



The late Chief Master Sgt. Donald Van Buren is remembered by the country and his wife, Louise, in the nation's capital.



courtesy photos

An enlisted communications troop is honored in the Korean War Veterans' Memorial where his image is etched. His wife compares the likeness.

ETCHING OF A PATRIOT

By Mr. Gerald Sonnenberg
AFCA Public Affairs

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILL. — It was just a moment in time in 1998 when a shadow of an image caught Cheryl Sutterfield-Jones' attention. It was while visiting the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. that she saw the face of her father staring back at her ... a face she hadn't seen for five years. "It felt like he was looking at me saying, 'Here I am. Don't walk past me,'" she said.

Time Machine Etched in granite among the faces of other American veterans was the face of Donald Van Buren. He was wearing a flight cap and goggles that Cheryl had come to know from a 1944 photo on her mother's dresser.

"After the initial surprise of seeing his image, I had bitter-sweet emotions of pride and love," she said. "I was somewhat sad that my father did not live to experience the memorial."

Donald Van Buren first served as a lieutenant in World War II flying B-17 bombers. After the war ended, he signed up as an enlisted man working in communications and as an air traffic controller. It was in 1947 that he married Louise in her hometown of Everman, Texas.

"Life as an Air Force wife was very interesting," said Louise Van Buren. "There were difficult times, but I choose to remember the many good times." Mrs. Van Buren was a Red Cross volunteer for more than 14 years at the different military base hospitals where the family was stationed during her husband's Air Force career. She received the ARC's Gray Lady Service Certificate in 1955 for her service.

Donald, who retired as chief master sergeant, moved to Mineral Wells, Texas, with his wife, two daughters, and two

sons in 1970 after 27 years on active duty and three years in the Air Force Reserve. He celebrated his 65th birthday by sky-diving for the first time with his son, Steve. It was several years later, after a lengthy illness, that he died in 1993.

The day the image was discovered, Mrs. Van Buren received a phone call from her excited daughter who was still standing in front of the wall. "At first, I'm not sure that she thought it could really be him, but she was anxious to see the pictures for herself," said Cheryl.

An image of the wall was e-mailed to Mrs. Van Buren who said she was excited and happy "for this honor to a very proud and dedicated military person."

Mother and daughter soon planned a trip to Washington D.C. so they could see it together. In September 2000, both of them stood at the memorial. Cheryl said that although they toured most of the D.C. memorials, they kept going back to the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

"During that trip we took a night-tour of D.C. The tour guide knew of our story. He told the group, and then all of them went with us to view his image."

All of the Van Buren children live in the area with their families. Larry is a retired Air Force colonel. Steve was in ROTC and flew and skydived with the Confederate Air Force, and Karen has worked in public service for many years. Cheryl is the chief executive officer of the Dallas area chapter of the American Red Cross, and her business trips often take her to Red Cross headquarters near the memorial. Since discovering the image, Cheryl has researched the memorial and become more involved in veterans activities. She recently spoke at the reunion of the 1st Combat Communications Squadron about the memorial, and she was appointed to the Selective Service Board in 2000.