



Families gather to remember 84 Staten Islanders killed in Vietnam

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By Jillian Jorgensen/Staten Island Advance



(Staten Island Advance/Hilton Flores)

Master of Ceremonies Dennis McLoone surrounded by the Honor Guard, Thomas J. Tori Chapter Vietnam Veterans of America at the Monument. 6/10/12 (Staten Island Advance/Hilton Flores)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- The aim of the annual ceremony held for the 20th time today in the small Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park was to make sure that the 84 Staten Islanders killed in Vietnam are never forgotten.

Judging by the crowd of well over 200 people in Castleton Corners, the Honor Guard of the Thomas J. Tori Chapter, Vietnam Veterans of America, is succeeding in its mission, even two decades after it began.

"This is an ongoing mission that will never be completed," Honor Guard Captain Nicky Castoro told the standing-room-only crowd.

Family members placed flowers alongside the memorial to the borough's 84 killed or missing in action in Vietnam, and the ceremony included a somber reading of each of the names, followed by the ringing of a silver bell for each one. New this year, the faces of those killed -- most of them young and smiling -- adorned the fence surrounding the small memorial park.

Chapter President Gene DiGiacomo praised his first vice president, Danny Ingellis, for taking on the task of finding the photographs of the 84 men and placing them in the park, even though the task was logistically difficult.

"He kept his promise," DiGiacomo said.

DiGiacomo told the crowd he had read and heard of many mothers -- including his own -- who wondered why their children never wrote home from Vietnam about the war, focusing instead on things like the weather. It was because they were no longer the boy their family once knew, DiGiacomo said, but soldiers. They could not imagine writing home about the awful things they were experiencing, he said.

"He couldn't share those things with you, the ones he loved, because he didn't want you to worry," DiGiacomo said.

"But above all, it was his duty as a soldier to shield you from the horrors of war."

The ceremony also included prayer, songs and reflections from other veterans. Chaplain Dennis McLoone, master of ceremonies for the event, offered a prayer from Rev. Lin McGee, national chaplain of the Blue Star Mothers of America.

"Our heroes have gone on before us -- too young to go -- but too brave to stay. Our hearts were set on our lives together, an eternity of days, a future of tomorrows, yet, day is done," he read.

Castoro, in his closing remarks, said the stone monument behind him, and ones made of granite and marble all across the country, were not the true legacy of fallen members of the military.

"Their true monuments are our freedoms, the American way of life," he said.

DiGiacomo said it was important to honor those who had died, and that the annual ceremony is especially important to their family members, who turn out in droves each year. Among them yesterday were Madeline and Raymond Flynn Sr., whose son Raymond Jr. was killed in Vietnam. His body was brought home by his brother, Mrs. Flynn said, who was serving with the Navy during the conflict.

"It was very moving," Flynn, a World War II veteran himself, said. "I'm glad they remembered all of the soldiers gone before them."

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Vietnam Veterans of America Thomas J. Tori Chapter 421 hold their annual Day of Remembrance for the 84 Islanders killed in action. (Staten Island Advance/Hilton Flores)

[Islanders Killed in Vietnam Remembered gallery \(10 photos\)](#)