

The Vietnam Memorial Wall

*Panel 40E, Line 75.* What does this mean: is it simply a number? A name? No, this is the spot on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. that commemorates my fallen uncle for his service during the Vietnam War. But not only does this spot bear his name, but rather it acknowledges that he fought for a good cause supported by his government in a “conflict” that the citizens of his country did not even support or recognize as the true war that it was.

In my interview with Jerome Andrews, one of the main questions I posed to him was “How did your visit to the Vietnam Memorial Wall affect you, and did it give you a sense of closure?” His response was strikingly simple yet entirely profound. When Jerome visited the Wall, he felt not only terrible sorrow for the loss of his comrades, but also a fierce sense of pride and dignity that the war that they had fought so long ago had finally received proper recognition for the men who perished. The country felt the war was really just a “Vietnam Conflict” and never really considered it a war, and that many of the men who served there were treated with physical hostility, harsh words, and disrespect upon returning to their country. But finally, with the construction of the Vietnam Memorial Wall, the men who fought and died in the war for their country were finally recognized for their noble sacrifices and were denied no longer.

After talking with my peers and coworkers, I feel that the greatest effect that the Wall has had on society is that it is a visual reminder that—even though we as citizens might disagree with an ongoing war such as many do with Iraq—there are still men and women over there who are fighting for our everyday freedoms and that they need to be treated with the dignity, respect, and honor that they deserve.

As a future teacher, I plan to have my students write letters to soldiers that are involved in a war rather than shy away from supporting those men and women. By this method, I am not installing a direct opinion of whether the war is right or wrong, but instead teaching students that we need to support our troops and be strong citizens by uniting as a nation and respecting all who call it home.

*Panel 40E, Line 75.* What does this mean? It is not just a number, a name, or even a spot on the Wall. It is a piece of history reminding Americans as a whole to salute those risking their lives for the greater good. We oftentimes use the phrase “United, We Stand,” but seldom does anyone want to acknowledge the second half: “Alone, We Fall.” Without support for our troops during future wars, I fear that we could again be faced with a situation like Vietnam where our country is torn regarding giving support to their national brothers.