

# Vets: It's time to respect Vietnam

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When Vietnam War veterans returned from battle during the 1960s and early 1970s, there weren't any trumpets blaring or graffiti filling the air.

What those veterans usually were met with was indifference, even anger. Bad feelings over the unpopular war continue today, though they are dissipating to a certain extent.

Good, bad or indifferent feelings about Vietnam, however, shouldn't keep the men and women who served there from receiving long overdue recognition for serving their country, said several local veterans. The parents of Roy Kenneth "Kenny" Williams Jr., a 1967 Farmington High School graduate who died in action in 1969, are pushing for an official tribute to those who fought in southeast Asia.

"I have a great affinity for anyone who went to 'Nam,'" said Jack Curd, a World War II veteran who is known in these circles by the nickname "Uncle Jack" or "Grandpa Jack."

Vietnam War veterans should "definitely" be remembered, in the same way Korean War vets are being honored at this year's 50th anniversary celebration, during the May 29 Memorial Day parade in Farmington, Curd added.

"The Memorial Day parade is the time to do it," Curd said. "I think it should be done."

If such a celebration did occur — and probably won't until 2001, according to Wally Christensen of the parade's sponsoring American Legion Walker-Grove post in Farmington — among participants would be Vietnam veterans Grant Riddell, a maintenance worker at Farmington High School.

The 49-year-old Riddell, who was one of Kenny's FHS classmates, said it would be difficult to draw a lot of Vietnam vets out of the woodwork, so to speak. But, such an endeavor is worth pursuing, he added.

"As long as you remember them they're not forgotten," said Riddell, who talks about Vietnam to Farmington High classes on a semi-regular basis. "Basically, the way we were treated when we came home was negative. There were all the protesters back here."

## Attitude adjustment

Another Vietnam War vet who served in 1969-70 is Gary Goss, director of the Farmington Public Safety Department. He said the old wounds of the anti-war movement and resentment soldiers felt upon returning to American soil, are slowly healing for many veterans.

"It was quite different from when we left," Goss said. "There was a lot of bitterness about that (the treatment when they returned). We didn't feel as respected, like the World War II vets."

"Our generation, the ones that went to Vietnam, grew up on John Wayne fighting World War II. That was the image we had, the sands of two Jims, Battle of the Bulge. ... So when we went to Vietnam and joined the service, we had that behind us and were proud to go. Obviously ... when we came back we didn't find the respect that we expected."

But, with the rise of the Vietnam War Memorial and the fall of communism during the 1980s, attitudes started to change and are still changing, with the general public becoming more understanding, Goss said.

About Kenny's parents' quest to properly recognize Vietnam veterans, Goss said he'd like to see it happen for next year's Memorial Day parade. (Such efforts would be wasted this year, because it is the 50th anniversary celebration of the Korean War, Christensen said.)

A positive spinoff is any resurgence of recognition could also get those vets involved in important service organizations such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign War, which now are predominantly made up of World War II veterans, Goss said.

American Legion's Christensen is still looking for Korean War veterans for the 50th anniversary tribute, to take place during the Memorial Day parade. Call (248) 474-8554.

# A tribute to a fallen soldier

Kenny

"While I was out building houses you with your Cobra were dying. Details are relative, your wife waits unknowing that I think of her at this moment or that you never again will. You were just a boy — 19, immature, with much to learn. But you were playing men's games, the stakes were high and you lost. Either we, your heart, too."

Kenny, we must now go our separate ways. Good-byes are said, but if we'd never said hello, we'd not have to say good-bye. And the happiness of your hellos far surpasses the tragedy of your good-byes. The sad part is not that you're dead, the sad part is that you are no longer alive. I miss you, Kenny."

By Emily Strange, American Red Cross "Donat Dolls" volunteer, Dong Tam, VN, 1969

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# Accident victims reported doing well

The siblings who survived an accident in front of Harrison High School Friday morning appear to be recovering well from their injuries.

Debra Lee was discharged from Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak on Wednesday, according to hospital spokesperson Eileen Wolf. The 13-year-old is a student at East Middle School.

## UPDATE

David Lee, 23, remains hospitalized, in good condition. He was driving Debra and 16-year-old brother Daniel to school when the accident occurred; Daniel died during surgery at Botsford Hospital Friday morning.

Farmington Hills Police have

not released an official cause of the accident, although Chief Bill Dwyer indicated an initial investigation showed David may have misjudged the speed of oncoming traffic before turning left into the driveway that leads to the high school. His Mitsubishi Eclipse was broad-sided by a Jeep Cherokee, which was driven by a 48-year-old West Bloomfield man.

(finally)



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