

VFW member starts free taxi service on base

Navy Seaman Apprentice Vivian Blakely

Apr. 14, 2011

TAXI

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – Joe Mortimer with the Fleet and Family Support Center at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi wears many hats.

One hat he wears is the District Commander for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States for District 2, Mainland, Japan, Department of Pacific Areas, and a member of the VFW Post 9612 in Camp Zama servicing both the immediate areas of Camp Zama and Atsugi.

Recently he's also added another hat . . . taxi driver.

“I saw a need with all the Marines that are here to do something for them because they're all just walking around.” said Mortimer.

“They don't have cars. It's not like the other folks who live and work on base. So initially when I started all this, it was to provide a service for these guys.”

This wasn't the only reason why the Pennsylvania native felt he had to act.

Mortimer spent 22 years of active duty in the Navy before retiring as a Master-at-Arms Chief Petty Officer.

"Being a retired Navy chief, I gotta do something about something," said Mortimer.

Every afternoon, once he finishes work, Mortimer goes out to his car to don on his VFW uniform, place signs and flags on his car, and proceeds to actively search for those in uniform who may need a ride, mainly Marines.

Some accept a ride from the VFW member. Some turn him down, preferring to walk. Some days are slow and some days are extremely busy.

In the first month since Mortimer first started his taxi service, he has picked up 288 people, has driven 63 hours and 716 kilometers (444 miles).

"I don't really have a date of when I'm going to end this," Mortimer said. "However, I'll just keep pluggin' along. Supportin' the guys who are supporting Operation Tomodachi."

Mortimer's free taxi service for the Marines and those in uniform usually runs from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays. It is not an off-base taxi.