

Action Report: Memorial Day Writers' Project (MDWP)

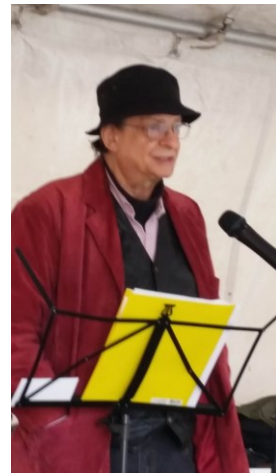
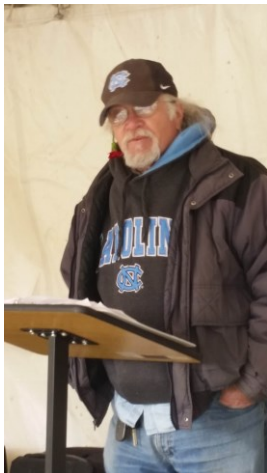
Activity: Veterans Day, a tribute to our country's veterans

Date: November 11, 2017

Location: The National Mall, Washington, DC

(Constitution Ave., and 20 St.) behind the sidewalk facing Constitution Ave.

Weather: Chilly: Mid 40s (degrees) with a slight breeze.



The Memorial Day Writers' Project (MDWP) has held an open mic venue for veterans and friends of veterans each Memorial Day and Veterans Day since 1993. This Veterans Day, the following readers spent the day with us as we paid tribute to those who served: **Jonathon and Brenda Myer, David Martin, Tom Glenn, Jim Smith, Tom LaComb, Brad White, Lad Carrington, Judy Gorman King** and our host, **Richard Epstein**. Thanks to all who raised their voices and shared their prose, poetry and song throughout the day. A brief summary of the day's activities is presented below.

A special note of appreciation to **Dick & Barbara Morris** and **Curt Nelson**. **Dick** and **Curt** couldn't be with us this year due to health issues. As it turned out, I'm sad to report our friend Dick Morris passed away on Nov 21, 2017. His funeral was held on Dec 16, 2017 at the University Christian Church in Hyattsville, MD. Not hard to believe, Dick sang at his own funeral.



Jonathan Myer flew the O-1E “Bird Dog” in South Vietnam as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) from early April 1966 through February 1967. Most of his flying was over Kontum Province (in the Central Highlands’ II Corps), except for 3-1/2 weeks over the (so-called) Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) just northwest of Dong Ha Air Base (in I Corps). Most of his province flying was visual reconnaissance (VR) over different areas, depending on weather or schedule, to report “significant sightings” to Intelligence or follow up on cues from prior sightings.

In addition, Jonathan liked to land at Kontum’s Special Forces A-Teams to bring supplies and sometimes give a patrol leader a view of the terrain he’d be covering. “The A-Teams were manned by ten Green Berets and a platoon of neighboring Montagnards, and as they were out of range of Army artillery for protection, we FACs liked to look out for them.”

The most challenging and enjoyable actions for FACs were controlling airstrikes. Some were “Preplanned,” based on Intelligence information, but the most gratifying were “TICs,” or “troops in contact” with Viet Cong (the local “VC”) or infiltrating North Vietnamese Army units (the “NVA”).

With one exception, Jonathan’s repertoire of songs about his FAC activities arose during the past 22 years. Owing to the near-freezing weather this 2017 Veterans Day, he limited his total to eleven of his favorites. Jonathan songs are listed below and are further described at the end of the report.

1. “How I Went IFR in Flying Buffalo Shit”
2. “FAC and the Green Beret”
3. “Hunting Trucks by Star Light”
4. “Mission to Maung Bak”
5. “My Peace Song”
6. “‘Willie’ Wilbanks’ One-Man War”
7. “Pink Elephant Polka”
8. “Glory Flying Regulations”
9. “Tally Ho”
10. “My Tally Ho Hit”
11. “Warrior Bards: Our War.”

CD’s of Jonathan’s songs and several of the songfests recorded by the Society of Old Bold Aviators (SOBA), or other of his fellow “warrior bards” who had “been there, done that, and had the T-shirts” (etc.), are available. Contact Jonathon at: jbmmmyer@gmail.com.

David Martin. David is a local poet from the Washington area. Dave read several exotic and original poems as outlined here. *Tathagata*, from the Prajnaparamita Sutra (Heart of Wisdom Sutra) Retake, No.1 (written by David). This was a premier performance of a poem based on the mantra of the oldest printed text in the world—a *Mahayana* Buddhist meditation on enlightenment (*bodhi*). The modern take or twist is an



examination of the

transitory, but transformative, nature of the range of enlightenment experiences which can be integrated into everyday life. *We Are the Other Force* (An Anthem for the Future). This poem highlights the urge to look for a successful development of our species, *Homo sapiens*, in the far future and the necessity to keep the future bright in our minds to work through and beyond contemporary obstructions.

On Entering the Sea (*al-Dukhul ila'l-bahr*). A two-voice arrangement of one of the premier love poems of the Arab poet Nizar Qabbani. The poem was translated into English from the Arabic by Lena Jayyusi and re-arranged for performance for two voices. This poem has come to be the signature poem for Maritza and David in their performances; often they conclude their poetry sets with it. This year, Maritza was in Puerto Rico helping relatives and neighbors cope with the aftermath of the hurricane.

Richard (Dick) Epstein, our host, read several pieces as listed below:



Something About a Bear—several humorous incidents involving his camp mascot (an Asian brown bear). *On Meeting a Cousin for the First Time*—a true story relating an incident in Phoenix Az. before shipping out. *PFC Peterson, USMC*—about a newby who arrived in country and took a local bus to his duty station in the Delta. *Thai Stick with a Hint of Hashish*—about an excursion into a town called Mukdahan. *Lima Site 85*—about the death of six AF techs on a mountaintop radar site in Laos 30 miles from North Vietnam. *They Wanted to Give Him a Medal* and *Close Don't Count*—captures a

story told by Jim Stewart (aka Tanker), from a brief talk he gave Memorial Day 2016. Richard also read several poems written by MDWP founder Clyde Wray, who now resides in Canada with his wife and family.

Tom Glenn. Tom read from his recent novel, *Last of the Annamese*—Tom told us of Chuck Griffin, a retired Marine officer, who returns to Vietnam in late 1974 as a civilian intelligence analyst to give his utmost to win the war. As the fall of Saigon looms, Chuck struggles to save his friend, South Vietnamese Marine Colonel Thanh; his wife Tuyet, with whom Chuck has fallen in love; and Tuyet's six-year old son, Thu, the last of the Annamese. Tom also told us of his last days in Vietnam as the North Vietnamese Army took over the country.



Jim Smith, read a quite a few of his poems including: *Passing the Torch*—about the time a



general dropped out of the air to visit Jim's firebase to a more recent time when a helicopter hovered above a protest and the reaction of the crowd; *Night in Southeast Asia*—a typical night returning to base camp, only this time a local came following Jim back to camp; *Veterans' Banquet*, an interesting and bizarre tale capturing a moment in reaction to a Vietnam victory celebration; *Two Years Later*—about Jim's time in a rainstorm at a '67 folk festival and another rainstorm in the Iron Triangle; *Listening Post*—about the lingering effect of LP duty in the dark in Vietnam and after returning back home; *Twice Broken*—about one's spirit being broken in war and again by society when returning home; *War Souvenir*—about taking a wallet from a dead North Vietnamese containing a photo of the dead soldier's girlfriend; *Washing the Wall*—Jim's

observation while washing the Wall in Washington DC with his fellow VVA buddies; *Life Story*—about the idea that one place is just as good as another and one war is as good as another; *Into the South China Sea*—about a refugee completing a puzzle and thinking of her younger sister lost at sea; and *Natural Selection*, —a poem about survival and how war impacts us all.



Tom La Comb read an excerpt from his book “*Light Ruck, Vietnam 1969*”. The story told of a few days in the life of a Fourth Division soldier, a new guy, me, taking part in a mission into an NVA base area west of Kontum, in the Plei Trap Valley. During this mission I was very thankful for the kindness shown to me by one of the old-timers, Sigmond “Ziggy” Sikorski. After a fierce battle, we took a hill named Cu Ce Pak. I loaded Ziggy on a dustoff, thinking he would be O.K. Not long after, we were told he had died on the chopper.

Lad Carrington drove up from N. Carolina to share the day with us. He missed the past several readings due to health issues and it was good to have him with us again. Lad sold more of his poetry books than anyone else this year.



After the day's activities, Jonathon and his wife, Brenda; Richard and his wife, Noy and lad Carrington had a great meal and intense conversation at Vietnamese restaurant (Nam Viet) located over the bridge in Arlington, VA. We all raised our glasses to our missing friends, Dick and Barbara Morris and to fellow veterans and friends who could not be with us.

We, as artists of every persuasion, come to the MDWP Tent and the Wall to remember in our unique way and remember we do. The above a brief recap of the day's activity at the Writer's Tent. It was a great day, being together, honoring the memories of veterans we knew and those we didn't know. Thank you all for sharing, 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 Memorial Day.

Jonathan Myer's Song Notes:

1. **How I Went IFR in Flying Buffalo Shit.** “IFR” stands for “instrument flight rules,” which apply when one is flying in weather. More loosely, it applies simply to obscured visibility. This really happened when I flew into the Dak Pek Special Forces camp on July 30, 1966. After a low pass to move cattle off the dirt strip, I touched down . . . and my wheels picked up the animal's (um) leavings, hurled them forward to my still-spinning propeller, which in turn covered my windshield and splattered through my open side windows!
2. **FAC and the Green Beret.** This is my exception: I wrote it in January 1967 as a mutual spoof on the Special Forces as well as FACs. A sly radio man asks the snotty FAC for assistance, which turns into a cry for help: they're under attack! Once fighters arrive, the FAC messes up his airstrike . . . but recovers:

Fighters, you're cleared in again, just do the best you can,

*The situation's so f---d up it'll take more than mortal man.
Just bomb the general area, and when the smoke clears out,
We'll count up all the bodies, and try to sort 'em out. . . .*

3. **Hunting Trucks by Starlight.** Flying over the DMZ was called Project Tally Ho, and we flew three times every two days around the clock, weather permitting. Days we flew singly in flights of two, and nights we flew two in one Bird, the front-seater control the aircraft and the back-seater searched for trucks with a Starlight Scope. One night I was flying, with “Salty” Harrison in the back seat. He spotted a truck while I called for flares and fighters, so when the truck reached a mile of straight road I had the fighters attack, and —

*The flares reveal a hole across the highway
Where [Charlie's] truck had just been blown to kingdom come.*

4. **Mission to Mang Buk.** Army Ranger Captain Phil Bosma would be in my back seat, “With two machine gun barrels and three cases of ammo / And some mailbags beneath his feet.” In short, the Bird Dog was grossly overloaded, but when the tail wheel left the runway “I knew the little Bird Dog would fly!” Climb out was slow and landing in the the rain on Mang Buk’s slippery runway was a challenge. A chat with the A-Team’s commander and two beers sure eased the flight back to Kontum.
5. **My Peace Song.** Lady Brenda and I were driving to Georgia (see next) when I picked up a PBS radio station with Brownie McGee’s butter-smooth guitar and Sonny Terry’s chugging harmonica for “Down by the Riverside” to “study war no more.” With my Vietnam tour nearly 35 years past, I determined to make my own “peace song.” However, it promised all sorts of vengeance before I’d “study war no more”!
6. **“Willie” Wilbanks’ One-Man War.** Two days before I left Kontum for a flight back to the U.S. of A., I heard that fellow-Bird Dog pilot Hilliard Almond “Willie” Wilbanks had been killed in combat; 11 months later, he was awarded the USAF’s second (and first posthumous) Medal of Honor. Thirty years later, I wrote the first version of his fatal story, and over the next 20 years as I learned more about his battle, I made corrections and added verses. It was my honor to meet his family members in the year 2000 and later, and contribute my ballad to his memory.
7. **Pink Elephant Polka.** Flying west of Kontum City one day, I spotted a couple of (honest-to-God) pink elephants! Suspecting that they were VC pack animals, I rolled in and launched a smoke rocket at them. Shi-erra! They had broken into a trot “And the rocket flew over their a\$\$!”

*Tarnation! I said as I circled around, Ready to try once more,
When my Bird Dog shook from a sudden “whump!” As if elephants evened
the score. . . .*

That spooked me — and when I reported it to Intel they only laughed at me. Fortunately, I soon carried an Army passenger, Gary Wineteer, who also saw some pink pachyderms. (Moreover, after we formed our FAC Association in 2000, other FACs stood up to vouch for their existence, doubtless from rolling in pinkish mud.)

8. **Glory Flying Regulations (III: plus SEA & GWOT).*** The original “Glory Flying Regs” was by the legendary Oscar Brand (d. Sep. 30, 2016, at 97), as he contrasted the daring activities of World War II (and possibly the Korean War) with the stupid make-work practices that replaced them. My version started by updating the Services to the Vietnam War (and later for the Navy), then added 30 years to include RPAs (Remotely Piloted Aircraft), then back to Calvin Coolidge who said “Buy just one (airplane) and let the pilots take turns flying it.” The chorus remains Brand’s — until succeeded by fighter pilots, who typically tell lies. . . .
- * South-East Asia (War) and Global War on Terrorism
9. **Tally Ho.** “Tally Ho” was the name of both the mission and the area, the DMZ. The unit was established (flying O-1E “Bird Dogs”) in May 1966, and was replaced by faster aircraft about a year later, when a SAM (surface-to-air missile) shot down Tally Ho’s new commander. I’m indebted to Cal Anderson, who gave me the “book-ends” of Tally Ho’s history. Several “excitements” occurred while I was there (as a fill-in) until the Bird Dog pipeline provided replacements. I tried to extend my stay, but when I flew south to get mail and other supplies, Lt Col Gibson (my Kontum boss) kidnapped me back again, and I finished my tour in Kontum.
10. **My Tally Ho Hit.** Fourteen years went by as I wrote more Tally Ho songs — until I realized I hadn’t covered the one time I took a hit . . . the only one of my entire tour, which severed five of the seven wires in my steel aileron cable! I had just forgotten about it, as other events, affecting other people, were more significant in my view. So here is the “remedy.” Yes, there are references to preceding events, but the outcome is different: the crew chief fixed the airplane, and I didn’t even note its tail number. Twenty of my 32 (or 33) missions over the DMZ qualified me for a month off my year’s tour, and as each out-of-country mission counted double, my 30+ added three Air Medals to my eventual total.
11. **Warrior Bards: Our War.** The first few verses were by “Yodelin’ Irv” LeVine to credit his fellow singer-songwriters of the Southeast Asia War: Toby Hughes, Chip Dockery, “Bull” Durham, Dick Jonas, Saul Broudy, the “High Priced Help, Bill Ellis, me (Jonathan Myer), and himself.
- My first change was to add FACs to the list: Ron Barker (who flew the F-100 “Hun” for short as well as the “Bird Dog” as FAC) replaced me while I added myself to the FAC list, along with Jim Roper (Ravens) and Dave MacKay (Ho Chi Minh Trail).
- My second change was to cover key presidential decisions, as well as the ruthless leaders in North Vietnam and our anti-war activists. The added four four-line verses address the vital processes and events that explain the war’s desperate end.

A final irony was that the South, whose Viet Cong wanted both to change its incompatible government and expel its “invaders” (first the French, then the U.S. and allies), got its wish — but, with the U.S. withdrawal and despite the ultimate valor of its own military — the South wound up conquered by even less compatible rulers, the communist North: “Out of the frying pan into the fire!”

Books and CD's by MDWP Presenters

• **Tom Glenn**, *Last of the Annamese*: A book about the choices forced upon those who fight wars, those who flee them, and those who survive them.

The Trion Syndrome: German professor suspects he's cursed with the inability to love or be loved. Tormented by nightmares and confused flashbacks, he's haunted by a half-remembered clandestine mission in Vietnam and by the myth of Trion, the Greek demigod who disemboweled his infant son to demonstrate his ferocity.

Friendly Casualties: A novel in stories, is centered on the Têt Offensive of 1968. It tells the stories of casualties, Vietnamese and American. At the core is the destruction of the McIntyre family—the colonel, his wife, and their two sons. In the first part, “Triage,” set between February, 1967 and April, 1976, one soldier murders another, an old Vietnamese woman gives up her chances of survival to save an American child.

No Accounts: A story of two men, one gay, one straight, who learn from one another how to become men by accepting loss and life itself.

• **Robert Doubeck**, *Creating the Vietnam Memorial: The Inside Story*

• **Joseph Underwood**, *The Eight Said No*. a sailor's story from the desk of the USS Hornet and USS North Carolina, in the battle for the South Pacific.

• **Scott A. Christofferson**, *Your Hero and Mine*, Scott, a collection of insightful and penetrating letters written by a 19-year old Information Officer attached to the 101st Screaming Eagles. • **William Powell**, *A Taste of War*, an Infantry Platoon Leader's recollections of service at Tay Ninh and Fire Base Hunter with the 25 Infantry Division. • **Richard Morris**, *Cologne No. 10 for Men*, a catch 22 look at life with the 1st Cav. Order from Amazon.com and other online booksellers.

• **Richard Morris**, *Sky troopers*, original songs written in Vietnam. Order from www.cdbaby.com/cd/richardmorris.

• **Joy Matthews Alford**, *Lord, I'm Dancing As Fast As I Can*, Sistah Joy's first book of poetry.

• **Joy Matthews Alford**, *From Pain to Empowerment*.

• **John Top Holland** and Father Patrick Bascio, *Perfidy: The Govt. Cabal That Knowingly Abandoned Our POWs and Left Them to Die*.

• **Maritza Rivera Cohen**, *A Mother's War*.

• **Jonathan Myer**, *Songs of the O-1E Bid Dog* and CD's from the Society of Old Bold Aviators. Order from: jbmyer@gmail.com.

• **Nancy Lynch**, *Vietnam Mailbag: Voices From the War, 1968-1972*, available at <http://www.vietnammailbag.com/>

• **Alexandra Lajoux**, *My Country is Your Country*, a blend of country, folk, gospel and bluegrass. The album's title song, "We Thank You," was sung by Alexandra at the MDWP Tent on the Mall. Available at <http://www.alexismusicstudio.com>

Thank you to all of you who participated and to those who help sponsors MDWP activities on the Mall. Special thanks to VVA 227 and VVA for their support.

If you have any suggestions for corporate sponsorship or suggestions, let me know. Don't forget to visit our website: www.memorialdaywritersproject.com or contact me at www.dick_epstein@hotmail.com.

God Bless.

It was a great day, being together, honoring 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 many of you again next Veterans Day. P.S. Your donation is most welcomed to help pay for the rental of our tent on the Mall and to keep the MDWP going.

MDWP Honor Roll: Hand Salute!

Briah "Gunny" Conner, Captain, USMC, Frederick, MD
Roy Correnti, USMC, Massachusetts.
Richard Morris, 1st Cav, USA, Hyattsville, MD
Rod Kane, Corpsman, 1st Cav, USA, Chevy Chase, MD
Racoon, Civilian, Washington, DC.
Sgt Maj USA, John Holland
Drolf Rolf, NSA