

The Moving Wall stood still in Grand Ronde

Saturday ceremony honors those who lost their lives in Vietnam

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

It represents the lost hopes and dreams of 58,268 Americans, their families and friends.

Tribal Elder, Tribal Council member and Vietnam-era Marine Corps veteran Steve Bobb Sr. called those hopes and dreams, "The what-ifs, the what could have beens, gone in a flash, a speck of time."

As emcee for a July 17 ceremony introducing The Moving Wall, a half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., Bobb introduced a small crowd of friends, families and veterans themselves to this traveling memorial that stopped in Grand Ronde for five days in mid-July.

Spirit Mountain Casino sponsored the memorial that was set up in just over an hour at the old powwow grounds in front of the Governance Center.

"The Tribe brings us so many enriching events," said Tribal Elder Marion Mercier. "It's important to get to be a part of it all."

Among those who came to be part of this event were Korean War veterans Marce Norwest, a Tribal Elder who gave the invocation, and Irv Fletcher, a member of the Governor's Veterans' Affairs Advisory Committee, who served on the Honor Guard.

It also brought out Iraq War veterans Zach Millsap and Greg Gwynn, both with tours of duty behind them and more ahead.

It brought out Vietnam veterans like Bobb and Clark Clendenin, John Gosnell, Michael Polston and Tribal Elder Alton Butler, and Tribal Elder and Tribal Council member June Sell-Sherer, who served in Germany. It brought out Sell-Sherer's husband, Michael, who served "a few clicks north of Danang."

The Wall reminded Gosnell of a friend who shipped out to Vietnam a year before he did. They were going to meet up, but his friend had already been killed when Gosnell arrived.

"I don't know any of the names," said Polston, "but I'm sure I've got friends up there." Polston served with the Marines in Danang. What he remembers is "how we were treated when we came back compared to how they're treated now. I'm happy to see how they're giving respect to the troops now, (respect) that we didn't get."

This knowledge is one of the things that Millsap carries, all these years later.

Between tours in Iraq, and after serving in the Honor Guard during the day's ceremony, he said that The Wall makes him think "how we have so much. (Veterans of Vietnam) tell me, 'Thank you for my service,' and I say, 'No. I owe you.' What I'm doing is nothing compared to what these guys went through."

Gwynn, who like Millsap is be-



Tribal members **Sophia Morning-Star Stewart** and her father **Travis Mercier** sing during The Moving Wall opening ceremony on the Tribal campus on Saturday, July 17.

Little Miss Grand Ronde Isabelle Grout leaves a program from The Moving Wall opening ceremony at the wall after the ceremony was over on Saturday, July 17. The half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., was on display on the Tribal campus July 15-19.

in Portland, he said, he was finally able to face The Wall, and he has now been back to see the original in D.C. many times.

"I finally can walk by it now," he said. "Time heals wounds, I guess."

Brainard joined Gene LaBonte on the Honor Guard, along with Millsap and Alton Butler. LaBonte is a Tribal Elder, Vietnam vet and chair of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Advisory Committee.

Bobb talked about the troubled times that accompanied the Vietnam conflict. "But we had a call to duty," he said.

Mike Sherer said the names represented "a lot of guys who never should have been there, who never should have died. All they wanted," he said, referring to the Vietnamese, "was to be free" of French colonial rule.

Irv Fletcher, a leader of Oregon AFL-CIO after his service in Korea, was another who "didn't think we should have been there, but that has nothing to do with honoring these men."

Honor and tears marked the day.

"They say of The Wall in D.C., when it rains, it appears to be weeping," said Bobb.

An elderly couple, who had visited The Moving Wall, afterward walked over to the West Valley Veterans' Memorial designed by Bobb.

On their way back, the woman said, "No, we don't want to be quoted. I'm sorry." A few seconds passed. "We lost our son," she added. ■

tween tours running convoy security "all over" Iraq, is working with the Tribe's ProStar Security team in the interim.

"I see a lot of good men, a lot of history here," he said. "This is something that the youth of America needs to know about."

And through the efforts of The Moving Wall's creators, many continue to learn.

The Moving Wall in Grand Ronde is one of two replicas of the original. The exhibits are the work of John Devitt and Gerry Haver, Army and Navy vets, respectively, from the Vietnam War, who wanted to share the experience of the original Washington, D.C., memorial, and succeeded, beyond their imagining, in city after city across the country.

"In November 1982, I went to the dedication of The Wall in Washington, D.C.," said Devitt. "I didn't expect to be moved, but it had a profound impact on me, and I realized it was something I wanted to share with guys I knew (in San Jose)."

On hearing the idea, Haver "went into his bedroom and came up with \$2,500 for the project," said Devitt. Haver passed on in 2000.

When back in D.C. photographing the original, Devitt said, "You're talking to all kinds of people, and someone said, 'So you said it was

going to be portable?' and we said, 'Yeah, it would be portable.'"

They did the original work themselves, and for almost 30 years the exhibit has averaged showings in more than 25 cities a year from April until after Veterans Day, more than 1,100 to date.

"I could of got rich," said Devitt, "but I didn't so I did this."

Ten years ago, after Haver's passing, Devitt's wife, Joy, joined Devitt on the road and has since been helping to erect the 72-panel exhibit.

Volunteers work with them at each stop.

As the 253-foot wall went up on Thursday morning, Joy, with a cloth in her hand, polished panel after panel of the black Plexiglas on wood frame design. The panels of the original, in Washington, D.C., are granite.

Grand Ronde Royalty at the ceremony included Tribal members Little Miss Grand Ronde Isabelle Grout, Amelia Mooney, McKenzie Aaron, Madison Aaron, Iyana Holmes and Kallie Provost.

"I couldn't look at The Wall the first time I saw it in D.C.," said Vietnam veteran Ron Brainard, who also is a past Tribal chairman of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, & Siuslaw Indians in Coos Bay. Quite a few years later

Photos by Michelle Alaimo