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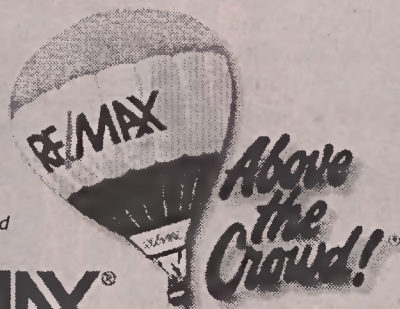


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## Transgender Vet march to Vietnam wall proclaimed success

D.C. Metro police escort TAVA group to sites around town

by Tina Rice

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Transgender Veterans March to the Wall, sponsored by the Transgender American Veterans Association (TAVA), turned out to be a greater success than the planners hoped for. Fifty transgender veterans participated on May 1 in Washington, D.C., many getting their first chance to face the Vietnam Memorial and the friends they lost in that war. Others came because they felt a need to meet with other transgender veterans, to feel close to others who had the same experiences as they did in the military. Attending were veterans from WWII, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the first Gulf War and all the peace times in between. Ages ranged from 27 to 77 years old.

The D.C. Metro Police Department gave the transgender veterans' bus a police escort from the hotel to the Wall.

TAVA members and friends were moved by the visit to the Wall as memories of pain and loss from the Vietnam War and other wars were recalled. One attendee, Sara Gibson, had tried five times in the past to approach either the Wall in D.C. or the Mobile Wall and could not get within 100 feet. This time she made it and it helped to have other transgender veterans with her.

In the afternoon four members of TAVA — Carol Krohn, Charlene Walsh, Sara Gibson and TAVA's Vice President Stephanie Heck — headed to Arlington Cemetery to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns. The structured and precise ceremony at the Tomb followed the changing of the guards. When the time came, the Master Sergeant of the Guards marched out and announced in bold, strong words, "This wreath being laid is provided by the Transgender American Veterans Association." Even long-time activists like Phyllis Frye began to cry.

Lisa Mottet from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said, "As one of the handful of non-transgender people there, it was a privilege and honor for me to be able to participate in the emotions and healing of the day. I was unprepared for, and



A transgender veteran at the Vietnam Memorial.

delightfully surprised by, the wave of pride and honor as the Army guards at the Tomb authoritatively and respectfully declared that the wreath being laid was provided by the Transgender American Veterans Association. The emotion and significance of that precise moment was palpable."

"Beyond the historic implications of the laying of the wreath — as well as the march itself," remarked Vanessa Foster, chair of the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition, "the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was devastatingly touching. The irony of the moment with the current war in Iraq was not lost on me. What was truly heart-warming was the lack of snickers, remarks, double takes and other reactions from the non-transgender crowd when the wreath laying occurred. The reaction was no different, no less reverent than for any other enlisted person. That is exactly as it should be."

TAVA Special Projects Chair Angela Brightfeather was quoted in the National Center for Transgender Equality (NTCE) newsletter as saying, "As people watched us cry at the Tomb of the Unknown when the wreath was dedicated and announced as coming from the Transgender American Veterans Association, everyone present knew and understood that they were at that moment a part of a historical event. Humanity was honored in that short period of time."

The NTCE's newsletter goes on to say, "Never before has an organization had the vision to organize such an event and NTCE applauds TAVA for the success of this weekend and their service to transgender veterans."

info: [www.tavausa.org](http://www.tavausa.org)

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