

Gainesville Veterans For Peace is hosting a virtual Memorial Day Weekend Event. Please attend and Share

Dear Friends,

2021 is the 14th year that VFP has held our commemoration, now known as the Memorial Mile, to remember those who have died in the wars in Afghanistan (since 2001) and Iraq (since 2003). As of April, 2021, the rising toll has reached 7028 American deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of the 2442 American deaths in Afghanistan, 1972 have occurred since we started this project. In 2007, we put up 3906 tombstones commemorating American soldiers killed in Iraq. In 2021 the American death toll has risen to 4586.

This year, Veterans for Peace will be hosting a virtual Memorial Mile event. Making it virtual not only provides safety in the (hopefully) waning days of the pandemic, but also allows much wider sharing, and an opportunity to share a powerful video that tells the history of the annual Memorial Day tribute.

Of course, we will all dearly miss the face-to-face interactions that have made these annual remembrances so meaningful. May we suggest one way to capture some of that missing sense of community? Let's all join together to promote a synchronized visit to the website to watch the video, debuting at noon on Friday, May 28th. Please share the link to the event as widely as possible. <http://www.vfpgainesville.org>. It will remain online and streamable from Friday through Memorial Day, Monday, May 31st.

Veterans for Peace feels that these losses cannot be adequately understood with numbers alone. The visual impact of the tombstones conveys the reality of these numbers. The virtual event will include videos made over the years of the line of tombstones, including photos of those tombstones with written messages on them from loved ones who visited their friend or family members' tombstone. It will also include testimonials from VFP members and others impacted by Memorial Mile and its message of remembrance.

Each tombstone includes the soldier's name, date of death, age, branch of service, rank, and hometown. Veterans for Peace places American flags on tombstones of local service members and on those visited by the public. Each year, people come to the Memorial Mile to place flowers and other expressions of love at the tombstones. In addition, we display posters depicting the cost of war. VFP intentionally works to end war and grieves for those civilians also caught up in the ravages of war, bring to the public's attention that the cost of war also includes dollars spent on war that could be better spent for education, housing, healthcare and more in the U.S. and abroad.

Music by local artists (participants in the annual Winter Solstice concert) will be featured prominently in the video, concluding with a debut of an original song, *The Ways of War*, written by Bob McPeek. Performers of the song include two great musicians from the music faculty at Florida A&M University.

First is Longineu Parsons II, whose dazzling Taps-like trumpet performance perfectly captures the sorrow and sacrifice of war. Longineu is a member of the jazz ensemble 21 Blue and has performed with and played for the likes of Nat Adderly, Cab Calloway, Herbie Mann, Sun Ra, and Branford Marsalis. He is also a University of Florida alumnus (with a Ph.D. in composition).

Next up is singer Darryl Tookes, also on the FAMU faculty, whose stellar career includes vocal work with a long list of famous musicians (Sting, Paul Simon, Aretha Franklin, Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones, and too many to mention).

Ways of War concludes with a choir comprised of 15 different singers, from all across America (California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Colorado), including well known singer-songwriter John Gorka. The choir was arranged by UF emeritus professor of music Russ Robinson.

Rob Rothschild and Bob McPeek have edited the video together and produced a moving and unprecedented tribute in the history of the Veterans for Peace Memorial Mile commemorations.

This event can be seen on our website: <http://www.vfpgainesville.org> or our [Facebook event page](#).

Thank You,
Scott Camil

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