

CUSTOM SALMON ROD PAYS TRIBUTE AND MORE

"After years of hard work, the Blue Star Peace Memorial was taking shape..."

Troy A. Buzalsky

Eleven years ago we were caught up in the future: Y2K, the new millennium, and a presidential race between the former Vice President Al Gore and the son of a past United States President whose name was also George Bush. It had been ten years since Operation Desert Storm, and 35 years since the conclusion of Vietnam, yet it was the Vietnam conflict that brought together a group of Veterans, determined to build the last ever Vietnam Era Peace Memorial, in the small city of Canby, Oregon.

After years of hard work, the Blue Star Peace Memorial was taking shape, including the acquisition of property, a stone wall perimeter and tribute brick courtyard, a peace bell, and an actual Huey Helicopter that served in Vietnam. However, the final element conceptualized was a larger-than-life bronze statue titled "A Hero's Prayer." The statue portrays a wounded soldier being carried by a fellow soldier, with a Vietnamese girl holding the wounded soldier's hand. The wounded soldier depicts Army Spc. Warren E. Newton of Canby, who was reported MIA on Jan. 9, 1968. The soldier carrying Newton represents Marine Pfc. Gary W. Martini, who received a Congressional Medal of Honor for rescuing two other Marines during a fire-fight that killed him on April 21, 1967.

After eleven years of relenting work the memorial was nearing completion, yet the Veterans' group still needed more than \$20,000 to fund the centerpiece statue. Enter the Rotary Club of Canby, whose motto is "Service Above Self." The Club made a pledge to the Veterans' group to raise the necessary funds to complete the memorial and an auction was the fundraising platform. Canby Rotarian Steve VanGordon is a master auctioneer, so the auction concept was a natural fit for the club.

When hosting an auction most people can attest that getting quality items is the most challenging task. Larry LaRue of Looney Lures, who has twice served our county with the U.S. Marines and U.S. Army, stepped up to the plate to coordinate the building of a Vietnam Era Military Tribute Salmon Rod.

This super-custom one-of-a-kind rod was built using a two-piece 9'3" Lamiglas XSH 112H blank. The handle started with a carbon fiber blank that received a special air-brush treatment by Larry LaRue. The base grip showcases elements of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines including submarines, aircraft carriers, tanks, airplanes, rockets, and even "bombs bursting in air". The top grip completes the theme with a symbolic American Flag whose broad stripes and bright stars, "gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there."

Custom rod builder Jay Johnstone, of Wraptor Custom Rods, took over from there, assembling the two-piece handle with a complimentary Alps blue anodized reel seat. Wraptor is well known for their feather inlays, and this rod received the royal treatment, weaving red, white, and blue feathers up and around the words "Vietnam Memorial 2011". The highest quality blue anodized titanium guides were wrapped with white metallic thread, trimmed in red, providing accent while completing the Patriotic theme.

No fishing rod is complete without a reel and for this rod, only the Made in America Penn International 975 was deserving, donated by Fisherman's Marine Supply. As a final touch, a custom-made wood showcase was crafted to hold and display this heirloom-quality masterpiece.

To set the stage for the Auction, Item #1 was an American Flag that flew over the Nation's Capitol during the Vietnam conflict. With Larue and Johnstone in the audience, excitement was in the air when item #33, the Veteran's Tribute Rod, was introduced. As auctioneer Steve VanGordon described the rod he placed the value as "Priceless"; truly a fair statement. Bidding generally starts low in auctions while buyers feel out the competition, but that would not be the case as the first bid started at \$500. Quickly the bid jumped with bidders one-upping each other in a greenback show-down. With the strike of the gavel, the auction ended, with Pre-Vietnam-era Navy Veteran Kelly Paxton's winning bid of \$900. Paxton is an avid angler, and agreed the rod was worthy of display, however, his plans are to knock the skunk off the rod during spring chinook season, and pay his tribute by fishing the rod as often as possible.

At the conclusion of the auction the Rotary Club of Canby kept its promise, raising more than enough to complete the memorial, and although not the highest money maker, there is little doubt that the Veteran's Tribute Rod had more heart, more soul, and more blood, sweat and tears invested than any other auction item...a true tribute to the all Veterans, past and present.

The dedication of "A Hero's Prayer" Statue is scheduled for August 6, 2011. A special thanks to all who invested their time, talent, and resources: Larry and Susan LaRue of Looney Lures, Jay Johnstone of Wraptor Custom Rods, John Posey of Lamiglas, Automotive Paint Specialties, Lighthouse Cabinets, and Robert Campbell of Fisherman's Marine Supply. The rod is also on display at www.wraptor.org.