THE WAR ON TERROR FOUNDATION
– PRESENTS –
THE VIETNAM "MOVING WALL"
August 2 - 6, 2012 • 2670 E. State Street, Hermitage, PA 16148

A SALUTE TO VETERANS
American flags for as far as the eye can see greet visitors as they enter Hillcrest Memorial Park in Hermitage, Pennsylvania. Originally they were the symbol of “America Held Hostage”. Today the Avenue of 444 Flags remains as silent proclamation that our freedoms must never be taken for granted.

The story began on November 4, 1979, when an angry mob led by university students stormed the gates of the American embassy in Tehran, Iran and took 53 Americans hostage. Americans watched in disbelief as the days on the calendar turned and negotiations with the terrorists failed to secure their release.

As day 100 of the crisis approached, Tom Flynn, owner of Hillcrest Memorial Park decided he was tired of seeing the nation’s flag burned by Iranians on the 6 o’clock news. He was determined to do something to help Hermitage and the nation remember our hostages.

With the encouragement of local veterans organizations, flag poles donated by Wheatland Tube, help from unemployed steel workers and casket flags donated by families of veterans buried in Hillcrest, on February 11, 1980, an American flag was raised for each of the 100 days of captivity. Thus began the commitment to raise a new flag every day until the hostages were released.

After eight American servicemen lost their lives during the ill-fated rescue attempt in Iran on April 25, 1980, citizens from Scranton, Pa. raised funds to build a permanent monument in memory of these brave men and placed it on the Avenue of Flags. The 10 foot monument features an eagle with its wings spread, announcing hope and freedom. At the base is the Eternal Flame, lit by six former hostages when they returned to Hermitage to see the flags and dedicate the memorial on February 14, 1981.

The hostages were released on January 20, 1981 but the Avenue of 444 Flags lives on some 30 years later as a symbol of our freedoms, with lasting gratitude to our veterans for securing them.

The park is visited by people from all over the world and is open year round, 24 hours a day, and admission is free. The flags are lighted at night and the front circle of flags is lowered to half-staff any time the President declares a time of national mourning. An unforgettable story from the pages of American History.

www.avenueofflags.com

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Courtesy of Visit Mercer County Pa.
WAR ON TERROR
VETERANS MEMORIAL

In the center of the Avenue of 444 Flags are 12 steel and glass monuments, 12 feet tall by 4 feet wide, in a circle around a beautiful fountain. The first 2 feet of the towers are stainless steel; above are five glass panels, each 2 feet high by 4 feet wide. Etched in the dark glass are the names of all military personnel who have died in the War on Terror since 1975.

The memorial is part of the War on Terror Foundation, a tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) organization and educational resource honoring those who gave their lives fighting to preserve our way of life. The foundation is not connected with the government or military and receives all funding from private and public donations. Tom Flynn, foundation president and owner of Hillcrest Memorial Park, said the foundation hopes to teach people, especially children that there is a price to be paid for freedom.

The first panel begins with the names of Col. Paul R. Shaffer, Jr. and Lt. Col. Jack H. Turner who were assassinated in Tehran, Iran on May 21, 1975. Two lines below are the names of the eight servicemen killed on April 25, 1980 trying to rescue the 53 Americans held captive during the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Also named are the 53 service members who died at the Pentagon in the September 11, 2001 attacks.


One of the things you will readily notice on the War on Terror Veterans Memorial is the number of women who have been killed in action. Each tablet on a monument has approximately 80 names; few tablets are without a woman’s name, some with three and four.

At the end of July, 2012, ten monuments are complete and contain over 7,000 names, all in chronological order of death. New names are added weekly, shortly after confirmation by the Department of Defense.

Designed by IKM Architects and built by Wesex Corporation, the War on Terror Veterans Memorial is something that all freedom loving people can be proud of and is a testament that those who paid the supreme sacrifice with never be forgotten.

Visit www.waronterror.org for more details.

Courtesy of Visit Mercer County Pa.
OLIVER NORTH VISITS THE WAR ON TERROR VETERANS MEMORIAL

Lt. Col. Oliver North USMC (RET) visited The Avenue of 444 Flags and The War on Terror Veterans Memorial on December 2, 2011 to film the 100th episode of “War Stories” for Fox News.
Welcome from the War on Terror Foundation

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Dear Friends,

You probably would like to know more about them than their names. That's why we put this booklet together. We ourselves wanted to learn more about the 44 men from our area whose names are on the Wall, and about the seven whose names are on the War on Terror Memorial. And we wanted to share that information with you. Each of them were people with hopes, dreams, families, friends, homes - people who sacrificed all those things for us. The more we know about them, the more we can appreciate them.

We couldn't include much information here, first because of the limitations of the printed page. And it is extremely difficult to learn much about men and women who died more than 40 years ago. Friends and family members have passed away or moved away; records and reports usually aren't accessible; and memories have faded.

The Vietnam Memorial Foundation in Washington is working to overcome that by building an education center that will present photos, details, and mementos of the servicemen and women listed on the Wall. Likewise, The War on Terror Foundation will build a rotunda with interactive touch screens, Internet access, and other digital features to enable you to know more about those who have sacrificed their lives for you.

Both memorials are projects of nonprofit foundations, supported only by contributions from private donors, without any government money. We welcome your support for the War on Terror Foundation so we can complete and maintain the War on Terror Memorial and its planned rotunda.

Thank You,

Sincerely,
Thomas M. Flynn
President, War on Terror Foundation

Hillcrest Memorial Park/Avenue of 444 Flags
269 East State Street • Hermitage, Pennsylvania 16148
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Dear Friends:

On behalf of the residents of Hermitage, we are proud to host The Moving Wall and welcome you to our city. The half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. lists the 58,261 names of the brave Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country during that war. This silent display and the respectful ceremonies over these 5 days honor and remember the veterans of the Vietnam conflict. It also expresses appreciation to all who have served our country in its wars and those currently serving. May this event serve as a Welcome Home and show our gratitude to all of our military veterans for their courageous efforts.

The Moving Wall has traveled across the nation to communities like ours whose young men and women answered their country’s call to protect the freedoms we enjoy. The name, however, does not refer only to the mobility of the wall, but also to the emotional reactions which it evokes. Families and friends touch a name and remember a lost father, son, daughter, brother, sister, or loved one. Veterans recall memories of fellow service members who shared the sacrifice but never came home. All who visit have private experiences and moving emotional responses.

We wish to thank the War on Terror Foundation, the supporting organizations and the individual volunteers for their efforts in bringing this memorial to our community. The Moving Wall was last in our city in 1996, long before the attacks of 9/11. It is a reminder that the call to duty is often unexpected, perhaps coming on a bright, cloudless September morning, but it remains an ongoing obligation to vigilantly protect our nation’s safety and freedom.

May this memorial and related ceremonies serve to remember and honor all veterans - World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan - and salute their courage and sacrifice. On behalf of our residents and the Board of Commissioners, we extend our warmest regards to those who have traveled to Hermitage to join in this tribute to them.

Sincerely,

William J. Moder, III
President, Hermitage Board of Commissioners
MERCER COUNTY PA KILLED IN ACTION

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THUT, GEORGE A., FARRELL
TOMKO, WILLIAM J., SHARON
TRENCHARD, HAROLD R., SHARON
TROPE, FRANK, FARRELL
TRUCHAN, HENRY, SHARON
TURNER, JAMES
TUTTLE, MAURICE W.
UBER, DAVID V., MERCER
UBER, FRANK J.
VAN HORNE, LESLIE, GREENVILLE
VAN RYN, JOHN G.
VAN TASSEL, CRAWFORD, SANDY LAKE
VATH, HOWARD B.
VELLENTE, LOUIS J.
VETE, ARTHUR P., MCKEES ROCKS
VICKERMAN, CHARLES M.
WALTERS, KENNETH E., GROVE CITY
WALTERS, HARRY L., JACKSON CENTER
WARD, ROBERT, SHARON
WATTERS, EDWARD, WHEATLAND
WEAVER, CLIFFORD E., GREENVILLE
WEAVER, HAROLD M., CUHAGO FALLS
WEAVER, HOWARD J.
WEBB, FRANKLIN K.
WEBER, ANTHONY N.
WERNITZ, HOWARD M., MERCER
WHITE, RICHARD J., GROVE CITY
WILLARD, JOHN, SHARON
WILLIAMS, JAMES R., SHARON
WILLIAMS, JOHN T., WHEATLAND
WILLIAMS, MORGAN D.
WILSON, GERALD R., STONEBORO
WILSON, HOWARD S., GROVE CITY
WILSON, THOMSON, SHARON
WINGROVE, ALLEN E., SANDY LAKE
WLODARSKY, HARRY, FARRELL
WOLFE, WILLIAM C., HADLEY
WOLFE, WILLIAM C.
YARABENIC, JOSEPH
YEZ, GEORGE F., WEST MIDDLESEX
YOUNG, MAURICE, SHARON
YUENGERT, GEORGE R., MERCER
ZUPEN, PAUL, GROVE CITY

KOREA

BAILEY, PAUL, MERCER
BANCROFT, EDWARD B., SHARON
BENTON, JOHN E.
BURNS, RICHARD N., GREENVILLE
CAUTION, WILLIAM E., SANDY LAKE
CLAWSON, PAUL E., JAMESTOWN
COGSWELL, JOHN O., GREENVILLE
DINGER, GLEN FREDERICK
EATON, GEORGE R.
JEWELL, DANIEL B., SHARON
KING, DONALD G.
KING, CHARLES J., SHARON
KING, JOHN E., SHARON
LATHAM, ERIC M.
LEWIS, WILLIAM G.
LOUTZENHISER, JACK, GREENVILLE
MCBRIAR, CHARLES H., FARRELL
MOORE, CURTIS
MUSHRUSH, EDWARD D., ATLANTIC
OLUCH, LOUIS, FARRELL
RAU, WILLIAM L., SANDY LAKE
RICHARD, NORMAN B., GREENVILLE
SCHUMACHER, HENRY JOHN, SHARON
SMITH, FREDERICK O., SHARON
SPON, RICHARD
TULIP, JAMES G.
TURNER, RICHARD C.
WINKLE, FRANK N., ADAMSVILLE

*Names provided by Mercer County Veterans Affairs Office.*
Dear Vietnam Moving Wall Visitor,

The intent of this program goes beyond honoring the men from Mercer County whose names are engraved on the Vietnam Memorial. There are stories in here about each of them. But we wanted to pay tribute as well to all Americans who have served – or are serving – honorably in the United States armed forces.

You will find here articles about four of our nation’s acknowledged heroes, recipients of our country’s highest award, the Medal of Honor. They are Mercer’s Lewis Francis Brest (Civil War), Greenville’s Gus Kefurt (World War II), Ellwood City’s Leslie Sabo (Vietnam), and Knox’s Ross McGinnis (Iraq).

You can also read about the seven Mercer County men whose names appear on the War on Terror Memorial.

But not all of these stories are about people who have done deeds we normally define as heroic. Heroism results from the willingness to sacrifice one’s life for one’s country and one’s friends. But there is another factor: opportunity. Only a tiny percentage of those who serve in the armed forces ever find themselves in combat; nevertheless, the overwhelming majority serve willingly and honorably. Without them, the armed forces could not function at all.

Before a soldier can be in a position to perform heroically, he must be processed in by administrative personnel; fed; housed; issued uniforms and equipment; trained; armed; supplied with ammunition; transported by truck, ship, plane, and/or helicopter, which need to be maintained and fueled. He must even be entertained from time to time.

Many of the people who do those things would be willing to trade places with the hero on the battlefield. They can’t, because they are needed somewhere else. That doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be honored as well. Everyone who serves honorably should be honored. So we’ve included stories about a wide variety of servicemen and women who represent not only themselves, but all others who have served similarly.

We have included here 100 stories. We wish we could have done more, but even 1000 stories would only be a small fraction of those in the Shenango Valley who have served honorably. That’s why I look at this program as a beginning rather than an end. I hope to find a way to publish more stories about veterans and active duty servicemen and women. If you know of someone whose story should be told, please let me know, preferably by e-mail: jjzentis@gmail.com, or by contacting the War on Terror Foundation.

I would also appreciate it if you would let me know about any errors you find in these stories. I am passionate about accuracy, but finding accurate information about people whose lives ended forty or more years ago is very difficult. So if you see something you know isn’t correct, please let me know.

Finally, I hope that you discover in these stories more and more reasons for holding in high esteem all the men and women who have served to make the United States of America the greatest nation in the history of the world.

– Joe Zentis
“Don’t write about me. Write about the ship.”

That’s what World War II veteran Earl Abbott said when asked about his military service. The ship was the USS Henrico, a 492-foot-long Attack Transport that carried 28 landing craft, 1500 troops, and assault equipment.

The newly commissioned Henrico launched 24 of the first landing craft to hit Omaha Beach on D-Day. Less than 20 years old, Abbott was Coxswain (driver) of one of those landing craft, loaded with a platoon of soldiers.

“The Coxswains carried .45 automatics,” Abbott said, “not for protection, but to make sure all the soldiers left the boats. We never had to use them. That’s the kind of soldiers they were, ready to die if they had to.”

After supporting operations in the Mediterranean for three months, The Henrico headed back to the U.S. to prepare for battle in the Pacific. By the end of March, 1945, she was engaged in the landings on Kerama Retto until she was hit by a Japanese suicide plane carrying two 500-lb. bombs. Forty-nine officers and men died as the entire bridge was blown off the ship.

“I got relieved just before it hit,” Abbott said. “The guy that relieved me didn’t even know what happened.

Loaded with ammunition, the flaming ship was without power to drive the firefighting equipment.

“We tried to pump water from the ocean with hand bilges,” Abbot said. “A destroyer came and helped us with their water. If they hadn’t come, we would have gotten blown up.”

But the destroyer had to leave before the fire was completely out.

“We couldn’t abandon ship because we had no power to lower the boats. Our only chance was for everybody to pitch in, and we put the fire out.”

The Henrico managed to return to Kerama Retto, then sail to San Francisco under her own power. After being repaired, she sailed again with replacement troops to the Philippine Islands. Finally, having carried troops into the teeth of the enemy during the war, she performed the infinitely more pleasant task of bringing thousands of troops home from the Pacific when the war was over.

Earl Abbott was honorably discharged on February 10, 1946. The Henrico’s career, however, continued for another 22 years. She earned three battle stars for service in World War II, nine in the Korean War, and four in Vietnam.

SPONSORED BY: John Flynn Funeral Home & Crematory
In providing for its own needs, the United States military services play vital roles in fulfilling the needs of society at large. The Shenango Valley has a family practitioner because the United States Air Force enabled Dr. Allison Angott to get her medical degree.

“Without the Air Force,” she said, “I would have had to be a specialist to pay off the debts of medical school. I say to my patients I’m your tax dollars at work. I’m here as a physician because you helped me go to medical school. And I appreciate that.”

When she needed financial aid to attend medical school, she discovered the Air Force’s medical training program. Through it, she was able to earn her degree at the University of Pittsburgh, and complete her residency in Erie.

She got her introduction to military life during month-long tours of duty each summer.

“We were sworn in as officers, wore a uniform, went to officers training and learned how to march, salute, and so forth. Each year I was at a different military hospital. I did a rotation in cardiology in Dayton, in pediatrics in San Francisco, survival training in Texas.”

When she went on active duty, she was assigned to Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.

“A week or two after I came on duty, Kuwait was invaded. I went on standby to be deployed as an orthopedic surgeon. That’s the only thing that made me uncomfortable during my tour. The Air Force uses their family doctors to fill in specialist slots because we have a broad range of training.”

Dr. Angott was never deployed, but her base in Montgomery expanded to receive casualties. The doctors and staff there were also trained in disaster/mass casualty exercises.

Part of Dr. Angott’s patients came from Montgomery’s large retired military population, which provided her with experience in all aspects of family practice.

Her four years of active duty provided her with more than a degree and medical experience.

“I am more appreciative of those who have gone before me and those who have given their lives for our country. I thank every serviceman I meet, and I honor the flag. I know the Constitution and a little bit more about what it means to be a citizen. I certainly didn’t pay enough attention when I took those classes in high school.”

Dr. Angott and her husband Richard have three daughters – Bethany, Leah, and Moriah.
James A. Bailey of Grove City wasn’t satisfied with one military career. He actually served three.

He was just 17 when he joined the Navy, becoming the fifth of the Grove City Bailey brothers to serve in World War II. In Korea, he served in the Army as a paratrooper. After that, he went to helicopter flight school and served three tours as a pilot in Vietnam.

“In between his tours in Vietnam, he flew President Johnson around,” said his brother, Dick. “Once he flew a Huey from Washington home to Harrisville and landed it in a ball field. That was the last time we saw him.”

During his third tour, CWO Bailey was flying combat missions in Long Kahn Province with the 118th Assault Helicopter Company. Unlike many other helicopter units, they remained stationed at Bien Hoa, near Saigon, throughout their whole time in Vietnam, from June of 1963 to July of 1971.

On October 9, 1969, CWO Bailey was commanding one of a group of six Hueys inserting and extracting troops during a combat operation along the Song Dong Nai River, not far from Saigon. In a landing zone big enough for only three helicopters at a time, Bailey’s was the last aircraft of the second group of three to land. Five U.S. troops scrambled aboard. During a hover check after lifting off, the pilot discovered that the helicopter lacked full power. He set the chopper back down and waited until the others had departed so he wouldn’t have to contend with their rotor wash. As he attempted to fly out, a rotor blade struck some very tall, thick bamboo.

The pilot tried his best to maneuver the aircraft over the river and set it down gently, but the aircraft pitched as its blades hit the water. It tipped onto its side and sank in less than ten seconds. The river’s current was very swift, making it impossible for the survivors to make it to shore. The only survivor was the pilot.

Searches were conducted for nearly two weeks, but none of those who had departed the aircraft were found at that time. Two who were in the aircraft were recovered and identified.

CWO Bailey’s remains were found much later and returned to the States. His family traveled from Mercer County to attend his funeral in Arlington National Cemetery.

ON THE WALL      Panel W7 Line 122
Early in 1943, Dick Bailey enlisted in the Army Air Force.

“A whole carload of us went up to Erie to join,” he said, “but I was the only one that went in. The rest of them all backed out.”

He never got home again until he was released from the service slightly more than four years later.

Dick was assigned to the 344th Service Squadron. They had a rough trip to the South Pacific.

“After going through Panama Canal, we dropped off supplies at Bora Bora. Going out the next morning we hit a reef, knocked a hole in the bottom of the ship, and bent the screw and the shaft. We vibrated the whole way to Noumea, New Caledonia.”

The 344th Service Squadron followed the U.S. military advances to maintain and repair combat aircraft.

“Every time they drove the Japs off an island, we’d move up. We had a prop shop, metal shop, welding shop, and paint shop. One time they brought a B-24 in on its belly because the wheels wouldn’t go down. We put a new walkway in it and bomb bay doors and had it flying again in two weeks.”

Less than ideal conditions sometimes seriously increased their workload.

“On Leyte, there were two airstrips. One was right along the ocean. They had to close it down because of the crosswinds. Guys were crashing all the time. So they built another strip up on top of a mountain. If they came in too short, they ran into the side of the mountain. If they went too long, they’d land down over the other side of the mountain.”

Although they were hit with Japanese attacks from time to time, Dick’s worst injury was the result of a motorcycle accident.

“A big truck and trailer had just refueled a B-24. It pulled right out in front of me and I hit him broadside. I got a fractured pelvis and a concussion.”

Before the war was over, all four of his brothers also served in the military. Dick’s brother John had entered the army about a year before him; he served in North Africa and Europe. His brothers Fonnie and Frederick also served in Europe. Fonnie was wounded and became a prisoner of war. James joined the Navy in 1945. He later served as a paratrooper in the Korean War and as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam.
For a Marine in Vietnam, as in most war zones, “Doc” was a Navy medical corpsman, because the Marine Corps had no medics of its own. “Doc” accompanied the Marines into the teeth of the battle, because when a Marine went down, “Doc” had to be right there to help him. With his focus on attending to others rather than on defending himself, the medical corpsman was particularly vulnerable.

Hospitalman Joseph A. Baker was serving with 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division in the province of Quang Tri, just south of the border between North and South Vietnam. His letters home contain vivid pictures of both the courage, vulnerability, and dedication of the Navy corpsmen.

“My platoon saw action today. I wasn’t with them but I had to help with casualties back here at camp. We had two dead and about twelve wounded. I’m not worried anymore about if I will know what to do. When they started bringing them in I just went to work without even thinking.”

Of course, he did often accompany his unit into the field: “We were hit on patrol yesterday and we lost one man and had two other wounded in action.”

Joe had his own close calls: “A corpsman from the 1st platoon was hit and I had to go to his wounded. He had three of them about 75 meters across an open rice paddy and I had to go get them. Our sentry opened up to give me cover and I started across running low. Then I began hearing rounds go over my head and saw them kicking up sand at me feet. I put it in high gear and really began moving. I had to check myself when I got there to make sure I wasn’t hit. A grenade launcher came over after me, then I got scared seeing what I had crossed through.”

In the gallows humor of combat soldiers, such escapes did not go unnoticed: “Most of the corpsmen out here have purple hearts already and they are kidding me because I don’t. They can’t understand it. I’ve been in more fire fights and sat through more mortar attacks than they have.”

Unfortunately, Joe’s good fortune ended on March 7, 1968 when he was killed by small arms fire.

Joseph was the fifteenth serviceman from Mercer County killed in action in Vietnam.

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral Home & Crematory
The term “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” didn’t exist before 1997, but it was a terrifying reality long before that.

Consider the case of Ray Bartolo, one of the first Americans to enter Flossenburg Concentration Camp, where Jewish prisoners were used as slave labor – and beaten, starved, and incinerated. It was one of the worst nightmares in all of human history. Just 20 years old, Ray found himself surrounded by people he described as walking zombies. The horror of it all was indelibly imprinted on Ray’s mind.

After Germany surrendered, Ray’s battalion was sent to serve with the Army of Occupation in Japan. He was discharged from the army late in 1945. That should have been the end of a bad dream and the beginning of a good one. But the good dream lasted only a few days.

When he arrived home, he had to help his parents cope with the loss of his brother, who had been fatally wounded on Christmas Day, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge. Eddie had to be brought home because the Belgian government wanted to recover the land used for the cemetery where he was buried. When the Grove City Veterans of Foreign Wars heard about it, they decided to start a veteran’s plot. Eddie Bartolo was the first person buried there.

While dealing with their deceased son, the family had to come to cope with the problems of their living son. The enduring memories of Flossenburg caused horrible nightmares. He frightened his family when he woke up screaming, but he could not talk with them about what he had experienced.

The healing process didn’t start until 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Flossenburg. Conversations with eight Jewish survivors who lived in Pittsburgh allowed Ray to release some of the suppressed memories that caused his nightmares. In fact, they inspired him to learn more about Flossenburg and the other concentration and extermination camps built by the Nazis – Buchenwald, Dachau, Ravensbruch, and Belsenburg, to name just a few. He began to give talks to high school kids, service groups, Lions Clubs, and Kiwanis Clubs.

One of his most important talks was before an audience of only two – an interviewer and a cameraman at his home in Greenville. It was part of a project to record the remembrances of people who had personally experienced the Holocaust. The tape is now a permanent part of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.
During the Vietnam War, body counts were reported almost daily, with Viet Cong casualties many times greater than American. For those whose loved ones were killed in the action, that was no consolation.

During June, 1966, the 4th Cavalry, supported by the 2nd Battalion 28th Infantry, conducted search and destroy operations in Binh Long Province, along the border with Cambodia, directly north of Saigon. The mission was to eliminate the 271st, 272nd, and 273rd Regiments of the 9th Viet Cong Division to secure Highway 13 and protect the city of An Loc.

On June 30, B Troop of the 1st Squadron 4th Cavalry Regiment was ambushed and severely damaged by the 271st VC Regiment. When the C troop and the 2nd Battalion 28th Infantry came in support, it turned into a three-day battle. By the time it was over, 270 Viet Cong soldiers were dead, compared with “only” 37 Americans.

The only thing that mattered to Mercer County was that one of those 37 was the radio operator for the Executive Officer of Company C, 2/18 Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. His name was Sp4 David E. Baun. He had been in Vietnam since May 20, 1966.

According to reports, Sp4 Baun distributed ammunition to the men of his unit with complete disregard for his own safety. He was killed while supervising the rescue of the wounded and the recovery of their equipment.

He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star with “V” device for valor, and the Purple Heart.

David was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Wade E. Baun, Jackson Center RD2. He also left behind his wife, the former Pauline Werner, Easton, PA, whom he married April 23 a week before going to Vietnam.

ON THE WALL Panel 08E Line 110

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest Memorial Park
Even the best training can leave out a few vital pieces of information.

“During pilot training with the P-51 fighter in Florida,” wrote Lt. Robert Beck, “we were given very little information on how best to parachute from this airplane. I was to find out the hard way later in Burma.”

After his plane was hit, he released the canopy and pushed himself up while holding the parachute’s rip cord.

“The wind slammed me back against the armor plate of the seat and my right arm was forced back pulling the ripcord and opening the chute in the cockpit!! My immediate words were, ‘ah sh--!’”

He was violently yanked out of the cockpit. The chute caught on the tail; then his weight ripped it loose. He found himself with a gaping hole in his chute falling rapidly toward his flaming plane on the ground. Ammunition was exploding, sending tracers flying in every direction.

In spite of the rip in his chute, he pulled the shroud lines to avoid flaming wreckage. He hit the ground very hard.

Injured, worried about the Japanese, he crawled through several gullies looking for a way to escape. He was aware that he was slipping into shock.

“I found a clump of weeds, crawled in, and forced myself to lie still and think of nice things at home in Pittsburgh, Pa.,” he wrote.

Four hours later he heard P-51s flying over, but he couldn’t attract their attention. A short time after that, another pilot landed and took him back to the base.

That was not Lt. Beck’s last great adventure. He continued to fly missions, including the longest single-engine fighter mission in World War II. Forty P-51s took off from what is now Bangladesh to attack an airfield near Bangkok, Thailand, more than 700 miles away. Taken totally by surprise, the Japanese put up no resistance. Thirty-nine of the planes returned home more than six and a half hours after they had taken off, having inflicted severe damage on the targeted airbase.

Lt. Beck returned home in June, 1945, and was discharged from the service in October. For his service, he was awarded an Air Medal, a Purple Heart, and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

He married June Shafer in 1948; they had three children. After working 38 years with Bell of PA, he started Sharon Commercial Printing. He passed away in January, 2006.
Many young men during the Vietnam War would have been delighted to fail the induction physical. Not Stephen Bednar. He tried to enlist, but failed the physical. He waited a little while, then tried again. This time he passed.

“He was very patriotic,” said his brother Martin Aubel.

He was also committed to helping other people.

“He wanted to pursue a career in the medical field,” Aubel said. “He jumped at the chance to serve in the army as a medic.”

In Vietnam, he served with A Troop, 4th Squadron, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. Reports from fellow soldiers revealed that he was very good medic.

“A guy who was in his squadron is writing a book,” Aubel said. “He said that Steve was an excellent medic, and a great conversationalist. Everybody liked him.

When they needed a medic to go along on a mission, they always took Steve. He was out on a mission several days before he died. I believe they took some fire and there were some casualties.”

Steve, however, was not killed by the enemy. He died in the base camp from viral pneumonia.

Ironically, Steve’s father had also died from illness while serving in the armed forces. In 1951, when Steve was just a year old, he passes away from non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Steve’s mother then married Samuel Aubel. Together they raised a close family – Stephen plus sisters Kathy Anderson, Theresa Swank, and Sue Weaver, and brothers Ed Bednar, Mark Aubel, and Martin Aubel.

Memories of the fallen are often laced with thoughts about what might have been. This anonymous entry appears with Steve’s profile at virtualwall.org:

“Steve was so funny! Always laughing, making us laugh. The last thing he said to me was ‘We’ll go out when I come home.’ I was so smitten! Me, an underclassman! But he never came home. We never dated. I think he never quit laughing, though. He was one of the rare few who can make the whole world seem wonderful, no matter what. It’s a sadder place without him.”

Martin Aubel remembers that Steve was not able to fulfill one of his wishes. “He sent all of his money home, Martin said, “so our mother could put it in the bank. His dream was to buy a Harley when he got home.”

Steve was the 37th Mercer County man to die during the Vietnam conflict.

ON THE WALL Panel 03W Line 107
Unlike many World War II soldiers, Jimmie Blose didn’t join the army in response to Japan’s Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941. He had enlisted in the Army Air Corps almost a year earlier, motivated by a love of flying rather than by a desire to avenge that “day of infamy.” Ironically, it was the flying rather than the enemy that caused his demise.

Even in high school, he passionately wanted to fly. He left Sharpsville in 1938 to study Aeronautical Engineering at the University of Michigan. While there, he took lessons to get his civilian pilot license.

He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in February, 1941. A short time after arriving at his first training base in Muskogee, Oklahoma, he wrote home about the stress of training: “Our planes cost over $14,000 apiece and they don’t want them cracked up. It costs the government over $100 a day to train us. That is why they are so strict and wash out so many. About three upperclassmen leave every day. They want only those who can fly and fly well.”

He, himself, did quite well: “I was seventh to solo in a class of 120. Not bad, was it?”

After completing training, Lt. Blose was assigned to the newly formed 70th Pursuit Squadron. On December 5, 1941, they boarded ships to sail to the Philippines. On December 7, they were ordered back to California because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In January, 1942, they were deployed to the Fiji Islands.

Unfortunately, his service there didn’t last very long. On April 22, he and another pilot were scrambled from Nausori Airdrome on Viti Levu, Fiji’s largest island, to intercept reported Japanese fighters. When bad weather closed in, they were instructed to land at Nandi Airdrome, 85 miles west of Nausori. The two fighters lost contact with one another. Lt. Shaw landed safely, but Lt. Blose never arrived.

Because of the thick vegetation, several weeks of searching for his plane produced no results. His fate remained unknown for 62 years. In 2004, a couple of Fijian pig hunters found fragments of a plane that looked as if it dated from World War II. The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command conducted a thorough archaeological/forensic excavation of the site. They discovered personal effects of the pilot, including a Sharpsville class ring. DNA evidence confirmed that the pilot was Lt. Blose.

He was interred in Hillcrest Memorial Park in September, 2007.
Militarily, the word “heroic” describes people who perform well in the face of enemy fire – sometimes for just a single day, or even a single minute.

But what about members of the armed forces who perform outstanding service for 20 years without ever being in combat? There should be another word to describe them that would garner as much respect as the word “heroic.” But there isn’t.

Despite several attempts to volunteer for combat zones, twenty-one-year navy veteran Bill Brandenstein never served in one. But without service like his, the United States armed forces would never be able to win a battle, much less a war.

Brandenstein joined the navy after graduating from high school in 1970. Trained as an electrician in San Diego, he was assigned to Vietnam. But his orders were changed, so he spent the next year and a half in the Philippines.

After a brief stint as a civilian, Brandenstein was trained in fire control – the systems that operate the weapons on board ships. He sailed on several cruises, served in training assignments, and spent two years in the recruiting office in Sharon. He finished out his naval career at Naval Station Great Lakes.

Brandenstein’s retirement was by no means the end of his service to his country and his fellow veterans. In a sense it was just a beginning. By chance, he happened to be present for the opening ceremonies when the Vietnam Memorial Moving Wall came to Hermitage in 1992.

“I never knew – and still don’t know to this day – who took my place going over to Vietnam, whether or not they ever made it back. Somebody went to Desert Storm instead of me. They could have been in the building that got blown up with the Scuds. So I have a little bit of survivor’s guilt from time to time – it bugs me.”

The experience moved Brandenstein to become active in the Mercer County Vietnam Era Veterans Organization, then in the VFW. He was commander of the West Middlesex post from 1995 to 2002, and VFW’s District Commander, with responsibility for 25 posts in Mercer, Crawford, and Erie Counties. He was instrumental in setting up the Mercer County Veterans Advisory Council and became its first commander.

Brandenstein is still active in the VFW and other organizations that support veterans.
When Lewis Francis Brest was buried in Citizen’s Cemetery in Mercer December, 1915, few words were chiseled into his tombstone: “Prvt. Lewis F. Brest 57th Pa. Infantry.” There was no reference to his being awarded a Medal of Honor during the Civil War. Brest received his Medal for what became the signature action for which it was awarded during the Civil War. On April 6, 1865, near Petersburg, Virginia, Private Brest captured the enemy regiment’s battle flag.

During the Civil War, the battle flag was far more than a decoration. On the battlefield, it was extremely important. Without it, scattered soldiers would have no idea where to go; with it, they all could see the rallying point for their regiment. Because of its importance, it was carried and defended by the best and the bravest soldiers in the regiment. To capture it usually took the kind of fortitude one associates with a Medal of Honor.

Unfortunately, in the early days after it was created, the Medal wasn’t as esteemed as it is today because many were awarded for frivolous reasons. For example, 864 members of one regiment received the Medal when 300 of them reenlisted before they had even seen one day of combat.

Lewis Brest should have been proud of his Medal of Honor because he deserved it. However, he was probably prouder of his long service with the 57th Pennsylvania Regiment. Merely surviving was something to be proud of. At Antietam 98 members of the regiment were killed or wounded, and three missing. In an assault on Marye’s Heights in the battle of Fredericksburg, they lost 87 out of the 192 soldiers engaged in the fight. At Gettysburg the undermanned unit lost another 34.

Brest remained active throughout the war except for the summer of 1863. Confined to the regimental hospital by a bout with typhoid fever, he missed the regiment’s action at Gettysburg. In the spring of 1864, he was wounded in the neck, but was back in action before very long.

When he received the Medal of Honor, he was probably happier about the thirty-day leave it earned him rather than the Medal itself. He is honored today, however, because of the Mercer County Historical Society’s Western Pennsylvania Civil War Reenactors Society. Through their efforts, the United States government awarded Private Brest a new memorial headstone, engraved in gold with “Lewis F. Brest, ‘Medal of Honor’ Pvt Co ‘D’ 57 PA Inf. May 15, 1842 – Dec 2, 1915.”
American forces in Vietnam fought two wars at the same time: the war to defeat the enemy with weapons and combat operations; and the battle to “win the hearts and minds of the people.”

The Marine Corps united these two missions by implementing the Combined Action Program, in which a squad of Marines would live in a Vietnamese village and combine combat operations, especially village defense, with Vietnamese Popular Force platoons. The close, constant contact between U.S. Marines and Vietnamese people was aimed at spreading the geographical area that could be effectively controlled by the U.S. military while improving understanding and trust between the Americans and the Vietnamese.

Given the nature of the war and the frequent inability to distinguish friend from foe among the Vietnamese, serving in these units demanded extraordinary fortitude and bravery. Corporal Roger A. Brown was one of those Marines who served in a Combined Action Group in Quang Nam province. He was killed by small arms fire while on patrol on December 18, 1968.

Roger was born to Jack and Pauline Cooper Brown in 1945 in Winchester, Virginia. According to his friends, he was a great guy. After working at General American Transportation Corporation and the Coca Cola Bottling Company in Sharon, he joined the Marine Corps on September 29, 1967. He trained at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and Camp Pendleton, California, before going overseas on March 1, 1968.

Roger left behind his parents; his wife, the former Marcia Gladysz; a son Gregory and a daughter Jacqueline; a sister, Mrs. Gail Shields; and a brother Jerry.

ON THE WALL Panel 36W Line 039

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
When you read the profiles of the men and women whose names appear on the Vietnam Memorial, you are overwhelmed with how young most of them were when they died – in their teens or early twenties.

Not so with the heroes of the War on Terror. Sgt. Daniel Brozovich, for example, was 42 years old when he died while on patrol in Ashraf, Iraq, on October 18, 2006.

The army of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s was made up mostly of draftees and young people who enlisted to fight in Vietnam. When the war there ended, so did military conscription. The last men drafted reported for duty in June, 1973.

So it was an all-volunteer army that fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many were career military reservists who were called to active duty.

That again was the case for Sgt. Brozovich. When he and his twin brother, David, graduated from Bedford High School in 1982, Danny joined the Marines and

David joined the Air Force. Four years later, Danny moved back to Pittsburgh to work for Alcoa. But he still believed in an obligation to serve his country, so he joined the National Guard.

He married Mary June Stevens; they had a daughter, Carrie. Then he moved to Greenville to work at Werner Company. That’s where their second child, Ryan, was born. For a short time before his last deployment, he worked as a guard in state prisons, first in Fayette County and then in Findlay Township.

During his military career, Sgt. Brozovich served a tour in Germany and two tours in Iraq. Daniel’s father, Anthony, admired the way Danny’s wife handled it all, calling her a rock who supported her husband and held the family together.

“When he was military, he was all military,” said his mother, Beth.

His compatriots in the army agreed with her. At the news conference at the National Guard Armory in New Castle announcing his death, Lt. Col. Grey Berrier II said Sgt. Brozovich was a charismatic leader who was “fully committed in word and deed to empowering the Iraqi people to pursue political and economic freedom. He was a man who “always led from the front.”

Sgt. Brozovich was well decorated with two Bronze Stars, a Purple Heart, the War on Terror Expeditionary Medal, a Good Conduct Medal, a Pennsylvania Meritorious Service Medal, and an Iraqi Campaign medal.
On July 21, 1969, PFC Roy Otis Buchanan arrived in Vietnam. He was assigned to a U.S. combat unit in Quang Ngai Province.

In most cases, it’s almost impossible to find specific details about such men’s experience upon arriving, even if you’re lucky enough to find the unit’s staff journal/duty officer’s log for the day. The journal for PFC Buchanan’s unit, the 3rd Battalion 1st Infantry 11th Infantry Brigade is available on line. It contains detailed reports of incidents and actions as they occurred.

You can learn from them that PFC Buchanan walked into the middle of intense combat activity. He probably had no opportunity to get used to the situation. He was very likely in combat almost from the moment he arrived.

The journal for July 22 tells us that at 0305 (3:05 a.m.) a reconnaissance popped a trip flare. They threw grenades, and there appeared to be more explosions than from their own grenades, but they had no casualties. At 0530 sensors at a designated map coordinate picked up the movement of seven or eight enemy troops; the American soldiers responded with 12 rounds from a recoilless rifle.

At 0920 two “Chieu Hois” (Viet Cong defectors) turned themselves in. One said he had escaped from ten VC with weapons and little food, and he expected them to “Chieu Hoi” soon.

At 2210, an ARVN (South Vietnamese Army) unit engaged four VC, resulting in one VC killed, one M-1 carbine and five Chinese grenades were captured.

Over the next two weeks, the Daily Logs show sporadic but apparently increasing activity, right up to August 8. That was a busy day:

0805: Recon made contact with MAM (military aged men), two were carrying weapons. Recon received small arms fire, negative results.

0930: B Company (PFC Buchanan’s unit) engaged unknown size enemy force resulting in six US WIA.

1130: B Company reports one US KIA from small arms fire.

1340: B Company reports one US KIA from small arms fire.

One of those had to be PFC Buchanan, killed just 18 days after arriving in Vietnam. His name will be remembered because of the Vietnam Memorial, but it seems as if no one will remember how he died.

ON THE WALL Panel W20 Line 111

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest Memorial Park
When First Lieutenant Paul W. Bush of Greenville arrived in Vietnam during April, 1967, he was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines at Khe Sanh, just south of the border with North Vietnam.

During the summer of 1967, Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army units began a massive buildup of forces in the area. For 77 days, the base was under constant attack by North Vietnamese ground forces, mortar, and artillery attacks. Enemy forces completely surrounded the camp.

Because the Command Chronologies of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines have been published, we can read detailed accounts of what occurred during that entire time period. Take, for example, 22 March 1968. Each entry is identified by time and serial number:

- 0003 hours (12:03 a.m.) – Serial number 1 – Company B rec’d two 82mm mortar rounds from 152O
- 0010 – 2 – Co. B received one artillery round from 152O
- 0620 – 8 – LP (listening post) 1 has returned
- 1310 – 24 – WIA report: shrapnel, right arm left leg, non serious
- 1637 – 31 – man hit his head on nail while entering bunker
- 2040 – 49 – all LPs have departed
- 2350 – 68 – Rec’d unknown number of incoming artillery and rockets, including direct hit on C Co. command post. Unknown amount of friendly WIA and KIA at this time. Final spot report will follow.

The log lists 74 items for that one day, ranging from hundreds of rounds of incoming rockets, artillery, and mortar fire, to the filling of 50 sandbags.

For the friends and family of First Lieutenant Paul W. Bush, including his new wife Patty, the only item that matters is item 68: the direct hit on C Company’s command post. The after-action report provides tells that the it killed three Marines, and another hit in the second platoon area killed two more.

One of those five KIAs was Lt. Bush.

“He was a really bright guy,” said his brother, James Busch. “He graduated from Thiel in 1966 magna cum laude. He joined the Marines because he knew he was going to be drafted.”
In the army, even if you don’t know where you’re going, you might end up exactly where you were meant to be – provided you have a broom, a passion for doing things perfectly, and a loving grandmother.

At least that’s how it worked for one draftee. When Jim Cardamon received his draft notice in 1956, a friend who attended the Citadel taught him close order drill using a broom for a rifle. With this advantage, he was selected as squad leader during infantry Basic and Advanced Individual Training.

At the end of AIT, Jim had no idea where he would be assigned. It turned out to be the “spit and polish” brigade at Fort Myers, Virginia. He was awestruck when he learned that it was the unit that provided ceremonial support for Arlington National Cemetery.

After two weeks of training, he was selected to join one of the honor guard company’s three platoons: honor guard drill team, casket bearers, or firing party. He chose the drill team.

One day he saw a soldier in dress blues going to the head of the chow line.

“I didn’t even know the army had dress blues,” he said.

He learned that the soldier was a guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He immediately decided that he had to go for that.

After practicing constantly with some of his friends who were tomb guards, he was given the opportunity. While some of those selected never made it to the tomb, Jim made it after just a couple weeks. Guards were usually first put out early or late in the day when there were few spectators at the tomb. Jim’s first call came for the noon changing of the guard, before the biggest crowd of the day.

“I got through the first change okay. But when I was standing at the end doing the 21 second count, I heard a noise. My hand was trembling so much that the bayonet was rattling.”

He managed to get through it all without screwing up.

“From that point on, I had the best duty the United States Army had to offer.”

People often ask Jim how he got to be a tomb guard. He explains that the army selects soldiers who fit a defined profile – certain height, military bearing, attitude, and such. Of course only a tiny fraction of those who fit it are selected.

“But I had another advantage,” he says. “My grandmother prayed me into it.”
Albert Christy was part of a unique military family. His father, Ambrose Christy, served the U.S. Army in World War I in France, where he was a victim of a mustard gas attack. His four brothers all served in the military, too.

What makes the family unique, however, is that each of them served in a different branch: Freddy in the Navy, Paul in the Coast Guard, Donald in the Army Air Force, Charlie in the Marine Corps, and Albert in the Army.

Perhaps the strength and determination of all of them came from a very hard childhood. Their mother died in childbirth in 1940, leaving Ambrose with eight children. Two of them, Albert and Paul, lived for a couple of years in St. Joseph’s Orphanage in Erie before they started school.

Albert dropped out of Mercer High School in his Junior year and joined the Army in 1955. After serving in Korea, he was assigned to Germany from March 1962 to April 1965. In September, 1964, he married Inge Gerlach. Through the Army education program, he achieved his high school diploma.

Upon leaving Germany, he was stationed at Fort Ord, California. From there, in spite of his family’s pleas, he volunteered for Vietnam. On February 6, 1966, he was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division in Dak Loc Province. A little more than a month later, while on a combat mission, Sgt. Albert Christy was killed by a sniper.

He left behind his wife, Inge, and their daughter, Diana, and two step-sons from Inge’s previous marriage. He is buried in San Francisco’s Golden Gate National Cemetery. His family was living in Seaside, California, while he was in Vietnam.

SSgt. Christy’s decorations include the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Purple Heart, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation.

ON THE WALL Panel 6E Line 17
Sp4 Jesse James Coon had a rare assignment in Vietnam. He was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company – to play in the division’s band. The 9th Division had a long tradition of bands in combat zone. They had one all the way back in World War II.

One might think that it would be a cushy assignment, away from the dangers that the 9th Division soldiers faced every day as part of the Riverine Force in the Mekong Delta. Maybe it was, most of the time. But not for Sp4 Coon. On April 23, 1968, he was riding in a military vehicle in the Mekong Delta. An enemy hand grenade thrown into the vehicle rolled under the driver’s seat. Sp4 Coon could have rolled out of the vehicle and saved himself. Instead, he grabbed the grenade and tried to throw it out of the vehicle. It exploded before he could do that. Sp4 Coon was killed, but the driver survived.

He was posthumously promoted to Sgt. E-5 and awarded the Bronze Star with “V” device for valor.

Jesse was born in Sharon on August 30, 1947, to Billy Coon Jr. and Mrs. Anna Roman Coon. He attended Farrell High School, but graduated from Hickory High School in 1966. He worked for Sharon General Hospital, Cohen's Store, and the General American Transportation Corp. before entering the service in October, 1966. His tour in Vietnam started on February 5, 1968.

Jesse left behind his father and stepmother, Julia H. Yourchisin Coon; three brothers, William, John and Richard; one sister, Mary Irene; and grandparents, Mrs. Marie Roman, New Wilmington, and Mr. and Mrs. Nick Yourchisin, Hickory Township.

A message posted on the Internet expressed the feelings of many who came back from Vietnam: “I remember Jesse in basic training. He was always making the rest of us laugh. I am very sorry he died so young. I served in Viet Nam too, and sometimes I feel guilty that I came home and so many didn’t.”

ON THE WALL      Panel 51E Line 37

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
Even before graduating, Ted Dalton told his friends he wanted to be a Marine, and tried to get others to sign up with him. He managed to get one to go into the Marines with him.

Over strenuous objections from his father, Edward Dalton, he enlisted in the Marine Corps barely a month after graduating from Hickory High School in 1967. After completing training, he shipped out to Vietnam on December 14, 1967.

He was assigned to A Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, in Quang Nam Province, near Da Nang. It was not a pretty place. According to one report on the Internet, of the 14,000 Marines killed in Vietnam, 10,000 were killed in Quang Nam Province.

In August, 1967, Corporal Dalton was wounded by a grenade; he returned to duty in early August.

In letters home, he thanked his father for being tough on him when he was growing up. He wrote that he couldn’t have made it without that.

By October, 1968, Ted was an experienced Marine, having been in combat for more than ten months. Unfortunately, experience doesn’t always guarantee survival. There is always this persistent fact: in the dark of night, in the thick of the jungle, one cannot distinguish friend from foe. Safety depends on careful planning, strict discipline, and precise execution of the plan. The slightest error in any of those aspects can result in disaster.

On the evening of October 31, 1968, something went wrong in one of those elements. Two squads of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines were positioned in the jungle to ambush enemy patrols. Their instructions were to shoot at anything that moved in front of them.

Something moved. They opened fire very effectively, killing two and mortally wounding one. Unfortunately, they weren’t enemy soldiers. They were fellow Marines.

One of those wounded was Marine Corporal Theodore Hubert Dalton from Hermitage. He was evacuated to the hospital in Da Nang.

“...A friend who was there visited us later,” said brother Edward. “He said Ted was awake and in good spirits. But he was wounded in the pelvis, and the bullet lodged in his spine. If he had survived, he would have been paralyzed.”

But the hospital couldn’t save him. He died there on Friday, November 1, 1968.

“He was laid out in our home,” Edward said. “He had written that he wanted to see snow. On the day they brought him home, it snowed.”

FALLEN HEROES

THEODORE HUBERT DALTON – HERMITAGE
VIETNAM – U.S. MARINE CORPS

Sponsored by: Hillcrest Memorial Park
Fr. Douglas Dayton served in the Episcopal Ministry for 20 years – three years as Assistant Rector at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Sharon, and seventeen as Rector. That’s quite a career, especially considering the fact that he didn’t start studying for the priesthood until he was 43 years old, after completing a twenty-year career in the United States Air Force.

“People who know how much I love the ministry would say to me, ‘I bet you wish that you had gone into the seminary right out of college,” Fr. Dayton says. “But I tell them that those 20 years in the military, particularly my tour in Vietnam, helped me to be a much better priest and pastor.”

After graduating from high school in 1960, he studied at Buffalo State Teachers College, then went on to get a Master of Science in Secondary Education from Fredonia State Teachers College.

That career path took a little twist because of the Vietnam War.

“I got on board with the Air Force’s Officer Training Program,” he said. “I became a 90-Day-Wonder at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.”

His Air Force Specialty was, appropriately, Education and Training. After assignments at Lackland and Hamilton Air Force Bases, he was sent to Nha Trang Airbase in Vietnam as education and training adviser to the Vietnamese Air Force’s 2nd Air Division.

“When I got there, the U.S. 7th Air Force personnel were running the airbase. Our job was to train the Vietnamese to be able to run the airbase by themselves. I was involved in a variety of training programs.”

U.S. advisers worked one-on-one with a Vietnamese counterpart. To be successful, the two had to develop a trusting, friendly relationship.

“My counterpart invited me to his home for dinner once,” Fr. Dayton said. “I tried to eat what I thought I could handle, but he made sure they served some that I could.”

After returning from Vietnam, Major Dayton taught four years at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, then served at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. Before retiring as a Colonel, he served as Professor of Aerospace Studies for the Air Force ROTC Detachment at Grove City College.

And that left him ready for his career as a pastor and priest.

Fr. Dayton and his wife Kathleen have two adult children, Rachael and Aaron, and four grandchildren: Darius, Lucia, Parker, and Zoe.
FALLEN HEROES

PFC ANTHONY DEGEROLAMO — FARRELL
VIETNAM — U.S. ARMY

assault against the enemy stronghold. Demonstrating indomitable courage and superior firepower, they crushed the determined foe.”

Four days later, PFC DeGerolamo reportedly volunteered for a night patrol with Company C. In an ambush, two Company C soldiers, Sgt. Robert Torres of Philadelphia and Cpl Wayne L. Golon of Bergenfield, New Jersey, were killed in action. PFC DeGerolamo was first listed as missing in action, but was later reported as killed. The incident took place two days after PFC DeGerolamo’s 24th birthday.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony DeGerolamo, Anthony had been an outstanding football player and an honor student in Farrell High School. His football coach, William Gargano, described him for the Sharon Herald as “a quiet boy you didn’t know was around unless he hit you on the football field.”

Gargano said DeGerolamo was one of the better linebackers ever to play for Farrell. “He wasn’t a big boy, but he was very quick and agile. He was a very fine football player and a real gentleman.”

He was drafted while he was near completion of his courses in pre-med at Youngstown State University. He arrived in Vietnam on January 5, 1968, exactly a month before he was killed.

ON THE WALL      Panel 37E Line 34

The Tet offensive launched by the North Vietnamese army and the Viet Cong late in January, 1968, cost the United States military more casualties than any comparable in the Vietnam war. One of those was PFC Anthony DeGerolamo from Wheatland.

PFC DeGerolamo was assigned to Headquarters Company, 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division. As a medic, he would have been attached to the battalion’s line companies during combat operations. They were indeed outstanding fighting units. On February 1st, 1968, Companies B and C charged from their Mekong Delta base in armored personnel carriers to counterattack the enemy forces who had seized parts of Saigon. According to the Presidential Unit Citation awarded them, “With complete disregard for their personal welfare, the men of Company B and C began a vicious

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest Memorial Park
In Vietnam, 20-year pld SP4 Ronald DiBartolomeo was a bobcat. That was the nickname of members of the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division, operating in the area of Bien Hoa. They conducted some combined operations with ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), which could be a very hazardous kind of combat.

On November 9, 1970, Sp4 DiBartolomeo’s squad headed out with five ARVN soldiers to set up an ambush. Randy Kethcart, another bobcat, described what happened:

“On the way there they walked into an ambush (which we believe was set up by the 2 ARVNs walking point since we never found them, believing that they went over to the other side).”

Two members of the patrol were killed outright. Ronald was severely wounded; he died two days later.

Spec. 4 DiBartolomeo was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Frankie DiBartolomeo, Springfield Township. After graduating from Grove City High School in 1966, he studied at Youngstown State University. He was drafted into the army in September, 1969, and was sent to Vietnam in March, 1970.

He was the 34th serviceman from Mercer County to die in the Vietnam war.

ON THE WALL      Panel 06W Line 052

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
Pvt Richard Joseph Drivere arrived in Vietnam on August 20, 1968. Assigned to B Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, he entered into a very hot combat zone in Quang Tri Province, just south of the so-called Demilitarized Zone.

When he arrived, the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines were in a serious confrontation with a North Vietnamese regiment around hilly terrain with names like Mutters Ridge, Razorback, and Hill 471.

But maybe it wasn’t so hot; but for sure it was very wet. Mother Nature attacked in early September with a super-typhoon names Agnes. Out over the South China Sea, it had produced winds clocked at 175 miles per hour. By the time it hit the Quang Tri area, those had diminished, but remained strong enough to slam the rain horizontally with such intensity that visibility was near zero. It kept troops on the hilltops from being resupplied for as many as five days.

One Marine wrote home that he and his fellow Marines had run out of C-rations, and were making soup out of water, ketchup, and a little onion. They tried to keep their stomachs warm with hot Kool-Aid.

In spite of that, the battle continued whenever it was possible. The 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines ran into a North Vietnamese regiment north of the Razorback, and the 1st and 2nd Battalions were rushed into position to block the NVA's escape routes.

The 2nd Battalion came upon a regimental supply area and captured 10,000 mortar rounds, 13,000 hand grenades, and hundreds of rockets.

Some time in all this action, Pvt Drivere was killed by enemy small arms fire.

The 1965 grad of Wilmington Area High School was the son of Joseph and Helen Drivere. He had a sister, Margaret, and a brother, David.

ON THE WALL Panel W44 Line 16

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest Memorial Park
On the evening of December 8, 1967, soldiers of the 1st Battalion 2nd Infantry Battalion were complaining that their air mattresses were full of holes from enemy mortar fire. Maybe they were seriously upset, but more likely it was their way of dissipating the stress caused by a rough day.

They were positioned in Phuoc Long Province, not far from the Cambodian border. The day before, one of their recon patrols had encountered the point element of a North Vietnamese army unit. The fight lasted only a short time, with no American casualties. That successful recon alerted the Americans to the presence of the large NVA force.

At 0200 the following morning, Specialist Paul Dufford from West Middlesex was manning a listening post with two other men in front of the battalion’s night defensive position. Detecting movement in the area, he radioed the battalion commander to warn of an impending attack. Their position was quickly surrounded by a large force. In spite of the danger, Specialist Dufford remained at his post so he could advise the commander on the size and movement of the enemy.

With the battalion being hit by heavy mortar fire, the three men were ordered to return to the perimeter, but their position was overrun before they could do so. An enemy grenade wounded all three men. Specialist Dufford killed the grenade thrower, who was only a few feet away. Ignoring the relentless enemy fire, he started to help his wounded comrades back to the perimeter. As the enemy closed in, he provided suppressing fire that allowed his comrades to reach safety.

He himself didn’t make it. He was killed by an enemy mortar round.

That day, the American forces repelled the massive assault with only four dead and a number wounded. The two battalions of the two 273rd NVA regiments that conducted the attack suffered massive casualties.

Had it not been for the bravery of Specialist Paul Dufford, the outcome might have been very different. For his heroism that night, he was awarded the Silver Star.

Paul was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dufford of West Middlesex, PA. The Hickory High School graduate was decorated not only with the Silver Star, but also with a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Combat Infantry Badge, and Vietnam service medals.

ON THE WALL  Panel 31e Line 64
What’s a hero? Don Eichelberger says it’s anyone who just does his job when he’s ordered to do it, and doesn’t crawl down into a hole. But men like Eichelberger always apply that to the guy next to him, never to himself.

During 600 days of combat with the Americal Division in the Pacific, crawling into a hole was rarely an option for Eichelberger, unless it was one occupied by enemy soldiers. Starting on the island of Bougainville, he fought as part of a twelve-man reconnaissance squad responsible for going out in search of enemy units.

During November, 1944, his patrol discovered an enemy encampment early in the morning. They called in an infantry unit, and an entire unit of 23 enemy soldiers were killed without a single American casualty. Everyone who participated in the raid was honored with a Bronze Star. According to the citation, “The courage and jungle craft displayed by all members of the patrol is especially meritorious. The careful preparation, skilful execution, and deadly accuracy of fire constitute a masterpiece of jungle fighting.”

After Bougainville, Eichelberger’s recon squad went out on patrols through the torturous jungles of the Philippine islands of Leyte, Cebu, and Negros, sometimes for as long as twenty days. With feet continuously wet from slogging through the jungle, Eichelberger had to be hospitalized for treatment of ulcers on his ankles. He also contracted malaria.

After Negros was considered clear of enemy soldiers, Eichelberger’s unit started amphibious training for what would have been the most devastating and terrifying beach assault ever: the invasion of Japan itself. He is thankful that the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki made that unnecessary.

Eichelberger spent three months in the occupation of Japan, then returned home.

“My welcoming was walking into the house and being embraced by my parents. I didn’t have any bells ringing or parades and what have you.”

What he did have were some tokens of what heroes sometimes get: not only two Bronze Stars, but also a Good Conduct medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Military Merit medal, Armed Forces Achievement medal, Philippine Liberation Medal (from the Philippine government), Army of Occupation medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Asiatic Pacific medal with three campaign stars.

So was Don Eichelberger a hero? If you ask him, he’ll tell you no.

But re-read his own definition of a hero, and make up your own mind.
For the military importance of service by a soldier who set foot out of the United States, few World War II veterans can match the work of Louis Epstein of Sharon.

While in the army, he attended college, trained with the army engineers to build and blow up bridges, and ended up fighting the Japanese not with explosives, but with radio receivers and a typewriter. He spent much of the last two years of the war behind enemy lines – without ever leaving the United States.

Eighteen-year-old Epstein joined the army right after graduating from Sharon High School. The army sent him not to basic training, but to an engineering course at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. When that program was terminated a few months later, Epstein was assigned to the Corps of Engineers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The training there included building and blowing up bridges, laying and clearing mine fields – and a battery of tests to determine the best placement of the recruits. One tested the ability to recognize rhythm sequences, which is key to mastering telegraphy and Morse Code. Because of his musical training, he achieved an almost perfect score. That earned him a spot in school to become a high-speed radio telegrapher.

After completing his training, Epstein was assigned to Fort Lewis, Washington, where he transferred to the 115th Signal Radio Intelligence Company. Their mission was to intercept Japanese army traffic in the Far East. He would listen to both sides of a radio-telegraphed conversation between two Japanese army officers and type it onto a roll of paper. Other personnel take the paper and teletype the information to Washington.

The messages consisted of groupings of four numbers, which referred to pages and line numbers in a certain encyclopedia. Without that encyclopedia, it was impossible to break. But with it, it was very easy. Unbeknownst to the Japanese, an American naval officer had picked up a set before the war.

Besides intercepting and decoding specific enemy messages, the intelligence experts could learn about Japanese fleet activities by analyzing the volume of traffic coming from the different points. With other stations in California and Alaska, they could also triangulate to pinpoint the source of specific enemy transmissions.

“I’m nothing but amazed at what this signal outfit accomplished,” Epstein said. “It wasn’t heavy duty combat, but it was an extremely interesting piece of work that was mentally challenging, and I think we made a lot of contribution to the war effort.”
In 1942, a project called the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) sent recruits to colleges and universities across the United States. The intent was to create a specialized corps of Army officers to enhance the conduct of the war and the restoration of civilian governments in Europe after the war. Tom Fiedler passed a series of tests to qualify for the program. He completed infantry basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia before being sent to Westminster College.

After just one semester, the program was terminated. Since Fiedler had infantry training, he was assigned with thousands of other soldiers from the curtailed ASTP program to the 95th Infantry Division at Indiantown Gap, PA.

By September, the Division was in Normandy preparing for a move to the front. While Tom’s unit was waiting for that advance, he participated in one of the most famous logistics operations of the war. Plans to build a pipeline from Normandy to Paris has to be scrapped because the army was advancing so rapidly, consuming 800,000 gallons of fuel a day. To keep the army moving, a continuous convoy of 2½ ton trucks hauled fuel in 5-gallon jerry cans from Normandy to Paris. There was no stopping. If a truck broke down, it was pushed off to the side of the road.

Fiedler’s Red Ball Express days ended when he moved with his division to front-line combat. Only three weeks later, he was hit with shrapnel from a mortar or artillery round. Most went through, but there was still a piece left inside.

“I was going to go ahead,” he said, “but when I went to grab my rifle, I couldn’t because my hand was stiff.”

That was the day before his birthday.

“They sent me back to an aid station. About six o’clock the next morning somebody shook me awake. I looked up, and there were chickens on his collar, a colonel. He said, ‘Is your name Thomas Fiedler?’ I said yes. He said, ‘Here’s your purple heart.’ That was my ceremony, and my birthday present.”

Tom ended up in a hospital in England, where they removed the shrapnel. After several months there, he was returned to limited service at a redeployment camp in France, where they processed soldiers to return home. He got back home to his home in Harmony, PA, in March, 1946, with his Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.
Dong Ap Bia is a mountain in Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, west south west of Hue, within range of North Vietnamese Army mortars positioned across the border in Laos. In military terminology, it was known as Hill 937, since it was 937 meters high. But it is best known as Hamburger Hill, largely due to a 1987 movie of that name.

The movie focuses on the actions of the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry, of the 101st Airborne Division as it assaulted the hill, which was heavily defended by the North Vietnamese Army from interconnected trenchworks and bunkers. But that battalion was just one of three American army battalions and two battalions of the South Vietnamese Army to attack it, reinforced by an awesome accumulation of U.S. air power and artillery. One of the American units was the 101st Airborne’s 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry.

David Garth Finnegan was a sergeant in that battalion’s A Company.

The attack on Hill 937 developed during an attempt to clear the A Shau valley of North Vietnamese elements. The valley was a vital link in the NVA’s resupply routes for men and materiel into the South. Before the battalions operation began, there was little reliable intelligence about the strengths and dispositions of the NVA. What they found on Hill 937 was a NVA elements solidly emplaced in an interconnected series of bunkers and entrenchments.

The American commanders thought at first that it was defended by a company-sized force. When the 3/187th Infantry’s assaults from the south were repulsed time and time again, the 1/506th was sent to attack from the north.

The American and South Vietnamese forces not only had to deal with the enemy, but also with the terrain and the weather. The steep hillsides turned to mud, making progress nearly impossible. It ended up taking ten days to reach the summit, in spite of 272 attack sorties by the Air Force, more than a million pounds of bombs, and 152,000 pounds of napalm. Up there they found more than 630 dead soldiers from two NVA battalions.

Sgt. Finnegan was killed on May 18, two days before the American forces reached the summit – which was also barely a month before the American forces abandoned the hill and two months before the NVA reoccupied their fortifications there.

Why is a question which must often remain unanswered.

ON THE WALL      Panel W24 Line 40
Jim Forrester was the kind of first that no one wants to be. He was the first Mercer County resident to be killed in the Vietnam War.

Sgt. Forrester had joined the army in 1962, two years before the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that led to the deployment of U.S. ground forces into Vietnam. He had served in Turkey, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico before being assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 7th Cavalry.

His tour began on January 18, 1966. On January 25, just a week after he arrived, the 3rd Brigade moved with other units from its base camp to a staging area in eastern Binh Dinh Province. From there, the 7th Cav launched Operation Masher. The 3rd Brigade opened an assault that was heavily resisted by the North Vietnamese Army. On February 1st, the NVA withdrew to the north and west. Enemy losses swelled to 1,350 killed in action, rendering two battalions of the NVA’s 22nd ineffective. The U.S. Army lost only seventy-seven men, but one of those was Sgt. Forrester. While participating in a night drop from a helicopter, Sgt. Forrester was raked by machine gun fire. He died instantly from a head wound.

When news of his death arrived here, a friend told the Sharon Herald that Sgt. Forrester had had a premonition of his death. On New Year’s Eve, shortly before his deployment, he had given this friend his airborne tie tack and said, “I don’t think I am coming back.”

That was not an uncommon feeling among those assigned to Vietnam, many of whom did in fact come back. Unfortunately, for Sgt. Forrester, it proved to be true. He never came back to his wife and three children.
Paul Frederick Foulk of Greenville was drafted in October, 1968, but unlike most draftees, he could have avoided being sent to Vietnam.

“My father knew a high ranking person in the army who said he could arrange for Paul to be assigned to Germany,” said his sister, Linda Brown. “But Paul wouldn’t do that. He volunteered to go to Vietnam because he felt it was his duty.”

When Paul was in training in Oklahoma, his friends thought he was in big trouble. A lieutenant colonel came to the barracks looking for him. But it was just one of my dad’s friends coming to take him home for dinner.

He arrived in Vietnam on April 4, 1969, and was assigned to B Battery, 1st Battalion, 21st Artillery, 1st Cavalry Division in Bien Hoa, just north of Saigon.

The problem with firing artillery at the enemy is that artillery pieces make a lot of noise and blow out a lot of smoke. That makes you a prime target for enemy artillery.

Sometimes you luck out.

“A guy who knew him in Vietnam visited us,” Linda said. “He said that one time a mortar round or something landed near Paul, but it didn’t go off. “They figured out that it was a time release bomb, the first one they had ever seen. A lot of officials came in to check it out.”

And sometimes you don’t luck out. On September 7, 1969, Paul was killed by an enemy round.

He was survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Donald G. Foulk, and by two sisters, Linda and Judy.

Paul was posthumously awarded a Silver Star and Purple Heart.

ON THE WALL      Panel W18 Line 54
In January, 1967, a kid watched the funeral of Marine Cpl. Richard A. Funelli, Jr. in Farrell, PA.

“I was in seventh grade and watched his funeral from a school window across the street from Our Lady of Fatima Church,” wrote Chip Krokoski. “His Honor Guard, dressed in their Blues, seemed impervious to the miserable weather that day. The conduct of those Marines that day instilled in me the desire to seek a military career.”

He did indeed become a career officer, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. He never lost his desire to know more about Cpl. Funelli. He finally got some answers many years later after posting a question on the Internet.

“Cpl Funelli was a machine gunner,” wrote fellow combatant Harry Faber. “His position was hit by sappers and the sand bags fell on top of him and he died that way... A lot of positions were hit with satchel charges that night. My hootch was blown up, even what I was sleeping on! It was like Custers last stand!”

“I remember Cpl. Funelli quite well,” wrote Jon Bolton, a survivor of that 15 January attack. “He had a great sense of humor. He made us laugh a lot.”

Bolton’s account of that night seems slightly at odds with Faber’s. “I remember Funelli initially surviving for some time after being wounded. He was lying on the ground outside of his bunker. In fact, I remember the Corpsman standing over him as he begged for Morphine to ease his pain.”

The information on the virtualwall.org that Cpl. Funelli died of artillery, mortar, or rocket fire would support Bolton’s version. The bottom line is this: it really doesn’t matter. Such variations can be attributed to the intense confusion that always surrounds close combat.

This was the second time Cpl. Funelli had been hit with shrapnel. He had been evacuated to Japan in March, 1966, to recuperate from wounds to his legs. He returned to Vietnam in late September.

Cpl. Funelli was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Funelli, Sr., of Farrell. Richard Fuller Sr. served with the Marine Corps in World War II on Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Cpl. Funelli enlisted in the Marine Corps two months after graduating from Farrell High School. He left behind his parents and a brother, Gerald, who was a ninth grader at Kennedy Christian High School at the time of Richard’s death.
In Mercer County, Capt. Maurice Garrett Jr. is one of the most recognizable names among those on the Vietnam War Memorial. That’s largely because of the long-standing uncertainty as to whether or not it should be there.

The doubts started from the time of the initial investigation of his helicopter crash on October 22, 1971. Capt. Garrett was flying an AH1G Cobra on an armed visual reconnaissance mission out of Quang Tri, along with three other helicopters. The weather was “marginal,” so Capt. Garrett ordered the other copters to hold while he flew into a valley to check it out. Five minutes later, he reported that he had zero visibility and would return to Quang Tri on instruments.

He never made it. His helicopter apparently crashed after hitting some trees. The aircraft exploded with such force that few identifiable parts of the aircraft remained. A search of the area found the remains of his co-pilot, but none of Capt. Garrett.

That left investigators with two possible conclusions. Because of violence of the explosion, they concluded that Capt. Garrett couldn’t possibly have survived the inferno, and that his body had been completely destroyed in the fire.

However, there remained the slight possibility that Capt. Garrett had somehow survived because something should have survived, such as helmet, watch, dentures, boot eyelets, and dog tabs. But none of those were found.

This second possibility was reinforced in 1984 when the Garrett family was told by a private source that Capt. Garrett was alive. Seven other families received similar word. Although the U.S. government said the information was false, it renewed the hope that Capt. Garrett was still alive, possibly a prisoner of war – a hope shared by his family, friends, and MIA groups.

Whatever his fate, Capt. Garrett was a true hero in the Vietnam War. A paratrooper during his first tour in Vietnam from December 1967 to December 1968, he was wounded three times, and was awarded his first Silver Star for “utmost bravery and heroism.”

Back in the U.S., he learned to fly the Cobra, then returned to Vietnam in December, 1970. Before his helicopter crashed, he had received a second Silver Star, a National Defense Medal, two Bronze Stars with valor device, three Purple Hearts, the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, and several Vietnamese medals.

Capt Garrett is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice E. Garrett, Lackawannock Township.

ON THE WALL Panel 02W Line 047
Sharpsville's John Getway joined the army right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. After basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, he became one of the very first paratrooper in the United States Army as part of the newly-formed 509th Airborne Regiment.

After training in Great Britain, the 509th spearheaded the invasion of North Africa in November, 1942. They flew over 1600 miles from England to conduct a parachute assault on Rafarquay Airport in Algeria. During subsequent combat operations, John was wounded in the hand while trying to fend off an enemy soldier's bayonet. He was treated with sulfa drugs and a tetanus shot, then sent on with his unit.

In July, 1943, John's unit took off for a night combat drop in Sicily. Mistaking them for enemy bombers, the American fleet in the Mediterranean mistook them for enemy bombers and shot down 23 planes. John's made it through, but it crashed into a mountain minutes after the paratroopers jumped.

During that jump John got wounded several times. Again, it was sulfa drugs, tetanus shot, and keep on fighting. In five days the division pushed forward 150 miles and captured 23,000 prisoners.

His division fought through Sicily, then landed in Italy and fought northward through Naples. Then they moved back to England to prepare for the invasion of northern Europe.

In September, 1944, John landed in a tree during a night combat jump in Holland. He hung there for three days with no circulation in his legs, unable to reach his canteen or k-rations. Two boys from a nearby village saw him and went to get their families to rescue him. Unable to walk, John was sent to a hospital in England, then to one in Miami.

John persisted through a year and a half of difficult physical therapy. When he got back to Sharpsville, he worked at Steel Fabricators, then at Sawhill for 30 years.

John married Ann Gray in 1955; together they raised four children.

John and Ann have been active in the 82nd Airborne Division Association, attending the association's annual conventions and 82nd Airborne Division reviews at Fort Brag. In 2002, at the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the airborne, John was chosen to represent the 504th.

John gives great credit to his late wife for helping him cope with the effects of his combat injuries, which persist to this day.
PFC Paul Good was drafted into the army after graduating from Sharpsville High School in 1965. When he arrived in Vietnam on May 9, 1967, he was assigned to Company A, 4th Battalion, 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division.

The Ninth Division was part of the Mobile Riverine Force (MRF), a joint force combining Navy and Army units to operate in the unique environment of the Mekong Delta.

There, conventional military maneuvers couldn’t be used because many streams, rivers, and canals severely restricted ground movement. The solution was to use helicopters and converted Navy vessels to insert army troops into areas where they were needed and to provide firepower in support of their operations. Because of the novelty of the situation, both equipment and tactics had to be invented.

As one member of the MRF wrote, “The Navy did the most in terms of development of equipment and how to use it. The Army did the same old stuff, only wetter. We went to war in boats and then got out and walked, waded, wallowed, swam, crawled, or ran until we were picked up again.”

The ships ranged in size from large troop ships, each of which provided living space for more than 800 troops, to armored troop carriers, modified LSTs that could carry an infantry platoon, and smaller, faster Swift Boats. Used to insert and extract infantry from combat situations, they also provided close-in fire support with 20mm cannons, .50 caliber machine guns, and grenade launchers, as well as small arms. Some of the larger vessels carried 105mm howitzers.

Planning for the MRF had begun in the summer of 1966, and the first elements arrived in January, 1967. By summer, 1967, enough river craft had been deployed to carry out sustained search and destroy missions. The full complement of vessels was not assembled until 1968.

That means that PFC Good participated in some of the earliest combat conducted by the MRF, including a major battle on June 19, 1967. Helicopters and Navy boats moved his unit into an area full of Vietcong troops. The ensuing battle left more than 250 Vietcong dead; 47 Americans were killed and many wounded. One platoon had 13 left out of the 35 who started the day.

After the battle, Paul Good was reported as missing. His body was recovered later.

He was awarded a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for meritorious achievement.
According to his mother, Shawn Graham was probably born to be a warrior.

When he was born in California where his father, Marine Sgt. Tom Graham, was stationed, Tom’s unit made Shawn an honorary Marine.

Shawn became a real Marine after graduating from Grove City High School in 1989. He could have chosen a number of career paths. He chose a warrior’s role: infantry. He served in the Marine Corps for ten years before leaving the Marine Corps to work in Texas, but the warrior in him couldn’t just quit. He joined the 124th Cavalry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard.

Like a true warrior, he was eager to serve in the War on Terror. When his father, Tom, was in Afghanistan with the Indiana National Guard, and his brother, Nicholas, was in Iraq with the Marine Corps when Shawn’s chance came to serve in Iraq with the Texas National Guard. Tom and Nicholas returned;

Shawn didn’t. He was killed on September 25, 2005.

Shawn Graham was a uniquely American brand of warrior – not the archetypical rough, violent man, but a compassionate, caring man. On the web site, fallenheroesmemorial.com, many tributes describe him as a very good friend, even a best friend. Sgt. Michael Almon wrote that “Sgt. Graham was a loving family man, outstanding soldier, and faithful friend...”

Shawn remains an inspiration to those who came after him. One soldier wrote this:

“I currently serve in Baghdad in the same position doing the same job Shawn served in when he was killed. In our offices we have a memorial with his picture and details of his life and his service. I pass the memorial every day and think of his sacrifice and the sacrifice of his family. He is not forgotten, and his life and example will always be a reminder to us of the terrible price he and so many others have paid.”

Shawn’s compassion – and its source – is obvious from this: he wanted to send money to his mom so she could buy clothes at the Salvation Army and send them to him so he could give them to the Iraqi people. She told him to keep his money, and sent him boxes of stuff for him to distribute among the Iraqis.

“That’s the kind of person he was,” his mom said.

Obviously because that’s the kind of person she was.

SHAWN GRAHAM – GROVE CITY
WAR ON TERROR – U.S. MARINE CORPS

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Many military police security units do their best to keep people out of military installations and operational areas. Andy Hamilton’s 307th Military Police Company did that for a while on a humanitarian in El Salvador.

“We guarded engineers while they built hospitals and schools throughout the country,” he said.

But in Iraq, at Fort Bucca, he spent his time hardening the prison to make it less escapable.

Originally from a place near Barkeyville, Andy joined the army in 2005 at age 18, fresh out of Franklin Area High School.

“I felt like I wanted to serve my country,” he said. “All my life I did heavy equipment operating, construction work, and farming. I decided I wanted a break from the monotony, so I joined the Military Police. And I thought it might set me up for a good career after I got out.”

After training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, Andy was assigned to the 307th Military Police Company, 320th MP Battalion in New Kensington, PA.

“We spent a lot of time doing desert training in Fort Irwin, California,” he said. “It was actually a lot of fun.”

Of course, the fun had a purpose, which was to prepare the company for deployment in Iraq. That happened in 2008, right after Andy got married.

Camp Bucca was named after Ronald Bucca, who had been an MP with the 800th Military Police Brigade, and was the New York City fire marshall who died in the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center. Camp Bucca was developed into a model detention facility, with prisoners housed in cinder block buildings rather than tents. It even had a U.S. Army hospital to care for the detainees.

The work may have been hard, under the constant awareness that the enemy might fire a rocket into the compound at any time. But Andy’s tour in Iraq wasn’t all bad. His best memories are of the companionship among the American soldiers there.

“All of us there had a strong bond,” Andy said. “We were as close as family. And, of course, there were the leisure time activities, such as volleyball and bocce. “All that desert made a good volleyball court,” Andy said.
The terrain in Vietnam varies from the broad, flat flood plains of the Mekong Delta to the mountainous terrain of the central highlands, covered with triple canopy jungles. Miles Bradley Hedglin of Mercer ended up in the latter when he was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry in Kontum Province, in January, 1969.

We can get a sense of what he went through there by reading the memoirs of Robert Granger, another soldier who was there at the time. He tells of the things you would expect: night patrols, incoming mortar and artillery rounds, close calls, enemy attacks on their base camps.

But Granger also tells of other aspects of jungle combat in Vietnam. In March, 1969, encamped on a hill designated as Hill 467, Company B was bombarded with artillery, mortar, and rockets for days. A sniper wreaked havoc on them; an airstrike failed to silence him, and patrols sent out to locate him could not do so. Water and food were getting low, and enemy fire prevented helicopters from resupplying them.

Three soldiers brought back several ammo containers of water from a stream that wasn’t far away.

“We were given two canteens each,” Granger wrote. “I filtered the leaches and algae out through the top of a dirty sock, then added the iodine tablets. Later in the day, one of the guys from another platoon offered me $480 for a canteen of my water. I turned him down.”

Granger’s descriptions of events on March 25 are gruesome. Granger sums up the events of March 25 in a few words: “Haven’t had any sleep to speak of in days. The lack of water and food and constant shelling is taking its toll on everyone. A five minute nap is about all I can get at one time. The night time probing and hearing the digging, moaning of their wounded and movement just outside the wire, with it dark enough not to be able to see a thing keeps everyone alert every minute.”

He attributes his survival to his guardian angel, since a B-40 rocket and a hand grenade exploded close to him without even inflicting a wound. PFC Miles Hedglin’s guardian angel must have dozed off. Miles was killed while providing cover fire to free others in his unit.

He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, and Combat Infantryman’s Badge.
When 1st Lt. Paul J. Hess, Jr., was deployed to Vietnam on September 14, 1966, he was assigned to very hazardous duty. As a Special Forces officer in the Central Highlands, he worked with a Civilian Irregular Defense Group – a counterinsurgency operation in which U.S. Special Forces worked with Vietnamese villagers to defend villages and conduct combat operations. His character and personal commitment was evident when he started a boy scout troop among the tribes that surrounded his base camp.

Despite the demands of his daily military duties, Lt. Hess remembered the folks back home. He sent a flag from Vietnam to the Shenango Valley Veteran’s Day Parade Committee.

On Veteran’s Day, November 11, 1966, the day the flag was used in the parade, Lt. Hess was killed in combat.

Descriptions of specific incidents in the Vietnam War are hard to find, but the web site of the 174th Assault Helicopter Company presents a detailed report of Lt. Hess’s last mission. According to Lt. Col. Marty Heuer, who served in 174th AHC, Lt. Hess was an observer on a helicopter gunship in support of a 25th Infantry Division operation against an enemy stronghold west of Pleiku, near the Cambodian border.

The rectangular landing zone was about two-thirds the size of a football field, mostly level, covered with three- to five-feet tall elephant grass, with two trees in the center. It was surrounded by triple-canopy jungle with 150-feet tall trees – perfect cover and concealment for the enemy.

Unfortunately, the LZ was beyond the range of any supporting artillery. The operation commander decided to continue with just the firepower provided by a dozen helicopter gunships in support of the troop-carrying “slicks” – UH1-B helicopters lacking weapons pods, with firepower provided only by door gunners operating 50-caliber machine guns.

Lt. Hess was aboard one of the gunships as an observer and possibly door gunner. As the helicopter was making a gunrun at low level, it was hit by small arms and/or .51 caliber machine gun fire. It exploded and crashed into the jungle in a ball of fire.

When examined later, the gunship was found to have been perforated with 99 holes from small arms fire.

Paul was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Paul J. Hess, Sr. He also left behind his wife, nee Donna Saibene; daughter Kimberly Ruth; three sisters and two brothers.
Trying to find information about a particular Vietnam fatality is a hit or miss operation. You have to start with the basic facts about the incident you are trying to find.

For example, you could know this about Merle Higgins: arrived in Vietnam on January 5, 1969; assigned to the 25th Infantry Division’s 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry (the “Manchus”); died of multiple fragmentation wounds received on June 5, 1969.

Then you search the Internet for his name, the unit, the date, the location, and anything else you can think of. After coming up dry, you are about to give up when you hit on a document called “Our Manchu Diary.” Forty-four pages long, it contains day-to-day troop movements, field operations, battles, casualties, and remembrances from 1966 through 1970.

About half-way through, there it is:

“June 5 1969- Charlie Company reported VC in the bunker line; ... Alpha Company reports that farmers in area said three VC companies moved out of Cambodia at 0300 hours into the Renegade Woods. Delta Company receiving small arms and RPG fire. Dust-off “163” completed (14 Delta WIA casualties)... Sgt Higgins (Bravo Company) was seriously wounded by a claymore mine that was detonated by a sniper—died the next day [06-June-69] at the 45th Surgical Hospital.”

A claymore mine is a curved rectangular weapon, about 8.5 inches wide by five inches high, that projects about 700 steel balls in an arc of about 60 degrees. It certainly produces “multiple fragmentation wounds.”

Sgt. Higgins was born in Farmdale, OH. At the end of Merle’s 5th grade year, the family relocated to Jamestown, PA. After graduating from Pymatuning Joint High School in 1965, he attended Thiel College before entering the army in February 1969. He was survived by his parents, Ellis R. and Ruth Anderson Higgins, and two sisters, Marian and Nelly.

In the spring of 1992, his family established the “Merle R. Higgins Freedom Award” fund at Jamestown High School, not only to honor Merle, but also to remind people that freedom is not a cheap commodity. It is a fragile ideal that only exists because of the suffering and sacrifice of brave men and women. This award is given annually to two deserving seniors (one male/one female) based on the character qualities of courage, honor, loyalty, determination and service.

Sgt. Higgins was the first Jamestown soldier to die in Vietnam within a two-month period.

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A humanitarian at heart, Ann (Deluchie) Jarocki went into nursing after graduating from Farrell High School in 1936. After completing her training, she joined the Red Cross “because they would send nurses to flood areas and hurricanes and tornadoes and I always wanted adventures.”

In 1941, she jumped at the chance to join the army, despite strong objections from her family. Lt. Deluchie served as a nurse in military hospitals in Ft. Lee, VA, and Ft. Benning, GA. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, she was among the first to volunteer for overseas service.

On March 1, she and her fellow nurses boarded a 17 ship convoy in New York without knowing where they were headed. When they arrived at the Panama Canal, they knew they were going to the Pacific. Six weeks later they were setting up hospitals on the northeastern coast of Australia.

The American army was fighting the enemy who occupied most of New Guinea, less than 100 miles to the north. Casualties were flown in to the hospitals in Australia.

Then, as U.S. forces advanced, Lt. Deluchie volunteered for transfer to a hospital on New Guinea. Although the enemy was being pushed back, they still had the capability of conducting air raids – sometimes even at night when the moon was full.

“The moon was so bright that when we were on night duty we would sit outside the tent and make our notes out there. I never saw such a beautiful moon in all my life.”

But because it was so brilliant, it made targets easily visible for air raids, so they called it the Bombers’ Moon.

After two and a half years in Australia and New Guinea, Lt. Deluchie was discharged from the army. Return from the war brought an end to her military service, but it didn’t diminish her commitment to humanitarian service. She became involved in the Mercer County Association of the Retarded (MCAR), serving as its first president, as well as a member of many committees.

She also volunteered continually wherever she was needed. She did blood pressure screenings at various locations in the Shenango Valley; was a ‘Polio Volunteer’ in 1954 with Dr. Jonas Salk, administering vaccinations and medications to control polio; was a school aide at Monsignor Geno Monti Elementary School, Farrell; and was a camp nurse for many years at summer camps for the mentally challenged.
You can find dramatic narratives about the battles that were taking place when certain fallen heroes were mortally wounded. But there are some fallen heroes whose deaths don’t inspire movie producers to base films on their final moments.

One of those is Doug Kashmer, who enlisted in the army after graduating from Reynolds High School in 1996.

Doug wasn’t a combat infantryman who attacked machine gun nests with hand grenades or killed enemy soldiers in hand-to-hand combat. He was a diesel mechanic. In Nippur, Iraq, on June 8, 2005, he was killed when the military wrecker in which he was riding accidentally rolled over.

That doesn’t make him less of a hero, because it isn’t in death that one becomes a hero; it is in life. And it isn’t the result of what happens to a person. It is the result of the decisions that person made. A hero is one who is willing to risk his life for his family, his friends, and his country – who is willing to go anywhere and do whatever he is called to do, to the best of his ability, to protect his family, friends, and country.

That’s what makes his death different from the 43,510 traffic fatalities that occurred in the United States during 2005.

Doug was very young when he decided to be a soldier. According to his mother, Carol Kashmer, he liked to play with toy soldiers. He would say, “Mom, I want to be a soldier. That’s been his dream since he was a little boy.”

But it isn’t childhood dreams that make one a hero. A kid has no idea what being a soldier really involves. A hero is one who follows through when he grows up and learns the risks involved, and continues even when life brings more reasons for quitting – such as having a wife and a child. Doug was serving in Mannheim, Germany, before he was deployed to Iraq. His wife, Toni Tennant, and their daughter, Kashmaria, were living with him there.

Before leaving for Iraq, Doug had a picture of Kashmaria tattooed on his leg so she would be with him wherever he went.

Heroism comes from taking that picture with him into harm’s way while leaving the real Kashmaria and his wife in Germany, aware of the fact that they might never see each other again.
It’s impossible to understand the strength and courage that enables one to perform in such a way as to merit the Medal of Honor. You might get a glimpse of it by considering the actions of Greenville native Gus Kefurt.

His excellence as a soldier is evident from the fact that barely four months after he joined the army in August, 1944, he was already a staff sergeant in Company K, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division in France. That excellence is confirmed by his Medal of Honor citation:

He distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on 23 and 24 December 1944, near Bennwihr, France. Early in the attack S/Sgt. Kefurt jumped through an opening in a wall to be confronted by about 15 Germans. Although outnumbered he opened fire, killing 10 and capturing the others. During a seesaw battle which developed he effectively adjusted artillery fire on an enemy tank close to his position although exposed to small arms fire. When night fell he maintained a 3-man outpost in the center of the town in the middle of the German positions and successfully fought off several hostile patrols attempting to penetrate our lines. Assuming command of his platoon the following morning he led it in hand-to-hand fighting through the town until blocked by a tank. Using rifle grenades he forced surrender of its crew and some supporting infantry. He then continued his attack from house to house against heavy machinegun and rifle fire. Advancing against a strongpoint that was holding up the company, his platoon was subjected to a strong counterattack and infiltration to its rear. Suffering heavy casualties in their exposed position the men remained there due to S/Sgt. Kefurt’s personal example of bravery, determination and leadership. He constantly exposed himself to fire by going from man to man to direct fire. During this time he killed approximately 15 of the enemy at close range. Although severely wounded in the leg he refused first aid and immediately resumed fighting. When the forces to his rear were pushed back 3 hours later, he refused to be evacuated, but, during several more counterattacks moved painfully about under intense small arms and mortar fire, stiffening the resistance of his platoon by encouraging individual men and by his own fire until he was killed. As a result of S/Sgt. Kefurt’s gallantry the position was maintained.

Kefurt was buried at the Épinal American Cemetery and Memorial in Épinal, France.
During his first Vietnam tour in 1965, Lance Cpl. Terence Edwin Klaric was severely wounded. After spending more than a year in a hospital in the United States, he volunteered to return to Vietnam. In December, 1966, he was assigned to the Combined Action Program with Headquarters Battalion of the 3rd Marine division, in Quang Tri, the northernmost province in South Vietnam.

At that time in the CAP, a Marine rifle squad and a Navy Hospital Corpsman would live in a village and work with a Popular Force platoon to provide security against the Viet Cong. The objective was to develop the Vietnamese forces to the point where they could protect the village by themselves. They also helped the villagers with humanitarian aid, such as digging wells, building schools, and the development of other humanitarian projects.

With only about a dozen men, far from any units that could provide quick support, the teams were extremely vulnerable to enemy attack. Many were overrun, often with few or no survivors.

As to Lance Corporal Klaric’s actual role in this, we know little other than the fact that he was killed on May 5, 1967, probably by an enemy grenade.

The Headquarters Battalion Command Chronology covering May 1967 covers such items as the opening of a new mess hall on May 7 for sergeants and below, with an enlisted club attached. Lance Cpl. Klaric might have enjoyed that, if he had still been alive.

The report also details the work of the Dental unit – 5365 procedures on 2304 Vietnamese patients, and the distribution of precisely 1027 toothbrushes.

Recorded for posterity is the fact that the headquarters communications center processed a total of 45,922 messages during that month of May.

What the report doesn’t include is any details about actual combat operations, other than a terse listing of the unit’s casualties: 7 officers wounded in action, 5 enlisted men killed in action, 50 enlisted men wounded in action. Names of those casualties are not included; but we know that one of those enlisted men was Lance Corporal Klaric.

Other than that fact, of course, none of the other details matters to his parents, Farrell residents Peter and Edith Parker; or to his two sisters and five brothers.

Lance Corporal Klaric was the seventh man from Mercer County and the second from Farrell to be killed in action in Vietnam.

ON THE WALL      Panel 19E Line 90

In 1969, a year after graduating from Greenville High School, Eric Knauf enlisted in the army “because it was the right thing to do.” During his initial testing, he qualified for helicopter flight school.

“They told me the washout rate was very high,” he said, “and then a very high death rate if you didn’t wash out. I said that’s okay.”

After training, Warrant Officer Knauf was assigned to an air cav unit in the Mekong Delta. At Christmas time, the unit moved us up to Quang Tri Province, by the DMZ.

There they participated in Operation Lam Son 719, a major invasion of Laos by the South Vietnamese Army, with aerial support from the U. S. Army.

“All we did all day, every day was go out and get into a fight,” he said.

A helicopter would fly into known enemy territory to draw fire. Other gunships would follow them in and attack the positions from which the enemy was firing.

“Our mission was to go find them and shoot as many as we could and come home at the end of the day.”

But as he had been warned, the casualty rate for helicopter pilots and crew was high indeed. Some days not everyone came home. On February 27, 1971, that included Eric Knauf.

“We were trying to get two pilots out of Laos,” he said. “The first rescue mission got shot down. We went in right behind them and got shot down, too. Another mission was able to get us out. The first two pilots are still listed as missing in action.”

Besides offensive missions, they also had to defend their base at Khe Sanh.

“They would fire mortars on us every night. We mounted C-130 landing lights and a minigun on a helicopter. When we saw the mortar flash, we would light up the whole area and hit the minigun. Their position disappeared, trees and all.”

Eric was one of the fortunate ones. He survived an astounding 1318 flight hours, including 1081 in combat. From that he accumulated what he calls a bunch of junk in this basement that includes three Distinguished Flying Crosses, a pile of Bronze Stars and Air Medals (31 of the former, 36 of the latter, including three for valor), and a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

Eric served four more years in the National Guard flying Cobras with an air cav unit in Washington, PA.
For Ed Kochis and his quartermaster unit in North Africa, the major threat to survival wasn’t enemy attack. It was meeting the ordinary needs of everyday life, such as food, water, and shelter.

They had c-rations – at least, when the supply ships weren’t sunk. They had to scrounge food any way they could, and buy it from the locals. One staple was a hard bread that the Arabs soaked in wine.

“We didn’t have any wine, Kochis said. “We seeped it in onions and water. I went from 225 pounds down to 185. We had one canteen of water a day to bathe and drink.”

For a year and a half, the 76 men in his unit slept in pup tents. Each soldier had a shelter half, so two had to get together to make up a tent. Kochis and his tent mate were both over six feet tall. When it rained, they had to put their duffle bags outside to keep our feet dry.

The unit’s living conditions improved after they moved to Italy, near Foggia. Some of his friends managed to “requisition” cots and some walled tents that could sleep five or six.

The closest Kochis got to the front lines was about ten miles.

“But that was close enough,” he said, “because the ground would shake when big bombs would go off. We had a few bombs dropped near our air field. But we were pretty lucky that way.”

Some of Kochis’s friends were not as lucky. On a day off in Foggia, he went to the movies. “While I was in the movies, I heard this fellow laughing. I said to my buddy who was with me, ‘That sounds like a fellow from Greenville.’ I hollered, ‘Hey, Bill Doyle!’ He said, ‘Who is it?’ I said, ‘Ed Kochis.’

Doyle was a B-17 pilot stationed about ten miles from Kochis. They saw each other a couple of times a week for several months. Then he didn’t show up. He had been fatally shot down over Czechoslovakia.

Kochis’s last few months in the army were nothing like his years overseas. As a PT instructor in Texas, he led calisthenics, played softball twice a day, and had the rest of the day off.

Returning home in 1945, Kochis got a job at the Greenville Motor Club, which became the Mercer County Motor Club. He remained as head of that organization for 41 years.
Leadership is a matter of getting your subordinates to want to do what they need to do to accomplish the mission. That happens when you gain their respect not only by striving to accomplish the mission, but also by looking out for their well-being. Emil Koledin was that kind of Marine Corps officer because he was that kind of a man.

He graduated in 1947 from Brown University in Providence with a degree in electrical engineering and a commission in the Marine Corps Reserves. He came back to Sharon to work as an electrical engineer at Sharon Steel. In 1950, he founded his own E. Koledin Electric.

When he was called to active duty in 1951 to serve in the Korean War, he closed up his business. He served as an engineering officer in the 1st Marine Division’s Shore Party Battalion, which was responsible for construction, road building, and other combat engineering functions. He wrote home about how cold it was – sometimes 20 degrees below zero.

After the war, he told his children about how much he loved and respected his fellow soldiers and everyone underneath him. When he had the chance to go to Hawaii on R&R, all of his men wanted him to go, but he would not leave. He insisted on staying with his men.

“That’s how he was his whole life,” said his daughter, Tanya. “It speaks really as to how he was as a man.”

As he sailed back home from Korea in May, 1954, he knew he would have to start up his business again, but didn’t have the capital to do it. So he played poker, and won enough to restart his business.

After reestablishing his electrical business, he opened Wesex Corporation as a general construction firm. Since then, Wesex has constructed many commercial buildings throughout the Shenango Valley and beyond. One of his favorite projects was the design and construction of the War on Terror Memorial in Hillcrest Memorial Park.

His love for his community and his country was expressed through his active involvement on many boards of directors, many civic organizations, and the Republican Party.

Through all this, he raised two families. He and his first wife, Claire, had two daughters, Janice and Kathleen, and one son, Emil (Butch). With his second wife, Kathy, he also had two daughters and a son: Teresa, Tanya, and Greg.
“However my country wants me to serve, that’s how I’ll serve.”

That was the response of Farrell native and current Greenville resident Michael Kolesar to every assignment he received in World War II – including ones for which he had neither experience nor inclination.

After joining the army on March 20, 1942, at the age of 26, he was assigned to the training section of the 2nd Convalescent Hospital at Camp Langdon, in New Hampshire. There he became detachment clerk and helped with the training. Because of his excellent job performance, he was selected for assignment with General Eisenhower’s First Army Headquarters in Shrivenham, England, where a Medical Field Service School was being established. But as sometimes happens in the army, his initial assignment didn’t make much sense.

“I was a medic, and I found out I was limited service because I had a punctured ear drum,” Kolesar said. “But I was assigned to the weapons section. I had never fired a gun in my life.”

Rather than complain, Kolesar learned about the weapons by reading manuals. His initiative, as well as his attitude and clerical experience, earned him a job as the section’s clerk, then a spot in Officer Candidate School.

When he was commissioned a second lieutenant on April 14, 1943, Kolesar trained doctors and nurses right there at the Medical Field Service School in courses such as field sanitation and chemical warfare.

After the D-Day invasions, Kolesar was sent to France.

“When I crossed the channel, there was a new group of soldiers,” Kolesar said. “At least I had lived a little bit, for me it wouldn’t be so bad. But they were only kids, just out of high school.”

In France, Lt. Kolesar helped establish a Medical Field Service School at the Chateau Le Marais, a beautiful estate complete with a moat, satin-finished walls, and beautiful floors.

After the war Kolesar used the GI Bill to attend Thiel College. He finished in three years and got a job teaching Social Studies, American Government, and Problems of Democracy in the Greenville schools.

“I say with great pride that I was a professional teacher. I got my Master’s Degree in 1951, and earned the equivalence of two other Master’s Degrees, so I had enough for a doctor’s degree.”

Throughout his teaching career, he displayed the same dynamic attitude he had as a soldier and military officer – a willingness to serve others in whatever way he could.
It may be unorthodox, but John Krofcheck is proud to be called an “S.O.B.” He was with the 100th Infantry Division in France when they captured the heavily fortified Fortress de Bitche on March 16, 1945, after a bitter three-month siege. From that, the division got the nickname “Sons of Bitche.”

That was just part of John’s unorthodox military career. When the 17-year-old enlisted in December, 1942, he became a military policeman in Washington, DC. His most dangerous assignment was directing traffic at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery. But he wanted to get into the action, so he volunteered for the infantry.

He definitely got his wish for action. With the 100th Division during an intense battle in the Vosges Mountains, his company commander called him forward.

“I was loaded down with the BAR and ammunition, running forward like a dog,” John said. “I’m not ashamed to admit that I was scared.”

He turned to see if his assistant gunner was behind him. He fell into a large shell crater, severely injuring his leg. But he faced his fear and continued on without going to the medics.

John witnessed both the worst and the best that men do under fire. His assistant gunner shot himself in the leg to get out of combat. And John saw Lt. Edward Silk single-handedly assault a German unit that had the Americans pinned down with machine gun fire. According to his Medal of Honor citation, Lt. Silk ran across an open field through intense machine gun fire, took out the gunners by lobbing grenades into an open window, then attacked a second building. When he ran out of grenades, he started throwing rocks. Twelve Germans surrendered to him.

John adds a detail that the citation omits. Lt. Silk’s courage may have been enhanced by some of the contents of his two canteens full of cognac.

In December, 1945, John got out of the army, but that was 18 years before the end of his military career. In 1946, he re-enlisted with the Military Police. He got out again on a hardship discharge in 1948. He helped establish a National Guard unit in Sharon and became its First Sergeant. When the Korean War started, he volunteered for reactivation and went to Korea, where his unit provided security for a quartermaster installation in Ascom City.

After Korea, John served in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas until he retired in 1963.
Many people have heard of the Bridge over the River Kwai because of the popular 1957 movie starring Alec Guinness. Set in World War II, it shows British and American prisoners of war building a magnificent bridge with great engineering but few other resources, then destroying it. The movie’s stirring theme song was played by practically every high school and college band in the country.

Because of the excellence of the movie, few people realize that the story is entirely fictional. Surpassing it in every way was the very real Liberty Bridge across the Thu Bon River 80 miles south of Da Nang. Built in 1967 by Navy Seabees (nickname based on the pronunciation of C-B, for Construction Battalion), under constant harassment from enemy forces, it was 2,040 feet long, 32 feet above the low water level.

Before its completion, all traffic on Route 1 south of Da Nang had to be ferried across the river one vehicle at a time. This slowed convoys literally to a standstill, and set each truck out as a slow-moving target. Because of its vital strategic role, the Viet Cong attacked the bridge constantly to destroy it or control it.

The mission to defend it was given to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. That was the unit to which Marine Lance Corporal Terrence M. Kuzak was assigned when he arrived in Vietnam on July 28, 1969. He undoubtedly heard stories about the tremendous battle around the bridge that took place on March 19, 1969, when a battalion-sized enemy force attacked a little after midnight. That day, a Navy corpsman named David R. Ray was killed while relentlessly disregarding his own safety to save others. For that he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

During another attack on 9 December 1969, Lance Corporal Kuzak was seriously wounded. He survived evacuation to a naval hospital in Yokosura, Japan. During his fight to recover, there, his doctors appealed to the folks back home to flood him with cards and letters to keep up his spirits. But he died on Christmas Eve, 1969.

Lance Corporal Terrence M. Kuzak was the only child of Michael and Ann Ciccarone Kuzak, R.D. 1 West Middlesex. He was a 1969 graduate of Farrell High School.

Lance Corporal Kuzak was the 31st Mercer County serviceman to be killed in the Vietnam War.

ON THE WALL Panel W15 Line 90
Why did Chookie LaCamera sign up for the U.S. Army in 1983, when he was a junior in high school?

“I wanted to jump out of airplanes,” he said. “I was nuts. I wanted to be an infantry soldier.”

He entered the army after he graduated from high school in 1984. After Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training, and Jump School, he was assigned to the 2/504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He spent the rest of his four-year enlistment there, with various training deployments.

One deployment was far more than a training exercise.

“I went to the Sinai Desert on a peacekeeping mission,” he said. “That was part of the 1979 Camp David Accords. They drew a demilitarized zone in the Sinai Desert to separate Israeli and Egyptian forces. It was a United Nations mission with contingents from 13 countries.”

When his commitment was up, Chookie got out of the army and joined the Pennsylvania Army National Guard in the usual one weekend a month, two weeks of summer training mode. He also worked as a civilian Federal Technician for the National guard, first as an administrative clerk; then he moved into logistics, and finally into communications in Pittsburgh.

When his wife developed brain cancer, he had to get a job closer to home to take care of her and their three kids. He found a good job at Sawhill. But when his wife started getting better, he wanted to go into the National Guard full time. In 2005, he went back on active duty as retention manager with the 107th Field Artillery in New Castle. That same year he moved into logistics. In 2008, he became the battalion’s S-1 NCO.

In civilian terminology, that’s human resources manager.

“We take care of the soldier in every single aspect,” he said, “whether it’s family care plans, life insurance, or promotions. We go the extra mile to take care of these guys because they are soldiers just like us.”

Sgt. LaCamera is still in the National Guard quite simply because he loves the military, and knows he is performing an important function.

“When I reached 20 years, the thought crossed my mind that I could retire. But I feel so good about being in the military that I stayed.”

He sums up his ongoing 28-year military career like this: “I have been blessed, I really have.”
COMMUNITY VETERANS

JOHN LECHNER – HERMITAGE DESERT STORM ERA – U.S. AIR FORCE RESERVES

John’s squadron was activated the week after Thanksgiving, 1990. At that time, he was a Pennsylvania State Police officer.

“I had to go in to work and quickly wrap up my whole life,” he said.

They were sent to Ramstein Air Base in Germany, where they were integrated into Aerial Port Squadron. The combined unit continued to demonstrate excellence in its mission to ship men and materiel to the combat zone.

“That’s quite a task, especially given the variety and volume of the shipments. They shipped troops, Apache helicopters, Patriot Missiles, weapons, and other materiel. On Christmas Day, 1990, they unloaded and loaded 55 planes within 24 hours.

When John returned in 1991, he continued serving in both the Air Force Reserves and the Pennsylvania State Police. When he retired from the reserves in October, 1997, he could look back on a uniquely varied career: ROTC at Gannon College, commissioned in the army Military Police Corps, two years on active duty, four years in the inactive army reserves, several active army reserve assignments, and finally twelve years in the Air Force Reserves. His State Police career was equally rewarding, with ultimate promotion to the rank of Lieutenant.

“A lot of what I learned in the military about leadership and command served me very well in the state police,” he said.

The Air Force Reserves hold competitions every year during each unit’s two-week summer active duty training. One year the Security Police Squadron at the Air Reserve Station in Vienna, Ohio, was rated as the very best in the whole Air Force Reserve system. The commander of that unit was Major John Lechner.

That wasn’t the only unit to excel under John’s leadership. When promoted to Lt. Col., he became commander of Vienna’s Aerial Port Squadron, which handles air cargo. Before John took command, it had won the honor of being the best Aerial Port Squadron in the Air Force Reserves. With John as its leader, it won the competition a second time.

Being the very best has its consequences. On 2 August 1990, the United States responded to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait with Operation Desert Shield.

“I figured we’d be among the first units to be activated,” John said. “We were the second Aerial Port Squadron called up. The first one was from President Bush’s home state of Texas.”
A lot of people do the strangest things trying to gain respect, but fail precisely because they are seeking it. James C. Lee has gained it in abundance because he didn’t seek it. He just spent his life doing what truly respectable men do.

That wasn’t easy for a black man growing up in the south. But he worked hard to get into college. Then, while in college, he was drafted into the United States Army. At the time, black men were assigned only to all-black units. Well, almost all-black. All officers above the rank of lieutenant were white.

Army life for a black soldier at that time was not just systematically degrading; it could be downright dangerous — right here in the United States. Lee was in the Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot awaiting overseas assignment on the night of July 11, 1943, when conflict a between white and black soldiers ended up deadly.

“I went up the street,” Lee said. “There must have been at least 15 or 25 people killed. The army says like only two or three people killed. But you could see those lying around.”

Assigned to the all-black 2nd Cavalry Division, Lee was sent to Casablanca in North Africa, where the division was dismantled to make up replacement units. Lee became Electrician Foreman in the 1334 Engineer Construction Battalion, which was responsible for furnishing electricity for military hospitals in Italy.

“Allied headquarters would allot me say 40 civilians to do the manual work and things like that,” said Lee, who was a tech sergeant by then, “and I had six NCOs with me that had electrical training.”

Lee worked with his unit all the way from Naples up to the Italian Alps. They were there when the war ended in May.

After the war, Lee returned to Farrell. Despite his outstanding qualifications and electrical experience, he found all doors closed to him because of the color of his skin. Always one to overcome adversity, he opened his own radio and television repair business which he ran successfully until his retirement.

For fifty years Lee has been a dynamic member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He has served as post commander, district commander, and many years as quartermaster of VFW Post 7597. The walls of his VFW office are covered with evidence of the respect Lee has earned: countless certificates and plaques honoring his service to his fellow veterans.
Pre-military experience can open non-combat opportunities for infantry soldiers. Nick Libeg had taken typing and shorthand before being drafted in 1940, so he was made a clerk typist in the 45th Division at Camp Barkley, Texas. One of his major jobs was to do the paperwork for courts martial. He had plenty to do. When the 45th Division went on maneuvers in Louisiana, Mardi Gras drew hundreds of men AWOL. The captain in charge of the courts martial was so pleased with Nick’s work that he recommended him for Officers Candidate School.

Commissioned at Fort Benning’s OCS, Nick served as a basic training officer at Camp Rucker, Alabama. His experience at running Libby’s Tavern in Masury gave him another opportunity, though not one that made his life easier. The jobs of mess officer and officers’ club manager were added to his other duties.

But it wasn’t Nick’s objective to avoid danger. He wanted to be a pilot, so he transferred to the Army Air Corps.

Maybe the lack of appropriate pre-military experience kept this chance from being so successful.

“I loved flying,” he said, “but I crashed two planes. After the second accident, my trainer asked whose side I was on in the war.”

So he became a bombardier and navigator in a B-24 flying out of England. Enemy fire made the work dangerous, but their most frightening incident occurred because of a problem within their own plane. Their twelve 500-lb impact-triggered bombs were held in place by solenoid-activated clips at their nose and tail. The bottom two of a stack of three failed, but the clip on the front of the top bomb released, tipping it nose down onto the one below. One wrong move would have detonated it. With air temperature at 20 below zero, Nick crawled along an 18 inch wide walkway over the open bomb bay doors and released the bombs with a screw driver.

“We were pretty close to heaven at that time,” Nick said.

Their reward for completing the required 30 missions was another not-so-great opportunity: assignment to the South Pacific. Fortunately, the war in the Pacific ended before they got there.

Nick was able to go back to managing Libby’s Tavern, raise a family, and pursue a successful career in real estate. He served in many community organizations, including the Farrell Lions Club, the Wolves Club, the American Legion, VFW Post 8860, the Optimist Club in Brookfield, and the Shenango Valley Board of Realtors.
FALLEN HEROES

JOHN H. LOPOCHONSKY, JR. - GREENVILLE
VIETNAM - U.S. ARMY

Nine months after graduating from Greenville High School in 1969, John Lopochonsky was drafted into the army. After training to be a helicopter door gunner, he headed to Vietnam in October, 1970 to serve with A Troop, 7th Squadron, 1st Cavalry.

He was assigned as a gunner on an OH-6A “Cayuse” helicopter. That put awesome power at his fingertips, probably 7.62 mm six-barrel minigun, a Gatling-type weapon that could fire at the rate of more than 2000 rounds per minute.

But to use that power, a gunner had to be both crazy and courageous. When teamed on a combat mission with a Cobra gunship, the Cayuse’s mission was to fly in low over suspected enemy positions to draw out their fire so the crew could mark their positions. Then the Cobra would come in with greater firepower and destroy them.

In other words, the Cayuse helicopters were sometimes used like moving ducks in a carnival shooting gallery. But unlike those ducks which flop over when hit with a b-b, the Cayuse could take a lot of serious hits and still take its crew home safely. One of them accumulated 1,340 combat hours, was shot down four times, and had two non-combat accidents. It was repaired every time, and in the end returned to the United States where it performed well for the New York National Guard.

Sgt. Lopochonsky wasn’t so fortunate. During his last mission, the Cayuse he was in crashed after taking too many hits. Before it crashed, however, Sgt. Lopochonsky proved that his core characteristic was ultimate courage. His Bronze Star citation, awarded posthumously, states that “he distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions, Volunteering for recon after the scout team came under intensive fire. . . . On a run over a heavily fortified enemy bunker, Lopochonsky completely exposed himself to enemy fire as he destroyed 5 buildings, one bunker, and four sampans.”

Sgt. Lopochonsky was survived by his brother James, and his grandmother, Mildred Artman.

He was the 37th Mercer County serviceman to die in the Vietnam War.

ON THE WALL      Panel 03W Line 109

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
When Sgt. Thomas R. Marshall of Sandy Lake wrote home from Vietnam, he didn’t write about the horrors of war. He wrote about how beautiful the country and the people were. That’s not surprising, because he was an artist at heart. It takes an artist to see focus on the beauty that can often be found in the midst of ugliness.

He enlisted in the army while he was a student at the Shenango Campus of Penn State University. According to his brother, Malcolm, he had received several draft notices and just got tired of being harassed. That was in June, 1968, two years after he had graduated from Lakeview High School.

“He was a very good artist,” Malcolm said. “He had a very bright future. And he was a super nice guy. He married Tracy Clark from Stoneboro a couple of weeks before he deployed.”

Tom took Basic Training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. He went on to graduate from non-commissioned officer school at Fort Benning, Georgia.

He headed for Vietnam on June 18, 1969, and was assigned to A Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division in Tay Ninh Province, near the Cambodian border. As time went on, it should have been an optimistic time for troops in Vietnam. On November 3, 1969, in a major policy speech on Vietnam, President Richard Nixon made a major announcement:

“We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in cooperation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all U.S. combat ground forces, and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly scheduled timetable. This withdrawal will be made from strength and not from weakness. As South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.”

Withdrawal of American forces, including the 25th Infantry Division, did proceed. So did the intense combat, and the continuing deaths of American soldiers – including Sgt. Marshall, who was killed by small arms fire on December 11, 1969.

He was survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm D. Marshall of Sandy Lake; his wife, Tracy; three sisters and a brother.
Michael Marzano didn’t always want to be a Marine.

“I believe he was about two years old when he decided,” said his father, Marine Sgt. Al Marzano, who served from 1969 to 1972, including a tour in Vietnam.

His desire to serve grew with him as he got older. Al remembers Michael loving to dress up in his Marine uniform.

In Sharon High School, Michael developed into an ideal candidate for the Marine Corps. He competed in wrestling and became a very good boxer. Unfortunately, during a wrestling match, he tore a ligament in his knee. When he tried to enlist in the Marine Corps after graduation, he was rejected.

But Michael wasn’t one to give up easily. Corrective surgery on his knee and rehab straightened out that problem. He continued boxing, even flirting with the idea of turning pro. But his dream of being a Marine still dominated. When he tried to enlist again in 1999, he was accepted.

After training at Paris Island, Michael was assigned to Camp Lejeune. He was deployed twice to Okinawa for mountain training. While carrying a mortar tube up a hill, he lost his footing and tumbled down. He was knocked out and suffered a back injury.

“He called me up,” Al said. “He was very upset because his sergeant major told him he couldn’t be deployed because of his injury.”

Upon completing his four-year enlistment, Michael got out of the Corps and started taking college classes in Phoenix, Arizona. But the Marine Corps was still in his blood, so he joined the 3rd Battalion 35th Marines in Brookpark, Ohio, which was going to Iraq.

The unit arrived there in March, 2005. On April Fool’s day, he achieved a lifelong goal by being promoted to sergeant, following in the footsteps of his father.

Toward the end of April, Michael’s unit was in Haditha, a small city about 150 miles from Baghdad. Insurgents had severely damaged the hospital. On May 7 they still occupied it. As Michael’s Mobile Assault Platoon was fighting to dislodge them, a van loaded with explosives exploded, killing Michael and three other soldiers.

For his service and his sacrifice, the VA Clinic in Hermitage was named in his honor.
COMMUNITY VETERANS

PEGGY MAZYCK – FARRELL
DESERt STORM ERA – U.S. ARMY RESERVES

MSG (ret.) Peggy Mazyck strongly felt that she should not be included among the veterans honored in this program. She feels that there are thousands of others who have done more, sacrificed more, suffered more.

She belongs in it, however, because there are hundreds of millions of Americans who have done far, far less. Without people serving honorably and diligently in the military reserves, our country could not field a viable fighting force when it needs to do so.

Peggy enlisted in the Reserves while she was a student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Assigned to the 347th Quartermaster Company in Farrell, she worked her way up through the ranks, eventually becoming platoon sergeant for the Product Control Section.

That made her a vital part of the 347th Company’s mission: to provide fuel to combat operations of all branches of the service throughout the world. Without it, tanks could not run on the battlefield; jet fighters could not attack; cargo planes could not bring in troops, equipment, and supplies.

Her unit conducted petroleum supply operations all over the USA, and completed a tour in Korea. Sgt. Mazyck achieved numerous awards including several Army Commendations Medals.

In the mid-1980s, Sgt. Mazyck transferred to the 1036th US ARMY Reserve Force School, which is also headquartered in Farrell. Because of the knowledge she accumulated, she became Chief Instructor/Writer, eventually being promoted to master sergeant.

“I was in charge of the whole group,” she said. “We were tasked with training soldiers from all over the country. During the summers, working with the equipment, you not only teach; you also learn constantly.”

During Operation Desert Storm, MSG Mazyck was activated to Ft. Lee, VA through the 8th/80th Battalion to train soldiers in petroleum supply operations. After this tour of duty, she returned to the 8th/80th until her retirement from the Army in 2002.

“I loved being in the Military,” she said. “I felt that I was doing something very good. It was gratifying to see soldiers gaining the knowledge they needed. I also loved the camaraderie. Over the years we became a very cohesive group.”

The next time you see a Reservist, shake his or her hand and thank them for their vital service. They may not fit the normal concept of heroes, but without them, there wouldn’t be many heroes.

Sponsored by: War on Terror Foundation
FALLEN HEROES

LT. COMMANDER ERIC PAUL MCBRIDE – VOLANT
VIETNAM – U.S. NAVY PILOT

ABOVE: McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II

On May 12, 1966, the aircraft carrier USS Constitution was deployed to the South China Sea carrying Fighter Squadron VF-161, “The Chargers,” with their McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II fighters. Lieutenant Commander Earl Paul McBride of Volant was an 18-year veteran assigned to Fighter Squadron VF-161, nicknamed The Chargers, aboard the aircraft carrier USS Constellation.

During their 111 days in support of combat operations in Vietnam, they flew 1368 combat sorties against roads, bridges, and other targets to slow down the movement of North Vietnamese soldiers and materials to the south. For this action the squadron was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation medal.

Before returning to San Diego in December, 1966, the Chargers had lost 15 aircraft and 16 aircrewmen. One of those was Lt. Commander McBride.

On his last mission on October 22, 1966, his plane went missing over the South China Sea. His body was never recovered. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism and extraordinary achievement for that last flight.

His daughter Roseanne posted this on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund site: “I was only 12 when my father left my life. We tried for years to find him and after 34 years we finally found his co-pilot who was also searching for us. After all these years, this kind man put to rest our fears that our father was captured or died in pain. Bless him, for he has now put peace in our hearts and we can put our father to rest (even though the Navy says he is missing in action). Bless all those who served our country and gave up the ultimate, their lives. They are not gone as long as we remember them.”

ON THE WALL      Panel 11E Line 98

SPONSORED BY: Specialty Metal Products
After arriving in Vietnam on January 1, 1969, Rodger McElhaney wrote a lot of letters home. He told them that his unit operated out of LZ Gator, a base of operations in Quang Ngai Province, near the coast of the South China Sea. A book by Tim O’Brien, a soldier who was in his company, describes the place: "LZ Gator was home to 700 or 800 American soldiers, mostly grunts. I remember a tar helipad, a mess hall, a medical station, mortar and artillery emplacements, two volleyball courts, numerous barracks and offices and supply depots and machine shops and entertainment clubs. Gator was our castle. Not safe, exactly, but far preferable to the bush. No land mines here. No paddies bubbling with machine-gun fire."

Their company got back to the base once a month or so for three or four days to relax, blow off steam, take hot showers and eat warm meals. The rest of the time they spent out in the bush.

That’s where things were really rough. Once Rodger was pinned down for a whole night in one of those rice paddies bubbling with machine gun. While he was a radio operator, he had to carry not only the heavy radio, but also his rifle, 300 rounds of ammunition, and his chow. On one mission he walked 18 miles in three days carrying all that stuff. After a week or so fighting on Batangan Peninsula, he started going to church and wore a cross around his neck.

He probably got a morale boost at the end of May when his home-town friend, Charlie Reefer, was assigned to his company.

Rodger treasured the "care packages" he got from home. In one letter he thanked his mom for the cookies she had sent, and told her that it had rained hard right after they arrived. He says he ate them with a spoon. Rather than having cookies and cream, he had cookies and water.

His letters were filled with thoughts and dreams about what he would do when he came home. Before he went to Vietnam, he owned a Harley 350 motorcycle. His dream was to buy a bigger bike when he got back.

Unfortunately, that dream was to remain a dream forever. He was killed on July 16, 1969, the second of three Jamestown men to die in Vietnam within a two-month period.
FALLEN HEROES

RAYMOND LEE MCGARVEY –TRANSFER
VIETNAM – U.S ARMY

As the name implies, search and destroy missions were designed to locate and eliminate enemy forces. That didn’t work so well when half a platoon of American infantry located a well-rested North Vietnamese Army battalion fresh out of Cambodia.

That’s what happened on July 3, 1966, to Raymond Lee McGarvey near Pleiku in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. First thing in the morning, his platoon was split in two. Half of them went west toward Cambodia, the other half in another direction. The half that went west stumbled upon an empty enemy base camp. They checked out, and determined that it was for a battalion-size unit. They decided to get out of there fast, but before they could get very far, they ran into an ambush.

Far outnumbered, they were the ones who were destroyed. Out of the 22 who had started out that morning, 15 lay dead and another four seriously wounded.

During that battle, Raymond McGarvey went out in a blaze of glory. His Bronze Star citation describes his heroic actions:

“On this date Private First Class McGarvey was serving as a rifleman in the 3rd Platoon, B, 1/35th Infantry which was on a search and destroy mission. His unit was ambushed by at least a reinforced North Vietnamese company; coming under intense fire and surrounded. Moving to a forward position, Private First Class McGarvey brought fire on the enemy inflicting many casualties. Seeing an enemy machine gun that was delivering particularly effective fire on his comrades, he moved to a better position in an effort to silence it. He continued his advance until within twenty meters of the bunker and then single-handedly charged the fortified machinegun position. In this act of great valor Private First Class McGarvey lost his life to enemy machine gun fire. His courage was an inspiration to all who saw it and strengthened the determination of his comrades to resist, despite the heavy odds they faced that day.”

For his service, PFC McGarvey was awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Bronze Star with V, the Purple Heart, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation.

Raymond was born in Clearfield County and moved to Transfer in 1964 with his parents, Mr. Walter E. McGarvey. He worked at the Greenville Steel Car Company before entering the Army.

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
Ross A. McGinnis’s kindergarten teacher asked him to complete a sentence, “When I grow up, I want to be ____________.” His reply: “An army man.”

Few kids that age actually know what they want to be; Ross really, truly did. He not only grew up to be an “army man.” He became the ultimate army man whose self-sacrifice resulted in his receiving the highest honor the United States can bestow on its military heroes.

Ross’s career choice never wavered. On his 17th birthday, he signed up for the Delayed Enlistment Program. During the next year, he completed the requirements to qualify for entry into the army as a PFC, rather than as a buck private.

He went on duty less than a month after he graduated from Keystone High School in 2005. After training at Fort Benning, Georgia, he was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team in Schweinfurt, Germany. The unit was deployed to Kuwait, then Iraq.

There the 19-year-old kid proved himself to be a man among men. During his first three months, he participated in over 200 combat missions in and around eastern Baghdad. He didn’t just participate; he excelled. In an intense battle on November 6, 2006, he displayed such courage that his commander recommended that he be given a waiver for the time required for promotion.

He performed his final act of bravery less than a month later, on December 4. Few things take more raw courage than to ride as a .50 caliber machine gunner on a Humvee maneuvering through narrow streets during urban combat. The gunner must position himself with his upper body fully exposed to hostile fire.

On this day, an insurgent threw a fragmentation hand grenade onto the vehicle. PFC McGinnis tried to deflect it, but it fell through the hatch into the vehicle, which was manned by four other soldiers. PFC McGinnis could have leapt out of the Hummer to safety. Instead, he dropped down into the vehicle and pinned the grenade between his body and the radio mount. He was killed instantly when the grenade exploded, but the other four soldiers survived. Only one of them was seriously wounded.

For his sacrifice, PFC Ross was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Ross is the son of Romayne and Tom McGinnis. He has two sisters, Becky and Katie.
According to friends who knew Paul McKnight in school, he was a quiet young man. His parents, John and Martha McKnight, once owned a farm that was east of Clarksville, on land that is now under Shenango Lake. His older sister, Elaine, born with spinal bifida, passed away in her 20s.

When he graduated from Reynolds High School in 1965, Paul followed a military tradition in his family. Three of his uncles served in World War II – Paul and Robert Yarian, and Eugene Leiphiemer. Two cousins, Dale Jackson Miller and Harold E. Miller, served in Korea.

Paul enlisted in the Army on April 24, 1966. In January, 1967, he left for his first tour in Vietnam. He was wounded in action twice before he returned to the states, for which he was awarded two purple hearts.

During the summer of 1969, the 1st Cav must also have conducted operations in Binh Long to the northeast of Tay Ninh. It was there that Sgt McKnight was killed. For his actions, he was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star with “V” device for valor. Here is an excerpt from his citation for that award:

:On a combat mission in Binh Long, he and the members of his squad came under heavy automatic weapons fire from an unknown hostile force in a night ambush site while trying to retrieve abandoned equipment. Sgt. McKnight returned the fire and directed his fire team during the fight. In the exchange he was killed.

In addition to the Bronze Star, Sgt. McKnight was awarded a Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, Vietnamese Service Medal, and an Air Medal.

The medals were presented for heroism in action in the Republic of Vietnam for action on July 31, 1969.

His Presbyterian Church in Fredonia honored him by dedicating its Carillon to him.

ON THE WALL Panel W20 Line 80
When one man is killed in combat, it isn’t just one man who dies. It is a son, a husband, a father, an uncle, a friend, a fellow soldier, and sometimes a leader who puts the safety and welfare of others in front of his own.

Lt. Col. Mike McLaughlin was all of those people. Early in the morning on January 5, 2005, in Ramadi, Iraq, he was with a crowd of 300 Iraqis who had responded to an Iraqi police recruiting drive. He was following the first priority of a military officer: Accomplish the mission.

At 7:02, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives. When shrapnel struck the back of Mike’s head, a soldier went to check him out. “I’m okay,” he said. “Go help the others.”

In that, he fulfilled a leader’s second priority: Look out for the welfare of your men.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t okay. He died from the wound.

The responses of those who knew him reveal what was lost to the world.

“Mike was a leader in word, deed, and action,” said friend and fellow soldier Lt. Col. Grey D. Berrier II. “He was a charismatic leader that always led from the front, and was the consummate professional.”

“Mike died doing his job the only way he knew how — out in front, with great enthusiasm and courage,” said Col. John L Gronski, commander for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team. “He was a very close friend. My heart and my prayers go out to his family.”

Tammy McLaughlin lost her husband. Their two daughters, Ericha and Erin, lost their father.

In a speech she gave at a Veteran’s Day ceremony, his niece Paige related some of her most precious memories. “When my sister and I were really little, we went to a beach house with him. He gave us licorice for breakfast.” She remembered him as a “man that would laugh at anything, one that would make anyone his best friend just by saying hello.”

Apparently Mike said hello to a lot of people. His niece Chloe remembers his funeral. “I saw so many people that I didn’t even know. I didn’t realize how many people were his friends.”

Chloe was six when her uncle died, and ten when she wrote this insightful conclusion: “I’m proud of the veterans that have served in our beautiful free country and I am very proud of my uncle Mike. The next time you see a veteran please say thank you.”
A sense of irony and humor was vital to U.S. military personnel in Vietnam. They would often take names of places they knew back home and apply them to areas in Vietnam where they served.

Happy Valley, as every Penn State fan knows very well, is the home of Penn State’s main campus in State College, PA. In Vietnam, Happy Valley was not a happy place, either for U.S. or enemy soldiers. The area was covered by thick undergrowth and elephant grass that grew as tall as ten feet. That, of course, made combat operations extremely difficult and dangerous – and made it a great place for a major Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army base camp.

It was better than great, because it was a perfect place to infiltrate men and materials for operations around Da Nang, its port facilities, and Logistics Command. From the surrounding hills, within 12 km of the city and its military operations, the enemy could fire rockets and other weapons effectively.

Defense of the area was partially the responsibility of the 1st Battalion 7th Marine Regiment. PFC Richard L. McNeish was assigned to Company B of that battalion after arriving in Vietnam on September 20, 1967. Barely more than a month later, on October 24, he went out on patrol with his unit. He was killed by an enemy explosive device.

PFC McNeish was the son of Kermith and Clara McNeish. He had enlisted in the Marine Corps during April, 1967.

PFC McNeish was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Vietnam Service Medal.

He was the ninth Mercer County serviceman killed in the Vietnam War.
After landing on Omaha Beach on August 9, 1944, a month and two days after D-Day, John advanced with the Seventh Armored Division all the way across France – fighting the Germans, building bridges, blowing things up, rescuing other military units, and liberating French cities.

By December, 1944, the American and Allied armies had reached the German border. It looked as if the war was almost over. Then Hitler launched a surprise attack with virtually all of his remaining forces and pushed the line back 70 miles. The Seventh Armored Division was thrown into this “Battle of the Bulge” as reinforcements.

John remembered it vividly: “The Germans sent at us two divisions of 16 to 18 year old kids out of high school,” he said. “They didn’t have any idea what war was, and had no training. They gave them those little burp guns. They thought they were cowboys.”

The Germans weren’t the only enemy. With limited transportation available, the American generals opted to give priority to shipment of ammunition and fuel rather than clothing. The weather turned bitterly cold, with wind chills around 30 degrees below zero. Stuck in summer uniforms, many of the troops – including John – suffered severe frostbite.

Meredith kept different kinds of souvenirs from his World War II combat days until his death in December, 2003. Some were extremely painful, such as the German bullet that could not be removed from his leg. And the extremely painful aftereffects of the severe frostbite plagued him until the day he died.

Other memories more than made up for the pain and suffering, such as the medals he received for his actions. He was also proud of the letters of appreciation sent to the Seventh Armored by the French cities they liberated.

Those letters painted vivid, positive pictures of the army’s swift and efficient advance. The mayor of Verdun wrote, “We shall never forget that in less than one hour you delivered us of our burden, and the rapidity of your advance has avoided the destruction of half of our village by these unchained brutes.”

The French people were also struck with the contrast between those “unchained brutes” the American soldiers. The mayor of Chateau-Thierry wrote, “All have been struck by the simplicity and the amiability and the cordiality of your officers and men.”

Even after hard-fought battles, the true character of the American soldier still showed through.
Donald Stephen Mihordin must have been an optimist. He married Carol Ann Kilgore on September 9, 1967, about a month after he had entered the Army. He had to have known that he would be going to Vietnam.

That happened on March 25, 1968, when he was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division’s Company D, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry on March 25, 1968. The Division was headquartered in Cu Chi, just northwest of Saigon. And that guaranteed that he would be involved in some serious combat.

The 25th Division had operational responsibility for Tay Ninh Province, just north of a portion of Cambodia that protrudes into Vietnam. That area of Cambodia provided a sanctuary in which Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units could gather supplies and troops to stage attacks into South Vietnam. Until late in the war, they could be certain that the American and South Vietnamese forces would not attack across the border into Cambodia.

Tay Ninh Province was intensely disputed throughout the war, especially after the NVA increased its use as an infiltration route during 1968. The fighting was unrelenting; making any break from it welcome, indeed. In the summer of 1968, Donald was able to go on R&R to Hawaii to visit his wife, Carol Ann.

Shortly after she returned home, she learned that Donald had been killed in action.

On November 26, 1968, Donald’s unit was engaged in a bitter fight about 3 kilometers southeast of Tay Ninh City. Before the day was out, 26 Americans were dead, including eighteen from the 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry. One of those was Sp4 Donald Stephen Mihordin from Sharon, mortally wounded in the neck when he triggered a land mine.

Donald never got to see his five-week-old son, Donald.

Donald was born in Greenville to Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Mihordin. After graduating from Hickory High School in 1965, he attended Youngstown State University until he entered the Army.

He was survived by his parents, his wife Carol Ann, son Donald, sister Charlene, and brother Richard. He was preceded in death by another brother, Jack Mihordin.

Sp4 Mihordin was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Good Conduct Medal.

He was the 19th Mercer County serviceman killed in Vietnam. He is buried in Hillcrest Memorial Park.

ON THE WALL Panel W38 line 77

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest Memorial Park
What was it like to be a rifleman in a Marine company on night operations in Vietnam? At times, utterly confusing, terrifying – and sometimes fatal. That’s what PFC Dennis Keith Millison experienced on February 26, 1969. He was on a search and destroy mission with his unit – Company L, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines.

The report in the newspaper said that he “died Friday of fragmentary wounds suffered when an enemy mine exploded in Quang Tri Province, near the demilitarized zone.” That gives no sense of what really happened.

We can get a slight, distant glimpse of what it was like by reading declassified official handwritten reports made by a commander during that night’s battle. These are not after-action reports written in the comfort of a base camp, but notes made during and immediately after the fighting. It’s difficult to read because the handwriting is understandably scribbly, and it’s filled with esoteric abbreviations. But here’s a sampling:

“Sudden tremendous amount of incoming 82 mm. RPG, satchel charges with main thrust of pull from north east finger. All maj bunkers were hit with first barrage. (CO, P, FDC, 81’s and arty plt cps). During hand to hand combat outside CP E-6 gained pomm with 2/4 who beyad supporting arty fire right on posit. in wire. Satchel charges, [other explosions] going off throughout inside perimeter. From this point on it was every man for himself. 0700 h medevac bird attempted to reach FSB Russell. From daylight to 1030h gained cas. count getting status of sit. found 25 en KIA conf. inside wire, will not be able to check outside perimeter.”

Sometime during that conflict, PFC Millison risked his life to pull a wounded friend out of harm’s way. When returning to the battle, he apparently triggered an explosive device. Records indicate that only six other Marines of the 3rd Division were killed that day.

PFC Millison was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Keith Millison of Sharon. After graduating from Sharon High School, he worked at GATX for over two years. When he received his draft notice, he chose to enlist in the Marine Corps.

He was survived by his parents, a daughter Melinda Denise, a brother Gary L., and grandmothers Mrs. Helen Harshman and Mrs. Elzetta Millison.

He was the second Sharon serviceman killed in Vietnam.

ON THE WALL Panel W31 Line 66

Vincient “Jim” Mongiello’s father Ben opened a harness and leather repair shop in Mercer after settling there from Italy.

“When the United States got involved in World War I,” Jim said, “Father closed his leather shop and volunteered for the army. He fought in four major battles with the Fourth Division in Europe. And he wasn’t even a citizen.”

That set a good example for Jim. He joined the Navy even before he graduated from Mercer High School.

“In the class of 1943, if you had passing grades, you could leave and go into the service and receive your diploma. In January I joined the Navy. My mother received my diploma in May.”

After training, he sailed on LST 177 across the Atlantic. Unfortunately, the flat-bottomed LST does not do well in the tumultuous waters of the open sea.

“I got seasick on the first day out of New Orleans. An officer caught me lying down. He shouted at me to get to work. I walked out on deck, and here’s the captain with a bucket to upchuck in – he was seasick, too. The rule was, if you were seasick, you worked anyhow.”

Barely 18, Jim was the ship’s “oil king,” responsible for taking on all fuel, dispensing it, and accounting for it.

“I had 57 tanks to take care of. At eight every night I had to have a report on the captain’s desk.”

LST 177 participated in the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, Anzio beachhead, and southern France. As the war was winding down, Jim came back to serve Shore Patrol duties in Philadelphia.

1967 and 1998, he organized 27 reunions of the LST 177. He collected LST memorabilia, including LST 177’s bell and helm (steering wheel). He sent most of it to LST 325, which is still afloat as a museum in Evansville, Indiana.

Throughout his life, Jim was very active in his community, serving 26 years on the Mercer borough council, and being involved in many organizations, including the Masons, United Methodist Men, VFW, American Legion, and Ducks Unlimited. As an alumnus of Mercer High School, he organized many reunions for his graduating class. In 2010, he was inducted into the Mercer High School Alumni Hall of Fame.
On November 29, 1970, Captain Cecil Gerald Moyer was piloting a C-123 aircraft that had just taken off from Cam Ranh Bay Air Force Base in Vietnam. Twelve miles south of the air base, the plane crashed in the jungle for undetermined reasons. The plane carried 32 Americans and 12 South Vietnamese. The Americans were officially listed as missing in action. When the plane was located on December 5, two non-commissioned officers were rescued from the wreckage. Further searches discovered the bodies of the remaining personnel. One of those was Captain Moyer.

Another C-123 crashed in the same vicinity several days before. All 79 people on that plane were killed.

Many years later, Captain Moyer’s wife, Sally, was serving at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center as a Stephen Minister at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center for many years. She came across an idea that inspired her: a portable chapel for use in patient rooms and family waiting areas throughout the hospital.

“It was something that just jumped out at me, something practical that was certainly needed by our patients, their family members and our own caregivers,” said Sally. “It was also a fitting memorial for my husband and those who died with him in service to our country.”

At the chapel’s dedication ceremony, the hospital’s chaplain, Jeff Ryan, made an observation that is too often forgotten. He pointed out that if Captain Moyer and those who died with him had lived, they would be getting ready for retirement and enjoying their grandchildren.

Captain Moyer was born in Greenville to Mr. and Mrs. Cecil G. Moyer. He graduated from Greenville High School in 1963, and from Thiel College in 1967.

He entered the Air Force in 1967, and was assigned to the 315th Airlift Wing in Vietnam.
During the Vietnam War, the United States military fought a limited war against an enemy who was fighting an all-out war. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army could cross the international borders with impunity, attacking the U.S. forces in Vietnam from bases in Cambodia and Laos, while our military was prohibited from attacking those bases – at least technically, and at least at first.

From early on, however, Special Forces conducted “black op” raids into Laos and Cambodia with units from the South Vietnamese Army. As the war progressed, larger units of the American forces themselves crossed the borders to attack enemy strongholds.

A guy named Mike explains why and wherefore on the web site www.armchairgeneral.com/forums:

“It was well known that this area in Cambodia was a NVA sanctuary with vast amounts of stores and bases. The routes they used were known by us as “Adams Trail” and “The Serges Jungle Highway.”

One of our responsibilities was to interfere with these as much as possible. The idea was going in with boots on the ground to destroy as much of it as possible to help cover our withdrawal. The anti-war faction had a field day-turning it into a major invasion of another country. It was 99% wilderness as shown and a lot was accomplished. SOG had spent a lot of time and effort scouting out that area. . . . My camp was just south and east of the border and we were on the receiving end of a lot of the stuff stored there. It was often safer to be out on recon than in camp.

Ralph Oliver Murphy III was with them in Cambodia when he died from multiple fragmentation wounds.

Kevin Scanlon, a fellow soldier, wrote on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial web site: “I trained with Ralph @ Ft. Jackson, SC & went to Nam with him in ’70. I didn’t know Ralph real well but was sad to hear when I returned home from Nam & Cambodia that he did not. He was a quiet but very good soldier as I remember in AIT. . . . I think about you guys all the time! God Bless you Ralph, you are a Hero.”

Ralph was a 1966 graduate of Grove City High School. He was the first person from Mercer County to be killed in Cambodia.

SPONSORED BY: American Legion Post 222, Grove City, PA
As the 164th Engineer Combat Battalion battled its way through Europe during 1944 and 1945, Claude Musgrove served as the unit’s photographer. He converted a captured German ambulance into a mobile dark room and made an enlarger using a condenser lens from a movie theater.

Along the way, he photographed history in the making. His unit was among the first to enter Germany, crossing the famous Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen. Hitler’s army had failed to destroy the bridge as they were retreating, so 8000 troops of the 9th Armored Division crossed it within 24 hours after capturing it. Claude’s battalion was put in charge of defending the bridge. The Germans threw everything they could at it – bombs, artillery, even frogmen who swam down the Rhine to blow it up. They failed, but managed to damage it severely.

“The major in charge of the bridge told the Stars and Stripes that after ten days’ work it was stronger than it ever was. The next day it collapsed and killed him and twenty-three engineers.”

Claude did his best to preserve historical photographs he found in German government buildings. He found more than 500 photographs taken by Hitler’s personal photographer. One shows Hitler and Mussolini inspecting a room destroyed by a bomb in the failed assassination attempt of July 20, 1944.

Another photo triggered a personal memory for Claude. It shows Herman Goering, head of the German Luftwaffe, with Colonel Ernst Udet, the number two ace in World War I, after the Red Baron.

“In 1935,” Claude said, “I saw him in person at the Cleveland Air Show. He was over here spying on our airports to see what we had. He flew a biplane upside down and picked up a handkerchief off the ground.”

Claude also had two books that each include a viewing apparatus and 100 stereoscopic photographs of Germany and the war. Another book on the history of the Nazis had actual glued-in photographs instead of pictures printed on the pages.

Claude returned to work at Westinghouse. After he retired in 1969, he and his wife Evelyn bought a motel in Clearwater, Florida, which they operated for nine years. After that, they spent winters in Florida and summers in Fredonia. Their family grew to include 18 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren.

He bought his first computer when he was 88. He used it to digitize the many photographs he had taken and collected.
In the spring of 1966, the North Vietnamese Army started inserting large forces into Quang Tri Province, just south of the border with North Vietnam. Units of the Marine Corps were moved into the province to deal with this problem. But the defensive strategy included the installation of artillery bases to establish interlocking bands of artillery fire. The base that held it all together was called Camp Carroll, about 13 miles northeast of Khe Sanh. To minimize the loss of American troops, the American military would fire more than seven million tons of shells on targets in Vietnam.

In May, 1967, the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines of the 3rd Marine Division was tasked with defending Camp Carroll. Command Chronologies of that battalion indicate that to do that, they didn’t just dig foxholes and wait for enemy attacks. They continually conducted patrols and unilateral offensive actions throughout their assigned sector.

Corporal Reuben James Neal from Wheatland was assigned to L Company of the 3/9 Marines. It was rugged, dangerous duty. With Army as well as Marine units operating in the same area, failures in communication sometimes ended in disaster. The Command Chronology for May 16, 1967, includes this entry: “Company L and Battalion Command Group YD 129657 was taken under fire by Army security units with convoy moving down Route 556. Received small arms and .50 caliber fire. Army was recong area by fire which resulted in one USMC KIA.”

That Marine was Corporal Reuben James Neal.

The son of Georgette Taylor of Wheatland, he had enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1958 after attending Farrell High School. He planned on making it a career.

“He was a tremendous athlete in football, track and field, low and high hurdle,” said Fred Jarrett, a high school friend. “He was a rugged guy, one of those people who stays on your mind.”

ON THE WALL Panel 20E Line 9

Camp Carroll
It was one thing to find an enemy unit in Vietnam. It was quite another to destroy it. When things weren’t going their way, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army were very adept at slipping away into the jungle to fight another day.

The solution was to cordon off the unit – completely surround it so it couldn’t escape. The classic example of that was the action at the end of April and beginning of May, 1968, a couple of miles northwest of Hue.

Valentine Ambrose Ochs, a mortar man from Sandy Lake serving with the 101st Airborne Division, was involved in that action.

An enemy force of unknown size was discovered to be holed up in the village of Phuoc Yen, in a bend of the Song Bo River. Fortunately, the NVA forces inside the village also didn’t know the strength of the force that would be thrown against them. In the early hours of the operation, they could have escaped by attacking the first elements being put in place. Before they did, they were surrounded by companies from three American battalions, elements from local Popular Forces, and the “Black Panther” Company of the 1st South Vietnamese Army.

With the enemy completely trapped, the American forces attacked relentlessly with artillery, helicopter gunships, and Air Force fighter-bombers. After five days, 107 NVA soldiers surrendered, leaving the bodies of 419 of their comrades in the village. By this time, our attacking forces knew that they had eliminated the 8th Battalion, 90th NVA Regiment. Until that day, no other NVA force had surrendered en masse to an American military unit.

Unfortunately. PFC Ochs did not live to see that happen. He was killed by small arms fire during the battle, just 28 days after he had arrived in Vietnam.

He was the son of Mr. & Mrs. Charles Ochs, Sandy Lake.

On the web site www.vvmf.org/thewall, his nephew, Tobias C. Ochs, posted the following tribute:

“Valentine Ochs was a kind caring young man. He loved his country and served it well. the news of Valentine

Ochs’s death came on his dad’s birthday. All seven of his brothers and sisters will never forget their older brother. He was killed on April-28, 1968, a day that his family and friends will never forget.”

ON THE WALL Panel 52E Line 41
Allen Neil Palm was a Greenville native, 1968 graduate of Reynolds High School, who ended up tromping through the marshes of the Mekong Delta with the 9th Infantry Division in the Mobile Riverine Force.

“Letters from the front were rare and are now long lost,” wrote his sister, Carol, “but I remember that his complaints were few – only that his feet were suffering from the march through swamps.”

Friends and family would not have expected many complaints. They were used to his unassuming attitude and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others.

“He and his brother Wes both wrestled at Reynolds,” Carol said. “One of them had to quit to help Dad on the farm. Allen quit so Wes could continue to wrestle. That’s what kind of a kid he was.”

After graduating from high school, Allen attended the New Castle School of Trades and worked as a material cutter in the Westinghouse in Sharon. When he was called into military service in October, 1968, Allen made no big fuss.

“We would never know what he thought about going half a world away to fight in the jungle,” Carol said. “It was simply his duty. He had already seen friends and neighbors ship out, so he prepared as best he could to leave his family and home to serve his country.”

Details of that service are difficult to find, but as a soldier in the 9th Division, we know that he served in the Mekong Delta. According to accounts by other soldiers, one of the most common tactics was to cruise up and down the countless waterways on the Navy’s modified ships until they were shot at. The ship would return fire, then drop off the infantry to assault and destroy the enemy. Sometimes they would be out for days on end, plenty of time to get their feet very wet.

Ninth Division troops would also be inserted into known enemy territory by helicopter and retrieved the same way when their mission was accomplished.

On December 5, 1968, Allen was killed by enemy booby trap while he was on patrol. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
John Pariza was born in East Liverpool of Romanian parents, who took him for a visit to Romania before World War II. Because of Hitler’s aggression, the family was stuck there throughout World War II.

“When I was ten old,” Pariza said, “I saw Germans drag Romanian Jews out of their homes and shoot them in the head.”

After his family came back to Youngstown in 1946, kids in school made fun of him because of his broken English. At age 16, he beat up a couple of his antagonists and spent three days in a detention home. When he was 17, he quit school and joined the army.

That was just before the North Korean army invaded South Korea, quickly pushing the South Koreans back into a 100 by 50 mile rectangle at the southern end of the Korean peninsula – the infamous Pusan Perimeter.

Within hours of arriving there, Pariza was on patrol in a rice patty.

“We got ambushed,” he said. “Two of the guys that I just got there with got killed right off the bat.”

The newly-arrived U.S. and United Nations troops fought their way up the peninsula to China. Pariza suffered frostbite and two wounds. He was even a prisoner of war – for about 45 minutes during the early part of November 1950. Elements of the Chinese army had come south to reinforce the North Koreans. While on patrol, his 12-man squad unit was captured by a whole company of Chinese.

“They assigned eight Chinese to take us north,” he said.

Fortunately, nearby Turk and Greek units of the United Nations contingent had seen what happened. They attacked the Chinese with knives. Not one shot was fired.

Because of that rescue, Pariza was not one of the 2,900 Americans who died in Korean prison camps, nor one of the 8,100 who are still listed as missing.

“The Korean War is the forgotten war,” Pariza said. “I told my wife, if it’s the last thing I do, I want to put up a Korean War memorial.”

It took him a year and a half to achieve that dream. You can visit it in front of the Oak Tree Country Club, next to the Ohio line on Route 318 – now known as the Korean War Veterans Memorial Highway, also through John Pariza’s initiative.
On February 22, 1991, hundreds of U.S. tanks and other vehicles massed in eastern Saudi Arabia to attack the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. The unit responsible for getting fuel to them was the 475th Quartermaster Group from Farrell, Pennsylvania.

How did such a responsibility fall on an army reserve unit?

During the 1980s, the Department of Defense reduced the active army, assigning logistical and other tasks to reserve units. In the end, there was no regular army petroleum group.

“We were it, basically,” said Bill Perrine, who had joined the unit in the early 1970s. That didn’t result in a lack of preparedness thanks to the exceptional commitment of reservists such as Bill.

Through the 1970s, he served one weekend a month and two weeks during the summer. That changed dramatically during the 1980s.

“The 475th became responsible for supplying all the fuel for the not just for the army,” Bill said, “but also for the air force, marines, and navy. Our job was to get petroleum supplies to anyone who needed them in a theater of operation. We had to figure out how to make that happen.”

It was an awesomely complex job that required Bill to spend as many as 100 active duty days a year.

“We planned the logistics from the time the petroleum comes out of the ground, through the refineries, into ocean-going tankers, to deep sea ports or across the beach, into the bladders, into the trucks, into the little refuelers, all the way to the guy’s jeep out in the field.”

They also participated in strategic planning to counter a variety of possible scenarios, such as a potential Russian invasion in Europe through the Fulda Gap. Then the attention shifted to Iran and Iraq.

“The war plans we wrote during the late 1980s got used in the early 1990s during Desert Storm,” Bill said.

Of course, planning isn’t enough; training is also necessary. The 475th participated in petroleum logistics exercises both in the United States and overseas.

When Bill took a job in Wheeling, WV, in 1987, he transferred to the 1036th U.S. Army Reserve school which was also in Farrell but required less time.

During Desert Storm, Bill was activated to teach in the petroleum school in Fort Lee, Virginia. To his disappointment, his requests to serve in Iraq were turned down.

Bill remained in the Reserves until he retired from the military in 1993.
When Leonard Pleban went into the army in October, 1942, he was assigned to the medical detachment of the 908th Field Artillery.

“I couldn’t even stand the sight of blood,” he said. “I puked a few times, and passed out a few times when I saw some of the surgeries, but after that it was nothing.”

During a training course at a hospital, a chiropodist told him about chiropody, which is the old term for podiatry. He didn’t realize at the time that he had discovered his future career.

The 908th Artillery was sent to France shortly after D-Day. The unit fought through five major campaigns, including the Battle of the Bulge. Leonard was one of the very few in his unit to emerge without a scratch.

“My captains wanted me to go to medical school,” he said. “I didn’t want to, because I didn’t want to sign any death certificates.”

Then he remembered chiropody, and realized that chiropodists (podiatrists) don’t have to do that.

So the army gave him his vocation. It also gave him an avocation. After the war, Staff Sergeant Pleban was assigned to help set up a nightclub to entertain troops while they waited to be demobilized. He served as MC and half a comedy team in the style of Abbott and Costello.

When he came back from the service, he took pre-med courses at Youngstown State, then enrolled in the Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine in Cleveland.

After completing his schooling, Dr. Pleban found that starting a practice wasn’t easy. He found space for an office in downtown Sharon, above the Sharon Restaurant. With 36 steps up and no elevator, it wasn’t ideal for a foot doctor. It wasn’t even an office, just a large room. Getting set up put him deeply in debt.

So he had an office and equipment, but no patients. His clientele built up slowly until one key element fell into place. He volunteered to work with the Sharon High School athletic program. He did that pro bono for 50 years.

“The school got a doctor without cost,” he said, “and I got the kids, their parents, and their grandparents as patients.”

He took advantage of invitations to host sports banquets and other events. His sense of humor, initially honed in his military nightclub, made him a roaring success as the Valley’s MC.

“He’s known as the Johnny Carson of the Shenango Valley,” says his wife Florence.
While Anthony Ponzio was studying Business Education at Youngstown College, he joined the enlisted reserves. He went on active duty a couple of days after finishing his degree in 1943. The night of his commencement he was already at Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio.

From there he went to Camp Walters, Texas, for infantry basic training. Combat infantryman wasn’t his dream job, so he transferred to the Army Air Corps in September, 1943. He successfully completed four and half months of pre-flight training.

Unfortunately, the army needed infantrymen more than they needed aviators. Tony found himself back in the infantry, training in California for amphibious combat in the South Pacific. In February, 1945, his unit headed out with all their tropical gear. They ended up not in the South Pacific, but in Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts.

In their summer uniforms, they stepped off the train into knee-deep snow.

From there Tony went to France with the 86th Infantry Division. They advanced all the way through France into southern Germany.

After Germany surrendered, Tony traded in his Browning Automatic Rifle for a typewriter. He worked in the regimental headquarters at in Heidelberg Castle updating personnel records in preparation for rotation back to the states.

When the Division arrived in New York on June 17, 1945, he got a thirty day leave. Tony came home and married Helen Christoff. She went with him to Oklahoma where his unit was training for assignment to the South Pacific, then came back to Youngstown when the division shipped out for the Philippines.

Japan surrendered before they got there. But Tony’s unit still had to fight, extracting Japanese soldiers from the caves around Manila. They didn’t know the war was over.

When Tony got out of the army early in April, 1946, he worked a sequence of temporary jobs, including three years as a teacher in Cortland.

Eventually he met an IRS agent who suggested he apply for employment with the agency. Tony passed the tests in January, 1955. For 21 years he wore a badge and carried a gun as an IRS enforcement agent. He participated in raids on numbers operations; surveillance in “peep trucks” and hotel rooms; and security operations for presidential candidates George Wallace, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon.

It was a far cry from the teaching career he had anticipated – but certainly far more interesting, and probably equally satisfying.
When he joined the army, William Rauber of Wheatland was following a military tradition established by his father. But Drago Rauber was never a part of the American armed forces. Born in Croatia, he served in the Croatian and British armies.

William was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1948. He was three years old when his parents emigrated to the United States. They settled in Wheatland, so William attended Farrell High School. He enlisted in the army in March, 1967.

He arrived in Vietnam on April 2, 1968, assigned to the Headquarters Company of the 6th Battalion, 31st Infantry, 9th Infantry Division. That made him part of the Mobile Riverine Force in the Mekong Delta, probably heading into combat aboard the descriptively named Brown Water Navy.

The Mobile Riverine Force was a joint military operation between the U.S. Navy and the 9th Infantry Division. The soldiers were inserted into combat and extracted either via modified Navy vessels or helicopters. One Riverine veteran wrote that the typical tactical plan was to go up and down the rivers and canals until they were shot at. Then the Navy would blast the area with .50 caliber machine guns and other weapons, then land the infantry to pursue the enemy. It was dangerous, wet, and intense duty.

He was there barely enough time to get his feet wet. Probably a couple of weeks after arriving, he told his parents in a letter that “tomorrow we are going out for two to five days.” They received that letter the day after they were notified that he had been killed in action on April 25.

He was survived by his parents, three sisters, and two brothers.

ON THE WALL      Panel 52E Line 10

SPONSORED BY: War on Terror Foundation
Charles Lenard Reefer went to school in Elderton, about half way between Kittanning and Indiana, PA. He left before graduating from high school. He tried to enlist in the Army, but he was turned down for medical reasons.

He moved to Jamestown when he was 18, after his mother passed away. In Jamestown he lived with his sister, Martha McHenry, and worked at Steel Car in Greenville. There he received his draft notice. When he went in for his physical, he was found fit for military service. It seems as if draft quotas could cure a lot of medical shortcomings.

When Charlie arrived at A Company, 5th Battalion, 46th infantry in Quant Ngai Province, he may have been surprised to find Rodger McElhaney there, who lived just down the road from him in Jamestown, PA. Whatever delight he had in that ended on July 16, 1969, when PFC McElhaney was killed in action.

Charlie himself outlived Rodger by only 23 days. He was killed by an explosive device on August 7, 1969.

According to friends in Jamestown, Charlie was full of fun, a very nice person. His nephew posted a tribute on the web site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund on May 25, 2001:

“It’s been such a long time...time that you missed so many things...times that you should have seen. It’s been a hell of a ride...you would have liked it...instead the ride took you from us, now both you and my dad are sharing that walk in the green fields of elephant grass. I thank you for what you gave and what you did for me...I took your ride, only mine was in the Corps...and my ride left me get off before the track came to an end. I remember you...I remember the night of the BBQ when you left us...find peace...Good Hunting Bro... Semper Fi”

ON THE WALL      Panel W20 Line 109

46th Infantry Patch
On April 8, 1945, Bill Roscoe found himself in the kind of situation where people tend to bargain with God. Like, “Lord, get me out of this and I promise to serve you the rest of my life.”

Bill had already made that commitment when he was much younger, so he made another one: “Get me out of this and I promise you I will never worry again.”

He was radio operator on a B-17 Flying Fortress when his plane was crippled by anti-aircraft. Instead of bailing out, Bill stayed to help his friend get out of the ball turret gunner’s pod.

The inexperienced crew members were bewildered, afraid to jump. So Bill pushed them out. Failing to count to ten before opening their chutes, they were too close to the plane when burning wing broke off and threatened to take them all out. The last one to jump, Bill managed the nudge the wing enough for the wind to take it away from the others.

With his chute full of holes, he hit the ground hard, injuring his feet. He was captured by the Gestapo, who marched the prisoners hundreds of miles. They had nothing to eat but bread made from sawdust and potatoes. Prisoners and guards suffered together.

They ended up in Stalag Luft 7A, a POW camp for airmen. Starvation and severe treatment caused Bill’s weight to drop from 185 to 85 before General Patton’s forces liberated them.

“For ten years after he got out of the service,” said his wife Dee, “Bill was very sick. He was yellow from toxic poisoning. The only thing that pulled him through was Dr. K. W. Bertram, and the Lord.”

At his 90th birthday party in 2005, Bill said that he and Dee had never had an argument. Faithful to the second promise he made to the Lord, he said he lived a no-stress life with a no-stress wife.

He and Dee were also faithful to his promise to serve the Lord. They served as Eucharistic ministers for 20 years, and taught religion for more than twice that long.

Fifty years after the end of the war, Bill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for that incident that lasted a few minutes in 1945. But he and Dee valued far more the satisfaction they earned through a lifetime of worry-free service to the Lord, to each other, to their family, and to their community.
Some men have received the Medal of Honor for using their bodies to shield others from a hand grenade; others for charging an enemy bunker; or for drawing fire upon themselves away from others; or for sprinting across an open field to save a comrade. According to Sgt. Leslie Sabo’s citation, he did not just one of those actions, but all of them:

[On May 10, 1970] Specialist Four Sabo and his platoon were conducting a reconnaissance patrol when they were ambushed from all sides by a large enemy force. Without hesitation, Specialist Four Sabo charged an enemy position, killing several enemy soldiers. Immediately thereafter, he assaulted an enemy flanking force, successfully drawing their fire away from friendly soldiers and ultimately forcing the enemy to retreat. In order to re-supply ammunition, he sprinted across an open field to a wounded comrade. As he began to reload, an enemy grenade landed nearby. Specialist Four Sabo picked it up, threw it, and shielded his comrade with his own body, thus absorbing the brunt of the blast and saving his comrade’s life. Seriously wounded by the blast, Specialist Four Sabo nonetheless retained the initiative and then single-handedly charged an enemy bunker that had inflicted severe damage on the platoon, receiving several serious wounds from automatic weapons fire in the process. Now mortally injured, he crawled towards the enemy emplacement and, when in position, threw a grenade into the bunker. The resulting explosion silenced the enemy fire, but also ended Specialist Four Sabo’s life. His indomitable courage and complete disregard for his own safety saved the lives of many of his platoon members...

The acknowledgement of his heroism was a long time coming. His Medal of Honor was presented to his widow, Rose Mary Sabo Brown, May 11, 2012.

That brought overdue recognition not only to himself, but also to those who fought and died with him. Leslie’s older brother George honored the seven other men who died that day: Larry DeBoer, James DeBrew, Fred Harms, Tom Merriman, Ernie Moore, Don Smith and Leslie Wilbanks. “These men, along with my brother, gave the ultimate sacrifice that day,” George said. “And we will remember them in our hearts. For their families here today, I want you to know that the Sabo family considers them all heroes and this Medal of Honor is for them also.”

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In the late 1960s, dropping out of college, even temporarily, was risky business. Bill Smith sat out the winter semester in his senior year because he had to ride his motorcycle to get to YSU. His plan to complete his degree in the warmer spring weather appeared to be doomed when the draft board sent him a draft notice. Fortunately, they agreed to postpone his induction until he graduated.

So right after graduating in 1968, Bill was in the U.S. Army, qualified to attend Officer Candidate School. The only branches available were the combat arms.

“I don’t know why,” he says, “but I chose infantry.”

Maybe not the best choice. Life in infantry units in Vietnam could be unpleasant and dangerous, especially for second lieutenants. That seemed to be where Bill was headed when he was sent to jungle warfare school after completing OCS.

Bill’s choice wasn’t so bad after all. He was assigned to the security detachment at the largest ammunition dump in Vietnam. What could be safer than being close to tons of high explosives capable of leveling the terrain for miles around?

Bill’s job was to keep that from happening. Before he arrived, the site’s security was in the hands of ordnance personnel who were neither trained nor equipped for the job.

“We did things differently,” Bill said.

With everything from tower guards to electronic surveillance, chain link fences extending four feet into the ground, mortar and artillery units to do recon by fire, and even guard dogs, Bill’s security detachment had to confront only one attack during his year there.

“By attack, I mean saboteurs trying to sneak in,” he said.

It turned out to be three young teenagers carrying satchel charges.

“We killed them. That hurt. But that’s the kind of war it was.”

But lack of action doesn’t mean lack of danger. That became apparent when the facility was closed down toward the end of Bill’s tour. All the ammo was transported to an RVN dump ten miles away. The night after the transfer was complete, the RVN dump blew up.

“We stayed in a bunker and watched it happening on the other side of the mountain,” he said.

His wife at Fort Benning heard about the Qui Nhom ammo dump being blown up. Contact with Bill through the Red Cross allayed her fears.

She was blessed when Lt. Bill Smith returned without a Purple Heart.
“I didn’t know the gun was loaded.”

That pathetic excuse takes on a whole new dimension when the “gun” is a recoilless rifle, an anti-tank weapon that fires a high-explosive round.

On January 11, 1970, the D Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry of the 1st Cavalry Division were cleaning their weapons at their base in Binh Duong Province, South Vietnam. One of the crew members, not knowing his recoilless rifle was loaded, accidentally fired it. The ensuing explosion killed four soldiers, including PFC Richard Bruce Spence of Grove City. This happened just twelve days after PFC Spence had arrived in Vietnam.

After graduating from Grove City High School in 1968, Richard B. Spence completed an airline school course in Hartford, Connecticut. He worked at La Guardia Airport in New York until he joined the army in July, 1969.

He completed basic and advanced individual training as a crew member on a recoilless rifle, which is essentially a long tube that fires an explosive anti-tank round. Slated to go to Vietnam, he spent a 22-day furlough with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Spence, during the 1969 Christmas Holiday. PFC Spence left Grove City on December 28 and arrived in Vietnam on December 30.

He was posthumously promoted to corporal and awarded the Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

ON THE WALL     Panel 14W Line 028

SPONSORED BY: VFW Post 519, Grove City
Sam Stanovich loved baseball. One of his favorite players was Joe DiMaggio. But DiMaggio was never Sam’s hero.

“My heroes are all the kids who died in the wars,” he said.

Sam and all four of his brothers served in war zones. Fortunately, none of them were heroes as Sam defines the word.

Drafted in 1942, Sam didn’t like military life.

“They never made a soldier out of me,” he said, “but I did what I had to do.”

Sam completed various training assignments before landing in France with the 104th Infantry Division in September, 1944. Along with the First Canadian Army, they captured the port of Antwerp, vital to the Allies’ supply lines.

Three months later, Germans launched the Battle of the Bulge. German paratroopers landed near the 104th positions. After months of fierce fighting, the Allies pushed the Germans back into Germany. There Sam personally witnessed the horrors of the Nazi regime.

“Our commander, General Allen, made us go into Nordhausen concentration camp. Underneath the stairways bodies were stacked like cordwood.”

Soon the Allied armies were nearing Berlin from the West, while the Russians were reaching the Elbe River from the East. That’s when Sam showed that he was a soldier who did more than he had to do. He volunteered for a mission that earned him a Bronze Star and a Russian medal, and got his name in a couple of books about World War II.

With no support, Sam and four others crossed territory occupied by many German troops. They took the bold step of mounting an American flag on their jeep.

“That saved the day. The Germans let us pass. They had killed a lot of civilians in Russia, so they knew they would get more humane treatment with the Americans.”

Within two weeks, Germany surrendered. Then many American soldiers, including Sam, were sent to California to train for an invasion of Japan. Fortunately, Japan surrendered before their training even began.

Maybe the army didn’t make a soldier out of Sam, but he came out of it a good man. He delivered mail in Farrell 30 years. His passion was coaching Little League baseball. In 1965, his team made it all the way to the state finals.

“When he was coaching little league,” his sister Martha said, “he was really great with those children. When he was a mailman he was the same. And he has always been a very considerate brother.”

SPONSORED BY: Jacqueline M. Polley
Early in World War II, heavy bomber crews could earn their way back home by flying 25 combat missions. In May, 1943, the crew of the B-17 Memphis Belle became the first one to do that. A 1990 movie shows her fluttering back to England after being hit on its final mission.

Fast forward to August, 1944. Irwin Stovroff was bombardier in a B-24 Liberator on its way back to England from its 35th mission.

“We started off to fly 25 missions,” Irwin said, “then it was increased to 30, and finally 35 because our losses were so high.”

Irwin's crew wasn’t as lucky as the Memphis Belle’s. It went down in France after being hit by flak. Irwin was taken prisoner, loaded into a boxcar, and shipped to Stalag Luft 1 in northeastern Germany.

He survived there only because a German colonel was courageous enough to defy Der Fuhrer.

“Hitler sent out orders for all Jews to be killed,” Irwin said. “Fortunately I had a very demanding, strong, marvelous guy by the name of Colonel Zemke. He threatened the commandant that he would be a war criminal if we were taken out of the camp. We were segregated, but I was there until we were liberated by the Russians in May, 1945.”

Fast forward again, this time to 1997.

“After I retired, I discovered there was a need to help ex-POWs,” Irwin said.

From an office in the Palm Beach Florida VA Medical Center, he and another ex-POW processed more than 400 claims for ex-POWs. “We got them the benefits they deserved,” he said.

Now to 2006. The POW work was slowing down, but another need arose. The director of the hospital asked Irwin to start a program for providing companion dogs for blind veterans.

“I went to ex-POWs and raised $100,000 within three months,” he said.

That was only the beginning. Since then, Irwin and his organization have raised over $3 million. They have placed more than 70 fully trained dogs with veterans who are blind, disabled, or suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.

Working with a number of other organizations, Irwin feels that he is living a dream come true.

“I am approaching 90 years old, and I am a very, very happy man.”

The next time you doubt that misfortune can be turned into good fortune, remember Irwin Stovroff’s odyssey from POW to happy man.
During World War II, simply getting to a duty station could be a long ordeal. After being trained as a clerk typist, Joe Thompson sailed with the 54th Air Service Group to North Africa. They camped out for a month before sailing through the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Indian Ocean to Bombay, India. Then they rode via narrow gauge railroad clear across India to an airfield near Dacca, which was about 50 miles from the eastern border of India with Burma.

“The railroad cars were about half the size of ours,” Joe said. “They were open air, with seats along either side.”

The mission of the 54th Air Service Group was to maintain and repair B-24 bombers that had been converted into tankers to fly fuel into U.S. military units in China.

“There were about 2000 Americans stationed at the base,” Joe said. “They would bring fuel by trucks from Calcutta and load it onto the planes. We had just one runway. About half a dozen planes would take off and land every day.”

Calcutta was about 250 miles southwest of the base.

During the two years Joe was there, they had about three mishaps when planes, fully loaded with fuel, failed to make it off the ground by the end of the runway.

Corporal Thompson, who was the son of a Methodist minister, was selected to be the chaplain’s assistant.

“I did the chaplain’s bookwork, wrote letters and so on,” he said. “If we had deaths in the unit, it was my job to write a letter of condolence to the next of kin. We built a chapel out of bamboo, with a thatched roof. One day a large windstorm came along and blew the whole thing down.”

They even had music in their services provided by a little pump organ.

The main enemy of the troops there was a little “bug” called the entamoeba histolytica, which causes amoebic dysentery. Shortly before he left for home, Joe was hospitalized for about a month by the disease.

After two years there, Joe was granted emergency leave to come back home because his father was dying.

“I was flown across India to Karachi,” he said. “As I was boarding the ship, I was notified that my father had passed away.”

Since the war was over, Joe continued on home, arriving in Volant late in December, 1945.
David was born on September 15, 1980, in Greenville, PA. He grew up in a small town of Jamestown, PA. He was the star basketball player for Jamestown and also enjoyed outside sports. Graduating from Jamestown High School in 1999, David enlisted in the Army and began his training at Fort Benning, GA, where he completed jump school and training as a paratrooper. He was assigned to C Co 3rd US Infantry Regiment. David served three years with the Old Guard in Washington, D.C., at Arlington National Cemetery.

When his enlistment was up in 2002, David entered the University of Maine and majored in Wildlife Ecology and at the same time, joined the Maine Army National Guard Bravo Company 3/172 Infantry. While studying for his degree, David received numerous awards and citations for his contributions and academic records. He worked with all types of animals, both land and marine life. He became a fellow in an honors program to work with middle school students in science.

While in Maine, David enjoyed hiking, mountain climbing, watching moose in some of the wilderness areas in Maine. He loved to kayak rivers, lakes and off the ocean coastline. Whenever he came home for a visit, his kayak was always on the roof of his car!

In March of 2006, David deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. David felt he wanted to support his country just like his dad had in Vietnam and grandfather in World War II. David was killed in action on May 6, 2006, from injuries received from an IED south of Baghdad.

David was posthumously awarded a Bachelor's of Science degree in Wildlife Ecology, magna cum laude. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Section 60, with so many other fallen heroes. His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman's Badge, Airborne Wings and the Bronze Star with Valor.

We will continue to honor David and his fellow soldiers who continue to serve and sacrifice in the name of freedom. Our family has started a memorial scholarship fund in David's honor. We hold a golf scramble each August to raise money for three $1,000 scholarships given to chosen seniors in Mercer and Crawford counties.

David was only 25 years old, but he lived everyday to be the best he could be. David always looked to capture the best that life had to offer... be it as a basketball player, a scientist on the ocean, or an avid hiker in the mountains of Maine, he "seized the day" in everything he did. He was well respected and loved by everyone who knew him. There is never a day that goes by that we don't think about him and the many good memories we had. The tears still always come for no reason. We all love David for who he was in our lives and his memory will never die.
Fallen Heroes

Captain Gary Lionel Vinas was the only Mercer County Vietnam fatality to serve in MACV – the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. He was a member of Advisory Team 99 in Duc Lap, about 80 miles southwest of the 25th ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam). Advisory Team 99 had the responsibility for advising the Division’s 49th Regiment.

MACV advisers had a very specialized and tricky role. They were expected to use their American military experience and know-how to advise their Vietnamese counterparts about all aspects of their unit’s operation – to recommend solutions to everything from administrative problems to tactical and operational challenges. The tricky part was persuading the Vietnamese to implement the solutions they recommended. To be effective, the adviser had to befriend his counterpart and win his confidence. One of the most effective ways to do this was to convince his counterpart that the solution was really his own idea to start with.

This was particularly important at the lowest level of the MACV operation. Regimental advisory teams were small, consisting of only three members of the United States military. They had to form very close and trusting relationships. To do that, they had to be willing to participate in every aspect of the regiment’s activities – including combat operations.

Because of the decentralization of the MACV structure, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find out what happened in a specific time and place. We have no details about the death of Captain Vinas, other than the fact that he was on a combat operation with the regiment he was advising. All that was reported is that he was a ground casualty as a result of an explosive device, probably a land mine.

ON THE WALL Panel 10E Line 2
Some high school graduates know exactly what they want to do. David Wallace didn’t. Through the summer after graduating from Sharpsville in 2002, he was exploring his options. Maybe technical school. Maybe the U.S. Marines.

“He came home one Friday,” said his mother, Carol Wallace McKay, “and said he was leaving on Monday. He had joined the Marines.”

David and a friend, Mike Kulka, had decided to sign up on the Marine Corps “buddy program,” through which friends go through boot camp together. That didn’t work out, because they didn’t go in at the same time.

Once he joined, Carol said, David knew he had found his calling. “He became very dedicated,” she said. “It was wonderful for him.”


There, as a combat engineer with the 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion, part of his job was to locate Improvised Explosive Devices, and to mark or destroy them. He not only did that himself; he also built a training facility to teach others how to do it.

But regardless of how much one knows about IEDs, there always remains the unpredictable element that makes them so dangerous. On January 27, 2009, while Sgt. Wallace was off duty, others from his unit were having problems with their IED sweeper. After he fixed it for them, he voluntarily went out with them in search of IEDs. One exploded, killing him and another Marine, Sgt. Trevor J. Johnson of Forsyth, Montana.

Sgt. Wallace was the first Mercer County soldier to die in Afghanistan in the global war on terror. Besides his mother and his brother Steven, Sgt. Wallace left behind his wife Erica, from Jacksonville, North Carolina, five-year old stepson Landon, and two-year-old daughter Brooklyn.

He also left behind what his mother calls his life-long friends: the community of Sharpsville, PA. “Sharpsville has supported us before and after his death,” Carol said.

The community erected a monument to him in Riverside Cemetery, named a bridge after him, and wrote many personal tributes to him on a Facebook page, “In honor of Sgt. David Wallace.”

For his valor, Sgt. Wallace was awarded a Bronze Star, but that probably means less than the honors given to him by those who knew him personally.
Trying to discover the facts about what went on in Vietnam is very tricky. Strange ideas seem to spring up out of nowhere.

For example, there is a persistent belief that Jack Wallace was a “tunnel rat” in Vietnam – one of these crazy people who would crawl into VC tunnels with a flashlight and a .45 pistol to root out the enemy. Jack himself certainly wasn’t the one who came up with that idea.

“I have no idea where that came from,” he said. “I was an electronics repairman in Chu Lai.”

Jack had enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1966. He volunteered for Vietnam several times before they finally sent him. He arrived there shortly after the 1967 Tet offensive.

What he found was a strange kind of war.

“The people who worked in our bases were from the villages around us,” he said. “Our people told you to watch them when they were walking things off. We got hit by a lot of rockets and you had to wonder how they knew where to fire them.”

Even within the U.S. military there seemed to be an element of distrust, or at least a lack of respect. Jack was stationed in Chu Lai, about 350 miles to the northeast of Saigon, as the crow flies. He got a four-day pass to visit his uncle in Saigon, but he had to figure out for himself how to get there. He caught rides on a plane, a helicopter, and a convoy. But the strangest part occurred when he got to Saigon.

“I tried to find a place to bunk on Tan Son Nhut Airbase, but they wouldn’t let me stay there because I wasn’t Air Force. The Army wouldn’t put me up, either. Finally the Navy put me up because I was a Marine, but they locked up all my weapons. I think I was the only person walking around Saigon without a weapon.”

Jack admired the people of Vietnam.

“The thing that amazed me was in some of the villages they didn’t have anything. They had years of war, but they were able to shrug it all off and raise families and be happy.”

What Jack got out of his Vietnam experience was an attitude toward life. “You have the ability to do anything you want if you try hard enough. Never give up. Don’t dwell on the past. Think of the future and press on.”

Jack Wallace – Sharon 
Vietnam – U.S. Marine Corps
LST technically stands for Landing Ship Tank, although some of its crewmen referred to them as “large slow targets.” They were some of the most remarkable pieces of equipment in Vietnam, if for no other reason than their endurance. More than 90 LSTs performed vital roles there; all but about ten of them had been built during World War II.

The large, flat-bottomed vessels were designed for hitting the beaches during the invasions in Europe and the Pacific to drop off tanks and other heavy equipment. But because of their load capacity, they were ideal for hauling large shipments of supplies and equipment, as well as armament. That made it functional for two roles: resupplying military units all up and down the whole length of South Vietnam, and patrolling the waterways and coastline of the Mekong Delta, intercepting suspicious vessels.

Jigs Warren arrived in Vietnam to serve on LST 819, Hampshire County, in February, 1967. He had graduated from Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island, and attended amphibious school in San Diego before going to Vietnam.

“We moved a lot of food supplies, ammunition, building supplies.” he said, “We also, on occasion, would support river patrol boats with fuel and ammunition.”

It was grueling and dangerous work.

“I really looked at it as a job. I was never and have never been busier in my life,” he said. “We usually worked 20 to 22 hours a day and slept for three or four hours. In 18 months on board ship, I never slept for more than four hours straight.”

His 18-month tour kept him in Vietnam through the Tet offensive in early 1968.

“We had just dropped off some supplies in Hue to build an enlisted club,” he said. “We were out of there by the time the attack happened.”

Jigs said that the Hampshire County was fired upon every single day. At night in Da Nang, the sky sparkled every night with tracers, the illuminated rounds fired by automatic weapons.

“It was nothing but a curtain of tracer bullets around the entire city, every night, every night for a year, .. that’s all you saw, the entire city engulfed in tracer bullets.”

Jigs felt compassion for the people who suffered most from the war.

“I guess the thing I remember most is the people in Vietnam who were practically overrun by military efforts all the time.”
Brandon Wentling – Hermitage
War on Terror – PA National Guard

“I thought it would be best to serve my country and do something special,” he said. “My dad was in the military for 25 years. My family has served forty or fifty years total. They’ve all served overseas.”


Sgt. Wentling sees a lot of benefits in serving in the Guard.

“You can get your schooling with one hundred percent tuition paid,” he said. “You’re not away from your family and you still get to play army.”

For the First Battalion 107th Artillery stationed at the National Guard Armory in Hermitage, “playing army” is serious business. To be prepared for deployment anywhere in the world, they must train constantly to operate some very large guns.

“The Paladin, the triple seven, and the one-one-niner,” Sgt. Wentling said.

The Paladin is a 155mm self-propelled howitzer mounted on tracks, like a tank. It can zip along at 35 miles per hour, stop and fire accurately within 30 seconds at targets ten miles away, then take off again. It can fire a maximum of six rounds per minute, sustained three rounds per minute. Operating it requires precise teamwork among its crew of six. The M777 howitzer is a similar 155mm weapon, but towed rather than self-propelled. The smaller, lighter M119 105mm howitzer can be transported by helicopter and even air dropped via parachute.

All of these systems depend on sophisticated electronics for accuracy.

“We train one weekend a month, usually Saturday and Sunday, but sometimes Friday, Saturday, and Sunday,” Sgt. Wentling said. “In the summer, we have two weeks of annual training. We must get certified before going out to shoot live rounds. Everybody has to work together in order to shoot safely.”

Sgt. Wentling was deployed for one year in Taji Iraq, about 20 miles from Bagdad. He also volunteers his time helping people returning from deployment.

“I help them with their paperwork and such,” he said.

When asked about the greatest benefit of serving in the National Guard, Sgt. Wentling answered without hesitation: “Pride and honor.”

When not serving with the Guard, Sgt. Wentling is a heavy equipment operator with Waste Management.
Those who deny the Holocaust should talk with the children of Herbert S. Werner. As children, they saw many photographs their father sent home that showed the concentration camps liberated by the 12th Armored Division.

Assigned to the headquarters of the 12th Armored Division as its chief financial officer, Lt. Col. Werner was in a position to observe the Division’s accomplishments, including its legendary combat operations, the capture of Werner von Braun, and the liberation of twelve concentrations in the area of Dachau.

He came to that position through a military career that started when he enlisted in the army in 1917. His first overseas deployment was with the Allied Expeditionary Force in France during World War I. Between the two world wars, he served as a captain in the Finance Corps of the army reserves.

As things were heating up in Europe during 1939, Captain Werner was called to active duty to serve as chief financial officer at the Raritan Arsenal in Metuchen, New Jersey. As the war progressed, the army sent him to its Finance Officer Training School at Duke University before assigning him to the 12th Armored Division.

That division entered the European Theater of Operations through Le Havre, France, on November 11, 1944. After fighting its way across France and through the Maginot Line, the 12th Armored Division became the “Mystery Division” of General Patton’s Third Army. To accomplish the invasion of Germany, General Patton assembled thirteen divisions, making it one of the largest American armies in history. The identities of twelve of them were known, while the thirteenth was kept secret to enhance the element of surprise. The identity of that division became known when it crossed the Rhine River on March 24, 1945.

By the time the 12th Armored Division was departing Europe, Lt. Col. Werner was the oldest finance officer in Europe.

“When they went through Le Havre to come home,” said his son Don, “he had to climb the rope ladder up the side of the ship. All the guys knew he was an old guy, by their standards. When he got to the top, they gave him a big round of applause.”

“I never fully appreciated what Dad’s unit really went through during World War II,” wrote another son, Richard. “Now I also appreciate why Dad always loved his 12th Armored Division ring!”

SPONSORED BY: Don and Barbara Werner
The collection of military memorabilia in the basement of the Mercer County Historical Society includes a poster of a cute young lady posing wistfully in a pseudo-military uniform. She is saying, “I wish I were a man so I could enlist!”

Fortunately, there were more than 400,000 women in the early 1940s who had more sense than that. They enlisted even though they weren’t men, and contributed to victory in countless ways.

One of them, Shirley Werner Rauch, enlisted in the U.S. Army’s Women’s Army Corps early in World War II. She learned how to fly a plane without ever flying a plane, and taught others to fly the same way she had learned. There’s no telling how many lives and planes she saved as a result.

Here’s the secret to that success: She was an instructor on the Link Flight Trainer, a simulator invented by Edwin A. Link in the early 1930s. Through a system of air bellows and electrical devices, it moved in very realistic response to the manipulation of controls like those in an airplane cockpit. A recording device on the instructor’s desk traced the “flight path” of the “plane” on a map or chart. It provided a safe and effective means of training pilots to fly through zero visibility and night conditions.

However, Shirley wanted to serve her country overseas. She probably would have been delighted with today’s opportunities for servicewomen. At that time, the only duty available was one that would probably have delighted the cute girl on the Historical Society’s poster: telephone operator on the old plug-in type switchboards.

The duty may not have been exciting, but the location was stellar: at the Hotel California on the Champs Elysees in Paris. It also gave her the opportunity to meet up with her father there, Lt. Col. Herbert Werner, who was in Paris working on a project for the 12th Armored Division.

Shirley is a charter member of the Women in Military Service for America organization. She has a plaque in her honor for her military service at the Women in Military Service Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery.
Dr. Benjamin Wood came from a family of physicians, and continued the tradition by producing his own family of physicians — with a twist. All five of his sons became physicians; he and four of them served as physicians in the United States Armed Forces.

For the senior Dr. Wood, it wasn’t a matter of choice. He had earned his medical degree at the University of Pittsburgh, then went to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for training in pediatrics in 1938. There he met a young lady from South Dakota named LaVaun “Vonnie” Gray. They got married and moved to Cleveland for an internal medicine residency at the Cleveland Clinic.

In the summer of 1941, Dr. Wood got called into the U.S. Army for assignment to North Africa.

“My mother fell apart on the detailer’s desk,” said their son David. “She said I’m all alone in Cleveland and pregnant. You can’t take my husband away from me. The guy shuffled through some papers on his desk and said there was an opening for someone to run a lab in Fort Thomas, Kentucky.”

So Dr. Wood served there until his first son was born. Then he was sent to North Africa. But before he left, Vonnie was pregnant again. This time, however, the pregnancy didn’t stop him from being sent overseas.

In North Africa, Captain Wood served in a mobile army hospital that followed the troops who were chasing Rommel through the desert. After North Africa was secured, he moved with his hospital on up into Sicily.

“Dad had one of those short military jackets,” David said. “It had four hash marks on the sleeve. We asked him what they were for. He said each of them represents six months service overseas. He had wanted to come home earlier, but they told him if he did, he would have to go back and serve even longer. Finally after two years he came home.”

But he wasn’t released from the army at that time. He was sent to San Antonio for tropical medicine training. Fortunately, the war in the Pacific ended before he was deployed there.

He returned to practice pediatrics in Sharon until his death in 1976. All five of his sons — Benjamin, Michael, John, Arthur, and David — are doctors. All but Arthur served in the United States armed forces.

He was survived not only by his wife and sons, but also by fifteen grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.
Dr. David Wood is one of the five sons of Sharon pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Wood. All five are physicians; four of them served in the United States Armed Forces.

When the Vietnam War was in full swing, sons Benjamin and Michael were in Canada – not to avoid the draft, but to attend medical school. While they were there, their draft numbers came up, so when they returned, they went into the army, but as doctors rather than privates.

Benjamin served a year in Long Binh, Vietnam, and completed his two-year obligation at Fort Bragg.

When Michael graduated from medical school in 1970, he went into a program called the Barry Plan, in which he could defer military service until he completed specialty training. He finished orthopedic surgery training at the Mayo Clinic in 1975 and served two years in the army in Heidelberg as an orthopedic surgeon.

John got his medical degree from the University of Virginia. The Air Force paid for two years of his medical school, so he served two years as an ophthalmologist at Wilford Hall in San Antonio.

David graduated from high school in 1977, a year after his father passed away.

“I grew up in a time when people didn’t talk about the military,” David said.

So seeking help from the armed forces to get through medical school wasn’t the first thing that crossed his mind. But it was the second thing.

“We had sort of sticker shock,” he said. When my brother went to medical school in Edmonton, tuition was $500 per year. When Arthur was in Penn State, tuition was $5,000. Six years later my first year’s tuition was $11,000.”

As his brother John had done, David applied for military scholarship programs. He was accepted into the Navy’s program, which paid for four years of medical school. That obligated him to serve four years on active duty, but he was able to defer that until he completed residency training in otolaryngology at the Cleveland Clinic.

Then he served four years with the Navy in Corpus Christi, Texas.

“I was of that generation that looked down upon the military,” he said, “but I saw it as a great opportunity to advance my skills as surgeon. I also got a deep respect for why we have a military, why we need a military, and how it works. My experience was very positive. I saw that the military made people better.”
For a helicopter pilot, excellence doesn’t guarantee survival. Thaddeus M. Yonika, Jr., of West Middlesex, enlisted under the U.S. Army’s warrant officer flight program in July, 1968. In February, 1969, he demonstrated his superior ability to fly helicopters by graduating sixth out of a class of 120 from primary helicopter school in February, 1969. He went on to the Rotary Wing Aviator course.

Two months later WO1 Yonika was flying attack helicopters in Vietnam with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry Division, headquartered in Tay Ninh, northwest of Saigon, near the Cambodian border. His skill and potential were recognized by his platoon leader:

“Thad Yonika was a Cobra Pilot in my Red Platoon. He said he wanted to get closer to the fight and requested a transfer to the Scout Platoon. I approved the move reluctantly because of his great potential to become a Red Platoon Aircraft Commander but his enthusiasm to fly Scouts was really genuine and we knew that he showed some of the unique qualities that would make him a great Scout.”

WO Yonika was assigned to fly a Cayuse Light Observation Helicopter. His job was to fly over suspected enemy locations to get shot at. His crew would mark the location of the source of the fire; attack helicopters such as Cobras would swoop in to destroy the enemy.

The Cayuse had the reputation of being able to take a lot of hits and still keep flying. But it wasn’t invulnerable.

On 21 December 1969 while flying OH-6A tail number 67-16142, WO Yonika and his crew encountered a force of NVA at a location we called Pearson’s Field, near the Cambodian border. His LOH was hit by enemy fire and as he evaded away from the NVA and tried to land outside the enemy’s fire the aircraft crashed. Unfortunately, the aircraft exploded and Thad along with Chris “Kippy” Gray (gunner/ Torque) and Barry Kaletta (observer) were killed.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus M. Yonika, Sr., of West Middlesex, Thad was a Rotary International Exchange Student to South Africa in 1966. After graduation from West Middlesex High School in 1966, he attended Shenango Campus of Penn State University and worked as an orderly at Sharon General Hospital.

He is buried in Hillcrest Memorial Cemetery.

ON THE WALL Panel W15 Line 81

SPONSORED BY: Hillcrest Memorial Park
There’s a military maxim: “Never volunteer for anything.” Joe Zentis volunteered many times, virtually always with fortunate results.

Through ROTC at Gannon College, Zentis was commissioned as a regular army officer in 1963. His volunteering for the infantry got him assigned to an infantry battalion in Germany. He served in an excellent unit, developed great friendships, and got to travel throughout Europe. One of his favorite trips resulted from his volunteering to lead a unit on a four-day 100-mile road march in Nijmegen, Holland.

Troops in Europe could not request assignment to Vietnam until late 1965. As soon as he could, Zentis volunteered. In November, he received preliminary orders to depart for Vietnam in January. A glitch in his orders kept him in Germany until May. During that interim, he met and married a lovely Australian lady. They recently celebrated their 46th anniversary.

Before Zentis left Germany, some of his friends who had not volunteered were assigned to combat roles with newly-deployed U.S. military units. Because he volunteered early, Zentis was assigned to a relatively safe Military Assistance Command provincial advisory team, which he found far too boring. He volunteered again for reassignment to any unit in Vietnam where he could serve a useful purpose. That got him transferred to a Vietnamese infantry training center in the central highlands. The MACV compound there surrounded the former emperor Bao Dai’s spectacular “Grand Bungalow.”

The training center allowed Zentis to exercise leadership and creativity. He invented a unique pop-up target range that earned him a Bronze Star for Meritorious Service. He describes his time there as stressful rather than horrible. “I didn’t have to kill anyone, and I never saw anyone killed or wounded. But every day I rode five miles between the MACV compound and the training center with my dinky little M-1 carbine on my lap. We never knew who or what was in the trees beside the road. But we were fully aware that the area was ‘pacified’ only because the Vietcong had other priorities.” That was proven seven months after Zentis left Vietnam, when the Vietcong easily swept through the area. The advisors who left the compound that day were killed on their way to their units.

Because of his willingness to volunteer, Zentis suffered no ill effects from his year in Vietnam other than a weight loss from 165 to 138 pounds.

Today, 50 pounds heavier, he says, “That problem was far too easily corrected.”
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THE FUTURE...
WAR ON TERROR VETERANS MEMORIAL

Statement of Purposes.

As provided in its Articles of Incorporation, the Corporation is organized for the charitable purposes set forth in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (or any corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law) (the “Code”) and, in furtherance thereof and not in limitation thereof:

(a) To erect a public memorial honoring those servicemen and servicewomen who have lost their lives in the war against terrorism;

(b) To educate the public regarding the history of the war against terrorism;

(c) To create and maintain an Internet website to educate the public regarding the war against terrorism and to memorialize servicemen, servicewomen, and civilians who have lost their lives in the war against terrorism; and

(d) to do all lawful acts incidental to the accomplishment of said charitable and educational purposes.
Beneath an undulating canopy of flags, Ron Veverka walked purposefully to the 12-foot-high steel and glass pillar.

He pointed to a name etched into one of the glass plates: Sgt. David M. Veverka.

“There he is,” said Veverka, 63, of Sharon in Mercer County. “My son. He was killed in Iraq, south of Baghdad, in 2006. He was a convoy commander. They were attacked, and his driver was killed. He pulled his gunman to safety before they got him.”

Sgt. Veverka is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. His father, a Vietnam War veteran, doesn’t get to Washington as often as he’d like. When he wants to feel close to his son, he comes to this War on Terror Veterans Memorial in Hermitage, where the names of more than 7,000 soldiers who died defending America are etched into a sobering monument in the middle of a cemetery.

“There are still days when, my goodness, you hear a certain song — especially ‘Amazing Grace’ — and it’s hard for me to take,” Veverka said. “This is a quiet place for me. I come out here all the time.”

The memorial took root in 1979 when Tom Flynn, 73, a cemetery owner and father of two sons, watched the news with dismay as 53 Americans were taken hostage in Tehran, Iran.

Flynn’s boys were ages 11 and 13 at the time. On day 80 of the standoff, he recalled, Flynn tried to talk to his boys about what it meant to be held by terrorists for nearly three months.

“But how do you explain 80 days to kids that age?” Flynn said.

He decided to show them.

When the hostage crisis reached day 100, he and a group of unemployed steelworkers planted 100 American flags in a grassy clearing on his 80-acre cemetery. They planted a new flag for each day the crisis dragged on.

Word of the flags spread quickly. Dead soldiers’ families donated flags from caskets. Television crews reported weekly from what became known as The Avenue of the Flags. Life magazine featured photos of the waving vigil.

Flynn had no idea how many flags he would need, but “once you commit to it, you can’t turn around,” he said.

When the hostages were freed after 444 days, many people asked Flynn when he would take down the flags. Others, particularly veterans, urged him to let them fly.

“They became a part of history, and they’re beautiful,” Flynn said. “I had to find a way to keep them up and we have, for 31 years.”

He started the nonprofit War on Terror Foundation (www.waronterror.org) to raise money for upkeep and to buy flags. Over the years, the memorial grew. Amid the flags stands the circle of steel and glass monuments. They list every soldier killed in the war on terrorism or by terrorists.


Every two weeks, staff etch the latest names.

“It’s not unusual to get the names on the monument before the body gets home,” Flynn said.

Last week, they added 45 names, including Antonio Burnside and Nicholas Dickhut.

Army Spc. Burnside, 31, of Great Falls, Mont., left behind a wife and four children when he died in Afghanistan when insurgents attacked his unit.

Dickhut, 23, an Army sergeant from Stewartville, Minn., called his 9-year-old brother from Afghanistan to wish him happy birthday before heading out on a mission. He died in a firefight.

Flynn wants the memorial to continue to grow. He’s hoping to raise $1 million to erect two 40-foot steel and glass towers in front of the memorial. They would represent the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center, and he’s hoping to get steel from the original structures for the memorial.

He’d like to complete the project in two years and says it will help educate people that “freedom comes at a price.”

Visitors, such as Veverka and other slain soldiers’ parents, can run their fingers along the growing list of etched names.

“I don’t see it ever ending,” Flynn said, his voice nearly washed out by the sound of 444 American flags flapping in the wind.

Published: Sunday, May 27, 2012, 7:36 p.m.
A) Flags looking Northwest.
B) Hillcrest’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
C) SMSGT Darin J. Wesoloski etches names.
D) Fountain in center of monuments.
E) Ron Veverka views son David’s name.
F-I) Flag plaques at the War on Terror Memorial.
J-L) Eight killed in Iran hostage rescue attempt.
M) Founder of Wesex Corporation.
N) President of War on Terror Foundation.
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