

**The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services**

**Michelle Lujan Grisham** *Governor*

**Sonya L. Smith** *Cabinet Secretary*

**DVS Commemorates Memorial Day**

**With a Brief Ceremony in Angel Fire**

**ANGEL FIRE—**The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) commemorated Memorial Day with a brief ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

. Due to public safety concerns regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was closed to the public. But a handful of people who stopped by the memorial were not turned away by DVS staff.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Manager DB Herbst read a proclamation shortly before a memorial wreath was presented outside the memorial museum.

“Whereas, since the founding of the United States of America, the men and women of our Armed Forces have sacrificed to serve and protect our nation from all enemies foreign and domestic—giving their live, when necessary,” he read from the official governor’s proclamation. “Whereas military service has always been a part of the fabric of New Mexico’s culture and history, as it is sure to be for future generations, now therefore I, Michelle Lujan Grisham, governor of the state of New Mexico, do hereby proclaim May 31st, 2021, as Memorial Day throughout the state of New Mexico.”

The wreath was presented by Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery Supervisor Randy Myklebust—and Vietnam War veteran Eugene Stefanko, who came all the way from his home in Latrobe, PA, to do the honors.

Mr. Stefanko was a member of the unit in which U.S. Marine 1st Lt. David Westphall was killed in action when it came under attack on May 22, 1968 near Con Thien, South Vietnam. The memorial was built by 1st Lt. Westphall’s parents, Victor and Jeanne, to honor him and all who served in the Vietnam War.

Mr. Stefanko is the last surviving member of the unit that came under attack, and was honored to pay tribute to his former unit member—along with others who have given their lives.

“I am proud to be able to honor my fallen brother today,” said Mr. Stefanko afterwards.
“I really didn’t know him personally that well. But he was a fellow Marine—and that’s why I’m here, honoring him today, too--with everybody else.”

The brief ceremony concluded with a benediction, and the ringing of the memorial’s Honor Bell 21 times—in lieu of a rifle volley.

DVS is producing a video of the ceremony, which will also have video messages from DVS Secretary Sonya Smith and members of New Mexico’s congressional delegation, along with the thoughts of some of those who attended the ceremony. That video will on the DVS website at [www.nmdvs.org](http://www.nmdvs.org). Click on the “News & Events” tab in the upper right…and then on “Recent Press Releases.”

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