



Nearly 500 feet long, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall lists the names of 58,195 Americans "declared dead" or "missing in action" as a result of the Vietnam War.

The Wall is a place where:

- Survivors remember buddies who died;
- Children honor parents they have never seen because the war deprived them of that joy;
- Families mourn the members they've lost;
- Families give thanks that their loved ones were not sent to 'Nam;
- Veterans gather to share the pain and remember the days when their country sent them across the world to fight a war most did not understand.

Some individuals visit the Wall every year, on special days, to remember specific events:

Dusk, September 23, 1968

In the South China Sea, the USS Intrepid is launching and landing 24 Skyhawk A-4's and support aircraft every 90 minutes. The work is hard for the entire crew. 12 hours on 12 hours off. Steam upwind, then downwind. Launch and recover.

Occasionally a plane will "crunch" during landing. "Hung Bombs" routinely release upon landing, bounce on the deck and splash harmlessly into the ocean. The days and nights are 99% filled with routine and hard work.

Towards dusk, word comes down about a damaged Skyhawk attempting to land. There's a little more tension now. We only see the light on the wing. We've seen thousands. This one indicates the bird's in trouble. All eyes are on it for the 30 second final approach. Count 30 seconds.

Nose up, nose down. Too fast, too slow, and upon touch down, way too slow. The Skyhawk gives up the will to fly, makes a left turn and crashes into the deck, the landing signal officer's platform and then the ocean.

Big explosion and "birds" in the air with nowhere to go. They've got to land or crash, we have to make the deck ready. Perform. Do your job. Two dead, one dying and one badly injured.

Bobby Lee Spencer is dying. He was the radio man for the Landing Signal Officer. His left leg and right arm were ripped from his body by the A-4. We put him into a litter and immediately took him to the operating room where he died.

I visit his name on the wall. Panel 42W, Line 2. I think about sacrifice and I often wonder if anyone else even thinks about Bobby these days. His death hurts more now than it did at dusk, on the 23rd of September, 1968. Now I've got the time. (Bruce Edgerly Roemmelt; Reflection placed at the base of 42W every 23rd of September.)

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Photo by [Eric Lamar](#).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Vietnam-Veterans-Memorial-Wall0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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