

GUEST OPINION - October 18, 2013 – Lan Phan Jones

Time to heal the rift, support war memorial

Thank you for publishing letters regarding the proposed joint American-Vietnamese War Memorial. Most letters have been from American veterans, so I feel it is important to share the Vietnamese refugee perspective. I am Lan Phan Jones, daughter of a South Vietnamese soldier, and Co-President of the American-Vietnamese War Memorial Alliance. I want Auburn residents to understand why we are proposing this memorial and what it means to Vietnamese refugees in this community.

First, the joint memorial honors the 58,000 American and 250,000 South Vietnamese and allied soldiers who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom in Vietnam. They deserve to be remembered and honored. The controversy surrounding the Vietnam War does not diminish their sacrifice or heroism. Contrary to Ron Jacobson's letter to the Reporter, there are good precedents for recognizing the South Vietnamese. The Korean War memorial in Olympia displays the South Korean Flag and inscriptions in the Korean language. The citizens of Texas, Florida, Kansas, California, and Australia have built joint American-Vietnamese memorials, which can be viewed on our website at: <http://honorvietnamvets.org>.

To the surviving American and Allied veterans we Vietnamese want to say "thank you" for supporting South Vietnam's struggle for freedom and democracy and against communist control. You are heroes to the South Vietnamese. Jesse Jose's letter to the Reporter says he does not want to be reminded of his Vietnam War service; he says the proposed memorial stirs feelings of shame and guilt rather than pride. Most Vietnam veterans served with honor and pride, and no Vietnam veteran should feel shame or guilt for serving their country. For those who regret some personal action we have a special message. You are still loved for your willingness to serve. The war took your youth and innocence, and we honor that sacrifice. We are sorry for what you have been through. Nobody can change what happened to American and South Vietnamese veterans – we both lost. We cannot give you back your youth, pay back your service, or bring the dead back to life, but we can show our gratitude. We want your children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and future generations to be proud that you fought for freedom in a far off land. Please, let your mind be open to grieve with us and accept our thanks. You deserve a peaceful heart. God bless.

The joint memorial is a lesson to the Auburn community and future generations. We Vietnamese know the price of freedom. We do not have a lot of words because our English is limited. When we display the yellow flag with three red stripes we need no words. That flag means we value freedom and we honor those willing to fight and die for freedom. And it means we are proud of Vietnam War soldiers. We are not defeated; because the love of freedom cannot be extinguished from the human heart. As the US Declaration of Independence says, we believe that we are endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When we display the yellow and three red stripes flag we let the world know that we are willing to fight and die for these rights when necessary. The memorial honors all Americans and Allies who joined in that struggle.

VFW Post 1741 Commander Frank Bannister, Jesse Jose and Ron Jacobson have complained that the joint memorial is dividing the community. It is true that the proposal has stirred strong emotions and debate. But it is a healthy dialogue touching wounds that must be aired to heal. Out of the difference of opinion comes a better understanding. Whether you supported or opposed the Vietnam War, I hope we can agree that those who served deserve our gratitude. We should not let the bitter emotions of a few prevent a joint memorial to honor all Vietnam veterans. The real division is created by the VFW's opposition to the memorial which excludes the South Vietnamese community and makes us feel misunderstood, abandoned, and betrayed by our brothers in arms.

I am really sad when Ron Jacobson compared South Vietnamese to German and Japanese. My father and the South Vietnamese soldiers fought side by side with American soldiers in the Vietnam War. The joint memorial recognizes soldiers who fought with Americans in the Vietnam War. German and Japanese soldiers fought against Americans in World War II. I want Americans to understand the difference.

Please support the proposed American-Vietnamese War Memorial. It is time to honor our Vietnam veterans while many are still alive. It is time to heal the rift that divided Americans over the Vietnam War and unite in thanking all those who served.

Lan Phan Jones
Daughter of a South Vietnamese soldier