

Trip to U.S. led to the navy for 19-year-old local native

OHSWEKEN — "I thought we were going to party," Art Smith said recounting a trip across the border in the late 1960s.

It was 1968 when some friends invited Smith — who was still in school — on a trip to New York.

"We ended up in the navy," Smith said.

More than 25 years later, after a dedication ceremony for The Moving Wall, a replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., he said he went for the adventure.

"Because I was 19."

His adventure was to build bridges roads and airports in the jungles of Vietnam, his friend Ron Curley ended up on a tanker in Europe, while a third neighbor went to patrol the jungle rivers.

Smith said he had regrets but only when he came back. When people spat on him and swore at him calling him names he never knew.

"I went into the closet." He didn't deny going to Vietnam, but he didn't volunteer the information.

Now, the three — and about 20 other natives and non-natives — are members of the North American Vietnam Veterans' Association, meeting monthly for breakfast and to organize family barbecues.

Senator Jack Marshall says there should be a memorial to Canada's Vietnam vets.

Marshall is fighting for space in the Ottawa-area for a memor-

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ial to Canadian veterans. The memorial, which wouldn't cost anything, is being donated by two Vietnam veterans from Michigan.

But to get the land, Marshall and the veterans need the support of the Liberal cabinet — something that hasn't arrived.

Marshall doesn't buy the notion that Canada didn't participate in the Vietnam War.

Admittedly, there weren't fighting troops carrying the Canadian flag, but Canada sold the United States \$10.5 million in material for the war effort, he said.

"To say we didn't participate, isn't fair," Marshall said.

And there certainly were Canadian boys in the jungles. About 40,000 Canadians fought in Vietnam, said Marshall who attended Monday's ceremony.

And, more importantly Canadians died in Vietnam, Marshall said. The names of about 110 Canadians are on the memorial to victims of the war.

The issue has the support of American veterans such as Allen Kent, the senior vice-commander of the Veterans of For-

eign Wars of the United States "We know who we are, we know what we did, and we know why we did it.

"We are proud of you and hope you are proud of yourselves," Kent said during the ceremony.

After, he said: "If their country (Canada) won't recognize them, at least ours should."

Apart from the issue of Vietnam, the experience of native veterans in general has not been positive. It is the subject of a senate committee inquiry.

Natives who fought during the First and Second World Wars were often mistreated after returning home, Senator Len Marchand of British Columbia said.

Marchand, reached at his home in Kamloops B.C. Monday, said that while many natives were heroes on the battle field, they were nobodies when they returned.

When they volunteered for military service, they also signed away their native status and their rights to native land.

At the same time, they were denied many of the veterans' benefits available to non-natives, said Marchand, citing the example of First World War veterans gaining land grants of 160 acres each.

"We couldn't find one case where an Indian got the 160 acres," said Marchand who is a native.