



Advertiser photo by T. Umeda

Dr. Rex Weigel, who lost his right leg in Vietnam, touches one of the 15 names he searched for on the wall. He said he visited the wall every day but one.

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# *They dismantled The Wall, but not the aching memory*

By Andy Yamaguchi  
Advertiser Staff Writer

Two candles, one still flickering in the wind.

A pouch of Beech Nut chewing tobacco.

Notes taped to the wall: "Charlie — I loved you. I miss you. Anne." . . . "LANCE THE KING!! Love, Gregg."

An opened can of beer.

A tuberose lei with a card: "We miss you so. Love, Auntie."

And there, among the hundreds of items of remembrance placed at the traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the State Capitol lawn, a letter wrapped in plastic:

*Dear Johnny,*

*I found your name on the wall today and my heart aches. I have nothing but the fondest memory of our growing up and surfing together at Rockaway Beach, N.Y. in the early sixties!*

They took down the wall yesterday.

Having spent a week on Maui and a week on Oahu, it will be on display in Hilo tomorrow through Feb. 13 in Wailoa State Park. The opening ceremony will be held at noon tomorrow.

The wall is a black river of names, 250 feet long, a half-scale Formica replica of the sunken memorial in Washington, D.C., designed by Maya Ying Lin.

Etched on it are the names of 58,132 Americans who died in Vietnam, including 282 from Hawaii.

All day long, people came for a last look. Sitting cross-legged on the Capitol lawn in front of the wall, tears streaming down his face, a former Vietnam vet wearing a jungle fatigue jacket sobbed out stories of that Southeast Asian war to a friend. She held him tightly.

A woman tried in vain to focus her camera through blurry eyes on a name she found on

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# Wall gone, but message remains

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the wall.

Another visitor found the name of a childhood friend, Maj. Stephen Clark, United States Marine Corps, shot down in his jet fighter in 1968 off the coast of Vietnam. He reminisced about how Steve taught him to throw a football, so long ago.

A Honolulu police officer, in uniform, draped an arm around a woman as she stared at the wall, remembering what was, perhaps thinking of what might have been.

A volunteer worker, helping people find names, said: "A girl collapsed in my arms and said, 'Our graduating class had 37 people in it, and two are on the wall.'"

*When you didn't return from Nam in '68 our group was forever changed. We really missed you in Sept. '83 when the hurricane surf came in. It was just the way you like it . . . big and gnarly!*

John Devitt, the wiry Vietnam vet who conceived of and built the moving wall in 1984, said Hawaii is the first place where leis have been brought to the wall.

Hilo will be stop No. 47. At each place people have brought photos, flowers, medals.

"Originally we moved the stuff along with the wall," Devitt said. "but it got to be so much."

Now everything — except flowers — is tagged and boxed and stored in San Jose, Calif., waiting for the day when a permanent display of memorabilia is built.

Devitt isn't sure that's right. "People don't leave things for other people to look at," he said. "It's their way of communicating with the name on the wall."

Sometimes the wall talks back.

Taped to the wall was a poem written by Jerry Kaopua Brighter, Castle High '67, to his son, Jerry, who was killed by



Advertiser photo by T. Uneda

Al Fernandez, who served in Vietnam as a major in the Special Forces, pays his respects to the moving wall as taps were played on the state Capitol grounds.

sniper fire a few months later, in 1970.

It reads, in part:

Come the time when my part is done

I'll come home to stay and then I'll run

To girl and to friends and I'll softly say,

"It's good to be home" and then I'll pray

For the friends and the comrades that are left behind

Who'll be ever in my heart, spirit and mind.

His mother, Ruth Brighter, taped it to the wall on Wednesday, which would have been Jerry's 35th birthday.

"I didn't intend to attach it to the wall," she said, but changed her mind when others there were as moved by Jerry's poem as she was.

*If there was anyone who loved*

*the ocean and was more obsessed with the sport it was you. Remember those January days in the water with full wet suit, fire, and of course the pint of blackberry brandy!*

The sun was low, and a thousand people stood in concentric circles near the wall yesterday afternoon, holding hands.

Let us never forget their sacrifices. Let us never forget the cost. Let us never again delay the remembrance of their loss," said Steve Molnar, director of the Vet Center, at the 15-minute closing ceremony for the wall.

The people sang "Aloha 'Oe" and a bugler played taps. When it was over, large men hugged each other tightly for a long time.

"Dad, who were they fighting?" a small boy said later. "Were they fighting guerrillas?"

*Johnny, I want you to know we appreciate your patriotism and sacrifice and I know you're up there where the sun shines every day, the tubes are perfect and the wind is always blowing offshore.*

*From me and the surf rats of '66,  
Aloha and Hang in.*

Biff S

Persons who wish to obtain a rubbing of a name from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, or who wish to get more information about the wall, can write: Pegi Donovan, Friends of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Inc., 4200 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Suite 106-180, Washington, D.C. 20016.