

2015 Memorial Service
589th Engineer Battalion Association - Vietnam
September 12, 2015

Etched into the black, wedge-shaped wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are the names of 58,000 U.S. troops killed in the Vietnam War. The sheer size of The Wall speaks to the tragedy surrounding Vietnam. Visitors stand before the wall and look at names - you can see the sadness and sorrow in their eyes. Sometimes they reach out and touch a name on the wall, and feel the finality of a name carved in granite. Some leave messages and memorials such as flowers, or maybe an item meaningful to the deceased. But there are more than these names to ponder, after all, another 304,000 soldiers were physically wounded, probably that many more psychologically wounded, tens of thousands have committed suicide since returning home...and then there is the consequence of Agent Orange. As people stand before the wall, their own reflections gaze back at them. Our own reflections are a cue for us to remember the living veterans while we honor the fallen.

As you view The Wall, the names etched in the granite seem to be endless - finding individual names takes time. At first, individual names on The Wall seem insignificant as compared to the total. One name more or less wouldn't change the size of the Memorial, but somehow each of those names stand for something. The names on The Wall are much like the Vietnam experience itself. As individuals, we didn't seem to make a difference...it was coming together as a force, as one unit that we were able to change the face of daily events.

Vietnam is not a historical event, but instead the accumulation of thousands of experiences that occurred over-and-over in the lives of thousands of us who were there. To each of us, Vietnam means something different. For some it is a faded memory, while others haven't been able to leave those memories behind - the sounds, the smells, the experiences just won't go away. As we speak of the Vietnam War on this day, let's not speak of it in a macro view, but from the perspective of us as individuals, with individual experiences; from the perspective of our fallen - not as names on The Wall, but as individuals who were very much involved in life before Vietnam.

This past Memorial Day, this Association sponsored what was originally called our "Adopt a Grave" program, but soon after evolved into what we now refer to as the "Honor our Fallen" program. The goal of Honor Our Fallen was to place a memorial on the grave of each of our Vietnam casualties during the Memorial Day weekend. Using the latest computer technology and hundreds of hours, Perry was able to

identify the final resting place of each of our fallen. When the request for volunteers to actually travel to the grave sites went out, dozens of you responded. It was amazing, and made me extremely proud to be one of you. Over the Memorial Day weekend, the volunteers performed a Memorial Service for each of our 26 fallen brothers. One of our brothers traveled over 4,000 miles to facilitate a service - a trip that took him several days; it meant giving up the Memorial Day weekend with his family; and he did it at his own expense.

Each of those Memorial Services has its own story, not about names on a wall, but of individuals with families who still mourn, friends who have not forgotten, and communities that still want to express their appreciation. I want to briefly share a couple of those stories with you.

Clyde Hutson and Dennie Pendergrass traveled to Aldrich, Missouri to recognize Donnie Rex Boggs. In preparation, Clyde and Dennie were able to make contact with a number of Donnie's next of kin, including his widow, two brothers and two sisters, and a son Donnie had never met before he died. In the process of bringing the family together, they were able to introduce Donnie's son to Donnie's side of the family, who he had never had an opportunity to meet. I want to share the thank you letter the son wrote to Clyde days after the service.

Sir (Clyde - C Company)

This has been too long coming and I apologize. I need to thank You and Dennie for what you did over the Memorial Day weekend.

I don't know if you realized this but I had never met my father's side of my family. You tracking me down and writing me that letter made it possible for me to do that. I just this day received a letter from my dad's sister wanting to get together and meet the rest of my kids and grandkids. I have 45 years of catch-up to play and I couldn't be happier.

In my eyes you and Dennie are two of the greatest men I have ever met. Please let Dennie and everyone know just how much I and my father's family appreciate you all and everyone else at the **589th Engineer Battalion Association** for what you did. I will never be able to thank you enough.

Signed: David Rex (Boggs) Stout

We don't always realize the impact a small gesture on our part can trigger. As an example, Perry traveled to Anaconda, Montana to pay tribute to Lieutenant Ronald Moe. If you are wondering where Anaconda, Montana is located, it is just a few miles northwest of Perry's home in Dawsonville, Georgia. With a few telephone calls, Perry was able to locate a brother in Seattle, a sister in Independence, Oregon

and a second sister in Wisdom, Montana. The family was so excited about the ceremony for their fallen brother they each traveled to Anaconda for Memorial Day weekend. A call to the Butt Veterans of Foreign Wars and another to the local American Legion resulted in full participation by both organizations. The veterans conducted a formal folding of the flag, which was presented to lieutenant Moe's family. The American Legion performed a full 21-gun salute, which they even allowed Perry to participate in. A bugler closed the ceremony by playing taps. What began as this Association's desire to honor one of our fallen, grew into a ceremony with several dozen participants, each with one goal in mind....to honor Lt. Moe for his sacrifice and to let family and friends know that Ron has not been forgotten.

These are simply two examples - we have 24 more stories about the good these volunteers did. I want to express my sincere appreciation to each of you.

This Memorial Service today has a theme; that theme is that it is all about individuals. Those of you who have participated in this service in the past, know that traditionally we have honored each of our fallen as individuals by announcing their name and the ringing of the bell. Today, we want to make that introduction a little more personal, so along with the announcement of their names, we will share some additional information with you.

Participating in the "reading of the names" ceremony is:

Tom McLain - A Company
Chuck Begley - B Company
Mike Morrish - C Company
John Ryan - D Company

Tolling of the Bell - Sterling Hester - Headquarters Company

Post Reading-of-the-Names

As I sat and listened to the reading of the names, I couldn't help but reflect on what these men had in common. Each of them was a real person, with real dreams, hopes and aspirations for the future. While in Vietnam, they would share those dreams and aspirations in quiet conversations with the rest of us, as we would share ours with them. The dreams varied from person to person, but the description of those dreams was always preceded by this short statement: When I get out of Vietnam. When I get out of Vietnam, I'll be with my family again. When I get out of Vietnam, I am going to be married. When I get out of Vietnam, I am going to school. However, these men, along with over 58,000 others, never got out of Vietnam, never got to pursue their dreams. Their dreams, hopes and aspirations, and those of their families, came to an abrupt end - and we will be eternally sorry for that.

Our casualties shared their youth. They were young - we were young - the average age of our casualties was 20 years old. Even those we considered the "old men" at the time - those 37 or 38 year-olds - seem young to us today. Young men of that age should not have to experience a Vietnam, because even if they survive, they are changed, not for a short period of time, but for the rest of their lives.

As I listened to the reading of those names, I thought about each of those individuals leaving a family behind: mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, wives and children. The unimaginable grief their deaths must have caused - the loss, the void that can never be filled.

However, after 45 years have passed, you have to wonder if each of those we lost has family left to care; to remember; to memorialize. We know that some do, probably even most of them do, but some probably do not. For me, therein lies the pain and sadness. To die an early death is a tragedy, but to be in a grave and be forgotten by your brothers is unforgivable.

That is why it is so important to continue our Honor our Fallen Program. Taking some time-out once a year to speak to them individually is the least we can do to help honor the sacrifice they made. I want to personally thank each of you that participated as an honor guard for this year's services. You did a great job and I couldn't be prouder of this organization.

In closing, there is one additional thing our casualties have in common. While looking at the Memorial Day pictures, I noticed each person is buried in a beautiful final resting place. That is what they deserve. They earned that much. God bless them, and God bless the members of the 589th Engineer Battalion Association.

I ask that we all bow our heads for a moment of silence.

Thank you,