



Freedom's Voice

The Monthly Newsletter of the
Military History Center

112 N. Main ST
Broken Arrow, OK 74012
<http://www.okmhc.org/>



"Promoting Patriotism through the Preservation of Military History"

Volume 6, Number 3

March 2018

Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day

Military History Center Golf Tournament

Benefitting

Military History Center

Friday, May 4

\$75 per player – \$300 per four-person team

**Play is limited to the first twenty-two teams
that register and pay their entry fees.**

**Four Person Scramble
Shotgun Start**

**For more information about participating as a player,
sponsor or donor, contact JeanE Bailie at 918-794-2712 or
BG Tom Mancino at 918-794-2712 or 918-277-2486.**



The MHC held its fourth annual Oklahoma Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day event at Broken Arrow's First United Methodist Church in the evening of March 15. About 250 people turned out for the event. The program began with MHC President Tom Mancino welcoming the guests. Broken Arrow High School Air Force JROTC cadets posted the colors, followed by Ms. Maggie Bond, Miss Oklahoma City University, singing the National Anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag and Dr. Clarence Oliver offering the invocation.

A Power Point photo display of highlights of the Vietnam War, arranged by MHC docent, Ken Collins, was shown. The featured speaker was Vietnam veteran, Major Jack O'Conner (USAF, Retired). He told the story of his involvement in the recovery of the remains of twelve POWs who died in captivity.

Ms. Bond, with instrumental and vocal accompaniment by Ken Collins, MHC docent, Dennis Hoch, and Mr. Tom Mullen, sang "More Than a Name on a Wall". Ken Collins narrated the tribute to the seven young men of Broken Arrow who were killed in action during the Vietnam War. Ken grew up with six of them. He related highlights of the lives all of them before they entered the armed forces. All but one died in 1969. He followed by singing "All Gave Some, Some Gave All".

Tom Mancino distributed Vietnam War Veteran lapel pins and certificates to an estimated 100 Vietnam Era veterans, who were in attendance, and who served in the armed forces any time during the Vietnam Era from November 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975.

Blue Star Mothers presented Gold Star flags to the families of the seven Broken Arrow heroic, young men. Ken Collins followed his presentations by singing "Welcome Home", a song of his own composition. That was followed by a bugler blowing "Taps" and final remarks by Tom Mancino.

Altogether, it was a most inspirational program.



Broken Arrow High School JROTC color guard



Ken Collins paying tribute to the seven Broken Arrow men who lost their lives during the Vietnam War



Ms. Maggie Bond singing the National Anthem with Dr. Oliver, Major O'Connor and BG Tom Mancino in the background



Blue Star Mothers presenting Gold Star flags



Major Jack O'Connor presenting his program

Museum Hours and Admission Fee

Tuesday – Friday: 10:00 – 4:00; Saturday: 10:00 – 2:00
Closed Sunday and Monday and major Federal holidays

Adults – \$5.00
Members and Children under 18 – Free

For more information, call (918) 794-2712

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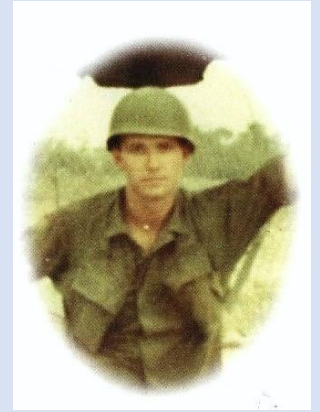
The Broken Arrow Seven



Sammy Jones, Jr.
Army



Vietnam War Veteran lapel pin



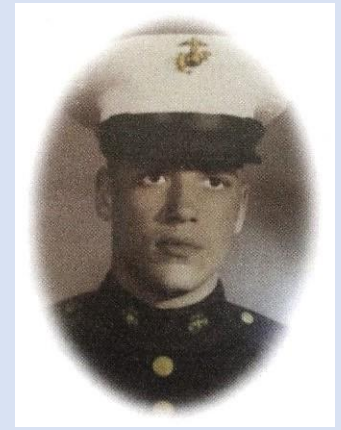
Walter Curtis Black, Jr.
Army



John Robert "Buddy" Gainer
Army



Broken Arrow Vietnam War Memorial



Paul David Lucas
USMC



James William Pendegress
Army
Silver Star – Bronze Star



Gary Keith Barnett
Army
Bronze Star with Valor Device



Kenneth Dean Rankin
Navy



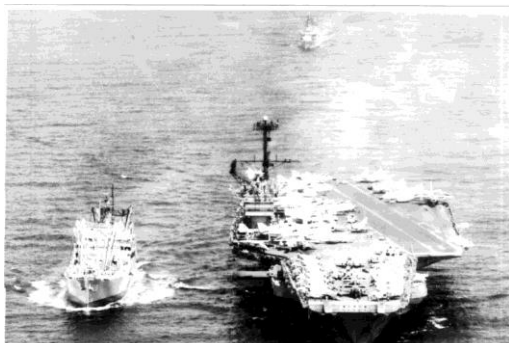
LTJG David Phillip Neislar – MIA

David Phillip Neislar was born in Brown County, Texas, on January 25, 1944. At some point, his family moved to Ft. Smith Arkansas, where he graduated from Ft. Smith High School. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1966. He was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy from the OU NROTC program. His military city of record is Norman, Oklahoma.

On February 20, 1969, he was a Lieutenant Junior Grade flying a F-4J Phantom fighter off USS *Ranger*. On that day, his aircraft crashed into the Gulf of Tonkin over the bow of *Ranger*. The F-4J sank with LTJG Neislar's body before rescuers could get to it.



LTJG Neislar's Memorial in Fort Smith National Cemetery



USS *Ranger* – ca. 1967-69 – Yankee Station, Gulf of Tonkin



1LT Aubrey Eugene Stowers, Jr. – MIA

Aubrey Eugene "Gene" Stowers, Jr. was born at Sentinel (Washita County), Oklahoma, on October 1, 1941. He was a bombardier/navigator on a Phantom II F-4D fighter-bomber in the 390th Tactical Fighter "Wild Boars" Squadron stationed at Da Nang Air Force Base, South Vietnam.

On March 21, 1968, 1LT Hesford (pilot) and 1LT Stowers were dispatched to fly a mission over Ban Karai Pass, Laos. Their aircraft was number two in a flight of two aircraft on the mission. The Phantom was struck by enemy ground fire and crashed on the side of a hill about twenty miles southwest of Ban Karai Pass. No parachutes were seen and no emergency radio beeper signals were detected. Hesford's and Stower's bodies were not recovered. They were declared missing, and Stowers was later promoted to Captain. The Department of Defense declared him KIA in 1979 and promoted him to Major.

MAJ Stowers has no memorial other than his name inscribed on a Tablet in the Courts of the Missing at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific and on The Wall.



390th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Da Nang Air Force Base



Vietnam War – 1968

Fifty years ago, 1968 was a year of superlatives for the Vietnam War. It was the most expensive year, with the United States spending \$77.4 billion (\$533 billion in today's money) on the war. The year was also the deadliest year of the war. 16,592 Americans were killed. The year of savage fighting began at 0500 on January 21, when the North Vietnamese opened a ferocious attack on the Marine outpost at Khe Sanh.



Siege of Khe Sanh – January 21-July 9 – defended by elements of the 3rd and 26th Marine regiments

On 0300 in the morning of January 31, the Tet Offensive burst forth throughout South Vietnam as regular North Vietnamese army and Viet Cong units simultaneously attacked all South Vietnam's provincial capitals and largest cities.



5th Marine Regiment at the outer wall of the Hue Citadel – Tet



USAF 377th Security Police Squadron at Tan Son Nhut Air Base – Tet

The deadliest week of the Vietnam War was February 11–17, during the Tet Offensive. 543 Americans were killed, and 2,547 were wounded during the week.



1st Cavalry Division in the A Shau Valley – April 19-May 17

Throughout the spring and summer, several more waves of attacks occurred, generally called Mini-Tet. The communists mostly attacked the outlying districts of Saigon.



9th Infantry Division in Saigon – Mini-Tet – June

On November 2, President Johnson terminated Operation Rolling Thunder, the three and a half-year, intensive bombing campaign over North Vietnam.



Navy Carrier Air Wing 14 over North Vietnam during Rolling Thunder

Eight of the thirty-two Oklahoma MIAs in the MHC's Vietnam MIA Memorial went missing in 1968, the most for any year – four of them are airmen lost during Rolling Thunder that year.

Facts of the Vietnam Wall

J. D. Collett – USMC, Vietnam Veteran

A little history most people will never know – interesting veterans' statistics off the Vietnam Memorial Wall:

There are 58,267 names now listed on that polished black wall, including those added in 2010. The names are arranged in the order in which they were taken from us by date and within each date the names are alphabetized. It is hard to believe it has been sixty-one years since the first casualty.

The first known casualty was Richard B. Fitzgibbon, of North Weymouth, Massachusetts. Listed by the U.S. Department of Defense as having been killed on June 8, 1956. His name is listed on the Wall with that of his son, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Richard B. Fitzgibbon III, who was killed on September 7, 1965. There are three sets of fathers and sons on the Wall. 39,996 on the Wall were just twenty-two years old or younger. 8,283 were just nineteen years old.

The largest age group, 33,103 were eighteen years old. Twelve names on the Wall were seventeen years of age.

Five on the Wall were sixteen years of age.

One, PFC Dan Bullock, was fifteen years old.

997 were killed on their first day in Vietnam.

1,448 were killed on their last day in Vietnam.

Thirty-one sets of brothers are on the Wall.

Thirty-one sets of parents lost two sons.

Fifty-four attended Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia.

I wonder why so many from one school.

Eight women are on the Wall – nurses – seven Army and one Air Force.

244 men were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War – 153 of them are on the Wall.

Beallsville, Ohio, with a population of 475 lost six of her sons.

West Virginia had the highest casualty rate per capita in the nation. There are 711 West Virginians on the Wall.

The most killed in action on a single day was 245, on January 31, 1968.¹

The most killed in action in a single month was 2,415, in May 1968.

The Marines of Morenci – They led some of the scrappiest high school football and basketball teams that the little Arizona copper town of Morenci (pop 5,058) had ever known and cheered. They enjoyed roaring beer busts. In quieter moments, they rode horses along the Coronado Trail, stalked deer in the Apache National Forest. And, in the patriotic camaraderie typical of Morenci's mining families, the nine graduates of Morenci High enlisted as a group in the Marine Corps. Their service began on Independence Day, 1966. Only three returned home.

The Buddies of Midvale – LeRoy Tafoya, Jimmy Martinez, Tom Gonzales were all boyhood friends and lived on three consecutive streets in Midvale, Utah, on Fifth, Sixth and Seventh

avenues. They lived only a few yards apart. They played ball at the adjacent sandlot ball field. And they all went to Vietnam. In a span of sixteen dark days in late 1967, all three would be killed. LeRoy was killed on Wednesday, November 22, the fourth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Jimmy died less than twenty-hour hours later on Thanksgiving Day. Tom was shot dead assaulting the enemy on December 7 – Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.

For most Americans who read this, they will only see the numbers that the Vietnam War created. To those of us who survived the war, and to the families of those who did not, we see the faces, we feel the pain that these numbers created. We are, until we too pass away, haunted with these numbers, because they were our friends, fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters. There are no noble wars, just noble warriors.

Ed. This essay was apparently written in 2010 or 2011.

Decorated Veteran Serves on the Home Front

Jon Humphries – *The Athens (Texas) Review*



J. D. Collett, front row, second from the right with hands crossed, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – the Wall – with other Vietnam War veterans

J. D. Collett served four years in the U.S. Marine Corps during the height of the Vietnam War. Most of those four years he spent on the ground in Vietnam. When he came home, Collett carried two Purple Hearts with him. However, returning to the states as a decorated war veteran was anything but an easy transition. After many years, he recognized his problems as symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Eventually, Collett decided to get an education, and started attending the University of Louisville. After finishing school, he became a detective with the Dallas Police Department. But, as he tells it, he was anything but settled, and he still had the desire to work with veterans with whom he shared so much. After serving for over twenty years with the DPD, Collett retired at age forty-five. He enrolled at Texas A&M University to work on a Master's Degree.

In 1997, one of his children committed suicide, and he soon found himself in a VA hospital for treatment of his PTSD. While there, one of the psychiatrists told Collett that if he would go to

¹ This is an error. The deadliest day of the war was November 17, 1965, when the 1st BN, 7th Cavalry lost 155 KIA near LZ Albany in the Ia Drang Valley.

school to learn how to help veterans with PTSD, he would pay the tuition. Collett accepted the offer, attended school in Killeen, Texas, and became certified to facilitate peer groups with other veterans suffering from PTSD, and to counsel the families of those who have lost their lives in service to the U.S., or who have committed suicide.

He now works as a peer-group facilitator in the Military Services Department for the Andrews Center in Tyler, Texas. He is also integrally involved with Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, an organization that counsels the loved ones of those who have served and died. Most importantly, he wants to help veterans find their place as he found his.

Ed. J. D. Collett lives in Jacksonville, Texas. For more information about him and his work, visit his Facebook page.



Support the Military History Center

Do you want to join the many patriotic Oklahomans who are already supporting the Military History Center's mission of "Promoting Patriotism by Preserving Military History"? If so, contact the Military History Center at (918) 794-2712 to learn how you can be a financial supporter, or click on the link below to go to the MHC website at

<http://www.okmhc.org/donate/>

There's something to accommodate everyone's budget. Monetary donations, as well as gifts in kind, are tax deductible, subject to IRS regulations.

We invite you to be a part of this unique opportunity to support a first-class military museum and history center in Oklahoma.

This Month's Featured Exhibit



This section of the Vietnam War Exhibit features some of the weapons used by the Montagnards, an ethnically distinctive people living in the South Vietnamese central highlands, who supported U.S. forces during the war. Major Avery Rogers brought the weapons home from his 1964-65 Vietnam tour. The MHC is grateful to Mrs. Betty Rogers for her gift of them. The framed flag is a South Vietnamese national flag that USMC CPL Craig Roberts took from the backpack of a dead South Vietnamese soldier in 1965. Note the shrapnel holes in the flag. LTC Roberts (U.S. Army, Retired) donated the flag to the MHC.

Operation Homecoming

During this calendar period, forty-five years ago, Vietnam War POWs began coming home in an operation appropriately named Operation Homecoming. The operation was a highly orchestrated event between the United States and North Vietnam. The prisoners were exchanged in groups, with the first Americans arriving at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines on February 12, 1973. The POWs were released in first in - first out fashion, being released in the order of their captivity. Operation Homecoming lasted until April 4. 591 live American prisoners were repatriated during the operation.



The first group of newly freed prisoners on a U.S. transport plane on their way to Clark AFB – February 12, 1973



Lt. Commander Everett Alvarez, Jr., (USN) was the first POW to deplane at Clark AFB on February 12. He was the longest held POW having been shot down and captured on August 5, 1964, in the first U.S. air strike on North Vietnam. He was greeted by ADM Noel Gaylor and Air Force LTG William G. Moore.



RADM James B. Stockdale, top in the door and Air Force COL Robinson Risner, waving at the bottom, at Clark AFB – February 12 – Stockdale was the senior POW. He was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1976 for his leadership and resistance activities while a POW.



LT Commander John S. McCain, III deplaning at Clark AFB – March 14



USAF LTC Robert L. Stirm is greeted by his family at Travis AFB, California – March 17. This iconic photograph from Operation Homecoming encapsulates the joy felt by the families of all 591 repatriated POWs, as well as the nation at large.

The MHC salutes Vietnam veterans.



James Robinson Risner



BG James Robinson Risner – ca. 1976

James Robinson “Robbie” Risner was born at Mountain Spring, Arkansas, on January 16, 1925. At a young age, his family moved to Tulsa, where he graduated from Central High School in 1942. Risner enlisted in the Army Air Force in April 1943 and attended flight training at Williams Field, Arizona, where he was awarded his pilot wings and a commission as a Second Lieutenant in May 1944. After completing further training he was assigned to the 30th Fighter Squadron in Panama. He was relieved from active duty in August 1946 and joined the Oklahoma Air National Guard as an F-51 pilot.

Risner was recalled to active duty in February 1951 and assigned to the 185th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Will Rogers Field (now Will Rogers World Airport) in Oklahoma City. In May 1952, he was assigned to the 336th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 4th Fighter Wing, at Kimpo, Korea. During the Korean War, he flew more than 100 combat missions in F-86s against MiG-15s over North Korea and China. He is credited with eight enemy aircraft destroyed in aerial combat and became the twentieth jet ace during the Korean War. Risner was an aggressive and daring pilot. He once shot down a Chinese MiG-15 at rooftop level over a Chinese air base. He received his first Air Force Cross (equivalent to a Distinguished Service Cross and Navy Cross) while serving in Korea.

In July 1956, he was transferred to George Air Force Base, California, as operations officer of the 413th Fighter Wing. Subsequently he served as commander of the 34th Fighter Day Squadron, also at George AFB. During his tour of duty at George AFB, Risner was selected to fly the Charles A. Lindberg Commemoration Flight from New York to Paris. Flying an F-100, he set a transatlantic speed record, covering the distance in six hours and thirty-eight minutes. From August 1960 to July 1961, he attended the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

In August 1964, Risner, now a Lt. Colonel, was assigned to command the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa. While on temporary duty with the 37th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, he was shot down over North Vietnam in April 1965 and was rescued. LTC Risner returned to duty and in September 1965, he was again shot down over North Vietnam. This

time he was captured and would spend seven and a half years as a prisoner of war.



This *Time* Magazine cover of April 23, 1965, caused problems for Risner after he was captured five months later. The Vietnamese knew they had someone important and attempted to make the most of it for propaganda purposes.

At the time of his capture, Risner was the highest-ranking POW held by the North Vietnamese. As senior officer, he assumed command of the prisoners. He would remain in that position until Navy Captain (a rank equivalent to an Air Force Colonel) James Stockdale was shot down and captured. Stockdale then assumed command. The Air Force created the 4th Allied Prisoner-of-War Wing for the Air Force POWs. Stockdale was commander of the Wing, and Risner was his Vice-Commander. Because of their rank, they commanded all POWs held by North Vietnam, regardless of service branch. Risner and Stockdale were among the first group of POWs repatriated during Operation Homecoming, on February 12, 1973. Risner had been promoted to Colonel and Stockdale to Rear Admiral.



COL Risner with MG LeRoy J. Manor in a parade in San Francisco – 1973

Risner was promoted to Brigadier General in May 1974. In August 1975, he became Vice Commander of the USAF Tactical Fighter Weapons Center at Nellis AFB, Nevada, from where he retired one year later. He eventually settled in Bridgewater, Virginia, where he died on October 22, 2013. BG James Robinson Risner is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

BG Risner was a highly decorated warrior. He received a second Air Force Cross for his leadership as a POW. Additionally, he held a Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, one with valor device, three Bronze Stars, one with valor device, four Purple Hearts and numerous other decorations.

THE WALL THAT HEALS

The Oklahoma Military Academy Alumni Association and Rogers State University will be bringing THE WALL THAT HEALS, a replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, along with its accompanying mobile Education Center, to RSU's Claremore campus in June to honor those who served during the Vietnam War.

THE WALL THAT HEALS honors the more than three million Americans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War and bears the names of the more than 58,000 men and women, including about 1,000 Oklahomans and twenty-one OMA cadets, who made the ultimate sacrifice during the war. THE WALL THAT HEALS will arrive in Claremore on June 6. Following its installation that day, the exhibition will be open around the clock until noon on Sunday, June 10.



The WALL THAT HEALS at Johns Creek, Georgia – March 31, 2017
The keynote speaker at the Jones Creek event was Vietnam War Medal of Honor recipient SMAJ Bennie G. Adkins of Walters, Oklahoma.

OMA alumni and RSU are bringing the traveling exhibit to Claremore in conjunction with the association's annual reunion on June 8-9. The Claremore stop will be among the first to host the new, larger THE WALL THAT HEALS exhibit, which includes a three-quarter scale Wall replica that is 375 feet in length and stands 7.5 feet high at its tallest point. With the new replica at this size, visitors will be able to experience THE WALL rising above them as they walk toward the apex, a key feature of the design of THE WALL in Washington, DC. For the first time in the history of THE WALL THAT HEALS, visitors also will be able to do name rubbings of individual service member's names on THE WALL.

"Bringing THE WALL THAT HEALS to Claremore allows us to honor our OMA Alumni who served during the war, while also providing the opportunity for area veterans and family members to experience the full power of THE WALL THAT HEALS," said Phil Goldfarb, President of the OMA Alumni Association.

The exhibit includes THE WALL replica and a mobile Education Center comprised of digital photo displays of "Hometown Heroes" – service members whose names are on THE WALL that list their home of record within the area of a visit; digital photo displays of Vietnam veterans from the local area honored through Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund's (VVMF) In Memory program, which honors veterans who returned home

from Vietnam and later died as a result of their service; video displays that teach about the history and impact of THE WALL and of the collection of items left at THE WALL in D.C.; educational exhibits told through items in the collection; a map of Vietnam and a chronological overview of the Vietnam War.

The VVMF coordinates local stops of THE WALL THAT HEALS and the accompanying mobile Education Center. The current schedule and more information can be found at www.thewallthatheals.org. The 2018 national THE WALL THAT HEALS tour is hauled through a partnership with the Truckload Carriers Association and the trucking industry and generously sponsored by USAA, FedEx and GEICO.

The VVMF is the nonprofit organization that built the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (THE WALL) in Washington, DC in 1982. VVMF is dedicated to honoring and preserving the legacy of service in America and educating all generations about the impact of the Vietnam War and era through programs, ceremonies and education materials. To learn more about VVMF, please visit www.vvmf.org.

The Oklahoma Military Academy operated in Claremore from 1919 to 1971, when the school transitioned to a community college and later became the regional university now known as Rogers State University. OMA was recognized as "The West Point of the Southwest" with more than 10,000 men and women attending the school during its distinguished history. The OMA Alumni Association was formed to preserve the school's legacy. OMA alumni have been instrumental in providing support to RSU, including both scholarships and development of the Claremore campus.



Patriot Guard Riders of Kansas City and northwest Missouri and law enforcement officers from several jurisdictions escort THE WALL THAT HEALS to the University of Central Missouri campus at Warrensburg – June 27, 2017

Ed. This article is excerpted from the RSU press announcement for the RSU-OMA THE WALL THAT HEALS event. OMA Alumni Association President, Phil Goldfarb, provided the announcement to the editor.

“Lest We Forget”



Vietnam Veterans Memorial – “The Wall” – Washington, DC

Freedom is not free.



THANK YOU