

Operation Welcome Home 2005

Maj. Gen. Stephen Goldfein
AWFC commander

Thirty years ago marked the end of the Vietnam conflict. For some of us, it seems like yesterday. Others are too young to recall.

On Veterans Day 1996, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund unveiled a half-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., designed to travel to communities throughout the United States in a program called The Wall That Heals. Recently, I was allowed the distinct honor and privilege of representing Nellis Air Force Base in Mesquite, Nev., as the traveling wall was opened to the public for a four-day display in the wall's only tour through the western United States to be held this year.

Not only was it a great opportunity to meet the great veterans and folks in Mesquite, it was also an opportunity to reflect on what we learned from Vietnam.

The essence of the wall reminds us of all those who served. It provides a clear understanding that we each swear an oath, our promise to support and defend our constitution.

We don't decide whether we will fight and we don't decide what we fight about. We fight for each other and the honor of doing our duty. Vietnam veterans honored their oath. But Vietnam veterans did so much more.

They faced a nation that blamed them for the fact we were at war. Vietnam veterans withstood the pressure with dignity and in so doing, they taught Americans how to separate politics from pure and honorable service to our nation. The sacrifices of our Vietnam veterans taught us how to do it right, and we



Photo by Master Sgt. Charles Ramey

Maj. Gen. Stephen Goldfein, Air Warfare Center commander, speaks to Vietnam Veteran Johnny Kinder while visiting the traveling wall in Mesquite, Nev.

are reaping the benefits of that today. Now when our troops return from the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of war, they are thanked and welcomed home with the honor and respect they have earned.

The traveling wall's stop in Mesquite heralded a year-long national effort to finally render a long overdue "welcome home" to our Vietnam veterans. This historic event, Operation Welcome Home, will culminate this fall at Nellis at our "Aviation Nation 2005 Airshow." The men and women serving their country from Nellis Air Force Base will

join forces with the communities of southern Nevada in a proud effort to honor our Vietnam veterans . . . and give them the welcome home celebration they never received.

Vietnam veterans taught us well. Our current generation has taken the same oath, leading us down a similar road – popular or not – and we will do our duty. I am proud to serve beside each of you, and I thank you for everything you do. God Bless our veterans and the United States of America.