

## Run For The Wall – Midway Route 2017 SitReps

### Day 11 – The Wall

Ready or not, today is the day. FNGs headed off to Arlington for their exclusive parade ride into this sacred place of all sacred places. Only FNGs get to do this, which also means only those that are RFTW members. No other motorcycle group gets to ride in formation into Arlington National Cemetery. Thankfully all FNGs on our Route got the special colored zip ties for entrance into Arlington. They departed from the hotel and those that have already been there know what follows that. I can't adequately describe the experience, there aren't words.

No morning mandatory meeting, no five minute horn, no Pledge of Allegiance which I miss and no chaplain's prayer which I especially miss. I did say my own prayer however, one of thanks for helping me make it here safely as well as my platoon and all our company. About 0900 I headed over to the Lincoln Memorial and walked the grounds to take some photos. I saw quite a few RFTW folks and talked with several other people there also wandering the grounds. Some asked about Run For The Wall and I was happy to tell them about it. It started out a great day. It seemed to get hot pretty quick just before time we were all reaching our tolerance factor. Some quicker than others I heard. That happens. I sat in the shade of the Lincoln Memorial and talked to a young man that did Run For The Wall as well. He was so polite I asked him if he was in the military and he said he was. He said this is the fourth time he has done the Run all on the Central Route. I told him thanks for your service and he said "and for your". We talked for a while in the shade. When it was time we moved down to the group. While we were all getting seated, I was compelled to yell out "How far did we go"? With the usual "ALL THE WAY" response. I couldn't help myself. It was fun. Finally the hour arrived. Hawk indicated that bagpipes would be playing Taps and asked us all to stand, which we did, some with a little difficulty, but all were helped to their feet. When Hawk called "Present Arm", we all saluted and Taps was played. Then Hawk called "Order Arm and be seated". I don't remember doing that before, but it seemed like the right thing to do and I liked it. I think it made for an impressive photo or two. With the group photo concluded. We all headed to The Wall. It was hot and the line moved slow, but that's the way it moves and that's what we are here to do. I wanted a picture of the ceremony at the center and was scolded for being on the grass by a docent. When I didn't immediately climb back in line she asked me again. A couple nice folks made room for me and I climbed in line. I guess I won't do that again. I think that act earned me at least a couple demerits. I finished walking the wall for me and my good friend Paladin that couldn't be here but wanted to and asked me to say high to his buddies on the Wall for him, which I did. At the end of the walk, I found my good friend Joe Hudson and he received my grateful hug and I his. I was fortunate and honored to turn a couple FNG pins. More hugs. Many "rubber side down" farewells. It started out a great day and ended a spectacular day.

Charlie Mike – Run For The Wall. Let's start making ready for 2017.

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### Day 10 – May 27 - Ashland, VA to Arlington, VA. (94 miles)

Here we are, the final day of the Run, before we assemble at the Lincoln Memorial. The day started like any other. Pack, breakfast, assemble, mandatory meeting Pledge of Allegiance and prayer. I always love the prayers our chaplain's corps provide for us. Thanking God for all his blessings and asking Him to continue to be with us as we ride. That our bikes may carry us safely to our destination, that our minds may be alert, that other motorists will notice us and be safe, that we may find healing today and every day, that we will remember why we are doing this and that we will give all praise and glory to God. I do thank God for the safety we have received from day to day. We have had extraordinary weather

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following us every day, thanks be to God. We have been safe. Many have found healing, some I know personally. Thanks be to God for all these things and for the blessings we don't even realize we received.

Platoon Leaders were given a few moments to talk with our platoon members. I didn't really have much to say. I told them it was an honor to lead them this year and thanked them for doing the best job they could. I hugged my leadership team and all my riders. They each thanked me for getting them this far.

Now we take our final ride together to Arlington.

We are on our way to the US Marine Corps Museum in Quantico, VA under LEO escort. I've been there before a couple times. Only the Midway Route stops here. I'm so glad they do. It's a great place to visit. We didn't have all the time we would like if we intended to ride into Arlington together, only about an hour. There is a giant leaning spire which is the center of and most prominent object of the museum. This spire represents the raising of the American Flag over the island of Iwo Jima. The museum is not yet complete. There are additional wings in the planning stage. Inside there are exhibits with multiple dioramas depicting battles fought from the Revolutionary war up through Vietnams. Future exhibits will include battle fought since Vietnam to the present. Outside there are also some pathways around the grounds of the museum I never had time to explore. I found out later that Navy Buff went that way and took several shots of the outside, so look for the photos Navy Buff posts. There's a map of the grounds at the front desk. I'm going to get one next time and check it out. When I walked inside I noticed right away that a bitchin looking chopper dedicated to the US Marine Corps was no longer there. I wondered why. While inside, I saw an armed Marine walking around the building observing. I asked him if I could talk with him a while. He said for a short time. He told me he was assigned to protect the museum and the people inside. He told me that the Commandant of the Marine Corps considered it only right that there should be Marine Corps presence inside their museum. That sounded completely appropriate to me. He was a sharp young man, willing to answer a few questions and very polite. He said there has never been any threat at the museum, but that if there was he and others like him were ready for action. After a couple minutes I let him resume his patrol.

I talked with a couple docents there. One asked me if I had been there before and I told him a couple times. He said that I'd probably seen most of what was here then except one thing and he pointed to a plane, an SBD Dauntless. This is a scout, dive bomber plane that was used during WWII, but this one was recovered several years ago from the bottom of Lake Michigan where it was used in training. My attention was focused on this man as he told me the story of repairing and hoisting the Dauntless to the position it now rests in. The story about this Dauntless Dive Bomber is here:

<http://potomaclocal.com/2016/02/09/plane-marine-museum-aircraft-lake-michigan/>

Soon it was time to leave. We got to our bikes, LEO departed and we followed. We had a very special treat in store. All traffic was blocked from the US Marine Corps Museum all the way to the host hotel in Arlington. This has never happened before that I am aware of. This was an absolutely awesome ride on the HOV lane of I-95. Not a single car was on the highway anywhere. I'd never seen this before. I wondered how this was arranged and how the execution of such a marvel was accomplished so precisely. When we rolled into Arlington I announced over the CB "Charley Mike" and many returned the call. We rolled in and parked. More hugs and thanks were passed around our platoon. The ride was complete.

Later the Central Route came in. Awesome. Then the Southern, again just awesome. I went down to the main floor and found my buddy and great friend Joe "Gump" Hudson former POW OIF. Hugs.

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Standing next to him was a young lady in tears. Joe asked me if I had heard the story. I shook my head, no. He said this woman is a dear friend and he introduced me to her. Gump said this is one of the nurses that cared for me after I was rescued in Iraq. She recognized me here and came up and introduced herself to me. This is the first time I've seen her since I was released from captivity in Iraq. I hugged and thanked her myself. More tears of joy.

Tomorrow is the day. A hard day for many of us.

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### Day 9 - May 26 - Fayetteville, NC to Ashland, VA (245 miles)

There's something magical about staying at the host hotel. Seeing all your buddies and talking about the stories of the day or relaxing with a cold one with your platoon mates. To others, staying at the host hotel may be a little hell on earth. No close place to park, long check-in lines, no diet cokes in the machine, card keys that don't work that you need go back down the elevator carrying all your gear, and cut back in line to get them remagnetized (I think I just invented a new word there). There's an endless number of things that work against you checking into a hotel that are multiplied many times over at host hotels, so some avoid them. I'm beginning to think they might be the smart ones, but I'll let you be the judge.

We left Fayetteville and headed for the Falcon Children's Home. Falcon is a private school that cares for children that have not been successful in the public school system. Teachers, faculty and children are doing remarkable things at this school, where doors are open to them that would otherwise have been closed. The children here provided an excellent program for us. Starting with colors and the National Anthem sung by a young boy that I think was named Kevin. I don't think he could have been more than 10 years old. He had a wonderful voice. Later their choir sang "Oh Happy Day". It was done so well it could have easily been at a Broadway production. There were some presentations, one of which was a donation from the school to Run For The wall. I thought that was really nice, but a little odd that the school was donating to the Run. When we left the school, the children lined the parking lot waving goodbye to us.

We next headed to lunch at the Shiloh Pentecostal Church. We received a very warm welcome. Have you ever seen an ice chest filled with spaghetti? How about two? Well we did and it was really good with extra sauce in pitchers to put on top if you wanted more as well as plenty of deserts. Up by the stage were a few model ships mostly scratch built (Ken posted pictures of them). The detail was superb and these were only a small part of the builder's collection. He and a couple other guys are currently building 5 more. What a rewarding hobby to be involved with. We had a little extra time here because a later event didn't make the schedule. So from lunch, we were headed to dinner. Top said if we got fat this trip it was his fault. So that's my story and I'm sticking to it. We had a little extra time to spend here so some of us took a short nap; funny how the older you get the easier it is to sleep in the darnedest of places.

As we were about to depart the church, local LEO mentioned that I-95 was backed 4 miles due to construction, so they quickly rerouted our escort service and we arrived at the Moose Lodge in Hopewell, VA with time to spare.

Hopewell. What a wonderful, loving and caring place. I think I'd like to move here. I know, I said that about a few other places already, but it's true. The people at the Moose were so nice to us. They spent

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all day preparing food and arranging tables and chairs for us. First they welcomed us inside the air-conditioned building and gave us water and iced tea or maybe it was sweet tea (pronounced “swait tay”). We were quickly all inside and seated. Soon a children’s choir from Tussing Elementary School Third Grade was singing a medley of songs about veterans and how they are so appreciated. Finally they sang “Thank You Soldiers”. A song they recorded years ago. It’s not quite popular on YouTube. This is them. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pfBUUZNBfM> I don’t know if there was a dry eye in the place, I couldn’t see to check. Afterward, we stood and applauded. We were all touched, just like the year before and the year before that. This song still gets to us all as sung by these children grateful for soldiers. After dinner and presentations all were leaving to get to their bikes and head down the highway to the hotel in Ashland, VA. I started policing my table and then the area around my table and noticed most of the room still needed policing. Navy Buff came up to me and asked me if I was ready to go. I told him I was bothered because I thought the hospitality shown to us was not appreciated since so many did not clean up after themselves or return their chairs under the table. I said I couldn’t leave this mess behind. Ken said, “Let’s clean it up”. I said, “Yeah”. When we left I felt better that the Midway Route did not leave the Moose Lodge members much to clean up after we’d gone. Maybe next time we visit, we will leave with a better impression on the loving folks at the Moose Lodge in Hopewell, VA.

There were four of us left at the lodge. Navy Buff, Vickie Meyer, Top Neil and myself. When we were all together ready to head out, Top asked who knew where we were going, I pointed to myself and he said “lead on” and off we went. We had a great time riding to our hotel in Ashland together. When I announced a lane change, Top would say “I got it”. Later I told him he made a great Tail Gunner also. He laughed a long, loud “Top” kinda laugh. What a great man. A great leader and a great follower.

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### Day 8 – May 25 - Asheville, NC to Fayetteville, NC (267 miles)

Today was another short riding day, but the events today made it one of the best days of the trip. I guess that could be said about every day, but today really was a exceptional. Siler City was just like the other years but even better if that is possible. The Buffalo Soldier Motorcycle Club was there to welcome everyone as well as a children’s ensemble that played bells for a couple songs. They were really good. The lunch however was the same ole thing - Grilled Sirloin Steak with potatoes, green beans and homemade peach cobbler and homemade ice cream. Yeah, just the same ole thing. Yeah right. I love Siler City. During lunch, Top asked nine Vietnam veterans to come forward. I jumped at the opportunity as well as several others and went up front. He had us add our names to a list for something later that he didn’t tell us about at the time. After lunch we all paraded through downtown Siler City before getting on the interstate. We drove through the school parking lot and were greeted by a few hundred kids. They had many signs saying “We Love Our Veterans” and “God Bless America”. I think if I were to move somewhere it would be to Siler City, NC or maybe Cookeville, TN. The people of Cookeville are about as American as they come. Well, Fayetteville is that way too. Geez, I don’t know there so many great towns with such great people. How can anyone decide which is best? It’s impossible. One thing is for sure and for certain and that is, we will be back again next year to see these places and visit these wonderful people.

We had two sponsored fuel stops today thanks to our anonymous benevolent donor. By the way, my platoon asked me who you are so they could thank you, but I couldn’t tell them. They asked me to tell you “thank you” from all the riders in Platoon 6. I’m sure the entire Run For The Wall company would

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like to thank you as well, but I'm also sure you know already how much your gift is appreciated and how much we all love you.

Our next stop Fayetteville NC. From the outskirts of town we picked up a police escort and began to see highway blocks, then more streets blocked, and then all the streets blocked. The folks in Fayetteville were stacked up at intersections as we came through their town. I hope they weren't too upset we were making them late for wherever they were going. We arrived and rode through downtown Fayetteville. What a beautiful street with brick roadway and trees lining the store fronts all the way through town. We stopped at the Airborne and Special Forces Museum. We were there for a very important event by several accounts. First is the Field of Honor. Every flag honors someone from North Carolina who is currently serving, those who have served, and the men and women who have made the supreme sacrifice for our nation's security and freedom. There's also a memorial for service dogs and some impressive statues of General Henry Hugh Shelton and Iron Mike who honors airborne troopers. Inside the museum there are several displays, one of which displays the actual events of the Mogadishu attack on a Black Hawk Helicopter for which the movie Black Hawk Down was created. There are other exhibits and a theater. We were all invited into the theater. A program was available and there were several invited guests. The company of Buffalo Soldiers was there and they escorted Mayor Nat Robertson from Siler City. There were also several former POWs being honored from World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam 1) Edwin M. Braswell, 2) William J. Richardson, 3) F. Paul Dallas, 4) John L. Mims, 5) Jacob G. Roth Jr. 6), Lawrence R. Wilson, and 7) Raymond C. Schrupp. The program included a biography of each of their experiences while they were in captivity. Of these servicemen, several spent many years as prisoners from one to 5 years. Their stories are horrific. The suffering they endured unconscionable, the suffering they endured unconscionable, the pain and loss they lived immeasurable, their character unconquerable. These are men that were determined to live and have to their last breath. They endured with the hope of someday being released. Their stories are incredible.

Rick McDowell (Hawk) was the organizer and MC for this presentation. There were several speakers and ceremony including colors, the National Anthem and invocation. Hawk had the nine Vietnam Veterans selected at Siler City to come to the front to receive a special Vietnam War Veteran 50<sup>th</sup> year commemoration pin. What an honor for us. Afterward the rest of the Vietnam veterans received pins as well.

Following our visit to the Airborne and Spec Ops Museum, we headed to dinner at the Destiny Now Church. An excellent meal was provided following which presentations were made to each of the Run For the Wall teams, platoons and participants. Daryl Neil (Top) announced that Mark Breland (Diesel) would be the Midway Route Coordinator for 2017. We thanked Top for leading us this year and welcomed Diesel as the new Route Coordinator for next year.

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### Day 7 – May 24 - Cookeville, TN to Asheville, NC (223 miles)

Today we got to sleep in a little since our meeting wasn't until 0730 and KSU and 233 miles isn't that far to go. A few more folks joined us this morning and a couple bikes were added to my platoon. That was nice. Ken took a photo of all the platoons today. Ours is a great group and we have a photo to remember us all by now. Those of us that have still have memories that is.

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Top restated a tradition that was lost last year. Each morning he reads a biography of someone that was lost in Vietnam. It's always a moving story many of us can relate to. At the end Top always says "and this is the reason why we ride" before he hands the bio to someone to take to the wall. Thanks Top.

It was hard to leave Cookeville. They love us so much here. Many showed up to see us off and we were escorted out of town by the local police department. We headed to our first stop which was Knoxville and the East Tennessee Veterans Memorial for lunch. There were a few words from local dignitaries and Top then a prayer from our chaplain corps and the Pledge of Allegiance to which all the folks in the area joined in. Afterward, a Wreath Laying ceremony commenced followed by cheers and applause. Lunch was served and we enjoyed the Veterans Memorial. Others took advantage of the water feature to take a much needed shower. Pretty funny stuff. I remember the first time Hawk ran through it. It's now a tradition like the Blue Hole has.

Getting out of Knoxville seems to be a little more difficult than getting in. LEO escort sure helps. We sure love all the escort service we have received across the US and there has been a lot.

Our next stop was the Citgo station where I figured Hawk (AKA Rick McDowell) would be waiting for us and he was. We haven't seen him for a year, so the first half hour or so was mostly for hugs. Hawk is a loveable guy and no one is more dedicated to Run For The Wall than he is.

Of again, but first we had to negotiate the Smokey Mountain twisties and a couple tunnels; that done we arrived at the Asheville Harley Davidson shop, all in one piece. Our excellent Staging Crew got us parked so we could each get out when we wanted to. There was a band playing and the smell of barbeque in the air. What a great event. Dinner was excellent and the band was great. They played a couple of my favorite Merle songs by request. After dinner Top said to all present like he has at most of our meal stops, "What do we say to all these people that fed and entertained us?" We answer in unison "THANK YOU".

Soon it was time for presentations. Several plaques and certificates were handed out. One of the representatives from the VA Hospital was there and she mentioned Run For The Wall and the fact that we didn't get a proper welcome home when most of us returned. She asked all the Vietnam Veterans to come up to receive a special 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary coin and she shook our hands, thanked us and told us "Welcome Home" then handed each of us a challenge coin. What an honor this was for me and many others. Next the mic was handed to Staff Sergeant Wayne Carringer, POW, and Bataan Death March survivor now 95 years old. He read a story about his experience and the many lessons he learned about life. He said, "Always be thankful for every meal you receive because you never know if you'll have one tomorrow. Always be kind and loving to your friends, because you never know if you will see them again". One last thing he talked about was avoid doing things that you will regret in the future. Thinking back on things we said in anger or hard times we gave to someone will cause us pain in the future when we reflect back on them. Once they seemed so important to us but now we know how trivial they really were. I thought the wisdom this elderly gentleman has gained over the years of his life and the unique and traumatic experiences he endured were of particular importance to helping me find happiness in my life, if I'll remember his words and make them a part of my life.



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As I headed to the hotel, I passed a trike that had a guy on the back with no helmet. When I looked closer, it was Staff Sgt Carringer and driving was Les Williams my friend and the leader of Platoon 8. I understand he got a similar ride back to the VA Hospital last year. I was floored. Thanks Les for stepping up. I'm sure Wayne was very happy for the opportunity to ride with you. This is yet (to use Top's words, "one more reason we ride").

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### Day 6 -

According to my GPS we finished today with just over 2000 miles. We are now in Cookeville, TN. Today started out a little different. It had all the usual activities, breakfast, mandatory meeting, drawings, with a couple other unusual items. The first was a comical lesson by Six String (pronounced Sacks Strang), on how to understand Cajun. I think most of us still don't get it. Some do however, since I heard a few laughs anyway. Next he also explained all the changes to the day's route, I think most of us understood all the directions but then later in the day he changed them anyway. Maybe that's a Cajun thing as well. I don't know. Next Gunny Graham got up and told everyone how Run For The Wall got started. I kinda knew the story, but ain't able to do it justice by trying to paraphrase it here. If you really want to know, you can ask him. We heard it from the man himself and at the appropriate time in the story, Gunny introduced a buddy of his he served with that he happened to find again several years later because Gunny had the names of guys he served with and rides for on his bike and his friend happened to see them and asked him how he knew them. Well, that's all I'm going to say here. It was an emotional moment him and for all of us. I'd like see more of what Gunny told us posted on the RFTW.org website under the Mission tab in the History section perhaps. It's a story all should hear. It's a touching story many of us may relate to, but definitely should know. Thanks Gunny for sharing it. I can tell even after all these years it's a hard story to tell because it brings with it painful memories.

Speaking of which, many individuals on the Run have painful memories that they hope to find answers to perhaps or at least relief from by associating with friends that share common stories and common pain and know some of the dark places we sometimes fall victim to. A friend of mine had such an experience today. I could tell he was troubled. I waited a moment and then walked over to him and hugged him for a while. The emotions were thick. The pain is still there after many years, but Run For The Wall has become his reason to cope with the pain and he is doing the best he can with it. Others are suffering with pain and demons of their own. There's no way we can tell how deep this pain goes or how tight a grip these demons have on them. All we can do is comfort them as they struggle to get through their battles with them.

Getting through Memphis was a challenge, but we cleared it with expert Road Guard service. We have in our hearts a warm place for these brave men and women to risk their lives to help keep us safe on the Run. I'm grateful to them. The efforts of the fuel team and the staging Team are also so vitally important. My thanks to them as well.

We stopped in Brownsville for another sponsored fuel stop, and headed to Dickson for lunch at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. One of my team members was not feeling well after the long hot

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ride. I helped him inside the building and got him comfortable. Later he felt good enough to ride again, but at my recommendation he headed off to the hotel once we got to Cookeville, TN to rest up. I hope he feels better tomorrow. The lunch at the church was nachos grande, with all the fixings and several kinds of deserts including one peach cobbler that I waited for a plate of. Most excellent I might add. We fueled in Gordonville and found out through the rumor mill that all the remaining fuel stops to Washington, DC had been sponsored as well. The individual who donated the funds to do this wants to remain anonymous. I know this guy however. He loves Run For The Wall and sacrifices much of his time and resources toward the success of the Run. He is also a major contributor to the bike build and other RFTW associated activity. He is a philanthropist that blesses the lives of many military and veterans and their families on a frequently recurring basis and spends countless hours of his time in service to all those in need. His level of assistance knows no boundaries. We all thank you and we salute you.

We made our way to our final stop at Cookeville. The welcome was indescribable. Police directed us through town. People and groups lined the streets with flags waving and cheering all the way to the Leslie Town Center. I'm sure there were a thousand or more people on the streets welcoming us. What an amazing sight. One FNG friend of mine said he had never seen anything like that and to him it was not only seeing but a feeling he never felt before. If you can imagine, then you know what he means. It is the Run For The Wall feeling that each of us thrive on, a personal feeling of welcome, of belonging, of love and appreciation for someone none of them know except as veterans. At the center we were greeted by everyone including the Mayor. Inside there were tables set with Red, White, and Blue table cloths. We found our way to tables and had a great meal quickly followed by a prayer of our Chaplain giving thanks to God for our safe travels of the day. We followed that with the Pledge of Allegiance thanks to Top's suggestion. On each table were several papers and drawings from grade school children written to veterans. I read several. My heart was warmed until my eyes were wet with love and gratitude for their thoughtfulness. I walked around to tables where no one was sitting and collected several of these drawings and papers. Here's what one said,

“Dear Veteran,

Thank you for our country, our freedom. You veterans are the best. You are the most bravest people. You fight in the wars and battles. You fight for our freedom. I feel like you help save our world.

Sincerely and truly,

Arianna Heart”

After dinner there were a few words from the dignitaries and Top and the usual presentations, then we were all excused to head to our hotel. A beautiful day and an exceptional experience was over. I can't wait to come back to Cookeville, TN. It is my home away from home.

Day 6 gone. Day 7 coming on.

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### Day 5

Unfortunately this will be a short one.

Last year we were in the middle of a storm in Shawnee, OK and at 2130 there was a tornado warning (tornado on the ground in the vicinity) so we all huddled on the ground floor until the threat was gone. This year, clear skies with the storm behind us. What a relief.

After packing and breakfast we gathered in the parking lot for a short worship service. Our chaplain gave a very encouraging talk about how we act; how we have each other's back and how we leave no one behind. He compared that to ways that Jesus acted similarly like when he stood between the condemned adulteress and the angry people that wanted to stone her and simply said while drawing in the sand "let him who is without sin cast the first stone". This action showed he was not afraid of the mob but cared for the one that needed help in a way that showed his love for her. We need to be like that.

After the usual morning routine we headed out to our first fuel stop which was again sponsored in Sallisaw, OK. The welcome into town was immense: flags, people, fire engines, LEO escort. Okie-D Freie pulled out all the stops. What a beautiful sight as we pulled into fuel. Our next stop was only a short distance, but it was again sponsored. So far the majority of our fuel stops have been paid out of someone else's pocket. I am certainly grateful as I know everyone else is as well. The entire Run has been a marvelous experience.

Soon we exited Texas and entered Arkansas where LEO teams were shuffled and the escort continued. We were on our way to the little city of Ozark and then to the VFW Post 8532. This was a little bit of a challenge since most of our riding has been on the "slab" as we call the interstate. I thought the narrow twisty roads were a welcome change. The Staging Team was at the entrance of the VFW and saluted when we arrive. Very professional! They did the same thing at other venues. We love these guys and gals. The welcome by the VFW members was also wonderful and the food was marvelous. Did you get some of that banana cream pie? Sinful stuff. The usual presentations were made and we thanked our hosts and servers for yet another wonderful meal and were off again, this time to Forrest City and the Ridgewood Baptist Church. If you remember last year it was pouring rain, but this year it was sunny and dry. Lovely riding weather. The Staging Team was there to welcome the riders again as well as all the members, servers and cooks who greeted us with open arms. There was a WWII Vet outside I said hi to and thanks him for his service and gave him a big hug. He appreciated being recognized. The food was great just like last year. Children were handing out cards that said God Loves You All The Time. I got another card that had a picture of an American Flag drawn on it with a little guy on a motorcycle. Such a precious little gift I'll cherish. Later there was a nice program with a guy playing guitar and singing a couple songs he wrote as well as the national Anthem. After many plaque presentations we were excused to head to our hotels.

Day 5 is in the books. The run is half over, but there's still a lot of great stuff ahead.

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### Day 4

What a fantastic day. Everyone made it to Shawnee in one piece. We had LEO escort throughout our trip through Oklahoma.

We started out from the Sam's Club parking lot where the Christian Heritage Church was on site providing breakfast burritos and coffee for everyone. So they served us Dinner the day before and breakfast they day we were leaving. I wonder if they love us more or we them. I think there would be an argument here.

The morning was foggy. I mean pea soup. Tail gunners engaged flashers to help platoons keep track of each other. The interstate was busy. So it was no joy ride in the morning, but we were all up for it. Soon we were in Oklahoma. The overpasses were covered with patriots waving flags and saluting as we passed under. Again our fuel stops were sponsored in Oklahoma. One was just before the Clinton Veteran's Center where we had a great meal with many of the patients there. They love our visit as much as we love visiting them. On the way there I came up with a new road name for one of my platoon's Tail Gunners. Randy had a close encounter with a bee the day before, so I suggested the name Blossom for him and he was honored by the Chaplains Corp to receive the christening. Randy is a great guy and he took the new road name with dignity.

On our way to Oklahoma City, traffic got plenty worse but riding with LEO made it so much easier. We made it without much effort to the Oklahoma City Memorial and spent some time there. A ranger for the memorial was on hand to explain the design of the memorial. It's quite an amazing story and all aspects of the design have meaning, from the Gates of Time, to the Reflecting Pool, the Field of Empty Chairs and the Survivor Tree. It is a wonderful memorial to a devastating attack against the American people, women carrying unborn children, mothers, fathers, children, families, all innocent people. These words are on the wall behind the Survivor Tree.

Team 5            4-19-1995

"Search for the Truth.

We Seek Justice.

The Courts Require it.

The Victims Cry for it.

And God Demands it".

Many still bare scars for what happened here twenty one years ago. Lives were forever changed. Our country was forever changed, but we will NEVER FORGET". You know, I'm not even sure it's any consolation that the perpetrator of this crime paid with his life. We know his name, but I'm not mentioning it. Only those whose lives were taken away from us are worth mentioning. Their names are under the chairs in the Field of Empty Chairs. Nineteen of which were children. God grant peace to their families and to the community of Oklahoma City. Our hearts go out to them all and to the thousands that came to rescue hundreds of survivors. The American Spirit lives on.

We arrived in Shawnee and headed to the VFW for dinner. A most excellent meal was provided by the VFW. Top asked us what we say to them and in unison we all said "THANK YOU" and we meant it.

Tom "Twotone" Lystrup - Platoon 6 Leader / Midway Route SitRep Recorder / [lystruptf@gmail.com](mailto:lystruptf@gmail.com)

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The afghan that Topper's wife Needles made for the Midway Route (and she made one for both the Southern and Central Routes as well) was auctioned off. I felt it my responsibility to such a good friend as Topper is to have this prize and now I do since I had the winning bid. Thankfully it is being shipped home for me since I have zero room to carry it on my bike. There were other presentations made. Ralph "Rowdy" Butler recited a couple poems he wrote that we all enjoyed very much. I'm hoping he'll send me the words to add here. Also, others spoke to us including Gunny Graham. He asked us how fare we were going. We responded with "ALL THE WAY".

Day 4 is done. Onto Day 5, the half way point. Does it feel much like half way already?

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### Day 3 -

Seems like we just started and already the Run is one quarter over. The weather in Albuquerque was excellent. A great breakfast was provided by the Rich Ford dealership. After the usual morning ceremony, the Ambassador Team headed over to the Veteran's Integration Center. At the VIC they collect and provide food for veterans and hand it out as necessary as well as every Friday for veteran's in need. They also help veterans get back on their feet by providing shelter, medical care if necessary and jobs. The VIC Outreach Coordinator is Wendy Webber. Their website is [www.nmvic.org](http://www.nmvic.org).

The Albuquerque, NM Police Department and other LEO agencies escorted the pack while our own Road Guards blocked oncoming traffic so we could escape downtown. The escort continued all the way through New Mexico. In Moriarty, we pulled off and rode through town in sort of a parade fashion. There were lots of people waiting to see us. Back on I-40 we tried to remain together as much as possible, but invariably traffic interfered. The road started to flatten out and the sky ahead of us was beautiful. We gassed in Santa Rosa and headed over to the Blue Hole for lunch. We've stopped here each time we've done the Midway route and everyone loves this place. The Blue Hole is a natural spring that forms a large deep pool and has a constant temperature of 61 degrees. Not very warm actually, but there were several kids and adults that jumped in. Some with swim suits and some fully clothed even, including their boots. Amazing! Lunch was served and there were the usual awards to hand out. We were soon back on the road and headed for our next gas stop in Glenrio, NM. Again the fuel was sponsored as it was all the way through the State of New Mexico. Thanks Chris Timm for all your efforts. There is a great car museum inside the gas station here if you have time to see it that is. Near the hydration trailer a local family showed up and sand a couple songs God Bless the USA and Somewhere Over the Rainbow, accompanied by two boys playing guitar. They were really good and a big hit with all us riders.

When we entered Texas, we were again escorted by Texas police to Amarillo. As we headed toward town a couple of Piper escort planes met us and followed us into town. It was great to see them flying overhead, but a little heard to watch them and the riders a head of us. Still it was nice to have them accompany us. Our first stop was the Christian Heritage Church where we were greeted by many patriots with flags and a huge flag draped between two fire engine ladder trucks. The food line went fast and we were all seated in a comfortable air conditioned building. The ribs were so good. All the food was great and there was cake! A member of the Christian Heritage opened with a blessing for us to be safe on our ride. We will of course always take any divine help we can get. The Star Spangled banner was sung and voices from all over the room could be heard singing along. We performed the Pledge of

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Allegiance. There were a few guest speakers including a Medal of Honor recipient, a general, a grade school class and oh yes...Top. The grade school kids put on an amazing show. Two girls sang and were backed up by other children with flash cards that included the words they were singing. At the end of the song, the children turned all their cards over to form an American Flag. What a great show. The servers were all thanked and hugged and hugged again. I think everyone loves coming here to Amarillo especially for the love the community pours out on each of us riders on the Run For The Wall. We'll be back again next year.

Day 3 is in the books

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### Day 2 -

So the plan for this morning was as follows, meet for our mandatory meeting, welcome and brief our riders and take off for our first stop. At the mandatory meeting one of our riders mentioned he was collecting donations and selling challenge coins to help the children of Milan Elementary School in Grants, New Mexico. Some of us pitched in to help out. Several new FNGs and veteran RFTW members showed up to join us. All were welcomed to the Run. We left Flagstaff and headed east, but traffic seemed to cling to us forever. Then the occasional road work slowed us down, but we finally made our next gas stop. The weather cooperated well and by Holbrook many of us were shedding layers. It stayed overcast and cloudy, but no rain, perfect riding weather. When we left Arizona and crossed into New Mexico we were greeted by the New Mexico Highway Sheriff's Department and local City Police Department officers. Anyway, they escorted us to our next stop and all the way through the state. I love crossing New Mexico.

Next we were headed to Milan Elementary School near Grants, New Mexico. Last year we just rode by and headed to the American Legion Hall at the rodeo arena. This time we were greeted by a few hundred school children and teachers. We all got to ride around the circle slapping hands with the children as we motored by. It was a little hard to control speed while doing this, but the kids loved it. We parked and went inside for a wonderful Mexican lunch. The enchiladas were outstanding. Next we went into the gymnasium for presentations. We had the usual ceremony by the American Legion Honor Guard. A little girl with a big beautiful voice sang the National Anthem that brought tears to everyone's eyes. The money collected earlier this morning was donated to the school by Cornman. There was about \$1200 in all that was raised for the school. Next, there were several presentations that followed. Chris Timm does an amazing job coordinating activities in the state of New Mexico to support Run For The Wall. All the food and all the fuel are paid for throughout the state. Chris received plaques for several contributors to hand out to them later. There were many other plaques and certificates handed out for outstanding work that many individuals do to make the Run a success. Soon we stood for the Pledge of Allegiance and the children stood. To hear the patriotism in all the school children's voices was a wonderful experience. Then something happened that none of us expected but maybe something we should adopt and decide to do when we next return to Milan, the children continued the Pledge with words of their own. As we were all silent they in one voice said, "I pledge to be a person of character; to help others when they need it; to treat others the way I want to be treated; to be caring, respectful, responsible; be a good citizen; be fair and trustworthy. I count! You count!" We all stood in awe as they recited these words in unison. Then we cheered and applauded to the children's delight. The children all sat back down. The principle spoke to us for a bit and asked us to come back next year (I'm pretty sure we will be after what we saw and how we felt). Later as we were leaving the gym, the children started chanting in a deafening tone, "USA, USA, USA..." We all joined in. It lasted for a couple minutes I think. Again, the tears flowed. I was sorry to be leaving, but as we did most of the children came out to wave good bye to us. Earlier in the cafeteria, I took a picture of a wall filled with letters from the children about veterans. One child wrote, "I want to be a veteran..." and then listed the reasons why he or she wanted to be, all worthy reasons to be sure. I teared up. I took another picture of a poster in the form of the American Flag that read Helping Hands for Our Veterans. Thank You. There were blue hands for the stars and red and white hands for the stripes, something I thought imaginative and very patriotic. I love Milan Elementary School. I know that many great Americans will be coming from that little school.

Next we were off to Casino 66 and another sponsored fuel stop. From there we were again led by the LEO from New Mexico Sheriff's Department and local City Police Department Officers into downtown Albuquerque

Tom "Twotone" Lystrup - Platoon 6 Leader / Midway Route SitRep Recorder / [lystruptf@gmail.com](mailto:lystruptf@gmail.com)

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and like Top mentioned later (completely shutting down the interstate and during rush hour), quite an honor to us riders to be treated that way. We arrived at the Radisson (host) Hotel and were greeted by many people waving flags and cheering for us. Then we found what all of us should be used to by now, yet another line to check in. Dinner was provided for us by the Veteran's Integration Center and after that more presentations. Most of which were again collected by Chris Timm. One of which was a very special presentation to Top's Mom who happened to be in the audience. It was quite an occasion. Thanks Top for letting us share in this special moment with you.

Today was incredible. I have a new love, the Milan Elementary School children. So Day 2 is over and we are onto Day 3 already.

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### Day 1 -

Wow! The day is finally here. Run For The Wall finally starts today. Getting lined up was a little confusing for some (like me), but we all got there and found our platoons, our places. Many vendors were there in the morning handing out all kinds of things for us to take with us. The food lines went fast. Hot breakfast burritos, donuts, coffee, water. There was another line that didn't seem to be moving fast enough for me anyway. The mandatory meeting was ... well mandatory. Colors. A beautiful rendition of our National Anthem. Didn't get her name, but what a remarkable voice. The Girls Scout signers were there as well. Watching the girls sign "bombs bursting", "star spangled banner" "o'er the land of the free" and "the home of the brave", all kind a brought a tear to my eye. Maybe more than one. It wasn't long and it was time to hit the road. This year is my honor to be a Platoon Leader for the first time. It has really been a great experience for me. As we departed, there were many patriots lining the street with flags and soon we were on the interstate. Above Cajon Pass the sun came out and before long we were at our first gas stop in Ludlow. This gas stop in addition to many more today was sponsored, gratis, nada, free. Don't know who to thank, but thank you to whoever you are and to who sponsored the next stop and the next one and the next one. All of them except the very last were all sponsored. Amazing.

Mother Road Harley sponsored our lunch in addition to many community members and organizations. I love the burgers there. After lunch there were several certificates and plaques handed out. I recognized that a guy names Roy received about half a dozen plaques on behalf of as many organizations. I talked with him for a while. On behalf of The American Legion and American Legion Riders groups he belongs to he collects money from several groups and tells them that for \$499 or less they can get a certificate from RFTW or for \$500 or more they can get a plaque, so most give him \$500 and he hands them each a plaque when he gets them. I thought this was an amazing thing for one guy to do. I have a tremendous sense of need to "pay it forward", but I'm not near as dedicated to doing that as Roy is. So I need to improve. Also at lunch a young lady was introduced as the first Miss Run For The Wall and Kingman, AZ is the first city to host a pageant for Miss Run For The Wall. What a gorgeous young lady (see the picture Ken posted on his website of her). Of course I had to have my turn receiving a hug and getting my picture taken with her. What a treat! Doing this had consequences however. I was a little late getting my rain gear on because we were told it might be raining in Williams. Needless to say, because I needed more time than I had, our platoon took off late and got separated from the pack. We needed to play catch up. I think it was worth it.

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The rain wasn't very bad at all. It got pretty cool as we headed into Williams for gas, but not bad. Next we headed to Flagstaff for dinner at the VFW. When we got into town Law Enforcement Officers were there to escort us through. Our own Road Guards helped as well. The streets were empty of cars. Everywhere in town the cars were stopped for us to roll through, an amazing sight. At dinner, the local Boy Scout Troop was there to welcome us as well as VFW members who cooked a great spaghetti dinner for us. A couple more plaques were handed out to contributors. We were then on our own to gas up for the next day and head to our hotels.

What an incredible day it was. The weather was more cooperative than I thought it was going to be, possibly because our Chaplains Corps asked God to make it so in their prayer for us today. At least that's who I'm giving credit to. Thanks to God for the nice weather and for our safety. Thanks to all that made today's ride memorable, enjoyable and efficient. Our Staging Crew is magnificent; our Fuel Team is a well-oiled machine; our Road Guards kept us moving with precision, our leadership brought it all together and got us from Ontario to Flagstaff in one piece. Our riders completed the first leg of their journey and put Day 1 in the history book. There are many others to thank that I haven't mentioned. You know who they are. Please make sure to thank everyone that helps make Run For The Wall possible. I don't know if I'll ever remember them all.

One more thing. At the Lake Havasu City gas stop I saw Velcro (alias Judy Lacey). Jim Frost pointed out that she and another gentleman were there representing the RFTW Walker's Brigade. I talked with her for a while. She's doing okay. Chemo treatments have started and will continue for some time, but she's optimistic and in good spirits. It was great to meet her face to face for the first time and to get a long awaited hug. God Bless You Judy!

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### Day 0 -

Today in Ontario started with the annual ride to Riverside National Cemetery. Several bikes and riders showed up to go. Many were FNGs. It was a real treat to see LEO in force to help escort us safely through town to the interstate. The Platoon Leader is Jim "The Mayor" Frost. I volunteered to sweep for him and Peter "Gearshift" Green assisted me. I think there were about 15 motor officers from the Ontario Police Department, whose efforts were coordinated by George Skropos. We lined up adjacent to the host hotel and departed for RNC at 0850. At the interstate, the Ontario Police left us in the hands of the California Highway Patrol that blocked I-60 eastbound for our entrance. Our group had roughly 80 bikes and we all made it to RNC in one piece, so to speak. Our first stop was the Medal of Honor Memorial where Pete Young the Director of Riverside National Cemetery spoke to us briefly and introduced Louis Lee Millett Jr., son of Medal of Honor recipient Louis Millett Sr. Following Lee's remarks, Gene Goldware spoke in detail about the Medal of Honor Memorial design and told many stories of the heroes who's name line the walls of the Memorial. In my ignorance, I don't know many of the names on the memorial, but did remember one, Audie Murphy. I found his name fairly easily. Gene had many more stories of these brave men and the lone woman recipient of the Medal of Honor than we had time for unfortunately. So next we headed to the Veteran's Memorial and the POW/MIA



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Memorial. The latter of which was designed by Louis Lee Millett Jr. The Veteran's Memorial is striking; a single soldier laying vertical a top a tall slab of stone with the aspect of being lifted up as it were to heaven. The soldier has a covering over his head and most of his body but his boots and a single arm are uncovered. This memorial gives me a deep a tremendous sense of loss, but at the same time a deep sense of gratitude and respect for the young men and women that put their lives on the line, some of which are taken from us. RNC is a beautiful cemetery and it is run very efficiently; sometimes managing as many as 80 or more burials per day. The cost of freedom is high. I wonder if we realize the tremendous price paid for the liberty we enjoy.

I heard it is the intention that the ride to Riverside National Cemetery may become an integral part of the Run For The Wall in the future. I think that is a great idea.

There were other events today to participate in. The FNG brief of course. Later the First Division USMC Band from Camp Pendleton favored us with several songs. The Chaplin Corps then performed a blessing of bikes and riders followed by a special blessing of riders by Chief for those involved in transporting the remains of a loved one on one the Run with us to his final resting place. Others were encouraged to receive a blessing, and I quickly took advantage. I need all the blessings I can get. According to the itinerary there was a Kia presentation, but I must have missed it. Sorry.

The meet and greet dinner was wonderful. The lines moved very fast and tables were prepared for all of us to sit and enjoy a dinner together. Following dinner an honor guard presented the colors and the National Anthem. Then Greg "Pied Piper" Smith addressed us and asked how far we were going. I think everyone knows by now how far we are going. We're going ALL THE WAY. There were several presentations of plaques by John "Hard Charger" Barker for those that have donated much to Run For The Wall and finally the Combat Heroes Bike Build presentation for Shawn Meadows. He received a helmet, vest and oh yes, a specially designed "one-off" Harley Davidson trike. What an amazing work of art. Many hands have been involved with this project. It was most rewarding to see the expression on Shawn's face and to hear the bike fire up. The cheers were deafening. Later, there was a live auction by Jelly Bean held for a carved stone art piece that brought \$800. Tom Russell had the piece specially designed and donated it for the auction.

Later a couple of darling little girls sang for us. One sang the National Anthem for which we all stood and saluted and then cheered and clapped. The other (she couldn't have been three) sang God Bless America. One little tiny voice was joined by all and then we applauded and cheered for this little sweetheart. So precious. What a way to end the night.

So ends Day 0. Tomorrow Day 1. Midway Route, I hope you are ready for rain east of Kingman. That's the way it looks. Thursday morning temperatures in Flagstaff are expected to be around 36 degrees. Maybe you'd rather consider taking the Southern Route. No? I didn't think so.

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Day -1

Many of us arrived in Ontario today. Although my distance is nothing like so many who have come a long way, the anticipation was killing me mile by mile. I just couldn't seem to go fast enough to get here. What a rush, to see so many friends that I haven't seen for so long. Actually, I think to use Top's phrase "all-a-yawl" are more like family; hugs were all around. The feeling was indescribable. Like a family reunion but better.

Check-in at the Radisson (host) Hotel was effortless despite no breakfast coupons. Oh well, I guess we can't complain too much for such a great rate. Thanks to the RFTW BOD for making great arrangements for us all. Registration, I heard a few complaints about the line moving so slowly. When I mentioned that next year "the complainers" could help out by volunteering to help with registration instead of complaining, I didn't hear any further comments. Thank you to our wonderful Registration Crew. I sure hope they get more thanks than what I saw. They certainly deserve it. Each FNG was treated by those registering as if they were some long lost brother or sister. In a way, I think they are. Those that registered an FNG welcomed them and gave each a big hug. All FNGs need to know that Run For The Wall exists for them. Each of us is here for them. We all have their back.

I was outside earlier in the morning when I heard a loud commotion. Something or someone very special was coming in. It turned out to be Shawn Meadows our double amputee veteran hero that we plan to honor especially tomorrow. I wonder what he thought about so many old folks interested to see him. Must a been at least a little weird.

Later, I heard another commotion. This time I heard bag pipes playing Amazing Grace. The Patriot Guard Riders and The American Legion Riders were bringing in the Fallen Heroes' Cart. This cart will be used at Dulles Airport to transfer our military brothers and sisters Killed-In-Action from the escort aircraft into the airport rather than using the regular baggage cart. This was the idea of a few patriots that work for Alaskan Airlines. Three of them brought the cart all the way down from SeaTac International Airport over the last few days to deliver the cart here to finish its journey on the Southern Route to Dulles International Airport to begin its service. Many more carts will be produced and delivered in a similar way to all the other major airports in the United States. Some of the Alaskan Airlines representatives that designed and built the cart were on hand to help with the unveiling and to explain what the cart was for. These men included Tim Fahey, Dan Brosch and Jim Rae, all true patriots. Dan read a little message he prepared explaining why they built it; a touching story for him to read and for us to here. Tim Fahey also gave us some additional explanation and both thanked us for our support; thank you Dan and Tim and Jim. Oh and by the way, Dan is an FNG on the southern route on top of that. Yeah, he's going "ALL THE WAY". Make sure you meet him and thank him for what he is doing to help promote honor for our brothers and sisters Killed-In-Action. This cart is a tribute to the patriotism that exists in the hearts of so many citizens across the United States and it's a wonderful token (to use some of Dan's words) of our love for the families whose loved one paid the price for the freedom we all enjoy.

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To the RFTW BOD, contributors, vendors, registration and leadership teams, state coordinators, fuel, staging, road guards, Missing Man coordinators, chase and support teams, chaplain corps, merchandize, MIA outreach, veteran and FNG riders, to all those that work behind the scenes that make Run For The Wall the great institution it has become, thank you one and all. Day -1 is behind us. Onto Day 0.