

**Action Report:** Memorial Day Writers' Project  
**Activity:** Memorial Day - A Tribute to our Veterans  
**Date:** Jun 6, 2013  
**Location:** The National Mall, Washington, DC  
**Weather:** Hot! Hot Hot!



Somehow the data file for the Memorial Day After Action Report has been lost, misplaced or deleted. This is an attempt to re-create the report from participant input I found while searching through my emails. The weather was typical for June, hot! We had eighteen participants throughout the day and several who read with us for the first time. At the conclusion of the open mic event, several participants ended the day with a great Vietnamese meal just over the bridge in Arlington, VA. A brief summary of each participant's time at the MDWP microphone is provided below. Special thanks to Barbara Morris, who took care of CD and book sales and greeted everyone who stopped by to look at the photo album and printed materials on the display table at the front of the MDWP tent.

**Mike McDonell.** After a brief genesis of how the present day MDWP came to be, co-founder Mike McDonell read a poem written by Vince Kaspar, entitled "Hugs " which captures the very essence of an early member of the MDWP and reveals his great humanity. Mike then read "It's My Job", an excerpt from Rod Kaine's celebrated memoir "Veterans Day". Rod was one of the five original veterans who read at the first gathering of the MDWP twenty years ago. Like Vince, he passed on and is still missed. Mike closed by reading the first piece he read at the MDWP's first gathering on Memorial Day 1993 at the Market 5 Gallery. "Magilla" is an after action report to the first of Mike's friends killed in Vietnam and it depicts in blank verse the deaths of several more friends. It ends with the encounter of two friends who



thought the other dead. They embrace in the street, "two older guys remembering when under Vietnamese skies."

**James Morris**, a Vietnam era veteran and developing poet, dropped by about 11:30 upon seeing the MDWP tent while touring the War Memorials and visiting his parents grave at Arlington Cemetery (Father was a Marine, MSG who served in WWII and Korea). James has been receiving treatment at the Washington DC VA Hospital and resides at the SE Veterans Service Center, Access Housing, one of the many great Veteran Organizations that help veterans who have fallen on hard times. At the recommendation of a Neuropsychologist at the DC Veterans hospital, James is working with his newly discovered ability to write poetry as he is overcomes speaking and nerve problems. James read his Memorial Day Poem titled: "The Outdoor Museum." James described a beautiful image of what he sees as the planned and intentional creation by our founding fathers of a new nation dedicated to freedom for all, depicting the many wars it took between 1776 and modern day to rid the world of tyranny and make it possible for a united world that can live together in peace.



**George Uscinowitz** was platoon leader for the 2nd platoon, B Company, 65th Engineers (Combat), 25th Infantry Division, III Corps. George worked out of Cu Chi, but his AO stretched east to the Michelin Plantation near Xuan Loc. His unit worked on road building and repair, quick culverts, land clearing, LZ clearing, minesweep, tunnels, fire base construction, all sorts of work with demolitions /explosives, and base camp facilities support. George is currently a full time student at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. As you can see according to the photo, George still fits into his uniform. I'd say that's quite a feat.



**Janet Hagelgans**, a newcomer to MDWP, read poems from a series about her training experiences with the National Park Service and the Pima County Sheriff's Department from 2010-2012. The poems she read were "The Fitting," "My First Paper Target," "My Friend's Headshot," "Lunch Break at the Gun Range," "Dashboard Camera," "Cleaning the Gun" and "Work After Police Work." Janet and I have been trading poetry over the internet and participated at several readings at the Writer's Center in Bethesda, MD.

**Heidi Hanes**. This was Heidi's first time reading with us. She was told about the MDWP by Terry Lockridge who met Heidi's brother when passing through Okinawa on his way to Viet Nam. Over the past two years Heidi has been writing a book based on her brother's letters home and described his experiences in basic training to his last days in Viet Nam. Heidi read several excerpts of her brother's letters and got an ear full of suggestions and advice from other writers at the tent.



**Jonathan Myer** sang a dozen songs, accompanied by his 12-string guitar. Half were his own, the rest borrowed or adapted from other singers and sources. Jonathan claims he took part in two wars: the "hot" one in Southeast Asia (SEA), where he flew the O-1E "Bird Dog" as a Forward Air Controller, or FAC, mostly in II Corps' Kontum Province, plus 3-1/2 weeks in I ("Eye") Corps flying over the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) out of Dong Ha (Marine base) in Quang Tri Province; the other was the Cold War, during which he flew fighter-interceptors in the Air/Aerospace



Defense Command: a year in the F-86L "Sabre" jet, and ten years (three tours) in the F-101B/F "Voodoo" — from 1958 through 1970, with his 1966-67 SEA tour in the middle. His songs are listed at the end of this report.

**Richard Morris**, a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant rifle platoon leader with 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, 1967-68, sang songs from his Skytroopers CD ([www.cdbaby.com/cd/richardmorris](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/richardmorris)) which he wrote in Vietnam in 1967 and recorded in 2007: "Diggin' A Hole," "Bong Son Bridge," "Chanh Giao Cave," "The Chaplain," "When's the Sun Gonna Shine on Camp Evans?," "Charlie's Gone From Khe Sahn," "Smoking Hamlet," "Counting Bodies in the Nam," "Mirage," and "I Got a Lonesome Me." Richard also read from his award-winning novel *Cologne No. 10 For Men*, a humorous satire about the war. Richard read from several sections of his book describing the requirement to count bodies after a successful ambush, NVA soldiers preparing to escape entrapment in a hillside rockpile, and a platoon sergeant who was shot by a sniper. Richard's web site is [www.richardmorrisauthor.wordpress.com](http://www.richardmorrisauthor.wordpress.com).



**Richard Epstein**, our host for the day was a microwave radio repairman with the 1st Signal Brigade at Phu Mu, Thailand and also worked as a civilian field engineer with Page Communications Engineers throughout II and III Corps, Viet Nam. Richard started us off with two poems written by MDWP co-founder Clyde Wray: "*For Those Who Were Scared Shitless...*" and "*Of Common Ground.*" Richard also read some newer poems he recently wrote: "*The Coconut Tree Monk*," (about a monk who lived in a coconut tree and claimed he had a solution that would stop the war); "*A Boy Named Thu*," (about a houseboy who needed a quick place to hide from the police); a poem in two parts "*Walk Tight/Hang Loose*" read with veteran Maritza Rivera Cohen and "*Get Over It*" (a conversation about war with co-founder Ed Henry).



**Tom Lacombe**, served as a rifleman with the Fourth Infantry Division. Tom read from his book "*Light Ruck, Vietnam 1969*," a 2005 Virginia Festival of the Book Selection. His book tells us of a day when young men were willing to give up their lives to take a hill. One of the young men was Ziggy, an old-timer who had befriended Tom, an FNG, a few days before. Tom helps load Sigmond Sikorski on a medevac, knowing Ziggy will be O.K. A short time later word comes that the boy had died.



**Sistah Joy** joined us again on The Mall, first presenting a new "work-in-progress" titled, "We Bear Witness," her poem acknowledging the responsibility we all bear in taking an active role in not merely observing but changing our world for the better where we can. She also presented a few long-time favorites, such as "Remembrances", "Freedom" and "On Freedom-2", the last two of which she wrote after viewing an art exhibit titled "Freedom." The "Freedom" exhibit featured works by "refugee artists" who presented several of their works created since having found sanctuary in this country. Sistah Joy's poem, "Remembrances," was specifically written for a Memorial Day observance at her church, Ebenezer AME Church in Fort Washington, MD, and has now been published in one of her 3 books. Contact: [Poetsistahjoy@aol.com](mailto:Poetsistahjoy@aol.com).



**Holley Watts**, a '66-'67 Vietnam Red Cross Donut Dolly, read 47W, a poem about her helping a guy find his buddy on The Wall on Memorial Day 2005. She also read about flying down the coast (from DaNang to Chu Lai) and the humorous response from the guys in the airfield tower on hearing the rare voice of an AMERICAN WOMAN, let alone one requesting landing instructions...with a country draw! Remembering Bunny Olson was a humorous poem about a memorable Aussie named "Bunny" and the memorable toy koala he gave her before he left country. She closed with a poem about the frustration of trying to locate the guys you know you lost when all you



had was their nicknames. The 34 names used in the poem were real, and still the question remains; *Where Can I Find Them On The Wall?*

**Tom Glenn**, Tom Glenn was in Saigon as an intelligence operative when the North Vietnamese attacked the city in 1975. Tom told us of his experience and how he tried to evacuate the 43 men who worked for him and their families.



**Maritza Rivera**, US Army Tactical Intelligence Officer 1974 - 1978 read "*Final Draft*," dedicated to the 22 veterans a day who take their own lives. She also read "*Witness*," a poem about wounded soldiers, medics and casualties of war, and two other poems: "*Newtown's Law*" and "*Semper Fi*," a last letter poem. Maritza leads a poetry workshop each year just across the MD border in PA.

**Gerald Ney**, an aerial surveillance officer as OIC (Officer in Charge) of the Imagery Interpretation Section of the 172nd MI Detachment, 173rd Airborne Brigade read several poems. Two were from a July 2013 Veterans Poetry Workshop and were in reaction to two other vets' poems also read. Hugh Martin's "*Firework Elegy*" on a PTSD response to 4th of July fireworks inspired "*Home but Not Home*" and W D Ehrhart's "*Souvenirs*" led me to write "*Buyer, Supplier, not Taker*". Also read "*In Memory of Skip*" about a Ft Benning classmate killed in Vietnam, "*Gone With the Grin*" written after the suicide of a vet co-worker, W D Ehrhart's "*Farmer Nguyen*" about a Vietnamese civilian caught between both sides, "*The Way Forward*" and "*The Lost to Be Found*", the last two dealing with the idea of the wounded healer.



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Thank you to all who participated in the Memorial Day Writers' Project bi-annual open mic on the National Mall, adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I also thank the current generation of combat veterans who spent the day with us. **Donations are appreciated to help pay for the tent and sound system.** For additional information, visit our website at [www.memorialdaywritersproject.com](http://www.memorialdaywritersproject.com)  
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**Jonathan Myer's songs**  
**Memorial Day, 2013**

Many of Jonathan's songs were memorials to KIAs, many of them ballads, telling how that person had been lost. Others were more general, written and sung by colleagues and strangers, but all in remembrance of the many who had perished in their country's service . . . during what is still our longest war.

**1. Different Missions.** (Poem by Bill Rothas. Tune: Jimmie Rodgers' "Waiting for a Train.") Rothas was an EB-66 pilot while his Aviation Cadet classmate Dick Allee was flying the F-105 "Thunderchief" fighter-bomber (aka "Thud"). Rothas's mission was stand-off jamming, while Allee's was an air strike, callsign "Scotch Two." Dick Allee's "Mayday" call gave his bearing as 60 nautical miles east of TACAN channel 89; "Crown" was the area EC-130 "AB triple-C" (airborne command, control and communications) aircraft for the area, and "Sandy" was the call sign for A-1E fighter-bombers when flying rescue support. The "different missions" of December 21, 1968, had different endings: Allee was declared MIA (later KIA in the crash), while Rothas and comrades mourned that night at the Takhli Officers' Club. Rothas's poem was published in the Air Force Times, which (he explained in our phone call) got him in trouble: his commander thought his description of the EB-66 flying "safe and sound" made his unit look bad. . . . Commanders! we agreed.

**2. Teeny Weeny Bird Dog.** My first song some 30 years after my 1966 – 67 FAC tour, it covers the typical events and challenges of flying the "low and slow" O-1E "tail-dragger" (originally the Army's L-19) over the subtropical jungles of Southeast Asia, some 10,000 miles from home. With all its shortcomings of performance, equipage and vulnerability, it was flown in parts of Southeast Asia throughout the war. One

reason so few O-1s are in museums is that, unlike its more advanced successors, most of the surviving "Bird Dogs" are privately owned — and still flying.

**3. FAC Meets Saigon Warrior.** (Tune: "Streets of Laredo.") In May of 1966, when Kontum's spring monsoon weather precluded any local flying for a spell, I took a trip back to Saigon. I bought my first camera, took care of paperwork at FAC Hq (then the 505th Tactical Control Group, under the 2nd Air Division), invested in 20 cases of their beer (to break our "drought" back at Kontum) — and saw my first "Saigon Warrior." This sardonic term referred to those rear-echelon troops who somehow were accoutered in all those combat items, from cammies to survival vests, that somehow were in short supply where they were most needed — at "the pointy end of the spear." (In my case, I had had to draw size 14 canvas jungle boots that took six months before I could swap them for my size 9W.) This song is one of wishful thinking, from 31 years later.

**4. Beer Call in the Boonies.** (Tune: "Little Old Sod Shanty.") This ballad, another 12 years on, tells how I managed to do everything I had in mind when I took that early trip back to Saigon (above): First, I was able to find and fête the FAC I had replaced, Capt. John Perry, "Baron 82" (which became my first callsign), and finally was able to acquire and bring back 20 cases of beer to Kontum — which broke our FACs' weeks-long drought. Moreover, I had for the first time in-county unsheathed my Randall survival knife (in anticipation of a non-existent ambush). This knife proved its merit all year long when opening well-taped parcels or beer cans (as they didn't have pop-tops back then).

**5. Jolly Green.** (Tune: "Abilene.") A favorite of the late James Patterson "Bull" Durham (RIP May 6, 2004), this song is about the Air Force's large HH-3E helicopter, nicknamed after the General Mills mascot (the Jolly Green Giant) for its camouflaged paint scheme. It was used primarily to rescue downed aircrews and ground troops in the highest-threat areas of Southeast Asia — a most welcome sight for any flyer ". . . high in this tree, Afraid of Charlie as I can be"! Its para-rescue jumper (PJ) dangling at the end of a cable had the dangerous job of hauling its new passengers aboard . . . often in the face of enemy fire. (See also the Jolly Green Association at "<http://www.jollygreen.org/>" <http://www.jollygreen.org/> )

**6. Ho Chi Minh Trail.** (By Toby Hughes.) The Ho Chi Minh Trail (Tru-ò-ng Son trail per the North Vietnamese) was an increasingly sophisticated network of hidden roads and way stations that began in North Vietnam and continued south through "neutral" Laos and Cambodia, with offshoots into South Vietnam along its length. Infested with anti-aircraft guns, it provided infiltration routes for men, supplies and munitions to support both NVA units and Viet Cong militias in the RVN throughout the war. FACs and fighters, often responding to patrols of MACV's Studies and Observations Group (SOG), worked 24 hours a day in all kinds of weather to find and destroy trucks coming down the Trail. As F-4C pilot Toby Hughes's haunting song relates, it was difficult and dangerous work, especially at night and in poor weather.

**7. 160 VC in the Open.** (By Toby Hughes.) Although Toby flew the F-4C fighter-bomber during his Vietnam tour, this rollicking song by a man who loves his work is more from a FAC's view: He sees a large VC force "in the open" — a rarity; he calls his Corps' Direct Air Support Center (DASC) to send some fighters equipped with anti-personnel munitions; with a flight of F-100 "Huns" holding high, he marks his target area with a "willie pete" (white phosphorous) smoke rocket — reveling in his opportunity ("It's the kind of situation that I love"). After the strike, he credits his fighters with "150 KBA" ("killed by air"). The last two verses have been attributed to "Nail" FACs (flying out of Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, aka "NKP" or "Naked Fanny"), who'd pass the bomb damage assessment (BDA) for their missions over Laos to their airborne control plane, call-sign "Cricket." Not a dangerous SAR (search and rescue) mission, but certainly successful enough to merit a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). . . .

**8. Teak Lead.** (Tune: "Red River Valley.") F-4 pilot "Chip" Dockery sang this song at our first Society of Old Bold Aviators (SOBA) military songfest in 1998. As he told it elsewhere, "Teak" was a call-sign used by a succession of F-105 fighter-bomber flights going over North Vietnam's Route Packs 5 and 6 (the Haiphong harbor and Hanoi areas), where defenses were the strongest. At one point, the "Teak" flights had suffered so many losses that the Air Force "retired" that call-sign altogether, for the sake of morale.

The singer relates how his leader, "Teak One" (or "Teak Lead"), led his flight through bad weather and ground-to-air defenses — only to die when "he never pulled out of his bomb run." The story ends as the singer briefs his own flight for the next day's mission . . . as "Teak Lead."

**9. Tally Ho.** (Tune: "Engine 143.") "Tally Ho" was the name of both the operation and its area, generally the eastern part of the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which roughly straddled the 17th Parallel between South and North Vietnam; more formally it was part of Route Pack 1, the southernmost of the six "route packages" that defined the strike areas in North Vietnam. "Bird Dog" FACs flew Tally Ho's aerial reconnaissance ("recce") and strike control missions out of Dong Ha Air Base, just south of the DMZ in Quang Tri Province in the U.S. Marines' I Corps, from July 1966 into May 1967. I flew with Tally Ho from late-September through mid-October 1966, and those 3-1/2 weeks yielded most of the events mentioned in this song.

**10. Hunting Trucks by Star Light.** (Tune: "Great Speckled Bird.") We flew Tally Ho missions around the clock (weather permitting), looking for signs of enemy activity. At night, the backseater used a light-enhancing Starlight scope to look for truck traffic heading south on the winding roads. They'd show up as light blips against a darkened background. When we found one, we'd ask our airborne C-130 command post ("Hillsboro") for a flare-bird (usually a C-130 "Blind Bat," which could light up the whole area) and fighters — to strike before the truck disappeared under jungle canopy. The odds were mostly with the trucks, but not this time: we were able to put in the fighters while "our" truck was speeding down a rare straight stretch of that road. This is the story of that mission, flown with "Salty" Harrison, in October of 1966.

**11. Coyote Four-One.** (Tune: "The Great Speckled Bird.") This is my ballad about an F-4, call-sign "Coyote 41," that crashed while under my control during an air strike in the DMZ the night of October 13th, 1966. The pilot unfortunately misjudged his altitude during a weapons pass and literally plowed a flaming furrow in the ground, "Oh, shit!" being his last words. Next morning, I copped a ride aboard the HH-3E "Jolly Green" rescue chopper that was going to search for any survivors, but there were none. . . . Some 32 years later (thanks to the search technique taught me by Army "Huey" driver Mike "Loadhacker" Sloniker, our local Red River Rats' expert on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial), I learned the identities of Coyote 41's crew — from "Our Wall" itself.

**12. Stand to Your Glasses.** Originally a poem sung by British troops in mid-19th century India during plague conditions (and possibly associated with the Sepoy Mutinies of 1857 – 58). The modernized version was first sung by Royal Flying Corps units France, during the Great War. Legend has it that the casualty rate for new pilots was so high that maintenance crewmen had to come to the Officers' Mess to teach their replacements the words. This (American) version mixes original words, such as toasts "to the dead already" and "the next . . . to die" in "flaming Spad and Camel" (French and British pursuit ships of the day), with later references to "Bosom buddies while boozin' are we" — namely, today's combat pilots rueful at the risk of death while adhering to principles of honor and duty, as "knights of the air."

**13. A Death in the Dak Na Valley.** (Tune: "Omie Wise.") The first name on 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 DeVere 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 MACV Intel 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. DeVere and I were there, and this tribute was played from my CD, in memoriam.

**14. “Willie” Wilbanks’ One-Man War.** (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 (the RVN’s Central Highlands) after 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-1F Bird Dog’s side window at the enemy troops until he was hit on his third pass and crashed. He was extracted from his bullet-ridden aircraft (while the enemy was distracted) and transferred to a “slick” Huey, but he died on the way to Bao Loc’s medical facility. By his sacrifice he saved an estimated 130 ARVN and U.S. 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.

**15. 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. Arranged by George Jones, et al., as “50,000 Names.” Renumbered by Irv Levine & JM to its current official total of 58,282.) I say: “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. . . . 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.” – JM.

**16. Reunion.** (Tune: “The Great Speckled Bird.”) This is Toby Hughes’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.” For several years, Toby (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, KIAs in 1968, the war’s deadliest year. His song begins by looking back via “faded pictures” and dust-covered model planes to “Memories of the time they rode the thunder / Part of something bigger than themselves . . . Brothers in a time of blood and dying”. . . who will “all meet at that final Great Reunion / And . . . fly with angels, out beyond the stars” — the combat flyers’ Valhalla.