

VETERAN'S CORNER

Tualatin Patriot Guard Riders are preparing to escort a cart customized to transport fallen heroes at airports on its way to our nation's capital

BY DALE POTTS

All three of the Tualatin residents who are active in the Patriot Guard will be involved next month in escorting a cart customized to transport fallen heroes that is headed for Washington, DC. Annually, Patriot Guard members participate on their bikes in a cross country "Run to the Wall" to the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, DC. This year, our Tualatin members are focusing on West Coast escort duties. From the Los Angeles area the ten foot long, five feet wide and five feet high cart continues on to our nation's capital. This cart is specially designed to insure that fallen military members are treated with respect and dignity when transported within airports. Patriot Riders have already delivered similar carts to five West Coast airports: Anchorage, Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles and San Diego. The carts are distinctively patriotic, painted blue with red carpet and American flag curtains and have five plaques, each representing a branch of the Armed Services. They are made in Seattle by a team of Alaska Airlines Fallen Hero volunteers.



Fellow vets keep saluting Marine comfortable with cold towels in 100 degree weather. Water keeps him hydrated.

Tualatin's three Patriot Guard members are Jim Kruchoski, Dan Boss, and Val Condino. Dan will accompany the cart from its starting point at SeaTac, on May 13, going South on Highway I-5 all the way to San Diego. He has completed two Runs for the Wall; 2014 and again in 2015. The riders cross to I-205 before leaving Washington and then have lunch at Latus Harley in Gladstone. Jim will join as the cart enters Oregon and continue on to California border. He became a Patriot Rider in 2008 and completed the cross country Run last year. Val, who joined the Patriot Riders six months ago, plans to participate from Gladstone to Canyonville where the escort group will spend the night at Seven Feathers Casino-Hotel. Jim estimates there will be 50 to 100 riders as the group enters Oregon and as riders join, will grow to 200 as they pass over the California border. By the time they reach Los Angeles there will be over a 1,000 riders. Other motorcyclists and patriotic citizens in other vehicles also join in. Participants have a choice of three routes for the ten day trip; Southern, mid-America and Northerly. The cart will take the Southern route. They will swell to over 250,000 by the time they reach our nation's capital on the Saturday before Memorial Day, May 28. There, they join with 150,000 other motorcyclists on the Pentagon parking lot. With over 400,000 strong, and millions of supporters applauding on sidewalks, the motorcyclists drive to the Lincoln Memorial, swing around the White House and park in the mall, meeting on the steps of Lincoln

Memorial. The streets they use are blocked off from other traffic for four hours. From there they walk to the Wall and declare their mission completed by placing a plaque at the apex. Other activities that weekend include the Rolling Thunder Parade through Washington, DC on Sunday. That name came from the roar of so many motorcycle motors, reminiscent of noise made by aircraft and weapons in Vietnam in Operation Rolling Thunder, 1965 through 1968.

The Run for the Wall was started in 1989 by two Vietnam veterans who traveled on motorcycles across America, talking to news media about the thousands of Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action (MIA) American men and women who are still unaccounted for from all our wars. This very visible public awareness mission continues each year. Participants must register in advance and also cover their own expenses. Many carry a sleeping bag, air mattress and a tent to camp out. The reception by citizens along the way is extraordinary. Towns literally close down and everyone lines the streets to welcome the riders, waving flags and cheering. Many of the stops have townspeople providing meals for all the riders.

Members of the guard ensure dignity and respect at memorial services honoring fallen military heroes, veterans with an honorable discharge and first responders. Jim advises that the Guard needs an invitation from a family member to participate in a funeral service. They will not get involved without this invitation. The invite form is on the website: www.patriotguard.org. Scroll down the left hand side of page. Click on one of the blue boxes that say "funeral" or "Memorial Service". This sends you to a "register" section which opens up to the request form. Jim also explained that a person does not have to be a veteran, have a motorcycle, have an American flag or leathers. There is no age requirement or cost. You just need to have a deep respect for those who serve our country. To join, you go to same website and register. It is a simple process. I did it and now am a member. Email messages advise of upcoming missions. You choose which you want to participate in. When serving on a mission, you need to get to the site an hour before the event. The Ride Captain organizes activities and has most volunteers enthusiastically staffing the flag line. There are even extra flags for new members. It is highly rewarding. As members say, "See you on the flag line."

Dale G. Potts has organized and MC'd Tualatin's Memorial Day observation for the past 13 years. He is a Navy Vietnam vet, serving as the Public Affairs Officer of the Aircraft Carrier USS Yorktown. After active duty, he remained in the reserves, retiring as a Navy Captain (same rank as an Army Colonel). His civilian career was primarily as the Oregon Public Affairs Officer for IRS. Contact Dale at vet.dale@gmail.com.



Lieutenant Dale Potts



Marine Staff Sgt Tim Walters has become legendary. He salutes the 400,000 Rolling Thunder participants for four hours.



Jim Kruchoski is the ride Captain for this area. His duties include liaison with the fallen hero's family, managing the many Patriot Guard activities on site and filing an after-action report.



Patriot Guard on way to Washington, DC, picking up more riders as they move across our country.



Part of Patriot Guard line at Tualatin's 2014 Memorial Day Observance.



Nothing stops Patriot Rider leader "Santa Ed". Picture taken by "Q" who dedicates his life to photographing fallen heroes.



Carts ready for delivery. Each is ten feet long, five feet wide and five feet high.



Flag line at Willamette National Cemetery (located off I-205). Vets get free burial/internment at National Cemeteries. Because of Westboro, Congress passed a law prohibiting protestors at National Cemeteries.



Dan Boss, with wife Kris, riding in procession at Willamette. Guard members do whatever asked; from pall bearers at funeral to escorting hearse to cemetery family has chosen and/or flag line at cemetery.



Val Condino is the newest member. The Patriot Guard averages one mission a day in Portland Metro area.



Escorting cart to Los Angeles (LAX) airport.

WANT TO HELP?

Donation boxes to help with rider expenses are located at Tualatin: Chamber of Commerce, Tualatin Animal Clinic, and Corner Saloon. In Tigard - Bob Lamphere Motor Cycles. Call 503 313-9343 if you want to host a donation jar. Or mail donations to Patriot Guard, PO Box 701, Tualatin, OR 97062. Patriot Guard is a 501(C)3 non-profit staffed by volunteers.