

Oconomowoc Chapter 635 Color Guard Represents Wisconsin at the 40th Anniversary of the Vietnam Wall

The 40th Anniversary of the Vietnam Memorial Wall was celebrated on Veteran's Day, Friday, November 11th, in Washington D.C. 33 states and the U.S. Territory of Puerto Rico formed a combined color guard in the Massing of Colors. Wisconsin was proudly represented by Vern Larson, Greg Bloch, Kreg Reimer, James Joyce, and Dennis Criel, members of Oconomowoc Chapter 635. Four of the Oconomowoc Color Guard and their AVVA Chapter Representative, Sharon Jung-Bloch, were honored to be able to read the 58,281 names of the brothers and sisters on the wall. Four of the Oconomowoc Color Guard returned on separate days to fill vacant slots. Our participation in the anniversary signified that as a chapter and representatives of the VVA Wisconsin State Council, we valued the names listed on the granite wall, and admired the family members and fellow veterans paying tribute to their fallen family members, friends, and fellow brothers and sisters. For many of us, reading the names or reaching out and touching a name on the wall forged a connection not only to the past but also to the present veterans and active military. An additional bonus was that spouses, family members, and friends traveled to Washington to join the chapter in commemoration. It was time well spent and a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Featured speakers at the event were 24th Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough, and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III. For us, the most memorable speaker was Connie G. Evans a Vietnam veteran and the first Indigenous woman to serve. She recounted her experiences as she left the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho Reservation to the field hospitals in Vietnam. Her story was simple but marked with sincerity, compassion, and pride in being a Vietnam Veteran. Her Vietnam experiences helped her forge a career path that is marked by professional and academic achievement as well community outreach.