
Action Report

Subject: Memorial Day Writers' Project (MDWP)

Activity: Poetry, Prose and Song on the Mall

Date: May 26, 2008

Location: Washington, DC

(Behind the sidewalk facing the Washington Monument and a picturesque pond on one side and the large POW and American flag on the other side.

Weather: Warm and sunny.

Note: The artwork you see scattered throughout the report is from the winners of the VVA 227 Vince Kaspar Art and Poetry Contest for Northern VA high school students.

Several students took top honors in both Art and Poetry.

Memorial Day started with a hug from the AFVN Weather Girl. Anybody remember her? I graciously accepted the hug on behalf of USMC Roy Correnti and Briah O'Conner. Being based in Saigon, I remember watching AFVN and a rather alluring Weather Girl. She stopped by to say hi to Ed Henry. Too bad Ed!



It was a great day. We had one heavy-duty crooning guitar-toting Forward Air Controller (a FAC), a bluesy harmonica player, and ten author/poets (from FL, TN, NC, GA, MD, VA and PA). We missed many of our old friends and welcomed some new friends. To all of those who could not be with us, we do think of you and wish you the best. Jonathan Myer is recovering from heart surgery and we hope he's taking it easy.

Dave McKay (Covey 636) took up the slack for Jonathan and did a great job. Here is a listing of the songs played and sung Air Force style about sorties over Laos, Cambodia and the DMZ. Several songs date back to WWI, WWII and Lad Carrington says some of the songs were derived from the early days of the Irish.

Come and Join the Air Force
The FAC
Willie Wilbanks One Man War
Bird Dog Pilot's Heaven
Tally Ho
Old O-2 Pilot's Tale
The Immortal Marine
Hey Mr. Taliban
Get Me Out of Vietnam
Green Fields of France
Tarpaulin Jacket Medley
The Dying Covey



Christmas in the Trenches
Fighter Pilot's Christmas
Rozin the Beau

Chaplain/poet Gerald Ney (173 Airborne): absent. We have to wait for Veterans



Day for his stirring invocation and closing. We started out with several poems by Judy Gorman King. Judy came up from TN to be with us and she brought some great poems to share. Joe Finch (25th Aviation Battalion medevac pilot) told us of his recent wonderful work in helping to raise money for the new generation of wounded veterans. He read excerpts from his book Angel's Wing and told us of the frequent difficulties encountered when evacuating wounded soldiers by helicopter.

Lad Carrington rode his Harley in from NC to join Rolling Thunder and to spend the day with the MDWP. Aided by a cane made from a pool queue, Lad read from his new book Give Me the Wind and

he penned a new poem titled "*Another Wall*." Lad also read "*The Bivouac of the Dead*" by Ted O'Hara in 1847 and got Dick Epstein off to a good start in creating this report. Thanks Lad.

Smiling Holley Watts (Donut Dolly, '66-'67, 3rd Marine Amphibious Forces, Cu Chi, DaNang, An Khe, and Phu Bai) read a poem entitled "47 W," a touching poem about a veteran's first visit to the Wall. Holley brought copies of her chapbook "Mud Sox 'n Other Things" and read several pieces from it. Proceeds from her chapbook are being used to help support the production of a documentary entitled "*A Touch of Home: The Vietnam War's Red Cross Girls*." Ask her about it. Holley can be reached at holleywatts@yahoo.com. You can see a trailer of the movie at: <http://www.arrowheadfilms.com/atouchofhome.html>.



Florida Keys Tour Guide Ray Campbell came up to visit friends after a 6-year absence and read a poem in honor of his veteran brother "*A Red Pin*."

Several Vietnamese families with Chi Ba wearing her conical straw hat to shield her face from the sun (flashback time) stopped by to look at Dick Epstein's photo album displayed at the front of the tent. Both families purchased a copy of the MDWP Anthology.

Now, for the treat of the day: a bear of a man sat quietly in the back row of the audience and whispered to me in a gruff voice: "if I want to get up to the mic, how long do I have to wait?" Since I have the power (and he was a bigger than

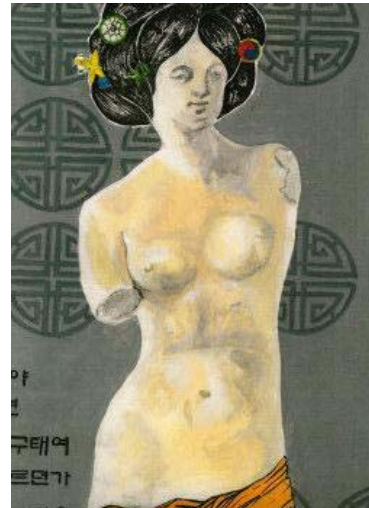


me) I told him he's next. That was our introduction to Master Sgt. Top Holland: veteran of The Big One (as they say) Korea and Vietnam. He said he joined the Army at the age of fourteen using his older brother's ID. He spent twenty-seven with the Army and did three tours in Vietnam with the Special Forces. I would have doubted his credibility, except he choked-up as he started to talk briefly about the "little people" he spent time with in the central

highlands. He did a poem from memory: "*A Red Ribbon for his Mother's Silver Hair*". I think John Wayne himself would have stepped aside to make room for him to pass. He is certainly a gem in the rough.

Terry Lockridge and his daughter spent the whole day with us. Terry told us of his recent work with returning veterans and read "*An Open Letter to Anyone Who Served in Vietnam*," by Julie Weaver. I appended Julie's fine letter at the end of this file. Take a look.

I spotted Mark Pankow in the audience with a friend and asked him several times if he would like to read. Mark did a poem from memory and he read a poem from Walt Whitman entitled: *The Wound Dresser*. Mike Basdavanos (who played several wonderful tunes on his harmonica) and also read from a book of Whitman about his encounter in Washington with a slave woman from Ethiopia. Mike first heard the poetry of the MDWP at Mariposa many years ago.



Co-founder Mike McDonnell (USMC) read from the MDWP Anthology, "Magilla," Mike's first poem about Vietnam; a poem about James McGill, listed on Panel 20E, Line 105. Mike also read a poem by Cathie Solomonson (*For You Bill*), Vince Kaspar (*Enough Hugs*), Rod 'Doc' Kane (*It's My Job*) and Roger Dorsey (*Panel 18E Line 115*). Dick Epstein



(although gravely ill) read a poem by co-founder Clyde Wray (*I Want to Write!*).

That's a fairly accurate picture of what went on Memorial Day 2008. 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. I Hope to see many of you again next Veterans Day. God Bless.

P.S. If anyone would like to make a donation to help pay for the tent, the address is:

MDWP
c/o Richard Epstein
1024 Stirling Rd
Silver Spring, MD 20901

(Scroll Down: letter to follow)



An Open Letter to Anyone Who Served in Vietnam

Dear Hero,

I was in my twenties during the Vietnam era. I was a single mother and, I'm sad to say, I was probably one of the most self-centered people on the planet. To be perfectly honest I didn't care one way or the other about the war. All I cared about was me how I looked, what I wore, and where I was going. I worked and I played. I was never politically involved in anything, but I allowed my opinions to be formed by the media. It happened without my ever being aware. I listened to the protest songs and I watch the six o'clock news and I listened to all the people who were talking. After awhile, I began to repeat their words and, if you were to ask me, I'd have told you I was against the war. It was very popular. Everyone was doing it, and we never saw what it was doing to our men. All we were shown was what they were doing to the people of Vietnam.

My brother joined the Navy and then he was sent to Vietnam. When he came home, I repeated the words to him. It surprised me at how angry he became. I hurt him very deeply and there were years of separation not only of miles, but also of character. I didn't understand.

In fact, I didn't understand anything opened my newspaper and saw the Vietnam veteran. The picture was of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in His countenance revealed the terrible As I looked at his picture and his tears, tiny portion of what you had given for done to you. I understood that I had but I also knew that I had failed to was like waking up out of a nightmare, nightmare was real. I didn't know what



until one day I anguished face of a taken at the opening Washington, D.C. burden of his soul. I finally understood a us and what we had been manipulated, think for myself. It except that the to do.



One day about three years ago, I went to a member of the church I attended at that time, because he had served in Vietnam. I asked him if he had been in Vietnam, and he got a look on his face and said, "Yes." Then, I took his hand, looked him square in the face, and said, "Thank you for going." His jaw dropped, he got an amazed look on his face, and then he said, "No one has ever said that to me." He hugged me and I could see that he was about to get tears in his eyes. It gave me an idea, because there is much more that needs to be said. How do we put into words all the regret of so many years? I don't know, but when I have an opportunity, I take's so here goes.

Have you been to Vietnam? If so, I have something I want to say to you Thank you for going! Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Please forgive me for my insensitivity. I don't know how I could have been so blind, but I was. When I woke up, you were wounded and the damage was done, and I don't know how to fix it. I will never stop regretting my actions, and I will never let it happen again.

Please understand that I am speaking for the general public also. We know we blew it and we don't know how to make it up to you. We wish we had been there for you when you came home from Vietnam because you were a hero and you deserved better. Inside of you there is a pain that will never completely go away and you know what? It's inside of us, too; because when we let you down, we hurt ourselves, too. We all know it and we suffer guilt and we don't know what to do so we cheer for our troops and write letters to "any soldier" and we hang out the yellow ribbons and fly the flag and we love America. We love you too, even if it doesn't feel like it to you. I know in my heart that, when we cheer wildly for our troops, part of the reason is trying to make up for Vietnam. And while it may work for us, it does nothing for you. We failed you. You didn't fail us, but we failed you and we lost our only chance to be grateful to you at the time when you needed and deserved it. We have disgraced ourselves and brought shame to our country. We did it and we need your forgiveness. Please say you will forgive us and please take your rightful place as heroes of our country. We have learned a terribly painful lesson at your expense and we don't know how to fix it.

From the heart,

Julie Weaver

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