

‘We Would All Go to Vietnam’

Five brothers who all served in Vietnam visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial last October

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For the first time in the five decades since returning to the U.S. from Vietnam, the Miller brothers found themselves together in Washington, D.C.

In front of hundreds of spectators, swallowed by cheers and bottled-up emotion, the five brothers strolled side-by-side, inspecting the names of more than 58,000 fallen Americans etched along the two acres of black granite walls that make up the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at the National Mall.

“It gave us a chance to finally see some of the guys we grew up with in Decatur, (Ala.) that got killed in Vietnam,” said John Miller, who served with the 1st Bn., 5th Marines in Da Nang from February to November of 1968.

“I picked out one name in particular,” said James Miller, who also served as a Marine in Da Nang. “We had joined as a buddy-plan — his name was John McVay. I was able to see his name and scratch it off.”

The five brothers (Leo, Willie, Thomas, John and James) from Decatur, Ala., joined a group of 28 veterans on behalf of Forever Young Veterans, a foundation founded in 2006 that sets out to fund trips for veterans that include the monuments in D.C.

For the Millers, in particular, the trip quenched a long-awaited “welcome home” that eluded them for nearly five decades since their return home.

“It was a kind of recognition we didn’t get when we first came back from Vietnam,” said Willie Miller, who served in the Army’s 101st Airborne. “We were treated like a second-class citizen at the time, when all we had done was answer our country’s call.”

The trip also put their unity in perspective. “When we joined the service, we had no idea that we would all go to Vietnam,” James said. “Then we had no idea we would all come back. Now we’re all here together, and it’s special.”

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