



CAPITAL CAMPAIGN CASE STATEMENT

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December 2022

This Case Statement outlines the background and need for the proposed expansion campaign. It highlights why campaign volunteers and the Board of Directors are asking for private investment to assist The Highground in continuing its important work. Once you have read this Case Statement and FAQ, we invite you to join us help Honor, Educate and Heal by considering a charitable gift to The Highground Rising Campaign.

The Board of Directors is grateful to the many pre-campaign volunteers who have worked diligently to advocate for this expansion:

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An excerpt of a recent newsletter from The Highground, a message from Executive Director Chris Pettis, sharing his emotional and physical journey during the 2020 Heroes Ride Bike Tour and the powerful impact he relates to the journey many Veterans experience.

I was challenged to participate in the 36th Annual Bike Tour about one month before the ride by one of our volunteers, Mike Gleisner. I had never ridden more than a few miles at a time let alone 40 to 60 miles in one day. My wife said I was crazy to even try it. But as a Marine, I naturally accepted the challenge.

My preparation began by purchasing a used bike and new riding and safety equipment. But my training consisted of letting that equipment rest in my garage until the day of the ride! (My backside had only about 20 seconds in the seat and the new tires were not even dirty.)

On Day One I had two mechanical difficulties, one was a quick fix in the parking lot. The other was about eight miles into the ride, leaving me walking versus riding. Luckily, after a few minutes I was picked up by a passing vehicle, conveniently driven by a Navy Vietnam Veteran. I never thought I would be getting a ride from the Navy again! I was able to make it to the Sports Den in Marshfield for repairs and meet with the riders to painfully complete that day's route.

On Day Two I had a welcomed relief due to Stone Ceremonies at The Highground.

On Day Three I rode with the Western route. Oh, did it hurt! But do you know what? I would do it all over again. Here's why. As I was peddling desperately to keep up with the experienced riders, (which was all of them) my legs were on fire, my bottom was beyond sore from that terribly uncomfortable bike seat, and low and behold there was a hill! In my case, a mountain in my mind.

Struggling to climb that mountain, I started to get passed by another rider. She started talking to me, and the next thing I know I am at the top of the hill, coasting down the other side. A half mile later there was another "mountain." The pain in my legs was almost unbearable, my bottom felt like I was sitting on a corn cob, and all I want to do was give up. Another rider started to pass me. But he also struck up a conversation. Again, I made it to the top and coasted down the hill. Every hill continued to be a larger, harder hill to climb, filled

with unbelievable pain in my legs, bottom and chest. I thought several times I should just give up and quit, yet there was always someone there to get me to the top and finish the ride.

Now I'm going to take you on a different type of bike ride on roads named Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Military Sexual Trauma, (MST). These roads have hills named depression, nightmares, anger, sleeplessness, hopelessness, isolation, anxiety, stress and loss of interest in life. These are just some of the many mountains on this ride.

Twenty-two service members a day, nationwide, either during service or after service commit suicide. Others fall to alcohol and drugs to help deal with their symptoms. Some overdose. Some make bad decisions and are incarcerated, sometimes up to life. Others have difficulty adjusting, unable to maintain a job or become homeless with little to no desire to make a change in their life. Couples divorce and families are torn apart, only compounding these symptoms. But the good news is that all of this is preventable!

The vision of The Highground is to foster that prevention by assisting Veterans in overcoming those hills in life not only with Veterans retreats, but by adding couples and family retreats and the most important gift of all—relationships with other Veterans.

With the help of mental health professionals, our goal is to provide Veterans with the tools needed to help them overcome adversity, provide continued support and make lifelong friends. Couples or families can get away from the stressors of life and focus on what's important, each other, and start the process of healing. The Highground is a place where they can build a bond with others who have the same struggles and provide each other with a strong support system. We invite you to read more on how you can help us help our Veterans climb their mountains with a gift to our capital campaign.

Will you please help?

Mission Statement

The mission of The Highground Veterans Park is to Honor, Educate and Heal.

Vision Statement

The vision of The Highground Veterans Park is three-fold:

1. To **Honor** the sacrifices of Veterans, active service men and women and their families through our memorial park and services
2. To **Educate** the public about the service rendered, the hardships endured, the sacrifices made and the human cost asked of and proudly paid by our service men and women
3. To **Heal** Veterans and their families by providing a park as a place for fellowship, support and reflection



Gary Weirauch, Campaign Chair



Chris Pettis, Executive Director



Board of Directors 2020-2021 | Front row: (left to right) Michele Benson, Don Quicker, Treasurer; Chris Pettis, Executive Director; Gary Weirauch, Chairman; and Scott Kissinger, Secretary | Back row: Ron Perry, Leonard Frye, Bill Lobeck, Steve Maddox, Al Lamovec, Gary Karczewski, Bob Barth and Greg Foye | Not pictured: Dan Curran and Dominic Anderson

Message from The Board of Directors

To our many friends and supporters, we are “The Highground,” a not-for-profit, predominantly volunteer organization comprised of both Veterans and non-Veterans, dedicated to serving the needs of the greater Veterans community. We rely entirely on a small, efficient, dedicated, and overworked paid staff, whose daily efforts are enthusiastically augmented by a sizeable, capable, and ever-changing supporting cast of volunteers and an all-volunteer board.

Since its inception in the mid 1980’s, The Highground has primarily been funded by private giving from individuals and foundations, although early in its history some public funding was received from the State of Wisconsin through two sizeable grants. While that arrangement has helped us maintain our independence and freed us from political constraints in the furtherance of our mission, this has simultaneously limited our activities and the scope of our effective outreach. It has now become apparent that a more significant level of private backing and funding from our private donors and friends is going to be necessary.

Most of us who fought in the Vietnam War returned from our service overseas to a tumultuous environment rife with scorn and smacking of betrayal by the very nation that demanded our service and sacrifice. We recognized that unless we chose to do it ourselves, nothing was going to be done to address the myriad and pressing needs of our Vietnam Veterans. From the very beginning, The Highground

was created to be a haven, a sanctuary, a respite, a place of our own where we could let down our guard, forgive ourselves for our sins and shortcomings, and take pride in the service we had afforded this country. The original focus on the Vietnam Veteran quickly grew to encompass, recognize, and embrace Veterans from all branches of service, involved in all 20th and 21st century conflicts, in times of war and in times of peace.

Riding the crest of over 35 years of successful growth and service, we find ourselves faced with the curious, but enviable dilemma of having done our job so well that we have begun to outstrip the operating capacity of our physical facilities. To continue serving the Veterans community in a timely and meaningful way and seek new, sustaining sources of capital, we are undertaking a carefully planned, necessary, and focused expansion. We are seeking the help and relying upon the generosity of businesses, organizations, and foundations to carry us toward that worthwhile goal.

You begin to understand why we are now endeavoring to enlist your financial support. This capital campaign is designed to help generate the income that we anticipate will be required to continue the pursuit and fulfillment of our mission. We are, indeed, grateful for any assistance you choose to provide.

Steve Maddox, Board of Directors Member

Mingo and The Eagle

In November 2003, a Bald Eagle was found injured near The Highground. The staff at the Antigo Raptor Rehabilitation Center rehabilitated the eagle and decided to release it near The Highground. In April 2004, a small notice was placed in the local paper announcing the eagle's release date. When the day arrived, to everyone's surprise, hundreds of people had gathered to watch the experience!

Bob "Mingo" Mingus was chosen to release the eagle. Mingo was a Vietnam Veteran and a good friend of Board of Directors member, Don Quicker. Both had served in Vietnam in the 101st Airborne Screaming Eagles at different times and in different units. An eagle is the symbol of the 101st Airborne Screaming Eagles and as such holds special significance to those who have served in the 101st. Mingo's involvement in setting the rehabilitated eagle free carried special meaning.

After completing his Vietnam tour, Mingo struggled with his combat memories and suffered greatly from PTSD. The loss of his very close friend, Dean Bonneau, was especially difficult for Mingo.

Dean was a helicopter pilot who had flown a Cobra gunship. Mingo was a combat engineer who specialized in demolitions. The only thing Mingo knew was that Dean had died in a helicopter accident and had been declared missing in action. Dean's body had never been recovered. For decades, Mingo lived with overwhelming survivor's guilt, much of it due to never being allowed the opportunity to assist in finding Dean's body. Recovering Dean's body became a life-long quest.

Years after returning home while attending an event at Fort McCoy for the installation of the new base commander, Col. Ray Boland, Mingo was introduced to the Colonel. Immediately Mingo noticed there was a 101st patch on Col. Boland's uniform, indicating the Colonel, too, had previously served with the 101st. He noted further Col. Boland wore some type of "air wings," meaning he was possibly a helicopter pilot and had served in Vietnam.

Mingo asked Col. Borland if he had ever known a helicopter pilot by the name of Dean Bonneau. The Colonel was startled by the question. As it turned out, Dean had been Ray's wingman in Vietnam and had been but a few yards away when Dean died. Ray told Mingo that Dean had fired a rocket from his pod of rockets, but the rocket had misfired, exploding in the pod and setting off all



Vietnam Veteran Bob Mingus releases a rehabilitated eagle at The Highground and finds his own healing.

of the unfired rockets. The helicopter, being made of titanium and other light materials, virtually vaporized, along with any trace of Dean. There was no body to recover. Although this ended any hope of Dean's body ever being found, Mingo's PTSD persisted.

The rehabilitation staff instructed Mingo on how to hold the eagle and release it. Even when the staff gave Mingo the signal to release the eagle, Mingo continued to hold it close. As the seconds stretched by, Mingo and the eagle remained motionless. Amazingly, the eagle seemed content to stay on Mingo's arm. Finally, Mingo urged it into the air where it rose and soared over The Highground.

After the ceremony, Mingo was visibly emotional. Friends asked, "Mingo, why didn't you release the eagle when they requested?" He answered, "As I held the eagle, I was nervous and overcome with emotion. I could feel the strong heartbeat of the

eagle, and it seemed like he was scared, too. The eagle leaned into me and rested its head on my cheek. I could feel our heartbeats slowing together. I thought of Dean and it felt like the eagle was Dean's spirit. Then, I felt a lifting of my spirit, our spirit, as if we both knew it was time. I released the eagle and said, 'Be Free, Dean!' In my mind, I was saying good-bye to Dean."

Mingo's is just one of the thousands of stories forever etched in the hearts and minds of our Veterans and their families. These stories are about heroes and heartache, honor and healing, but above all else—hope.

When the eagle finally departed, it carried with it much of the pain of Dean's death and some of Mingo's PTSD.

The stories that create memories and reflect the depths of the sacrifice of our United States military Veterans and their families are too numerous to record in any one place. Yet there is a place that has endeavored to create a beautiful and inspiring natural tribute to honor Veterans. It seeks to remember those who have died serving our country, to educate the next generation about the importance of those sacrifices, and to create new ways to help returning servicemen and women heal and become whole again.

This place is The Highground Veterans Memorial Park.

Healing from wartime memories (Post Traumatic Stress) begins with re-examining the past and gathering new meaning from it. The Highground offers space for Veterans, servicemembers and their families to heal in both individual reflection and within the presence of others. The Highground is a safe space for servicemembers to gain new perspectives, mourn, memorialize and share with others their stories, tears, or just a "welcome home," on their path to healing from wartime memories.

The Highground allows Veterans to celebrate lives worth living and dying for, in their own space, in their own time.

The pathways design interwoven through this Case Statement is meant to invoke the unique journey each Veteran takes during their healing process. The Highground offers the space, time and friendships for this important healing to take place.

*-Mary Haupt, Volunteer and
Licensed Social Worker*

How It All Started

The history of The Highground is best described by the man who started it all, Tom Miller.

"I really began this project many years ago, in 1964, while serving in the 2nd Bn/7th Marines in California. This is where I met my partner, Jack Swender. Jack was from Kansas City, Kansas.

We landed in Qui Nhon, Vietnam on the 7th of July, 1965. We soon set up our battalions' headquarters. It was located 15 miles west of that beautiful city in what was once an old French artillery base during the early 1950's. Set off the road, there were huge pits dug into the ground about five feet deep. These pits ended up being internment camps for suspected Vietcong.

The day came as many came in Vietnam: gray, overcast, heavy-aired, with drizzle, but very quiet. We had slept in dirty water, 5" deep, just a few nights before and we were soaked to the bones.

We smelled and we were tired to say the least. Some small contact was made during the morning. We had just finished lunch in a hut and were moving through a small market hamlet named Ky Phu, when the 80th Battalion of hard-core Vietcong hit us. We were cut into two groups, with Jack and I being at the end of the first group.

We didn't have to communicate to each other the fact that we had to hold the town from being overrun by the Vietcong as they were trying to move a 50-caliber machine-gun into the middle of it. We held them off for I would say 15 to 20 minutes before a recoilless rifle shell blew apart the rear wall of the house we were in. I like to think, and I do believe, that our action saved many Marines' lives that day, although it did cost Jack his.

The day that Jack died in my arms was the saddest day of my life. One grows to love another when they are that close in combat. In late 1983, I again



The Highground continues to honor founder Tom Miller's promise to Honor, Educate and Heal. He is pictured here with his wife Rose.

picked up the drive to produce our memorial. The mood of America had changed, and I had come in contact with a group of Vietnam Veterans (Vietnam Veterans of America – Wisconsin delegation). Through them, the outstanding network needed to produce this project could be developed. It wasn't until late 1984 that people started to believe that I was really going to do something and then they slowly fell into place and supported the project. And so, it began."

The Highground has evolved to be a memorial park that pays tribute to the dead, as well as honors the survivors, their service, and their sacrifices. It also pays tribute to the people who supported the Veterans when they were away and upon their return.

More than anyone could have imagined, Tom turned the dream into a reality.

The Highground is incredibly grateful and indebted to the Clark County American Legion, the Clark County Board, the Listeman Foundation, the State of Wisconsin and Neillsville area businesses for the crucial initial support they provided. Their generous contributions made what began as a modest and limited undertaking into something significant, enduring and meaningful and of great importance to generations of Veterans, their families and supporters.

The Highground, once no more than a field with a beautiful view and harboring untapped promise, has grown to become a wonderful and expansive park complex encompassing that very view and fulfilling its still-evolving promise. Such is the spirit of The Highground.

When the Gold Star Tribute was first constructed, workers digging to create its large star-shaped base noticed a woman motioning to them from the Plaza area above the site. When, they went to talk with her, she offered them a small bag of soil and asked if they would incorporate it into the tribute. She explained, "This is soil from my garden, the place where I last saw my son alive." That day her soil became part of the Gold Star Tribute.



To military Veterans of all eras, The Highground is a place of vision, safety and security. Board member Don Quicker was one of the first to refer to the site as The Highground.

Goals of the Campaign

The Highground complex, totaling approximately 155 acres, is located in central Wisconsin. It has served Veterans and their families for more than 35 years. The beautiful grounds are continually maintained by a crew of nearly 200 volunteers. The number of annual visitors is 225,000 and that number continues to grow. Some 7,000 of those annual visitors are Veterans, many of whom become recipients of personalized support services as they visit, tour and come to know The Highground.

The expansion of The Highground will take the organization to the next level. Improved services and facilities for Veterans and their families will provide the following:

- Increased financial stability and long-term sustainability with the pay-off of the \$450,000 mortgage
- Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities act (ADA), ensuring access to the entire park and all memorial sites for disabled Veterans and visitors
- A new 12,000 square-foot Welcome and Visitor Center, with space for larger events, meetings, and programs, as well as mental health services
- Improved parking, allowing for safer access to memorials and the Welcome and Visitor Center

The Highground's Tributes

The Highground began as a dream to create a place to recognize and remember all personnel who lost their lives in the Vietnam War. Over time, The Highground has gained well-deserved recognition as being a sacred place, a place to recognize and remember those who have fought bravely and sacrificed selflessly for our country.

The Highground's impact on visitors is undeniable. The following descriptions of the memorial park's sculptures, statues, and memorials provide some background, but one must visit in person to feel the full power of the stone and bronze of the sculptures, statues and memorials.

Countless volunteers and donors helped turn the tribute visions into reality as John Heywood's quote describes: "Many hands make light work."

The following is intended to produce a glimpse into the creation and intent of each tribute. Countless gifts of time, talent and treasure by donors and friends provided the inspiration and hard work to bring them to reality. Every gift and every effort is greatly appreciated.

Vietnam Veterans

The *Fragments* Tribute is the Vietnam Veterans Tribute. Dedicated in 1988, *Fragments* was designed by Robert Kanyusik, who served as a Lieutenant in Vietnam. It was cast by the University of Wisconsin – Platteville staff and students. *Fragments* honors and celebrates the memory of all who served in the Vietnam War and is a source of closure and peace to many Veterans and the families of those who served.



Fragments



The Nurse Tribute

The Nurse

The Nurse is a Tribute to female Veterans. The design was originally submitted by Roger Brodin for consideration in the competition for a Women's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. It was dedicated at The Highground in 1992. Diane Carlson Evans is the nurse who not only served as the model and inspiration for this sculpture, but was also the driving force behind the creation of the women's memorial eventually placed on the mall in Washington, DC. This statue enjoys a place of prominence and unchallenged importance at the base of the flagpole on The Highground Plaza.

National Native American Vietnam Veterans Tribute

The *National Native American Vietnam Veterans Memorial* Tribute represents the approximately 574 Native American tribes in the United States. This group suffered the highest death rate of any demographic group in the Vietnam War. The statue of a Native American warrior was designed by Harry Whitehorse of Madison, Wisconsin, and

dedicated in 1995. The Ho-Chunk Nation was instrumental in its development. The memorial contains the names and dates of death of all the Native Americans killed in Vietnam. On a rotating basis, flags of many of the Native American Nations fly at the memorial, next to the American flag.

WWI Veterans Tribute

Dedicated in 1992, *the Doughboy* – WWI Tribute personifies the foot soldier of World War I. Frequently depicted on other memorials in a combat pose, our *Doughboy* stands with his free hand raised in welcome. His other hand holds his rifle, not “at the ready,” but rather at his side in a relaxed, non-threatening manner reflecting the peaceful nature of his surroundings at The Highground.

WWII Tribute

The Globe – WWII Tribute was dedicated in 1993. The design contains an open stainless steel globe with inset stained glass theater ribbons and a marble base. The final design, agreed upon with permission of both artists, is a compilation by artists Stephen Kanyusik and Ralph Ely, and now proudly stands on the Plaza to honor WWII Veterans.

Korean War Tribute

With sculptures by Wisconsin artist, Michael Martino, *the Korean War Tribute*, dedicated in 2007, shows the heat, cold, and anguish experienced by those who served on the Korean peninsula. More than 20 Korean War Veterans served on the committee that worked to create this tribute at The Highground.

Persian Gulf Tribute

The Persian Gulf Tribute (the “Bootprint”), honors all who served or are serving in the Global War on Terror, from Desert Storm to present day. Dedicated in 2016, the tribute takes the symbolic form of a military boot print in the desert sand and features four statuary pieces created by Wisconsin artist, Michael Martino. The committee which brought this tribute to The Highground was comprised primarily of Persian Gulf Veterans and Gold Star parents of those who were KIA in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Gold Star Tribute

The Gold Star designation is officially offered only to immediate family members of service personnel lost in combat while in service to this country. This tribute was dedicated in 1990 and has, over the years, undergone many structural changes while always retaining its large star-shaped base. *The Gold Star Tribute* is comprised largely of gold-colored sand surrounded by a solid border of lighting and incorporates an elevated, illuminated *Gold Star* metal sculpture at its center.



Gold Star Tribute



Meditation Garden

Dove Effigy Mound

The Dove was created to resemble the sacred mounds built by the ancient Mound Builder Society civilization. When it was dedicated in 1989, soil from all 72 counties in the State of Wisconsin was interred at the location of the heart. *The Dove*, designed by Vietnam Veteran and artist, David Giffey, pays tribute to POW/MIAs. It serves as a place of respite and healing for those struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Meditation Garden

The Meditation Garden was specifically created to be a place that offers enhanced tranquility, peace, quiet, and solitude away from The Highground's main plaza. Several meaningful components are found in the *Meditation Garden*, including *The*

Ascension of Doves sculpture and *The Fountain of Tears* tribute.

The Ascension of Doves was designed by Anne Jensen and created by welder David Hallingstad. Dedicated in 2006, the piece was commissioned by Gold Star parents, Joel and Janie Brockman, to honor their son, Andrew Wallace, who was KIA in Iraq on Sept 26, 2005.

The Fountain of Tears Tribute, dedicated in 2009, tells the story of the ultimate sacrifice of a fallen soldier. The figure at the top of the fountain holds the dog tags of his fallen comrade in one hand, while his other hand rests on the helmet of his fallen comrade. His tears flow down five metal teardrops into a stream, finally reaching the widow and child, who hold the folded flag of the fallen. The tribute reminds visitors of the grief that flows between the battlefield and the home front.



Fountain of Tears Tribute

Women Air Force Service (WASP) Tribute

Dedicated in 2006, the *WASP (Women Air Force Service Pilots) Tribute* was created by WASP Veteran and sculptor, Dorothy Swain Lewis. More than 1,100 women served as WASPs during WWII. They tested new prototypes of aircraft, trained male pilots, and ferried aircraft. It wasn't until the 1970s

that women of WASP were granted Veteran status for their service. Thirty-seven of these women died while serving. The plaque at the statue's base reads: "We live in the wind and sand and our eyes are on the stars."



The Highground Liberty Bell

The Highground Liberty Bell

As part of the country's centennial celebrations in the 1970's, a group of Minnesota businessmen commissioned this sculpture as a full-scale replica of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The replica traveled across the US and was seen by more

than one million school children before finding its permanent home at The Highground. It was dedicated, with its current timber frame shelter on July 4, 2002.

The Museum

The Highground Museum was dedicated in 2010. Designed to be a place that continually meets The Highground's mission to Honor, Educate, and Heal, it houses a permanent military museum, as well as unique and meaningful exhibits that are changed

at intervals throughout the year. The Museum also houses a military history library, registry books that accompany the Honor Stones on the Plaza, Veterans Resource literature and tourism information.

Military Working Dog Tribute

The Military Working Dog (MWD) Tribute was dedicated in 2018 and honors all who have served as MWD handlers and their canine warriors. Styled after a canine and handler serving during the Vietnam War, the tribute pays homage to all MWDs and handlers from all eras. Created by Wisconsin

sculptor, Michael Martino, the tribute was brought to The Highground through the work of the MWD tribute committee, which is primarily made up of Vietnam Veterans and Vietnam Veteran MWD handlers.



Honoring the fallen



Introduction to The Capital Campaign

Recognizing its growing responsibility and commitment to Veterans and their families, the Board of Directors began investigating an expansion campaign to address the multiple needs of The Highground in late 2018.

A Campaign Readiness Study was completed in the fall of 2019 by Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC. It identified the possible fundraising success of the proposed campaign, its leadership potential, and the capacity to reach a \$4M goal.

The study cited a deep and wide love for the organization, major gift potential, and general support for the focus of the initiative. At the time of the study's completion, the results did not indicate \$7.5M could be raised. However, the findings did highlight the capacity to fundraise \$4M once a thorough planning and cultivation period had taken place. According to respondents, the most pressing needs were the construction of the new Welcome and Visitor Center and the payoff of the mortgage.

Volunteers, supporters, and the area's philanthropic community all shared positive

opinions about The Highground, the proposed project, and the potential to expand services to Veterans as the organization continues to evolve and grow.

To secure philanthropic success, a regional, state, and national focus is underway. Stakeholders and volunteers will be mobilized to help secure funds for the project, as well as raise awareness of the long-term financial support required for the organization.

Executive Summary from Strategic Planning Study

As the capital campaign planning began in the spring of 2020, the Board of Directors also engaged in a strategic planning process to set future goals for the organization. These were aimed at building on existing strengths, while also developing solutions to some weaknesses which were identified.

Information was collected via a review of documentation from the organization, individual interviews, a planning session with key volunteers and the Board of Directors, as well as surveying of organizational stakeholders.

Volunteers are precious to The Highground and an invaluable help to the staff. Karen Swader was one of those unexpected, yet very welcome, volunteers. She came to The Highground and asked how she could help. Karen said, "If there's a need for it, I do like to weed." Karen soon discovered that there were plants everywhere and weeding is a never-ending task. She said she only had a few hours, but vowed she would do her best.

When it came time for the staff to leave for the day, Karen said she just wanted to finish a little more, and then would leave. The next morning, staff found Karen weeding in another location. Staff asked, "You didn't stay all night, did you? Tell us your story."

Karen said she had spent the night at a nearby motel. Her husband, a Vietnam War Veteran who loved The Highground, had passed away a year earlier. Karen told the staff, "I feel close to him here, so I came back and just wanted to do a little more weeding to feel close to him."

Karen and Steve Swader

Today Karen is remarried to a wonderful man and they both continue to return to The Highground to take part in the three-day bicycle fundraiser held in August (and sometimes help with weeding).



Karen and Steve Swader

Upon its completion, the proposed strategic plan outlined goals and key activities for the next five years of the organization, with the fourth and fifth years being more loosely designed to allow for flexibility as the organization changes and evolves.

The Study concluded that several key elements would help strengthen the organization, with the main objectives being: 1) development and formalization of programs to better support Veterans and their families, and identifying grant funding to facilitate this; 2) Board training and revitalization; 3) a restructuring of staff to allow the Executive Director more time and energy to grow outside connections; 4) an increase in public relations activities to help expand the organization's profile beyond the immediate central Wisconsin region and; 5) fundraising strategies to help lessen dependence on special events and focus on a more donor-based fundraising plan.

Our Family of Volunteers and Expansion Plans

As an organization and memorial park, The Highground provides unique support services to Veterans who visit the site. Further, a site with the size and scope of The Highground requires an extensive and on-going maintenance plan. The organization relies on a dedicated and ad hoc group of approximately 200 volunteers, many of whom have served in the military, to staff the grounds. However, these volunteers do not just staff the grounds—they also offer advice, support, and a reassuring presence to families and Veterans who may be dealing with the emotional and physical wounds of their service.

The expansion will further develop the unique function of The Highground, and will lift the organization to the next level of service and growth. The new building will provide a physical space for additional programming to meet the varied and ever-expanding needs of Veterans. It will also provide the essential, and often missing, component of connecting service providers with service seekers.



One of the approximately 15 annual Honor Stone laying ceremonies honors veterans and their families and permanently recognizes their sacrifice and service.

A much-needed large gathering space, capable of accommodating 150 to 200 individuals, will be the key element of the new building. This will allow large groups to come together for special programming. The new facility will prove especially helpful both during inclement weather and for high-traffic holiday services, such as those held on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

Moreover, unused space for additional stone placements on the current plaza is almost non-existent. The proposal for expanded space in the open-air plaza will provide families with both the opportunity and the room to continue the placement of stones honoring servicemen and women.

The proposed center will bring all staff and volunteer functions together under one roof. Through improved building maintenance efficiency and streamlined organizational operations, The Highground will be able to reduce operation costs by consolidating the activities currently undertaken in several locations into the new Welcome and Visitor Center. Equally as important is the expansion of services to Veterans, especially for those Veterans who may require additional support through formalized programming.

The project will improve services for aging and disabled Veterans through repairs and updates to

increase the level of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance within the building, for parking and on the trails.

The proposed Welcome and Visitor Center will accommodate larger tours and school groups than can presently be served. This in turn, will help raise public awareness of Veterans, their service, and their sacrifice. The library and archival collection will be relocated to an updated reading and viewing area, allowing individuals and groups to utilize these educational resources more conveniently. There will also be additional private spaces made available where Veterans can meet with volunteers, staff, or possibly even onsite therapists as more formalized support programming is developed.

Lastly, the campaign will address the \$450,000 mortgage currently carried by the organization. The mortgage payoff will allow more of the yearly operating budget to go towards general maintenance and programming. This will also free up funds to help maintain aging infrastructure throughout the park while addressing the enhancement of programs devoted to promote expanded healing opportunities for Veterans and their families.

Understanding the Project

Why is now the time to be looking at a campaign to expand The Highground? Simply stated, it is because of the growth the organization has experienced. While operating with limited paid staff, an extensive volunteer crew, and a modest budget, the organization has warmly welcomed a skyrocketing number of visitors and maintained an impressive level of care. The Highground hosts 225,000 visitors annually. With robust publicity, high-profile champions across the country, and a strategic capital campaign, The Highground expects to significantly increase the number of annual visitors.

Thousands of Veterans have returned from their service bearing physical and psychological scars. For some, the mental preparedness that helped them during combat tours has hindered resuming relationships and stepping into life “back home.” There are troubling mental health statistics for Veterans that must be addressed. To that end, over the past decade, the organization has transitioned from a local Vietnam Veterans memorial to a national memorial park destination. It has also become a site that provides and promotes healing for Veterans and their family members.

The Highground continually strives to reduce the level of these troubling statistics through direct involvement with affected Veterans. To date, this contact has been relatively limited and necessarily informal. An exchange may start with a chance encounter. For example, someone visiting the gift shop might refer to his or her own or some other’s service. If the ensuing conversation suggests to

The Highground staff that there might be issues with PTSD, that individual can then be connected with a volunteer who will help the Veteran feel comfortable to talk freely regarding details about the individual’s service time, military experience, or connection to the military. This exchange may represent the first time in years such an unburdening has taken place. It is entirely possible this intervention might make a life and death difference for on occasions it truly has meant the difference.

The Board and staff wish to transform this type of interaction from informal to formal and provide an invaluable resource that is nationally recognized by Veterans and their family members. It is the mission of the Board of Directors and staff to expand specific mental health programming, referral services for employment and housing, retreats, and more.

The Highground conducts retreats for female Veterans which are currently held at The Highground. Starting in 2019, staff worked with professional counselors to help develop these needed retreats which were designed to address the subject of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). It took two years to organize this as the staff needed time to consult with professional counselors on how best to hold a retreat for women, particularly one that would address the subject of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). At the end of this amazing three-day healing journey, one of the female Veterans who attended related, “This is the first time I have slept without nightmares in 10 years.”



One of The Highground's most meaningful programs is the free distribution of carefully-selected books on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to Veterans and families struggling with this condition. At least 1,000 such books have been distributed over the past several years. Kirk Rodman, a past director of The Highground, recalled a story in which he gave one of these books to a Veteran who was having a very hard time with PTSD. Months later, this Veteran returned to The Highground, a markedly happier man. At first, Kirk did not recognize him. The Veteran said, "You gave me a book the last time I was here. It helped." He hugged Kirk, who looked past him at the man's wife. She was silently mouthing the words, "Thank you, thank you."

Benefits of Expanded Facilities

The Highground is viewed as a place of healing, a spiritual place, and a place where Veterans and their families can receive the care and resources that they need. By constructing a new building and making more efficient use of existing buildings, this campaign expansion will provide opportunities for The Highground to handle increasing numbers of annual visitors and to address the mental health needs of the Veterans who visit.



Dove Effigy Mound

The Dove Effigy Mound is located on a grassy hillside, making access to this tribute challenging for anyone mobility impaired and/or wheelchair-bound. The original construction of the Dove took place under very rainy, muddy conditions and involved the delivering and locating of tons of soil, including modest but meaningful contributions of soil from many locations around the globe, all to be used for the fashioning of this dramatically beautiful project.

In the midst of this demanding and muddy process, a wheel-chair bound Veteran was seen watching from the Plaza above. He wanted to be part of the creation of this tribute, a tribute which was so close to his heart. Several volunteer workers lifted him in his wheelchair to a place atop the emerging dove effigy, and handing him a shovel, enabling him to fulfill his need to be a part of the tribute. This experience helped him take a huge step forward in dealing with his grief for those who were unable to return to their families or, like himself, who returned forever changed.



Annual events like the Heroes Ride Bicycle Tour and Honor Ride Motorcycle Ride provide hundreds of individuals the opportunity to raise funds and awareness to support the ongoing mission.

Educating the Public About the Importance of Veterans

The new multi-purpose Welcome and Visitors center will allow for larger tours and school groups. The center will also provide an updated reading and viewing area containing the library and the archival collection of wartime literature. The benefit of these improvements will be realized through and enjoyed by a better informed and aware public.

Opening Our Doors to New Friends and Donors

Approaching individuals, businesses, foundations, and corporations during this campaign will result in new additions to the donor pool of The Highground. These new donors, along with our current donors, will help spread the word and ignite passion for the mission of The Highground, thus encouraging others to join and support these efforts.

Economic Asset to the Region and Wisconsin

The economic impact of The Highground on the Neillsville area, Clark County, and State of Wisconsin is considerable. The Highground is an invaluable asset to the region, contributing to sales, profits, jobs, tax revenues, and income in the greater Neillsville area, as well as lodging, restaurants, and transportation in the wider community. The economic impact currently stands at \$12 million, and with the proposed expansion, that number is sure to continue to increase annually. Through continued growth and higher visibility, The Highground will become an ever-increasing economic asset to the surrounding communities and the State of Wisconsin.

Vietnam Veterans who come to The Highground receive a special Welcome Home patch and a beaded keychain made by former board member, Jim Fox, and his wife, Susan, to represent the familiar Vietnam Service Ribbon. Thousands of Vietnam Veterans have told staff and volunteers it is at The Highground where they have finally heard the words, “Welcome Home” after decades of being ignored or worse. Countless tears of healing, anger, memories, and sadness have been shed by the Veterans, the staff, and volunteers during this “Welcome Home.”

Conceptual Building Design

Architect’s Narrative/Facility Concept and Design Components



Conceptual design of The Highground expansion.

A Building Committee comprised of Board of Directors members and volunteers was convened to manage the details for the expansion project. The group identified the new building placement on the site and program requirements. Concepts solidified into a building design the group was confident would provide The Highground with its expansion goals and objectives. Photorealistic renderings were created to understand the relationship of the new building with existing structures and memorials. Vehicle and pedestrian circulation will be improved and new amenities within the building will be incorporated to aid the organization in fulfilling its important mission to Veterans and Veteran stakeholders.

2020 Annual Operating Budget

Expenses:		Income:	
Gift Shop Cost of Goods Sold	\$75,000	General Donations	\$330,000
General Expenses incl. interest	\$175,000	Event Donations/Stone Sales	\$215,000
Educational Programing	\$15,000	Museum Donations	\$10,500
Maintenance Costs	\$25,000	Corporate Sponsorships	\$10,000
Event expense/stone costs	\$80,000	Gift Shop Income	\$150,000
Museum Expense	\$15,000	Total Income:	\$706,500
Payroll Expenses	\$330,000	Net Cash Flow: \$500	
Total Expense:	\$715,000		

The same income was projected as 2019 with the difference of \$45,000 from a payroll protection grant and another \$50,000 from in-store sales due to having an online store and better weather.

The same expense was used as 2019 except for current payroll, an increase in general expenses of \$15,000, and an increase in gift shop cost of goods and services of \$25,000.



A bench along the 4-mile trail system

Future Operating Budget Following Expansion *2024 Cash Operating Budget*

Cash Expenses:		Cash Income:	
Wages	\$445,000	Bike and Motorcycle Honor Rides	\$115,000
Payroll taxes	\$30,000	Foundation and other grants	\$100,000
Travel	\$10,000	Corporate Annual Contributions	\$100,000
Internet and Telephone	\$12,000	Miscellaneous Fund Raisers	\$25,000
Utilities	\$42,000	Legacy Stone sales	\$125,000
Site Maintenance	\$45,000	Memorial Gifts	\$25,000
Janitorial	\$14,000	General Donations	\$300,000
Postage	\$8,000	Gift Store Sales	\$200,000
Newsletters	\$24,000	Gift Store Cost of Goods Sold	(\$110,000)
Office Supplies/Computer software, etc.	\$10,000	Gross Cash Revenue:	\$890,000
Supplies	\$24,000	Net Cash Revenue:	\$52,000
Advertising/Fundraising	\$20,000		
Event Expense/Exhibits	\$50,000		
Cost of Legacy Stones	\$35,000		
Insurance	\$30,000		
Accounting/Legal	\$20,000		
Miscellaneous	\$24,000		
Gross Cash Expense:	\$838,000		

Ways to Give to The Highground Rising

We hope you will consider making a gift that is personally meaningful and satisfying to you. We understand that the effects of COVID-19 may continue to affect the ability of some to make gifts to this campaign, but it is important to note pledges may be remitted over time, even up to five years. Congress has identified ways to encourage giving to important, worthwhile causes like this expansion campaign even during this challenging time.

Enhanced Charitable Giving Incentives as a Result of the CARES Act

The CARES ACT temporarily changes the Universal Charitable Deduction. Taxpayers who do not itemize their deductions can take a one-time deduction of up to \$300 for gifts made to charitable organizations. The provision is intended only for the year 2020; however, in the text of the bill, it states taxable years “beginning in 2020.” and does not include a sunset date, thus it conceivably could extend beyond 2020. The deduction is only for gifts of cash made in the calendar year 2020 and does not cover other types of gifts or contributions made to donor-advised funds or private foundations.

The CARES Act suspends the 60 percent adjusted gross income limitation for individuals’ charitable contributions for the year 2020. In a typical year, an individual can only take a charitable deduction of up to 60 percent of their adjusted gross income, no matter how much he or she gives. For 2020, there is no limit, making cash contributions fully deductible.

Pledge Commitments

Payments on pledges can be fulfilled by cash, check, commodities, or appreciated property. Donors are advised to consult with your financial advisor if making gifts not by cash or check.

Because many large corporations offer employee matching gift programs, The Highground recommends potential donors check if such a program exists with their respective employers. This is an excellent way to increase both the size and the impact of gifts to The Highground Rising Campaign.

A Pledged Gift

Your pledge may be fulfilled over three to five years on whatever schedule and by whatever method of payment best suits your planning. Typically, contribution installments may be made twice a year. The Highground business office will send payment reminders for set dates. You will receive tax-deductible gift receipts for each payment made. By spreading payments out over three to five years, making a pledged gift allows you to give at your highest capacity.

An Outright Gift

An outright gift of cash is the simplest and most common way of giving. Outright gifts also include appreciated securities, bonds, or personal assets; real property assigned ownership; or beneficiary status in paid life insurance with cash value (in any single form or combination). Many of these types of gifts hold specific capital gains tax advantages and deductibility for you.

Gifts of Stock

Financial advisors may recommend using assets other than cash to make charitable gifts or fulfill pledges. For example, anyone who bought stock that has appreciated may have a potentially lucrative asset to use in making charitable gifts.

If you wish to make a stock donation, you are able to write off the stock’s value at the time of its deduction instead of writing off what you paid for it. For instance, if you have a \$50,000 block of stock for which you paid \$10,000, you are able to write off \$50,000 on your taxes and you would also avoid paying the capital gains tax on the \$40,000 in appreciation of the stock.



Thousands of school children visit The Highground annually. On this day, a group of children shared an impromptu gesture of respect and gratitude for Veterans.

IRA Charitable Rollover

The IRA Charitable Rollover allows individuals aged 70 ½ or older to make direct transfers from their IRAs to qualified charitable organizations. Each transfer has a maximum of \$100,000 (\$200,000 per couple) in any one year. Transfers can be made in more than one installment and can go to multiple charities. Donors with retirement assets in 401k, 403b, or similar accounts must first roll those funds into an IRA and direct the IRA administrator to transfer the funds from the IRA directly to a public charity.

What charities can receive an IRA charitable rollover?

IRA charitable rollover gifts must be made directly to a 501(c)(3) public charity.

What are the tax implications of IRA charitable rollover gifts?

Because the transfers occur directly from donors' IRAs to qualified charities, donors don't have to count the transfers as taxable income for federal tax purposes. IRA charitable rollover transfers can count as a donor's required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year. IRA charitable rollover transfers cannot be made to charitable gift annuities or charitable remainder trusts.

Can an IRA charitable rollover benefit a donor advised fund?

No. Donors would first have to withdraw the funds from the IRA and recognize those distributions as income. Then they can deposit the distribution into a donor advised fund and calculate their charitable deduction according to the general rules pertaining to percentage limitations and itemized contribution reductions.

How do I initiate an IRA charitable rollover?

You must contact your IRA administrator/ coordinator to initiate the transfer to a 501(c)(3) public charity. We also encourage you to notify The Highground that you are making an IRA charitable rollover.

Did you know?

- An IRA charitable distribution is a better option for donors who regularly give a portion of their income to charity and do not itemize deductions.
- Donors may want to consider a 501(c)(3) public charity as a beneficiary of their IRA because the IRS may impose taxes of up to 60 percent on IRA funds not distributed during their lifetimes.

Guidance on tax impacts of charitable giving is based on current tax law and CARES ACT changes for 2020. Please consult your tax advisor to understand the tax benefits in your individual situation.

All gifts and pledges are strictly confidential.

Donors to The Highground Rising may choose to remain anonymous or to make their gifts in honor, in memory, or in recognition of specific individuals, events, or accomplishments in their lives. Donors may also choose to have their names or the names of designated others displayed on a plaque on a

Donor Recognition Plan

Item(s) to be named:	Suggested gift amount:
Welcome Center Building	\$1 million
Museum	\$500,000
Exhibit Area	\$500,000
Building Art (outdoor)	\$250,000
Eternal Flame	\$250,000
Visitor Welcome Area/Foyer	\$200,000
Outdoor Observation Deck	\$150,000
Gift Shop	\$100,000
Theatre Room	\$100,000
Chapel	\$50,000
Conference Room	\$50,000
Landscape Garden on West Side of Building	\$50,000
Doughboy Relocation and Garden	\$50,000
Main Level Parking Area	\$50,000
Upper Level Parking Area	\$50,000
Reconfigured Lower Level Parking	\$25,000
All Access Path	\$25,000
Eternal Flame Path	\$25,000
Service Organization Display Wall	\$25,000
Exhibit Display Pad	\$25,000

Unless a donor wishes to remain anonymous, all contributions of \$1,000 or more to The Highground Rising will be permanently recognizes in the facility on a Wall of Honor. The recognition will be in the

Giving Societies:	Contribution of:
Fleet	\$500,000 and more
Division	\$250,000-\$499,999
Regiment	\$100,000-\$249,999
Battalion	\$50,000-\$99,999
Company	\$25,000-\$49,999
Platoon	\$10,000-\$24,999
Squad	\$2,500-\$9,999
Fire Teams	\$1,000-\$2,499

The final Naming Rights will be completed when the design stage is finalized by the architects and building committee.

form of an engraved tile. Donors will be allowed to specify in what manner they wish to have their gifts recognized. The size of the Giving Society tiles will be related to the size of the gift it recognized.



Hundreds of Veterans are honored at annual Stone ceremonies as a lasting tribute to their service and sacrifice.



For many years volunteer Bonnie Henchen has helped keep everything beautiful at The Highground by planting, weeding and watering.



The Highground has many programs for Veterans, including Veterans retreats, which are a source of healing for Veterans dealing with PTSD, as well as a bonding experience. This photo was taken during The Highground's Female Veterans Weekend Retreat in 2019.

Addendum

Historical Timeline of The Highground

Here is a brief timeline of significant events that have occurred in the history of The Highground beginning in 1965:

1965 – Tom Miller & Jack Swender were combat Marines during the Vietnam War. Their unit was caught in a mortar attack during which Tom lost an eye and Jack was killed, dying in Tom's arms. Tom wanted to create a place to remember Jack and all others who were killed in the Vietnam War. After 15 years of trying, Tom was finally able to enlist the support of a few key individuals to advance his vision of creating such a memorial.

1985 – Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project (WVVMPP) was created. The current site of The Highground was selected from over 50 different potential sites in 12 Wisconsin counties. The site was purchased, and the Listeman Foundation repaid the purchase price with a grant. Also in 1985, Tom Miller rode his bicycle for 1,244 miles around Wisconsin, one mile for each Wisconsin service personnel who died or was lost, his or her fate suspected but ultimately unknown fighting the war in Vietnam.

1986 – The Listeman Foundation grant required that a permanent fixture must be placed at the site within one year from the original purchase. To satisfy this obligation and secure the WVVMPP site, the 70' Flagpole, later to be repositioned, was donated and installed by the Clark County American Legions. To this day, the flagpole flies the two flags which continually wave above The Highground plaza-- A stars and stripes U.S. Flag (15' x 10') and a POW / MIA Tribute Flag. Both flags are flown 365 days a year.

1988 – Dedication of the Park and the Fragments Tribute, the poignant and understated Vietnam

War tribute that was the first to grace The Highground. Fragments, in its place of honor on the point of the plaza, stands as a testimonial to the realization of Tom's dream.

1989 – Dedication of the Dove Effigy Mound – Designed by Vietnam Veteran, David Giffey, the Dove pays tribute to POWs/MIAs from all 20th and 21st Century conflicts.

1990 – Dedication of the Gold Star – This tribute was created to acknowledge and honor the loss suffered by each Gold Star Family. It was constructed and dedicated to all Gold Star Families recognizing the loss of a service man or women to the ravages of war.

1992 – Although the Fragments Tribute was the first memorial at The Highground to feature a female figure as an integral part of the service tribute, the Nurse's Tribute, which stands strategically at the base of and in front of the Flagpole is the first military memorial in the United States to pay tribute exclusively to its servicewomen. The year 1992 also marked the dedication of the WWI Doughboy Tribute.

A poignant experience worthy of note transpired the same year. A North Vietnamese citizen, whose brother was among the many combatants classified as Missing In Action during the war in Vietnam, visited The Highground where he was encouraged to partake of the healing environment present there. He burned incense on the Dove Effigy in memory of his missing brother. This man was so moved by his experience at The Highground that he, along with partners, went on to create the Vietnam-American Peace Park North of Hanoi.

1993 – The WWII Tribute is dedicated. The tribute is comprised of two separate design entry concepts, which were ultimately merged with the consent of the two artists who created them to form the tribute on the Plaza.

1995 – Dedication of the National Native American Vietnam Veterans Tribute. Many Native Americans felt inadequately represented by the Three Soldiers statue, which is part of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. The tribes themselves oversaw the fashioning and placement of this memorial which welcomes visitors as one enters The Highground from the west. It was the decision of the tribes that this impressive bronze figure created by Harry Whitehorse serve as their National Vietnam Veterans Tribute.

1996 – The Timber Frame building is dedicated. The building was constructed in traditional timber frame fashion using wooden pegs. Each component was numbered and transported to The Highground, where it was assembled by volunteers with the assistance and under the supervision of Lyle Lidholm, its designer and one of the its major contributors.

2002 – The Highground Liberty Bell Shelter is put in place. The modern casting of the replica Liberty Bell, which now resides at The Highground beneath its own timber frame shelter, was originally commissioned by a group of Minneapolis

businessmen to celebrate the 1976 Bicentennial. For several years it toured throughout 36 of the contiguous 48 states on the back of a flatbed truck and was seen and enjoyed by thousands of people before ultimately finding its home at The Highground. The Liberty Bell functions as a key component of virtually every outdoor event held at The Highground and has been rung by countless visitors.

2004 – A developmental forest with 4 miles of hiking trails is dedicated.

2006 – The Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) Tribute is dedicated as a tribute specifically created by Dorothy Swain Lewis, a WASP, who became acquainted with The Highground while traveling with a group of fellow ex-WASPs through the country. This same year, the Meditation Garden which includes arbors, the Ascension of the Doves sculpture, a Meditation Shelter, a Prayer Stone, and the sculpture known as the Fountain of Tears was dedicated.

2007 – The Korean Tribute, comprised of three



Dedication of the National Native American Vietnam Veterans Tribute



The Korean War Tribute

statues representing the cold, heat, and anguish endured by our servicemen and women during that conflict, is dedicated. The statues rest on granite slabs in the shape of the Korean Peninsula. They are surrounded by a Yin Yan feature taken from the South Korean flag. The tribute is ringed with an ever-growing number of Korean Honor Stones and with a series of plaques that provide a brief history of the Korean War, a war which has been left unresolved and never formally ended.

2010 – The Learning Center (Museum) is dedicated. This building houses a permanent museum, military history library and exhibits that are changed at intervals throughout the year. The Registry books from all of the honor stones and ongoing educational and historical programs are preserved here.

2016 – The Persian Gulf Tribute is dedicated. Known by many as The Boot Print, the Persian Gulf Tribute symbolically represents a military boot print in the desert sand. This tribute honors the service and memory of all who serve/served in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and pays specific

homage to those who served in the Persian Gulf region of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

2018 – The Military Working Dog (MWD) tribute is dedicated. The inspiration for this tribute was provided by a letter written to The Highground by the wife of a local man who served as a dog handler in the Vietnam War. The figures in the statue most nearly reflect the appearance of a Veteran of that war, although the larger intent of the tribute is to recognize and honor military working dogs (MWDs) and handlers of all eras.



The current Museum space

Military Working Dog Tribute

The day of the Military Working Dog Tribute (MWD) dedication, former dog handlers were asked by a Highground staff member if any still carried a photo of their dogs.

The majority immediately produced just such a photo. Their response was as emotionally charged as it was unanticipated, underscoring the wisdom behind the creation of this tribute.

"There is no faith which has never yet been broken, except that of a truly faithful dog." - Konrad Lorenz

Part of every dedication ceremony is the reading of names representative of those being honored. For the occasion of this ceremony, the names of 50 military working dogs were also read. More than once during the reading of these names was heard, "That's my dog!"

Following the ceremony, several Veteran handlers volunteered that for the first time since concluding their service, they felt a sense of closure. Sadly,

and ironically, the military considers working dogs "equipment" and, with few exceptions, all remained in the combat theater where they served to either be euthanized or given away.

Erling Anderson of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, had been a handler, although not the original handler of a dog named Satan. Erling's widow, Jan, wrote the letter that inspired the creation of our MWD tribute. Mike Voorhees, Satan's original handler in Vietnam, was invited to be keynote speaker at the dedication. For decades Mike had harbored the unfounded sense of guilt that the training he had provided Erling with Satan had been somehow lacking.

Some months after that training was concluded, Mike had learned Erling had died in an ambush. No information on Satan's status was uncovered. Knowing Jan would be at the MWD Tribute dedication, Mike tried to imagine how she might react to meeting him.

Mike's character and the strength he derived from his post-Vietnam vocation in the ministry shone through his dedication address. He did, indeed, meet Jan. Following his speech, she embraced Mike – both of them in tears, both finally having found some needed closure.



Military Working Dog Tribute

"My eyes are your eyes to watch and protect you, my ears are your ears to hear and detect the evil minds in the dark, my nose is your nose to scent the invaders to our domain and so you may live my life as also yours." - Unknown

The vision of The Highground Rising is to continue and expand service to the greater Veterans community by honoring the military service of all and remembering the sacrifices asked of and made by service men and women and their families.

The Highground endeavors to educate the public about the true costs of military service. It strives to find ever more effective ways of promoting healing to damaged lives and relationships among those who serve so gallantly, selflessly, proudly, and bravely.

When you are asked to give to The Highground Rising Campaign, please say, "Yes, I want to honor Veterans and help Veterans heal."

When you are asked to give, please give generously in memory of all who served and died.



The Eagle and The Hawk

Lyrics co-written by Mike Taylor and John Denver

"The Eagle," borrowed from and based on "The Eagle and the Hawk"

by Mike Taylor and John Denver, reinterpreted for The Highground by poet Steve Maddox

I am the eagle, and this is my country, From ocean to ocean 'neath endless blue sky.

I am the eagle....there's blood on my feathers, But time is still turning, they soon will be dry.

All those who see me and all who believe in me, Share in the freedom I feel when I fly.

Come dance with the west wind 'oer wheat field and forest, Above rolling hillsides and up to the stars.

Reach for the heavens and hope for the future, For all that we can be, and not what we are.





**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!**