

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

COMMEMORATING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL

HON. RICHARD E. NEAL

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 18, 2007

Mr. NEAL of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, I would like to take a moment to reflect upon the events of 25 years ago and to remember the tremendous sacrifice a generation of veterans and their families made for our country at that time.

58,256 names are engraved on the black granite walls of the Vietnam Memorial Wall here in Washington, DC to honor America's war dead of a generation ago. The stories of these individuals and their families make our hearts ache today and will never be forgotten.

Jo-Ann Moriarty, a reporter from The Republican newspaper in Springfield, MA, compiled a series of stories this Memorial Day about Vietnam veterans from Western Massachusetts that touches upon their experience while serving our country. Their stories are remarkably similar to those being told by the brave men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today. Sharing this history is critically important so that we never forget the serious impact of war.

I would like to submit the first two pieces of Jo-Ann Moriarty's series into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD today for others to enjoy, and to thank veterans from Massachusetts and across America for their service to our country.

[From the Republican, May 27, 2007]

RAW EMOTIONS SURFACE AT VIETNAM MEMORIAL

(By Jo-Ann Moriarty)

At each end of the Vietnam Memorial Wall, the black granite rises only 8 inches above the earth—ankle high.

But, with each step forward, visitors find themselves sinking deeper and deeper into a well of names—tens of thousands of names of America's young men—engraved on a stone wall that, at its center, towers 10 feet.

For many veterans of the Vietnam War, it feels as if they are descending into an abyss. It can be suffocating.

All those names etched into the wall take one's breath away. They find themselves drowning in memories and images of buddies and brothers they loved and lost.

Marine Corps Capt. Daniel M. Walsh III, now the director of veteran affairs for the city of Springfield, had his sergeant, Leonard A. Hultquist, die in his arms during combat just moments before he, himself, was struck by a bullet.

Under fire, Army Cpl. Heriberto Flores, who is today the head of the New England Farm Workers Council in Springfield, was a door gunner aboard a UH-1 Huey helicopter when he saw his friend from Springfield, Army Spc. Paul E. Bonnette, hit by enemy fire. He was 21.

This marks the 25th anniversary year of "the wall," a long, thin line of black granite that stretches 246.9 feet along the National

Mall. Nestled into the landscape below the lofty monuments that honor George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, it is the nation's memorial to its war dead in Vietnam.

It was designed by Maya Lin, an Asian-American, at the age of 21 while she was still an undergraduate at Yale University.

It bears 58,256 names.

It took a decade after its building before Walsh, Flores or Springfield attorney Frederick A. Hurst could make their visits. Hurst's youngest brother, Army Spc. Ronald C. Hurst, was killed April 12, 1967, when the Jeep he was driving struck a landmine in Vietnam.

"It was emotional," said Flores, who ultimately first visited the monument with his wife, Grace.

Hurst stenciled his brother's name during his visit. "It was tough," he recalled recently.

Walsh only went because he was engineered there by three of his young sons, one of whom became a Marine and all of whom wanted to know their father's history.

"I never had any intention of going to see it," Walsh said. "We lost a lot of people. A lot of people were hurt. A lot of bad things happened."

The wall holds the names of guys with whom Walsh shared foxholes and who were friends from Holy Name School—like Army Sgt. Walter "Buddy" J. Fitzpatrick, of Springfield, killed in combat in South Vietnam on March 3, 1967, and Army Lt. Bernard J. Lovett Jr., also of Springfield, whose tour of duty in Vietnam began on July 22, 1970 and ended when he was killed in action on Oct. 16, 1970 in Hua Nghia.

Walsh knew and admired another Springfield friend, Marine Capt. Ralph E. Hines, who was killed in combat on Feb. 19, 1967. He was 28.

Oddly, when Walsh finally made it to the wall, he found the unexpected.

"It was peaceful," Walsh said. "The memories kept flowing back, a lot were good, with the troops."

In Vietnam, Flores saw duty aboard Huey helicopters, dropping infantrymen in the field in the morning and collecting them in the afternoon. He would notice fresh faces among the troops and pray they would make it back on the helicopter by the end of the day. Some were waiting in body bags.

To Flores, the wall is validation.

"I think it is closing the circle," Flores said. "Certain lessons we've learned. The nation has honored us. For so many years, we were losers. And now, people realize we were soldiers."

Those soldiers were in a no-win situation as Vietnam devolved into a civil war where the enemy and the innocent were hard to distinguish. Army infantrymen and Marines snaked through the jungles, going from hilltop to hilltop, moving constantly while the Navy patrolled seemingly endless rivers and the Air Force and Army flight crews performed missions from above. Vietnam was a place of guerilla warfare and underground tunnels, where everyone—man, woman or child—could be the enemy, or not.

There was the My Lai massacre, in which American soldiers killed hundreds of innocents, and back home anti-war protestors chanted outside of President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House, "Hey, hey LBJ, how many kids did you kill today."

"Anyone there was a loser," said Westfield native Benjamin Sadowski Jr., the son of a survivor of the famed World War II Battle of the Bulge, who survived his own combat tour in Vietnam.

Up north in the tiny Franklin County town of Shelburne Falls, which had a population of about 2,600 at the time, families grieved the loss of four of their sons in Vietnam.

Altogether, from the four counties of Western Massachusetts, the Vietnam War claimed 200 casualties, 50 in the city of Springfield alone.

"Two of my best buddies, plus my brother," said John E. "Jack" Palmeri, whose brother James E. "Jimmy" Palmeri died 11 days after being hit by mortar fire on Feb. 26, 1967. He was 20.

Jack Palmeri, who enlisted in the Army and was sent to Germany, had advised his younger brother to do the same. "But Jimmy said, 'I can't stand the military for three years. I'll take my chances.'"

While others shed their uniforms when returning home from services, Jack Palmeri wore his home in honor of his brother and his friends, Army Spc. Ronald E. Wissman, killed at age 20 in action on May 21, 1967, and Marine Capt. Paul T. Looney, a helicopter pilot shot down on May 10, 1967.

For those who returned home, he said, "We were not welcomed. The country was divided and Vietnam divided it."

In those days, there was sometimes no distinction between the hatred of the Vietnam War and the U.S. troops who fought there.

The nation was torn apart by race riots. Anti-war protesting students were caught up in the homefront violence seen in the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968.

Kennedy, running a presidential campaign on the promise of getting out of Vietnam, was shot dead in June. Months after his killing, the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago was engulfed in violence in the streets—the Chicago cops beating the long-haired protesters who had gathered to demonstrate against the war in Vietnam.

There were the killings of four students at Kent State University as they protested the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970, shot dead by Ohio National Guardsmen.

There was Vietnam veteran and future U.S. senator John F. Kerry in 1971 in combat fatigues testifying against the war before the Senate Foreign Relations committee.

And, the U.S. troops, fighting in a divided country half-way round the world, wound up returning home to another divided country.

It was a time of tumult and change, verging, at times on chaos.

Rock star Jimi Hendrix sang to the rage, pain, passion and confusion of the nation's youth: "Purple haze all in my brain. Lately things just don't seem the same."

In Vietnam, New York banker Henry "Hank" Trickey was a sergeant in "Alpha" Company of the Army's 101st Airborne Division and was steps behind Springfield native Spc. Peter F. Nolan when Nolan was hit by ambush fire, dead on May 8, 1970, at the age of 21.

"There was no front line," Trickey recalled recently. "Constant movement. You never knew what was in front of you. You never knew if you would make it through the day."

Flores flew infantrymen in and out of battle zones every day. Sometimes the drop was

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

bad—sending the soldiers off to a set-up by the enemy. Sometimes, the helicopters were under intense fire, and one would go down or an American B-52 bomber would appear and drop napalm.

“It was organized insanity,” Flores said. “People you are defending are shooting at you.”

A lot of the guys, like Flores, were high school drop-outs. But blacks, whites and Latinos discovered among the rag-tag, chain-smoking, beer-drinking fearless ranks a brotherhood free from racism and filled with pure faith, courage and valor.

“When we see each other, we say, ‘I love you, brother,’ and we really mean that,” Flores said. “I was proud to be there. We did not choose the war; they sent us.”

The wall which memorializes the dead from a war that once divided the nation has become a source of comfort, a place for mending.

“It is a healing thing,” Palmeri said.

Hurst, who views his brother’s death as a waste of a life that had so much promise, said he has found a peace at the monument.

“My personal comfort came from the reaction the country had to the wall,” Hurst said. “The wall brought a resolution to the whole Vietnam thing.”

Oklahoma resident Tommy Kellogg was steps behind Springfield teenager Army Pfc. James A. Messer when Messer was caught in an ambush.

Messer, 18, a parachutist, had been recently recruited from B Company of the 1st 327 Infantry Battalion of the 101st Airborne to join Tiger Force. It was a fierce band of 45 soldiers on a new assignment with loose orders concerning search and destroy missions in the jungle.

Kellogg has not seen the wall. Nor has Hank Trickey.

James Austreng, of Wisconsin, also hasn’t been able to make a visit to the wall. Yet, after all these years, he still holds the memory of a 21-year-old from Westfield, James D. Zebert.

It was Zebert who provided cover for his squad—including Austreng—only to be shot dead minutes later in Tay Ninh, South Vietnam, on June 27, 1979. His tour had begun just 18 days earlier.

The Army private who served under Capt. Steven J. Popkin, of Springfield, still can visualize the Mohawk helicopter pilot wearing his hat slightly askew.

“Capt. Popkin was one of the nicest guys all around. He was a damn fine aviator,” said Bruce Gaylord, who grew up in Michigan. “He didn’t lord his rank over anyone. He would never make a joke about someone else. He had a rich sense of humor and a wonderful laugh.”

“He was a good officer, the kind of guy you would follow into hell,” Gaylord said.

But not to the nation’s capital.

“I could never bring myself to it,” Gaylord said.

[From the Republican, May 28, 2007]

VIETNAM GREEN BERET MADE CHICOPEE PROUD

(By Jo-Ann Moriarty)

What can you say about a 24-year-old man whose name is among 58,256 on the Vietnam War Memorial?

That he was the platoon leader in Bravo Company.

That every day he assigned someone from the squad to watch over ‘Mouse.’

That he and his grunts, strapped with M-16s, trailed a jungle maze for weeks and fought for their lives as the young lieutenant tried to pick their battles.

Mark C. Rivest, of Chicopee, was an officer and gentleman.

He was one of the famed “Green Berets” in the Army’s Special Forces, and he completed

two tours in Vietnam as the leader of a platoon which, for the most part, was composed of draftees, many of whom were high-school dropouts.

A couple of guys in the band of 30 men should probably have never been in the Army, let alone assigned into the deadly terrain around Hue, a battle-scarred city just below the North Vietnam border.

“He is a very hard person to forget,” recalled Manhattan businessman Anthony Loiero, who turned 21 in Vietnam and served under Rivest between 1969 and 1970.

“One of the things I remember the most about him was that he tried to keep us out of trouble,” Loiero said. And, when they went in for the fight, “he would make sure that we were all protected. He was concerned about the guys he was responsible for. The jobs we were doing, he wanted to make sure we were there to do them the next day.”

The year before Rivest and most of his men arrived in country, the Tet Offensive in 1968 ramped up the carnage and particularly bloody was the battle for Hue.

When Communist forces seized the city, they held the city for 25 days “committing ghastly atrocities during the initial phase of their occupation,” wrote Stanley Karnow in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book: “Vietnam. A History.”

Back home, America was violent, too. Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated within months of each other. America was at war with itself. That summer, anti-war protesters were beaten by Chicago police as they stormed the Democratic Convention.

By 1969, when Rivest, who left behind his parents, Paul and Catherine, two brothers and a sister in the Aldenville section of Chicopee, and Loiero, an only child, who grew up in the Italian enclave of West New York, N.J., where he still lives, got to Vietnam, the death toll of American soldiers and civilians—both in the North and South—was staggering.

Before they met, Rivest had completed a six-month tour as platoon leader and, instead of alternating to the rear, “he transferred into the field again at his request,” Loiero said.

Rivest earned the confidence of the soldiers in his new platoon almost immediately. Even-tempered, without bluster, he was approachable and ruled by a shot from his dark eyes.

He was college educated. He smoked Chesterfields, played the piano and had something about him that Loiero still associates with Louis Armstrong’s song, “What a Wonderful World.”

It took Loiero 13 years before he went to “the wall” in Washington, D.C., to take in the full measure of the Vietnam War’s toll and tragedy, his delay mostly attributable to seeing the actual engraving of his platoon leader’s name.

Now, middle-aged, Rivest’s covenant to keep the men in his platoon safe with his good judgment and keen skills is even more precious to Loiero who came home, got a college degree, has a successful graphic arts business and is happily married with two children.

“We were a rag-tag bunch of good guys living every day hoping that every one of us would live to go home that day,” Loiero said, adding that he still thinks “about the way he treated us. How he protected us. How his main objective was to watch his gaggle of geese and to make sure we did the right thing.”

“If we were in harm’s way, he would be the first one out there clearing the path,” he added.

Rivest made his platoon a band of brothers. And, he did it in many ways, Loiero said.

There were, for instance, specific orders that someone in the squad watch over a guy nicknamed “Mouse,” and a couple of other grunts, who Loiero said, “should never have been in the Army. Should never had been sent to Vietnam. And never should have been in the infantry with the rest of us.”

Rivest instilled a discipline for constant movement.

The checklist was drilled into his men: Rifles cleaned. Gear together. Who’s got the gun flares. Teeth brushed. Boots tied up. Who’s watching “Mouse” today? Who’s sleeping first.

“Then you’d start all over,” Loiero said. “You make a commitment to the guys next to you and they make it to you. It is a brotherhood.”

After their tour ended, Loiero went home. And Rivest, from what Loiero has been able to piece together, returned to Special Forces duty. The next assignment he accepted took him into Laos where he was killed in ground combat on June 4, 1970.

These days, Palmer resident Josh R. Morin, who once lived across from the Rivest home on McKinstry Avenue in Chicopee, carries the green beret of his boyhood friend to schools in Western Massachusetts as he talks to students about U.S. history and the Vietnam War.

As boys, they played Army together with their younger brothers.

Morin had been to Vietnam and back before Rivest went, and he warned his buddy against going because the terrain had gotten so dangerous. Morin’s combat buddy had been shot dead inches from him.

When Rivest was killed, Morin, married at the time but living on the same street, said he couldn’t go to the funeral.

“I couldn’t go to his funeral and face his mother and father, the idea that I made it and he hadn’t. I couldn’t deal with it and now I regret that,” Morin said. “I never saw them again.”

Someone in the family later entrusted Morin with Rivest’s green beret and his medals.

AUTHORIZING USE OF ROTUNDA TO AWARD CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL TO DR. NORMAN E. BORLAUG

SPEECH OF

HON. LEONARD L. BOSWELL
OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 12, 2007

Mr. BOSWELL. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my good friend and Colleague Mr. TOM LATHAM for his leadership on H. Con. Res. 164, which authorizes the use of the rotunda of the Capitol for a ceremony to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Dr. Norman Borlaug.

I am honored to know Dr. Borlaug. He is a great humanitarian who is credited with saving over a billion lives. No small task but for Dr. Borlaug it was all in a days work.

In 1944, Dr. Borlaug participated in Rockefeller Foundation’s pioneering technical assistance program in Mexico. He was a research scientist and worked on high-yield and disease resistance cereal grains.

His work changed production agriculture, as we know it today. Dr. Borlaug is also credited with beginning the ‘Green Revolution’ in Mexico, Asia, and Latin America.

He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his groundbreaking work in world agriculture