

24 October 2000

MEMORANDUM: In Memory Plaque Design Program Notes

PROJECT: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Consultancy
Washington, DC
JCAIA 9708.10-VVMF (In Memory Plaque)

TO: File

FROM: James Cummings, AIA
Washington, DC
20007

telephone
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RE: Design Program Issues

REMARKS:

The following outline notes record several thoughts about the design objectives, and potential design expression, for the In Memory Plaque which will be installed at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial site.

Where the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is mentioned, it refers to the Memorial Wall, the Three Servicemen Statue and plaza, the Vietnam Women's Memorial statue and plaza, and the Flag Plaza with dedicated base, banner and flag. The directory stands, accessory walkways and site accessories are considered part of the site, not the Memorial.

These design objectives, and other thoughts, are not recorded in order of importance. Some of the comments may appear to be "stating the obvious."

1.0 Legal Requirements: Comply with the Authorizing Legislation (H.R.3293)

- 1.1 Honor those:
 - who died after their service in the Vietnam War, but as a direct result of that service, and whose names are not otherwise eligible for placement on the Memorial Wall
- 1.2 Size:
 - at least six square feet
 - not larger than 18 square feet

1.3 Consultations:

architects of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc
architects of the Vietnam Women's Memorial, Inc

1.4 Inscription:

authored by the American Battle Monuments Commission

2.0 Design Challenge:

The significant challenge of this design effort is to balance the desire to honorably commemorate those remembered by the In Memory Project, with preserving the powerful experience available at the existing Memorial.

The meaning and dignity of the In Memory Project will be served by maintaining the existing serene and contemplative environment at the Memorial. The addition of a new element at the Memorial must be done with some care not to dilute the power of the existing design.

With these overall objectives in mind, this list includes some more specific issues:

2.1 Prominence versus invisibility

The In Memory Plaque must achieve sufficient "presence" at the Memorial to honor those commemorated. "Prominence" is not required. This is an area of design where a "balanced" solution must be carefully pursued.

2.2 Vertical or Horizontal Expression

The character of the Memorial is primarily horizontal. The landscape, and the Memorial Wall are horizontal elements that are set in careful relationship to vertical elements.

The Washington Monument (major vertical element) serves to remind the visitor that the service and sacrifice of Vietnam Veterans, as recorded on the Memorial Wall, is set in a larger context of American History and the Nation (taking the point of view that the Washington Monument has become a symbol of the USA, as well as a commemorative structure to George Washington)

The Statues of the Three Servicemen and the Women's Vietnam Memorial are other vertical elements, located in careful relationship to the Memorial Wall. They serve to "humanize" the more abstract Wall of etched names, commemorate those who survived the War (as opposed to those killed or missing), and provide a more explicit and inclusive representation of the Veterans.

An argument could be made that vertical elements at the Memorial represent the living, and the primarily horizontal elements commemorate those who have died.

A horizontal element would be more easily integrated into the assembly of site elements, where an additional vertical element would require careful consideration. An additional vertical element, depending on its size, might create a sense of "sculpture garden" experience that would lessen the strength of the existing Memorial elements.

2.3 Integration

It is important that the In Memory Plaque be seen as an integral part of the Memorial, in order to remember those commemorated as members of the struggle in Vietnam. This sense of integration might include location, materials, design of text, lighting and other design elements related to the existing Memorial elements.

The In Memory Plaque should be designed as a permanent addition to the Memorial.

2.4 Functional Considerations

Consideration should be made to allow visitors to be in the presence of the In Memory Plaque and feel "apart" from the main traffic flow. There should be a place to leave wreaths, flowers, mementos and other commemorative objects, as has been experienced during the history of the Memorial Wall and the statues.

3.0 Inscription and Future Additions

3.1 Partner Inscriptions

The inscription of the In Memory Plaque should be written to act in relationship to the other inscriptions at the Memorial.

The statues bear no inscriptions. The Memorial Wall bears the following inscriptions:

" In honor of the men and women of the armed forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed in the order they were taken from us."

" Our nation honors the courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty and country of its Vietnam Veterans. This memorial was built with private contributions from the American people. November 11, 1982."

The flag base, in the Flag Plaza, bears the following inscription:

" This flag represents the service rendered to our country by the Veterans of the Vietnam War. The flag affirms the principles of freedom for which they fought and their pride in having served under difficult circumstances."

3.2 Commemoration

The inscription should be worded in a way that will serve as a dignified and positive commemoration.

For example, the wording of the legislation "whose names are not otherwise eligible for placement on the Memorial Wall" might be replaced with words that imply no judgement, such as "are not included on the Memorial Wall," or "could not be included on the Memorial Wall."

3.3 Commemorative Mention

The mention of those commemorated should be as general as possible; or, there should be a "master plan" design for the In Memory Plaque as the first installation of similar additional plaques to commemorate further groups who believe the Memorial does not represent their populations.

End of Memorandum.