

Memorial Plaque Dedication Speech

Ft. Walton Beach, Saturday, October 4, 2003

ALL GAVE SOME , SOME GAVE ALL

Welcome Stinger and Shadow Family Members and Brother gunship warriors. It is a privilege and honor to be here with you once again at Hurlburt Field's "Air Commando Memorial Park." They say the Vietnam War was a long time ago. Wasn't it just yesterday?

More than 58,169 men and women "Vietnam Veterans" have their names inscribed on the greatest of walls, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., as either "Killed or Missing In Action." These men and women, including our 16 Shadows and Stingers, represent the "Very Best" America had to offer.

Our Vietnam Veterans represented on the "Vietnam Memorial Wall," and those represented on the plaque we enshrine today, chose to serve and answer the call to duty, honor and country. These were "hard choices" and "hard decisions" during the 1960's and 70's for them as well as many of you. They chose to serve their country when called, rather than the many alternatives that were available. Our brothers asked for "nothing" in return, except for the respect of their countrymen. We Vietnam Veterans not only "talked the talk, we walked the walk," and without doubt, remembered President John F. Kennedy's words "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country."

Today we answer the question many of us have asked over the past few years....what can we do for the brothers we lost. Today we place upon this memorial park a plaque dedicated to our brothers who gave the ultimate sacrifice in Southeast Asia.

It is also dedicated to each and every one of us here today. This Air Commando Park is a place where we can and must come full circle and help heal the wounds and heartache caused by the Vietnam War. A place we come to "Remember" and "Honor" the ultimate sacrifices of "America's Best" who are represented here on this memorial plaque. This is the time and place to remember our familys' and our own sacrifices and commitment in Southeast Asia. There were good times and bad, which will be remembered forever. The Vietnam War is not our life, just an important chapter in our life.

We often ask ourselves, why these men gave their lives for the United States of America. I believe the answer is, in part, that we fought and died for each other. William Shakespeare said: *"We shall be remembered; we few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that shed his blood with me shall be my brother."*

William Shakespeare had it right. Our lives will never be the same after serving in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. We have been, and will be, forever changed. This is neither good nor bad, "just the way it is." War does that to all warriors, their families, and their friends.

Our first reunion and memorial service in 2000 gave us a chance to properly say goodbye to our 16 members of the Special Operators killed In Action. In the past we never had the full opportunity to pay them the respect and honor they deserve. Yes, there were small ceremonies and tributes, but our detachments were located too far away from each other and our home base, to be able to accomplish this the way we wanted to.

This is a "Great Part" of why we are here today. We are here, together again, as a military combat unit, with our fallen warriors and their family members, "saying both hello and goodbye," to our fallen "Stinger and Shadow Heroes". We come to honor those whose names are inscribed on this plaque, who along with their families and friends gave the supreme sacrifice. They will never be forgotten!

We must never forget to tell all of America what the Vietnam Memorial stands for, what this memorial stands for. We also must never forget our POW-MIA's. Vietnam Veterans, and we Shadows and Stingers in particular, should never rest until everyone is accounted for.

We of the 71st , 17th and 18th Special Operations Squadrons had a "Great" mission. If it weren't for the Shadows and Stingers and their skills and sacrifices, many more names would be on the wall and many more in this park. Indeed, we Shadows and Stingers were the "Best of the Best." We dared to go when and where others would not go. People need not take our word for this. All they have to do is ask the units our squadrons supported: the beleaguered air bases and camps, Special Forces and advisors. Ask the Green Berets, LRRP, Mobile Strike Force and Ranger Team members. Ask the South Vietnamese villagers who were in danger of being over run. Ask the "Brown Water Navy" Sailors, including the Seals and UDT and ask the U.S. Army and Marine Corps - they will tell you!

LET WE VIETNAM VETERANS, OUR FAMILY MEMBERS, STINGERS AND SHADOWS NEVER FORGET THE SACRIFICES, REPRESENTED HERE, ESPECIALLY OUR GUNSHIP BROTHERS KILLED IN ACTION.

REMEMBER—ALL GAVE SOME , SOME GAVE ALL

WE ARE HERE NOW TO HONOR THOSE WHO GAVE ALL! [A reading of the names of the KIAs by three prior 17th and 18th SOS Commanders]

WELCOME HOME BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND ITS VETERANS.

Memorial Service remarks by AC-119 Gunship Association President Gus Sininger