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## Wapak man establishes Vietnam soldier memorial

by Lisa Gagnon

Storyteller Jim Bowsher tells of a group of Vietnam War veterans who came to his garden to see the memorial. They took a long time getting into position for a photograph, discussing who should stand where. He finally realized that they were lining up as they had for a picture taken during the war, leaving spaces for their fallen comrades.

It is for those men, living and dead, that Bowsher created the memorial in his stone garden in Wapakoneta. The memorial includes two gravestones, one engraved with the word "VIET" the other with "NAM". A blue and white sign with the word "PEACE" on it holds a prominent position.

"I built it for the men who served, all the men who died in our generation," he said. "All the men who were damaged by that war, their names are not on that (Vietnam) wall."

The stone garden, located behind his house in Wapakoneta, contains monumental structures of man-made and natural stone. The Vietnam soldier shrine is the only military memorial there. "The Vietnam War Memorial, that was a personal memorial," said Bowsher, who is not a veteran.

Bowsher has been interviewing soldiers since he was eight years old, beginning with a World War I veteran who lived down the street. A phrase the veteran told him still sticks in his mind: "War is a series of blunders and errors, and whoever makes the least wins."

"Very few get by unscathed," he noted.

He's also interviewed numerous World War II veterans who were on both sides of the conflict. "The individuals you would talk to in the '50s were real gung ho. Twenty years later, they weren't so enthusiastic. As the years went by, they denied they had a helmet with a hole or some such trophy," he remarked.

As the years go by, "it's suddenly out of context. Having killed those guys is suddenly out of context," he explained. The Japanese and Germans are now American allies, as are the Soviets.

He tells the stories at schools, veterans' meetings and in his backyard. He described one lecture he frequently gives to veterans' organizations:

"There's this huge sword I hold up, and to the people, it's like ecstasy."

He then proceeds to read anti-war sayings, starting with the Biblical phrase about living and dying by the sword.

"My whole speech is anti-war," he said.

Despite this, he's been asked to return again and again to speak to veterans' organizations. He believes part of the reason is that, while he is against war, he has great empathy for the soldiers.

A published author, he's presently working on a new book, which he insists be titled "Napalm loves the little children." The reason, he said, is that soldiers in boot camp during the Vietnam War were required to sing to the tune of "Jesus loves the little children" the words "Napalm loves the little children/all the little children of the world/red and yellow, black and white, napalm burns them up just right."

"What do you think those soldiers think of whenever they hear that tune?" he asked.

He said his publisher has threatened not to publish the book, but a Vietnam veteran who owns his own press offered to publish it. "If he thinks it's a good title, who is my publisher to quibble?," he queried.