

SEASIDE VETERANS HONOR SERVICE, SACRIFICE IN VIETNAM

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



Seaside's Mark Hansen, a Vietnam war veteran, presented plans for a granite memorial to be installed in Seltzer Park in Seaside's Cove. The plaque will honor veterans who attended Seaside High School. The plaque is estimated at a cost of about \$14,000, to be raised from contributions. About \$1,000 is already donated, Hansen said.

Ninety Seaside High School attendees served in the Vietnam war. Their names will be memorialized on the plaque. We spoke to Seaside High School grads and Vietnam veterans Hansen and John Alto at the Signal office.

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Q: Tell me about yourselves and your time in Vietnam.

Alto: I'm 77 in November.

Hansen: I'm 74. I'm from the Seaside High School class of 1963. I stayed in college as long as I could and got my degree. I told them at the draft board I'm not opposed to going, but I'd prefer to have my college out of the way.

I finished Portland State University in 1968 with a bachelor of science degree in social science. I wanted to save the world. I got married in December 1968. I got my draft notice in April 1969, went to basic training and was in Vietnam Oct. 1.

Q: How long were you over there?

Hansen: Fifty-two Saturday nights — one year.

Q: Where did you serve?

Hansen: I was down south. We were about 30 miles from Vung Tau. My base camp was Nui dat, which was the compound for Australians and New Zealanders. It was huge. We'd do fire missions for them. I was with a 155 self-propelled Howitzer unit.

Q: You were close to the action?

Hansen: We were always behind the infantry to give them fire support. I was scared the whole time I was there. My unit was very lucky.

When we'd go on road marches, we'd go after bunkers, prepping LZs (landing zones) so helicopters could come insert troops and pick up the casualties.

We went up to the Cambodian border in March 1970. We could've been ambushed at any time. It never happened. I'm very fortunate.

Q: John, tell me about your experience.

Alto: I graduated from Seaside High School in 1961, then went to OSU. At that time all men had to take two years of mandatory ROTC. I kept going, took four years, and graduated in June of '65.

It was right after I bought a new Corvette convertible when they told me, "You're going to Vietnam." My new Corvette sat in a barn for a year.

I got on the USS Walker from San Francisco, from there to Hawaii. We left in the middle of the night, 50 buses loading people onto ships. It took about a week to get to Vietnam.

When I got there, they assigned me to an army unit in the la Drang Valley. It was talked

about in the movie "We Were Soldiers." It was the first major U.S. involvement, and it got real ugly.

I didn't have one day of infantry training other than ROTC, and I told them that. The colonel in charge said, "That's good information. Just don't tell your platoon."

At the time there were only 10 people in the platoon. We never did have the chance to deploy or train together until we were in the combat zone. The rest of the platoon came in en masse and they were straight out of basic and AIT (advanced individual training).

Most of the platoon sergeants had been in the army, and some had fought in Korea. My platoon sergeant fought in World War II, when I was three years old. And here I walk in taking over the platoon. He's in the Army 25 years. I was the rifle platoon leader.

Our platoon was called the aero rifle platoon. That was a brand new concept because air mobile was just getting started. We were probably the first army combat unit without medics. They felt because we had helicopters we didn't need medics.

Q: What was your primary mission?

Alto: We were based at Cu Chi (north-west of Saigon). We were the first response if a pilot got shot down. If a unit was in trouble, the klaxon went off, we had to be in the helicopters in three minutes. And that happened quite often.

Every night one of my squads had to be outside the wire, concertina wire bordering the camp. They came back in looking like they'd been lost 15 days, and they had to get back in with us and do our jobs.

I don't know how many combat assaults we did, but I know it was more than 100.

The biggest worry, we were never knowing what was waiting for us.

Our secondary mission was putting out five-man, long-range patrols. They stayed out for five days, five men. We were responsible for putting them in. In case someone was waiting for them, we had to go in and get them back out. If they were compromised, we had to react.

We were getting mortared in the base camp the whole time. The biggest worry was never knowing what was waiting for us.

(Author and Seaside High School graduate) Karl Marlantes talks about that. In World War II, there was a line. If you were behind the line, you could have a drink, relax.

We were never safe anywhere in Vietnam. There was no safe place, in the air, on the water, in the (Mekong) Delta. They were getting ambushed all the time coming up the river.

Q: At the conclusion of your tour, did you consider re-enlisting?

Alto: Before I left, they said they have a job for me. I said, "No, I'm going home."

I had one or two days left in March 1966. The colonel said, "You're going to go out and train the new lieutenant."

Three of us got separated from the patrol. I got grazed by a grenade coming our way. None of us got hurt; we were well-trained by then. I looked out and saw a (Viet Cong) rifle coming our way — and I'm here and he's not.

I went back and walked down to the colonel's tent and he asked me, "You see those blades turning? All your stuff is in that helicopter." I said, "Yes, sir!" He said, "Go get in it, you're done."

I shook his hand and didn't see him for 25 years. I still can feel that freedom bird tak-



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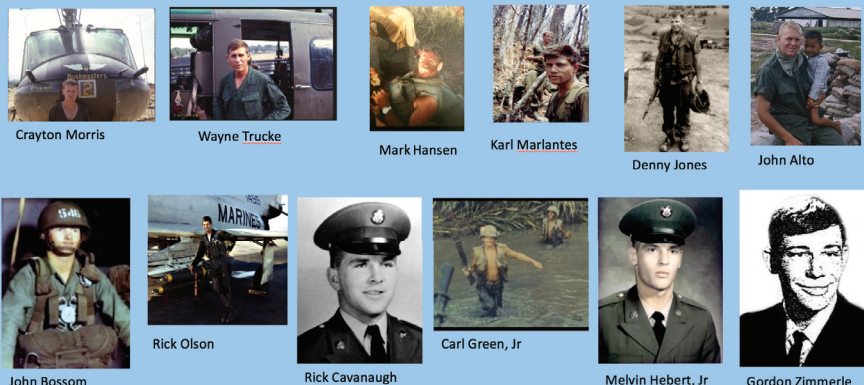
'We left Vietnam. Vietnam never left us.'

— John Alto

R.J. Marx

Veterans Mark Hansen and John Alto hope to remember all Seaside High School grads who served in Vietnam.

In Honor of Seaside High Veterans Who Served in Vietnam



Some of the local veterans of Vietnam.



Gray granite Vietnam War memorial.



The area where plaque is to be installed overlooks the Cove.

ing off. As soon as you could feel the wheels leave the ground, everybody jumped out of their seats.

The new lieutenant I was breaking in that day asked for an immediate transfer when we landed back in the base camp. Gone the next day.

Q: Let's talk about how the idea of a plaque for Seaside High School Vietnam vets got started.

Hansen: Crayton Morris, a highly-decorated helicopter pilot, kind of got this thing started. He's got skin cancer really bad. He's had over 90 operations.

Q: Was that Agent Orange?

Hansen: Yes.

Alto: In fact, I'm wearing a pump right now.

Hansen: I've got prostate cancer, that's one of the ones attributed to Agent Orange. We're still in Vietnam healthwise.

Alto: We left Vietnam, but Vietnam never left us. It's affected a lot.

Q: How did you get the list of 90 veterans?

Hansen: It's hard to get information. The draft board won't give you anything, so you start calling up people and family members. Back issues of the Seaside Signal have been very helpful.

Q: I see you are discovering new Vietnam vets day by day.

Alto: The monument company said they can always add people, because we don't want to miss anybody.

Q: What's your timing to install the plaque?

Hansen: Sometime next year.

Alto: We're just starting, but it's going to roll.

Hansen: We have \$1,000 now and we need \$13,000.

Q: What is your message for today's generation?

Alto: Sacrifice.

Hansen: That's the main thing.

Alto: People would die for your freedom and a lot have. We had a really major participation for a small high school. The majority of people were under 25 that got killed, and they were draftees.

Q: What was it like coming home?

Alto: When they processed us out, they wouldn't let us leave without our uniform on.

They said, "You're not going to be treated right if you have your uniform on." I went into the PX, they bought me Levis, a jacket, had my stuff packed up — and when I got home my family was waiting for me.

Industrious starlings stalk the best apples in the garden

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



We're nearing the end of apple picking season and there's not much left on the trees. We have two apple trees in our front yard. It took some research to learn they are king pippins. We have the trees trimmed and looked after every year by Arborist Archer LLC; he also grooms the area around their trunks and does a little fertilizing. The result of his efforts is we have amazingly abundant trees. No exaggeration, we ate or gave away well over 200 apples this year — some of it going to the local food bank — and the trees are still not bare.

The birds are working on that.

I work from home and my desk faces the front windows, giving me a view of the yard, if not the porch. I realize this column is called, "View from the Porch," but the porch is off the kitchen, not the living room, which is where I work. The yard is fenced in and there is a gate, which I like because it is a

busy street and the fence creates a bit of a barrier. That hasn't stopped passersby from grabbing an apple or so off the trees since some of the limbs dangle over the fence.

I don't mind at all people taking an apple or two or even three at a time.

But a few folks have shown themselves to be just plain greedy.

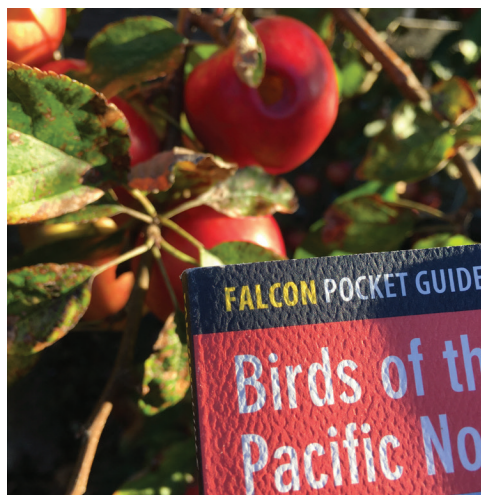
The birds, to return to the birds, are greedy. In fact, they're voracious.

I watch them for hours at a time in the afternoon, pecking away at the fruit.

This time of year, the apples remaining on the trees are super sweet. They are at their peak for sugar content.

I'm not much of an ornithologist. I only recently learned to differentiate between a tern and a gull and am easily baffled by the different varieties of gulls common to this region. My husband gifted me with a copy of "Birds of the Pacific Northwest," the Falcon Pocket Guide edition, and it's been quite helpful identifying the different birds.

Attracted to the trees and shrubs (in summer we have blueberries) I've seen hummingbirds, woodpeckers, mourning doves, and the occasional sapsucker. We've been visited by jays, and there are lots of crows. I get excited when I see a tiny chickadee because the



Eve Marx

You need a guide to keep track of the local visitors.

crows scare most of the smaller birds off.

The bird that has come to dominate my front yard, however, is the European starling, also known as *Sturnus vulgaris*. And they are vulgar, these birds, as they are very pushy. The dozen or so who have taken up residence in our mini-orchard have clearly communicated to all the other birds that when it comes

to the apples, they're the bosses.

It's fascinating to observe how they all swoop in at once. They converge on the trees and peck away with machine precision for two to three minutes before something alarms them and they all fly off. They're methodical, returning to apples still on the tree whose thick skins they've already penetrated, working away at whatever hole they've made until the apple is demolished.

They're nothing if not industrious.

Starlings are strong and fast; they can reach speeds up to 48 mph. Scientists say they can taste salt, sugar, citric acids, and tannins found in grapes and acorns. They know the difference between table sugar and other kinds of sugar, which is important since they can't digest sucrose. I've read starlings are outstanding vocal mimics who can imitate the calls of up to twenty other species of birds.

So far they haven't learned to imitate the saxophone, a sound frequently heard around our house.

I'll miss the birds in a few weeks when the apples are all gone.

Meanwhile as an excuse not to work, they've been quite diverting. Certainly an improvement on checking my email every 15 minutes or going on Facebook.



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