

Tokens of Remembrance

At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, that long wall of black marble engraved with the names of those killed in the war, people come to remember their friends and loved ones. They often leave tokens of their remembrance: flags, sealed letters, pieces of clothing, photos. Volunteers collect these tokens daily and store them at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection.

A book called "Offerings at the Wall" pictures many of these mementos. One man left dog tags, a headband, and a letter that reads, "To all of you here from Echo Company, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division ... I leave you my headband which contains my sweat from the war, my dog tag, and a picture of me and Mike. Another time, another place. I'll never forget you."

A woman left a braid of hair and a picture of a house with an American flag hanging at the porch. Her note read, "Wayne, I think of you every day and miss you so much. I love you."

Written on one flag was this message: "May all of you who died, all of you still missing, and all of you who returned home never be forgotten -- Connie."

This is Memorial Day Weekend, 2004. Begun as Decoration Day, a time set aside to honor the nation's Civil War dead by decorating their graves, Memorial Day was declared by Congress to be a national holiday celebrated the last Monday in May. The war in Iraq and its uneasy aftermath have shown us in vivid and painful ways of the sacrifices of our men and women throughout our nation's history to preserve the freedoms we hold dear.

Although we may not be able to leave some token at a war memorial somewhere, in the midst of camping, picnics and family get-togethers, let us find some way to pause in meditation or prayer in remembrance of those who have died in America's wars.

--Beecher Hunter