



VIETNAM VETERANS TO BE RECOGNIZED AT INAUGURAL HOMECOMING CELEBRATION AT CHARLOTTE MOTOR SPEEDWAY ON MARCH 31, 2012

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (Dec. 19, 2011) -- More than 216,000 North Carolina residents served in Vietnam, and some 1,600 made the ultimate sacrifice in that war. Now, the USO of North Carolina and Charlotte Motor Speedway, with support from the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters, will honor their service with an incredible Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration for the military members and their friends and families.

The inaugural Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration became a reality on Thursday, Dec. 15, after years of planning – and some 40 years after the Vietnam Conflict ended. A highly decorated military audience was on hand to announce the event, which will be held March 31, 2012 at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Honored guests included David Kennerly, Pulitzer Prize Winning Vietnam Combat Photographer, Lt. Gen. Tom Waskow, Air Force, (Retired), Forward Air Controller, Republic of Vietnam, Col. Quincy Collins, Air Force, (Retired), Vietnam POW, Col. Charles Williams, U.S. Army, (Retired), Artillery Battery Commander and Battalion Operations officer, 101st Airborne Division, Republic of Vietnam, Lt. Col. John Falkenbury, U.S. Army (Retired), President, USO of North Carolina, and Danny Highsmith, President, North Carolina Association of Broadcasters. Also in the audience were Vietnam veterans and representatives of the USO of North Carolina, Rolling Thunder, the North Carolina Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, the Purple Heart Association and the Veterans' Legacy Foundation.



Shown at the press conference are (L-R) Danny Highsmith, President, North Carolina Association of Broadcasters, David Kennerly, Lt. Gen. Tom Waskow, Air Force, (Retired), Lt. Col. John Falkenbury, U.S. Army (Retired), President, USO of North Carolina.

Vietnam veterans never received the type of homecoming celebration that today's troops receive as they return from service. To honor those who served and the military members who returned from combat, the USO of North Carolina is holding a long, overdue homecoming celebration. Hosted by the USO of North Carolina and Charlotte Motor Speedway, the Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration 2012 is set to be an unforgettable experience featuring live entertainment, displays and demonstrations, military salutes, and much more! Supporting partners for the event include Lowe's, Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola Consolidated, Lorillard and RJR. Tickets to the event are free and available in advance at www.charlottespeedway.com/WelcomeHome or at the gate.

“This a way for we, the North Carolinian community, to say thank you to a generation who perhaps didn’t get the thank you’s that we would have expected when returned from combat from 1965 to 1973,” said Lt. Gen. Tom Waskow, Air Force, (Retired), who shared his perspective on the need to recognize the Vietnam veterans at the press conference. “We want to bring the veterans here so we can give them a venue where they can sit down and look at the benefits which they have earned, but number two we wanted this to be an opportunity for we the North Carolinian family to say thank you to them because no one really did that in 1972 when I came home. This is an opportunity for us to show our appreciation to these great men and women and to show them that the legacy lives on in the wonderful way that our men and women are treated today, and that same courtesy is extended to these older folks.”

To help spread the word about the upcoming event, the Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration launched a new public service announcement featuring Col. Quincy Collins, Air Force, (Retired). He had an illustrious Air Force career, from opening the new Air Force Academy in 1955 as an Air Training Officer, to being the Aide to the Four Star Commander-In-Chief of U. S. Air Forces in Europe, to being shot down by the North Vietnamese Communist and spending 7½ years in prison cells in and around Hanoi.

“I feel a passion for this operation,” said Col. Collins. “When I came out it was sort of the end. And here were a group of POWs who had been held and America liked that, they liked the fact that we were out. So, no Tomatoes, no vegetables thrown at us. Two weeks before that, that wasn’t the case. Guys still



coming back getting bad mouthed couldn’t get jobs and so forth. But, when we came back hopefully that changed the atmosphere a little bit. I remember when I landed in San Francisco, the first thing I did was to go through a VA hospital. I wanted to tell those guys how much I appreciated what they did because America had not expressed that to them. And when those guys knew I was there they sought me out in that hospital and said “man I am glad *you’re* out.”

And I’m trying to say, “Hey we really appreciate what *you* did” and their voices were “we would have not have changed places with you at all.” I mean how humbling can that be. And that is why this is so very important. It’s time to get this out of our brawl so to speak and let the guys feel like they really are welcome and I think this group can do that.”

The Vietnam Veterans’ Homecoming Celebration will feature an incredible display of photographer David Kennerly’s Pulitzer prize-winning portfolio of combat photos from the Vietnam conflict. At 25, the Roseburg, Oregon native won the 1972 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography for his previous year’s work that included photos of the Vietnam, Cambodia, and India-Pakistan Wars, and the Ali-Frazier fight in Madison Square Garden.



A lone American soldier walks over a hillside near the A Chau Valley in South Vietnam that has been devastated by artillery fire during heaving fighting. This image, taken in 1971, was among those in a portfolio of his year's work that won the 1972 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography for UPI photographer David Hume Kennerly.

“I think that is the role of the photographer to shed a little light into corners of the world you wouldn't see otherwise,” said Kennerly. “It certainly is a tribute to the fighting men and women. And I think a lot of the pictures, not mine necessarily, but other photographers in the Vietnam War for instance really depicted the courage and valor of the American soldiers who were fighting the war. That is really important for back then and for future generations.”

The USO of North Carolina, which created the event, encourages Vietnam veterans and their families to join in the event.

“The Vietnam Veterans’ Homecoming Celebration was created to educate, to inform and to assist those who served our country in the Vietnam Conflict,” said Lt. Col. John Falkenbury, U.S. Army (Retired), President, USO of North Carolina. “We are going to educate people about the sacrifices of our Vietnam Veterans and all veterans. We are going to assist our Vietnam veterans by having veterans’ services organizations out here, the VA and the American Red Cross. And then we are going to entertain everyone. We are going to have top-tier entertainment here and make this a day that the people in the Charlotte area and around the region will always remember. “

For more information on the Vietnam Veterans’ Homecoming Celebration, visit www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/WelcomeHome, follow the event on twitter at <http://twitter.com/VetsWelcomeHome> and “like” it at <http://www.facebook.com/VetsHomecoming2012>. To see the PSA, visit <http://www.youtube.com/user/VetsHomecoming>. For display and sponsorship opportunities, contact Geoff Ulrich, Victory Management Group, at 704.591.1265.

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About the USO of North Carolina

The USO of North Carolina's vision ... leading the way to enrich the lives of America's military in the Carolinas. The mission of the USO of North Carolina is to serve and support America's military and their families. This year, the USO (United Service Organizations) of NC has been providing morale, welfare and recreational services to U.S. military personnel and their families for 70 years. The USO of NC is a nonprofit, charitable organization, relying on the generosity of North Carolinians to support its programs and services. The USO of NC is supported by Marine Federal Credit Union, LC Industries, Bank of America, GEICO and other corporate donors. The United Way and the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC-29349) have joined thousands of individual donors to support the USO. For more information on the USO of NC, please visit our website at www.uso-nc.org.