



Museum group to unveil replica Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Saturday ceremony

May 29, 2009 11:21 am

— By Libby Cluett

Lone Star News Group

MINERAL WELLS — It's not the original, but its impact will be just as meaningful for Vietnam veterans and the families of those service men and women who gave their lives in service.

The National Vietnam War Museum on Saturday will unveil its replica Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in a ceremony expected to draw some 1,000 people to the museum site located about 45 miles west of Fort Worth on the eastern edge of Mineral Wells, Texas.

The recently completed wall, approximately half-scale in size, is based on the polished black granite wall in Washington, D.C. Its mirror-like surface is intended to reflect the images of the surrounding trees, lawns, monuments and visitors. Likewise the local replica memorial wall's black panels reflect the south-eastward-facing ground and sky.

The museum will unveil the replica wall on May 30 — “the real Memorial Day,” or Decoration Day, according to NVWM Treasurer and wall overseer Jim Messinger.

The unveiling ceremony will serve as a day of remembrance for those who died in our nation's service in Vietnam. In addition to the unveiling, the morning events feature the band Hogleg, Patriot Guards, a parachutist, an American-Indian blessing of the wall and guest speaker Joe Galloway. Galloway served as a journalist and war correspondent and received a Bronze Star — the only medal awarded to a civilian for valor during the Vietnam War.

His experience in the Ia Drang Valley of Vietnam in November 1965 became material for his 1992 book, “We were Soldiers Once ... And Young: Ia Drang — The Battle That Changed The War In Vietnam,” which also became a movie. The book was co-authored by Harold Moore, who at the time was the lieutenant colonel in command of the battle. Galloway and Moore recently penned the 2008 sequel titled, “We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam.”

Saturday's dedication comes on the heels of two other dedication ceremonies last year at the museum site. In August, the organization celebrated the “Hoisting of the Huey,” followed in November by the dedication of the Camp Holloway Memorial Wall event. Both events drew hundreds of people as word of the gradually building museum continues to grow nationally.

The local replica wall — the only other replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall besides “The Moving Wall” — holds the names of 58,260 men and women who served in the U.S. military and died as a result of their service in Vietnam.

“We brought the moving wall to Mineral Wells in 1998,” said Messinger. “It was such a hit that we decided we wanted a permanent one. The museum board said, ‘Let's build a wall.’”

Messinger said the local wall was built from the work of volunteers.

As far as the construction, he said, “I took my lead from the Moving Wall, which is engraved aluminum.” Messinger went to Bobby Richards two years ago to see how this could be done. In September 2008 they moved dirt around to contour the land and in January had an informal groundbreaking ceremony.

Veterans constructed the wall armature, or supporting structure over the past six months. The work was spearheaded by Mineral Wells Vietnam-era veteran Ralph Lister with help from Millsap Navy seaman Melvin Davis. Helping them with onsite construction were Jerry Lampier, John Chesnut and Gary Salisbury. Messinger said that another one to two dozen veterans added their helping hands.

Aluminum panels contain the same names, follow the same format and use the same font as the original wall. Like the original wall, the local replica can be updated and names added as necessary.

“Names can be added to the wall and that depends on a committee in Washington, D.C., if someone is eligible to be added,” Messinger explained.

He said that names are added if a veteran dies as a result of Vietnam War injuries. He said there were four added last year to the Washington memorial, which appear on the local wall, and one was added this year, which will have to be added locally in the near future.

The other alteration might come if remains are found or the status changes for someone recorded as “missing in action.” Messinger said that those who are MIA have a plus sign next to their name. If a person who is MIA is confirmed dead, their plus sign would become an asterisk on the local wall.

Any additions or changes to names would be recognized at Memorial Day, Messinger said.

After Messinger typeset names in computer files, Richards Signs of Mineral Wells engraved the names onto black 063 anodized aluminum panels with an automated CNC router. Russell Richards said they estimated that the process eventually took about 13 hours per 4-foot by 8-foot sheet of aluminum.

“Russell Richards and Bobby Richards have worked extra long and extra hard to make this happen,” said Messinger.

As he worked on each aluminum panel, engraving 58,260 names, Russell Richards said he thought about the sacrifice the soldiers made for the country.

“It’ll touch you,” he said.

The wall has a total of 70 panels with 58,260 names. Names are listed in chronological order by the date a soldier died, with some exceptions.

People can search for a name via computer at www.thewall-usa.com to find the exact panel and row where the name is located.

Eventually, the NVWM will install a computer kiosk to help visitors perform a search for names.

Location

The National Vietnam War Museum is located on U.S. Highway 180 East in far western Parker County about 45 miles west of Fort Worth, Texas, just outside Mineral Wells. Look for the Huey helicopter mounted atop a pole on the south side of U.S. Highway 180 when entering Mineral Wells from the east. Visit www.nationalvnwarmuseum.org for more information about the organization and event.

Program of activities

(times are approximate)

8 a.m. – Breakfast burritos are available.

9 a.m. – Bands begin to play.

10 a.m. – Bands pause while the Liberty Bell begins ringing (rings 70 times, one ring for each panel on the wall).

10:20 a.m. – Bands begin again.

10:30 a.m. – Patriot Guard arrives.

10:45 a.m. – Bands stop as Dana Bowman arrives by parachute.

11 a.m. – Ceremony begins with welcome followed by invocation, posting of colors, Pledge of Allegiance, National Anthem and introductions.

11:30 a.m. – Guest speaker Joe Galloway.

11:40 a.m. – Unveiling of the Wall and raising of the service flags.

11:45 a.m. – Burial of the purple heart.

11:50 a.m. – Native American Blessing of the Wall.

Noon – Rifle salute.

12:01 p.m. – Taps.

12:02 p.m. – Bands begin to play.

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.

Photos

