

## Overpowering experience



Artist Anita Miller discusses the Lima Company Memorial now on display at Secrest Auditorium in Zanesville. Lima Company lost 22 Marines and their Navy corpsman almost five years ago in Iraq. The memorial, consisting of eight painted panels set in an octagon, depicts portraits of the fallen. At their feet are three eternal candles and bronzed combat boots. Timothy Bell Jr., Justin Hoffman and Nicholas Bloem are depicted in the painting behind Miller. (Trevor Jones, Times Recorder)

### **Life-size portraits are remembrance of the Lima Company Marines killed in Iraq**

**BY KATHY THOMPSON • Staff Writer • June 26, 2010**

ZANESVILLE -- Look into Lance Cpl. Nicholas W. B. Bloem's eyes and you see trust.

The grin on Lance Cpl. Timothy M. Bell Jr.'s face shows how much he loved to tease.

It's clear Sgt. Justin F. Hoffman was a leader, but one with compassion and generosity.

These are just three of the Marines depicted in The Lima Company Memorial on display at the Secrest Auditorium until mid-August.

Lima Company lost 22 Marines and its Navy Corpsman almost five years ago in Iraq, and the memorial, consisting of eight painted panels set in an octagon, depicts portraits of the fallen. At their feet are three eternal candles and bronzed combat boots.

The creator of the memorial, Anita Miller, of Columbus, actually woke from a dream in October 2005 about creating a memorial. Even though she knew little of the Marine unit, she soon became aware she was being compelled and guided to honor the Lima Company of the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment.

"When I first started this, I didn't know exactly who these men were or how their relationships with each other worked. I had a vision, and my heart went out to all the families," Miller said as she stood in front of the painting with Blome, Bell and Hoffman. "I had a list of 23 names and I closed my eyes and meditated. Then it started to become clear. Tim and Justin were inseparable, each having the other's back. Nick, well, Nick was like the younger brother that tagged along, but wanted to make sure he was taking care of his buddies. That's how each painting is. Each painting has its own story, just like each of these men were unique and have their own stories."

Miller had lots of help from fellow Marines, family members of the men and their friends.

"I got thousands of pictures of these men," Miller said. "I spent at least a year preparing before I started painting. I had to know who each one was, what they were like, what they did, what they dreamed, what they loved. And I truly believe as I started, each and every one of these men spoke to me and helped me. I had a lot of help, seen and unseen."

Miller said each man gave "everything he had" for us. Behind each of the faces in the memorial, there stands thousands of men and women behind them.

"I know the public showing their support for this memorial and for these men means so much to all the families," Miller said. "We want to honor them because they gave their lives for our freedom."

Mayor Butch Zwelling said it broke his heart to view the paintings.

"They suffered all these casualties," Zwelling said. "One was only 18 years old and just out of high school. This is such a tribute to them."

Zanesville artist Alan Cottrill said he found the memorial powerful and told Miller it gave him goosebumps.

"You captured the essence of these men," Cottrill told Miller. "You got their gestures and expressions perfect. This is very powerful."

Miller said she found it challenging to try to capture each Marine's personality.

But Miller does capture the forgiveness Lance Cpl. Eric J. Benholtz had in his heart, the kindness and goodness of Lance Cpl. Michael J. Cifuentes, the joy Lance Cpl. Christopher J. Dyer brought to all who knew him, and the dedication Sgt. David K. J. Kreuter had for his family and fellow Marines.

Miller is planning to include Sgt. Bradley J. Harper, a Dresden native who was killed Aug. 3, 2005, while assigned to the 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Marine Forces Reserve out of Norfolk, Va. Harper's amphibious assault vehicle was hit by an IED while

he was conducting combat operations south of Haditha, Iraq. Harper was not supposed to be with the unit when he was killed, but he went to protect his fellow Marines. Miller said the date for the Harper unveiling has yet to be determined, but it will be displayed with the Lima Company Memorial.

The memorial has been displayed at the Ohio Statehouse and in Washington D.C., and Miller hopes to take it to other cities and towns.

John Kunkel, manager of the auditorium, said he was honored Miller brought the memorial to Zanesville.

"It's an overpowering experience," Kunkel said. "We can't forget these men. We'll never forget them."

For Miller, the memorial began as a vision.

Now it has become an opportunity to experience "the love and dedication of these Marines whose faithfulness never wavered," Miller said.

"You'll feel their loving spirits when you stand in the middle of the memorial," Miller said. "There's communication here. You can almost feel the wind moving through the pictures as it made its way across the desert they were in. The memorial will speak to you. And that's a comfort for the families. And, I think, for those men who died."

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