

*Inscribed on the back of the Vietnam War Monument:*

IN MARCH 1965 MARINES ARRIVED IN SOUTH VIETNAM SIGNALING THE BEGINNING OF AMERICA'S GROUND WAR. PRIOR TO THIS THE U.S. HAD SENT SPECIAL FORCES TO TEACH COUNTERGUERRILLA TACTICS TO SOUTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS. THE LAST U.S. TROOPS WERE WITHDRAWN ON MARCH 29, 1973 IN ACCORDANCE WITH A PEACE TREATY SIGNED IN JANUARY 1973.

2,709,918 UNITED STATES FORCES SERVED IN VIETNAM OF WHICH 75% WERE VOLUNTEERS. THE AVERAGE AGE WAS 22. IN A YEAR'S TOUR OF DUTY, AN INFANTRYMAN WOULD SEE ABOUT 240 DAYS OF COMBAT.

THIS WAS A JUNGLE WAR. TO BE STATIONED IN VIETNAM, WHETHER AS GRUNTS, SOLDIERS, AIRMEN OR PART OF THE SUPPLY LINE, WAS TO BE EXPOSED NOT ONLY TO THE DANGERS OF WAR BUT THE ENVIRONMENT.

VIETNAM HAD TWO SEASONS - HOT AND HUMID AND HOT AND MONSOON. THE AMERICAN FIGHTING MAN WOULD BE CONSTANTLY DRENCHED IF NOT FROM THE MONSOONS THEN FROM THE HEAT AND THE UNRELENTING HUMIDITY. PATROLS HAD TO SWIM RIVERS AND WADE THROUGH STAGNANT SWAMPS AND RICE PADDIES; THEN THEY WOULD STOP TO REMOVE LEECHES.

PATROLS HAD TO HACK THROUGH JUNGLE VINES, BAMBOO AND RAZOR SHARP ELEPHANT GRASS. THEY WERE ALWAYS WATCHING FOR THE UNSEEN SNIPER; PITS WITH PUNJI STICKS OR HIDDEN TRIP WIRES WITH GRENADES OR OTHER BOOBY TRAPS.

THE COUNTRY HAD TICKS, MOSQUITOES, GIANT CENTIPEDES, RATS, FIRE ANTS, CROCODILES, POISON DART FROGS, TIGERS AND 30 KINDS OF VENOMOUS SNAKES THAT COULD INJURY OR KILL.

THERE WERE THE DISEASES: DYSENTERY, TUBERCULOSIS, RABIES, TYPHUS, HEAT PROSTRATION, PNEUMONIA, DENGUE FEVER, YELLOW FEVER, MALARIA AND LEPROSY.

IT TOOK SIX OR MORE MEN TO SUPPORT EVERY MAN OUT IN THE FIELD. THOSE THAT RAN CONVOYS WOULD WONDER WHY 25 MPH SPEED LIMITS WERE REQUIRED THROUGH ENEMY TERRITORY. SOME OFFICERS THAT LEAD THE 50 TO 200 TRUCK CONVOYS OVER

DIRT ROADS WOULD PUT THE PEDAL DOWN TO PRESENT A MORE DIFFICULT TARGET AND GRUDGINGLY TAKE THE SPEEDING TICKET. AFTER ALL WHAT COULD THEY DO, "SEND ME TO THE NAM"?

THEN THERE WERE THE ENEMIES OF FEAR AND ANGUISH. THE FEAR OF COWARDICE COULD INCAPACITATE HIM IN BATTLE AND GET HIM OR ANOTHER KILLED. THE ANGUISH OF WATCHING A BUDDY DIE AND BEING UNABLE TO HELP BECAUSE HE MUST CONTINUE TO FIGHT. TO KEEP HIS SANITY HE OFTEN TOLD HIMSELF AND OTHERS "IT DON'T MEAN NOTHIN."

THESE WERE THE CONDITIONS THAT THE AMERICAN FIGHTING MAN LIVED IN AND FOUGHT. STILL HE SLOGGED ON TICKING OFF THE DAYS ON A CALENDAR UNTIL HIS TIME IN HELL WOULD BE OVER.

GENERAL WILLIAM C. WESTMORELAND, COMMANDER OF AMERICAN FORCES IN VIETNAM, CALLED HIM "THE FINEST FIGHTING MAN OUR COUNTRY HAS EVER PRODUCED".

EARLY IN 1975 NORTH VIETNAM VIOLATED THE PEACE TREATY AND INVADED THE SOUTH. WITH U.S. SUPPORT WITHHELD, SOUTH VIETNAM FELL. THE WAR FOR SOUTH VIETNAM OFFICIALLY ENDED ON APRIL 30, 1975.

UNITED STATES FORCES:

KILLED: 58,148

WOUNDED: 303,704 OF WHICH 153,329 REQUIRED HOSPITALIZATION

PRISONERS OF WAR: 591 RETURNED HOME ALIVE

OVER 600 REMAINS HAVE BEEN FOUND SINCE 1973

MISSING IN ACTION: OVER 1,500