YOUR HISTORY

VIETNAM AIRMEN GATHER IN COLORADO SPRINGS

Memorial being constructed to honor 300 who sacrificed lives

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The Forward Air Controllers (FAC) Association will hold the national FAC reunion in Colorado Springs on October 1-5, 2008. We are expecting 400-500 attendees, including some FACs from Australia. In conjunction with the reunion, the local Colorado Springs FAC organization is building a memorial that will honor nearly 300 American servicemen who died while flying or supporting the FAC mission during the war in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos).

Spearheaded by hundreds of other veterans of that unpopular conflict, this memorial will educate people of the Pikes Peak Region about the sacrifice and heroism of these Americans who died in the combat zone. The list of those killed includes Air Force, Army, and Marine personnel, both officer and enlisted. The memorial will also recognize the two FACs who were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. In addition to this gathering of men who flew O-1 Bird Dogs, O-2A Skymasters, and OV-10 Broncos, the

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F-100 Misty Fast FACs will also participate in this memorial.

The people being memorialized are true heroes in every respect. The Forward Air Controller (FAC) mission was one of the most hazardous of the War in Southeast Asia; so much so that The History Channel, when it did a program on FACs, called it "Suicide Missions, Forward Air Controllers." FACs flew small propeller aircraft for hours over the battle field to identify enemy targets and then direct the bombing by fighters and bomber aircraft that had only enough fuel to remain in the target area for minutes.

FACs supported all branches of the military, so this is a multi-service event. Forward Air Controllers were the "air component commanders" of the battle. They were the only ones with the communication equipment to talk to all elements — those fighting on the ground and in the air. They were the operations center that called for fighter or bomber aircraft and had the ordnance that could make the difference in the course of the battle.

The responsibilities of the FAC were enormous, the difference between life and death for the Army and Marine Corps fighters on the ground. It is said that there would be many more names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. if it were not for the FACs. FACs are held in high esteem by all who fought in the war, and the dedication will reflect that.

The stories of certain FAC missions can now be told. The Southeast Asia conflict was a wide-ranging war for the Air Force because they flew throughout the region, in both North and South Vietnam, out of Thailand, out of Laos, and over Cambodia. Some missions involving Laos and Cambodia were classified up until 1993. Of the 78 FACs killed outside South Vietnam, few of their families were told the details of their deaths. This caused hard feelings and extended grief for their families. The families can now hear about the dangers faced, and celebrate the heroism, of those who were lost, bringing healing and closure for the deceased's family.

Due to the unpopularity of the war, and the way returning military members were treated, many veterans suppressed their emotions. Returning veterans got no public thanks or recognition. It is only in the past few years that veterans of all types have decided to recognize those that gave the ultimate sacrifice and the families of those that were lost. The camaraderie that occurs among those who faced death in war is beyond the imagination of those who never were placed in such a position.

That was a disservice that we can only try to make up for today with monuments such as the 2008 FAC Memorial — yet we can never do enough. Over 750 people are expected to attend the event on October 3, 2008. We invite all who will the honor the heroism and sacrifices of FACs to attend the dedication in Memorial Park at 10:00am on October 3rd.

Help us honor these brave men who gave their lives and saved an untold number of American and Allied soldiers during the war in Southeast Asia. For more information, check the FAC Web site at: http://www.fac-assoc.org.