



Bricks from the Hanoi Hilton

BY MOKIE PORTER

Three common bricks from the Hanoi Hilton—known to the Vietnamese as the Hoa Lo Prison and earlier by the French as La Maison Centrale—were presented at The Wall in Washington, D.C., on Vietnam Veterans Day, March 29, by the Vietnamese linguists of the Air Force Security Service.

The bricks are marked “F.C. & Cie”—the trademark of a French silversmith—and “Hanoi.” At the beginning of the 20th century, Foret Collin and Company manufactured the metal doors, prison bars, and brick molds for La Maison Centrale. All that is left today of the prison is the gatehouse, a museum to bad times past.

Salvaged during the building’s 1993 demolition, the bricks were chosen by the Doggers, members of the 6994th Security Squadron, U.S. Air Force Security Service, to represent “the courage, service, and sacrifice of the POWs who were housed there during the Vietnam War, and of all American veterans who answered their country’s call to duty during the Vietnam War, including the more than three hundred Vietnamese linguists of the U.S. Armed Services who perished in the conflict.”

Addressing those gathered on the East Knoll of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial grounds, Brig. Gen. Timothy Haugh of the U.S. Air Force Cyber Command spoke of the men being honored.

“The two enlisted linguists who are being recognized today, Sgt. Todd Melton and Sgt. McNeill, were with the United States Air Force Security Service,” he said. “Within that branch and that portion of our Air Force, the operators are expert enlisted technicians—they are the operators who provide warning and insight, and they save lives every day. We also have with us family members of the Army 138th Radio Research crew aboard a JU-21 that was shot down on March 4, 1971. The crew of five are still missing in action.

The Doggers concluded the ceremony by presenting the bricks to three organizations in recognition of their service to Vietnam War veterans: Vietnam Veterans of America, the National Park Service, and the Medal of Honor Society.

VVA member Perry Keaton presented a brick to VVA’s Rick Weidman and Sharon Hodge in front of Panel 33W in honor of SSgt. Clarence Leon “Boone” McNeill of the 6994th Security Squadron’s 460th Tac Recon Wing.

Jimmy Herbert, representing the National Park Service, presented a brick in remembrance of Todd Melton to Karen Cucurullo, acting superintendent of the National Mall and Memorial Parks, and Rich Bini, representing the Medal of Honor Society, presented a brick to Brig. Gen. Ron Rand and MOH recipient Brian Thacker in remembrance of Medal of Honor recipient Lance Sijan, who died at the Hanoi Hilton in 1968.

In the words of Gen. Haugh: “Our nation’s contract is that we will never forget. We will never forget.” ■