



Sean Venables/VVA

A Solemn Moment

On Veterans Day afternoon following the ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Grant Coates, who chairs VVA's POW/MIA Committee, placed a letter and a POW/MIA bracelet on behalf of Deborah J. Hernandez at *The Wall*.

Hernandez's letter was addressed to James J. Connell, a U.S. Navy A-4E Skyhawk pilot shot down by a surface-to-air missile near Hanoi on July 15, 1966. After bailing out, he was taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese and spent the next four-and-half years in the infamous POW camp the American prisoners sarcastically nicknamed the Hanoi Hilton.

Connell, who had graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1961, died in captivity on January 14, 1971. After Vietnam returned

his remains to the U.S. in March 1974, he was buried at Fort Rosenkrans National Cemetery in San Diego, posthumously promoted to Lieutenant Commander, and awarded the Navy Cross.

Hernandez's letter explained that she had worn James Connell's POW/MIA bracelet since the early 1970s, only recently learned of his death, and wanted to honor his sacrifice by leaving it at *The Wall* where it would be part of the massive collection of other objects left there since the Memorial was dedicated on Veterans Day 1982 that the National Park Service collects, catalogues, and preserves.

In the photograph Grant Coates is pointing to Lt. Cmdr. James J. Connell's name on Panel 9E, Line 22, on *The Wall*. ♦