

Goons disrupt Vietnam vets' plans

By Frank Bucholtz
News Contributor

There won't be a gathering of Vietnam veterans in the Maple Ridge area this summer, thanks to vandals who destroyed a remote camp.

The Sayres Lake camp was so badly vandalized that it has now been bulldozed out of existence (see separate story). It was planned as the site for Firebase '94, a weekend gathering of veterans of the Vietnam War. Sayres Lake was the site of Firebase '93, a successful event which drew a large number of veterans from Canada and the United States.

Woody Carmack, a Maple Ridge

prison guard and active member of Vietnam Veterans in Canada, organized last year's event and has been busy working on plans for a follow-up Firebase event this year. A couple of months ago, he went up to the Sayres Lake camp and discovered the extent of the vandalism.

"They'd ripped the wiring and electrical boxes out of the huts and kitchens, poured paint over the stoves, broke the toilets and pulverized them to pieces," Carmack says. "The steel gate was cut with a torch. It did not look like a random act of violence."

Carmack and other organizers scrambled to look for alternate sites,

but they didn't have enough time. B.C. Hydro's Stave Lake campground would be a good alternative site, but it was already fully booked.

"We scoured the entire area, and got down to walking through cow pastures. We finally decided not to go ahead, but to plan a picnic instead."

The picnic, scheduled for Aug. 20 at Allco Park in Maple Ridge, is open to all veterans, not just those who fought in the Vietnam War. Among those invited are veterans of the war who fought on the other side — Vietnamese veterans who now live in Canada.

Invitations are also going out to

other veterans' groups, and Carmack is hoping for a good attendance. The Royal Canadian Legion, which recently voted to accept Vietnam veterans who were Canadian citizens at the time they signed up as full members, will be invited.

"We're going to invite every veterans' group we can possibly think of," he said.

Plans are already underway for a Firebase '95 somewhere in the Maple Ridge-Mission area. Carmack said the success of last year's event make it imperative to find a good site soon.

He's had interest from veterans as far away as North Dakota, and

attributes the interest to the name, remote location and variety of events and opportunities, including counselling from a specialist in post-traumatic stress disorder.

"The name Firebase means a lot to vets," he said. Firebase was a term they used to describe an isolated outpost. "A lot of people found Firebase '93 to be a novelty, and we had a lot of response from all over the place."