

'Moving Wall' brings home Vietnam War's toll

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — When Barry Clifford landed at the Rochester airport after serving in Vietnam from 1967-68, he expected to be greeted by his family.

He did not expect someone to spit on him.

And even when he went out to bars or parties after his return to the states, Clifford recalled, the veteran learned not to talk about his experiences in the Vietnam War.

"Nobody wanted to hear it," said Clifford, founder of the Greater Rochester Vietnam Memorial Corporation. "We were baby killers."

For many Vietnam veterans, the war became something they didn't talk about for fear of such reactions, Clifford said.

From July 28 to Aug. 3, however, the estimated 28,000 Vietnam and Vietnam-era veterans in the Rochester area had the opportunity to speak about their war experiences, to vent some of the feelings they have about the war and the way they were treated upon their return, and to finally say goodbye to friends who died years ago.

Last week, Rochester's Highland Park South was home to one of the three traveling, half-size replicas of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. Known as "The Moving Wall," the memorial bears the name of the more than 58,000 men and women who died in the Vietnam War.

The wall includes the names of 312 Rochester-area men killed and the 12 men missing in action from the war, Clifford noted.

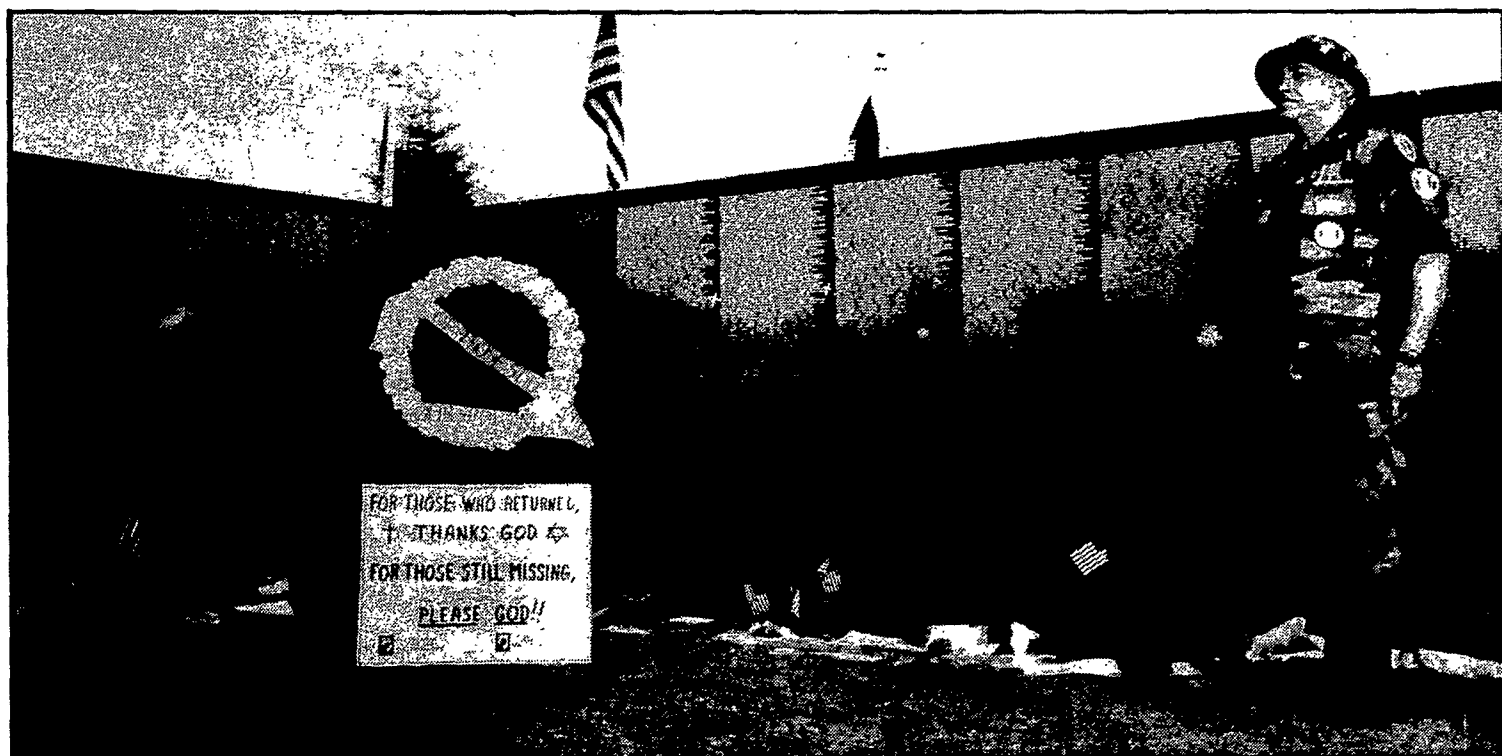
Barry Culhane, current chairman of the Greater Rochester Vietnam Memorial Corporation, estimated that 16,000 to 18,000 people viewed the wall during its stop in Rochester. In addition to veterans, he added, visitors of the wall included friends, relatives and acquaintances of those who served and died in Vietnam, as well as people too young to remember the war.

"The presence of 'The Moving Wall' stimulated so much healing among people," Culhane said. "It ended up being a tremendous education experience for people."

Culhane, who served as a medic in the states during the war, said he has visited the original wall in Washington. The wall had a profound effect on his life, Culhane discovered.

"It made me aware of the real effects of war," Culhane said. "It made me sensitive to the sacrifices young people make and are willing to make for our country. When you see the names, it's a reality you can't avoid."

Marlene Kehoe, whose husband, Jim, served in Vietnam, noted that "The Moving Wall" allowed families who can't



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Vietnam Veteran Dick D'Imperio stands at attention following an Aug. 1 wreath-laying ceremony at the "Moving Wall" installation in Rochester's Highland Park.



As the wall is taken down for transport to Providence, R.I., Barry Clifford, founder of the Greater Rochester Vietnam Memorial Corporation, says a last goodbye Aug. 3 to comrades listed on one panel.

travel to see the original wall in Washington the chance to experience its impact.

"I think there was a general feeling of, 'They've come home,'" said Kehoe, who served as a volunteer at "The Moving Wall" to help and comfort visitors when necessary.

"They've been very emotional," Kehoe added, "but they're glad it's here. It helps the healing."

"When guys were in Vietnam, they didn't get to say goodbye to a lot of their buddies," explained Clifford, a parishioner of St. Lawrence Church in Greece. "A lot of them didn't get a chance to go through the mourning period."

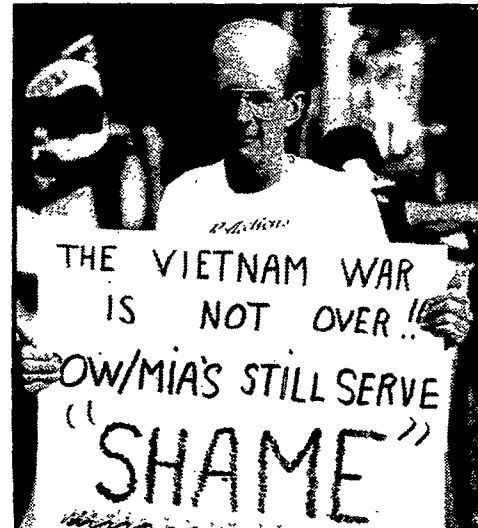
"It gave me a chance to sit down in my home town and grieve for the guys I served with," Clifford stated.

Father Peter Deckman, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church, 77 Whitney St., Rochester, said the wall helped him recall the death of a friend, John Tette, who was among the first U.S. casualties of the war, was killed in 1960.

"It's powerful to see somebody on there that you know," said Father Deckman. "I'll never forget when John died. It was just a police action, and somebody we knew died."

"The Moving Wall" also gave some veterans who had never dealt with the war and its effects the opportunity to take some beginning steps toward getting help, Clifford said.

"There are a lot of guys who should get into counseling, who should get into some veterans' groups," Clifford said. "A lot of guys made the first step to come down to the wall and connect."



Jim Kehoe participated in an Aug. 1 march at Rochester's Federal Building to demand more rescue efforts for POWs/MIAs.

Numerous visitors left behind various messages at the wall, including notes, letters, flags, pictures, flowers and even baby rattles.

The items, which were collected on the last day of the wall's visit, will eventually be placed with similar articles left during the walls' tours across the country. According to organizers, the items will be put in a museum to be built when the walls stop touring the United States.

"The Moving Wall" provided a boost for efforts to build a permanent Vietnam memorial in Rochester. Monroe County has already set aside a site for the permanent memorial, very close to where the "The Moving Wall" was exhibited.

Initial plans for the site have been developed, and organizers are about to begin soliciting funds from Rochester-area corporations and private donors.

Search committee may appoint interim school superintendent

ROCHESTER — The search committee charged with hiring a new superintendent for diocesan schools may instead name an interim superintendent next month, according to Peter J. Spinelli, committee chairman.

Spinelli, who also serves as chairman of the diocesan Christian Formation and Education Council, said the search committee's efforts to hire a permanent superintendent have been hampered by the vacation plans and work schedules of committee members.

He said the five-member committee has found it difficult to schedule meetings to examine applications and conduct interviews with candidates. The committee met twice in July, after it was formed when Brother Brian Walsh, CFC, the current

superintendent, announced his resignation from the post earlier this year.

Brother Walsh is slated to leave Sept. 1, according to Father George Norton, diocesan spokesman.

If the committee finds it necessary to name an interim superintendent, Spinelli said that person might serve in the post until the middle of the school year. He also speculated that an interim superintendent would be picked from a pool of candidates living in the diocesan area and surrounding regions.

Despite the delay in choosing a permanent superintendent, Spinelli was optimistic about the eventual outcome.

"We've gotten some good responses, and very interesting responses, so we're hoping to continue the process," he said.

— Rob Cullivan

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