

# Vietnam Veterans Memorial

## Official Park Guide

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.

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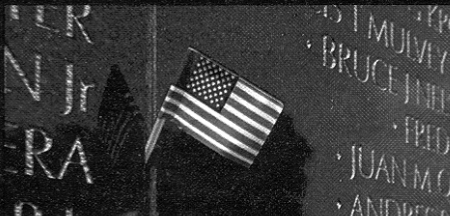
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# OUR NATION HONORS THE COURAGE, SACRIFICE AND DEVOTION TO DUTY AND COUNTRY OF ITS VIETNAM VETERANS. THIS MEMORIAL WAS BUILT WITH PRIVATE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

November 11, 1982



## Beginning the Healing Process

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc., a nonprofit charitable organization formed to establish the memorial, was the idea of Jan Scruggs, a former infantry corporal during the war. It was incorporated on April 27, 1979, by a group of Vietnam veterans in Washing-

ton, D.C. The founders wanted Vietnam veterans to have a tangible symbol of recognition from American society. They early on realized that whatever design would ultimately result, four basic criteria had to be met: (1) that it be reflective and contemplative in character, (2)

that it harmonize with its surroundings, especially the neighboring national memorials, (3) that it contain the names of all who died or remain missing, and (4) that it make no political statement about the war. By separating the issue of those who served in Vietnam from that of

U.S. policy in the war, the group hoped to begin a process of national reconciliation.

## "Names Would Become the Memorial"

Maya Ying Lin conceived her design as creating a park within a park—a quiet protected place unto itself, yet harmonious with the site. To achieve this effect she chose polished black granite for the walls. Its mirrorlike surface reflects the surrounding trees, lawns, monuments, and the people looking for names. The memorial's walls point to the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The 58,182 names are inscribed in chronological order of the date of casualty, showing the war as a series of individual human sacrifices and giving each name a special place in history. "The names would become the memorial," Lin said.

The names begin at the vertex of the walls be-

low the date of the first casualty and continue to the end of the east wall. They resume 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 denoted. 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 denotes that the individual's death was confirmed. The approximately 1,150 persons whose names are designated by the cross were either missing or prisoners at the end of the war and remain missing and unaccounted for. If a person returns alive, a circle, as a symbol of life, will be inscribed around the



cross. In the event an individual's remains are returned or is otherwise accounted for, the diamond will be superimposed over the cross.

### Some Facts About the Memorial

The walls are 246.75 feet long and the angle at the vertex is 125°12'. There are 140 pilings with the average depth to bedrock being 35 feet. The height of the walls at the vertex is 10.1 feet. The granite comes from Bangalore, India; it was cut and fabricated at Barre, Vermont. The names were grit-blasted in Memphis, Tennessee, with the height of individual letters being 0.53 inch and the depth, 0.038 inch.



## The Personal Legacy Lives On

Sculptor Frederick Hart's goal was to create a moving evocation of the experience and service of the Vietnam veteran. He has described it as follows: "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. . . . Their strength and their vulnerability are both evident." The flag flies

from a 60-foot staff. The base contains the emblems of the five services. The sculpture and flag form an entrance plaza.

The completed memorial has achieved all that Lin and Hart hoped that it would and more. Rubbings are taken of the names by loved ones. Every day family members and friends leave mementos and tokens of remembrance at the memorial making them as much of a legacy of the Vietnam years as the memorial itself.



Statue by F. E. Hart and VVWF 1984.

## **Establishing the Memorial**

On July 1, 1980, Congress authorized a site in Constitution Gardens near the Lincoln Memorial for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial thereby providing the prominent, large parklike setting that the organizers had hoped to find. That fall it was announced that the memorial's design would be selected through a national competition open to any U.S. citizen 18 years of age or older. The 1,421 design entries submitted were judged anonymously by a jury of eight internationally recognized artists and designers. On May 1, 1981, the jury presented its unanimous selection for first prize. The winning design was the work of Maya Ying Lin of Athens, Ohio, who at the time was a 21-year-old student at Yale University. The following January it was determined that a flagstaff

and figurative sculpture depicting fighting men in Vietnam would be added to the memorial site. Washington sculptor Frederick Hart was selected to design the sculpture of the servicemen.

On March 11, 1982, the memorial's design and plans received final approval, and ground was formally broken on March 26. Construction of the walls was completed in late October and the memorial was dedicated November 13, 1982. The life-size sculpture was installed in the fall of 1984. On November 11 that year, the President accepted the completed memorial on behalf of the Nation. The \$7,000,000 cost of establishing the memorial was raised entirely through contributions from corporations, foundations,

unions, veterans, civic organizations, and more than 275,000 individual Americans.

### **Administration**

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Address inquiries to the Superintendent, National Capital Parks—Central, 900 Ohio Drive, SW, Washington, DC 20242.

**Vietnam Veterans Memorial**  
Washington, D.C.

**National Park Service**  
U.S. Department of the Interior