

No statue for women vets? 'A slap in face'

By Tom Henderson
staff writer

Women who served in the Vietnam war fear their contributions in the armed forces and as civilian volunteers have become a forgotten chapter of American history.

They — and many of the men they worked with or whose lives they helped save — are incensed that a commission in Washington, D.C., has vetoed proposed plans for a statue of an Army nurse to be erected on the grounds of the national memorial to those who died in Vietnam.

"What a slap in the face of women," said Christine Giuli of Farmington Hills, who served as a Red Cross volunteer in Vietnam in 1966-67. "No one is aware that all these women were there. It's a deep, dark secret. We just visited the memorial in the spring and, my goodness, there's plenty of room. That (a statue of a woman) would be a real asset."

GIULI SAID she supported the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project Inc. The project's goal is to have a statue honoring the nation's female Vietnam veterans placed near the Vietnam Memorial.

"If it wouldn't have been for women, that wall in Washington would be significantly higher and longer," said project spokeswoman Jacqueline Hanson.



Ron Wech
"endless belt of carnage"

A statue near the wall depicts three men.

About 10,000 women served in Vietnam as nurses or doctors. Thousands of others were there running post stores, serving as civilian clerical help or volunteering with such organizations as the Red Cross and the USO.

The black marble wall with the roster of the dead at the Vietnam Memorial site lists eight women, including Diane Hedwig of Detroit, a first lieutenant who died Nov. 30, 1967.

At least three women working with the Red Cross also died during the war.

RON WECH of Farmington Hills was a medic in Vietnam in 1969-70, serving with the First Infantry at Danang and later near the Cambodian border just before the incursion that touched off college protests and the Kent State killings.

He said the toll suffered by many of the women was in terms of their number of dead but in the stress of treating the wounded for 16-hour days for months on end.

Wech said that helicopter-evacuation techniques perfected in Vietnam brought wounded people to hospital bases who, in other wars, would have died at the front.

"Many of those casualties were still living but their wounds were hopeless," he said. "Imagine working on someone with five units of blood going in and six units coming out at the same time (through wounds)."

"They did that all day, every day. They were on an endless belt of human carnage. It's amazing any of them came out of it with any sanity."

"AS FAR AS J. Carter Brown's statement that the statue isn't needed because the healing process is complete, that's patently untrue. It's false," Wech said.

Brown is chairman of the Washington Fine Arts Commission, the or-

ganization that rejected the statue. Wech has asked Farmington Hills schools to write letters urging members of Congress to support proposed House and Senate bills that would overturn the Arts Commission ruling.

He passes out literature from his Videotax store in Sterling Heights. And he has placed literature supporting the women's memorial at a handful of Farmington Hills businesses.

"The minute I heard about the campaign a year ago I said, 'Of course. It's necessary. It makes sense.' And I wanted to help," he said.

"They were very much with us. The women were under fire. They lived in the mud like we did. It was every bit as bad for them as it was for any grunt. Their contribution and sacrifice and hardship have been ignored, pure and simple."

ROBERT HYSKO, a Westland police officer and commander of one of the two Westland VFW posts, has volunteered to help the women in their campaign for a memorial.

"There's most definitely a need," said Hysko, a medic with the 12th Evacuation Hospital in 1966-67.

"People tend to think of war as a male operation, but I served with

women and saw what they did, and I definitely feel they deserve some recognition. I feel very strongly about it."

Barb Lilly of Battle Creek is the Michigan co-ordinator of the project. She recruited Wech for the project a year ago when they met on a Channel 56 program about the Vietnam war.

They recognized each other in the studio — they had known each other as students at Wayne State University, and her sorority once serenaded his fraternity after a football game.

"There were, 20,000 miles and 20 years later," said Wech.

LILLY WAS a Red Cross volunteer with the 101st Airborne in Phan Rang and with the 1st Infantry in Lai Khe.

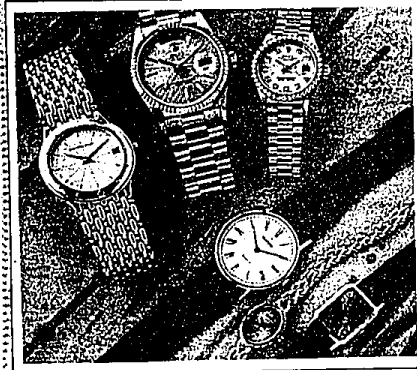
"I wrote a book about Vietnam," she said. "I've only gotten rejections on it so far, but I did it mainly as a catharsis, anyway."

Those interested in volunteering to help with the project or in getting information about it, can write Barb Lilly at 125 Brentwood Drive, Battle Creek, Mich., 49015.

The project has raised about \$300,000 and has pledges for \$500,000, say officials of the Minneapolis-based fund drive.

They say they will need about \$1.3 million to finance lobbying and promotional efforts for the statue, to compile a list of and contact all women who served in Vietnam, and to erect the statue.

Tax-deductible checks can be sent to: Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Box 45, 511 Eleventh Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minn. 55415.



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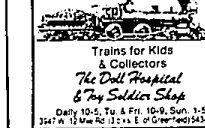
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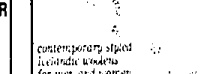


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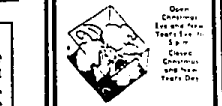


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