

Action Report: Memorial Day Writers' Project
Activity: Memorial Day - A Tribute to all Veterans
Date: May 28, 2012
Location: The National Mall, Washington, DC
Constitution Ave. and 20 St. (behind the sidewalk
facing the pond)
Weather: Clear Sky, 90 degrees



Memorial Day 2012 was certainly a little different than previous Memorial Days. Saturday morning (May 26), I went down to the Mall to meet with the tent crew, verify positioning of the tent in compliance with our permit, set up and test the sound system, and arrange the chairs. Nancy Lynch Steele (*“Letters to Nancy”*) used the MDWP tent for her book sales on Sunday (the 27th) and all was well.

When I arrived on Monday morning (May 28), the tent, chairs, and audio equipment were gone. The MDWP banner and several boxes of books, as well as Nancy’s display boards, were left in a heap in the middle of the field. Luckily, a representative for the Department of Veterans Affairs was hunkered down in his air-conditioned travel van and he gave me the use of his 10 x 10 tent and I “borrowed” a few chairs from another abandoned tent. Thus, we had to operate in a much smaller space, too close to equally constrained neighbors, with few chairs and no audio equipment.

Several organizations left Saturday for home because of crowd control measures put in place by the Secret Service. The photograph at the top of the page shows the restricted access to the unsecured area where our tent was located. The veteran’s group from Massachusetts (who every year erects an oversize POW-MIA and American Flag) was asked to leave because their tent and flags were within sight of the Vietnam War Memorial (where the President was scheduled to speak).

Because of the President’s visit to the Wall, certain security measures were put into effect by the U.S. Park Police and the Secret Service:

1. There was no access to the restrooms adjacent to the Women’s Memorial.
2. There was no access to The Wall. That’s right! You could not walk in front of, visit, or lay a wreath at The Wall (*Our Wall!*).
3. There was no parking on Constitution Ave. until the conclusion of the event.
4. The public was allowed to cross Constitution Ave. only designated streets.
5. Tents were not allowed to setup in the area established by the Park Service permits.
6. All tents were relocated along the path facing the duck pond.

MDWP participants had to make a determined effort to reach our tent. Lacking a security pass, MDWP participants were denied permission to cross Constitution Ave at 20th St. and were told to cross at 18th St., then walk back to 20th St., carrying or dragging our gear. I crossed at 21st St. and followed a group of Red Cross workers. I was stopped by the police and asked for my pass. I told the officer I had a tent at the unsecured area and that’s where I was going. At 20th St. , I was stopped again and it was strongly suggested that I should walk down to 18th St. and enter the sidewalk there. I refused and created a little fuss. Secret Service personnel let me through.



By 4:00 PM Tuesday (May 29), it was finally explained to me that the Secret Service made an after hours request to the tent rental company that the VVA tent had to be removed from the Mall and the tent crew removed the MDWP tent by mistake. I can only assume the VVA tent had been erected early and was located in the designated secure area facing Constitution Ave. I learned this only after Nancy Lynch Steele threatened to call Vice President Joe Biden's office to look into the situation. (As an FYI, I immediately passed this information on to the tent rental company.)

Now, about the day's activities at the MDWP tent: Dick Morris and his wife, Barbara, set up a table in the shade across from our borrowed tent so that Dick's beautiful singing voice did not upset the people at a neighboring tent (Veterans of Foreign Wars). Larry Rock and his wife joined us for the first time. Larry recently interviewed 150+ WWII veterans and wrote a book about veterans who provided support for combat troops. Unfortunately, Larry had to leave early and couldn't stay. Doug Bergman arrived early and took to the streets and gave away signed 1st edition copies of his book "*Names I Can't Remember.*" Tom McLean came with his wife, two grandsons, harmonica, and guitar.

Jonathan Myer took up residence in the shade of our tent to sing throughout the day. James Stewart (aka Tanker) had a slight accident with his 100-year-old guitar and brought a younger, larger, and heavier guitar from his home in Ok. Local poet Maritza Rivera came to help out and read several poems from the perspective of the veteran's mother that she is. Steve Scuba (active duty male nurse at Walter Reed) brought his wife and read a touching story about a young Iraqi patient he got to know.

Dr. Fred Foote (also from Walter Reed) joined us on the Mall and read several interesting pieces. I met Fred the day before at a reading hosted by Ron Capps of the the Veteran Writer's Group at the Navy Museum. Old timer Gerry Ney didn't make the move to CA as of yet and came to participate with us. Local poet John Welsh read several new poems using his unique perspective and Bocar Moussa Ba,

President of African New Vision, brought his daughter and honored the *African Tirailleurs*, who fought in World War I, II, and SE Asia.

Since we had a more intimate group this year, our host, Richard Epstein, was able to squeeze in several of his own poems (at the request of several relatives who also made it to the Mall this year with two large trays of pastries for all.)

Before we left the Mall, I spoke with two veterans who stopped for a moment to look at the photos on our bulletin board. One had an artificial limb; the other was badly disfigured and burned. We talked about writing and their interest in our activity. They got the message that the MDWP was a place where fellow veterans of a different era welcomed them, appreciated their sacrifice, and were truly interested in hearing what they had to say. I also spoke with a member of the Army Signal Corps (in his snappy Army Blues), who stopped to listen for a while. Before he left, he called to us in his military voice and gave us a respectful salute.

At the day's conclusion, a handful of MDWP participants got together at the *Nam Viet* restaurant across the bridge in Arlington, VA for a drink, a relaxing meal, and good conversation. As we were preparing to leave, a smiling young face for the Secret Service told me to expect a fly-by of F-4s. Soon a lumbering C-130 made a pass over the Mall and was followed by a lower, larger, B-52. Quite a sight! I was waiting for the rumbling of explosions off in the distance. I am pleased to report there were no explosions.

Everyone who came deserves special thanks for making it to the MDWP tent to share their words, their stories, and their songs in tribute to our fellow veterans. Thank you all for coming. It was great to be with you again.

In their own words. The following was received as input to the MDWP After Action Report.



Dick Morris came early and started singing early: first, between our tent and the tent belonging to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, across from our tent, then his wife, Barbara, coaxed him back into our tent. We were occasionally drowned out by the speakers playing patriotic music behind our tent and we paused for the event speakers, as well as a long list of people invited to lay a wreath at the Wall. Here is what Dick had to say about the day on his blog <http://richardmorrisauthor.wordpress.com/2012/05/29/not-as-predicted/>.

Dick sang songs he wrote while in Vietnam: “Chanh Giao Cave,” a song about the Rockpile Operation of A Co. 2/5, a 13-day siege where 179 NVA were extracted from holes between the rocks; “Diggin A Hole,” about digging foxholes; “Bong Song Bridge,” a catchy tune about the time spent guarding the Bong Son Bridge; and “When’s The Sun Gonna Shine On Camp Evans?” about monsoon season at the northern HQ of the 1st Cav.



Jonathan Myer flew the Cessna O-1E “Bird Dog” in the Republic of Viet Nam as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) in between his second and third F-101B/F “Voodoo” all-weather air defense interceptor assignments in the U.S. As a FAC, he flew the O-1E mostly in II Corps’ Kontum Province in the Central Highlands, but with 3-1/2 weeks at Dong Ha in I Corps, flying over the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between South and North Vietnam. Most of his songs derive from his FAC tour; they are listed and described at the end of this report. Jonathan says that, “Like the proverbial salesman who sold his product at a loss, but made it up on volume,” because (what with the heat and delays and Presidential preemption) he only got to do half his planned repertoire — he’s made his Song Notes twice as long.



Tom McLean and his two grandchildren gave a surprise presentation of typical questions posed by the younger generation and Tom supplied the answers. Tom served in Qui Nhon as an MP and was one of the early participants of the MDWP in 1993. Tom sang several of his signature songs before he had to head back early. Tom sang “We Were There,” “Flashes,” and “An Aging Veteran.”

We’re still waiting for Tom to bring a CD of his recorded songs. In the mean time, you can hear Tom songs on the MDWP Website.



James Stewart, a tank commander, hopped a train from Oklahoma to visit the Wall and to participate with his friends the MDWP. Jim played several songs on his guitar throughout the day and got all us all to sing along. Some of Jim’s music is also on the MDWP Website.

Jon Welsh shared the day with us and read three poems. His first poem, “Light Brigades,” criticized the ease with which politicians and the public send soldiers to war and then fail veterans and their families when they return home. Next he read “My Name Was Mohammed,” a poem about the forgotten civilian casualties of war. He closed his reading with “Inauguration Poem,” calling for a world of peace and order, the end of selfishness, hatred and mean speech.



Fred Foote read several poems based on his experience at Walter Reed as a physician. Fred is starting a poetry workshop and open mic for veterans being treated at Walter Reed and I hope to join him there.

Larry Rock had to head home early, but here is a little about his forth coming book, “*The Tooth and the Tail*.” This is an oral history in which the support troops tell the previously untold story of what they did in Vietnam. Support troops are defined as men who, while they may find themselves in combat situations, have a primary responsibility to support the combat troops. For the combat troops to eat it, drink it, shoot it, throw it, walk on it, sleep on it or talk through it, somebody has to get it to him. And for him to get there and back, somebody has to drive him, fly him or sail him. The some bodies that do that are the support troops, America's Hidden Army.



Gerry Ney was OIC of an Imagery Interpretation Section in the 172nd Military Intelligence Detachment with the 173rd. Gerry's poems included "The Leaf Rider," "The Haunted Dream," "In Memory of Skip," "Purple Leaves," "On the Road to Ollie," "Nothing Uplifting About Uplift" "The Armpit of the Armpit," "Vietnam Lowdown In-Country Backstabbin' Backside Fraggin' Cook Cuppa Coffee Blues," and "Gone With the Grin."

Maritza Rivera (in her own words): Joining the MDWP on Memorial Day posed quite a challenge.



Barricades on Constitution Ave. required a bit more prowess than I had anticipated. I found an opening and made my way across the street only to be met by a Secret Service agent who admonished me for such audacity. I found the MDWP tent but unlike other years, it was quite small, no sound system, and just a few chairs. Hmm, something was not quite right. And what about the large American and POW/MIA flags? I wondered why they weren't flying? I was greeted by a small and intimate gathering of Veterans and supporters. There were stories, poetry, and song despite the obvious changes in

location and amenities.

Maritza read *Witness*, a poem inspired by a program that Richard Epstein, Joy Matthews and I attended at the White House Executive Office Building (EOB) on November 16th, 2011, which was sponsored by NEH. The program was titled: Using the Humanities to Support the Veteran Community. The poem is forthcoming in the July issue of *Sojourners* magazine.

She also read from her chapbook titled "*A Mother's War*" starting with "*Camouflage*," a poem about the sights, sounds, and emotions as a group of veterans prepare for deployment overseas, "*Semper Fi*," a poem about receiving a son's last letter "Maritza and Richard joined each other in reading two of their poems, "*Encounter in Two Voices*" and "*Walk Tight/Hang Loose*."

No matter the obstacles faced this year, it was important for me to join the MDWP in honoring the service and sacrifice of so many. At one point in the afternoon, a butter bar lieutenant stopped by and raised his salute to those of us there and a young Marine and Veteran of the Afghanistan war stopped and stayed to listen. He had lost an eye in a roadside bomb attack and later shared how he could relate to the sentiments voiced by the Viet Nam Veterans. Mission Accomplished again this year! See you all on Veterans Day.

Richard Epstein, a microwave radio repairman with 1st Signal and technician with Page Communication Engineers, read: "A Sense of Honor" (about intruding thoughts imposed by the names on the Wall);



"Bang! Bang!" (a remembrance of playing cowboys and Indians as a young boy and the events of Viet Nam); "Strange Sounding Words," (a poem about the all too familiar names of cities and villages throughout Viet Nam and the memories that rise); "At The Writers' Tent," (a poem about the ceremonies at the Wall and at the MDWP tent); "Untangle Those Things," (a poem about the letting go of thoughts and emotions); and "Get Over It! (advise from Ed Henry and Richard's response).

Steve Scuba currently works with wounded veterans at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Steve told us of an encounter he has while in Iraq with a young female Iraqi patient who was distraught because she was told due to her injuries, she should not fast for Ramadan. To help ease the situation, Steve volunteered to fast in her place. The words used soon became a slogan, a bond, and battle cry of solidarity and pride.



Bocar Ba brought his daughter and read a tribute to the Senegalese Tirailleurs, sharpshooters, who fought alongside the French in WW I and WW II. Bocar extended his grateful thanks to MDWP participants and all veterans. Bocar's daughter received a stern lecture from Abraham Brown, a grizzly bear-sized soldier from the 1st Cav about the importance of listening to her parents, about not being "slick," and the importance of getting a good education.



Jonathan Myer's Song Notes

Jonathan Myer ("JM") claims that, between the 40° weather of 2011's Veterans Day and the 90° humidity of this Memorial Day — and the effects such "climate change" have on his guitar-playing fingers — the D.C. Mall is "no country for old men"; accordingly, he plans to grow younger for next time. In the event, as (1) this day had been chosen to mark the start of a 13-year commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War's duration, and (2) ten more KIA names were added to The Wall (and 12 others' status was changed from MIA to KIA, their remains having been recovered, identified and repatriated), his ballads would focus on the tragic side of the war: its cost in lives, and memories of some who had paid the ultimate price.

1. Warrior Bards. (By "Yodelin' Irv" LeVine; added verses by JM, 2008.) Tune: "Waiting for a Train.") This is Irv's (and Jonathan's) tribute to the relatively few Southeast Asia (SEA) War singer-songwriters whose repertoires include first-person accounts of that war's triumphs, tragedies, pain, and occasional insane humor:

*All across the country side, You'll hear them sing and play,
Those warrior bards from long ago, It seems like yesterday.
They'll sing you songs of fighting men On land and in the sky,
Of how it felt to live back then And have their good friends die."*

Irv took the war up through LBJ and McNamara; Jonathan added Nixon, Kerry, Fonda, and tells how "Congress left the South [Vietnam] bereft by cutting off the funds" — to show how "our" war ended.

2. 58,000 Names Carved in a Wall.

(Original poem "The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall in 58,000 Names" by Native American Johnnie Rainwater, whose tribal name means Warrior Princess. Tune by Jamie O'Hara, George Jones, et al., as "50,000 Names." Renumbered by Irv LeVine & JM to its current total: 58,282). Jonathan says, "In so many ways, this song is a sublime representation of what 'The Wall' means, not just to us Vietnam veterans but to the families of those whose names are on it, and to people who visit it from all over the

world. Maya Lin's design was controversial at first, condemned as a 'gash in the earth,' but its combination of simple design and methodical accounting for all known KIAs and MIAs steadily grew on people. I myself have gone from years fearing to visit it to strong emotion when I did, finding the names of fellow-FACs and others, and (thanks to Mike Sloniker, aka 'Loadhacker') even using its listing by casualty dates to identify an F-4 crew, Coyote 41, who had remained for me an anonymous loss for over 30 years. This song's very words, simple but universal, speak to the masses of people who visit 'Our Wall' every day, what they find there and what they leave behind: part of their very souls."

3. Answered: The 9-11 Call.

(By JM, Oct. 2001 & May 2011. Tune: "Battle Hymn of the Republic.")

Jonathan has been doing his "Answering the 9-11 Call" annually since October 2001 to memorialize the attack of that tragic day, promise retribution, and reaffirm the U.S.'s dual goals of Freedom and Democracy. Then, on May 1st of last year, 2011, that "9-11 call" was "answered" — by SEAL Team Six's raid on Osama bin Laden's refuge in Abbottabad, Pakistan. "Answered: The 9-11 Call" is the logical and historical sequel. Here, Jonathan blended both songs: the first and next-to-last verses of "Answering..." followed by all of "Answered..." to conclude with the original's final verse and chorus:

*Democracy and Freedom in the world of Western Man,
They've been our goals and destiny e'er since our land began.
People ... come from everywhere ... to join us if they can
— As Freedom marches on!
Life, and Liberty, and Happiness. [x 3]
— As Freedom marches on!*

As noted before, this song is neither anti-Islam nor anti-Muslim — but it is anti-terrorist, and specifically anti-OBL ... and it's good to know that "Allah" was on our side that May Day of 2011!

4. A Death in the Dak Na Valley.

(By JM, 1999. Tune: "Omie Wise.")

The first name in a list of FACs KIA is "Arthur J. Abramoff." Flying as Cagey 86 in a hilly area north of Kontum Province's Dak To town and air base, Art's Bird Dog was downed by ground fire as he was marking an enemy position on 20 January 1967. This ballad integrates the accounts of fellow-FAC De Vere Henderson (who took control after Art's crash), three of the two U.S. Army UH-1B "Huey" helicopters' four pilots who took part in the rescue attempt, and the combat journal of fellow-FAC Vance Leuthold. Art's Army Observer (LT Hull, a newly assigned Intelligence Officer) had survived the crash, crawled away to hide, and luckily was picked up by "Black Cat 606," the first Huey on-scene; Major Leuthold, who had boarded the second Huey "Mardi Gras 730" at Kontum, jumped out near the smoking wreckage ... but Art was beyond help. Leuthold was awarded a Silver Star for his action. Forty-five years later, Art's alma mater, New York University, dedicated a student lounge in its New York City downtown campus to his memory.

5. Different Missions.

(Poem by Bill Rothas. Tune added by JM: "My Pocketbook Was Empty.")

Bill Rothas was an EB-66 pilot while his Aviation Cadet classmate Dick Allee was flying the F-105 "Thunderchief" fighter-bomber (aka "Thud"). They had met for drinks the preceding evening at their Thailand base's Officers' Club, and Bill's poem is about the following day's mission: Bill was flying a routine stand-off jamming mission, while Dick was flying a lower-level air strike as "Scotch Two" — when his Thud was shot down. Dick's "Mayday" numbers gave his bearing (60 nautical miles east) of his TACAN navigation site (channel 89), "Crown" was the EC-130 ABCCC (airborne command, control and communications) aircraft for the area, and the "Sandys" were A-1E fighter-bombers used for rescue

support. The “different missions” of December 21, 1968, had different endings: Dick Allee was declared MIA (later KIA in the crash), while Rothas and comrades mourned that night at the O-Club. Rothas’s poem was published in the Air Force Times.

6. Hunting Trucks by Star Light.

(By JM, 1998. Tune: “The Great Speckled Bird.”)

O-1E FACs flew “Tally Ho” missions (over the DMZ) around the clock from July 1966 through May 1967, looking for signs of enemy activity and infiltration. Jonathan flew with them from late-September through mid-October 1966:

“At night with two of us flying in the “Bird Dog,” the back-seat pilot used a light-enhancing Starlight scope to look for trucks heading south on open stretches of road, while the front-seater flew the aircraft and controlled any air strikes. When we found one, we’d ask “Hillsboro” (our C-130 airborne command post) for C-130 flare-birds (“Blind Bats”) and fighters — to strike before the truck disappeared under jungle canopy. The odds were usually with the trucks, but not this time. This is the story of that mission, flown with “Salty” Harrison, in October of 1966. Even the enemy merits respect.”

7. Reunion. (By Toby Hughes.

Tune: “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”)

For several years, Toby Hughes (who flew the F-4C “Phantom II,” unit call sign “Sharkbait”) would annually post on our Red River Rats subnet the names of the 58 flyers he knew KIA in 1968, the war’s deadliest year. This is Toby’s powerful homage to his lost comrades and all others “who flew the skies of Southeast Asia,” and to the aircraft many of them flew: “. . . Thud and Phantom and Skyraider . . . Bird Dog, Jolly Green and Hun” — whose pilots and crews will “all meet at that final Great Reunion / And . . . fly with angels, out beyond the stars” — the combat flyers’ Valhalla.

8. ‘Willie’ Wilbanks’ One-Man War.

(By JM, 1997. Tune: “Jesse James.”)

On February 24th, 1967, Hilliard Almond Wilbanks was shot down near Di Linh in Lam Dong Province in the southern part of II Corps (South Vietnam’s Central Highlands) while warning a group of Vietnamese Army Rangers (and their U.S. Ranger advisors) of a well-prepared ambush by a larger North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) force. With no fighters immediately available (and Army helicopter gunships a few minutes too far away), Willie fired all his rockets to warn the Rangers and divert the enemy, then fired his M-16 rifle out of his O-1 Bird Dog’s side window at the enemy troops until he was hit and crashed. By his sacrifice he saved an estimated 130 Rangers from sure death. Eleven months later, he was awarded the Air Force’s second (and first posthumous) Medal of Honor (MOH) of the Southeast Asia War.

9. CAPT Dick Schaffert’s 2009 “Letter” to LCDR Norm Levy, KIA.

In a cover letter the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association (aka “Red River Rats”), Dr. Dick Schaffert, Captain USN (Ret.) and F-8 “Crusader” pilot (aboard the USS Oriskany during its three cruises, 1966 – 68) wrote, in part:

“During McNamara and Johnson's Operation Rolling Thunder, Oriskany's Air Wing 16 suffered the highest loss rate of all naval aviation units in the Vietnam conflict. We made three deployments and launched over 44,800 missions from Yankee Station. We lost 86 of our assigned 64 combat aircraft and 72 of our assigned 78 Naval Aviators; 59 were killed and 13 captured or missing in action. . . . The sustained courage and dedicated professionalism of Air Wing 16 air crews, demonstrated during and after Rolling Thunder, convinced President Nixon that an all

volunteer military was a viable option. He canceled the draft in 1973. . . .

"I lost two wingmen and two roommates during Rolling Thunder. Realizing their loss would likely be ignored or forgotten by "modern-day" America, I began writing an annual Memorial Day letter to the roommate whose Navy career had paralleled mine. . . . I've been able to email the last dozen letters to friends and other patriots who value their memories of those who died for our country. Having passed the actuarial age, this will be my last letter. It hasn't changed much. The cold hard facts of Vietnam and America's 'protest generation' remain unchanged and unfortunately unrecorded."

That last concern, however, is finally being addressed by the establishment of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration,* whose Proclamation** was read by the President this Memorial Day of May 28, 2011. In parallel, Jonathan Myer, who had read CAPT Schaffert's last letter to the MDWP audience in 2009, read it again for 2012. The letter is provided below. Norm Levy had died in the Oriskany fire of October 26, 1966.

* <<http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/>>

**<http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/assets/1/14/Presidential_Proclamation.pdf>

Letter to LT. Norm Levy

CAPT Dick Schaffert USN (Ret)
Last "Annual Letter" to his USS ORISKANY roommate, LCDR Norm Levy
(Died in the USS ORISKANY fire of 26 October 1966)
Written for Memorial Day, 2009

Lieutenant Commander Norm Levy,
Navy Fighter Squadron VF-111

Good morning, Norm,

It's Memorial Day, 7:29am Tonkin Gulf time. Haven't talked with you in a while. The USS ORISKANY, that magnificent lady on which we went through hell together, has slipped away into the deep and now rests forever in silent waters off the Florida coast.

Seems like a good day to make contact. This is the 43th year since I last saw you, sitting on the edge of your bunk in our room on ORISKANY. You remember . . . it was the 26th of October 1966.

We were on the midnight schedule. There was a solid wall of thunderstorms over the beach, with tops to 50,000 feet; but McNamara's Pentagon planners kept sending us on "critical" missions all night. At 4:00am, they finally ran out of trucks to bomb - in that downpour - and we got a little sleep.

The phone rang at seven; you were scheduled for the Alert Five. I had bagged a little more rack time than you, so I said I'd take it. I went to shave in the head around the elevator pit, the one

near the flare locker.

The ordnance men were busy putting away the flares. They'd been taking them out and putting them back all night, as the missions were continually changed.

I finished shaving and started back to our room when the guy on the IMC said: "This is a drill, this is a drill, FIRE, FIRE, FIRE!" I smelled smoke and looked back at the door that separated the pilot's quarters from the flare locker. Smoke was coming from underneath.

I ran the last few steps to our room and turned on the light. You sat up on the edge of your bunk. I shouted at you: "Norm, this is no drill. Let's get the hell out of here!"

I went down the passageway around the elevator pit, banging on the metal wall and shouting: "It's no drill. We're on fire! We're on fire!" I rounded the corner of that U-shaped passage as the flare locker exploded.

The tremendous concussion blew me out of the passageway and onto the hangar deck. A huge ball of fire was rolling across the top of the hangar bay.

You and forty-five other guys, mostly Air Wing pilots, didn't make it, Norm. I'm sorry.

Oh, God, I'm sorry! But we went home together: Norm Levy, a Jewish boy from Miami, and Dick Schaffert, a Lutheran cornhusker from Nebraska.

I rode in the economy class of that Flying Tigers 707, along with the few surviving pilots. You were in a flag-draped box in the cargo compartment.

The San Diego media had found out about the return of us "Baby Killers." Lindberg Field was packed with scum enjoying the right to protest. The "right" you died for! There was a bus, with our wives, waiting for us - there was a black hearse for you.

The protesters threw things at our bus and your hearse, not a policeman in sight. When we finally got off the airport, they chased us to Fort Rosecrans. Their obscene activities kept interrupting your graveside service, until your honor guard of three brave young Marines with rifles convinced them to stay back.

I watched the network news with my kids that night, Norm. Sorry, the only clips of our homecoming were the Baby Killer banners and bombs exploding in the South Vietnam jungle (Recall our operations were up North, against very heavily defended targets, where we were frequently knocked down and captured or killed). It was tough to explain to my four pre-teens.

You know the rest of the story. The protesting scum were the media's heroes. They became CEO's, who steal from our companies - lawyers, who prey off our misery - doctors, whom we can't afford--and elected politicians, who break the faith and the promises.

The only military recognized as "heroes" were the POW's. They finally came home, not because

of some politician's expertise, but because there were those of us who kept going back over Hanoi, again and again. Dodging the SAM's and the flak, attacking day and night, and keeping the pressure on - all by ourselves! Absolutely no support from anyone!

Many of us didn't come home, Norm. You know . . . the guys that are up there with you now. But it was our "un-mentioned" efforts that brought the POW's home. We kept the faith with them, and with you, Norm.

It never really ended. We seemed to go directly from combat into disabled retirement and poverty, ignored by those whose freedoms we insured by paying the very high premium. The only thing many of us have left is our memories, Norm, and we hold those dear!

We'll all be joining you shortly. Put in a good word for us with the Man. Ask Him to think of us as His peacemakers, as His children.

Have a restful Memorial Day, Fighter Pilot. You earned it.

Your Roomie,
Dick Schaffert
