

THE WALL

This past weekend I was filming in Washington DC, the city of my birth and as always, felt compelled to revisit The Wall. On it are the names of two of the men that trained me, some of the men I trained with and some of the men I trained. Six men named Smallwood died in Vietnam, none of whom I knew. There should have been seven, but for the grace of God.

RETURN TO EDEN

Yet to me, the most affecting, the most resonant name there is Paul Savanuck. He was a friend from college; enjoyed guitars and girls and beer and poker, as did I. Paul was easygoing, with a ready smile and sly sense of humor. He became a combat photographer for the Stars & Stripes and died with great valor while trying to protect and rescue several wounded soldiers.

I attended the dedication of The Wall back in 1982 and have the strongest memory of having touched his name that day. It is etched high atop Panel 26W; oddly enough, fully ten inches beyond my reach on tiptoes.

This past Saturday was gray and overcast, a typical DC winter's day. As I stepped back from Panel 26 to collect myself, I noticed among the crowd two middle-aged men, one in a flight jacket. After allowing them a private moment with their own memories, I approached and asked, "You were a chopper pilot. Did you fly slicks or gunships...or dustoffs?" He replied, "I flew Medevacs, 1969-70, out of Cu Chi." I said, "I was an advisor with MACV in '69; my dustoff flights came out of Bien Hoa – but someone like you, maybe someone you knew, took care of me and my people when we were most in need. Thanks."

Then we shook hands and exchanged the phrase that is our benediction, expressed with gratitude by all Vietnam veterans who made it back:

"Welcome Home."

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