

Paper Mache for 5-30-25 by David Read

I spent part of the holiday weekend as I usually do this time of year watching the annual National Memorial Day concert in Washington, DC. It takes place on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol facing the Mall with the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial in the distance. I was able to attend the event in person several times while living in the Capital region. The event is a powerful, emotionally overwhelming reminder of the meaning of the holiday. Emceed by actor and veterans' issues activist, Gary Sinise, aka Lt. Dan from his appearance in *Forrest Gump*, the event honors American veterans, servicemembers, and military families, and features musical performances, documentary footage, and stories based on wartime experiences. Actors present first person narratives and letters home from service men and women who were either killed in action or survived despite life threatening injuries. Featured attendees included Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine and veterans from most major conflicts since WWII and other veterans and their families featured in the presentations.

Many years ago, over a Memorial Day weekend, I remember watching *Apocalypse Now*, and *The Deer Hunter* back-to-back. Talk about a double header. This year, I watched the new movie called *Warfare*. Co-directed by Iraq War veteran Ray Mendoza and filmmaker Alex Garland, it is a harrowing war drama that immerses viewers in the realities of modern combat. Based on Mendoza's firsthand experiences during a 2006 mission in Iraq, the film unfolds in real time which means when they say back up will be on site in five minutes, the audience gets to endure that five-minute wait adding to the intense situation. The film realistically captures the ordeal of a Navy SEAL platoon trapped in hostile territory as they find themselves besieged by insurgent forces. *Warfare* is a powerful testament to the experiences of soldiers on the front lines, offering a stark and unvarnished look at the horrors of war.

Speaking of fallen soldiers and the meaning of Memorial Day, this weekend I learned about the renaming of Fort Benning, the Army base in Georgia. Named in 1918 for Confederate General Henry Benning, the base was renamed Fort Moore in May 2023 to honor Lt. Gen. Hal Moore, a highly decorated Viet Nam veteran, and his wife, Julia. Mrs. Moore is the person who profoundly transformed the military's approach to notifying families of fallen soldiers. During the Viet Nam war, she witnessed the Army's practice of delivering death notifications via telegrams handed to taxi drivers, a method she found impersonal and distressing. Mrs. Moore took it upon herself to accompany these drivers, offering comfort to grieving families and attending numerous funerals. Her advocacy led to the Army establishing in person casualty notification teams with uniformed officers and chaplains. For more on the importance of this service, see the movie called *Taking Chance* with Kevin Bacon. A true story, it follows a Marine Corps officer who volunteers to escort the body of a fallen Marine back to his hometown for burial. The film portrays the rituals and protocols involved in honoring the fallen and the emotional impact on those who are tasked with delivering the news. But it's never easy. In a clever work around and "gotcha" move, earlier this year, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the name reverted to Fort Benning, this time to honor Corporal Fred Benning, an unknown WWI hero who, in fairness, had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Guess it's better than honoring a Confederate traitor, but really. Leave it to works of art to partially insulate us from the horrors of events like warfare, while still driving home the extreme nature of these events. Other than that, hope you enjoyed your hamburgers and hot dogs.