

Fund Raising

The \$7.0 million cost of establishing the memorial was raised entirely through private contributions from the American people. Corporations, foundations, unions, veterans and civic organizations, and over 275,000 individual Americans provided the gifts to build our nation's newest landmark. No Federal funds were appropriated, although the perpetual maintenance of the memorial will be responsibility of the National Park Service.

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the vietnam veterans memorial fund

Washington DC



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a symbol of the nation's honor and recognition of the men and women of its armed forces who served in the Vietnam war. While, as a special tribute, the memorial is inscribed with the names of the nearly 58,000 who gave their lives or remain missing, it is dedicated to honor the "courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty and country" of all who answered their country's call.

The War

The Vietnam war was the longest in our nation's history. Two American advisors were killed on July 8, 1959, and the last casualties in connection with the war occurred on May 15, 1975, during the Mayaguez incident. Approximately 2.7 million Americans served in the war zone; 300,000 were wounded and approximately 75,000 permanently disabled. Of the casualties, approximately 1,300 remain missing and unaccounted for.

The American advisory role began in the mid-1950's. In 1964, U.S. personnel numbered approximately 20,000. By the "Gulf of Tonkin" Resolution, on August 7, 1964, the U.S. Congress authorized the President "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." In March 1965, the first American combat troops were landed. In mid-1969, at the height of U.S. involvement, American military personnel in Vietnam numbered 550,000. Under a treaty signed by North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the Viet Cong and the United States, a cease fire went into effect on January 28, 1973, and U.S. combat forces were withdrawn from Vietnam as of March 28, 1973. On April 30, 1975, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam surrendered to the advancing North Vietnamese forces and all remaining U.S. civilian and military personnel were evacuated.

During the war, American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines fought with heroism and determination under some of the most difficult circumstances ever encountered by American military personnel. Tragically, upon their return home they received virtually no recognition for their service and sacrifice because of the raging domestic controversy over U.S. policy in conducting the war.

Establishment of the Memorial

The memorial was established by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc. (VVMF), a nonprofit, charitable organization incorporated on April 27, 1979, by a group of Vietnam veterans led by Jan C. Scruggs, a wounded and decorated former infantryman, from Columbia, Maryland. The founders of VVMF wanted Vietnam veterans to have a tangible symbol of recognition by American society. By separating the issue of the service of the individual men and women from the issue of U.S. policy in Vietnam, VVMF hoped to begin a process of national reconciliation. Significant initial support came from U.S. Senators Charles McC. Mathias, Jr., of Maryland and John W. Warner of Virginia. On November 8, 1979, Senator Mathias introduced legislation to authorize a site of national parkland for the memorial. The first significant financial contributions to launch the national fund raising campaign were raised by Senator Warner.

On July 1, 1980, Congress authorized a site of two acres in Constitution Gardens near the Lincoln Memorial. In October of that year, VVMF announced a national design competition open to any U.S. citizen over 18 years of age. By December 29, 1981, there were 2,573 registrants, and the competition became the largest of its kind ever held in the United States. By the deadline of March 31, 1981, 1,421 design entries had been submitted. All entries were judged anonymously by a jury of eight internationally recognized artists and designers, who had been selected by VVMF. On May 1, 1981, the jury presented its unanimous selection for first prize, which was accepted and adopted enthusiastically by VVMF.

The winning design was authored by Maya Ying Lin of Athens, Ohio, who at the time was a 21 year old senior at Yale University. In August of 1981 VVMF selected a building company and professional architecture firm to develop the plans and build Ms. Lin's design. She became a design consultant to the architect of record.

In January 1982, VVMF determined to add a flag staff and sculpture to the memorial site to provide a realistic depiction of Vietnam fighting men and a symbol of their devotion to country. On March 11, 1982, the design and plans received final Federal approval, and work at the site was begun on March 16, 1982. Ground was formally broken on Friday, March 26, 1982.

In July 1982, VVMF selected Washington sculptor Frederick Hart to design the sculpture of the servicemen to be placed at the site. On October 13, 1982, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts unanimously accepted the proposed sculpture and flag staff. Construction at the site was completed in late October, 1982, and the memorial was dedicated on November 13, 1982. The life size sculpture to be cast in bronze is expected to be completed and installed at the site by the end of 1983.

Memorial Design

The Vietnam veteran sponsors desired above all that the memorial have a prominent site, and envisioned a large parklike area. They therefore requested the western end of Constitution Gardens. They set four major criteria for the design: it (1) be reflective and contemplative in character, (2) harmonize with its surroundings - especially the neighboring national memorials, (3) contain the names of all who died or remain missing, and (4) make no political statement about the war.

Ms. Lin conceived her design as creating a park within a park—a quiet protected place that was unto itself yet harmonious with the overall plan of Constitution Gardens. To achieve that effect she chose polished black granite for the walls. Its mirror-like surface reflects the images of the surrounding trees, lawns, and monuments. The walls point to the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, thus bringing the memorial into the historical context of our country. The names are inscribed in the chronological order of their dates of casualty, showing the war as a series of individual human sacrifices and giving each name a special place in history.

The list of names begins at the vertex of the walls below the date of the first casualty, and continues to the end of the east wall. It resumes at the tip of the west wall, ending at the vertex, above the date of the last death. With the meeting of the beginning and ending, a major epoch in American history is signified.

Mr. Hart's goal was to create a sculpture which was a moving evocation of the experience and service of the Vietnam veteran. He has described it as follows:

"The portrayal of the figures is consistent with history. They wear the uniform and carry the equipment of war; they are young. The contrast between the innocence of their youth and the weapons of war underscores the poignancy of their sacrifice. There is about them the physical contact and sense of unity that bespeaks the bonds of love and sacrifice that is the nature of men at war. And yet they are each alone. Their strength and their vulnerability are both evident. Their true heroism lies in these bonds of loyalty in the face of their aloneness and their vulnerability."

The flag will fly from a tall staff, the base of which will contain the emblems of the five services. The sculpture, the flag, and a permanent name directory will be grouped together and prominently located to enhance the entry to the memorial.

Memorial Statistics

Each of the walls is 246'-8" long. They meet at an angle of 125°, 12'. They point exactly to the northeast corners of the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial. The walls are supported along their entire length by 140 concrete pilings driven approximately 35 feet to bedrock. At their vertex the walls are 10'-1 1/2" in height. The stone for the walls, safety curbs and walkways is black granite quarried near Bangalore, India. All cutting and fabrication was done in Barre, Vermont. The variations in color and texture are a result of different finishing techniques, i.e. polishing, honing and flame treating.

The names and inscriptions were gritblasted in Memphis, Tennessee, using stencils produced through a photographic process. The names were arranged chronologically and typeset in Atlanta, Georgia, from a computer tape of the official Vietnam casualty list. The letters are approximately .015 inch in depth. There are a total of 57,939 names inscribed on the walls.

Arrangement of Names

Each of the walls is composed of 70 separate inscribed granite panels. The largest panels have 137 lines of names; the shortest have one line. There are five names on each line. On each wall the panels are numbered from "1" to "70", with panel No. 1 at the vertex and panel No. 70 at the far end. The numbers are inscribed at the bases of the panels.

The names of the first casualties (in July 1959) appear on the first line of panel No. 1 on the east wall below the date "1959". The chronological listing of the names proceeds line by line down each panel and then to the top line of the panel to the right, as though the panels were pages in a book. The sequence of names proceeds from panel No. 70 on the east wall to panel No. 70 on the west wall. The listing continues on each panel to the right, until the names of the last casualties (in May 1975) form the last lines of panel No. 1 on the west wall, above the date "1975".

Locating a Name

An individual name can be located by referring to the alphabetical directory installed at the memorial site and determining the panel and line on which the name appears. In addition, the list of names of servicemen and servicewomen who became casualties in a given time period can be searched. The lists of names for the following time periods begin on the panels and lines indicated.

DATE	PANEL	LINE	DATE	PANEL	LINE
JUL 59	1E	1	JAN 69	35W	14
JAN 62	1E	4	FEB 69	33W	30
JAN 63	1E	15	MAR 69	31W	98
JAN 64	1E	39	APR 69	28W	101
JAN 65	1E	81	MAY 69	26W	89
APR 65	1E	99	JUN 69	23W	34
JUL 65	2E	26	JUL 69	21W	41
OCT 65	2E	100	AUG 69	20W	82
NOV 65	3E	10	SEP 69	18W	18
DEC 65	3E	119	OCT 69	17W	21
JAN 66	4E	47	NOV 69	16W	11
FEB 66	4E	127	DEC 69	15W	12
MAR 66	5E	92	JAN 70	15W	113
APR 66	6E	70	FEB 70	14W	88
MAY 66	7E	15	MAR 70	13W	70
JUN 66	7E	130	APR 70	12W	64
JUL 66	8E	114	MAY 70	11W	78
AUG 66	9E	92	JUN 70	10W	129
SEP 66	10E	59	JUL 70	9W	108
OCT 66	11E	32	AUG 70	8W	73
NOV 66	12E	2	SEP 70	7W	29
DEC 66	12E	131	OCT 70	7W	102
JAN 67	13E	106	NOV 70	6W	33
FEB 67	14E	102	DEC 70	6W	100
MAR 67	15E	124	JAN 71	5W	19
APR 67	17E	83	FEB 71	5W	71
MAY 67	19E	2	MAR 71	4W	13
JUN 67	21E	25	APR 71	4W	98
JUL 67	22E	90	MAY 71	3W	21
AUG 67	24E	58	JUN 71	3W	60
SEP 67	25E	76	JUL 71	3W	96
OCT 67	27E	35	AUG 71	3W	120
NOV 67	28E	107	SEP 71	2W	7
DEC 67	31E	20	OCT 71	2W	32
JAN 68	33E	11	NOV 71	2W	58
FEB 68	36E	45	DEC 71	2W	82
MAR 68	42E	12	JAN 72	2W	94
APR 68	47E	29	FEB 72	2W	103
MAY 68	53E	27	MAR 72	2W	112
JUN 68	62W	19	APR 72	2W	126
JUL 68	54W	25	MAY 72	1W	10
AUG 68	50W	40	JUN 72	1W	34
SEP 68	45W	18	JUL 72	1W	51
OCT 68	42W	52	OCT 72	1W	76
NOV 68	40W	70	JAN 73	1W	108
DEC 68	37W	15	JAN 75	1W	121

The Missing

Each name is preceded (on the west wall) or followed (on the east wall) by one of two symbols - a diamond or a cross. The diamond symbol denotes that the serviceman's or servicewoman's death was confirmed. The approximately 1,300 men whose names are designated by the cross symbol were in missing or prisoner status at the end of the war and remain missing and unaccounted for.

In the event a serviceman's remains are returned or he is otherwise accounted for, the diamond symbol will be superimposed over the cross. If a man returns alive, a circle, as a symbol of life, will be inscribed around the cross.

