relationship was special from the beginning of the event and it still is in 2019.

In the beginning, the Gold Star Mothers were the age of the mothers of the riders. The mothers who had lost their children in Vietnam wanted this relationship with someone who was close to the age of the child that died serving their country. It meant so much to the mothers and to the riders. It has carried these Gold Star Mothers through many years with living without their child. We continued those traditions for many years, and now the "Vietnam Moms," as we call

Bound in heart: Rolling Thunder and American Gold Star Mothers

them, rarely get to come to Memorial Day, but they carry the memories of the many rides and hold them in their hearts.

It means so much to all of us who have lost our child who served their country, to be included and treated so special. We hope to honor those who have served by being there for all of them. It is especially meaningful to be with them in Washington, D.C., and at the Wall. We will never forget. As we ride through the streets, we are filled with pride just to be a part of it all. The flags are waving and so are we.

This year, the weekend is even more special and we know that there may be many changes in the coming years. Just know that American Gold Star Mothers will always be there, whether it is one of us or many of us. This reunion is dear to us, and when we see the thousands who have come to hear the roar of the engines and see the flags waving, we are filled with pride just to be a part of this historic day.

We offer our heartfelt gratitude to each rider who commits to this ride and weekend. We know that our children would have loved this. I know they look down from heaven and see that we are there for all the veterans, riders and for their memory. I can hear



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

A prayerful Candle Light Vigil in memory of loved ones.

them saying, "You go, Mom!"

Thank you Rolling Thunder for always remembering Gold Star Mothers everywhere. Thank you for remembering our children. We appreciate all your support and love. You protect us and appreciate us, and we love you. We can never thank you enough. Our mission is to support you and all veterans and we cherish the relationship. We are Mothers On A Mission, A Powerful Force! We are there for you!

Becky Christmas is the 2018-2019 National President of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. Becky is from Wagon Mound, New Mexico, where she and her Army veteran husband, Brad Christmas, raised their three sons on their family ranch. CPT Todd Christmas, her oldest son, was killed on 29 November 2004, in a Black Hawk helicopter crash close to Fort Hood. Todd had returned from a year deployment to Iraq and was a passenger on the Black Hawk.

JOHNSON

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you that it lived up to its name. I spent the next nearly seven years of my life there — 42 months of that in solitary confinement.

Our captors blatantly disregarded the Geneva Convention and we POWs endured torture, starvation and grossly unsanitary conditions. The North Vietnamese also worked hard to make us POWs feel forgotten and alone. We had to lean on each other and our faith in God to carry us through.

I know my wife Shirley and other POW wives also struggled during the Vietnam War because of the lack of support they received. They were told not to talk about their loved ones' imprisonment ... but that didn't last long. Many brave POW wives found each other and banded together to bring about action.

Even though the country was divided, they were able to get people to rally behind the cause of the POWs. The media started to take notice. Pressure was put on the North Vietnamese, and gradually conditions in the camp started to improve. Ultimately, we POWs were

brought home in 1973 because of the determination and hard work of these fearless women.

During my service in Congress, I remained committed to carrying on that same hard work and bringing home fellow service members who were left behind in previous wars and conflicts. These efforts were part of a promise my POW buddies and I made to ourselves — a promise that when we got out, we would stop just griping about our government and instead work to make things better.

As the U.S. congressman for my home district in Texas, part of this promise included supporting a strong military and ensuring our troops and veterans had the resources they needed, both on the battlefield and when they returned home.

I was pleased that my bill to allow for the inclusion of a Wall of Remembrance at the Korean War Memorial was signed into law in 2016. This wall will list the names of all members of the U.S. Armed Forces who gave their lives in support of freedom during the Korean War. It will also list the total number of all American POWs and MIAs from the Korean War. I also introduced a resolution (H.Res. 129) that called for intensified efforts to



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1992.

Rep. Sam Johnson and co-author Jan Winebrenner wrote about his years in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" prison camp in "Captive Warriors: A Vietnam POW's Story"

recover and repatriate every American troop who remains unaccounted for.

Sadly, there are about 83,000 unaccounted for American troops to this day.

Our Armed Forces swear to leave no man behind, which is why I have vowed I will never stop fighting for our defenders of freedom — just like our POW wives did for us.

My commitment to this country and those who fight for it will never end. Thank you to all the brave men and women in our Armed Forces, past and present, for your service and sacrifice to the greatest nation in the world — the United States of America. And thank you to the military families who support your loved ones — it means more than you could ever know. God bless you and I salute you.

Republican Rep. Sam R. Johnson served the 3rd Congressional District in Texas between 1991 and 2018. He served on the House Ways and Means Committee, where he was chairman of the subcommittee on Social Security. He and co-author Jan Winebrenner chronicled his years in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" in "Captive Warriors: A Vietnam POW's Story" (Texas A&M University Press, 1992). This article originally ran in *The Washington Times* in 2017 and has been updated with permission.

Legion Riders ensure Gold Star families aren't forgotten

By The American Legion

Since 2012, American Legion Post 177 in Fairfax, Virginia, has served as a rallying point for thousands of American Legion Riders (ALR) traveling from all over the nation to take part in Rolling Thunder activities in the Beltway. It's no different this year, with record numbers having already signed up for Post 177's three-day Run to the Thunder. Events at Post 177 include a Friday night dinner and POW/MIA ceremony, followed by the escorted ride to the candlelight vigil at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; a wreath-laying at Arlington National Cemetery Saturday afternoon; and the Ride to the Thunder to participate in Sunday's Freedom Ride through Washington, D.C.

Some of the events already have approached 600 or more registrants, with an anticipated 10-20 percent more showing up to participate without having pre-registered.

Among those at Post 177 will be a group of very special guests. A handful of Gold Star families — survivors of U.S. military personnel killed in the line of duty — will be attending what has become somewhat of a family reunion. The Gold Star families are welcomed with open arms and assured neither they nor their lost loved ones will be forgotten.

"Every day is Memorial Day for our Gold Star families. We need to be there for them. Not just as members of The American Legion family, but as American citizens," said Bob Sussan, chairman of The American Legion Riders Advisory Committee and a member of Post 177. "Nobody can replace those fallen heroes — especially in the eyes of their families. But we can offer shoulders to cry on, assistance with education benefits, and assurances that their loved ones' sacrifice will never be forgotten."

Dan McLaughlin, a member of ALR Chapter 117 in Butler County, Pennsylvania, lost his son Michael during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006. He's attended multiple Run to the Thunder weekends at Post 177. "It's very, very important (in the healing process) because you see so many other Gold Star families here," McLaughlin said. "You get a chance to talk to them and understand what they're going through — what they're feeling and how they're making changes and accepting things in their life."

Memorial Day Weekend used to be extremely difficult for Barbara Bilbrey, a Gold Star mom who lost a son serving in Iraq. Then she began coming to Post 177 and found herself surrounded by friends and supporters who assure her that her



PHOTO BY CHERYL DIAZ MEYER / THE AMERICAN LEGION

Legionnaire Charles Webb hugs Gold Star Mother Barbara Bilbrey, center, while World War II veteran Bruce Heilman, and Phil Perlman, left and right, join Legion members to lay a wreath at the Civil War Unknown Monument during the American Legion Riders Run To The Thunder in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, May 26, 2018.

son's sacrifice is not forgotten.

Barbara's son, Charles Jr., was killed in 2007 at age 21 in Saqlawiyah, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was deployed with the Army's 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division. During a conversation with fellow Gold Star Mother Linda Lamie, Bilbrey talked about how difficult the

the sacrifice. And every time we're able to tell Charlie's story to somebody, that keeps him alive."

For Lamie, whose son Gene was killed in action in July 2007 during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Memorial Day Weekend in Fairfax with the Legion Riders has become an annual trip.

"Gene is buried at Arlington, and we live in South Georgia," Lamie said.

Every day is Memorial Day for our Gold Star families. We need to be there for them. Not just as members of The American Legion family, but as American citizens

holiday weekend was for her. Coming to Post 177 became a way to cope with her loss. "People that don't understand the military; to them it's getting their pool opened or going camping. It's a party," Bilbrey said. "To those of us who have lost (a military member), it's not a party. (At Post 177) we've found nothing but support from the Legion, the Legion Riders. They may not know us. They may not know my son. But they respect

"We get to come see him twice a year. Coming to Arlington and participating with The American Legion keeps Gene's memory alive. I tell everybody that dying for your country is not the worst thing that can happen. Being forgotten by the country that you died for is the worst thing that can happen. Gene had two children. As long as the Legion Riders continue, my grandchildren will know their father."

But for American Legion Rider Sharon Sculthorpe, it's important the survivors also aren't forgotten. A member of ALR Chapter 325 in Danville, Virginia, Sculthorpe has spent six Memorial Day weekends as an escort for a Gold Star mom during Rolling Thunder, making sure each one makes it to where they need to be on Sunday during the demonstration ride through Washington, D.C. "To have a Gold Star mom, a Gold Star wife, to be entrusted to take them on that ride ... I think the biggest thing for me is that so often they feel forgotten," Sculthorpe said. "When their son or daughter dies, or their husband or wife, the whole country rallies around them. But as time passes, people fade away and then — for lack of a better way of putting it — the silence becomes deafening because you feel all alone."

"So many of them have told me that they feel so alone, and that this brings back their faith that America loves them and their children and sacrifice, and that we won't forget them. You've given them back a little bit of what they've lost. They feel like that the sacrifice they gave was worth it. That it wasn't in vain."

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National Alliance marks 30th anniversary

Seeks accounting of last-seen-alive POWs

By National Alliance for Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen

This year marks the 30th anniversary for The National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen Annual Meeting.

The Alliance was formed when Dolores Apodaca Alfond, former prisoners of war and family members of America's POW/MIA from World War II, Korean War, Cold War, and the Vietnam War grew dissatisfied with what they witnessed regarding the POW/MIA accounting mission.

Our founding members did not start their quest for truth 30 years ago but had been involved in the POW/MIA issue for several decades prior. The Alliance has kept true to their founding principles over the decades and now include America's missing personnel from the Gulf Wars (Operation Desert Shield and Operation Iraqi Freedom), Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom), and those held hostage due to military and government work they were doing overseas at the behest of the U.S. government.

As a respected and honest advocate, The Alliance continues its mission to represent our



Janella Apodaca Rose



Dolores Apodaca Alfond



Nicolette Apodaca Rose

missing Americans and their families. We strive to work truly as an "alliance" and work with other nonprofits, academia, and concerned citizens to reach our goals, which are simple:

- The return of any live POW.
- A truthful and accurate accounting of our missing.
- The recovery and scientific identification of remains or a reasonable explanation as to why return, recovery, or a full accounting is impossible.

As the decades have passed, The Alliance, as well as

members of Rolling Thunder, have expanded their membership from veterans, former POWs and their families, and the families of POW/MIA. Designated primary next of kin (PNOK) for POW/MIA have become elderly or deceased and the fight for our POW/MIA has been passed on to generations far removed from their loved ones who are unaccounted for. This is a very sad state, which indicates how delayed the truthful and accurate accounting of America's POW/MIA is.

No matter how much time

has passed, The Alliance's and Rolling Thunder's fight is still ongoing. This fight can be witnessed in our current world news. A key issue for The Alliance goes beyond the accounting of the remains of Americans — we seek an accounting from North Korea and the Vietnam War countries of Americans last known ALIVE in enemy hands who have not yet been returned. According to voluminous declassified files related to the Korean War, some of the missing American servicemen were sent from North Korea through China to

the former Soviet Union. The fate of some of our Vietnam War servicemen can very likely be tied to the former Soviet Union as well.

When we began 30 years ago, our National Chairperson was Dolores Apodaca Alfond, and our primary modes of correspondence were type-written letters and the Bits 'N Pieces Newsletter, which was sent via snail mail or fax. Our research included hours upon hours reviewing microfiche and printed material at the National Archives. When Ms. Alfond passed away in 2010, her sister Janella Apodaca Rose was nominated and elected into the National Chairperson role and worked with the Board of Directors to fulfill Ms. Alfond's last wishes for The Alliance. Ms. Alfond wished for The Alliance's vast documentation and research regarding Vietnam War-era POW/MIA to be donated to The Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University to keep the data available for future generations. The Alliance's information is being digitized and will eventually be available at www.vietnam.ttu.edu.

Much of our other research was held in hard copy by Lynn

» see **NATIONAL** | C15



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

By Nancy Sinatra

It's almost the summer of 2019, do you know where your children are? Do you know where your husband is, your

'United in the cause' for POW/MIA

brother, your friend?

Believe it or not, there are thousands of servicemen and women who served in various wars still unaccounted for. Their families still don't know what happened to them.

Imagine how you would feel if one of your family members were missing — missing for years and while in harm's way! How could you go on with your normal life?

The Rolling Thunder organization has been trying to alert people to this dreadful problem for decades and bring families back together. Not only by holding demonstrations each year on Memorial Day in Washington, D.C., but their more than

90 chartered chapters spend thousand of hours visiting VA hospitals, offering moral support to the patients and staff. Their work is endless.

All are united in the cause to bring full accountability for the Prisoners Of War/Missing In Action (POW/MIA) of all wars, reminding the government, the media and the public by our watchwords, "We Will Not Forget."

The organization regularly donates POW/MIA flags to local area schools, youth groups, nonprofit 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. 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. sponsors search missions into Southeast Asia for POW/MIAs and the remains of those killed in action. Rolling Thunder®, Inc. also helped facilitate the publishing of a POW/MIA postage stamp through the U.S. Postal Service that displayed dog tags with the declaration, "POW &

..... MIA — NEVER FORGOTTEN."

Pop culture icon, recording artist and activist Nancy Sinatra has sold millions of records. Among her well-known songs are "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'" and the James Bond theme song, "You Only Live Twice." Ms. Sinatra is the author of two books, "Frank Sinatra, My Father" and "Frank Sinatra: An American Legend," and oversees two popular websites, sinatrafamily.com and nancysinatra.com. Follow her @NancySinatra. This article originally ran in The Washington Times in 2017 and has been updated with permission.

Why Rolling Thunder matters — and why its mission may never end

By Rockie Lynne

I still remember my first trip to D.C. with Rolling Thunder. I loved riding my bike into Washington for the annual Memorial Day demonstration, being part of that impressive gathering of motorcycles, running through cheering, emotional crowds, and playing the concert on the National Mall. But the day before was so much more significant to me. A group of us went to the homes of two veterans who were too sick to attend. We sat in their bedrooms and swapped stories for hours. We let them know they were truly important to us — that we cared for them. They couldn't come be with us, so we went to them. I can't tell you how much it meant to those men — and to me. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed, and I said right there and then, I have to be part of this.

As I attended more Rolling Thunder events, I learned more about all the things they do to make a positive difference in veterans' lives and how they educate our government about important legislative changes. I think every great cause needs a theme song, so I wrote the record, "Rolling Thunder: We Will Not Forget," about what this organization stands for and put into song form their main mission that POWs and MIAs must never be forgotten. I firmly agree with that mission — that our nation must account for every single



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

person sent off to war. It's hard to believe, but there are still more than 80,000 soldiers unaccounted for from all the wars we've fought.

After 30 years, Rolling Thunder's work is even more relevant to Americans. For one thing, we now have the ability to use DNA testing to identify any remains that are found. That's why the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery is empty now: In 1998, they identified the remains of the last unknown Vietnam War soldier, Michael Joseph Blassie, who was shot down near An Loc in 1972. After his body was exhumed, a DNA test showed who he was, and his remains were able to

be returned to his family. Can you imagine what it meant to them after all those heartbreaking years? Now, we're sending out new generations of troops to wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and to active-duty deployments all over the world — unfortunately, our mission may never end.

It's still a shame to me that Artie Muller, Rolling Thunder's commander, and so many of our riders weren't welcomed home from the Vietnam War as they should have been. So this is a peaceful protest to honor those brave men and thousands of others — a million of us roar in formation into our nation's capital in support of veterans and to respect our fallen heroes. It's one cause all Americans can get behind because it's done for all of the right reasons; it cuts across all human boundaries. You don't have to be a veteran to feel part of it. You can be a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent; in fact, you don't need to be political at all. This issue has nothing to do with race or religion or socioeconomic backgrounds. You don't even have to ride a motorcycle to be part of Rolling Thunder, although I highly recommend it!

I think the biggest reason I love being part of Rolling Thunder is because of the generous, kind people I've met all over the country, everywhere I go, at every event. The Rolling Thunder community is so honest and so real. A lot of people say they'll give you the shirt off their back,

but it's just empty words. My Rolling Thunder compatriots really would give you their shirts and anything else you need. Every year, they stage this massive ride, which gets a lot of attention, but it's far more than that. We have 90 chapters nationwide, and we're doing great things for veterans every single day, both on the national level and in our hometowns.

This year, I'll be on stage again, this time as a headliner. It means so much to me personally to play for this powerful, iconic gathering, and I hope you can join us this year. The experience may well change your life as it did mine. In this world filled with divisiveness and insecurity, Rolling Thunder provides us a unique opportunity to agree upon one thing: All of our brave veterans deserve to be honored, today and forever.

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Singer-songwriter Rockie Lynne is lifelong Harley-Davidson enthusiast and U.S. Army veteran. He has been a member of Rolling Thunder®, Inc. for eight years, and is now North Carolina Chapter 2 Vice President. Known as the "Voice of Veterans" for his many patriotic songs, he released the album, "Rolling Thunder: We Will Not Forget," to honor the group and its ongoing commitment to American POW and MIA soldiers. To get your copy of "Rolling Thunder," please visit www.rockielynne.com.

'Thank you' to vets — and no more vets left behind



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

By Gordon Painter

It has been an honor singing for the veterans at Rolling Thunder over the past 18 years. Visiting the VA hospitals and singing for veterans, from World War II nurses and Tuskegee Airmen to all other veterans needing care, has been the most memorable and magnificent experience.

I thoroughly enjoy singing at the

Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool the day of the ride, but visiting the VA hospital will be missed the most. Just because this coming Ride for Freedom is the last in Washington D.C., does not mean Rolling Thunder will stop helping veterans and their families.

It may pave the way to better ways to educate the public about how, as Rolling Thunder says, "Many American prisoners of war were left behind after all previous wars and to help correct the past and to protect future veterans from being left behind should they become POW/MIA."

Remember, if you can read this, thank a teacher. If you can read this in English, thank a veteran. Thank you!

.....
Gordon Painter, born in Kelso, Washington, and raised on a farm, enjoys singing, especially at local VFWs and VA hospitals.

NATIONAL

From page C14

O'Shea, a concerned citizen and The Alliance's primary researcher. Ms. O'Shea worked tirelessly to research the vast POW/MIA issue, build our Bits 'N Pieces Newsletter, and build our original website to post information. When Ms. O'Shea passed away in 2015, The Alliance transferred more hard copy and digital information to other researchers who are experts in various wars to continue The Alliance's research mission. Our user-friendly website (www.nationalalliance.org), YouTube Channel, Pinterest, Facebook, and Twitter (@AlliancePOWMIA) accounts also house various "bits 'n pieces" of our research. Our newsletter, Bits 'N Pieces, got its name due to the methodical process of gathering information over the years to provide an understanding of the various POW/MIA issues. We no longer fax our newsletter, but it can be found on our website and Facebook page. If you are interested in receiving the newsletter and other information direct to

your e-mail, please contact us at info@nationalalliance.org.

We are proud to have been part of Rolling Thunder's events from its beginning. Ms. Alfond and Ms. O'Shea were guest speakers or attendees during the Ride for Freedom events up until their deaths. In 2014, the torch was passed to another generation in the Apodaca family, Nicolette Apodaca Rose, to represent The Alliance during Rolling Thunder's Ride for Freedom Speakers Program. Ms. Rose is honored to represent The Alliance as well as her MIA family members from the Vietnam War and WWII's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Please join The Alliance for our 30th Annual Meeting on May 25, 2019 from 9 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Virginia. It is free to the public and all are welcome. We also look forward to seeing you during Washington D.C.'s last Rolling Thunder Ride for Freedom. After 32 years, on May 26 at 1:30 p.m. in front of the Lincoln Memorial, you will have the chance to hear from Rolling Thunder and The Alliance, longtime friends and advocates for America's POW/MIA!

Wreaths Across America remembers the lives and loved ones of fallen heroes

By Karen Worcester

Memorial Day weekend is the kick off to summer, the end of the school year and as many of these long weekend “holidays,” a time to be with family. I am certainly looking forward to seeing my own kids, grandkids and getting in some “Nanny” time.

I relish these special times more than ever since having had the privilege of working with Wreaths Across America and becoming close friends with many Gold Star families. They too will gather Monday with their families, but they will be missing a loved one. Loved ones we collectively pause to honor on this day. Loved ones missing from their lives forever.

It is that loss and sacrifice that fuels the need to differentiate between Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

A few years ago, I had the honor of meeting and becoming dear friends with Edith Knowles. Edith, who was well into her 80s at the time, had spent her life keeping the memory of her brother Cpl. Horace Marvin “Bud” Thorne alive. Edith and her brother were part of a big family that lived on a farm in New Jersey during WWII. When Edith was 13, her brother boarded a ship with so many others and soon found himself in the throes of the Battle of the Bulge. The family prayed he would come home safely and treasured any word from overseas. His last letter home was full of his longing to be home with his family for Christmas. This was not to be.

Thorne died Dec. 21, 1944.

“Bud,” as Edith always referred to him, was to become a posthumous recipient of the Medal of Honor. His heroism is honored with monuments and a school named in his honor.

As a supporter of the Survivors of the Battle of the Bulge and a Board Member for Wreaths Across America, Edith visited schools and communities talking about her brother and others like him, and would read his last letter to anyone who would listen.

On her last trip to Arlington National Cemetery before she died in 2015, Edith brought along a life-size cutout of her brother so children in schools and people who gathered could “meet” him. She addressed him directly with a raw emotion that hadn’t been dampened by the 70 years that had passed since his death. He was her hero.

Heroism of men like “Bud” Thorne affords all of us our freedom. In that way he and those who serve impact all of our lives. The loss of his life altered Edith and her family’s lives forever.

President George W. Bush spoke



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA.

Edith Knowles honoring her late brother and Medal of Honor recipient, Cpl. Horace Marvin “Bud” Thorne, at Arlington National Cemetery.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA.

Cpl. Horace Marvin “Bud” Thorne, who died Dec. 21, 1944, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

of this in his May 27, 2002, Memorial Day speech in France at the Normandy American Cemetery, home of the graves of 9,387 Americans killed in World War II. The cemetery sits near the beaches of Normandy, from which U.S. troops launched the June 1944 D-Day invasion.

“All that come to a place like this feel

the enormity of the loss,” the president said. “Yet for so many there’s a marker that seems to sit alone. They come looking for that one cross, that one Star of David, that one name. Behind every grave of a fallen soldier is a story of the grief that came to a wife, a mother, a child, a family or a town. A World War II orphan has described her family’s life after her father was killed on the field in Germany. ‘My mother,’ she said, ‘had lost everything she was waiting for. She lost her dreams.’

“There were an awful lot of perfect linen tablecloths in the house that never got used — so many things being saved for a future that was never to be.

“Each person buried here understood his duty but also dreamed of going back home to the people and the things he knew. Each had plans and hopes of his own that parted with him forever when he died.

“The day will come when no one is left who knew them, when no visitor to this cemetery can stand before a grave remembering a face and a voice. The day will never come when America forgets them. Our nation and the world will always remember what they did here and what they gave here for the future of

humanity.”

This is why it is so important to remember not the deaths of these men but the lives they laid down so we could live in a free America. Today, as we look towards Memorial Day, I remember Edith’s closing words each time she shared Bud’s story, “My brother never got to be a veteran.”

We honor all who serve. Today we remember those who never had the opportunity to become veterans.

Remember, Honor, Teach.

Karen Worcester is executive director and volunteer with Wreaths Across America, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded to continue and expand the annual wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery begun by Maine businessman Morrill Worcester in 1992. The organization’s mission — Remember, Honor, Teach — is carried out in part each year by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies in December at Arlington, as well as at more than 1,600 participating veterans’ cemeteries and other locations in all 50 states and overseas. For more information or to sponsor a wreath please visit www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org.

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as well as at more than 1,600 additional locations in all 50 states.

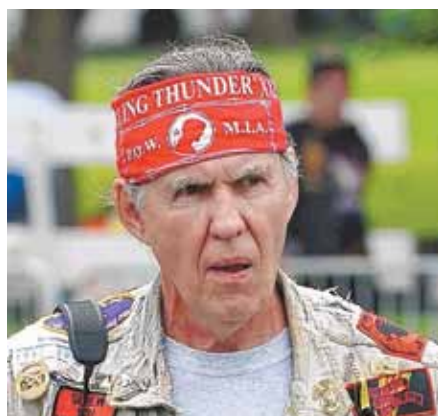
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to reach the goal of placing a veteran's wreath on every gravesite at our nation's cemetery.

Wreaths Across America receives no government funding.



wreathsassacrossamerica.org

CFC#66860



By Patrick J. Hughes

During the summer of 1992, while delivering photographs, I had the privilege of meeting Dianne Mossman. While talking, I noticed a picture of a Navy pilot near her desk. The pilot was her husband, who is missing in action. Shortly after that day, I obtained, and still wear, a bracelet in honor of LTJG Joe R. Mossman.

Dianne mentioned a veterans' organization called Rolling Thunder and suggested checking them out. I contacted Artie Muller, Rolling Thunder's executive director, and volunteered my professional photographic services. Since 1993, I have been a part of the First Amendment Demonstration "Ride For Freedom."

Rolling Thunder's major function is to publicize the POW/MIA issue — to educate the public of the fact that

Rolling Thunder: My 'Welcome home'

many American Prisoners Of War were left behind after all past wars, to help correct the past, and to protect future veterans from being left behind should they become Prisoners Of War/Missing In Action.

American Gold Star Mothers are always there with us for our Friday night candlelight vigils at "The Wall," honoring all of our fallen heroes. Each mother holds our "Flame Of Freedom" as she says the name of a loved one.

On the Saturdays before the Ride, I have gone to Arlington to watch the Changing of the Guard and photographed bikers as they held a wreath-laying ceremony.

On Sundays, the day of the Rides, everyone gets up early to arrive at the North Pentagon parking lot to help organize, sell patches and pins, and stage the thousands of bikes that soon will fill this massive space. At noon, a whistle is blown and the bikes start to leave, heading over Memorial Bridge, going around the White House and other D.C. landmarks, before parking on grassy areas near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

On my first Ride, I was in the back of a pickup truck with some wreaths that we were to place near "The Wall." There were thousands of people along the way, cheering and waving flags,

and I could hear the words, "Welcome Home!" Like so many other vets, I will #NeverForget that day, the day I was thanked for my service to "Our Country."

This being the last year will be tough, as the Rides are like going to a family reunion and seeing so many old friends who only get this opportunity to meet up once a year. There are so many images — being in the North Pentagon parking lot very early on Sunday morning and seeing the masses of bikes, all types. Going up on the walkway bridge to create a pano of these rows and rows of motorcycles. Leaving to make our way to Memorial Bridge to catch the police escort of these thousands upon thousands of pristine, shiny steel bikes as they roar forward across the river. Capturing Marine Tim Chambers standing and saluting all riders till the very end, up to four hours when the last bike has passed. These will forever be part of my memories.

Over the years, there were Rolling Thunder demonstrations at the communist Vietnamese Embassy with speeches asking, "Where are our live POWs?" Heather Renee French, Miss American 2000, helped in raising awareness of homeless veterans; her father, who was a wounded veteran of the Vietnam War,

came to Rolling Thunder XIII.

Rolling Thunder XXI, May 25, 2008, had the amazing experience of riding motorcycles to the White House and awaiting the arrival of President George W. Bush on Marine Helicopter One. This led to our visit to the Rose Garden and the Oval Office, where we personally met with the President.

I have met numerous families of Iraq/Afghanistan POWs, assisting them in pressuring our administration to bring their loved ones home alive. Too many would eventually only receive bone fragments of their beloved family members.

It has been an honor to be a part of this amazing event. When Ray Manzo first came up with this idea, he was shunned by veterans organizations but welcomed by veteran bikers. Growing larger each year, taking over D.C. on Memorial Day weekends, is a tribute to Ray and to both Artie and Elaine Muller for continuing this legacy.

.....
Patrick J. Hughes, a U.S. Marine veteran who served in Vietnam, is a storyteller, using the lens of his camera to build a visual picture that captures history. Follow him at patrickjhughes.com and @Patrickmag12chu.

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Thank You

to Artie Muller and his Elaine for their dedication to Rolling Thunder®, Inc. and the POW/MIA issue. Being a part of this organization whose peaceful, yet passionate, demonstrations have helped return the remains of those missing to give peace to their families. We continue to help Veterans with rent, mortgage & utilities through Rolling Thunder Charities, Inc. God bless our Veterans, troops serving and our POW/MIA's.

Nancy Regg — Rolling Thunder



Of all those we have lost over the years, you are forever in our thoughts and our hearts. We know you are with us in spirit.

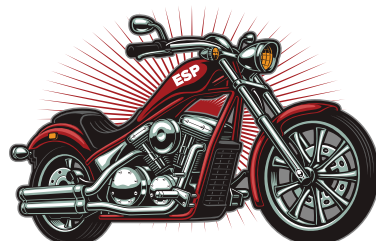
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Congratulations ROLLING THUNDER® INC. XXXII

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— Lisa Gray & Cheryl Wetzstein

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The Washington Times

Veterans sue to remove Bible from display at VA hospital

Object to sacred text in public site

By CHRISTOPHER VONDRACEK

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A group of veterans in New Hampshire has filed a lawsuit to remove a Bible on display in the lobby of a VA hospital in the state's largest city, Manchester.

The Bible, which is bolted inside a Plexiglas case, decorates a POW/MIA memorial table at the Manchester VA Medical Center. It belonged to a POW from World War II, and honors the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, the Bible's supporters say.

But the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a group of religiously diverse veterans, objects to the placement of the sacred text in a public building, arguing that it amounts an establishment of religion by the government in violation of the First Amendment.

"The Christian Bible clearly doesn't represent all of the myriad religious faiths and non-faith traditions of the U.S. armed forces veterans using the Medical Center and to presume that it does is quite blatantly unconstitutional, unethical and illicit," said Michael L. Weinstein, whose group filed a lawsuit Tuesday in U.S. District Court of New Hampshire against the hospital.

According to the lawsuit, Mr. Weinstein on Jan. 28 phoned an assistant to Dr. Alfred Montoya, the hospital's director and a defendant in the lawsuit, and said 14 members of his group had complained about the Bible's display in a lobby of a building owned by the federal government. The Bible was removed three hours later.

But, by Feb. 23, following an uproar from other veterans, the Bible was returned — this time, bolted to the table.

"The placement of the Christian Bible, here, is in violation of that fundamental proscription, that the government may not establish any religion," says the lawsuit, whose plaintiff is Air Force veteran James Chamberlain.

Court papers filed Tuesday ask for a preliminary injunction against the VA and the removal of the Bible.

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation claims a membership of

64,000 service veterans and counts members of various faiths under its roles and says the lead plaintiff is a devout Christian, according to the lawsuit.

In Washington, a spokesman for the Department of Veterans Affairs decried Mr. Weinstein's group as being "known for questionable practices and unsuccessful lawsuits."

Spokesman Curtis Cashour said the litigation is "nothing more than an attempt to force VA into censoring a show of respect for America's POW/MIA community."

"Make no mistake: VA will not be bullied on this issue," Mr. Cashour said in an email to The Washington Times.

The battle over the VA Bible in New Hampshire echoes a conflict in South Dakota in April, when the Christian legal group First Liberty Institute intervened to pressure VA hospital officials in Sioux Falls not to accommodate requests from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation to remove a Bible from a remembrance display case.

"We are pleased to see a growing trend of VA officials following the law by allowing the Bible to be displayed on POW/MIA remembrance tables," First Liberty official Mike Berry said at the time.

First Liberty represents the Northeast POW/MIA Network, which donated the Bible to the Manchester VA hospital, and said the group should be able to include the Bible in a display representing the "strength through faith necessary for American service members to survive."

A 2016 VA memo says that any religious or secular items on display at a POW/MIA memorial table must "remain neutral regarding the views expressed by the group." But Mr. Weinstein identifies the source of recent trouble with another event from that year.

"Since the latter part of the summer of 2016, when Trump became the presumptive GOP presidential nominee, MRFF saw an almost immediate doubling of its client load," he said.

This Washington Times news article originally published May 9, 2019.



PHOTOS BY ELAINE MARTIN.

New Freedom Farm in Buchanan, Virginia, is a nonprofit dedicated to serving veterans, especially those with substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions. The farm, founded by Navy veteran and forensic nurse Lois Dawn Fritz, houses numerous rescued animals that are used as part of the therapy services for vets.



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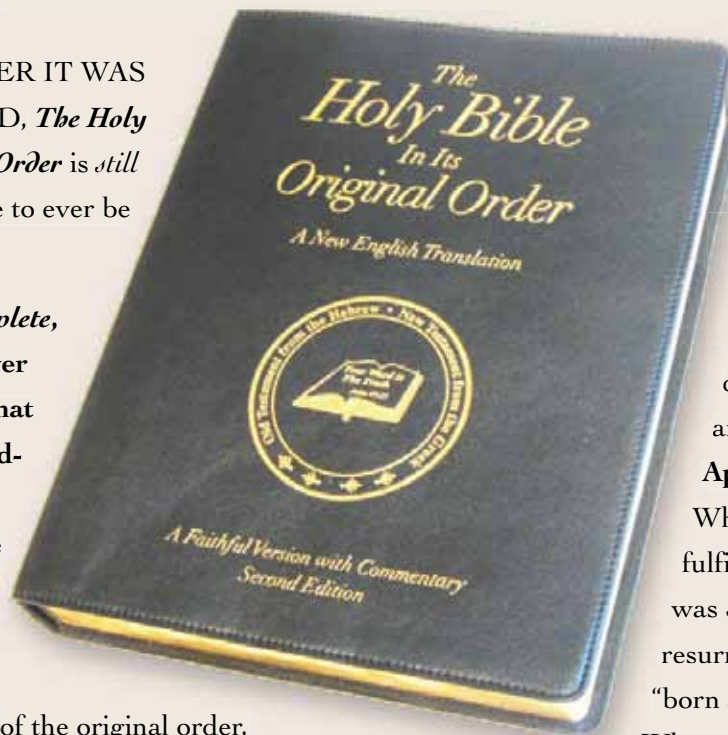
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For POW/MIA, 'the fight will continue'



PHOTO BY NANCY REGG.

By Don Schaible

I have always felt that what Rolling Thunder and Artie Muller did, in forming the decision to bring the POW/MIA plight to the American people and to those in Congress, was a momentous

task. It could only be undertaken by a strong leader, with tremendous assistance from like-minded individuals, to remind people that we would "never, ever leave a fellow warrior behind." I think that mission has brought the POW/MIA issue to the forefront even though a lot of work still needs to be undertaken. The powers that be in D.C. never made it easy. They presented many roadblocks and tried their damndest to break our will, but they couldn't. Old age eventually caught up to us all, but believe me, the fight will continue.

I began my journey with Rolling Thunder in New Jersey in 1997 and attended my first Ride to D.C. in 1998. It was an experience that is unforgettable. I made a decision on that day that as long as I was alive and able, I would travel to D.C. every Memorial Day weekend, and I have. In 2000, I retired from the New Jersey State Police and moved to Florida. During my first five years there,

I led a group of Florida Rolling Thunder members on motorcycles to D.C. and back. Health eventually took its toll and I was forced to fly in, but I never gave up. I was there to help in any way I could, and if you know Artie Muller, you know that meant you never sat idly with your hands on your ass. These weekends have been like a reunion — renewing friendships and getting caught up on the lives of others from other parts of the country and Canada — but with one goal in mind: the plight of the POW/MIA and hopefully bringing some type of closure to the families of the missing.

Going forward? It is my hope that the many chapters throughout the country will continue to participate in local events and be a part of the activities to educate people about the POW/MIA issue and expand the outreach to schools and organizations. To never let die the reason that Rolling Thunder was formed, that being the full accountability

of ALL POW/MIAs. As Americans, I believe we should ask for nothing less.

Speaking personally, Rolling Thunder has propelled me to become active in military affairs. I have become a member of the Disabled American Veterans and have been the commander and a service officer of the local chapter. There, I have been able to assist veterans and their families with their needs, which is the other part of the Rolling Thunder mission statement. I feel honored to have been a member of this great organization and I want to offer a "welcome home" to those who have served this great country. I will also continue to pray to GOD for the return of each and every soldier or sailor who has given their ALL for ALL of us.

Retired New Jersey State Trooper Don Schaible served overseas, including Vietnam, with the U.S. Navy Seabees. He is part of Rolling Thunder®, Inc. National.

'My father ... someone I can really look up to'

By Joe Muller

Rolling Thunder has always been a big part of our lives, our whole family. I was just a little boy when we were going down to D.C. for the POW/MIA issue.

My father was in the Army, and I was taught to honor the military, support the troops, support the POW/MIA issue and remember the people who died in the wars. Seeing all the motorcycles, going on for years and years, like 32 years now? And when I got older, I got a bike and rode down too. [The Ride] is a feeling inside your heart; it makes you feel really good although it's hard to explain.

Yes, it's been a passion for my father. He just dedicates his whole life to helping other people — when they come back from the wars, the organization

tries to help people out, help them get back on their feet.

My father is someone really special to me, someone I can really look up to. He's dedicating himself to this issue and helping other people. He's always busy working. Everytime you go over there, he's in his basement in his office, talking to people, doing paperwork. It's a full-time job for him and he does it all from his heart. He doesn't get paid for anything at all. You've got to be special [to do that]. How many people want to give up their life for others?

After this year, the Rides will be more local — all the states can do something on the same day, same time. It will be great publicity in another way. It will be spread out more and even more people will come.



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Joe Muller and wife Nickcole stand with his father Artie Muller (left) and children Alivia and Gavin.



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Rolling Thunder leaders make a wreath presentation at U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial.

Rolling Thunder's mission going 'Hometown America'

By Bob Rivers

During my 14 years with Rolling Thunder, I've participated in many of its activities including the annual Memorial Weekend Washington D.C. "Demonstration Run."

Many people view this gathering, particularly the caravan of hundreds of thousands of motorcycles on Sunday, as simply a parade of motorcycles. I believe that those who are instrumental in making the annual "RUN" happen view Rolling Thunder XXXII as having the very same objective as the 1988 Run — to cry out, so all the world can hear, that many of America's military combatants have been sent to foreign places never to be seen nor heard from again by moms and dads, siblings, spouses and children.

Why can't there be a complete accounting of those who were sent to foreign places as members of this country's armed forces never to be seen nor heard from again?

To me, this is personal. I had an uncle who joined the Army and was sent to fight in the Korean conflict. He went missing and my grandmother was notified that he was missing and presumed dead. Years later, as she lay on her deathbed, she cried for the one who didn't come home.

Participating in the Memorial Weekend Rolling Thunder effort gives me the opportunity to demonstrate my belief in its mission. And according to my mind's eye, if one believes in something, one must be willing to participate in some meaningful way in "making it happen." So, for a number of years I've been



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB RIVERS.

Bob Rivers (right) stands with Gold Star Daughters and Arlington County Police Department officers who provided motorcycle escort in 2018.

responsible for providing transportation for the Gold Star Mothers and to a lesser extent Gold Star Wives and Daughters.

The Minnieland Academy has graciously allowed Rolling Thunder to use some of its 14-passenger "Minnie buses" during the Memorial Weekend. My task is to secure a team of drivers to fulfill the transportation requirements of a schedule that I develop prior to the Memorial Weekend.

The schedule begins Friday afternoon with the pickup of the Minnie buses from the Academy's Woodbridge and Manassas locations, then providing transportation to the Friday night "Candle Light Vigil" and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. On Saturday morning, there's a visit to the Naval Memorial followed by the visit to the Washington VA, then

to the Rolling Thunder Banquet for the Saturday night activities.

The Sunday morning transportation includes gathering Gold Stars from various locations to rendezvous at Spates Community Club on Fort Myer where an Arlington County Police Department escort leads them to the starting point of the Demonstration Run. The Minnie buses follow in the procession behind the motorcycle-escorted Gold Stars (in the event a mom became distressed).

My day doesn't end until the Minnie buses are returned to their storage locations. Early Monday morning, I depart D.C., making the trek back home to New Jersey with a sense of satisfaction that comes with a job well done and with a sense of pride in knowing I did my part in making the weekend event happen.

The Rolling Thunder Memorial Weekend activities in Washington D.C., have attracted public notice due to press coverage in D.C., the East Coast and elsewhere in the nation. However, since its issues are national in scope, how effective has it been in reaching "Hometown America"? I submit to you that there are probably many small towns in America that have given their sons to this country's war efforts but may not even be aware of or don't feel touched by the one large Memorial Weekend event in Washington D.C.

I've often heard that all politics is local. Applying this to the question of how to better reach the four corners of America with Rolling Thunder's Memorial Weekend message, maybe we can get a better bang for our efforts by ending the one big Memorial Weekend "blast" and organizing smaller "blasts" strategically happening around the country. So, in 2020, rather than having one large Rolling Thunder Memorial Weekend event in Washington D.C., let's replace it with 10 — or 16 or more — regional Memorial Weekend events. We can partner with other organizations that believe in and are willing to step up and support such efforts. In my mind's eye, this has potential. Whether it happens, only time will tell. Think of the change being the beginning of a metamorphosis.

.....
Bob Rivers is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran (1966-1970) serving a tour in Vietnam. He is a member of Rolling Thunder®, Inc. and has served on its National Board of Directors.

The Ride for Freedom: A 'show of gratitude' for others' sacrifices

By "New York Myke" Shelby

It's interesting that as we get closer to this year's Memorial Day, I have had the chance to digest the idea that there may not be another Rolling Thunder Ride for Freedom in D.C.

I ride to The Wall on Memorial Day to pay my respects to those who sacrificed their lives on the battlefields I fought on, and I don't believe that annual journey will be ending.

But the sight of hundreds of thousands of the nation's veterans riding each year in the nation's capital — and the veterans of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan joining us Vietnam veterans — helped highlight that sacrifice as well as giving us a loud voice on the POW/

MIA issue that could not be ignored. The Ride demonstrates the ongoing commitment of veterans to each other and our camaraderie.

I must also say the huge crowds that line the streets cheering and waving American flags stand in stark contrast to the way we were once treated, and it means a lot to all of us. It may sound crazy, but I see that as a show of gratitude for every name on that Wall, an appreciation of their sacrifice. I often wonder if the Gold Star families feel that and know how much their loss and their sacrifice is being acknowledged and appreciated. I like to think that everyone on that Wall knows we're coming, hears us, feels us and feels our love. I think of that every mile as I ride there, every



PHOTO BY LEE STALSWORTH.

Michael Shelby with wife Petrina.

minute I'm there and all the way back home to the life I live that they paid for.

It's my hope and belief that that level of high-profile exposure to the issues that affect all veterans will continue and grow on into the future. Hopefully the local Rolling Thunder Memorial Day events will be as successful as the annual D.C. demonstrations have been and will enhance any ongoing and continuing efforts in D.C. as well!

.....
Michael Shelby served as a U.S. Air Force combat controller in Vietnam in the 1960s and is now owner of San Diego Harley-Davidson. He is a member of Rolling Thunder®, Inc. National.



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