

Hills resident to head up Canadian Viet vet salute

By Susan Buck
staff writer

It's a new twist on the Vietnam War: a war that was undeclared but took the lives of 58,000 American soldiers.

Seventy Canadian citizens, who voluntarily enlisted and fought as soldiers in the American armed forces, also died in that war.

Plans are under way in July to honor all Canadian citizens who voluntarily enlisted in the Vietnam War.

Their enlistment is an irony of opposites. Some American men who were U.S. residents chose to go the other way and take up residence in Canada to resist the draft because Canada chose uninvolved in the Vietnam War.

"Canadians who served in Vietnam with the U.S. military are considered mercenaries and traitors by their government and have never received a word of thanks for their sacrifices in Southeast Asia," said Ed Johnson, a Farmington Hills Vietnam combat veteran.

Johnson is chairing the "Welcome Home Canadian Vietnam Veterans" event, sponsored by nine veteran groups, which will be held at the Michigan State Fairgrounds in East Lansing June 30 to July 4. The public event is expected to draw Vietnam vets from as far away as Australia and New Zealand.

PROCEEDS FROM donations will

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be used to help build a monument in honor of Canadian Vietnam vets in their country.

Johnson, 40, served in the 19th Division, U.S. Army, for almost 15 months during 1969 and 1970. He is a social work technician at New Horizons, Farmington Hills, which provides vocational training for the physically and mentally handicapped, ages 18-50.

Johnson has participated in local fund-raising events for veterans and has helped with job placement for veterans in the city of Detroit. He now hopes to improve the lives of Canadian veterans through similar efforts.

A mercenary, by definition, is a professional soldier hired by a foreign country.

According to unofficial reports, mainly from veterans groups, as

many as 30,000 Canadians voluntarily enlisted in the U.S. armed services during the Vietnam War.

"Many of the Canadians I talked to said they felt so bad when they returned. They were trying to fight a war against the Communists. With all the draft dodgers, they replaced them. Many suffer the same ill effects as U.S. Vietnam veterans from Agent Orange, wounds and post-combat trauma," said Johnson.

THESE CANADIANS blended in quietly in their units, but occasionally were spoken of disparagingly within their units and referred to as "Canucks," Johnson said. After discharge, Canadians, including their veteran groups, frowned on Canadian Vietnam vets, considering them traitors and forbidding them to participate even in parades, he said.

"Vietnam was such a controversial war and lasted such a long time, from 1964 to 1975, that when these guys came home, it left a bad taste in people's mouths," Johnson said. "They fought a war that a lot of Canadians thought was illegal. I had one Canadian in my unit, but I never realized so many had volunteered. Neither does 90 percent of the Canadian population."

Johnson was drafted into the war in 1969, a victim of a numbered lottery, which determined a man's draft priority through chance. He had dropped out of Livonia Franklin High School. "I was just kicking around in some fly-by-night job, just making enough money to party. I came home and my mom was crying. My dad just sort of smiled and handed me the letter. It said, 'Greetings.'"

Johnson saw active duty in the Mekong Delta and later Cambodia. "In April 1970, we went into Cambodia with a reinforced company of 200 and when we came back in June 1970, we had 68 people," he said.

BEFORE HE left the armed services, Johnson earned a graduate equivalency diploma. Johnson grew up in Livonia. He later went to Madonna College there and studied psychology.

Johnson has lived in Farmington Hills for 14 years. His wife, Kathy, is a nurse at Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Hills.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Ed Johnson of Farmington Hills is chairing the "Welcome Home Canadian Vietnam Veterans" event, sponsored by nine veteran groups, which will be held in Detroit June 30 to July 4.

Leader sees tribute as 'the last big hurrah'

By Susan Buck
staff writer

The Vietnam war evokes memories of a time some Americans and Canadians would like to forget.

"America is a country of veterans," said Ed Johnson, a Farmington Hills resident who is organizing a Canadian Vietnam veterans salute this summer at the State Fairgrounds in Detroit. "There are 26½ million veterans living in this country. The event will give these veterans a chance to get a hug and a pat on the back. It's the last big hurrah."

It will be a new chapter on the Vietnam war.

According to Johnson, as many as 30,000 Canadian citizens enlisted in the U.S. armed forces during the Vietnam crisis.

That number is questioned by Violet Parnazone, who works as a liaison for the Canadian government. She considers the number high.

"We're unable to substantiate that number," said Parnazone. "There

wasn't an influx of Canadians. Some had dual citizenship and some may have already been living in the United States at the time."

ALSO, WHEN some Canadians enlisted in the war, many listed an American residential address, often a hotel that they were living in temporarily, after crossing the border, said Parnazone.

"I would be very surprised to see how many show up at this event. It's said that usually 20 percent show up at these kind of events," she said.

Parnazone acknowledged that these Canadian Vietnam veterans have been excluded from participating in parades, except in some cases. "Canada did not participate in the Vietnam War," she explained.

Statistics vary depending on the source; there appears to be no official statistics regarding the exact number of Canadian citizens who enlisted during the Vietnam War or how many men resisted the draft during that time.

"I don't know if anybody has the numbers," said Diane Pringle, of the veteran affairs foreign services unit in Washington. "We use a working number of 5 to 8,000 but veterans groups, by soliciting each other, think it's between 20,000-40,000. We don't believe 30,000 is accurate."

Met Small, a Wayne State University history professor knowledgeable about the Vietnam War, also believes the number is high. "There were 2.7 million who passed through the southeast Asian theater from 1961 to 1973 and all of those did not see combat. Likewise, the percentage of draft resisters was very little," he said.

Small added that he thought the idea of a memorial monument was "a nice idea."

THE REASONS why Canadian citizens sought U.S. military status are as myriad and diverse as human nature. For some it was a coming of age; some wanted to serve in the

military as their fathers did and this would be their only chance; others wanted to pick their branch of military service.

Frank Montour, a 1967 Farmington High graduate has dual citizenship. Of Canadian Mohawk Indian heritage, his extended family resides in Canada.

Montour explained his enlistment as a traditional and cultural "family-kind" of thing. "There was a feeling that Communism needed to be stopped where it was," he said.

Today, Montour, a University of

Michigan graduate, is a counselor-therapist at the Veterans Center in Lincoln Park.

Likewise, in the early 1960s, Lee Hitchins, president of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans in Ottawa, drove an hour from his home in Smiths Falls to Buffalo, N. Y., where he and two other Canadian buddies enlisted.

"Basically, it was a chance for travel," said Hitchins. "It's hard to think of it now, but when you're 18 and you're from a small town of 8,000, it has something to do with the bright lights, too. A lot of guys did go

for the express purpose of Vietnam."

HITCHINS SERVED on the Navy ship, "U.S. Destroyer." He holds steadfastly to there being 35,000 Canadian Vietnam veterans, as cited by the Canadian Department of National Defense at a recent military symposium held at Royal Military College in Kingston.

"A lot of guys won't come out," said Hitchins. "They got turned on when they came back. There's been a turn-around. Now it's acceptable to know a Vietnam veteran."

Residents sound off about Hills' problems

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more politically motivated to turn over city into another Southfield," said a Westmeath resident. "This so-called master plan seems to be a figment of the council's imagination, but not what the citizens of this city really want."

The residents were among 244 who returned surveys to Mayor Terry Sever, which he mailed to 1,050 residents in mid-March. The survey asks residents to rate various city departments, including police and fire. It also questions them on whether the city council should select the mayor or whether the public should elect one. Residents also were asked to comment on their concerns about the city.

Some residents responded with only a few words. Others let their thoughts flow. Council behavior, increased taxes and assessments, overdevelopment, the lack of open space and recreational facilities, the need for more visible police patrols in neighborhoods and traffic congestion topped the list of concerns.

"QUIT LOOKING for ways to spend money. Why not try to save and reduce taxes? Be as responsible with money as we who have to work for it," a resident wrote.

Another resident wrote: "It (the city) has grown too much and too rapidly. How sad to see \$300,000 homes built on top of each other."

Some residents complimented Sever for mailing the survey while others criticized him, assuming tax dollars were used for its printing and mailing. The mayor paid for the survey and for postage.

"I did this more on a personal basis. I have always wanted to do a survey. It's tough to determine what the priorities are at budget time (in May)," Sever said. "It definitely has helped me to draw conclusions. I had some opinions but no basis for those conclusions."

From the returned surveys, Sever figured out the average ratings residents gave the city departments. The rating scale was one as excellent, two as good; three, fair; four, poor; and five, bad.

The fire department received the highest rating with an average 1.60, followed by the police department with a 1.66; special services department, 1.72; public works department, 1.96; city administration, 2.03; and city council, 2.35.

Of the 344 returned surveys, 113 responded that the city council should select a mayor and 118 said the mayor should be elected by the

public. Thirteen residents didn't respond.

"I THINK a lot of people may have interpreted a strong mayor type of government like (Detroit) Mayor Coleman Young's," Sever said.

Sever, who believes the mayor's role should be more than ceremonial, plans to take a deeper look into the mayoral issue, particularly lengthening the one-year term.

"Politically, the city is at a disadvantage. Every year a new mayor comes in trying to build relationships with the county and state. Once you've established those relationships, it's time to leave and a new person comes in," Sever said.

The mayor also asked residents whether they would be willing to spend another \$1-\$2 per month to improve services. Without a doubt, the majority of residents who responded to the survey said "no." About a third of the respondents said yes, but only for particular services such as improved police and more recreation and park facilities.

"With the tremendous increase in commercial development, increased tax base for both residential and commercial, Farmington Hills should have adequate funds. More effort is needed to get more 'bang for the buck,'" said a Forest Brook Drive resident.

THOUGH SURVEY results are available for other council members, Sever said none have shown an interest. Preliminary results were shared with council members, however, and city manager William Costick is reviewing police patrols in response to residents' concern about more patrols in neighborhoods, Sever said.

Sever said he intends to make residents' feelings about the city council's behavior known to council members. "I intend to bring this up to the council. Council in the last 10 months has been under a lot of pressure. I think some of the pressure rubbed off on each other," he said.

City plans survey

If you've ever wanted to talk back to the people in City Hall, now is the time.

City administrators and officials want to know what you think about the services, programs and quality of life in Farmington Hills. They have prepared a survey that you will receive the first week in May.

The city has undergone significant increases in population, housing, traffic and building in the last

few years. How have those changes affected your opinion of Farmington Hills? How satisfied are you with the city services? What are the issues to examine now for a better tomorrow?

Your responses to these and other questions will be a contribution in determining both today's needs as well as future needs of the community.



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