

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Memorial Wall

The Memorial Wall is made up of two 246 feet 9 inches (75.21 m) long gabbro walls, etched with the names of the servicemen being honored in panels of horizontal rows with regular typeface and spacing. The walls are sunk into the ground, with the earth behind them. At the highest tip (the apex where they meet), they are 10.1 feet (3.1 m) high, and they taper to a height of 8 inches (20 cm) at their extremities. Symbolically, this is described as a "wound that is closed and healing."

When a visitor looks upon the wall, his or her reflection can be seen simultaneously with the engraved names, which is meant to symbolically bring the past and present together. One wall points toward the Washington Monument, the other in the direction of the Lincoln Memorial, meeting at an angle of 125° 12'. Each wall has 72 panels, 70 listing names (numbered 1E through 70E and 70W through 1W) and 2 very small blank panels at the extremities. There is a pathway along the base of the Wall, where visitors may walk. The wall listed 58,191 names when it was completed in 1983; as of May 2015, there are exactly 58,307 names, including 8 women. Approximately 1,200 of these are listed as missing (MIAs, POWs, and others). Directories are located on nearby podiums so that visitors may locate specific names.

Names

On the walls are the names of servicemen classified as KIA (Killed in Action), or MIA (Missing in Action) when the walls were constructed. The names are inscribed in Optima typeface. Information about rank, unit, and decorations is not given.

Those who died in action are denoted by a diamond; those who were missing (MIAs, POWs, and others) are denoted with a cross. When the death of one who was previously missing is confirmed, a diamond is superimposed over the cross. If the missing were to return alive, which has never occurred as of September 2015, the cross is to be circumscribed by a circle.

The names are listed in chronological order, starting at the apex on panel 1E in 1959 (although it was later discovered that the first casualties were military advisers who were killed by artillery fire in 1957), moving day by day to the end of the eastern wall at panel 70E, which ends on May 25, 1968, starting again at panel 70W at the end of the western wall which completes the list for May 25, 1968, and returning to the apex at panel 1W in 1975.

According to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, "there is no definitive answer to exactly how many, but there could be as many as 38 names of personnel who survived, but through clerical errors, were added to the list of fatalities provided by the Department of Defense.

The Three Servicemen

A short distance away from the wall is another Vietnam memorial, a bronze statue named "The Three Servicemen" (sometimes called "The Three Soldiers"). The statue depicts three soldiers, purposefully identifiable as European American, African American, and Hispanic American. In their final arrangement, the

statue and the Wall appear to interact with each other, with the soldiers looking on in solemn tribute at the names of their fallen comrades. The distance between the two allows them to interact while minimizing the effect of the addition on Lin's design.

Women's Memorial

The Vietnam Women's Memorial is a memorial dedicated to the women of the United States who served in the Vietnam War, most of whom were nurses. It serves as a reminder of the importance of women in the conflict. It depicts three uniformed women with a wounded soldier. It is part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and is located on National Mall in Washington D.C., a short distance south of The Wall, north of the Reflecting Pool.

In Memory memorial plaque

A memorial plaque, authorized by Pub.L. 106–214, was dedicated on November 10, 2004, at the northeast corner of the plaza surrounding the Three Soldiers statue to honor veterans who died after the war as a direct result of injuries suffered in Vietnam, but who fall outside Department of Defense guidelines. The plaque is a carved block of black granite, 3 by 2 feet (0.91 by 0.61 m), and inscribed "In memory of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War and later died as a result of their service. We honor and remember their sacrifice."

Ruth Coder Fitzgerald, founder of The Vietnam War in Memory Memorial Plaque Project, worked for years and struggled against opposition to have the In Memory Memorial Plaque completed. The organization was disbanded, but their web site is maintained by the Vietnam War Project at Texas Tech University.

Ritual

Visitors to the Wall will take a piece of paper and place it over a name on the wall and rub wax crayon or graphite pencil over it as a memento of their loved ones. This is called "rubbing".

Visitors to the memorial began leaving sentimental items at the memorial at its opening. One story claims that this practice began during construction, when a Vietnam Veteran threw the Purple Heart his brother received posthumously into the concrete of the memorial's foundation. Several thousand items are left at the memorial each year. The largest item left at the memorial was a sliding glass storm door with a full-size replica "tiger cage". The door was painted with a scene in Vietnam and the names of U.S. POWs and MIAs from the conflict. Other items left include a Harley Davidson motorcycle with the license plate HERO, a plain brown teddy bear which was dressed by other unconnected visitors, a 6' abstract sculpture titled "After the Holocaust", and an experimental W. R. Case "jungle survival knife" of which only 144 were made.

History

In April 27, 1979, four years after the Fall of Saigon, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc. (VVMF), was incorporated as a non-profit organization to establish a memorial to veterans of the Vietnam War. Much of the impetus behind the formation of the fund came from a wounded Vietnam veteran, Jan Scruggs, who was inspired by the film *The Deer Hunter*, with support from fellow Vietnam veterans such as retired Navy chaplain Arnold Resnicoff. Eventually, \$8.4 million was raised by private donations. A year later a site near the Lincoln Memorial was chosen and authorized by Congress on the site of a demolished World War I Munitions Building. Congress announced that the winner of a design competition will design the park. By the end of the year 2,573

registered for the design competition with a prize of \$50,000. On March 30, 1981, 1,421 designs were submitted. The designs were displayed at an airport hangar at Andrews Air Force Base for the selection committee, in rows covering more than 35,000 square feet (3,300 m²) of floor space. Each entry was identified by number only, to preserve the anonymity of their authors. All entries were examined by each juror; the entries were narrowed down to 232, then 39. Finally, the jury selected entry number 1026. The artist was Maya Lin.

- November 1, 1955 – Dwight D. Eisenhower deployed the Military Assistance Advisory Group, referred to now as MAAG, to train the South Vietnamese military units and secret police. However, the U.S. Department of Defense does not recognize this date since the men were supposedly only training the Vietnamese, so the officially recognized date is the formation of the Military Assistance Command Viet Nam, better known as MACV. This marked the official beginning of American involvement in the war as recognized by the memorial.
- June 8, 1956 – The first official death in Vietnam was United States Air Force Technical Sergeant Richard Bernard Fitzgibbon, Jr. of Stoneham, MA who was murdered by another U.S.A.F. airman.
- July 8, 1959 – Chester M. Ovnand and Dale R. Buis were killed by guerrillas at Bien Hoa while watching the film *The Tattered Dress*. They are listed 1 and 2 at the wall's dedication. Ovnand's name is spelled on the memorial as "Ovnard," due to conflicting military records of his surname.
- April 30, 1975 – Fall of Saigon. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs uses May 7, 1975 as the official end date for the Vietnam era as defined by 38 U.S.C. § 101.
- May 15, 1975 – 18 U.S. servicemen (14 Marines, two Navy corpsmen, and two Air Force crewmen) are killed on the last day of a rescue operation known as the Mayagüez incident with troops from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. They are the last servicemen listed on the timeline.
- May 4, 2010 – Six names were added to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial during a ceremony. The new names are veterans who died after the war as a direct result of injuries suffered in the combat zone.