



KEVIN O'NEILL / STAFF ARTIST

Virtual memorial

Online Vietnam Wall profiles those who sacrificed it all

thinking we would wind up serving our country in Vietnam. I know you are with God and pulling (op) so keep an eye on us.

Till we meet again — your Vietnam brother — Bob Klein"

With America in the midst of two wars, we should all take time this Memorial Day to reflect on the true meaning of the holiday. I was moved to learn more about this national day of remembrance because of a website sent in by reader David Norton, www.virtualwall.org.

The site is basically a list of those in uniform who were killed in the Vietnam War. It's a simply designed site with several ways to search for a name — by last name, by state and city, by military unit, by the wall panel on the actual Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., where a name appears, or by medals of valor a person received.

I know some people who served in Vietnam, but I don't know anyone who died there, so I decided to search for names using the state and city link. Municipalities in each state are listed alphabetically, with the rank and name of each resident who was killed in action.

I picked names at random from the area. Clicking on a name takes you to a screen that lists the name, rank, branch of service, hometown, date of birth and death, and the location of the name on the actual Wall. It also has pictures of the decorations received. There's a link that gives a more complete profile of a person's service history. It's when you click this link that the site starts to have a profound impact.

The profiles

Pfc. Class Jody Allen Cron was a Marine Corps rifleman from Nicholson. He started his tour of duty on Feb. 10, 1968, and was killed by an explosive device in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam, on March 19, 1968. He was 18 years old. He was in country just over a month.

Pfc. James John Murphy was an Army infantryman from Scranton. He started his tour on Sept. 22, 1967, and died from multiple fragmentation wounds on Nov. 5, 1967, in Binh Dinh Province, South Vietnam. He was 20 years old and lasted only 45 days in Vietnam.

America at war

Years fought in parenthesis, followed by American battle deaths.

- American Revolution (1775 - 1783) 4,435**
- War of 1812 (1812 - 1815) 2,260**
- Mexican-American War (1846 - 1848) 1,733**
- Civil War (1861 - 1865) Union forces 140,414; Confederate forces 74,524**
- Spanish-American War (April 25 - Aug. 12, 1898) 385**
- World War I (1914 - 1918) 53,402**
- World War II (1939 - 1945) 291,557**
- Korean War (1950 - armistice 1953) 33,741**
- Vietnam War (1954 - 1975) 47,424**
- Persian Gulf War (August 1990 - April 1991) 147**
- War in Afghanistan (Oct. 7, 2001 - present) 791 as of May 28**
- Iraq War (March 19, 2003 - present) more than 3,486 as of May 28**

There's a grainy black and white photo on 2nd Lt. Carol A Drazba's page along with some notes and links to other websites about women killed in the war. The 22-year-old Army Reserve nurse from Dunmore was killed in a helicopter crash in South Vietnam just over four months after she started her tour. She is one of only eight women on the Wall.

The profiles are compiled as statistics using military jargon but they have a powerful, sobering effect when you start to read them. These were real people, thrust into a foreign war on the other side of the world. Their lives were ended violently before they got a chance to reach their prime.

The site allows you to attach notes, photographs and links to websites to the profiles. Seeing the young faces and reading the comments left by their comrades intensifies the impact of the listings.

The following message was posted on the page of Army Pfc. Gerard Coyle of Scranton, who was killed in a helicopter crash in Tay Ninh, South Vietnam, at the age of 21 after just over five months in country:

"TO A BROTHER THAT SERVED HIS COUNTRY WELL, I SAY THIS: You are sadly missed by one and all. I remember our school days and never

With over 58,000 names on the Wall you can spend a great deal of time reading the profiles of the fallen. It really gets you thinking about the high cost of war. People will always debate the "justness" of particular conflicts, but respect must be accorded to those who have paid the ultimate price in service to our country.

The site is more than just the profiles. The Height of Valor section lists those who received the nation's highest decorations for their actions. There is also a Missing in Action section that tracks the status of those unaccounted for. There is a section with information on, and the history of, the actual Wall. The Faces of Freedom section contains photos of the fallen that link to their pages. There's also a frequently asked questions section and a section with links to related sites. Another section tells the story of how the Virtual Wall came to be. Profiles of the people who built and maintain the site, some of them Vietnam veterans, are provided in another section.

Honoring the fallen

The United States was borne of violence and has been in a dozen wars to date, including the American Revolution and the conflicts currently raging in Iraq and Afghanistan. Countless military actions that didn't rise to the level of war have also been conducted.

Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day. It was a day set aside to honor the Civil War dead by decorating their graves. There had been many informal celebrations around the country, but it was proclaimed an official observance by order of Gen. John A. Logan in 1868. Originally celebrated on May 30, Congress in 1971 declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday of May.

So this Monday, while you're enjoying the day off, flipping burgers on the grill and enjoying a cool beverage, take a moment to reflect on those who sacrificed so that you could enjoy your freedom. Better yet, visit a veterans hospital or put up flags in the veterans section of a cemetery and give something back to those who have given so much.

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