

A Park Worth Fighting For

Last Friday was a day to remember. It was o-dark thirty, when Charlie and Mike Carey volunteered to initiate Operation Arlin Rhine Drive Gateway Opening. After seven years it finally happened. The look on the veterans faces were of shock. How could it be that the City with grant money to build the Veterans Memorial Park took seven years to do nothing, but only a month for the County to take over the project and take down the houses on the property to start the Veterans Memorial Park? I pulled up in my truck to the Boss Burger parking lot, and I was listening to the Boss (Bruce Springsteen) singing "Born in the U.S.A."

The first thing I noticed when I got there was Charlie Carey's excavator, which looked a lot like a tank on a battlefield. The houses were coming down, as he rolled his steel metal tracks of the excavator over the remnants. It was a great feeling to see such excitement by those who were there. The members of the Veterans Committee that were out there had hoses and were wetting down the material, and were helping in whatever way they could. I had heard stories from several of them how the City had come over and asked for various permits. I know the feeling. I've had the same questions asked of me on projects that I have worked on. I'm amazed that these questions of permits come up when the City of Oroville was the lead agency for the Centennial Park and Veteran's Park environmental documents, and yet the City did not pursue any permits from any jurisdictional agency – both state and federal (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, Department of Fish and Game, and Federal Emergency Management Agency).

There was and has been acrimony in the air between the vets and the City. I keep hearing certain people say that we need to build bridges between the agencies and the community. All I could think of that day was Bridge Over the River Kwai.

Standing on the side triggered thoughts and memories, as I looked out over today's battlefield on Montgomery Street and Arlin Rhine Drive. I thought about my three brothers who were all in the armed services – Nick, Bill and Larry, and how I am pledging to put three memorial bricks in their names, as well as my grandfather who served in World War I. My brother Bill, who was a helicopter mechanic, was a Vietnam Vet who served in Ke San. He told me when he came back from Vietnam that you either die when you get there or die right before you leave. His best friend in Vietnam died

before he left. When he came back he weighed a little over 100 pounds, and was a more profoundly quiet person. I admire him a great deal.

The other thought in my mind was of Major James Padgett, a soldier from the Vietnam War who was missing in action in 1972. I wore his MIA bracelet for a number of years and was stunned when Joan Lee, a Veteran's Memorial Park committee member, found his name and phone number for me two years ago. It was an amazing phone call, and very emotional for both of us.

It occurred to me again while I was standing at the Veteran's Park property that it is the perfect location for the Veteran's Memorial Park. The property sits right next to the Vet building that has stood there since 1926 by the Feather River. The River provides the perfect backdrop for this park, and for reflective time that can be spent remembering our brave heroes from Butte County. It's taken a long time to get to this point, but it is now the beginning of the conclusion of something that has been long awaited for by many. This has been a park worth fighting for. Thanks to the Butte County Board of Supervisors Bill Connelly, Curt Josiassen, Jane Dolan, Kim Yamaguchi, and Maureen Kirk; Brian Haddix, Butte County C.A.O.; Bruce Alpert, Butte County Counsel; and Butte County staff for moving so quickly.

Quote

"The Veteran's Memorial Park is long overdue, and I'm overjoyed to see it happening. I'm grateful to the cooperation of FRRPD and the donation of Carey construction and the full support of the Board of Supervisors, as well as PG&E for volunteering and helping out. It's going to be a beautiful asset to our community and long overdue edifice for fallen soldiers." Bill Connelly, Co-Chairman, Oroville Veterans Memorial Park Committee

"After this many years, I'm glad we're finally breaking ground on the Veteran's Memorial Park. Before I finish my time as a Butte County Supervisor, I want to see this project well on its way to completion. I'm glad to have been an integral part of this important project for my District and for Butte County as a whole." Curt Josiassen, Butte County Board of Supervisors

Local Veterans Facts

Arlin Rhine Drive is named after Clifford Arlin Rhine, who grew up in Oroville. He was a Corporal in the Marine Corps, and was killed in action in Iwo Jima during World War II. He received a Purple Heart.

126 men and women from the Oroville area have died serving their country.

For more information about local war heroes, be sure to visit the Oroville Veteran's Memorial Park web page at www.oroVILLEveteransmemorialpark.org

FRRPD Upcoming Events

Sign up now for the Walk into Fitness class, which begins on April 23. Call FRRPD at 533-2011 for more information.

Come enjoy a day of simple games such as yo-yo, hula hoops, darts, jump rope, hopscotch, and more at FRRPD's first Simple Games Olympics, Sat., April 26 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Municipal Auditorium.

Jr. Giants baseball sign-ups start May 1. Call FRRPD at 533-2011 for more information.

Sign up now for adult soccer, which starts June 3. Call FRRPD at 533-2011 for more information.

See you in the parks!