

Action Report

Subject: Memorial Day Writer's Project (MDWP)

Activity: Poetry, Prose and Song on the Mall

Date: Nov 11, 2006

Location: Washington, DC

(behind the sidewalk facing 20<sup>th</sup> Street and Constitution Ave.)

Weather: Blue sky, few clouds, mid 70's, no wind.



When Vietnamese visit a Buddhist temple or Catholic church, they often light incense, which creates a thin ribbon of smoke floating upwards to show the path prayers should take. That's how I see the voices flowing from the MDWP tent on the Mall—drifting slowly upward, combining with the prayers and thoughts of those visiting the Wall....

This year we had eighteen participants who read, shared personal experiences, played their hearts out, and sang of lost friends, of air strikes and firefights. Doug Bergman (Lt. 101 Airborne) set up shop to our left with his book *Names I Cant Remember* and Red Cross worker, Jean Lamensdorf, set up shop to our right with her book *Write Home for Me*. So there we were, with arms open wide.

We started with an invocation by Gerald Ney (USA- Aerial Surveillance Officer '68-'69 and Chaplain, Philadelphia United Veterans Council. Gerry had a cast on his foot and arrived by bus from the City of Brotherly Love.

Co-founder **Mike McDonell** started us off with a greeting to long-time friend and performer "Pretty Boy **Roy**" **Correnti** (USMC) and his wife Lisa who drove down from Boston. Mike read the first poem he wrote about Vietnam: a poem about James McGill, Panel 20E, Line 105 and a poem by W. D. Ehrhart entitled *Invasion of Granada*. The poem, a short one, voices Ehrhart's desire to end the need for monuments. Later during the day, Mike read several of Vince Kasper's poems: *Bill's Candle*, *Passing the Hat* and *Hugs*. These poems are available in the MDWP Anthology. Each demonstrates the ability to transcend the mundane and offers a method to cultivate a better world. Vince was friend and mentor to many members of the MDWP and VVA Chapter 227. Vince passed away in 1995 and the MDWP and VVA 227 support a scholarship in his memory.



**Jean Lamensdorf**, Aussie Red Cross worker, who was stationed at Vung Tau and Nui Dat, told us a little about her 300-page book *Write Home for Me* and of her experiences during her tour in Vietnam (1966). She made a follow-up visit in 1995. Her Random House book is on the bestseller list in Australia. If you like to order a copy, contact:

Jean Lamensdorf  
105 Alford Court  
Chadds Ford PA 19317  
610-388-0268

**Wayne Miller** (USMC- Hooahh) read his award-winning poem, *When I was Young, I Felt So Old*. The poem shows that he applied his Marine training and spirit throughout his civilian life.



**Lou Barnett**, Chaplain of VVA Chapter 142 in Michigan asked about our sign-up sheet. He said he has a song he wrote, but he wasn't sure if he could remember all of the words. I gave him a pad and pen and he went to work. Then he borrowed a guitar and a pick from Dave McKay and we heard *Freedom Isn't Free*. Wow! He dedicated his song to Cory Smith, who was watching from the sidewalk, a young wounded Marine back from Iraq.



There was also a **very big bear of a Green Beret** sitting in the audience with his grandchildren (also wearing Green Berets). His grandchildren (two girls and a boy) were about five or six years old and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Doug Bergman** read a new piece—an epic poem in process. A recurring line went: "What was it like being twenty one? My dreams died in a war never won." I think it's going to be a song.

Doug also read an excerpt from a Senate Report to remind us of the POW/MIA issue and a lovely story of his that's floating around the Internet *Tiny Christmas Tree*. Doug also read *Dancing on a Land Mine*, provided by Seabee Gary Lillie.



I was pleased to see **Gary Lillie** once again in our audience. Gary is one of the forces behind veteran's radio.net. Their theme: "ordinary people doing extraordinary things." Tune it in next Sunday. <http://veteransradio.net/>. Gary gets my personal prize for writing the longest, most comprehensive, and most telling poem of what it was like to be a Vietnam veteran—all with excellent style. Gary brought extra copies of his work for the audience. His poems included: *Jim and David B*, *My Squad*, *30 Years*, and *I Wasn't a Grunt*. If anyone wants a copy, let me know. I think his poems would make great songs.

Forward Air Controllers (FACs) **Jonathan Myer** and **Dave MacKay** sang of their adventures and those of pilots, both factual and figurative, involving the F-100, F-4, F-105, and of course the O-1 "Bird Dog" and O-2 "Skymaster" (aka the "Oscar Deuce"). Their own FAC missions included both in-country reconnaissance and close air support of ground forces, and out-of-country interdiction operations against enemy infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, under call signs of "Raven" and "Covey." They sang of experiences over Southeast Asia, in memory of the men, the machines, the missions, and the times.



Jonathan flew the O-1E "Bird Dog," mostly on in-country missions in II Corps' Kontum Province (as Baron then Cagey 82) plus a few weeks flying in the DMZ (as Covey 75), from April 1966 through February 1967. If interested in his and others' flying songs of the Southeast Asia War, E-mail him at <j-bmyer-alexva@erols.com>.

Dave MacKay flew the O-2A "Skymaster" (aka "Oscar Deuce" or "Oscar Duck") throughout 1969. Although based in-country at Pleiku in II Corps, he flew out-of-country missions (as Covey 536) during the long interdiction campaign against North Vietnam's infiltration of forces and supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and Cambodia into South Vietnam.

At one point, they were joined briefly by **Serrveyah Sri Kiep**, a young camera-toting Cambodian woman who wanted her picture taken with our crooners. She recited a poem of her own and led us in a prayer for peace and harmony. A complete listing of songs performed by Jonathan and Dave McKay is provided at the end of this report. Jonathan has several CD's if you want to hear more about the experiences of Vietnam era pilots.

Another unexpected event: Jonathan "captured" a passing fellow-Red River Rat, **Mike Brown**, whom he introduced as "the only copter pilot he knew who literally had his ass shot off in the air and lived to tell about it." Mike told us how he survived the loss of his tail rotor when an SA-7 shoulder-fired heat-seeking missile hit his Cobra helicopter. He was hit in his helo's rear section at 4,000 ft. above the ground, yet managed to maintain enough control while spiraling down that the "landing" was not fatal. It was quite a story. Not only did Mike and his co-pilot survive, but they landed in an NVA base camp -- unguarded at the time! You can see a painting of the incident and read Mike's full story at the time, at [www.vhfcn.org/missile.html](http://www.vhfcn.org/missile.html).

A young mysterious soldier visited **Alexandra Lajoux** in a dream. The image of the soldier wouldn't leave her until she wrote the lyrics and music to *We Thank You*. Her CD is now being distributed by American Forces Network Iraq. Alex is also a *Soldiers' Angel*. Copies of her CD can be obtained at [Alexismusicstudio.com](http://Alexismusicstudio.com). She uses the money for packages she sends to our troops in Iraq.



**Mike Basdavanos** joined us once again. Mike plays "harmonica stuff" as he calls it: free-form laments, blues, swing, and jazz. We also thank Mike for bringing **Colette Thomas** who read two wonderful poems: *Eclipse*, a poem that questions how war fits into the equation of our being and our powerlessness to influence it and *Proof Through the Night*, a poem of hope.



**Gerald Ney**, a "Leg" with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne, read *Pass the Pipe and Sugar Cane*, *Light on the Shrapnel Please*, which told of an incident on a photo mission and the hospitality afforded by Charlie and the local Montegnards. Gerry also read *Leaf Rider*, which is based on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, *Here They Be Dragons*, and from his experience as a supply officer, "Uneeda, What, When?"

**Lad Carrington** and friend came for the day from North Carolina. Lad read one of his keynote poems *Have you Seen my America?* a poem about touring our country on motorcycle (and got him a job writing for Harley Davidson), *Charlie*, a poem based on a member of a dysfunctional psych group, and another favorite of mine, *Name on a Wall*.

The mother of **Rachael Bosveld** (KIA Iraq, age 19) read a poem her daughter wrote at the age of 12. Her poem conveyed a premonition that she would not live to fulfill all of her ambitions and dreams. I'm glad we were able to hear from Rachael through her mom.

Filmmaker, author and poet **Raul Maldonado** also stopped by and read an emotional poem.



**Holley Watts** (Donut Dolly, 67/68, 3rd Marine Amphibious Forces, Chu Chi, DaNang, An Khe, and Phu Bie) stopped by and read *Panel 47W* a poem about a veteran's first visit to the Wall, and *Remembering Bunny Olson...* a bunny bear with open arms; that's what arms are for...

And now the "Raccoon" connection (AKA Benjamin Hunter Mark Gibbs): Last Veterans Day, a homeless person with wonderful creative talent and a smooth voice spent the day with us and won our hearts. Raccoon passed away last September and I was contacted by **John Pedemonti**, who asked about our video of Raccoon playing with the MDWP. One thing led to another and I found that Raccoon has quite a following and John plays his material too.



John brought Raccoon's brother (Robin), Raccoon's wife (Tina), Chitown (another guitar playing singer/songwriter) and April another admirer of Raccoon's music. So, that's how we captured John Pedemonti and his friend Chitown. John is a combination of Cat Stevens, Bob Dylan and John Pedemonti. It was a great tribute to Raccoon and I know Roy enjoyed it too. John maintains a site for Raccoon's songs and will soon have a clip of Raccoon playing with the MDWP. Check it out and purchase a CD if you like at [www.raccoonsongs.com](http://www.raccoonsongs.com). You won't regret it. His spirit and voice will get to you.

John played the following Raccoon songs written by Raccoon: *Six Pack Heart Attack*, *Rainbow Warrior*, *Sit N Think N*, *Harvest Day*, *Horn Of The Unicorn*, *Ten Little Indians* and *Dumpster Diver*. You can read the words and hear some of them at Raccoons Website. Here's a taste of one of my favorite Raccoon tunes — *I like to sit and think about the way I sit and think the things I'm thinking about. Don't stop me now; I think I'm thinking* (or something to that effect).

**Chitown** has a gruff voice that says I've been there and made it back too. He's a combination of Wiley Nelson and Chris Kristofferson; captivating and a pleasure to listen to. He sang *In the Valley*, *In My Soul*, *Country Road* and *The Dragon Flies at Midnight*.

**The Conclusion:** That's a fairly accurate picture of what went on Memorial Day 2006. 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 time. God Bless.

If this reaches anyone who knows Ron Murray in the Harrisburg area, tell him I expect him to ride down here and read with us. Also if this reaches the two 1<sup>st</sup> Signal guys I met on the Mall, send me an email.

Here's the play list of songs sung by Jonathan Myer and Dave McKay. Jim Roper, a Raven FAC who flew the O-1, O-2 and OV-10 "Bronco" during multiple out-of-country tours, has moved to Colorado but was with us in spirit.

**Songs Performed by Jonathan Myer and Dave MacKay:**

"Raven FACero." The Three FACeros' signature song, in which a "bump-tious" young FAC loves not wisely but too well. (As announced, there are no dirty words in this song.)

"Cobra 7." F-4 fighter pilot Toby Hughes's tribute to FACs and their role in controlling fighters flying close air support for ground troops in contact with the enemy.

"Sher-Babe." Toby Hughes's account of how he brought home his damaged F-4 (named after his wife), hit during an interdiction mission on behalf of the Marines at Khe Sanh.

"Draft Dodger Rag." A Korean War-vintage song outlining all the reasons a young man really couldn't go to war -- and, ironically, a favorite among those of us who did.)

"Pink Elephant Polka." Jonathan's true account of sightings during visual reconnaissance missions along the tri-border area of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam.

"The FAC Who Never Returned." Dave led this parody of the Kingston Trio favorite, transposed to the typically dangerous flying environment of the Southeast Asia War.

"Give Me Operations (FACero Style)." Jonathan's update of the WW-II classic (popularized by Oscar Brand) to lampoon FAC aircraft, with verses by Dave MacKay and Jim Roper for their O-2 and OV-10, respectively.

"Glory Flying Regulations -- SEA Version." Another Jonathan Myer update (of Brand's WW-II classic), here to contrast the peacetime aftermath of air combat in Southeast Asia.

"The Wall." By Tim Murphy (a platoon leader in the 4th Inf Div; ops near Pleiku in the Central Highlands): A heart-rending description of the lasting costs of war, not just to those killed or wounded, but to their families and friends forever.

"How I Went IFR in Flying Buffalo Shit." Based on an actual flight into Kontum's Dak Pek Special Forces camp, Jonathan explains how there were more risks than just the VC.

"O1-E Song." Fighter pilot Irv LeVine's tip of the hat to FACs in his contrast of the lethal capabilities of his F-105 "Thunderchief" to the primitive features of the O-1 "Bird Dog."

"The Raven FAC Battle Hymn." Dave MacKay led this Raven adaptation of Dick Jonas's "Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats" -- both combining warriors' resolve with regrets for their fallen comrades.

"One-Level Gunner." Dave and Jonathan alternated verses in Toby Hughes's mock comparison of American fighter pilots and VC gunners charged with bringing them down.

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Thank you to all those who participated with us and those who help sponsor our activities on the Mall. If you have any suggestions for corporate sponsorship, let me know. Don't forget to visit our website: [www.Memorialdaywritersproject.com](http://www.Memorialdaywritersproject.com).

Request 1: If anyone has any suggestions on how to reach out to today's veterans, let's hear it.

Request 2: If you have any suggestions about the MDWP readings on the Mall, or interested sponsors to help defray the rental cost of the tent, let's hear from you. Send your comments to [:eppy1111@aol.com](mailto:eppy1111@aol.com)

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Tis I below:

