

By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

Print Page

November 03, 2016 10:06AM

## Vietnam veterans honored at traveling wall

The traveling wall was on display Oct. 26 through Oct. 30.

Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

Lt. Gen. Michael Lundy, commanding general of the Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, was the keynote speaker for the opening ceremony welcoming the American Veterans Traveling Tribute's Traveling Wall Oct. 27 at Ray Miller Park in Leavenworth.

The wall, an 80 percent scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., arrived in Leavenworth Oct. 26 and was on display through Oct. 30. Each day featured speakers and music.

Col. Andrew Shoffner, Fort Leavenworth Garrison commander, said Lundy's address brought the significance of the event into focus for everyone.

"Today, on these historic grounds, we take time to pay homage to the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that have gone before us," Lundy said. "These brave men and women paid the full measure on the field of battle to preserve this great nation and secure the freedoms and liberties that generations of Americans have enjoyed since our founding. And, most importantly, we'd want them to know that their sacrifice was not in vain and we're not going to let them down — because they made us who we are — a standing example to the people of the world that freedom comes with a heavy price. And the best way we can honor their memory, is for us — their legacy — to continue to serve with the character and commitment they exemplified and the honorable example they provided us all."

In addition to active-duty personnel and local officials, many service organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion were represented.

"We have the honor of serving as the host for the opening ceremony," said Steve Davis, commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 56. "Each night this week a different veterans service organization will serve as host. The color guard is made up of members from local VFWs. Some are from Holton, one from Topeka and another from Leavenworth."

Vietnam veterans, military retirees and active-duty service members also attended, including Thomas Rodriguez, a local veteran who served two combat tours in Vietnam.

"I personally have seven brothers (in arms) on the wall, and they are buried at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery," Rodriguez said. "I first went to Vietnam at the age of 19 years old in 1966 with the 1st Logistical Command. During my second tour I was with the 6th Battalion, 31st Infantry, 9th Infantry Division. And, I also worked part time with the Air Force and the Navy. It warms my heart to see this many people here becoming educated about Vietnam."

Vietnam ranks fourth in the number of total U.S. war deaths behind the Civil War, World War II and World War I. To further illustrate, the Department of Veterans Affairs cites figures that reflect that there was one death for every 58 who deployed to Vietnam from 1964-1975.

"It means a lot personally for brothers in arms, who proceeded me in service, to have their sacrifice recognized," said Steven Hoffpauer, a retired Army colonel and currently a Department of the Army civilian employee with the Center for Army Leadership. "We have now moved forward and have had multiple generations serve since those who did during the Vietnam era. It's a brotherhood. And thus, to have one recognized, I hope means to recognize all."

Among the several hundred people who visited the memorial exhibit on the first day and attended the opening ceremony was Carl Plaskett, a veterans service representative for the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs.

"We have a number of offices located throughout the state and at the various veterans hospitals. It's an honor to serve our veterans, and it is especially wonderful to attend events like this one whereby we can properly welcome our Vietnam veterans home," Plaskett said.



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Navy veteran Richard Painter, of Piper, Kan., looks for the names of men he served with aboard the USS Oriskany in 1966 at the American Veterans Traveling Tribute's Traveling Wall, a replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., Oct. 28 at Ray Miller Park in Leavenworth. Painter said who knew several of the service members who died on the USS Oriskany in a fire Oct. 26, 1966 — including Chaplain (Lt. Cmdr.) William Garrity Jr. and pilot Cmdr. Harry Juntilla, whose names he found on the wall. Painter said he departed the aircraft carrier about three weeks before the fatal fire. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp