

Rolling Thunder Magazine
—Edition V—
May 2005

Rolling Thunder Magazine (RTM) is published annually by Rolling Thunder Motorcycle Rally, Washington, DC, Inc., just prior to each year's rally. Our purpose is to provide information on the POW/MIA, active duty military and veteran support issues. We also strive to provide our readers with the most complete schedule of activities calendar available on events of interest in the Washington, DC area on Memorial weekend.

RTM is distributed nationwide and to our troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as being viewable online at www.rtmrwdc.org. The magazine is also available at most of our advertiser's locations and thousands of copies are distributed at the Myrtle Beach Bike Week in mid-May and handed out near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The cost of publishing and distributing the magazine are covered by advertising dollars. Anyone interested in showing their support of our active duty military and veterans by advertising in this publication can contact us online or at:

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We would also like to ask that when you visit our advertisers, let them know you saw their ad and thank them for their support. Without their advertising dollars, Rolling Thunder Magazine would not be possible.

Anyone wishing to submit articles, letters, photos, etc. for consideration of publication in future issues, please contact us online or at the address above. Material for publication consideration should pertain to the Rolling Thunder Motorcycle Rally, the POW/MIA issue, or issues pertaining to our active duty military and veterans. All submissions become the property of Rolling Thunder Magazine and will not be returned.

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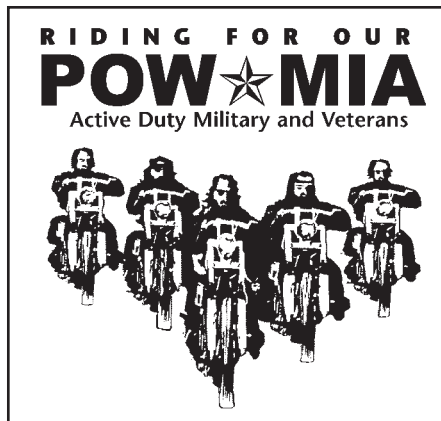


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Schedule of Activities4
 Area Map7
 Letter from the Editor8
Rolling Thunder Joins Uniting Americans in a National Moment of Remembrance12
California to DC Run for The Wall Schedules.....15
The History of the POW/MIA Flag and Logo.....16
Speicher and Maupin: Still Prisoners of War17
U.S. Angels18
Rolling Thunder Magazine Salutes the Mothers of Our Military Past, Present and Future20
Gold Star Mothers22
Star Touring and Riding Supports the Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives23
Boss Hoss Cycles.....26
Moms and Dads of Adoptaplatoon Continue Their Labor of Love.....28
The First to Say "Welcome Home"30
Fran O'Brien's Steak House — Friday Night Dinners.....33
Operation Never Forgotten — Supporting Families of Fallen Heroes.....34
Marines, The Few The Proud36
Fallen Angels, The Women on "The Wall"37

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—LETTER FROM THE EDITOR—



PRESIDENT BUSH HAS URGED every American to find some way to thank our military and help out the military family down the street. Speaking to a group of Marines and their families on December 7, 2004 at Camp Pendleton, California, the President called for the country to “stand with the men and women who stand up for America – our military.”

Bush urged people to go to the Defense Departments website www.americasupportsyou.mil to learn about private efforts undertaken nationwide to show support for our troops. The site showcases some of the many ways the country is expressing support and appreciation for the men and women of our armed forces. The President named a few examples which included 15-year-old Shauna Fleming from California who collected one million letters thanking our military personnel.

The President talked about a husband and wife team who regularly travel to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland to greet wounded troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Vietnam Veteran, Steve Cobb, and his wife Tanya, welcome the troops home and offer whatever help they can provide. Despite earning four Purple Hearts and a Silver Star in Vietnam, Steve said, “Nobody but demonstrators came to meet me and other returning veterans of the war,” and he vowed not to let it happen again. “I never want to see another generation of troops come home without being welcomed and appreciated,” Bush quoted him as saying.

The President mentioned John Gonsalves, a contractor from Massachusetts, who after hearing of a soldier who lost both legs in a rocket-propelled grenade attack, started the “Homes for our Troops” program. The non-profit group builds and adapts homes for disabled veterans with special needs. Also mentioned was Karen Guenther who, along with other Marine Corps spouses, started the “Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund” to raise

money for families struggling with the costs of food, lodging, travel and lost income while standing by their loved ones recovering at a military hospital. Since its founding, they have grown into a national organization that has helped more than 300 military families across the country with more than \$400,000 in grants.

Rolling Thunder Motorcycle Rally, Washington, DC, Inc. and Rolling Thunder® National are veteran service organizations and both are involved in many activities to support our active duty military, wounded troops, our veterans, and the POW/MIA issues. We also actively support other organizations with the same goals.

I wish I could do articles on, or make mention of, all the individuals, groups and organizations nationwide who have given of themselves to support our troops and especially our wounded veterans. Unfortunately, space does not allow for that. I have instead chosen several individuals and organizations that I am familiar with whose efforts deserve not only recognition, but the support of our readers.

Also in this issue, I felt compelled to salute the mothers of our veterans. Over the years, I have met many of the Gold Star Mothers (see article on page 22) from the Vietnam War, several from Desert Storm, and now from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. These ladies have truly paid a tremendous price for our defense, our freedom and our way of life. I have met mothers of our wounded troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. I have also met many mothers of veterans who have served in combat zones around the world. Those whose sons and daughters make it home safely still pay a high price by having to live through sleepless nights with the wonder and worry about their loved ones’ safety until they return home.

To all of these wonderful ladies, I/we salute you.

—Smitty

R I D E S A F E



Saturday, May 28th
5:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Saturday Night Dinner
Prime Rib & Lobster
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Sunday, May 29th
8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
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THE FIRST TO SAY "WELCOME HOME"

—by Don Smith

By the Defense Department's count, over 15,000 soldiers have been medically evacuated from Iraq. The injured soldiers are usually stabilized at Landstuhl Hospital in Germany before making their way to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, by way of Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. As soon as the airplanes bringing the wounded land, the injured are welcomed home. Among the first to greet them are Steve and Tanya Cobb.

Steve Cobb, Commander and Adjutant of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), Greater Washington Chapter 353, is a former Army Colonel and recipient of four Purple Hearts and a Silver Star for his service in Vietnam. Steve's wife Tanya, Unit Organizer of the New Ladies' Auxiliary Unit 353 of the Greater Washington (DC) Area, also knows firsthand what its like to be wounded in combat. Tanya is a former Lieutenant who served with distinction in a Special Forces Unit with the Army of the Russian Federation. During her seven years of service, she was wounded five times in the Nagorny Karabakh Conflict in Azerbaijan. She was invited to join the elite Russian unit by its commander after he saw her in action.

Today, Steve and Tanya spend a lot of time driving out to Andrews Air Force Base where they meet and greet the

wounded before they are transferred to the hospitals. Neither the weather nor the hour of the day or night, or even an invitation from the President to be present at a speech he was giving to Marines and their families at Camp Pendleton where he planned to honor the Cobbs for their service, deter them from making at least three trips per week to Andrews AFB.

In an interview aired on American Morning on December 22, 2004, Steve said, "We welcome home all troops, whether battle injury or non-battle injury. We tell them thank you, God bless you, welcome home, and we appreciate all you have done. We try to offer as much as we can on information of benefits and on further treatment. Any time they need a service officer or anything else, we provide them the kind of information that they need to follow up, not only to receive treatment, but to get back to a normal life." He went on to explain, "For Purple Heart recipients, many schools and universities now have free tuition for them. We're pushing legislation to get that adopted nationally. In addition, all disabled veterans, Purple Heart recipients included, have a 10 point job preference for any government job. We inform them of this. We try to tell the patients that at every hospital, there will be a VA representative there to help them and that VA representative is solely dedicated to helping Iraq and Afghanistan returning veterans. So, if they run into any bureaucratic roadblocks or other problems, they can ask for that person by position and cut a lot of red tape."

When Colonel Cobb was asked if what he's doing for the wounded troops today helps take some of the edge off a rough homecoming three decades ago, he responded, "Yes, it does. It certainly does. When I came home, mostly all I saw were demonstrators and there were certainly no parades. There were no welcome homes. I wanted to make sure that never again would another



Ed Schnug, Sr. Vice Commander of Chapter 353, Steve Cobb, Commander of Chapter 353, Tanya Cobb, Unit Organizer, LAMOPH Unit 353, Valeria Ortiz, LAMOPH Unit 353, and Al Ortiz, PDC, Korea War Veterans Liaison Officer, Chapter 1775, paused for a photo with Chief Warrant Officer Benjamin Luster, Greeter of Marine Liaison Office (center), after their visit to Bethesda NMMC.

generation of veterans go through that experience that I had. That's why there's no pay or compensation involved in the work we're doing. It's a personal thing, to make sure that every veterans is appreciated, thanked, welcomed home and then taken care of after they get home."

"The reaction I get is really wonderful. Some of the guys and girls, as I can tell, are about my age or a little younger or a little older. Sometimes they have emotional issues. Now they are back and they really love to feel welcomed home and secure..." Tanya said when responding to a question about the reaction she gets from the U.S. military.

The visits to Andrews AFB are part of Operation "Welcome Home" which is a joint special project of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), Greater Washington Chapter 353 and the Ladies' Auxiliary Military Order of the Purple Heart (LAMOPH), Greater Washington Unit 353. Operation "Welcome Home" also consists of visits to wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and wounded Marines, Seabees and Corpsmen at Bethesda National Naval Medical Center. Among the MOPH members are Ed Schung, a World War II Marine Raider and Al Ortiz, a Korean War Infantryman. Joining Tanya from the LAMOPH are members Valeria Ortiz and Mary Straub.

"I am an ordinary person. These wonderful men and women risked their lives for me and I cannot do enough to thank them for it. There is nothing I would not do for them", says Mary Straub,



Patriots Steve Cobb, Ed Schnug, and Al Ortiz visit with Navy Hospital Corpsman Third Class Robert Speicher from Camp Lejeune, NC (left), Marine Staff Sgt. Jason Thompson from Dunkirk, NY (center), and Marine Corporal Maximo Carretero from Norfolk, VA (right), all wounded in Iraq, on May 16, 2004. MOPH Greater Washington Chapter 353 and LAMOPH Unit 353 visit and welcome home Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors treated at military hospitals in the Washington, DC area several times a week.

wife of a Vietnam Veteran and a Red Cross Volunteer at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

All wounded patients are presented with a Purple Heart Welcome Home packet that includes a miniature Purple Heart lapel medal, a U.S. flag lapel pin, a 60-minute phone card. A sheet of 20 Purple Heart stamps, and a Welcome Home letter for one of America's heroes. Also, they receive information on the MOPH, a complimentary one year free membership, a wallet size Purple Heart calendar, and details on how to contact

Veterans Service Officers for help when needed.

Above all, the message of the "older" Purple Heart Veterans is one of gratitude and understanding. Steve Cobb leaves each patient by saying, "Thank you for your service and sacrifice and all you have done for us. God bless you, and welcome home."

The Purple Heart was initially created as the badge of Military Merit by General George Washington on August 7, 1782 and revived on February 22, 1932. The MOPH is the only congressionally char-

tered veteran's organization exclusively for combat-wounded veterans and their dependents. The MOPH Chapter 353 has over 260 members. The LAMOPH, a new Unit in formation, has 9 members and is always looking for a few good and active ladies. As of March 31, 2005, they have greeted and provided immediate and/or follow-up assistance to over 4,600 Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve military service members.

Great work folks!

For more information on how you can help, visit www.purpleheart353.com.



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