

Viet vets to welcome gulf comrades

by **Kathy Sheehan**

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When Marine Gunnery Sgt. Frank Thompson returned to his South Philadelphia home from Vietnam in 1973, there was no fanfare. No parade. No thanks for his service. Nothing.

But when Marine Capt. Daniel Claney returned to the Philadelphia area last week after flying bombing missions in the Persian Gulf, there was a whole country full of patriotism and yellow ribbons to welcome him.

There was also Thompson and other Vietnam veterans who invited Claney to Independence Park yesterday and presented him with a miniature American flag and a

POW-MIA flag.

The welcome-home and flag presentation for Claney was a preview of what's in store for other returning Persian Gulf soldiers on the Fourth of July.

Vietnam veterans from the area have formed a "Welcome Home Committee of Philadelphia" and plan to co-host the city's Fourth of July parade, dedicating it to returning soldiers from the Iraq-Kuwait conflict.

After the parade, and before the fireworks, hundreds of Vietnam veterans will assemble on the Art Museum steps to present flags to hundreds of veterans of the Persian Gulf war.

"We want to make this a memora-

ble welcome-home for the men and women who served in the Persian Gulf," said Bob McMahon, co-chair of the Welcome Home Committee.

He said the parade and flag ceremony would have "a lot of symbolism," and be "a passing of the torch, so to speak, in that they [Persian Gulf soldiers] will welcome home soldiers of future conflicts, no matter how popular or unpopular the conflict."

Although many cities and states are planning their own welcomes for returning soldiers, McMahon and co-chair Cliff Jeffries have asked federal officials to encourage other Vietnam veterans groups to host similar July 4th celebrations for the gulf troops.

The Philadelphia group hopes to raise \$500,000 for the parade here and an additional \$400,000 to benefit gulf soldiers from the Delaware Valley and their families.

The benefits would include job-training services for the newly returning veterans.

An undetermined number of soldiers from this region served in the gulf. McMahon said the number is thought to be large because Pennsylvanians represented 20 percent of all troops there.

Donations are being accepted at the Welcome Home Fund, P.O. Box. 16355, Phila., Pa. 19114. Veterans or others who want to participate in the parade or volunteer support should call: 546-9500.