

Natives remember Vietnam

In 1986 I had the good fortune to visit the unusual monument to the Vietnam War Veterans. It is in the form of a long wall inscribed with rows and rows of names of the thousands of soldiers killed in Vietnam. The wall is in a public park, not far from the famous Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

The Arlington National Cemetery is where some of the most revered U.S. heroes lie, including former president John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. It is sad and ironic that the Vietnam War became such an embarrassment to the U.S. government and politicians that the veterans of that war had to put up their own monument to their dead. That is why it is in such a modest location.

The people who re-write history will probably some day claim that it was an "unofficial" war. Refusing to officially remember these soldiers by not referring to them on the cenotaphs, with veterans of the First World War and the Second World War is a step in that direction. The Canadian government too is slow to recognize these veterans. By the wall, I saw a wreath which had been laid by the Vietnam War veterans of Toronto. Accompanying it was

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Victims

dozens of names. There may be as many as 40,000 Canadian veterans of Vietnam.

The Six Nations veterans do not have such hang-ups. In Veterans Park in Ohsweken, a stone commemorating the Vietnam veterans is prominently attached to the main cenotaph. This is as it should be. Those who were killed in this war are not less dead than the others. The supreme sacrifice was the same and should be remembered. Let others play politics with history.

On Sunday, Nov. 6, a Buffalo, N.Y. TV station aired a very unusual and interesting tribute to Indian veterans of the Vietnam War. Called Warriors, it was produced by Indians of the Buffalo area and had an all Indian cast.

Even the songs about the war were written and sung by Indians.

The short program showed an Indian veteran visiting the Western New York Vietnam War Veterans' Monument. Like the one in Washington, D.C., it too is in the form of a wall. It is in a park on Buffalo's waterfront. Though he was not old, the veteran walked with a limp and a cane. The narrator voiced the veteran's thoughts as he spotted two familiar names on the list of those who will never return.

The two names were both of former Six Nations Indians. Gregory L. Bomberry was a sergeant in the 101st Airborne Division when he was killed in September, 1968. Leslie N. General, who was a corporal, was killed the same year.

The young soldiers plodding through the jungles and rice paddies had plenty of time to reflect on death. They saw whole villages go up in a flash of flame. They saw comrades blown to bits before their eyes. A chant-like song about Vietnam had the recurring line, "Afraid to die young." A poem started out, "If I die in a strange land . . ." The worst fears of these young men were realized. The least we can do is continue to remember them.