

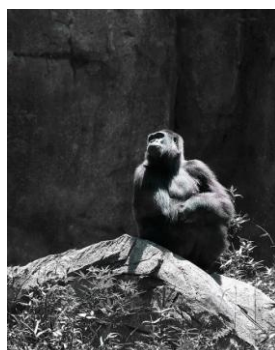
Action Report: Memorial Day Writers' Project

Activity: A bi-annual Tribute to our Veterans

Date: May 26, 2014

Location: The National Mall, Washington, DC

Weather: 83 degrees.



Winners from the VVA 227 *Vince Kaspar Award for Excellence of Expression in the Arts* from Wakefield High School, VA sponsored by VVA 227 and the MDWP.

The weather for the MDWP open mic event couldn't have been better! It was a great day to be with fellow veteran and friends. We had **twenty-two participants** throughout the day, several who read and sang with us for the first time. Like last year, at the end of the day, a core group of participants got together for a great Vietnamese dinner at Nam Viet, a Vietnamese restaurant just over the bridge in Arlington, VA. Special thanks to Barbara Morris, who took care of CD and book sales and greeted everyone who stopped by to look at our display of books, our photo album and mission statement and other printed materials at the MDWP tent. Our tent was available to authors with books to sell and several MDWP participants took good advantage of that. Special thanks to **Curtis Nelson** who read for Ken Williamson and took wonderful photos of our participants throughout the day and to **Jimmy Stewart** (Tanker from OK) who helped me unload my car and setup all of the equipment for our day on the Mall and 95-year veteran of three wars and photographer **Peter Ruplenas** for sharing the day with us. A brief summary of each participant's time at the microphone is provided below.



Jonathan Myer and **Dave MacKay** (up from Alabama for the occasion) were Forward Air Controllers (FACs) in the Southeast Asia (SEA) War. They sang two sets of both their own and others' songs, which are listed (with explanatory notes) at the end of this report. Both men were assigned to units in II Corps, but with

different missions, aircraft, and times in-theater. Jonathan flew the single-engine O-1E "Bird Dog" during 1966 – '67, mostly in Kontum Province, though with a few weeks' duty in I ("Eye") Corps, flying out of Dong Ha air base on surveillance and interdiction missions (Project "Tally Ho") over the "DMZ" (aka "Route Pack 1"). Dave flew the two-engine (puller-pusher) O-2A "Super Skymaster" out of Air Force base at Pleiku, with most of his then-secret missions crossing the tri-border junction (of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) into lower Laos to interdict North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces traveling south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to infiltrate men and supplies into South Vietnam; he flew 142 such missions, mostly at night, in 1969.

Richard Morris, a 1st Lieutenant rifle platoon leader with 2nd Bn, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, 1967-68, sang songs from his Skytroopers CD which he wrote in Vietnam in 1967 and recorded in 2007: "Diggin' A Hole," "Bong Son Bridge," "Chanh Giao Cave," "Charlie's Gone From Khe Sahn," "Counting Bodies in the Nam," "Mirage," "You Ain't Alone," "I Got a Lonesome Me" and "Go To Sleep." He also read several pieces from his award winning novel *Cologne No. 10 For Men*.



Tom McLean brought his wife, grandson, harmonica and guitar. Tom sang several of



his original songs, "*Humanitarian Salute*" a pean to all of those on the humanitarian front, especially two catholic nuns who helped him out, one from the Holy Family Hospital in Qui Nhon. And "*Aging Veteran*" which outlines some of the many obstacles that Vietnam Veterans face over the years and even today. In the second set, Tom sang "*Living In Others Dreams*," a song about the futility of many young men dying in all wars and "*Spirits of the Wall*" which is Tom's take on the Vietnam Memorial, why it was built and who it was built for. As always, Tom left us wanting to hear more.

Richard Epstein, our host, was a microwave radio repairman with the 1st Signal Brigade at Phu Mu, Thailand and also worked as a field engineer with Page Communications Engineers throughout II and III Corps, Viet Nam. Richard popped up now and then to read while the next scheduled person got ready for the mic. Richard read a poem written by Rod Kane entitled "*It's My Job*" which portrays the life of a medic and a poem by Clyde Wray entitled "*Still Searching*," a poem about a soldier's thoughts when confronting the reality of war and its lunacy.



George Uscinowitz was platoon leader for the 2nd platoon, B Company, 65th Engineers (Combat), 25th Infantry Division, III Corps. George worked out of Cu Chi, but his AO stretched east to the Michelin Plantation near Xuan Loc. His unit worked on road building and repair, quick culverts, land clearing, LZ clearing, mine sweep, tunnels, fire base construction, all sorts of work with demolitions /explosives, and base camp facilities support. George is currently a full time student at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. As you can see according to the photo, George still fits into his uniform. I'd say that's quite a feat.

Doug Bradley is a Madison, Wisconsin-based veteran who has written extensively about his Vietnam, and post-Vietnam, experiences. Doug served as an information specialist (journalist) at U. S. Army Republic of Vietnam (USARV) headquarters near Saigon. Following his discharge and tenure in graduate school, Doug relocated to Madison where he helped establish Vets House, a storefront, community-based service center for Vietnam era veterans. Doug read from "*DEROS Vietnam: Dispatches from the Air-Conditioned Jungle*." This is a unique, fictional montage of the war and postwar showing the experiences of Vietnam support troops. Structurally based on Ernest Hemingway's "*In Our Time*"



DEROS Vietnam (Date Eligible for Return from Over Seas) is a riveting collection of 16 short stories and 16 "interlinears" about the GIs who battled boredom, racial tensions, the military brass, drugs, alcohol . . . and occasionally the enemy.



Brad White resides in the Washington area and writes fiction and poetry. Brad read two of his new pieces: "*When Your Syllables Aren't En Vogue*", a haunting poem about rejection that we as writers go through and the purpose of our writing, the stories that go untold because of short sighted editors and "*Dandelion*" a poem about the recent passing of Massachusetts publisher, poet, biker, radio talk show host and friend Jose Gouveia.



Judy King came up from TN to be with us this Memorial Day. Judy read two of her well-known signature poems "Welcome Home" and "The Spirit of The Wall". Long time friend and MDWP participant Dattrinne Barker *spend most of the day with us and read "When I Hear Taps."* We thank you both for joining us and sharing your work.

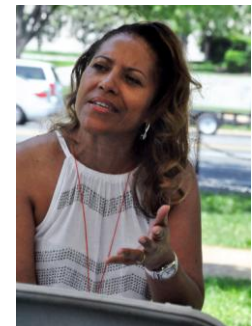


Dr. Fred Foote (USN Captain, Ret) heads up the Warrior Poetry Project at Walter Reed, National Military Medical Center, Bethesda (WRB) and is poetry editor of *O-Dark-Thirty*. Dr. Foot read from his upcoming book, *Medic Against Bomb; A Doctor's Poetry of War* (to be published by Grayson books in October 2014). Dr. Foote is also managing a project for veterans at Walter Reed called *the Green Road*, a half-mile-long path providing wheelchair and foot transit through the NMMC campus, a venue for engagement with art and nature, and a platform for education in holism for the military and the nation at large. Fred read several poems centering on the daily struggles of the medical professional and their Iraqi patients.



Kerry Pardue was an invited speaker at the Woman's Memorial and participated with us too. This year Kerry decided to read a poem he wrote about a nurse that served in Vietnam. In his own words, Kerry believes many of the nurses are what he calls "closet vets". He named them that because many of them never talk about what they did or how it impacted them. Kerry also read a piece entitled "Miracle Bride" the story of how he met his wife as a pen pal while serving in Viet Nam. Kerry also told us about his recent book: "*Poems in The Keys of Life.*"

Sistah Joy presented three poems, preceded by an acknowledgement and a tribute to her recently deceased friend, **Acie L. Byrd**, who passed earlier this month. Acie who was an atomic veteran, Vietnam veteran, broadcaster, orator, organizer, civil rights activist and humanitarian. The first poem, "*I Proudly Wave The Flag,*" was presented to honor and in tribute to Acie. Her second poem, "*We Bear Witness,*" was presented in honor of South African President, Nelson Mandela. Her third poem, "*Remembrances*" was presented in tribute to all who served and gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to this country. The poem was specifically written for a Memorial Day observance at her church, Ebenezer AME Church in Fort



Washington, MD, and has now been published in one of her three books of poetry. Contact: Poetsistahjoy@aol.com.

Holley Watts, a '66-'67 Vietnam Red Cross Donut Dolly, read *47W*, a poem about her helping a guy find his buddy on The Wall on Memorial Day 2005. She also read about flying down the coast (from DaNang to Chu Lai) and the humorous response from the guys in the airfield tower on hearing the rare voice of an AMERICAN WOMAN, let alone one requesting landing instructions...with a country drawl! Remembering Bunny Olson was a humorous poem about a memorable Aussie named "Bunny" and the memorable toy koala he gave her before he left country. She closed with a poem about the frustration of trying to locate the guys you know you lost when all you had was their nicknames. The 34 names used in the poem were real, and still the question remains; *Where Can I Find Them On The Wall?*



Tom Glenn lived in Saigon as an intelligence operative when the North Vietnamese attacked the city in 1975. Tom told us of his experience and how he tried to evacuate the 43 men who worked for him and their families. Tom read from his novel-in-stories, *Friendly Casualties*: about a war correspondent assigned to the Vietnam highlands in 1967 and 1968 who befriends three short-timer GIs building an enlisted man's club. In Tom's words: The camp was subjected to a rocket attack at the beginning of the Tet Offensive. The new club building is destroyed, the three soldiers are sent by chopper to attack the enemy, and the reporter is forced to fly to Saigon. The reporter learns by letter that one of his soldiers lost a leg in combat and the other two were killed. He thinks to himself, "I've told myself I'm past it, but sometimes at night when it's cold and sharp and clear, I'm back there again with my three short-timers. Tom also told us of his new book: "No- Accounts," a heartwarming and compassionate narrative about men and women living with AIDS in the Washington area.



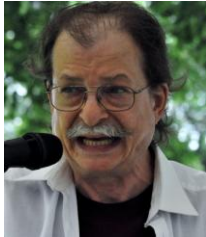
Maritza Rivera, US Army Tactical Intelligence Officer 1974 - 1978 read "*Final Draft*," dedicated to the 22 veterans a day who take their own lives. She also read "*Witness*," a poem about wounded soldiers, medics and casualties of war, "*Walking Wounded*" and "*Semper Fi*," a last letter poem. Maritza leads a poetry workshop each year just across the MD border in PA and also participates with me in the Warrior Poetry Project at Walter Reed, National Military Medical Center, Bethesda (WRB). Thanks to Maritza, we closed out with Jimmy Stewart singing uplifting patriotic songs.



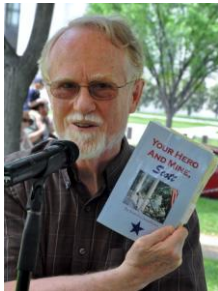
Barbara Martin, singer-songwriter, joined us for the first time and we are all glad she did. Barbara mentioned that she is working on a new song that will reflect on her day in the Mall. In her own words: "I followed two men who sang song after song about their experiences in the Vietnam War. I felt embarrassed to get up and do my thing after that. I wasn't there in Vietnam, but my brother was and he died there. His experience as a soldier and his death affected my life and the life of my family deeply. I started out with two spirituals: I'll Fly Away and Swing Low Sweet Chariot to honor all those who have crossed over. My second song was the song I wrote for my brother, Dennis Martin, "I Won't Forget". I've been hesitant to sing this song, as it is not patriotic, but was what my brother and I experienced--our truth. The response I have been receiving from the song has taken away most of the fear of singing it. I ended with a song by Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer, "My Shining Hour"--a song of hope of meeting those we've lost again." Barbara has a CD containing several of the songs she sang.



Curt Nelson was assigned to the 26th Public Information Detachment at US Army Engineer Command, Long Binh. Curt came to the MDWP tent to read for **Ken Williamson**, author of " *Vietnam Memories in Verse*." Curt was the editor of *KYSU Magazine*, an Army Engineer publication. Curt read several vignettes from Ken's new book. I temporarily misplaced my copy of Ken's book, so I am unable to describe the content or tone. However, I do remember enjoying reading each section and wanting to read more. Curt also brought copies of "**The Bamboo Shoot**" by James Parker Wollner. FYI: Curt took all of the participant photos used in this report. Thanks for helping out, Curt.



Back for the second time is another poet and author from the Washington area, known as **Q.E. Quasar**. Quasar brought a gentle plea for us to pay more attention to our spirituality and that of our environment.



Clyde Christofferson read from his a copy of " *Your Hero and Mine, Scott*," a collection of letters written by his brother Scott, before his death near Chu Lai on October 8, 1967. Scott was a combat reporter for the 101st Airborne Division, and the unit he was with on that day got ambushed. Clyde's book is a very good read.



Last but not least, **Jim Stewart**, tank jockey, came by train from Oklahoma to visit the Wall and to participate with his friends at the MDWP. Jim spent the night at my house in order to help load up the car and setup the equipment. Jim played several songs on his guitar toward the end of the day and got all us all to sing along. Some of Jim's music is also on the MDWP Website.

Thank you to all who participated in the Memorial Day Writers' Project bi-annual open mic on the National Mall, adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I also thank the current generation of combat veterans who spent the day with us. **Donations are appreciated to help pay for the tent and sound system.** For additional information, visit our website at www.memorialdaywritersproject.com

Jonathan Myer & Dave MacKay, Song List
Memorial Day, 2014

Many of Jonathan's and Dave's songs were memorials to KIAs, many of them ballads, telling how that person had been lost. Others were more general, written and sung by colleagues and strangers, but all in remembrance of the many who had perished in their country's service . . . during what is still our longest war.

1. **58,000 Names Carved in a Wall.** (Original poem by Native-American Johnnie Rainwater; the song “50,000 Names“ © by Jamie Ohara and popularized by George Jones; numbers updated first by Irv LeVine and currently by JM.) This most poignant of memorials focuses on the tearful visits of family members “Searching for a boy from long ago” — and souvenirs they leave behind. The current number of names was planned to add 14 to total 58,300, but so far just 13 were added to total 58,299 — and that’s the way we sang it.
2. **Warrior Bards.** Originally written by “Yodelin’ Irv” LeVine to honor his fellow-Southeast Asia War balladeers through the President LBJ and SecDef McNamara years. Then JM added verses to include FAC singers . . . and other persons who “helped” to bring that war to its ignominious conclusion.
3. **Dueling Yankee Air Pirates.** The North Vietnamese were so upset at the U.S. Air Force and Naval airmen who were bombing their country (in between “pauses,” that is) that they called them “Yankee Air Pirates.” In turn, our crews proudly adopted the term, and as one said, This may have been the first time we Southern boys were willing to be called “Yankees”! Dick Jonas wrote the original song, while FACs Dave MacKay and Jim Roper later adapted it to their own out-of-country missions, Here, Jonathan sang Dick’s verses, Dave followed with the FAC variants, and both joined in on the choruses.
4. **My Peace Song.** While cruising down I-95 in 2001 to attend fellow-FAC ‘Willie’ Wilbanks’s* inauguration into Georgia’s Aviation Hall of Fame, Jonathan heard Brownie McGhee’s butter-smooth guitar and Sonny Terry’s chugging harmonica as they sang “Down by the Riverside” on PBS radio. As the SEA War had been over for more than 25 years by then, he decided to write his own peace song and “study war no more” . . . but AFTER I “lay down my Willie Pete” (marking rockets), “smoke grenades,” “nape and snake” (napalm and high-drag 500-lb bombs), “CBUs” (cluster bomb units), and “20 mike-mike” (20-millimeter machine-gun fire) — “THEN I’ll study war no more!” Like Frank Warner’s “Old Rebel Soldier”: “I won’t be reconstructed, and I do not give a damn!”
5. **The One-Level Gunner.** In this Toby Hughes song, he describes the thoughts of an F-4 pilot (sung by Jonathan) and the apparently unskilled Vietnamese gunner (sung by Dave) who shoots at him . . . always without effect. The F-4 pilot comes to realize that if they kill the gunner, his replacement might shoot straighter — while the actually expert gunner deliberately misses the Phantoms . . . so that he can sit out the war in relative safety. (It’s funnier when sung.)
6. **Sher-Babes.** Toby named his F-4C “Phantom II” “Sher-Babes,” after his wife. Dave MacKay sang the verses as Toby, while Jonathan joined in the choruses. The siege of Khe Sanh, a U.S. Marine base at the extreme northwestern corner of South Vietnam, began on 21 January 1968 and lasted 77 days until 9 April, before and after the 25-day battle for Huế and the country-wide “Tet Offensive,” which began on 31 January. “On the thirty-third day of the fight” (22 February), Toby’s mission was to interdict supplies destined for NVA forces besieging Khe Sanh. “Hit as he pulled off the bomb run,” the rest of his suspenseful ballad details how he managed to nurse “Sher-Babes” as far as Da Nang’s runway, where “She dies as her wheels touch the ground.” A love song, indeed.
7. **Stand to Your Glasses.** Originally a long poem mourning British troops who died of plague in mid-19th century India, the modernized version was first sung by Royal Flying Corps units in France during The Great War (1914 – 18). Legend has it that casualty rates for new pilots was so high that maintenance NCOs had to come to the Officers’ Mess to teach their replacements the words. This (American) version mixes original words (like “flaming Spad and Camel,” French and British “pursuit ships” of the day) with later references to “Bosom buddies while boozin’ are we” — namely, today’s combat pilots pondering the risk of death while adhering to principles of honor and duty, as did their “knights-of-the-air” forebears.
8. **Loved My C-Rations!** Halfway between the sublime and the ridiculous is the mundane . . . and what could be more mundane than combat rations? To the tune of “Rye Whiskey” (more or less), Jonathan describes how he’d take along a C-ration box on his dawn patrols in the O-1E “Bird Dog,” and eat them when convenient. He later found out that (*mirabile dictu!*) they even tasted good when heated — on the ground, of course.

9. **FAC and the Green Beret.** Jonathan's first song (written in January 1967, near the end of his FAC tour in Kontum Province), it begins with a Special Forces radio operator (Dave) asking for air support from a snarky FAC (Jonathan) in his "Lima One-Nine," (for "L-19," the traditional Army name for the "Bird Dog"). They trade barbs as the situation worsens and both come under fire. After major confusion between radio operator, FAC and his fighters, the song ends happily: "Your friendly FAC and fighters will always save the day, / Killing off the Charlies till the last Green Beret!" While the song is a spoof on the actual "blood brotherhood" that prevailed between Province FACs and the Green Beret A-teams they supported, some of its incidents actually happened during Jonathan's FAC missions in the Central Highlands.
10. **The FAC.** Dave MacKay's rendition of a poem provided by "Raven Jim" Roper some years back, this song captures the essence of a FAC's life during the SEA War: "I've flown a million miles in this barb-wired land / Aged a hundred years in a twelve-month span"; "You've never really lived 'til you've almost died / That's the time you feel the most alive"; "Hey FAC, we're gettin' run down from the South / Can you put a can of nape in Charlie's mouth?" — and: "... Through battles I was there, I'm the guy who ran the Air / The warlord in the sky they called the FAC."
11. **The Ho Chi Minh Trail.** The Ho Chi Minh Trail (*Tru-ò-ng Son trail* to the North Vietnamese) was an increasingly sophisticated network of hidden roads and way stations that began in North Vietnam and continued south through "neutral" Laos and Cambodia, with offshoots into South Vietnam along its length. Infested with anti-aircraft guns, it provided infiltration routes for men, supplies and munitions to support both NVA units and Viet Cong militias in South Vietnam throughout the war. FACs and fighters, often responding to patrols of MACV's Studies and Observations Group (SOG), worked 24 hours a day in all kinds of weather to find and destroy trucks and troops coming down the Trail. As F-4C jock Toby Hughes's haunting song relates, it was difficult and dangerous work, especially at night and in poor weather. Dave MacKay, with 142 Trail missions in his O-2A out of Pleiku as *Covey 536*, led the song, while Jonathan felt the hair rising on the back of his neck.
12. **Ballad of the Black Berets.** While shopping at then-Fort Myer's Post Exchange four years ago, Jonathan saw the 10 May 2010 Army Times, whose huge headline read: "SOLDIERS SAY: 'DUMP THE BERET.'" The inside article began: "10 years later, soldiers still loathe it and want it off their heads." That was enough for Jonathan, who had followed the original brouhaha when the Army's Chief of Staff decided that the black beret — the elite Ranger headgear — should be extended to the rest of the Army to enhance morale and symbolize "a strategically responsive force for the 21st century." Rage, scorn and scandal ensued ... as this song documents. Interestingly enough, while the current Veterans Administration scandal was in full fury this Memorial Day, none of the media even mentioned this earlier fiasco.
13. **Ballad of the Green Berets.** The U.S. Special Forces (USSF), better known for their "green berets," evolved from WWII's Office of Strategic Services (OSS) (which became the CIA in 1947) to conduct unconventional warfare operations, particularly in Southeast Asia. After Robin Moore wrote *The Green Berets* in 1965, SSgt Barry Sadler wrote his "Ballad of the Green Berets" (with Robin Moore's music) while recovering from a punji-stake wound that almost cost him his leg. First performed in January 1966, this simple patriotic song shot to the top of the hit parade (#1 for five weeks) and has been a staple among military singers ever since. Meanwhile, for a few years the Green Berets even had their own comic strip, and John Wayne starred in 1968's "The Green Berets" movie. Both U.S. and international parodies abounded, perhaps the most recent being Jonathan's "Black Berets" above. Dave closed the loop with the original version this Memorial Day.
14. **I Fly the Line.** Dave MacKay set this song (to Johnny Cash's famous "I Walk the Line") during his tour as *Covey 536*, an out-country FAC flying the O-2A Super Skymaster out of Pleiku Air Base during 1969. His mission was to interdict the lower Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos. His song, however, tells the general story of how a FAC did his primary job of visual reconnaissance and airstrike control during the SEA War, whether he faced small arms fire (which "I don't sweat") or automatic crew-served weapons (which was "what I fret"). The end of his second verse, "I'll fly and fight anywhere at any time / Because they're mine, I Fly the Line" reflects the close relationship between FACs and the ground units they supported.
15. **The Sycamore Tree.** Dave said he wrote this song before he even got to Vietnam. His "Sycamore Tree ... straight and tall" represented the U.S., while he refers to the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), tongue-in-cheek, as a "friendly little country" run largely by our mutual enemy, the Viet Cong (VC); as such it was a "thorn in the side" of the U.S., which

throughout the 1960s refused either to empower our military to pursue a more aggressive strategy or to withdraw from an increasingly unpopular war. The VC (aided and eventually supplanted by the North Vietnamese Army, or NVA) carried out a steady campaign of terror against the RVN's infrastructure, thus to control its people — as typified by "five men dead . . . lying in the shade of the Sycamore Tree." Although Dave finishes with "And we've been there, you and me," his original words before going to Vietnam himself were "And it's waiting there for you and me" — to reflect the fact that, whether as volunteers or draftees, most young American men faced the prospect of being sent there.

- 16. Hunting Trucks by Starlight.** O-1E FACs flew "Tally Ho" missions (over the DMZ) around the clock from July 1966 through May 1967, looking for signs of enemy activity and infiltration. Jonathan flew with them from late-September through mid-October 1966: *"At night with two of us flying in the "Bird Dog," the back-seat pilot used a light-enhancing Starlight scope to look for trucks heading south on open stretches of road, while the front-seater flew the aircraft and controlled any air strikes. When we found one, we'd ask "Hillsboro" (our C-130 airborne command post) for C-130 flare-birds ("Blind Bats") and fighters — to strike before the truck disappeared under jungle canopy. The odds were usually with the trucks, but not this time. This is the story of that mission, flown with "Salty" Harrison, in October of 1966. Even the enemy merits respect."*

* Capt. Hilliard Almond Wilbanks, KIA 24 February 1967, was awarded the USAF's second (and first posthumous) Medal of Honor of our Southeast Asia (SEA) War. He may be found on panel 15E, line 88, on Our Wall.

