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Three Marine Combat Vets To Be Honored At Bike Ride

WESTFIELD—Two Iwo Jima survivors and an Afghanistan combat veteran will be honored at special ceremonies on Sunday, September 18, at the kick-off of the fourth annual Marine Corps League (MCL) motorcycle ride to collect donations for the Marine Corps Reserve's Toys for Tops and the Wounded Warrior project.

Aldo Mancini, chairman of the ride for Westfield River Valley, Detachment 141, MCL, said the combat experiences of Don Dorrington of Cummington, Don Withee of West Springfield, both Iwo Jima veterans, and Joshua Bouchard of Granby, who lost his leg in Afghanistan, will be the detailed during the opening ceremonies.

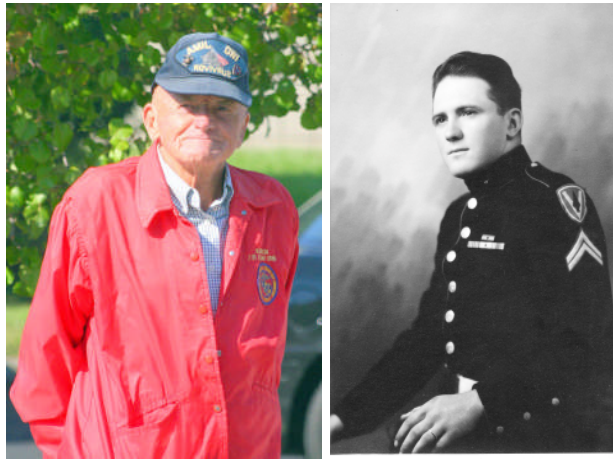
Both Dorrington and Withee will ride in a Humvee along the ride route. Joshua, a Marine sergeant, will be represented by his father, by Jim Bouchard, himself a wounded combat veteran of Vietnam where he served with the Marines as a U.S. Navy corpsman .

“We proudly honor these Marines for their service to this country,” said Mancini.



On July 22, 2009, then U.S. Marine Corps Commandant, General James T. Conway, presents U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Joshua J. Bouchard, 28, of Amherst/Granby, Mass. with The Purple Heart for wounds suffered in Afghanistan when his Humvee was destroyed by an IED on April 7, 2009. The Commandant made the presentation at Bethesda Medical Center. Sgt. Bouchard is presently receiving treatment for his injuries, including the loss of his left leg below the knee and serious back injuries, at Bethesda and is stationed at the Wound Warrior Barracks there. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo.)

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2011 Don Dorrington 1945

When 85 year-old Don Dorrington of Cummington, stepped onto the sands of Iwo Jima in the fourth wave on D-Day, he was assigned to C Co., 5th Motor Transport Battalion , 5th Marine Division. Instead of riding ashore, he and his company stripped 50-caliber machine guns from their disable vehicles and set them up a ridge above the beach. Dorrington, a former commandant and a life member of Detachment 141, was at the base of Mt. Suribachi and joined in the celebration of the historic Flag raising. He narrowly escaped death or serious injury when a Japanese mortar shell landed between his legs as he lay sleeping against his machine gun. “ I was told not to move until the engineers removed it,” he recalls. Dorrington disembarked the island on March 3, 1945 without a scratch. He is now a semi-retired logger in Western Massachusetts.



2011 Don Whitee 1942

The battle for Iwo Jima was a short campaign for Marine PFC Don Withee of West Springfield, a life member of Detachment 141, who received serious leg wounds from Japanese mortar shells on the second day of the island battle as he and other members of G Co., 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division seized part of Motoyama Airfield #1 on Feb. 20, 1945. “Being there was just like being a football player, you are nervous before you go into the game but once your in you do your job.” Above right, Withee at Parris Island, SC in 1942 and today at 88 years old. A BAR man, he landed in the second wave on Feb. 19, 1945 and became one of more than 18,000 Marines wounded in the battle. Withee enlisted on Dec. 8, 1941 and previously suffered a concussion and a perforated ear drum from a concentrated barrage of enemy mortar shell bursts on Bougainville, New Hebrides, in Nov. 1943.

Jim Bouchard, is a hero in his own right. He took an AK47 bullet through his chest, narrowly missing his heart as he was treating a wounded Marine, . Both he and Josh are members of Detachment 141.

The motorcycle ride will kickoff from the parking lots at American Legion Post 185 at 478 Springfield St. and Headquarters Lounge, 485 Springfield St., Agawam, at 10 a.m. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. A donation of a new unwrapped toy and \$15 qualifies participants for the ride. Coffee and doughnuts will be served.

Mancini said the motorcycle parade will wind its way from Agawam, through Southwick Westfield and several towns on back roads and into the Leeds section of Northampton to visit with patients at the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Western Medical Facility.

“We expect to arrive at Leeds between 11:30 and noon. After visiting with the veterans there for about a half-hour, we will head for the Holyoke Soldiers Home and expected to arrive there around 1:30 pm,” Mancini said.

He said that riders and other members of the contingent will accept toys and cash donations from the public at any of their rest stops.

“Last year we collected more than 200 toys and sent \$1,500 to the Marines Helping Marines project,” Mancini said. “We expect to send more this year as all the food is being donated.”

After greeting veterans at the Soldiers Home, the motorcycle riders will head to the American Post 338 in Southwick for a pig roast and refreshments.