

THE 173D AIRBORNE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION HERALDRY PROJECT

By Bob Wolfgang, Director of Heraldry

The soul of the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial is the data contained therein. Most revered are the names of the fallen warriors from all generations of Sky Soldiers, whom we have pledged never to forget. The Memorial serves as a lasting tribute to the bravery, service and sacrifice of Sky Soldiers and their allies who served in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Countless hours of research went into the production of the Heraldry information displayed on the granite.

Soon after the Memorial Foundation was formed, Foundation Board member Ray Ramirez began researching the history and lineage of the 173d Airborne Brigade. His research focused on unit awards and honors, the Order of Battle, and the names of fallen warriors. He obtained several lists of the 173d's fallen from Vietnam, which had been developed by various sources over the years, and consolidated them into one master list that became the Foundation's baseline for this project. Much of Ray's early Heraldry work appears on the finished product.

In June 2007, Bob Wolfgang was appointed Director of Heraldry. He was tasked to create the layout and compile, refine and edit the data, artwork and pictorials that would appear on the 30 granite panels of the Memorial. Bob enlisted the services of Joe Flesch, Floyd Riester, Diane Wolfgang, and the late Mike Deems to assist him in this important project. Floyd's experience with helping build the Soldiers Field Memorial in Rochester, MN proved invaluable in moving the project forward.

The most important element of the Heraldry data is the roster of the fallen Sky Soldiers from the formation of the Brigade through the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) deployment that was underway that spring. The Memorial Foundation Board of Directors spent many hours discussing how the names of the fallen were going to be displayed.

After considerable deliberation, the Memorial Foundation Board of Directors adopted the following criteria:

- The names of the fallen would be placed on the inside panels of the Memorial, thus "protected."
- Due to space limitations, only Sky Soldiers serving with organic or assigned units of the Brigade would be listed, with one exception: our fallen brothers from "Down Under" who served with distinction during the Brigade's first year in Vietnam would also be included.
- Names would be engraved alphabetically by last name which would provide user-friendly access for visitors and not require a directory.
- Rank would not be included, as the life of a private and a senior officer are equally precious.
- The names of those who died in theater of non-combat causes would be listed on the Memorial.

Editing and correcting the list of the Vietnam fallen proved to be the most time-consuming entity of the project because the baseline data contained many duplications and misspellings, and included names of soldiers from units that were temporarily attached to the Brigade over the six years and four months Vietnam deployment.

The Heraldry Committee published an appeal to all Sky Soldier veterans in the Sky Soldier magazine and on the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation website, asking everyone to review the list online and notify the Foundation of corrections or additions. Between 2006 and 2009 the Heraldry Committee was able to add 17 fallen Vietnam Sky Soldiers to the database who were previously unaccounted for, through family members or comrades coming forward with information.

Mike Deems and Joe Flesh undertook the job of refining the available Order of Battle information, confirming and expanding it to ensure inclusion of all units assigned to the Brigade between May 1965 and August 1971. They spent many hours at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., pouring over records and Department of the Army orders. The task was complicated by the fact that the Brigade's Table of Organization and Equipment changed frequently over the course of six plus years. When Mike became ill, Joe marched on, and completed the project in October 2008.

In addition to gathering and verifying information the Heraldry Committee also had the task of developing the creative layout evident in the Memorial. They determined how many granite panels would be required to list the names of those who died in service in Vietnam, the content of the panels opposite the lists of the fallen, and the Brigade history and other information pertinent to the Vietnam era. A separate panel honoring the 173d Sky Soldier recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor was developed. The Foundation Board of Directors elected to devote a separate display **of six panels** to the 173d ABCT. A total of four panels are held "in reserve" for information from future deployments.

In September 2009, the Memorial Foundation Board of Directors awarded Columbus Monument Company (CMC) the contract to furnish the engraved granite panels for the Memorial, using both sandblast and laser etch methods. South African Absolute/Jet Black Granite was selected for the substrate, along with font style and sizes. CMC prepared Computer Assisted Design (CAD) layouts to scale of each panel with its designed copy. Following revisions, paper proofs were provided to the Foundation Board for final approval prior to proceeding with fabrication. The Memorial Foundation is extremely grateful to Lynn Evans of CMC for her professional expertise and advice in guiding us through this final, most critical phase of the Heraldry effort.

Most Memorials have a "begin date" and "end date" that makes layout planning and physical construction relatively simple. The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial will continue to be a work in progress as the Sky Soldiers of today and tomorrow record new achievements to be added to the Brigade's distinguished history. A unique feature of the Memorial is its adaptability and flexibility to accommodate future data inputs for generations to come. Each panel can be removed from its frame, reversed, polished, and

engraved with additional data, if required, once the four blank panels are filled. In addition, three blank panels are stored within the memorial in case one of the displayed panels is damaged beyond repair. This unique feature of the Memorial enables the Foundation Board of Directors to reassert with some confidence the pledge that the heritage of our unique Brigade, and the service and sacrifices of all Sky Soldiers, will never be forgotten.