Final Tribute to James E. Widener

Burial at Arlington

Welcome Home Parade

Together Then...Together Now
I would like to start by saying that it was a great job by our Honor Guard in representing Chapter 20 in Washington at the service for James Widener, our local MIA from the Vietnam War. With the support of the community we were able to send the Honor Guard to Arlington for the service. The donations exceeded the money needed for the trip and the excess will be put into a secured account in the event another MIA is returned.

Chapter 20 has started a pilot program for the National VVA called VetsConnect. This program's goal is to keep our newly returning veterans and all other veterans informed as to the benefits due to them in the area of compensation, health care and employment. We have developed a flyer (see this issue of the BTL) that will be handed out at area malls, in group meetings with families and at the military units locally. Chapter 20 has applied for grants from the State of New York through Joe Robach and one with VVAF nationally. Our goal, if grants are secured, is to provide challenge coins with the Chapter 20 logo on one side and phone numbers for benefits on the other. The thought of the committee is that they will be more apt to hold on to the coin rather than a flyer. HOPEFULLY our veterans, old and new, will seek out help on these issues and not go through life without the help they have earned.

Memorial in Highland Park I spent a couple minutes on WCMF talking about the Memorial on the live broadcast on site. Chuck Macaluso and I were on hand to give tours and answer questions. At 10:30 I was at the War Memorial for the annual Veterans Day service with the other local veterans groups. Then on a rainy night at 6:00 P.M. that day we had our service at our memorial in Highland Park. I would like to thank all those who stayed through the rain to honor our nation's veterans.

On December 4 the Board will put together the budget for 2007 and in January we will bring it to the membership. 2007 will bring us to a budget that will be a little tight and spending will not be all that we are used to, mainly because of the lower income of the store and the new restrictions on donations to the car business. So I ask that you try and understand and help us keep within the budget.

In closing, thanks for your service and your support of Chapter 20.

Together then together now
Ken Moore, President
POW-MIA
Gail Bologna-Melens, Coordinator

Once again, I have never been prouder of Chapter 20’s Honor Guard. A group of us attended the burial of James Edward Widener on Friday, November 3, 2006. It was chilling to watch the Marine Corps Honor Guard at Arlington National Cemetery. The precision of their steps and movements was awesome. But, the best thing was when Jay Widener told me that it was such a comfort for him to look beyond the casket holding his son’s remains and see our Honor Guard standing at attention a little in the distance with the flags flying in the wind. I think that was what our being there was all about – bringing comfort to the family in any way we could. That was the least we could do, seeing the sacrifice that was made by Jim Widener 39 years ago. May he now rest in peace on American soil and may his family find peace in knowing that he is finally home.

Being the POW-MIA Chairperson for Chapter 20 I have to say that this is what it is all about – having our POW-MIAs accounted for and brought home. I wish it didn’t take so long.

Ray has written a very descriptive article – I just write from my heart and about my feelings which at this time are overwhelming. We have quite a few pictures that we will share with the membership at a future meeting.

At the time of this writing the number of persons still missing and unaccounted for remains at 1,798. I will, as always, continue to print the names of those that have been identified and as much information as is available to me about them.

Please, keep flying your flags (both American and POW-MIA), have a decal on your car window. We have to keep this issue out in the public eye to make sure that this will never happen again to other families. POW-MIA flags can be purchased very reasonably at FRED’S FLAGS in Fairport. He is listed in the phone book. He is a Veteran as was his father who started FRED’S FLAGS.

Please have a very safe and happy holiday.

Veterans Incarcerated
Ron Trovato, Chair

Craig McLaren, President of Chapter 190 in Atmore Alabama, has been in regular contact with us with letters and copies of the legendary chapter newsletter The Eagle Speaks. Despite the many difficulties in publishing a regular newsletter inside a correctional facility, The Eagle Speaks continues to provide veterans a wealth of important information and we applaud his proactive approach to incarcerated veterans issues and his candor in his writing.

Jeff Langnese (Vietnam Veterans Group San Quentin, California) has been keeping us posted on their activities including their Veterans Day events and Holiday Toy Program. Some of their guys have been paroled to the “Swords to Plow Shares” Veterans Transitional Program nearby on Treasure Island which a veteran can stay at for up to two years. Congrats also on their recent food sale which was a highly successful fund raiser for the vets there. Reputation is everything in the food sale industry and we thank the guys for all their hard work. The group there also voted to donate $1,000 to Operation MOM and we commend them for their diligence in raising funds for such a worthy cause.

Chapter 205 (Auburn Correctional Facility) had their Veterans Day service at the Chapel on November 10th with a movie and refreshments afterwards. At the last general membership meeting, the guys of 205 donated $108.00 to the annual Christmas drive which will be concluded on December 8th. Thirty-seven members attended the October 20th G.M.M. as well as outside guests. The crochet platoon has cranked out over 250 sets of hats and scarves and a tip of the hat to those guys as well as to Bob Ahalt (President) and Bill Seifert (Vice President) who have kept Chapter business moving forward despite the difficulties faced by an active incarcerated chapter in a maximum facility. Because the committee budgets here have been flat lined until next year, they are really doing everything on their own and I give the guys at 205 a lot of credit for keeping everything together there.

We also recently heard from Chapter 745 of the Twin Rivers Unit in Monroe, Washington. Their October newsletter had informative articles on the history of Veterans Day, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the meaning of a flag draped coffin. Congrats to Thelbert Lawson, who was named VVA Incarcerated Member of the Year, and to all the guys at 745 who made that possible. Terrific newsletter, guys, and we thank Robert Colemen for keeping in contact.

Finally, on a personal note, it was great to share our Chapter’s 25th anniversary with everyone, especially with Ernie and Regina Bullock. That was a long, long time in coming and we can all learn a lot from both of them. And a special thank you is in order to Gail Melens who donated a large American flag to the guys at the Groveland Correctional Facility (Chapter 603). It should have arrived there exactly on Veterans Day!
Marching Unit
Ray Melens, Commander

Before I really get into the typical Marching Unit report, I want to report about an event that just happened two days ago, while it’s still fresh in my thoughts and my heart.

The date was Friday, November 3. The place was Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The event was the funeral ceremony for repatriated Pfc. James E. Widener, USMC.

After 39 years, Jim’s remains were positively identified and laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. Members of Chapter 20’s Honor Guard, POW/MIA Chairperson, and our AVVA Liaison were in attendance and the Honor Guard took part in the military honors along with the US Marine Corps.

Words cannot begin to explain the emotions and honor that was felt by those of us in attendance. We can only try to explain how we felt. I do know that I can speak for all of us that were there when I say that we were all very humbled and also honored to be able to take a small part in Jim’s ‘Welcome Home.’ There is so much to report about the service, but it is also very difficult to describe. There will be several pictures of the service in this issue that may say it better than I can.

The service began with the hearse arriving and the Marine pallbearers waiting to carry Jim to his final resting place. After all the family members were out of their vehicles, the casket was then brought from the hearse with true military precision. Our Honor Guard was immediately brought to ‘Present Arms’ and the salute was held until the casket was placed over the grave. The Navy chaplain then began his part of the service. All during the service the Marine pallbearers held the flag above the casket. It was then time to fold the flag. Trust me when I tell you that our Honor Guard will never be able to fold the flag with the precision that those Marines did it with. But we still do just as well. The 21-gun salute was rendered and followed immediately with the playing of Taps. During this time our Honor Guard was of course at ‘Present Arms.’ The flag was then presented
to the family and the usual words of sympathy were expressed to them by the flag presenter. Then *Amazing Grace* was played by the piper. After all the Marines had left, our Honor Guard marched from our position over to the side of the casket. From there we rendered our final salute and Gail and Kathy placed a Vietnam Campaign ribbon necklace upon the casket with all the flowers that were already placed upon the casket. I then uttered the words “Welcome Home, Jim” and then gave the command ‘Ready Two’ and we marched off out of sight. As we marched off the lone piper, Dave Linder, began playing the Marine Corps Hymn, and we halted and saluted for this final tribute.

Later that afternoon, Gail and I caught up with Jay Widener (Dad). We spent some time alone with him and again expressed our sincere condolences on behalf of Chapter 20 and ourselves. While I was driving back to get the rest of the Honor Guard and some guests that came on their own, Jay told Gail something that really tugged at our heart strings. He had expressed to Gail what a comfort we were for him. He talked about how he sat there during the service at the grave and what a comfort it was to him to look up at his son’s casket and look over it to see us standing there looking as sharp as could be. He kept commenting about how we provided such comfort for him and his family during a very trying time. He could not express enough to all of us later when we were all together, how much he appreciated us being there and how much it meant to him. I have to tell you, and I’m sure the HG members will agree with me, that Jay is truly an amazing man. Don’t let anyone tell you that Jay cannot keep a conversation going either. You

The following was written and read to the Honor Guard upon our departure for Washington, D.C. on November 2 to partake in the funeral service for MIA, Pfc. James Widener USMC, by Sue Oleksyn.

*Bon Voyage* to our noble Honor Guard as you depart

For Washington, DC, with a heavy heart.  
Tomorrow you will bestow great honor on a hero  
Who answered his country’s call,  
With strength and courage above most all.

For 39 years, James Widener was MIA  
While all who loved him continued to pray  
For a miracle that would bring him home  
To those who lived each day with his fate unknown.

Each one of us sends with you today a prayer  
That God will hold James, his family, the Marines and you in His loving care.  
Know that we are with you to the end.  
Upon that you surely can depend.  
We do not understand what life has in store  
For each of us as we open each door  
To life’s crosses and challenges which seem overwhelming with strife  
But God’s promise will give to us eternal life.

Rest in Peace noble hero as you receive full military honors  
For a life that was lived with great courage and honor.  
We will all continue to pray  
For you and our nation, the USA.
After all the Marines had left, our Honor Guard marched from our position over to the side of the casket. From there we rendered our final salute and Gail and Kathy placed a Vietnam Campaign ribbon necklace upon the casket with all the flowers that were already placed upon the casket. I then uttered the words “Welcome Home, Jim” and then gave the command ‘Ready Two’ and we marched off out of sight. As we marched off the lone piper, Dave Linder, began playing the Marine Corps Hymn, and we halted and saluted for this final tribute.

AVVA
Kathy Gleason, Liaison

AVVA members continue to be active and support the members of VVA Chapter 20. Some journeyed to D.C. in September for ceremonies at The Wall for POW-MIA day and then again this past month for the repatriation of Pfc. James Widener. It is truly an honor to have our membership represented in these endeavors.

All work and no play...We had a great time at the Halloween party and hope to see more attend next year. The decorations were great, the food scrumptious. Although some initially balked at the Kitty Litter cake, I noticed there was substantial “litter” gone by the end of the evening. The King and Queen were there, along with some asbestos workers, an M&M (yellow), Tigger accompanied by 3 devilish females, a genie, a Civil War soldier and his belle, a witch, a homeless vet and a very cheeky cowboy in chaps. The consensus was to repeat it again next year, so we’ll put it on the calendar again.

2007 will be here before we know it. In January we will host a Euchre party. Watch the BTL for more details. It will be on Saturday, January 27th. There will be prize money, light refreshments and the normal fun that seems to follow us around whenever we gather.

We’re fast approaching the holidays and I ask that you all look around you and support others in our extended family that may need a bit more support whether enduring illness, being caregivers of those ill, those grieving for loved ones who have passed or those with little or no family supports. Let’s be certain all are remembered and supported during this holiday season.

I offer the following holiday gift suggestions, in the words of Oren Arnold:

“To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect.”
Chapter 20 thanks the following sponsors of our 25th Anniversary Celebration:

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Between the Lines is published monthly by Chapter 20, Vietnam Veterans of America. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Chapter 20, or the Vietnam Veterans of America, its officers, board of directors, or the general membership. No subscription fee is charged for this publication, and inclusion on the mailing list is available on request. Between the Lines can also be seen on the Chapter 20 website, www.vva20.org.

We welcome letters to the editor, poetry, original articles, and suggestions. Submissions can be sent to: Between the Lines, 1199 E. Main Street, Rochester, New York 14609. If you want to submit something on disk, call the office (585-482-7396) to check on compatibility. If you want your manuscript returned, include a self-addressed envelope with postage. We reserve the right not to use materials we think are not appropriate for the publication, and to edit for space and clarity. We’d also like to have a phone number as well as your name in case there are any questions.

The deadline for submissions intended for a particular month’s issue is the 5th of the preceding month. If the 5th falls on a weekend or holiday, the deadline is the first business day following the 5th.
Help Build The Veterans Walk at the Rochester Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Any past or present member of the United States Armed Services, Active or Reserve, is eligible for an engraved paver brick. For information and an order form, please contact the Chapter 20 office at 482-7396.

FNG and The Welcome Home Parade
by Bruce VanAppeldoorn

I joined the Chapter two years ago this fall. It was pretty much a no brainer. I had seen the Marching Unit in several local parades and my impression of the first Chapter meeting I attended was “good group of folks who want to help the community and other veterans.” No one had the “poor me…I’ve been screwed by the government” mentality.

The best decision I made was to get involved with the Marching Unit. It wasn’t hard. Spoke to Ray Melens and took a few bucks over to see Charlie at C.M. Gifts and Militaria at 497 Stone Road. Charlie has complete uniforms and accessories. He has served the Chapter for years and even gives us a discount.

Soon it was Spring and the Parade Schedule came out. The first event was for the City’s Lilac Festival. It was a beautiful day and I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rockers. I decided to treat the parade as any assignment so I applied my Iceman personality. Don’t make eye contact…just march. As I had done a lot in the Marine Corps, I accomplished the mission but as a Marine not as a person.

After the fact I realized that the crowd noise was for us…it was our Welcome Home. I wrestled with that experience and wondered if I could participate in another parade. Next was Memorial Day and I found myself marching in the parade that my parents had taken me to so many times as a boy. This one was the ultimate Welcome Home as the crowd exploded as we marched by. In the canyon of downtown Rochester it was magnified…it was electrifying.

The added benefit has been the friendships that I have made during the parade season. The parades now include some quality time with friends and family. It is so much more than I had envisioned.

I have been stripped of my FNG status. Maybe it’s your turn to be the FNG and experience the welcome home applause of the crowds from Holley to Sampson State Park to downtown Rochester.

As for me, if I can walk I will march. If I can’t walk, I’ll follow Wally’s example. Wally has shown us that being mechanized has its advantages….not only can you keep in step but no one can beat you to the beer tent.
Did you know?

You can read Between the Lines even before it is printed and arrives in your mailbox. Once each issue is laid out, it goes on the Chapter 20 website, www.vva20.org. We try to have it available by the first of the month.

Calendars and Cards Wanted
Do you have calendars or packages of cards sent to you by charitable organizations which you don’t need? Ralph Pascale can see to it that they are distributed to hospitalized veterans. Give them to him at any membership meeting.

United Way Designation
Chapter 20 is now on United Way as a donor designation eligible agency. Please donate!

Congratulations...

United Way

Drivers needed!
Volunteers are urgently needed to drive the DAV van. Can you help fellow veterans this way? You do not have to be a member of the DAV. To volunteer, or for further information, please contact John Lewiston at the VA Clinic, 463-2636.

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This kept the dye from burning and resulted in more smoke production.

Once starter patches were replaced in the violet and red smoke grenades, the amount of smoke produced was more than adequate to meet military standards. The violet smoke grenades successfully produced the right color, amount of smoke and burn time. However, the smoke produced by the redesigned red smoke grenades was too pale compared to the original. Additional research and testing will be necessary to develop smoke for the red M18 grenades.

The Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program and the Environmental Security Technology Certification Program provide funding for this program.

Kathleen Voigt is a Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc., consultant supporting the U.S. Army Environmental Center.
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Operation Welcome Home: www.operationwelcomehome.org
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X=Present E=Excused A=Absent