

Monument dedicated to Vietnam Veterans

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Veterans of the 8th Battalion, 4th Field Artillery traveled here from as far away as Sydney, Australia, to witness the dedication of a monument commemorating their years of service in Vietnam and the 27 soldiers from the unit who died in action.

The new monument occupies a prominent position in Fort Sill's Constitution Park, west of Condon Road on the north side of Sheridan Road.

"Isn't this a magnificent sight? Just look at where we are. Right up front where this battalion has always been," said retired Maj. Gen. Ike Smith of Washington, D.C., battalion commander in 1969-70. "I certainly want to commend the folks who picked this site. We could not have asked for a better place."

Smith said this year's reunion drew more people than any previous battalion reunion. In addition to Australia, the states of Alaska, New Jersey, Montana, North Dakota, Missouri, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Texas and Oklahoma are represented.

In his memorial address, Smith said he has a tremendous amount of respect and owes of gratitude to people like retired Col. Bill Kindt of Lawton, who commanded the battalion during its infancy and helped it mature. He also praised the committee that worked on the monument.

"It was done with dignity and respect, and it's something we can all be proud of," Smith said.

Cut from a quarry near Granite, the 9-foot granite marker weighs 6,000 pounds and is set in a concrete foundation that is 6 feet deep, according to retired Chief Warrant Officer Joe Talley of Lawton. It was shipped to Georgia for engraving and returned to Gragg Monument Co., Lawton, for emplacement at Fort Sill.

The marker was designed by San Antonio architect Fred B. James, who served with the battalion in Vietnam as a specialist 4. James has done a number of graphics projects for the organization, including membership plaque that has been presented to the families of the unit's 27 fallen soldiers.

"Those who died fighting under the shield of this battalion and whose names are inscribed on this monument will know no other battalion. They gave their full measure, and there is nothing else left for

them to give," said Smith, adding, "There were, those who were seriously wounded fighting under the shield of this battalion, and I see them now bearing their scars as badges of honor."

During Thursday's ceremony, the monument was flanked by 27 flags, representing each soldier listed on the memorial, according to retired Master Sgt. Larry Martin of Champaign, Ill., president of the 8-4 FA Association. Smith dedicated the monument in their honor, in the name of the 8th of the 4th.

The names of the soldiers were read by retired Lt. Col. Brian O'Neill of Sparta, N.J., who served as 8-4 FA's B Battery commander in 1968-1969. The names read were: Orval L. Skirvin, James Allen Lowery, Arkie Junior Wright, Ralph Anthony Lo Grasso, James Wilburn Wood, Harold Metcalf, Kenneth John Greene, Freeman Bolen, Allen Lee Faler, Albert S. Chastain, Melvin Eugene Clark, Christopher James Bell, Pedro DeHerrera, George Washington Pierce, Forrest Hughy Hollifield, Larrie Cornelius Allen, Melvin James Felton, Blake Dominic Whitney, Donald Gene Gibler, James Byrd Foster Jr., Loyd Van McCarthy Jr., Johnny Gordon Williamson, James Edward Tighe, Davis Junior Morgan, Stuart Marshall Binkley, Rueben Thomas

Aragon and Paul Trujillo.

"On behalf of the current and future soldiers here at Fort Sill and all artillerymen around the world, we accept this fitting tribute being presented to the installation in memorial to the 8th Battalion 4th Field Artillery, and specifically to those soldiers who paid the ultimate price for freedom while serving your battalion," said Col. Jeffrey Yaeger, deputy commander of the U.S. Army Field Artillery Center and assistant commandant of the U.S. Army Field Artillery School.

Yaeger told the association that as their lineage is remembered, it is important to remember that their children and grandchildren are now picking up the challenge "to continue our promises to the future."

He said the events of the last five years, and particularly the last two days, show "we are involved in a difficult struggle. This is a struggle that will take the time, the energy and the resources of our nation. It is a noble cause as well as a significant challenge. You can take great pride in the knowledge that those of you who served in the 8-4 have set an example to be emulated by today's soldiers."



Veterans of the 8th Battalion 4th Artillery who became known as the "Guns of the DMZ" during its years in Vietnam, unveil a monument Thursday in Fort Sill Constitution Park.