

Action Report

Subject: Memorial Day Writer's Project (MDWP)

Activity: Poetry, Prose and Song on the Mall

Date: May 28, 2007

Location: Washington, DC

(behind the sidewalk facing 20th Street and Constitution Ave.)

Weather: Overcast, warm, muggy.

It was a good day. We had three guitar-toting Forward Air Controllers, two singers/songwriters, a harmonica player, two journalists and eleven poets. We missed some old friends and welcomed some new friends. To all of those who could not be with us, we think of you often and wish you the best.



Chaplain/poet **Gerald Ney** (173 Airborne) started us off with an invocation. **Holly Watts** (Donut Dolly, 67/68, 3rd Marine Amphibious Forces, Chu Chi, DaNang, An Khe, and Phu Bie) broke the ice with a poem entitled “47 W,” a touching poem about a veteran’s first visit to the Wall. Holly brought her new chapbook “Mud Sox ‘n Other Things.” Proceeds from her chapbook are being used to help support the production of a soon-to-be-released documentary entitled “*A Touch of Home: The Vietnam War’s Red Cross Girls.*” Ask her about it. Holly can be reached at hollywatts@yahoo.com.

Rich Barrett (USMC) read from an article he wrote, which recently appeared in “*VietNam Magazine.*” Rich’s five-page article is about the highly decorated, Medal of Honor winner Bud Day and fellow POW John McCain.

Jonathan Myer, Dave MacKay and welcomed newcomer **John Ojala** (from Detroit) and serenaded us with tales and true stories about the life of a Forward Air Controller (FAC) over Laos, I Corps and the DMZ. They did two sets throughout the day. A listing of song titles (with commentary) is presented at the end of this report.

Co-founder **Mike McDonell** (USMC) read from the MDWP Anthology, “*Magilla,*” Mike’s first poem about Vietnam—a poem about James McGill, Panel 20E, Line 105. While thumbing through an old notebook, Mike came across some poems he forgot he had—poems not heard before at the Writer’s Tent. We’re glad he found them. It was a pleasure to hear these gems.

Gerald Ney read several poems sent to him including “*Visiting Hours*” by Jim Rose, President, Galveston County Chapter 685, VVA President, and member Army Transportation Association Vietnam; “*Return to Nowhere*” by E. T. Thomas and “*A Vietnam Wife,*” by Mary Rogers, as well as several of his own poems.

First timer **Dick Richards** (USN) stopped by to read with us. Dick gave us some insight to the Navy’s point of view. Dick read “*Staying On Station,*” “*Enjoy a Starry Sky Some Night,*” and “*To Know the Love, To Know the Pain.*” We hope Dick will join us again

Our host **Dick Epstein** got a couple poems in between set-ups. Dick read two new poems written by Clyde Wray and one of his own poems "Room 3 A," depicting a typical night in Saigon (during Tet of '68).

Gary Jacobson (1st Cav) flew in from Idaho. It was Gary's first visit to the Wall. Gary read from his book "*My Thousand Yard Stare.*" This is a whopping 270-page book of poetry and color photos. You can find his work on <http://pzzzz.tripod.com/namtour.html> or does a goggle search on his name. Thanks for joining us Gary.

Singer/songwriter **Alexandria Lajoux** came to sing and spend the afternoon with us. We could hear her harmonizing with the FACS throughout the day. She passed out copies of her CD and sang its title song "We Thank You." Alexandria was accompanied by a guitar strumming voice student (a young veteran, Rick Steele, who recently served in Iraq). Rick did a great job singing John Lennon's "Imagine." Visit Alexandria's Web site www.AlexisMusicStudio.com/links. Alexandria and Rick did three songs. Maybe next year, we can get them to add another one.

It was good to have first timer **Odessa Maxwell** with us. Odessa is a West Point Graduate, mother of three and a dog trainer to boot. Odessa read several poems from her chapbook: "*Beautiful Woman Thou Art,*" "*Youthful Promise,*" "*Prayer for You,*" "*So Far So Close,*" and "*No Choice of His Own.*" Each poem is a story.

Now a certified old timer, **Terry Lockridge** read a poem written by author Doug Todd: "*That One Guy*" and "*I'll Find Someone for You.*" A touching poem about Robert Haines (KIA) and an old favorite: "*Do Not Stand at my Grave and Weep.*" Terry also told us of recently receiving a Bob's dog tags, which were purchased from a shop in Ho Chi Minh City by a group called the Cana Mission.

Steve McKennon, a local poet involved in Poets Anonymous, joined us for the first time. Welcome Steve. Steve read "*Dyslexic Postmen,*" "*Alien Landscapes,*" "*Homecoming vs. Dying Thoughts*" and "*Popcorn Sandals*"; all quite different from our battle scenes.

I saw old friend Joe Mitchler walk by twice. Sorry we didn't get to hear what he has been doing. Historian, author, and storyteller, **Lad Carrington** just got some metal rods tucked not too gently into his back. Lad won't be on his Harley for a while. We'll have to wait until a while to hear his "*Give me the Wind*" and "*Have you Seen my America?*" a poem about touring our country on motorcycle and his idea of what makes a hero.

Who else did we miss? Dolf Droge (NSA Specialist, advisor to Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, and former local talk show host), Ed Henry, Briah Conner, Clyde Wray, Roy Correnti, and Cathy Solomonson. We hope they will be again be with us soon.

That's a fairly accurate picture of what went on Memorial Day 2007. It was a good day. Hell, it was a great day, being together, honoring the memories of veterans we knew and those we didn't know. A day of honor and a day of remembrance. Thank you all for sharing yourselves, for raising your voices so that others won't forget, so that names on the Wall will never be just names.

Below is a listing of all of the songs sung by Forward Air Controllers Jonathan Myer, Dave MacKay John Ojala. Many of these songs are available on CD:

1. *Ba Muoi Ba*. Green Beret Barry Sadler's song about a Montagnard striker and how his enjoyment of Ba Muoi Ba ("33") beer would get him into trouble.
2. *Cobra 7*. Toby Hughes's story of a III Corps FAC who comes to the aid of a downed Army helicopter crew, at the cost of his own life.
3. *A Death in the Dak Na Valley*. Jonathan Myer's account of fellow-FAC Art Abramoff's last mission and ensuing rescue attempts of 20 January 1967.
4. *Different Missions*. EB-66 pilot Bill Rothas's poem about the loss of his Aviation Cadet classmate, F-105 pilot Dick Allee, on 21 December 1968.
5. *D-Day Dodgers*. An ironic response to Lady Astor's slur against the British Eighth Army, which fought its way up Italy during WW-II.
6. *O-1E Song*. F-105 pilot Irv LeVine's comparison of his role and risks with those of a "Bird Dog" FAC flying "low and slow" beneath his "Thud."
7. *One-Level Gunner*. Toby Hughes's look at the uneasy relationship between an F-4 unit and the NVA gunner assigned to shoot them down.
8. *Raven 20 and Scar*. John Ojala's ode to his brother-in-law Dick Defer (Raven 20) and his Hmong backseater "Scar," shot down over the Plain of Jars, Laos, on 18 October 1971. (See <http://www.ravens.org/dickdefer/defer.html>)
9. *Raven FAC Battle Hymn*. The Raven FACs' version of Dick Jonas's "Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats," in which they toast their own lost comrades.
10. *Raven FACero*. A ditty about a Raven FAC who loved not wisely but too well ... and paid the price. (Jim Roper swears it is not autobiographical.)
11. *Sher-Babes*. Toby Hughes's "love song" to his F-4 "Phantom II" (named after his wife), which took hits over Khe Sanh but still brought him home.
12. *Skin That Tiger*. Jonathan's ballad about a tiger-skinning for Soeur Marie Louise (director of Kontum's leprosarium for Montagnards), which He witnessed at Kontum's B-Team compound in the summer of 1966.
13. *Sycamore Tree*. Dave MacKay's allegory about Vietnam, "a friendly little country...run by the Cong" who were "a thorn in the side" of the U.S.
14. *Tchepone*. Toby Hughes's "cowboy tale" of an F-4 pilot inveigled into an air strike on that "peaceful" Laotian town -- and it's deadly response!

15. *Teak Lead*. A Red River Rats' song about their strike fighters' "Teak" callsign: So many "Teaks" were KIA that the Air Force retired the callsign!
16. *The Aging Pilot*. Jonathan's latest, about his transition from "dashing young man in his flying machine" to old codger in his second childhood....
17. *The Wall*. Green Beret Tim Murphy's haunting retrospective on the symbolism of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial -- "our Wall."
18. *"Willie" Willbanks' One-Man War*. Jonathan's memorial to FAC classmate Hilliard A. Wilbanks, the Air Force's second MOH awardee (and first awarded posthumously): Willie saved 100 ARVN Rangers and their U.S. Army advisers from an NVA ambush, but at the cost of his life -- a month before his DEROS.
19. *Young Covey*. A parody of the Kingston Trio's "Tom Dooley," this "Covey" (i.e., out-of-country) FAC is warned to be a mite more careful!
20. *Your Flying Special*. Jonathan's recognition of the bond between combat flyers and their aircraft -- may they "Bring all of you boys back home"!

Hope to see many of you again next Veterans Day. God Bless.
For information contact eppy1111@aol.com or visit our web site at www.memorialdaywritersproject.com