

One Man's Tribute to Vietnam Veterans

By *Cathryn Domrose*
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

A damp, musty smell pervades the Museum of the Forgotten Warriors. Like a bunker, one veteran described it. Mannequins dressed in military uniforms stare into the shadows. Music blares from a loudspeaker: "Satisfaction." "California Dreaming." "The theme song of American soldiers in Vietnam: "We Gotta Get Out of This Place."

BAY TRIPPING

Dedicated to veterans of the Vietnam War, the small museum outside of Marysville in Yuba County returns names and faces to those forgotten warriors. It provides a repository for their memories and mementos. And it reminds all visitors that once upon a time existed a piece of hell called Vietnam.

"This is pretty heady stuff," murmurs the museum's curator and founder, Dann Spear. He guides a visitor through a maze of glass cases crammed with photos, news clippings, letters, patches, insignias, weapons, books and dolls from Vietnam. Most were donated by veterans or their families.

Spear arranges each soldier's memorabilia around a photograph and a typed story, then displays it in no particular order.

"It's like the war," he says. "The war was cluttered. The war made no sense."

Some of the soldiers in Spear's museum were killed in the war or are missing. But most still work as police officers, teachers, state senators, game wardens.

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"You hear that Vietnam veterans are all crazy. They're not," Spear says. "They are the generation now that's running this country. They're real strong."

The typed information contains the soldier's unit, call sign, where the soldier served and what the veteran does now. Sometimes it tells more.

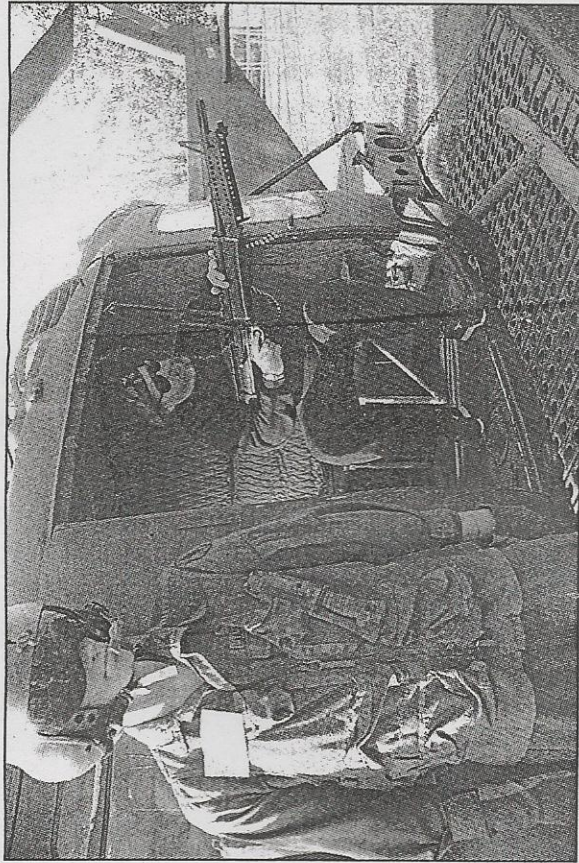
Spear points to a utility belt in a display case of North Vietnamese weapons and uniforms. Army veteran Joe Fegan brought it to Spear last year. He had taken it from a soldier he had shot, the only person in the war he knew he killed. The soldier was Fegan's age, fighting the same awful war in the jungle. By donating the belt, Fegan hoped to stop the nightmares that still haunted him.

"I feel like I let the spirits go," he told Spear later.

Spear has collected military memorabilia since he was 11. As a child in Ohio, he was fascinated by veterans groups, amazed by the camaraderie of the Flying Tigers, the World War II flying aces. When friends went to war in Vietnam, he wrote them. They sent back letters, Vietnamese money, patches. He displayed everything in glass cases bought at a secondhand store.

Spear graduated from high school the year the Vietnam War ended. When his friends came home, one by one, they didn't want to talk. No one threw them parades or called them heroes.

Spear decided he would create a tribute. He began collecting weap-



SKIP SHUMAN / Special to The Chronicle

WAR MEMORIAL: Jack Hartman, a Live Oak resident and Army gunner in Vietnam, sits in a Huey on the lawn of Dann Spear's Museum of Forgotten Warriors near Marysville.

quire a tank and two helicopters displayed on the lawn of the acre lot, beside a plaque reading "Lost we forget."

Spear has laid a foundation for a third room. He builds when he can put aside the money from his salary as an encroachment inspector. He won't accept money, especially not from veterans, he says. He will take any memorabilia from any veteran of any war. His museum is dedicated to the Vietnam War, but he also displays artifacts from other conflicts.

Spear opens his museum on Thursday evenings, the first Saturday of every month and Veterans

and Memorial days. The museum's limited hours and its location across from Beale Air Force Base discourage curiosity seekers. Spear says he wants the museum to be a place where people can reflect.

Spear himself often walks around the museum, rereading a letter from a veteran who called him "the keep-

MUSEUM OF THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

The Museum of the Forgotten Warriors is outside of Marysville, about 40 miles north of Sacramento to near Beale Air Force Base.

DIRECTIONS

Take I-80 to Sacramento/Reno. Take 99/1-5 exit (toward Redding) and follow 99 to Marysville/Yuba City. Take Highway 70 toward Marysville. Just after Oliverhurst, take Erie Road exit, go over an overpass, turn right and head east for three to four miles on Erie Road. Turn left on Griffith Avenue, right on North Beale Road and continue about five miles to A Road, where a red radar screen sits on a white building. Museum sign is on the right side of road. Turn right on A Road and continue until you see helicopter and tanks on the front lawn.

HOURS

Open 7-10 p.m. Thursdays and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. the first Saturday of the month, Veterans Day and Memorial Day. It's also open by appointment. Admission is free. Call Dann Spear, (916) 742-3090.

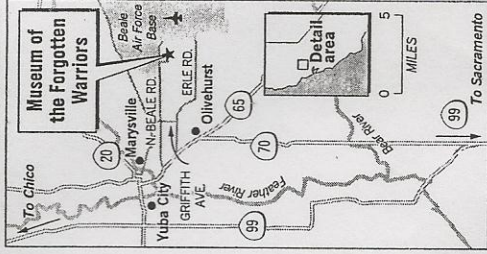
ACCESSIBILITY

Museum is on ground floor, but wheelchair users may have trouble turning around inside.

DONATIONS

Those who wish to donate pictures, information, patches or anything about any war may call Dann Spear or write to him at: 5865 A Road, Marysville, CA 95901-8017.

— *Cathryn Domrose*



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of our souls," looking at a pin helmet donated by a nurse who unofficially flew helicopters, marvelling at the youth of the faces in the photos.

"After a bad day at work," he says, "I'll come out here and talk to old friends."

MUSEUM OF THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

Dedicated To Served In The



Those Who Viet-Nam War

Dann Spear
Curator/Founder
5865 "A" Road
Marysville, CA 95901
(530) 742-3090

Open Thurs. Eves.
7:00 - 10:00 p.m.
Veterans and Memorial Days
Also The First Sat. Each Month
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.