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25th Anniversary of Wisconsin's Vietnam Veterans' Tribute

Saturday, September 14th marked the 25th Anniversary of Wisconsin's Vietnam Veterans' Tribute. This tribute, titled "Fragments", has become a destination for veterans and loved ones of those who were lost in Vietnam who are seeking a respectful, serene place to work through their memories, grief and unsettled emotions that they have faced since the Vietnam War. The Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans' Tribute is called "Fragments" because none of the four service personnel featured are solitary; they all blend together and must rely on the support of those beside them. That is how it is in war and that is the feeling that came over The Highground Veterans Memorial Park in Neillsville on this day as approximately one thousand people came together to show their support of Wisconsin's Vietnam veterans and re-dedicate the tribute.



At Noon, Color Guards from the Wausau VVA #479, Plover American Legion VFW #10262, Boyd American Legion #326, American Legion #0291, Augusta VFW #8478, Michael Both VVA Chapter 5, Mattoon American Legion #287 and the Pala Veterans from the Pala Band Mission Indians from California accompanied several Vietnam veterans as they honorably read aloud the names of the 1,244 Wisconsinites that were killed or missing in action during the Vietnam War.

At 2:00, these nine color guard units presented flags formally to begin the 25th Anniversary and Re-dedication ceremony of "Fragments". The National Anthem was led by "Vets for Freedom", a musical group comprised of veterans. Chaplain James Seim, who had served as chaplain in the Vietnam War, led the ceremony with a powerful invocation expressing how even as we experience the changing seasons and changes in our own lives we have still taken pause to honor, remember and reflect on "that company of comrades from Wisconsin who have offered their lives, who have made living sacrifices of all their hopes and dreams, their talents and gifts, all that they had to share with fellow citizens for our sakes."



Kirk Rodman, Volunteer General Manager of The Highground, presented the guest speakers, Howard Sherpe, Steve Piotrowski, and Don Quicker, all notable members during the founding and/or shaping of The Highground in its initial years and who have continued in their dedication for The Highground's mission of healing and education through the present day. Robert Kanyusik, sculptor of "Fragments", spoke about the physical formation of the statuary and how he had strived to achieve a precise reflective, emotional and healing essence in the solid tribute.

At the close of the ceremony, the names of all Wisconsinites that have been killed in the Persian Gulf region, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Fort Hood were read. Bob Kitto, a member of the Plover American Legion #543, performed Taps after the reading.

Many exhibits pertaining to "Fragments", Vietnam and the Vietnam War were on display at The Highground, including a 500 square foot map of the area in which the Vietnam War was fought. Vietnam veterans were able to sign on the regions where they had served. Friends and family of those who were lost in Vietnam, or who have since passed, were also able to sign comments on the areas in which their loved ones had fought and served. Other displays at The Highground were a UH-1 Huey helicopter from VVA #331, a Vietnam Memorial Caisson and the names of all 1,244 Wisconsin KIAs and MIAs were individually present on hanging wood blocks which veterans and family members were invited to take home with them.

The day was an appropriately emotional, honorable and healing day at the Highground. Each of the Vietnam veterans, loved ones of KIAs and MIAs, and supporters of veterans were able to experience this day of re-dedication and support and come away a step further in their journey of healing. Several businesses and individuals donated their time and goods to make this day possible.

Those looking for more information on The Highground Veterans Memorial Park can call 715-743-4224 or go online to www.thehighground.org.



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