



Elder Lance B. Wickman

The Wall: Reflections on the Legacy of Vietnam

Elder Lance B. Wickman

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It is an honor for me to deliver this keynote address on this Veterans Day program. This is particularly so because today the *Saints at War Project*, sponsored by the department of Religious Education at BYU, unveils its work with respect to those Latter-day Saints who served in Vietnam. As one so numbered, it is a *signal* honor, for I feel that I am speaking on behalf of all such who fought or served there. To my former comrades in arms I say: I pray earnestly that I may represent you well here today.

Veterans Day is a day of remembrance. It is a day to remember all veterans who have served in America's wars. All have sacrificed; some have sacrificed profoundly. The ranks of twentieth century soldiers are thinning with every passing year as the vets of the Second World War and Korea respond increasingly to that heavenly trumpet that "never calls retreat." Even Vietnam vets are passing beyond this earthly pale at an accelerating rate en route to the "mansions of the Lord." Their places are filled daily with returning soldiers from America's twenty-*first* century wars. It was Plato who declared that "only the dead have seen the end of war."¹ Scriptural declara-

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tions of “wars and rumors of wars” in the last days offer grim assurance that there will be no permanent thinning of veteran ranks anytime soon.

So, with the turning of the seasons we gather each year on the 11th of November to *remember* . . . to remember and to pay our respects to those who have served and, especially, to those who have fallen. Today, I would like to focus my comments on those who served—and especially those who fell—in Vietnam. I have entitled these remarks “The Wall—Reflections on the Legacy of Vietnam.”

The Wall

My own remembrances stretch back almost half a century now, more than forty-seven years, to be exact. As a newly commissioned lieutenant of infantry on that fateful June commissioning day in 1964, Vietnam was a distant and mysterious place on the far side of the planet that one could read about only by turning to snippets of coverage on the back pages of newspapers and periodicals. Then, not six weeks later came the Gulf of Tonkin “incident” that led to a Congressional resolution of the same name. Suddenly, “Vietnam” was catapulted from the back page to the front page. Overnight, a word that virtually had been in no one’s vocabulary became a household word. And for me and hundreds of thousands of other young Americans, “Vietnam” would become the proverbial “elephant in the room” for the rest of our lives. Profoundly affected by the so-called “Vietnam experience,” none of us would ever be the same again.

One cannot visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC without being intensely moved. Known simply as “The Wall,” the memorial is both an imposing and a deeply spiritual place. No heroically posed statues of soldiers raising flags, no outsize images of commanders with lofty visage mounted on spirited horses, so typical of other monuments to wartime military service, The Wall is merely a list of names. But no ordinary list. Panel after panel of names, column upon column, row upon row of names at present, 58,267 of them—each having given the “last full measure of devotion” for his country.

Most were young men, some mere boys, when life was torn from their breasts. The circumstances of their deaths were largely ignoble. They died in the putrefying muck of a rice paddy or the oppressive green rot and humidity of a jungle expanse. Their remains were returned home—if they returned at all—in black body bags and sterile steel coffins to a nation preoccupied with the controversy that swirled around that war. Few beyond family and loved ones noted their return, as few noted *our* return. And so, like victims of a colossal plane crash, their names have simply been listed on The Wall.



Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC — “The Wall.”

But there is a serenity, a deep sense of nobility, that permeates the aura surrounding The Wall. Reading down the list of names—recognizing name after name after name of those who were once comrades in arms—one is struck by the spirit of sacrifice, of consecration, that The Wall represents. These were lads who loved the sunrise and sunset’s glow. Football and movies and cars and girl friends and . . . *vitality* . . . had been the substance of their lives. But all of this they laid on the altar of the nation when it called. The conflict was distant, the politics confusing. Many of these dead may never have really understood why they were fighting. They knew only that their country had called. And they answered. No escape to Canada. No mob rants. The war trumpet had sounded. And they listened and heeded; and, ultimately, they gave all—in very deed, “the last full measure of devotion.”

All of this is what The Wall represents. Perhaps that is why it may be the nation’s most beloved, most honored monument to the Fallen.

And so on this Veterans Day—on this Day of Remembrance—I wish to speak not only to you, the veterans who yet live, but to our former comrades assembled in solemn and hallowed ranks beyond the veil. To you and to them, I offer my salute, as I offer some personal reflections on the *Legacy of Vietnam*. It is a legacy to the nation. It is a legacy to the Church. And, in a

deeply personal and intimate sense, it is the legacy of each veteran who served there to those generations who have followed and will yet follow.

A Legacy to the Nation

We who live in such relative proximity to the Second World War—the last so-called “good war”—may not realize that virtually all of the nation’s other wars have been controversial among our citizens. Most began with some measure of enthusiasm. But enthusiasm quickly faded as coffins began returning the remains of our soldiers. Even the Revolution, which lives in a rosy-hued and honored memory today, divided the citizens of the Thirteen Colonies among loyalists and patriots. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was vilified by many in the North who wished only peace with the seceding South. And, notwithstanding the ubiquitous displays of red, white, and blue bunting, and the rousing patriotic melodies of George M. Cohen in 1917, there still were many who wondered why America was involving itself in Europe’s war as General John J. Pershing lead the “doughboys” of the American expeditionary force “over there.”

Yet the war in Vietnam took the nation to new depths of controversy, and there are many reasons for the controversy. Time permits the briefest of references to only some of them. America was some two decades into the chill of the Cold War. A nuclear standoff between East and West, complicated by a burgeoning “Third World” crop of undeveloped and developing nations in Latin America; and Asia and Africa emerging from nineteenth-century European colonialism, created fertile soil for Soviet expansionism. This expansionism by the East was met by a web of alliances in the West. And both sides competed for the affections of the uncommitted nations with butter as well as guns—“foreign aid,” as it came to be known.

Cold War geopolitics made for very strange bedfellows, among them partnerships of convenience with corrupt dynasties and dictatorships that held themselves out for purchase by the highest bidder, East or West. One such was the Diem regime of South Vietnam, where in the 1950s we began sending military “advisers” to assist the South Vietnamese army in fighting a communist insurgency that became known as the Viet Cong. The United States made such bargains under the conventional logic of the time that “containment” or “deterrence” of Soviet ambitions was the nation’s highest foreign policy objective. The fear was that if one such “domino” in the Third World fell to the East, a long file of other “dominoes” would similarly topple. Vietnam has been described as “where the domino fell.”²²

As if all this wasn’t complicated enough, it was the sixties. The dream of “Camelot” had been dashed on a late November day in 1963 when an

assassin's bullet felled President John F. Kennedy in his open limousine in Dallas. The Civil Rights revolution of the decade led to racial unrest. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Governor Ross Barnett, Huey Newton and Governor George Wallace are only a few of the names of those who fueled the controversy.

And then, on August 2, 1964, into those stormy seas of geopolitical and racial controversy roared three North Vietnamese Navy patrol boats, which attacked the U.S.S. *Maddox* in the Tonkin Gulf. The result was a near-decade long descent into the maelstrom of the Vietnam War for the United States of America. More than fifty-eight thousand combat deaths and a geometric multiple of that number in combat casualties later, we withdrew from Vietnam, only to watch haplessly as the anemic forces of the corrupt South Vietnamese regime succumbed to the Army of Communist North Vietnam.

And what for?! Was our nation's involvement in Vietnam worth the time, treasure, tears and, most of all, the tragedy in individual lives that it cost?! The overwhelming verdict of contemporary historians and political scientists has been in the negative. Pundits on the left and on the right—fueled by a virtually united media—have competed with one another to decry what they maintain was a failed policy and, in the estimation of some, even a failed national morality.

Largely forgotten in all this hue and cry has been the soldier—the veteran—who has borne the burden of the battle and who now in body, mind and even soul bears the scars. His country called. He answered. He fought. He suffered. And in many cases he suffers still. Was it really all for naught?

The panoramic sweep of history tends to suffer from a certain myopia when viewed at too-close a range. This is especially true when immediate events are immersed in controversy. Often, only the passage of time allows a clear picture. Could that eventually turn out to be true of Vietnam, as well? Will future generations of historians, untainted by the vitriol that splashed from the boiling cauldron of the 1960s and with a view unclouded by the fog that invariably surrounds contemporary events, have a different answer to that question—was it worth it? No one can say for sure. And certainly in offering these personal reflections it is not my purpose today to make a political judgment about the War in Vietnam.

But it is well to note that even in our times there is another perspective. Not every present-day commentator has regarded the “loss” in Vietnam as a strategic defeat. Viewing that contest from a broader perspective—as a long “battle” in an even longer Cold War—one such observer has described Vietnam as “the necessary war.”³ Michael Lind, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, has written: “Only now is it possible to view the Cold War as a whole and to evaluate the U.S. strategy of global containment that

led to the U.S. wars in defense of South Korea and South Vietnam.”⁴ Lind has also written:

Once the Vietnam War is viewed in the context of the Cold War, it looks less like a tragic error than like a battle that could hardly be avoided. The Cold War was fought as a siege in Europe and as a series of duels elsewhere in the world—chiefly, in Korea and Indochina Had the United States repeatedly refused to take part in proxy-war duels with the Soviet Union, and with China during its anti-American phase, it seems likely that there would have been a dramatic pro-Soviet realignment in world politics, no matter how many missiles rusted in their silos in the American West and no matter how many U.S. troops remained stationed in West Germany. . . . The United States, then, was fated to [either] forfeit the Cold War, or [alternatively] to fight in difficult conditions on battlefields that its enemies chose.”⁵

So there it is—a contemporary view that Vietnam was less about “winning” territory than it was about the United States demonstrating to friend and foe alike that it would meet its commitments and that it would not back away from Soviet aggression. What matters in war ultimately is not the outcome of a particular “battle,” but that the war itself ends in victory, as the Cold War most certainly did for the United States.

Will that be the eventual verdict of future generations of historians? We cannot know. Time only can pass that judgment. It is enough today, on this Veterans Day when we honor those living and dead who fought in Vietnam, to simply offer a perspective that the *cause* was worthy and undertaken in the best interest of our country *as seen by the nation’s leaders in the crucible of that perplexing time*.

Those who served, those who fought, and especially those who died were willing to offer themselves in that crucible in order that America remain true to its lodestar of “liberty and justice for all.” Nobler than feats of bravery under fire is the quiet valor of those who stepped forward when their country called, even as many others decried the endeavor. Regardless of eventual political judgments about the war, the nobility of that response by these citizen soldiers, I believe, is the legacy of Vietnam to the nation. I turn now to some reflections about the legacy of Vietnam to the Church.

A Legacy to the Church

October 1966 found our infantry battalion deep in the jungle where we spent most of our time. I don’t remember quite how, but on that operation I learned that Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, then of the Quorum of the Twelve, was to be paying a visit to Vietnam. His plan was to hold a series of meetings with Latter-day Saint servicemen, commencing with the northern quadrant of South Vietnam at Da Nang; and then making several stops down the length

of the country until he reached Saigon, where the last such meeting would be held at the Caravelle Hotel. That last stop was closest to our unit's area of operations.

There were three of us in our battalion of some five hundred men who were Latter-day Saints. Besides me, there was a sergeant-squad leader in our rifle company and a medic in one of the other rifle companies. Since I was a lieutenant and the senior in rank, I went to the battalion commander to see whether the three of us could be excused from combat duty for twenty-four hours so that we could attend this special meeting. To my delight and surprise, he agreed! So the three of us "caught a hop" on an ammunition resupply helicopter back to our base camp, where we cleaned up and put on fresh uniforms. We then found another ride on a helicopter flying to Saigon. We arrived at the meeting site atop the Caravelle Hotel just as the meeting was beginning. It was October 30, 1966.

Present at the meeting were about two hundred LDS service personnel, a few Army nurses and Red Cross workers, and a handful of Vietnamese converts. Accompanying Elder Hinckley were Elder Marion D. Hanks and President Keith E. Garner of the Southern Far East Mission.

It was a wonderful meeting! Besides the General Authorities present and President Garner, I remember that a Vietnamese sister gave a short talk; and the first Vietnamese to be ordained an elder offered the benediction. Elder Hinckley was the concluding speaker. He gave a memorable address, as he always did. As he concluded his remarks, he told us that before he left Salt Lake City, President David O. McKay, who was then the president of the Church, called him to his office. President McKay advised Elder Hinckley that if he felt so impressed he was authorized to dedicate that land of Vietnam to the preaching of the gospel. Standing before us on that sultry October day, Elder Hinckley said, "I feel so impressed."

Then, as we bowed our heads, this great Apostle offered a transcendently beautiful prayer of dedication. A Spirit descended over that small congregation that is impossible to describe. I can only say that it was one of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life. Even today, I cannot think of it without tears welling in my eyes. I remember thinking that in the midst of that terrible war where Satan's vices were so evident on every hand, somehow the Lord had found a way to do His work.

Full-time missionaries could not be sent in any significant way. Combat circumstances prevented an organized proclamation of the gospel across the land. But there in that small congregation and dotted across the landscape of South Vietnam in dozens of encampments were LDS boys. Though we wore the uniform of our country, more significantly we bore the holy priesthood of God. *We* were the missionaries! *We* were the ones whom the Lord had called at

that time to bring the gospel to the peoples of Vietnam. Our efforts were small, even when the results are viewed cumulatively. But the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ had arrived among the people of Vietnam. If the “bridgehead” was small, it was a bridgehead nonetheless.

“Bridgehead”—that is the word President Hinckley used to describe the first arrival of the restored gospel in Vietnam. He was deeply moved by his experiences on that trip. Indeed, I can tell you from personal conversation with him decades later when he was President of the Church that even then those experiences brought a tear to his eye and huskiness to his voice as he reminisced of them. He first spoke from the pulpit of the Tabernacle about them a year and a half after his first visit to Vietnam. He entitled his address “A Silver Thread in the Dark Tapestry of War.” I quote briefly from those moving remarks that deserve a full reading:

Notwithstanding the evil and the tragedy [of the war], I see a silver thread shining through the dark and bloody tapestry of conflict. I see the finger of the Lord plucking some good from the evil designs of the adversary. I see coming out of this conflict, as I have witnessed in other conflicts in Asia, an enlargement of the Lord’s program. . . . I make no defense of the war from this pulpit. There is no simple answer. The problems are complex almost beyond comprehension. I seek only to call your attention to that silver thread, small but radiant with hope, shining through the dark tapestry of war—namely, the establishment of a bridgehead, small and frail now; but which somehow, under the mysterious ways of God, will be strengthened, and from which someday shall spring forth a great work affecting for good the lives of large numbers of our Father’s children who live in that part of the world. Of that I have a certain faith.⁶

It will soon be a half century since those events. The decades have flowed past like a river of time. President Gordon B. Hinckley has moved beyond us to his next ministry. We here assembled who served in Vietnam have grown gray. Many of those early Vietnamese converts, escaping when their nation collapsed, have made a new home in the United States. Their grandchildren represent a third generation of Vietnamese in the Church. Some of this generation have served as missionaries and now contribute significantly in their wards and stakes and communities. In their lives, we see the beginning of the fulfillment of that prayer of dedication uttered on a hotel roof some forty-five years ago.

But I am pleased to report that there is more, much more, that is happening in Vietnam itself. With the war long since over, friendship has replaced hostility. The United States has become Vietnam’s largest and most significant trading partner by a wide margin. The streets of its cities are bustling with a new generation that know of the war only from their history books and the tales of their aging forbears, just as is the case in this country.

And the Church? I am happy to tell you that the Church enjoys warm and cordial relations with the government of Vietnam. We now have a measure of official recognition. Two large, dynamic and growing congregations of Latter-day Saints can be found in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (which we knew as Saigon!). As reported in the *Church News*, Elder Quentin L. Cook—another Apostle—met last spring in Hanoi with senior government officials, discussing the further regularizing of relations between the Church and the government.⁷

We look to the day, hopefully not far distant, when missionaries will once again walk the highways and byways of Vietnam. But this time, they will not wear khaki or olive drab. They will wear white shirts and black name tags identifying them officially as servants of the Lord. And, as seems likely, many of these young men will be the grandsons of those who *first* heard and embraced the gospel in Vietnam—that courageous *first* generation of converts, who received the gladsome message from that *first* generation of missionaries. And in those missionary ranks may also be the posterity of that *first* generation of “missionaries,” who came clothed in the military uniform of our country.

That, my dear friends, I submit is the legacy of Vietnam to the Church.

A Personal Legacy

I come now to what is perhaps the most difficult and challenging part of the message I wish to deliver. I speak of the *personal legacy* that each who has served in Vietnam has drawn from the experience and offers to those who will follow. I say “difficult and challenging” because for each of us who fought or otherwise served there, that legacy is intensely intimate and personal. Like you, over the years I have encountered many of our brethren who are “Vietnam vets.” I have counseled and shared experiences with some. My heart aches for those who are yet haunted by the ghosts that screech and yowl from the dark and cobwebbed corners of memory. To this day, I am moved by the image of an aging veteran in faded fatigue jacket, hair and beard stringy and unkempt, weeping upon the ground before a pathetic bundle of wilting flowers placed at the base of The Wall. Like all wars—but particularly obvious with this one—the conflict has left in its wake the detritus, the human flotsam and jetsam, of broken bodies and broken souls.

For others, the personal legacy of Vietnam is represented by a handsome, youthful face smiling back from a dusty photograph or fading with the years in the mental snapshots lining the corridors of memory. It is the image of a husband, a son, a father never met, who went, who served but who did not return. Yes, the times and seasons have rolled on as they inevitably must. But

for those who have lost a beloved son or brother or the husband of her youth, time will be forever frozen on that fateful day of the last parting.

It is not my purpose today to dwell on such sorrows. But I acknowledge them and pay reverent tribute to them before sharing some personal reflections of my own. My course, though difficult, has been different. In speaking of it, it is my sincerest wish not to be other than profoundly respectful of the experiences, memories and legacies of each and all who have likewise served.

President James E. Faust was a beloved friend and mentor. On one occasion, he asked me what I thought of my experiences in Vietnam. After some reflection, I responded that I would not repeat them . . . but that I would not trade them either.

I served twice in Vietnam, once as an infantry platoon leader and once as an adviser to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. I first arrived in country in early 1966 with the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry, of the 25th Infantry Division. Trained as an Army Ranger, I was platoon leader of the 1st platoon, Charlie Company. Departure had been difficult. We had been stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Pat, my bride of two years, and I lived in near idyllic circumstances in a small bungalow on the North Shore—literally!—of Oahu. The flight that was to carry me to the war zone was scheduled to depart at the unearthly hour of two a.m. from Hickam Air Force Base near Pearl Harbor! Not wanting her to be traveling home alone from the airbase at that hour, particularly under such circumstances, I had arranged for a military friend in our ward to drive me. He was to pick me up at eleven p.m.

All that long evening, Pat and I just sat on the sofa in our little home listening as the surf rhythmically washed upon the sand and receded. Our feelings were so profound that we could not speak. Finally, the dreaded hour arrived. I donned my uniform, closed my duffle bag and took her in my arms one last time before stepping through the door, closing it behind me. One of my most vivid reflections is of that door that now separated us. I wondered if I had just seen her for the last time. It was truly night.

But then, something wondrous happened! As my friend and I drove through the darkness, the memory of our sealing in the Los Angeles Temple was ignited. I saw her across the altar of the temple, our hands joined as our souls also became one . . . forever. In that brilliant flash of inspired memory, the blackness was driven away. In that moment, I knew that no matter what happened, no one could take her from me. That feeling of belonging to one another remains with me to this very day.

In my experience, the life of the combat soldier can best be described as miserable anxiety. Heat, humidity, insects, snakes, snipers, *punji* pits, booby traps, the ever-present threat of ambush, mortar and rocket attacks—all these and more are the common circumstances of a war in the jungle. As with some

of you, I endured them all. Death stalked every jungle clearing, every tree line, every stand of bamboo, every bend in a jungle trail. In my mind's eye, I still see the lifeless bodies of friend and foe. I hear the screams of the wounded. I see terrible, life-altering wounds impossible to describe, blood everywhere. The Civil War general William T. Sherman once said that "war is hell!"⁸ He knew what he was talking about.

But for me, in the midst of that hell, I found a glimpse of heaven. I found it in the Book of Mormon. For the first time, I became acquainted with Mormon and Moroni. Before my combat service, I had been a missionary. I had read the Book of Mormon, including the so-called "war chapters" in Alma and in Mormon, multiple times. But now, I *experienced* them. I came to *know* Captain Moroni, and Mormon and his son, also named Moroni. As Mormon described combat as "dreadful" and "the work of death," I knew exactly what he meant (Alma 43:37). Even more important under the circumstances, I *knew that they knew* what I was experiencing! For the first time, I gained an appreciation for the war chapters. I realized that they had been written for me and for every other Mormon soldier who would be drawn into the wars of the last days. I learned from these great soldier-prophets that one could be a combat soldier and still be free from the blood and stains of war.

I drew great reassurance for the welfare of my own soul from these magnificent passages (among others):

And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery; Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people. Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ. . . . Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men (Alma 48:11–13, 17).

To this day, when I gaze at the image of the Angel Moroni atop one of our temples I remember that this Angel of the Restoration also was once a soldier—a soldier whose own combat experiences were so terrible as to cause mine to pale by comparison.

We were supposedly in Vietnam on a one year tour of duty. But for the combat soldier, it might as well have been for eternity, because that is what it felt like. In November 1966, our battalion had been in the jungle for several weeks. We had returned to our base camp for some needed "R&R." It was a Saturday night. Having taken our first showers in many days, we were sitting around in our tents cleaning our weapons and listening to music on the

Armed Forces Radio Network. Suddenly, an urgent message crackled over our battalion radio net. Another battalion, still out in the jungle, was being overrun by a large enemy force. We were needed to go right then to the rescue.

I had learned that in the combat zone there is a constant sense of anxiety, like static, that was always in one's viscera. But this night, with that sudden urgent message, my sense of anxiety blossomed into a dark sense of foreboding. Yet there was no time to find a quiet place for prayer. No time for fasting. There was only time to grab helmet and rifle and move out.

As I did, though, I uttered a silent prayer in my heart. No sooner did I offer that prayer than there came to my mind—quite literally as a still, small voice—the words of a passage of scripture. You will be familiar with it. It is found in the book of Proverbs, the third chapter: *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”* (Prov. 3:5–6). With those words there settled over me a deep feeling of peace. I felt the Spirit nearby.

Events moved rapidly. We remained in the jungle for another extended period. Finally, it was the last day of this particular operation. We were scheduled to return to our base. I was riding in an armored personnel carrier through a lightly forested area of jungle when my vehicle rolled over an enormous enemy land mine, command-detonated by enemy soldiers nearby. The force of the explosion was so great that the engine was blown from the vehicle together with its tracks and road wheels. Everyone inside, including me, was wounded. But no one died.

And in the instant following the blast there again came to my mind that same still, small voice and those same comforting words, *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”* These are reflections—reminiscences—that were in my mind when I responded as I did to President Faust's question. No, indeed I would not care to repeat the Vietnam experience. But it is also true that Vietnam was for me, as I believe it was for each who served there, a defining experience. In my case, I treasure—and would not trade—those defining experiences that have had the convincing power of God, His love and the reality of the Restoration.

My prayer is that, as each of us peers into the river of time upon our own customized Vietnam experience, he may see glimmering in the depths the nuggets of truth, testimony and tender mercies that are his own personal legacy.

In Memoriam

And so, I come full circle in these remarks to where I began—to The Wall and the 58,267 names of the fallen engraved thereon. A few days ago, I received an email from my friend, Otis J. Brooks. “Juice” Brooks was a sergeant and a fire team leader in my rifle platoon in 1966. I hear from him from time to time. In this email, he shared some statistics about the names on The Wall. I share some of them with you:

The first known casualty was Richard B. Fitzgibbon, of North Weymouth, Massachusetts. Listed by the U.S. Department of Defense as having been killed on June 8, 1956. His name is listed on the Wall with that of his son, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Richard B. Fitzgibbon III, who was killed on Sept. 7, 1965.

There are three sets of fathers and sons on the Wall.

8,283 were just 19 years-old

The largest age group, 33,103 were 18 years-old.

997 soldiers were killed on their first day in Vietnam.

31 sets of brothers are on the Wall—31 sets of parents lost two of their sons.

244 soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War; 153 of them are on the Wall. One of those, Danny Fernandez, was an automatic rifleman in my platoon. He died on February 19, 1966, when he threw himself on a hand grenade to save the lives of others.⁹

On this Veterans Day, I cannot speak of the legacy of Vietnam without remembering those veterans who did not come home with us. Theirs was the supreme sacrifice. All died in the service of their country. The Latter-day Saints among them also died in the service of their God. Their devotion, their memory may be the richest legacy of all.

Of the various films about Vietnam, to my knowledge only one of them was intended as a tribute to those who fought. *We Were Soldiers* tells the true story of the first large scale action between American and North Vietnamese forces, fought in the Ia Drang Valley of the Central Highlands in November 1965. For that film, Nick Glennie-Smith, with lyrics by Randall Wallace, composed a moving anthem in tribute to the veterans of Vietnam, particularly those whose names are on The Wall. He entitled it, appropriately, “The Mansions of the Lord.”¹⁰ I close with those lyrics:

To fallen soldiers let us sing
Where no rockets fly nor bullets wing
Our broken brothers let us bring
To the Mansions of the Lord.

No more bleeding, no more fight,
No prayers pleading through the night,
Just divine embrace, eternal light
To the Mansions of the Lord.

Where no mothers cry and no children weep
We will stand and guard though the angels sleep
Through the ages safely keep
The Mansions of the Lord.

Notes

1. Plato, as quoted by General Douglas MacArthur, "Duty, Honor, Country," address given to the cadets at West Point, May 18, 1962.
2. See James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945–2000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
3. See Michael Lind, *Vietnam, The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
4. Lind, *Vietnam*, xii.
5. Lind, *Vietnam*, 256–57.
6. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Silver Thread in the Dark Tapestry of War," in *Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 1968, 21–24.
7. "Apostle meets with leaders in Vietnam," *Church News*, March 5, 2011, 4, 11.
8. General William T. Sherman, Michigan Military Academy, June 19, 1879.
9. Otis J. Brooks to Lance B. Wickman. See also "Veterans Galleria" at Branson.com; and <http://www.history.com/shows/vietnam-in-hd/interactives/vietnam-veterans-memorial>.
10. "Mansions of the Lord," musical score by Nick Glennie-Smith, lyrics by Randall Wallace, in *We Were Soldiers* (Paramount Pictures, 2002).