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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.

## THE HEALING BEGINS



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 Washington, D.C. The founders wanted Vietnam veterans to have a tangible symbol of recognition from American society. They realized early on 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 the important process of national reconciliation.

To veterans and their loved ones, the healing process often involves leaving mementos at the wall (left).

## NAMES 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. Their mirrorlike surfaces reflect 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 58,267 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. Lin said, "The names would become the memorial."

The names begin at the vertex of the walls below 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 (west wall shown at right). 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 has been declared deceased. The 780 persons whose names are designated by a 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, is inscribed around the cross. In the event an individual's remains are returned or are otherwise accounted for, the diamond is 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; the average depth to bedrock is 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, Vt. The names were grit blasted in Memphis, Tenn. The height of individual letters is 0.53 inch and the depth, 0.038 inch.



## THE FACES OF HONOR

Sculptor Frederick Hart's goal was to create a moving evocation of the experience and service of the Vietnam veteran. He has described it: "They wear it on their 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 emblems of the five services. The In Memory plaque, dedicated in 2004, is located within the northeast corner of the Three Servicemen Statue. The plaque honors the men and women who served in Vietnam and later died from causes related to the war; they are remembered for their sacrifice.

Dedicated on November 11, 1993, as part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Women's Memorial honors the women of the U.S. Armed Forces who took part in the war. The statue was sculpted by Glenna Goodacre and depicts three women coming to the aid of a fallen soldier. It recalls the courage and sacrifice of all women who served. Planted around the memorial are eight yellowwood trees—a living tribute to the eight service-women killed in action while in Vietnam.



## ESTABLISHING THE MEMORIAL

On July 1, 1980, Congress authorized a site in Constitution Gardens near the Lincoln Memorial for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, providing the prominent, park-like 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, 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, D.C. 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 (Veterans Day) of that year, President Ronald Reagan accepted the completed memorial on behalf of the nation. The \$7 million cost of establishing the memorial was raised entirely through contributions from corporations, foundations, unions, veterans' groups, civic organizations, and over 275,000 individual Americans.

The completed memorial has achieved all that Lin and Hart hoped it would—and more. Loved ones take rubbings of the names. Every day family members and friends leave mementos and tokens of remembrance, making them as much of a legacy of the Vietnam years as the memorial itself.

### More Information

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

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National Mall and Memorial Parks  
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