

The Vietnam Memorial – A Tribute to Robert Doubek by The Embassy Series

By Gary Tischler

This is a special night in so many ways, joyous, but also mindful of the occasion, celebratory of a man and his achievements, but also memorializing a time and a war.

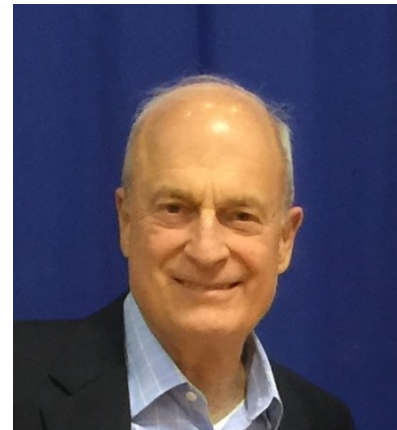
We are honored, of course, to honor Robert Doubek, who was so instrumental in gaining support for the Vietnam Memorial, which honors and recognizes the over 50,000 American soldiers who served and sacrificed their lives in that war. Mr. Doubek does us honor, as he does for the Czech Republic.

That wall on the mall is a hallowed place, especially the just-celebrated Memorial Day, when it seems to acquire extra shimmer and meaning in the presence of the veterans that war, roaring in on motorcycles, quietly searching the walls for the impression of letters of names not forgotten by them. But it is that way, every day.



That wall is personal to many of us here—Embassy Series founder and director Jerome Barry served with the 1st Cavalry Airmobile unit in Vietnam—and all of us who were young then lived in its shadow, its drama and its losses. We are most of us not children but many of us were young then, in that time of war and dramatic changes, many of them sparked by the war and its existence in the daily news.

This is a city of many memorials to perhaps too many wars. It seems to be the hallmark of civilized man to engage in often savage, wholly destructive and uncivilized activities we call war, and the world's greatest democracy has not been immune from that, being born in war and revolution. The National Mall,



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especially at or near the Reflecting Pool, where Abraham Lincoln seems to preside as a kind of chief mourner, has a nexus of the memorialization of the human cost of our various wars, conflicts and struggles, and each bears the particular stamp of those conflicts.

Here, there's a classic, historical tone to the World War II memorial in its design, noting the far-flung nature and size of that war which changed the power structures and cultures of almost all the world. Only when the veterans themselves were there when the monument first opened and they poured over the monument did it become animated. Their numbers are dwindling now and the monument is slowly receding into a historic place.

This is something that is not likely to happen to the Vietnam Memorial, a memorial like no other. The generation who fought there or struggled with its politics and impact will disappear one day, one month, but the monument itself will never lose its immediacy, its sheen and shine, its intimacy. There's a simplicity to it that grabs at the human heart, any human heart, with a suddenness that is sometimes shocking. It was marked initially by acts of recognition of a particular kind, now and in the future it will be marked by acts of recognition of another kind, the plainness and glory of names.

There is something almost blinding and clear and honest about the place. You can take away the messages, the flowers, the pictures left behind, and they are taken away, sooner or later, they wilt and fade, and the memory of shuffling feet of men and women and families going by and suddenly finding the name they were looking for, they too will be taken away, back to home.

The names always remain. Not even military cemeteries with their white crosses and names and greenery are quite so clear, so truthful, so artless. The object here is not to create art, but what art does, which at its best and highest, is to tell the truth. Jerome Barry remembers a young man in his very youth named Sgt. Luther Burton, from Virginia, age 23, whom he knew at Fort Benning, Georgia, and who was killed in Vietnam, and whose name is on the wall. Luther was Lieutenant Barry's education assistant.

Every one of us, by some dint of connection, relative or six degrees, it matters not, can find a name like that and be frozen into a hush. This will happen, tomorrow, into the distance as long as the memorial exists. Those names are the truth. You can recite them out loud, or fold them into your heart, you can sing them, connect them, copy them, and they will be there. That's the truth of that war—the names, the loss. Because that war, with all its divisiveness, its demonstrations, its challenges and the horrors of how it was fought changed America, released us and unmoored us from simpler times and towns in which we grew up, and to which we sometimes still yearn to return.

The time before Vietnam is irretrievable, but the names are not. They are as honest, and clear as a tear, as rain running down the names on a stormy day. There may be, for all we know, a dozen occasions of a Sam Jones, but none are the same, but they are kin and offer kinship. The losses were almost too painful to bear because of their sheer number. If you

walked by that wall, slowly, in a day, and recited every name out loud, it would be like telling the story of America. All of it. Fifty thousand. Five thousand, a hundred, a dozen, three, one.

Sgt. Luther Burton.

Luther William Burton

Sergeant

C CO, 2ND BN, 7TH CAVALRY, 1ST CAV DIV, USARV

Army of the United States

Roanoke, Virginia

December 14, 1941 to November 01, 1965

LUTHER W BURTON is on the Wall at **Panel 3E, Line 11**

See the [full profile](#) or [name rubbing](#) for Luther Burton

