



A veteran sees a familiar name on the Vietnam Traveling

War Memorial while it was in Hanley Falls.

FROM MY BACKYARD

By Byron Higgin

The veteran walked over to me, looked me in the face and said, "You know what this is, don't you?"

He handed me a string of multi-colored beads.

Then he said, "Welcome Home, soldier."

I've been home from Vietnam since 1960, a long time.

Yet it wasn't until this year I've been told, "Welcome Home."

It happened this week in Hanley Falls at the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall on display in Hanley Falls.

The veteran was nearly bronze himself from the sun and he had on veteran's gear and

motorcycle leather.

“Welcome home to you, too,” I said.

It’s very sobering when you see the wall and names of men you knew jump out at you.

“I lost 13 friends in one spot on one day,” the veteran told me.

Again, I was humbled by the experience.

It happened to me one other time in St. Paul earlier this year when veterans from across the state of Minnesota gathered to be honored for their contribution to the war in Vietnam.

“Welcome home,” a soldier said.

It felt so good to hear those words, even if they were late by several years.

This time in Hanley Falls I looked at the beads the veteran gave me and I did know what they meant.

They meant sacrifice, honor, friends lost forever and a time that changed my life forever.

Vietnam left me with a sobering value of Freedom.

I knew after arriving home we were FREE in this country because other men died ... my friends, my comrades, my buddies in arms.

Some came home wounded — and others didn’t come home at all.

So when I saw the wall last weekend, it wasn’t just sobering. I’d seen the replica before and the real wall in Washington.

That time I actually dropped to my knees when I saw the name of my former bunkmate in basic training.

I hadn’t heard he’d died, so it was quite a shock.

But the fact is, there is nothing easy about knowing your friends died any time. It’s just harder seeing their names on a wall in front of you.

And each time, tears flowed as I thought about my friends ... gone forever, but never forgotten!

LAUGH A LITTLE: If an airplane crashed right on the Canadian Border and the United States border and all the people died — where would they bury the survivors?

Answer: “They don’t bury survivors, silly!”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: As my old pappy used to say, “I think I think more than you think I think.”