

I received a letter in the mail a bit ago, and it reads like this:

Dear Mayor Crawford: I've been trying to get in contact with you regarding the enclosed document. When I read it, I was very taken by it, and thought it very fitting for the upcoming Memorial Day Service. You see, two years ago on Memorial Day you gave me a piece about a P.O.W. I read it at the Mishicot ceremony. So, I thought I might be able to return the favor. While I realize that it may be too late to fit this in, my wife encouraged me to try anyway...so here it is.

Mayor Crawford, I served 22.5 months in Vietnam as a Navy Seal. And a month and half before my second tour was to end, I was wounded and sent state side. So, you see, I might feel a strong tie to this piece, not to mention that it was a Navy Seal who wrote it. I'll appreciate whatever you decide, even if you only read it yourself. I hope to see you this Memorial Day.

This narrative, sent to me by a veteran named David describes another memorial ceremony. One that is deeply individual and personal...and one that takes place at yet another veterans' memorial just off the Mall in Washington, DC. And even though it addresses a war that shattered lives and hopes and dreams of the generation I'm proud to be a member of – I guess each war has had that impact – these words written by Navy Seal Herman Melville Piere have a message of hope for all Americans.

*He had come at dawn because he knew that then, before the world had awakened, he would find the silence he knew was essential. He had come early because he also knew that he must be alone.*

*The eastern sky glowed with the pink that heralds the coming of the sun on clear mornings, and he stopped for a moment to gaze at it, basking in the warmth that it evoked within him. There was a chill in the air, and he had been fighting back the urge to shiver.*

*He moved on, wishing his footsteps were not audible in the morning stillness. Looking ahead through the bud-laden boughs of young trees, he could see them, the three men.*

*They stood motionless, maintaining the silence he had felt so important. He drew nearer and felt his stomach muscles tighten as he saw that one of the men held an M-60 machine gun on his right shoulder. And a wash of nostalgia swept through him as he recognized the flak jacket worn by the man in the middle.*

*The three men didn't move when he stepped up to them and pulled the black beret from his head. Their bronze eyes looked beyond him, filled with conviction and a trace of ironic despair. They were eyes that had seen the*

*power and the glory of America, and had witnessed the agony of shattered dreams and the sorrow of death. Their eyes, which had once scanned bamboo thickets in search of Vietcong, now centered upon a long black wall covered with names that bore poignant testimony to days and people gone but not forgotten.*

*He looked at these three men for a long time and saw something of himself in them. Then the rays of the rising sun began to glint off their metallic features. He turned, and the four of them together watched the etched names on the granite wall grown brighter in the morning sunlight.*

David, I am glad your wife encouraged you to send this. Veterans, thank you for your courage and sacrifices. Fellow citizens, have a safe Memorial Day.