Seven Names on a Long Black Wall in Our Nation’s Capital

 I’ll tell you how they got there. In 1971 I was Platoon Leader of 3rd Platoon, D Company, 39th Combat Engineer Battalion, Quang Tin Providence, Vietnam. We were responsible for mine sweeping Route 533 that ran from Tam Ky to Tien Phuoc. We had been sweeping the road for only a couple of weeks and none of us had ever performed a mine sweep and we had yet to discover an IED as they are now called. We started our sweep at the old French Steam Roller and proceeded east and usually met the sweep team from Tam Ky at the village on the road by the abandoned FSB LZ Young. We had to do a field expedient mine sweep meaning that since we had to cover 5 miles of road in around 3 hours we could not cover all of the road surface slowly and methodically as we should but the detector operators swung the detectors every step which meant that the only covered 1/3 of the road surface. There was a convoy that was running from Tam Ky to Tien Phuoc after we cleared the road to IED’s. We detected no IED’s and after we met with the other sweep team we returned to FSB Phoenix at Tien Phuoc so that we would not get caught on the road. We missed an IED that day and one of the 2 ½ ton trucks hit it and both men in the truck died. A month later the same thing happened during another convoy only this time an APC was hit and all 5 men in it died. I took us a while to discover that usually there was only 1 IED every other week or so but when convoys came there was always at least 1 and as many as 3 one time, we got better at mine sweep but the enemy was also very good, the would bury and IED and use an old piece of tire to put a tire track over it. With authority comes responsibility, since I was in command of the mine sweeps, I was responsible of the IED’s missed and the deaths that they caused. So there are Seven Names on that Long Black Wall that I am responsible for being there and that is why I always cry on Memorial Day.

 John R Lewis 1LT CE