



GUEST OPINION – October 9, 2013 – Dan Heid

## Joint war memorial would fit in Auburn

Recently, we have seen in the Auburn Reporter letters and guest editorials speaking for or against a proposed joint Vietnam veterans memorial.

Some such letters say a majority of Auburn VFW Post members oppose the memorial, and say it is causing a division among veterans. There is a division. Some support it, others don't. I am a member of Auburn VFW Post 1741 and I support the memorial. Veterans from outside the VFW also support the memorial.

Those "against" the memorial said things like – it should not be located in Veterans Memorial Park; it would not apply to all veterans; it would cost public money; there should be no private monuments in City parks; it is dividing veterans; Vietnam was a waste of time; and the memorial would remind Vietnam veterans of things they want to forget.

My responses are as follows:

1. Veteran memorials ought to be located in Veterans Memorial Park. But if it is that important to keep Veterans Memorial Park for American veterans only, put this memorial in another park. Unfortunately, the VFW apparently opposes it going into any park.

2. Although the proposed memorial would not apply to all veterans, why not support something that is valuable to some veterans?

3. The memorial would be built with privately donated money. City costs would be minimal, things like mowing the grass around the memorial.

4. There are already private monuments in City parks, such as park benches and trees installed and dedicated to loved ones. Larger monuments in parks can always be approved by the City Council.

5. There may be a division among veterans about the memorial, but some veterans would welcome it. The memorial intends to do two things of value: express gratitude for service in Vietnam, and point out that the people of South Vietnam wanted us there, thus saying thank you and showing a legitimate purpose for being there.

6. Suggesting that Vietnam was a waste of time is hard for me to swallow. We were sent there to help the South Vietnamese preserve freedoms. In Vietnam, I was a field combat corpsman (medic) serving with the U.S. Marines of First Reconnaissance Battalion out of Da Nang, Vietnam. We had some tough tasks, but knowing that while we were facing enemy fire, folks back home were protesting against the war, made it even tougher.

I will never forget, when I returned home from overseas, being "greeted" at the airport with anti-war signs, hostile jeers, insults and profanity. Unfortunately, America abandoned the South Vietnamese much as it did the U.S. troops who served in Vietnam. Remember, anti-war protesters said the people of South Vietnam did not want us there. Yet, think how desperate people would have to be to leave everybody and everything behind, departing in over-crowded boats heading for who-knows-where. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese boat-people died trying to escape Vietnam after the fall of South Vietnam.

7. A recent guest editorial suggested that Vietnam veterans may oppose the memorial because of guilt they feel for horrid things they did, and because it would remind them of atrocities and their guilt and shame. If American troops did shameful things, shame on them. But I submit atrocities would have been very, very few in number. I certainly saw nothing like that.

Instead, I felt proud, I am still proud, to have served in Vietnam and proud of the guys I served with. We tried to do things about which we could be proud. Some of my fondest memories of Vietnam are of Med Caps, where some

Marines and Corpsmen (when not out on patrol) would go into rural villages with medical supplies to help people who probably never, ever saw a doctor. Their gratitude is something I will never forget and will always cherish. That is certainly not something that gave us feelings of guilt or shame.

This memorial would fit in Auburn, a city that strongly supports all veterans.

*Dan Heid is a member and judge advocate (parliamentarian) of Auburn VFW Post 1741. He also is the City attorney for Auburn, a position he has held for the past 12 years. Heid served as a Navy corpsman (medic) in Vietnam during 1970-71.*