

## **NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMANDERY**

### **A “WELCOME HOME” FOR VIETNAM VETERANS**

Between 11 and 13 May 2023, companions of the National Capital Commandery represented the Naval Order in the Congressionally-mandated Welcome Home event for Vietnam War veterans at the National Mall in Washington, DC. This event marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the United States’ direct combat involvement in the Vietnam War. It was organized by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration Commission.

Participant organizations formed a temporary community of white tents for exhibits, displays, videos, and talks. Visitors could meet and talk with representatives from veterans’ and POW/MIA organizations. These organizations, such as Veterans of Foreign Wars, Daughters of the American Revolution, Navy History and Heritage Command, Library of Congress Veteran’s History Project, Women in the Military, Purple Heart Foundation, Gold Star Families, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Association, Quilts of Valor, ROTC units, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and the Veterans Administration had tents on site. Hundreds of cities, churches, civic organizations, military bases/posts, health clinics, and veteran’s honor flight associations signed on as Commemorative Partners, including the Naval Order of the U.S.

Vice Commander, MCPO David Mattingly (USN Ret) a Vietnam Veteran, led the National Capital Commandery effort. The commandery invited Brown Water Navy veterans -- who did not have a tent of their own -- to come and stand watches with us. Our exhibit featured photos of the Maritime Services’ members including Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Merchant Marine units, ships, and small boats supporting the American effort during the Vietnam War. Companions in attendance told visitors about the Naval Order and invited them to join, giving them specially-designed tokens ("poker chips") with contact details. The Naval Order tent also invited fellow companions to display their books about the Vietnam War. Dr. Ed Marolda who wrote *Admirals Under Fire* and *By Sea, Air, and Land*, and Lewis McIntyre who wrote *TACAMO* attended and talked about their books. Those in the Naval Order tent were thrilled with a visit from our fellow companion, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro!

The weekend began with a patriotic opening ceremony by the US Navy Band and the Armed Forces Joint Color Guard. Various groups provided panel discussions on the legacy of Vietnam from a variety of perspectives. One four-star panel consisted of two generals and two admirals who served during the war, including the 23rd Commandant of the US Coast Guard, Admiral Thad Allen, USCG, Ret. (the 2011 Naval Order DSSA recipient) and 17<sup>th</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, USN, Ret. (the 2012 Naval Order DSSA recipient). A static display of Vietnam-era helicopters provided visitors with a hands-on understanding of the importance of helicopters in combat. Several drill teams gave demonstrations of their skill. The closing ceremony included a concert by the USMC Band, Free Country.

Welcome Home was an opportunity for a grateful nation to thank and honor our Vietnam War veterans and their families for their service, valor, and sacrifice. The Vietnam War Commemoration Commission plans additional events thru 2025 signifying the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

**Submitted by Judy Pearson, Ph.D.**

**Photos and Captions**

{Note to Editor: These five are the most important photos. The others are just fillers that you can use if you want to.}

Photo 1: Companions of the National Capital Commandery standing watch.

Photo 2: Commemorative Partner Citation

Photo 3: Authors Lewis McIntyre and Dr. Ed Marolda

Photo 4: Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro and MCPO Dave Mattingly

Photo 5: Captain John Rodgaard shakes hands with Admiral Mike Mullin after a panel discussion.