



Volume 8 - Winter 2023

HONORING FOREVER

NEWSLETTER

Korean War Monument Dedicated on Veterans Day

Over 650 people attended the unveiling of the newest monument on the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum grounds. Referred to as the Forgotten War, the Korean War lasted from 1950-1953. The 122nd Fighter Wing Airmen unveiled 12 seven and a half foot statues. W. Paul Wolf, a Korean Veteran himself, was the major donor of the monument and spoke at the ceremony along with Reverend Young Soo An, Pastor of the Korean Congregation at First Presbyterian Church in Fort Wayne; Antoinette Lee from the Korean Community; Fire Chief Eric Lahey, a veteran; and Commander Greg Bedford.

Twelve 7.5 foot tall bronze colored soldiers highlight the new monument



W. Paul Wolf speaking at the dedication.

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**VETERANS NATIONAL
MEMORIAL SHRINE
AND MUSEUM**

"Where No Veteran Will Ever Be Forgotten."

honoringforever.org

2122 O'Day Road • Fort Wayne, IN 46818

260-267-5022



Korean War Monument *Continued from page 1*

Fiberglass Animals and Objects in Hastings, Nebraska created the statues. Lea Ann Powers, a local designer, was in charge of the project and making sure all specifications were met on the project along with 2nd Vice-Commander Eric Johnson. The monument is lit at night, so visitors can view the soldiers in the dark as well as during the day. Each statue has the face of a local Korean Veteran, which makes the new monument so very personal.



Warrior Breed Motorcycle Club gathers for dedication.



Antoinette Lee speaks of her experience growing up in Korea.



Soldiers on trailer ready for installation.

★ The Mission of the Shrine ★

- To provide a forever memorial for all military Veterans of the United States.
- To educate today's youth on the history of war and conflicts that the United States has been involved in defending the freedoms we enjoy every day.
- To preserve artifacts of their service; to give future generations a better understanding and appreciation of the historical past of the United States.



Calendar of Events

January

- Jan. 1 New Year's Day
- Jan. 15 Martin Luther King Day

February

Black History Month

- Feb. 3 Four Chaplains Day
- Feb. 4 USO Birthday
- Feb. 12th Week National Salute to Veteran Patients
- Feb. 14 Valentine's Day
- Feb. 19 Presidents Day
- Feb. 19 Coast Guard Reserve Birthday

March

Women's History Month

- March 3 Navy Reserve Birthday
- March 4 Hug a G.I. Day
- March 5 Seabee Birthday
- March 13 K-9 Veterans Day
- March 15 American Legion Birthday
- March 17 St. Patrick's Day
- March 21 Rosie the Riveter Day
- March 25 Medal of Honor Day
- March 29 National Vietnam Veterans Day

Gordon Richardson Family Honors Their Dad

Gordon Richardson was a Vietnam veteran who passed four years ago. Gordon's son Patrick started a golf tournament to honor his father. This year's tournament was held at River Bend Golf Course in Fort Wayne on Saturday October 7th. Eric Johnson, 2nd Vice Commander, received a check for \$3,000 on behalf of the Richardson family to the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum. Many thanks to Patrick and his mom Deb, for this wonderful donation in support of our mission
"Where no veteran will ever be forgotten."

A Holiday Message...

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Board of Directors who have volunteered hundreds of hours over the last year making the "Shrine really Shine." We dedicated the new W. Paul Wolf War History Museum on Memorial Day weekend. We converted the old museum into the new Event Center, and the front room is taking shape to become the Medal of Honor Library. We added two new Civil War monuments at the end of September. On Veterans Day, November 11th, we dedicated the spectacular Korean Veterans Monument with 12 seven and a half foot tall soldiers as a tribute to local Korean Veterans. We just took delivery on a M-247 Sergeant York tank that sits on the north end of our property. Soon the Gold Star Families monument will be dedicated, and then the WWII monument. Last, but certainly not least, is the Sterling Chapel, now under construction. The Legacy bricks have already been installed on the front of the building. We couldn't have accomplished any of these projects without help from our donors, our volunteers, and our veterans who we have pledged to never forget. Here's wishing you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Stay Safe, Be Well!

Greg Bedford,
Commander

Museum Open
Monday, Thursday,
Saturday and Sunday
11am to 4pm
Memorial Grounds
Open 24/7

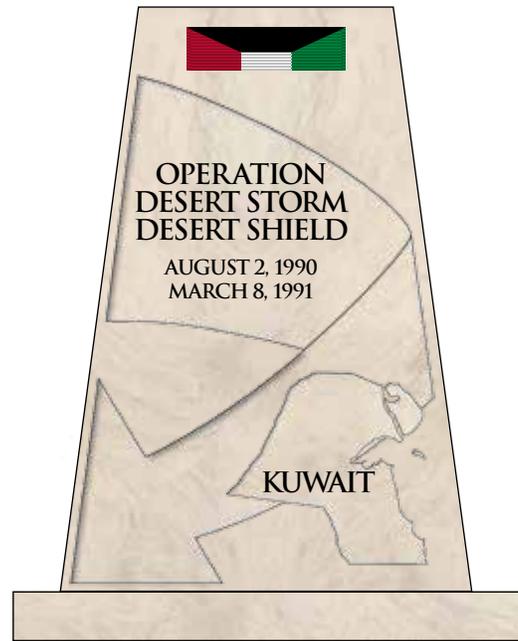


New Memorials Coming to the Memorial Grounds

The Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum is pleased to announce efforts to fund two new memorials. We have a design for a Desert Storm/Desert Shield memorial and a combined memorial for Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom and the Global War on Terrorism to honor all of those who have served in the Middle East conflicts for their country. We at the Veterans Memorial will continue to make sure no veteran is forgotten through the memorials to all those who fought and those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country.

The combined OIF/OEF includes a tribute to the Global War on Terror Veterans who served in multiple countries, which are routinely forgotten in the shadow of Iraq and Afghanistan, including countries like Yemen, Djibouti, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and dozens of other countries. And we must not forget those who served to support the war effort in the United States, veterans served away from their families across the globe who despite not being in direct combat, still played essential roles in the War on Terrorism. This is why we chose the “globe”

artwork as its symbol. If you would like to help, donations can be made to the Veterans Memorial Shrine and Museum. Just denote that you would like your donation to be directly applied to the Middle East Memorials. We thank our community partners for their continued support.





Pearl Harbor: Japanese Midget Subs

by Robert Thomas, Museum Curator

On December 7, 1941, during the earlier hours of the morning, the Imperial Japanese Navy sent five submarines carrying five midget submarines near western approach of Oahu. The five midget submarines launched with a two man crew and armed with two torpedoes. The midget subs were to approach and penetrate the harbor defenses of Pearl Harbor. They would then wait for the air attack. Only two successfully enter the harbor.

The first submarine would be spotted by a minesweeper and reported. The destroyer USS Ward DD-139 arrived in the area and after a search, they spotted a periscope out the water. At 6:45am, the USS Ward opened fire with its 5" gun and struck the conning tower. This sank the midget sub immediately, and the USS Ward dropped depth charges before reporting up the chain. The US Navy destroyed an enemy sub before the surprise raid strikes.



Sub two entered the harbor and at 7:50am, it would be spotted near the USS Medusa. The ships in the harbor began to attack it when the Japanese planes arrived overhead. It would be hit in the conning tower by the USS Curtis at 8:40am, but it would fire one torpedo at the destroyer, USS Monaghan and miss. The USS Monaghan would ram the sub at 8:43am and drop depth charges which destroyed the sub.

Sub three would enter the harbor and join the air raid. It would fire both torpedoes, one striking the



USS Oklahoma and the other striking the USS West Virginia. The sub would retreat to the West Lock to wait for a time to escape the harbor. The crew would send a message of success to the mother submarine that evening, but the crew would realize they were not going to escape. They committed suicide to evade capture, and the sub remained on the bottom of the lock. The sub would be found in 1944 when the harbor was dredged after a tragic accident of several transports exploding with ammunition. All the damaged equipment would be dumped outside the harbor to clear it for operations. This would not be discovered until the sub wreckage was found in 2003. The sub had no torpedoes and minimal damage.

The fourth sub was spotted and depth charged near the entrance. It was sunk from a close explosion which damaged the sub.

The fifth sub that left late, the result of gyroscope issues which gave it trouble entering the harbor entrance. It would get depth charged which only

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Pearl Harbor *Continued from page 6*

knocked the crew unconscious. After some time they revived, but the sub had drifted to the eastern end of the island. The crew set the sub to self-destruct, but it was not effective. The charge did knock out the crew and killed one of them. The second one would wash ashore and be captured by a Sergeant patrolling the beach. He would become the first Japanese POW and become shamed when this was revealed in Japan. The sub would be pulled ashore by tractors and taken as a war prize.

Veteran Community Mourns Death of a Wonderful Friend

Allison Wheaton and husband Randy Strebiger were recently killed in a plane crash outside Ludington, Michigan. Allison was the founder of the Summit Equestrian Center in Fort Wayne and was instrumental in helping local veterans suffering from PTSD and other mental illnesses with equine therapy.

She was the lead person for "Trail to Zero" by Brave Hearts who sponsored 20 mile rides two years ago and last summer in Fort Wayne to help bring awareness for reducing veteran suicides. She had been the driving force behind this local program, and will be missed by all of us at the Veterans Shrine and Museum. God Bless her and Randy...what a terrible loss for our community and all Veterans who she had served.



Civil War Wreaths of Honor

by Tom Schmitt, Board Member

There are 22 headstones in the Civil War area of the National Veterans Shrine and Museum property. One of these is a revolutionary war Veteran, One is a War of 1812 Veteran, and twenty are Civil War Veterans. The Civil War veterans are from various Indiana Volunteer infantry, cavalry and naval units. These headstones are monuments only, there is no one buried on the property. These veterans were buried on the battlefield where they fell. These monuments have been placed here to honor them and all Veterans of the United States.

The flag flying directly behind this monument is a 34 star-flag, It is the flag that these men served under. It has 34 stars as President Lincoln would not allow the removal of the stars representing the Confederate states.

Indiana sent 210,000 Soldiers, Sailors and Marines to the Civil War, of these 2,130 were sailors and marines. They served in 308 engagements during the war. During the war 25,028 died, 7,243 in battle and 17,785 from disease. Approximately 48,000 were wounded in battle.





Legacy Bricks Installed on Front Of Chapel

by Bruce Lehman, U.S. Army Vietnam 1969-1970

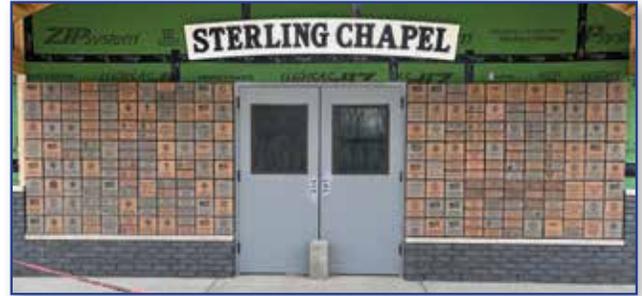
Mike Avila and his wife, Kim, have spent many days volunteering for the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum. It's possible that the recent hours they donated might be some of their most memorable ones, especially for Kim.

Kim's father, Robert Powers, served in WW II as a Navy coxswain. He had purchased a Legacy Brick years ago and with changes to our grounds and governance, it needed to be stored. On the day of the brick installation project, Kim had the honor of placing her father's brick on the wall.



"Mike is a great volunteer and has done various projects at the Shrine and Museum including the monument sign on O'Day road, the Vietnam walkway bricks, and now the Legacy Bricks," said Eric Johnson, 2nd Vice Commander of the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum.

Both Mike and Kim have a long history of military service in their families, including grand-fathers, fathers, and uncles serving honorably. Johnson went on to say, "It is an important milestone as those who have purchased bricks. Now, they can visit the chapel and see the dedicated work that has been done. This phase of the Legacy Brick Program was the work of a community of individuals dedicated to and honoring and remembrance of all veterans. Veterans have been waiting for a while to see their bricks and that time is now."



The front of the Sterling Chapel and entrance area features 230 Legacy Bricks in combinations of 4 x 8 inches and 8 x 8 inches. (The Legacy Brick Program does continue with other opportunities for placement around the memorial grounds*) Avila and a team of supporters, including Rick Porfilio, Sharon Hudson as well as volunteers Kim Avila, Becky Cummings, and Tim Koontz and a dedicated group of bricklayers finished the work of what Porfilio called a giant "Jigsaw puzzle." In a phone interview, Porfilio said, "We wanted to honor requests such as two friends or family members that wanted their bricks next to one another. It was meaningful project that all can be proud of."

There are bricks honoring veterans from WWI, WWII, Korea and Vietnam. It all ties to our mission, "Where no veteran will ever be forgotten."

A huge thank you to NEICA, and their affiliates: Bricklayers Local Members 4 IN/KY Glenn Head, Patrick Rowles, Joseph Mayer and Von Jefferson, Laborers Local 213.

*<https://thatsmybrick.com/vnmsm>



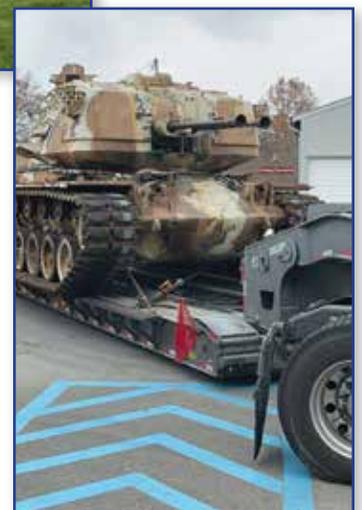
Arrival of new Artifact, the M247 “Sgt York”

by *Tim Schild, Board Member*

The Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum added our newest macro-artifact to the memorial grounds, a M247 “Sergeant York” self-propelled anti-aircraft vehicle (It’s a tank.) The M247 Sergeant York Division Air Defense (DIVAD) was a self-propelled anti-aircraft gun developed by Ford Aerospace in the late 1970s. A new turret with twin 40 mm M266 Bofors auto-cannons guided by radar was fitted, using the chassis of the M48 Patton main battle tank. The vehicle bears the name of the well-known World War I soldier, Sergeant Alvin York.

The Sergeant York was intended to fight alongside the M1 Abrams and M2 Bradley in the U.S. Army, in a role similar to the Soviet ZSU-23-4 and German Flakpanzer Gepard defending its units from incoming enemy aircraft. It would replace the M163 Vulcan Air Defense System SPAAG and MIM-72 Chaparral missile systems.

Despite the use of many off the shelf technologies that were intended to allow rapid and low-cost development, a series of technical problems resulted in the cancelation of the project in 1985. With only 50 of the M247s being produced and never being put in full service, this is rare and unique addition to our collection. It is available to view at the north end of the parking lot at the VNMS&M, though it’s very difficult to miss upon visiting us. We would like to thank Steve Crosby from Crosby Excavating for preparing the site for the new tank, and Lance Lattimer from TWAY Lifting Products for providing all the cables to pull the tank. We would also like to thank our donors who made it possible to transport the M-247 from Virginia: Ron Turpin, Chuck Surack Foundation, Bill Bean and David Long. Also to the Warrior Breed, American Legion Post 97 in Auburn, IN and Post 31 in Angola, IN.



M247 SERGEANT YORK



There is always something to do at the Veterans Shrine...

Volunteers are the backbone of everything we accomplish at the Veterans National Memorial Shrine & Museum. We are so blessed for the constant support we receive from the community. In August, the Fort Wayne TinCaps, full team and staff, offered a morning of service trimming trees, clearing brush, and completing heavy lifting chores to improve our grounds. In September, students from Indiana Tech offered deep cleaning of the Museum and grounds to help beautify our campus. A Middle School football team and Scout troop recently raked leaves for us. We also have two Scouts working with us to obtain their Eagle Scout status. Individual volunteers help each Wednesday with chores like cleaning and keeping up flower beds. Some volunteers enjoy working in the museum as greeters and helping in the gift shop. Several of these volunteers are training as tour guides in the W. Paul Wolf War History Museum.

Our volunteers are so valuable to us! If your small group or corporation is looking for a service project, let us know. We will certainly appreciate your help. Thank You,
Bonnie Davis, Volunteer Coordinator



The 7th & 8th grade football teams from Precious Blood, St. Elizabeth, St. John's New Haven, and St. Joseph Catholic Schools.



The TinCaps Baseball organization cleans up the memorial grounds.



Indiana Tech students Tron Wilson and Cooper Musseman with 2nd Vice Commander Eric Johnson





Did You Know...?

- In 1935 the U. S. Army collaborated with the Hershey company to develop a chocolate bar to provide American soldiers with a chocolate bar to sustain soldiers in an emergency. The officer in charge of this effort reportedly said, “it should taste little better than a boiled Potato.” It was so bitter and hard that soldiers would not eat it, so in 1943 this led to the development of Hershey’s Tropical Chocolate Bar, which was in continued use as late as 1991. This emergency food ration went to the moon with the crew of Apollo 15 in 1971.
- That of the 802 Southeast Asia POWs (661 military, 141 civilians/foreign nationals), most of the 472 held in North Vietnam were imprisoned in several locations, some longer than eight years. Some of the 263 POWs held by the VC in South Vietnam jungle camps were imprisoned for as long as nine years. There were also 31 prisoners held in Laos, 31 in Cambodia, and 5 in China (two of whom were held for over 19 years under horrible conditions).
- The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency lists 684 POWs returned home alive from the Vietnam War – the majority after the U.S. pulled out of the war in 1973. (The war officially ended April 30, 1975). As of early 2023, there are 1,582 Americans still unaccounted for, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.
- Veterans are more likely to be in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) than non-veterans. 8% of veterans are employed in a STEM field compared to 6% of non-veterans. California is home to 10% of all veterans in the STEM workforce.

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Dave McComb Donates Golf Cart

Thanks to Dave McComb, the Shrine has a new Club Car Golf Cart. This late model Club Car is all-electric and comes with a charger, too. Dave was kind enough to offer us this newer model golf cart to help transport our guests to and from the memorials in the park. This particular cart was purchased from Pine Valley Golf Club and refurbished at Bill Miller Golf Carts. Thanks Dave for thinking of us. We do appreciate your donation.



*“Joe, yestiddy ya saved my life an’ I swore I’d pay ya back.
Here’s my last pair of dry socks.”*



Ways to Support the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum

Thanks to all of our donors who made a donation in calendar 2023! Your support this year is greatly appreciated and is essential in meeting our mission of “No veteran will ever be forgotten.”

You can also make contributions online at www.honoringforever.org or by scanning the QR code on this page.

Memorials given in 2023 for:

Archie Bristow
Bennie Braswell Sr.
Fred Ireland
Gordon Richardson
John M. and Flora Snyder
Bobby Walradth

Thrivent Choice Deadline

The Thrivent Choice deadline is rapidly approaching for members to give to the organization of their choice! Thrivent Members, don't forget you can direct your Thrivent choice dollars to us at our official incorporated name of War Veterans Memorial Shrine of American History Inc. Get your designation submitted by March 31, 2024.

<https://www.thrivent.com/about-us/membership/thrivent-choice>

#thriventchoicedollars #thankyou

Kroger Cares and You Can Too!



Do you want to help the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum without doing anything besides your normal grocery shopping? You are able to do this by using Kroger Community Rewards! It doesn't cost you a thing and Kroger will donate a percentage from your grocery bill to us.

To Use the Kroger Community Rewards Program: Visit <http://www.kroger.com>. Once logged into their Kroger account, search for “War Veterans Memorial Shrine of Amer History Inc.” either by name or MK539 and then click Enroll. New users will need to create an account which requires some basic information, a valid email address and a rewards card.

- Customers must have a registered Kroger rewards card account to link to your organization.
 - If a member does not yet have a Kroger rewards card, please let them know they are available at the customer service desk at any Kroger.
- REMEMBER, purchases will not count for your organization until after your participants register their rewards card.

Participants must swipe their registered Kroger rewards card or use the phone number that is related to their registered Kroger rewards card when shopping for each purchase to count.

★ Donations Accepted ★

The Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum operates solely on donations from our community. We also welcome in-kind donations. As a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization, donations can be made to “War Veterans Memorial Shrine of American History, Inc.” Our EIN # is 35-1300823. All donations are tax deductible in accordance with IRS regulations.



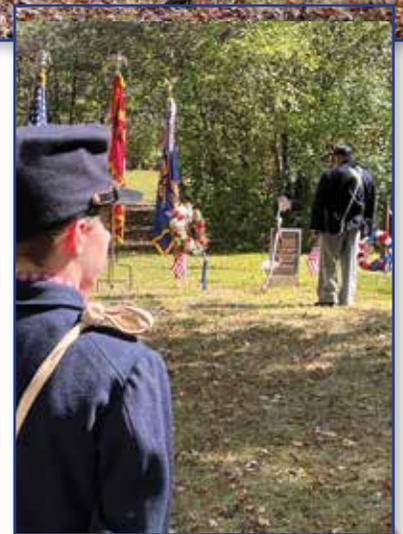
[Donate Online](#)

Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum Pays Tribute to Civil War Soldiers and New Monuments

September 30th was a special day in Civil War History in Fort Wayne. Starting at 11 am at Lindenwood Cemetery Section S2 there was a special ceremony to recognize a new headstone for Daniel H. Amsden, Company B 12th Indiana Cavalry. He had been buried in an unmarked grave since 1881. Having recently discovered who the grave belonged to, Tom Schmitt from the Veterans Memorial Shrine and Museum arranged to have a new headstone made for Mr. Amsden and notified his family of his final resting place and ceremony on Saturday, September 30th which they attended.

Upon completion of the ceremony at Lindenwood Cemetery, the dedication ceremony moved to the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum at 2122 O'Day Road. The second ceremony of the day was the dedication of the Sultana Monument at the Veterans Memorial Shrine Park. On April 27, 1865, the United States experienced its worst maritime disaster in history. Mere weeks after the Civil War came to an end, the steamboat Sultana exploded and sank in the Mississippi River, killing an estimated 1,700 Union soldiers who had just been released from a prisoner of war camp and were on their way home.

The third ceremony was the dedication of the newest Civil War monument donated by Chris Bickel and her late husband Glen. This beautiful 6 ft high black granite monument honors all who served during the Civil War.





Four Freshmen Appear at the Vietnam Memorial Wall



The singing group the Four Freshmen were in Fort Wayne for a series of concert performances at the Grand Wayne Center on September 22nd and 23rd. They were celebrating their 75th Anniversary of their musical influence throughout the world. On Friday morning September 22nd they came to the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum and sang the Stars Spangled Banner at the wall in front of fans and veterans alike.

A three day convention was held in Fort Wayne September 21-23 by the Four Freshman Society. The Four Freshmen performed their first professional engagement at the 113 Club owned by Jack Eisner, which was located on the same property where the Grand Wayne Center sits today.



Did You Know...?

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- The first woman to serve in the military posed as a man. In 1781, Deborah Sampson enlisted in the Army with a fake male identity. She went undetected until she sustained multiple injuries in battle and her identity was discovered. She was the only woman to earn a full military pension for participation in the Revolutionary Army.
- During the early years of this nation, the U.S. Army oversaw exploring and mapping The United States. The Lewis and Clark Expedition was an all-Army affair. Army officers were the first Americans to see such landmarks as Pike's Peak and the Grand Canyon, and the first Americans to reach the Pacific Ocean. Lewis and Clark's team mapped uncharted land, rivers, and mountains. They brought back journals filled with details about Native American tribes and scientific notes about plants and animals they had never seen before, and opened the door to the country's westward expansion.

Veterans Host Volunteer Luncheon

On Wednesday October 25th the Veterans Memorial Shrine and Museum hosted our first annual volunteer luncheon. It was held in the new Event Center which has been converted in the space occupied by the old museum.

Bonnie Davis, our Volunteer Coordinator set up the entire event. We want to thank all the volunteers who attended and hope those that couldn't make it will come to our next luncheon. One of the highlights to the gathering was Tom Schmitt's background on the Civil War uniforms, hats and how the Marine Corp really came about through the United States Navy! Tom, who is a Board Member and a Civil War aficionado, gave an entertaining and educational spin to the rules and regulations associated with the Civil War period. Good friends, good food, and good program!



Return to Vietnam Part 2

By Greg Banicki MS, LMFT ASA Spec 5 O4B Vietnam 1972-Board Member

As I reflect on my recent visit to Vietnam, I'm amazed at how quickly the three months have passed since I spent two weeks (9/2 – 9/17) travelling the country on a tour with Vietnam Battlefield Tours (VBT).

In response to the question, "How was your trip.," I have struggled at times to find enough words to describe it. To say it was awesome, unforgettable, informative, eye-opening, happy, sad with bittersweet moments, and filled with mixed emotions was just part of my experience. At times, it was a slightly disorienting ride in the Wayback machine.

I can say without a doubt that my second tour in Vietnam was less dangerous, less frightening, and less confusing than my first tour. I was able to see and enjoy the country with little stress and anxiety.

Yet there were some challenging moments for me on this tour... at the tunnels of Cu Chi, on the visit to the War Remnants Museum, and at the battered and shattered school building in An Loc, where the NVA offensive in III Corps was halted in 1972.

My travelling companions were all great people. There were seven Vietnam veterans on this tour. The VBT coordinators were VN veterans and have been there many times over the years. In addition, there were three couples (one from Ireland) and two middle east WOT vets with us. Pappy (Patrick) is a retired Army sergeant-major who was working on his PhD in history and was doing research for his dissertation. He served in both Iraq and Afghanistan as a platoon leader with Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and his father was a Navy pilot who flew missions in Vietnam. We hit it off and shared a couple of interesting adventures together.

The flight took about sixteen hours, but the jet lag was not too bad after we arrived at Tan Son Nhat (TSN) airport and took our first bus tour of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). On the way into the city, we stopped at the old French racetrack and what is left of the old 3rd Field Hospital. Later, we checked



into the Northern Hotel which was our base of operations whenever we were in Saigon.

What I first noticed after we arrived in Saigon was the absence of soldiers and military vehicles, diesel fumes, cyclos, and the old blue and cream-colored Peugeot taxis. There were few hostile looks as we encountered people along the way. I was also amazed and surprised by the number of modern office buildings and skyscrapers in Saigon, and later in Nha Trang. When I last saw Saigon, I think the tallest building was either the Caravelle hotel or Majestic hotel. Now it's Landmark 81, with 81 floors and four floors of shopping, and it's only the tallest of many.

Back in 1972, I spent quite a bit of time driving around, through and beyond the city on official trips to the American bases of Bien Hoa, Long Binh, and some other places in III Corps. I thought I would

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Return to Vietnam

Continued from page 14

remember TSN and Saigon (HCM City) well. However, no way. It's not the Saigon I knew back then.

Hell, it's not the same Vietnam where most Vietnam veterans served from 1961-1973.

During the two weeks we were in-country we travelled from Saigon (MR III) to My Tho in the Delta (MR IV) and up to Pleiku and Kontum (MR II), and back to Saigon. There is very little of the American military footprint left in Vietnam except for crumbling runways and other broken-down leftovers. Time takes its toll on everything. That's for certain.

While Vietnam is governed by a one-party communist system, it appears the government is no longer as oppressive as it once was and there is less interference in the lives of most people, at least on the surface. Most of the Vietnamese people we met along the way seemed genuinely happy and were glad to meet us. When they learned we were U. S. Vietnam Veterans, the friendly welcome was astonishing. We had no issues wearing our Vietnam Veteran caps while on the tour.

The final victory for the North in 1975 was on obvious display in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), and in other cities and some more rural areas we visited. The Vietnamese flag is red with a yellow star and is seen almost everywhere. Monuments to their soldiers and battles fought against the French and Americans are found in public parks and plazas. It was disorientating and a bit of a shock at first to see them.

Although it was the rainy season in the south, we were fortunate to have very few days of rain and it never slowed us down when it did rain. The temperatures were consistently in the high 80's and low 90's in Saigon, and a bit cooler in the highlands.

For our first excursion, we headed south to My Tho in the Mekong Delta. On the way we passed the site of the former Nha Be Naval Base. We travelled by bus, then on a boat trip down the Mekong River

to Thoi Son Island. All in all, it was a good introduction to life in the Delta, which was the AO of the 9th Infantry Division during the war.

Our Vietnamese guide, Mr. Phi was born there during the war years. He said life was very difficult after the Americans left and the VC took control, and things only began to get better when some time had passed following reunification. Mr. Phi was efficient, friendly, and knowledgeable about the history of Vietnam and the French and American Wars; he was indispensable on our travels to the places we visited in southern Vietnam. Mr. Phi always brought his tablet, and he was able to show us photos of how the bases and places we visited looked so many years ago.

The next morning it was time to hit the road again and head to Tay Ninh. As we continued our journey it was as if the ghosts of war were beginning to join us. On our way northwest to Tay Ninh, we stopped at the old Phu Loi Airbase and walked around the deteriorated runway, then drove up through Ben Cat and Lai Khe. Near Lai Khe we stopped where there once was an airfield, and landing pads where helicopters used to take off and land. Only a crumbling runway here too, along with a broken down old French bunker. Then we travelled on through the Michelin rubber plantation, Hobo Woods, and the Iron Triangle.



After spending the night in Tay Ninh, we visited the Cai Dai temple complex, had lunch at a restaurant owned by Ms. Tuyet, a female VC war hero. On the road again we passed by Nui Ba Dinh (aka Black Virgin Mountain), a 3000-foot mountain that

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Return to Vietnam

Continued from page 15

was occupied top and bottom during the war by the Americans. However, the center had a cave system, and the enemy owned the caves.

We also stopped at the Cu Chi Tunnel system on the way back to Saigon. The Vietnamese government basically operates this area as a living history exhibit, with re-enactors dressed in VC uniforms. Part of the tunnel system was located under the base camp of the 25th Infantry Division and the tunnels were used to hide and move fighters around, and to harass and fight American soldiers.

Interestingly, many of the tourists we saw there were younger Vietnamese. An exhibit was set up to show and demonstrate how the VC used booby traps to fight the war against the Americans. Several stations featured improvised booby traps which would result in gruesome wounds. Those were hard for me to look at without thinking of the terror and pain they caused to our troops.

The next day, back in Saigon, we went to the War Remnants Museum (formally the War Crimes Museum) and visited the old Presidential Palace (now Reunification Hall), and several other places of interest in the city.

The War Remnants Museum is a well-curated, well-organized museum, even though it only tells the story from one side, one perspective, one interpretation of history, for the victors get to write their own history. In many ways, it tells a horror story for them and for us. I made myself go into the Agent Orange exhibit room there, and for many reasons that exhibit nearly broke me. I wept for the first time in a long time as I felt compassion for the illness and suffering many of our vets continue to deal with, and for all the Vietnamese people who were tragically harmed by this poison dropped on Vietnam.

Our group travelled by air-conditioned bus most of the time (w/o window screens), except when we flew up to Pleiku (MR II) at the end of our first week. Our bus driver drove all night to meet us there the next morning.

In MR II we went to the site of the former Camp Enari near Dragon Mountain and Pleiku, which was the main base for the 4th Infantry Division. Once again, we could only find remnants of a crumbling runway at the former airfield there. But we could stand not too far from Dragon Mountain, look to the west and see the dark and formidable A Shau Valley, where many battles were fought with the NVA.

From there we headed south to Quy Nhon, first stopping at the Vinh Son Orphanage for Montagnard children in Kontum, and then passing the old Kontum MACV compound, which is still occupied today. I was really pleased we visited the orphanage because I have been a supporter for the past several years. I was surprised and elated when I learned it was on our itinerary to visit.

The next day we headed down to the coast on Highway 19 and over the Mang Yang Pass, where Mobile Group 100, a French task force, was effectively wiped out in June of 1954. We stopped and walked around a large memorial to the Viet Minh soldiers who fought there. Some of those coastal roads are still very steep and dangerous. Our bus driver was awesome. We overnighted in Quy Nhon and left the next morning to head down Hwy 1 to Nha Trang.

On our way to Nha Trang we saw the remnants of Tuy Hoa Airbase and temple ruins of the Cham people, who ruled the area from the 5th to the 12th century. We stayed in a very nice upscale hotel in modern Nha Trang near the beach and we had one full day there on our own. I had free time to roam around the city and take photos of the people and the sights.

Our return trip to Saigon was along the coast of the South China Sea to Phan Thiet and it was so incredibly beautiful.

That next night, nearing the end of our tour, we stayed at the Seahorse Resort at Mui Ne/Phan Thiet. Then on the road again to Saigon for our final day, passing by the former locations of the Phan Thiet Airbase, and Bien Hoa and Long Binh military bases. We made a stop near the perimeter

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Return to Vietnam

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of the old Bien Hoa airfield to hold a ceremony honoring Major Dale Buis, the first American soldier killed in Vietnam on July 8, 1959.

We arrived back in Saigon and had some free time in the afternoon, the day before our flight back to the states. Pappy and I decided to go to a sort of used parts flea market that sold all kinds of stuff, and we were told old war relics might be found there. Arriving near closing time, we found a stall heaped with things that had what we were looking for. Pappy found an NVA helmet badge for the pith helmet he was taking home. I homed in on a big pile of things that I quickly looked through, and found about a dozen Montagnard bracelets, an old Zippo lighter left behind by a GI, a Marine's lost dog tag, and miscellaneous military pins that have been donated to the museum.

After we left the market, we walked to the (famous) Caravelle Hotel and went up to the 12th floor bar open to the outdoors. The Caravelle was the hotel where reporters stayed and drank their cocktails after the infamous 5 o'clock follies and watched the war at a distance. It was a fitting view for a drink on our last evening in Vietnam. Later, the tour group met for a final dinner to celebrate the memories made and honor our journey. A table was set up and arranged for the "missing man".

The trip finally crystallized into a magic moment for me on that last morning before our flight home. Mr. Phi went above and beyond the call of duty when he searched for and discovered the location of the Davis Station compound, near the old flight line at Tan Son Nhut, where I was stationed in 1972.

With only hours before our flight left for the U. S., Mr. Phi hired a cab that took us to a Vietnamese army base near the TSN airport complex. It took three attempts at three different gates to get in. After being allowed in by a friendly guard, then driving in and walking a short distance, it was

stunning to see that there was mostly nothing I recognized there, and I felt disoriented.

Davis Station, the HQ for the 509th RR Group (ASA), where I spent much of my tour, was outside of Saigon, right next to the airbase flightline. As with the sites of other American bases and installations, there was almost nothing left of our presence there. When we finally found the location, I could literally see and feel the passage of time. It was amazing that I still thought I would recognize anything. Mr. Phi told me that the small Buddhist shrine we visited there was erected where a memorial to Sp. 4 James T. Davis had once stood. Davis was the first ASA soldier KIA in 1962. He said Davis was honored in some way by the Vietnamese who lived there.

I burned incense at the shrine and offered up a prayer for the soldiers and civilians lost in our war, and a prayer of thanks and hope for the future. Without exaggerating the significance of my visit there, I believe I was able to find some part of myself I left behind after my first tour, and dropped off some baggage better left there this time. This really was a healing journey for me, and my time in Vietnam had come full circle.

Strange indeed.

It took going back to Vietnam for me to finally come all the way home. So while we can never forget the past, we can decide to forgive our former enemy as well as ourselves!



Buddhist Shrine at the location where Davis Station used to be.