

Subject: Veterans' Day 1999 in Washington DC

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From:

To:

Hi everyone,

Veterans' Day in Washington, DC is always memorable. This year was no exception. The Family Contacts Committee (Jim Schueckler, Jack Taber and I) did the name rubbings that were requested of us. Certain moments, you never forget. I remember the lady Jack mentioned in an earlier post, a woman in a jean jacket with smudged makeup and teary eyes, asking him if he could do one more that was up a little high for her. I saw her the next day, too. I wish I had asked her who he was. I touched 27 names that were on a list I took out there, which I had organized before leaving home by panel and line number. And I laid down a "Happy 50th Birthday" memorial to my brother, David.

There were lots of school kids, lots of parents, lots of teenagers - and lots of veterans. The ceremonies consisted of the Armed Forces Color Guard presenting the colors, remarks by Philip Martineau, president and CEO of Levi Strauss, and Paul Delrossi, chairman and CEO of General Cinema Theaters who came to the financial rescue of the Women's Memorial. Diane Carlson Evans, founder of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, was slated to speak but had lost her voice. John McDermott performed the moving song, "The Wall" and the keynote address was by Heather French, Miss America 2000. She explained her work on behalf of disabled vets, stemming from her dad being one.

I watched the ceremonies proudly seated with my brother David's Cobra "high bird" pilot, John Powell, two of his co-workers at AmVets, and Lisa Vad, daughter of Joe Vad D 1/4 Cav KIA 11-6-69. It was the first Veterans' Day Lisa had spent at the Memorial. I wish I could have seen the television coverage as I understand we were picked up by the camera - including my flight jacket with my braid hanging down in back.

This was my 4th year to be at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Veterans' Day. It's quite a mixed bag because of David's birthday being on Veterans' Day. But in that beautiful pattern that the universe has, which we are privileged to glimpse once in a while, there is absolutely no other possible day in the calendar year that he could have been born, in my opinion, that would better exemplify what his short life has meant to my long(er) one. An opportunity to embrace living veterans. I am now exactly twice as old as my big brother David was when he shipped off to Vietnam in June 1969.

So I go out to Washington DC to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and be among the living whom the Wall brings together. I really feel at home there now, wearing my green flight jacket that was given to me by the Vietnam helicopter pilots and crew members who took me in back in 1997, the successor to the same style flight jacket David was wearing the last time I saw him in June 1969. (That one was "military issue - returned to supply.") Thank goodness people I end up talking with usually feel comfortable enough to ask me about my long search for his friends, and how it has turned out. I still

have very little to say about David, and I usually gab more about how I came to be where I'm at, honored to be able to sit for a few days a year among a band of brothers that means so much to me.

I have a hard time verbalizing the nature of the strong connections I feel with those who have allowed me to travel back partway to 1969 with them, because it's not all about 1969, or 1970, some of it's about today and that's what ties into Veterans Day - a day we honor LIVING veterans. I keep thinking of Mark Herring's words on VHFCN about Veterans' Day being for the living. To be able to know someone who was in the same place at the same time as my brother, and more than that, to know that they are enjoying some degree of happiness and success in life, brings me the most profound feeling of contentment I've have ever had. It satisfies my deep need to know that something that was a part of his world, emerged, survived and flourished.

I know a certain amount of remembrance of the fallen is always part of Veterans Day, but Memorial Day is a better focus for that. I think David would have gotten a big kick out of all the people visiting the Wall on "his birthday" - as I do. But I feel that the guys who are there standing in front of the thing are the ones who really need to be celebrated, because each of them COULD have ended up there, and every one was willing to end up there. Maybe not for the whole tour, maybe not every minute of every day - but at many points of reckoning along the way.

My other brothers had some fun in the 1st Cav hospitality suite, with a poor old guy, a Korea War Vet who could not quite figure out my jacket with the Warrant Officer bars, C troop and Cav patches, Purple Heart patch etc. He told one of them he didn't think we had any female Warrants. Brian Piggott leaned over and told the guy, "She wasn't a SHE when he was THERE. Her name was John." And made a "snip-snip" motion with his fingers. You should have seen the guy's face. They had him going for a while and from then on he called me John.

I also attended the 1st Cav Ia Drang Dinner, hosted by Lt. Gen. Hal Moore, that brings the likes of Capt. George Forrest, 1LT Larry Gwin, Joe Galloway, 2LT Bob Jeanette, SP4 Jack Smith, and all the rest of those brave guys who were involved in the famous battles back in 1965, all together in one room. Talk again about heroes. A lot of Cav Pride in that place.

Sometimes the most meaningful moments pass by quietly. I was explaining how I had polished one of David's pins for hours not knowing it was supposed to be dark in color. These are symbols you guys know about, but we family don't often have a clue. I told Charlie Rains, VHCMA director, about another item that was in his belongings that I couldn't interpret, two pieces of orange felt with black ribbons down the middle. If he understood me correctly, Charlie told me they were "leader tabs" indicating that David was at some point a leader in his class - in something. Wow. I never knew - I'm proud of ya, bro. Charlie, thank you for helping me know David a little better. This is how it works, guys.

It was sure great seeing everyone again. Eric Walsh brought along two fellow Canadians, Les Brown and Davin McLaughlin. Everyone helped make a still-living vet's daughter, Heidi Baker, feel welcome. Bill Williamson and Sue, Buddy Walker and family, Chris White, Ken Boling, Frank Reilly and Mary, Mel and Susan Canon and boys Lance and Jordan, Mike Sloniker, Hank Llewellyn, my brother's CO Bob Tredway, Don Armstrong, I know I'm leaving out several folks and lots of stuff. The time was all too short.

I appreciate all the VHFCN traffic and messages of remembrance on Veterans' Day. You are my heroes. I love you guys and welcome home.

Little sister,
Julie Kink
sister of WO1 David Kink, C Troop 1/9th Cav KIA 8-3-69