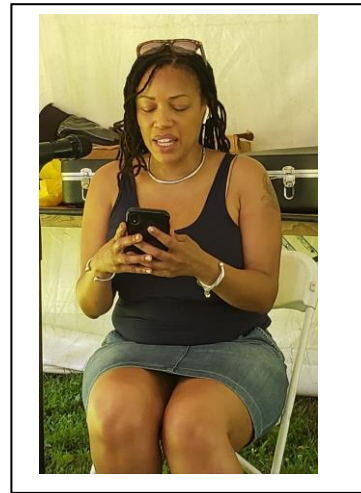
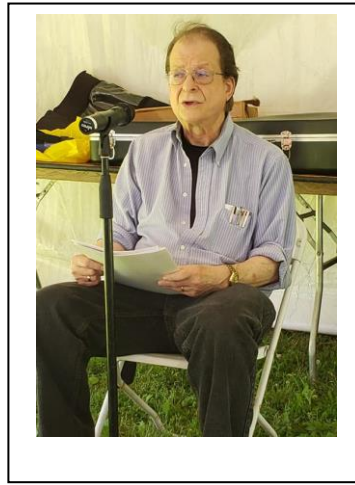


Action Report: Memorial Day Writers' Project (MDWP)
Activity: A Tribute to Veterans
Date: May 27, 2019
Location: Washington, DC (Constitution Ave. and 20 St.).
Weather: Couldn't be better.



Kudos to USAF FAC **Jonathan Myer**, SRAO Donut Dolly **Nancy Smoyer**, Civ **Jesse Alexander**, USN **Brenardo Taylor**, USA 11B - 9th Inf. Division **Bill Lord**, USA-USMC **Dani Figuera**, Civ. **David Martin**, Civ. **Sistah Joy Alford**, Civ. **Nora Burns**, our host, USA 26L20 - 1st Signal Brigade **Richard Epstein**, as well as **Kim Costabile** and **Diane Barker**.



Jonathan Myer. Jonathan flew the O-1E “Bird Dog,” a single-engine tail-dragger that cruised at 80 mph; most of his 1966 - 67 tour as a Kontum Province Forward Air Controller (FAC) in the Central Highlands with 3-1/2 weeks flying over the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Jonathan is the guy who marked targets for disposition by air power. Jonathan sang in two sets, many of his songs are ballads about his tour in Southeast Asia set to traditional melodies; The songs he sang are listed and briefly described below.

1. *58,000 Names Carved in a Wall.* (With last year's 58,390 corrected to 58,274.)
2. *The Aging Pilot.* (From youthful daring to old man's dotage.)
3. *Different Missions.* (Bill Rothas's poem: how he heard his AvCad mate die in his "Thud.")
4. *Answering the 9-11 Call.* (How USA was shocked by the four-plane attacks in 2001.)
5. *Answered: The 9-11 Call.* (How 10 years later, Intell and Navy SEALs avenged us.)
6. *The Dumbest Thing.* (Running out of gas in my O-1E — twice! and lived both times!)
7. *Teeny Weeny Bird Dog.* (My first post-war song, an homage to the O-1E.)
8. *FAC and the Green Beret.* (Snotty FAC & snide radioman, a mix of fact and fiction.)*
9. *Glory Flying Regulations (III).* (Oscar Brand take-off: all Services in Vietnam, and later.)
10. *Frankie and Johnnie (AF).* (Hostess catches cheating pilot...ends with military funeral.)
11. *Last Flight.#* (Every pilot's mythical end — sooner or later; finds fellow pilots in heaven or hell.)
12. *How I Went IFR in Flying Buffalo Shit.* (Landing at Dak Pek A-camp; crew chief added.)
13. *My Peace Song.* (First, "lay down" all weaponry on enemy; Then "study war no more....")
14. *"Willie" Wilbanks' One-Man War.* (2d AF, 1st fatal MOH: Saved 100+ ARVN from NVA trap.)
15. *Tally Ho.* (3+ weeks FACing over the DMZ vs. NV trucks. Hairy ops: lost F-4 Coyote 41.)
16. *My "Tally Ho" Hit.* (As #2, I was shot at. Saw 5 of 7 wing cables cut only after landing!)†
17. *Warrior Bards: Our War.* Irv Levine IDs singers; JM adds FACs, shows how the War ended.)



Nancy Smoyer read several sections from her new memoir *"Donut Dollies in Vietnam: Baby-Blue Dresses & OD Green."* Her book is based on letters she wrote home to her parents and from emails to veteran groups since then. I'm halfway through the book and it's a great tribute to all Donut Dollies whose job it was to visit the troops wherever they were. Nancy had “Wall duty” and could only stay with us for a short time but sold almost all her books.

Jesse Alexander. This was Jesse's first time with the Memorial Day Writers Project. Jesse and I met at a Mariposa poetry retreat at Waynesboro, MD. Jesse read *"Warrior Soldier Uncle Priest;"* a poem in honor of his



Uncle, Col. (Ret.) Rev. George W. Alexander II. Jesse also read "The Warrior's Prayer" by Paul Laurence Dunbar (from the *Life & Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, Winston-Derek Publisher, 1992, pp 225.) Good to have you with us, Jesse.

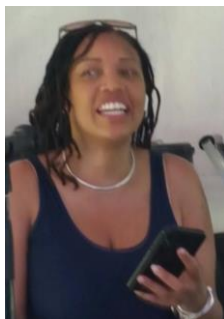
Bill Lord. Bill, a first timer with the MDWP read "*Chopper Pilots*," a chapter from his memoir "*50 Years After Vietnam*." The chapter reads as a tribute to all the chopper pilots who served at great danger to themselves while helping infantry soldiers on the ground. Later, Bill read another chapter, "*Friendly Fire*," as a playful jab at guitar player and singer Jonathan Myer who had flown the slow moving O1-E Bird dog to mark ground position and direct air support. The chapter recounts the mayhem that occurred when Bill's company was mistakenly marked for an air strike by a friendly FAC. I just finished reading Bill's book. It's a great read.



Dani Figueroa, an ASAP newcomer with guitar in hand, sang "*Rewind*," a song about hope despite the inability to go back in time and "*Why*," a song written from the perspective of the outsider looking in with love, pain, and hope. Dani served in the USA and USMC as truck driver (munitions) during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. She is currently active with ASAP.



Norah A. Burns. After disappearing for four years, Nora surprised us with a visit and "*Remembrance*", "*In The Land Of The Living*", and "*Conflict*" in honor of her Father Donald Taylor, who served in 1969-1970 Da Nang, 37th Signal Battalion (Security) & 1970-1971 Ashau Valley, 101st Airborne (Infantry). She also read "*Time In Service*", "*Legacy I*", and "*Of Ramadi*". These newer pieces were written in honor of her Father, Grandfather's and Uncles who served in wars passed, and in honor of a cousin, Jaworski Doucette, who served several tours in Ramadi, Baghdad (Camp Anaconda), Iraq and Bagram, Afghanistan.



Sistah Joy, Prince George's County Poet Laureate, debuted her poem, "You Are Not Alone," and also shared "Remembrances," both of which are specifically written to encourage and pay tribute to veterans. She also shared "*Get Outta My Way*," an empowerment poem with a faith-centered message and "*This Freedom Thing*," a poem of tribute and honor to ancestors whose spirits inspire and guide many today in their quest for freedom and equality. She also shared her inspirational island-accent poem, "*Grandmama's Good Life*," which speaks of ethical, cultural and moral precepts passed down through "mother-wit."



David Martin, aka Quasar, read a medley of poems and stories in English, Arabic, and Persian—both his own original work and classics written by by-gone poets. David was a member of the merchant marines

working in Vietnam and the South China Sea in the summer of 1967 on the S.S. Cynthia Olson, a freighter contracted to haul munitions and equipment from Okinawa and Taiwan to Nha Trang and Qui Nhon.

David read: “So Utterly Other Sings the Light” (with an epigraph in Arabic from the Koran: *Surat al-Qadr*), the opening poem of *Light First, Light Last*; “Three Spirits in One Body” by Alexei Vyazmin, translated from Russian; “A Vietnam War Ghost Story,” a discussion of consciousness in dying and after death; selected lines from *Qasida Balqis*, a poem by Arab poet, Nizar Qabbani about the assassination of his wife in a bomb blast meant for him in Beirut in 1980; “Enigma,” by Omar Khayyam, read in Persian and English, a quatrain about the mystery of the Universe; “*Dulce et Decorum Est*,” (“It Is Sweet and Right [to Die for One’s Country]”), the classic WWI poem about patriotism by Wilfred Owen; “Anthem for the Earth, a climate-change/eco-disaster poem, which announces the over-arching war that now engages us and calls us to resist our own extinction as a civilization and a species; “Thanks and Praise from the Far Future for Saving the Earth,” a counter-poem in which the survivors of the present extend their gratitude to us in the present time; “Blood Web,” a poem that describes the unity of the animal kingdom; and lastly a section in Arabic from the Koran, memorializing the Muslim dead at the Battle of Badr (ca. 626 C.E./4 A.H) and exhorting the survivors to endure—with an informal translation in English: read in response to Sistah Joy’s poem about those who endure.



Brenardo Taylor. Bernardo served aboard ship in the U.S.N. and is a poet activist and master of the spoken word. Bernardo read “*M.D.W.P.*” a homage to our program on the Mall: helping Veterans to deal with Memories and Emotions through therapeutic recall and expression, and then finding support by sharing this information with the Veteran community; “*911 In Reformation*,” another memorial poem focused on the events of September 11th 2001, written on the 10th anniversary; “*Walls*,” about the division of people in our country based on race, specifically in the armed forces, based on personal experience; “*Parrots, Lizards, Fools*,” about divisions and descent based on repeated mistrusts.

Brenardo read several pieces from his new chapbook “*Bridge Over Trouble*” beginning with the title poem that speaks to one of the purposes and roll as poet; “*If The Sun Must Set*,” about remembrances; “*Thank You For YS*,” a poem inspired by hearing other veterans at MDWP and the Warrior Writers of people serving their country in combat situations, and drawing from his own experiences the loneliness and isolation that military members encounter while in service; “*Sankofa V.O.B.*,” addresses the divisions in society with focus on a man of African-American heritage contemplating freedom obtained in a myth; “*Just Breathe*,” about the complex nature of the world in which we live and the need to remember the simplest way to get through it all; and “*Born To Lead*,” testimony to the rise of an American who rose to be commander in chief, who brings dignity and honor to us all.



Dick Epstein in his 1st Signal Brigade shirt, read several original poems including “*They Wanted to Give Him a Medal*” a tale told by tanker **Jim Stewart** of the 69th Armor Battalion; “*R-P-G!*” a prolonged reaction to the inevitable; “*Close*,” an encounter with a Montagnard; “*Waiting for Dark*,” an incident that took place in rural Thailand; “*After Dak To*,” “*Home*,” one

soldier's definition of home and "*Nam Viet*," describes the result of our time in Vietnam. Richard also read two poems sent in by **Diane Barker**: "*Taps*" and "*When I hear Taps, I Cry*."

Kim Costabile (from our Poet Warrior days at Alfio's in Bethesda) made a seventeen-block walk and joined us toward the end of the day and selected one of my poems to read "*Letting Go*," about a late-night visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, aka "the Wall."

In Remembrance:

Our thoughts go out to **Vince Kaspar, Rod Kane, Briah "Gunny" Conner, Richard Morris, Emily Strange, Roy Correnti, and Racoon Gibbs, Gary Lillie and WWII Veteran Paul Grayson** who are with us in spirit.

If you have any suggestions for corporate sponsorship, or to make our event better, let me know. Don't forget to visit our website: **www.memorialdaywritersproject.com** or contact me at dick_epstein@hotmail.com. Until next time, God Bless.

Conclusion: It was a great day, being together, the memories of veterans we knew and those we didn't know. 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 you again on Veterans Day.