



A Wall That Heals

Deliberately setting aside the controversies of the war, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial honors the men and women who served when their Nation called upon them.

The **Vietnam Veterans Memorial** is a national memorial in Washington, D.C. It honors U.S. service members of the [U.S. armed forces](#) who fought in the [Vietnam War](#), service members who died in service in Vietnam/South East Asia, and those service members who were unaccounted for (Missing In Action) during the War.

Its construction and related issues have been the source of controversies, some of which have resulted in additions to the memorial complex. The memorial currently consists of three separate parts: the [Three Soldiers statue](#), the [Vietnam Women's Memorial](#), and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, which is the best-known part of the memorial.

The main part of the memorial, which was completed in 1982, is in [Constitution Gardens](#) adjacent to the [National Mall](#), just northeast of the [Lincoln Memorial](#). The memorial is maintained by the [U.S. National Park Service](#), and receives around 3 million visitors each year. The Memorial Wall was designed by American architect [Maya Lin](#). The typesetting of the original 58,195 names on the wall was performed by [Datalantic](#) in [Atlanta](#), Georgia. In 2007, it was ranked tenth on the ["List of America's Favorite Architecture"](#) by the [American Institute of Architects](#).

Memorial Wall



The Memorial Wall, designed by [Maya Lin](#), is made up of two [gabbro](#) walls 246 feet 9 inches (75 m) long.^{[3][4]} 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 m) high, and they taper to a height of eight inches (20 cm) at their extremities. Stone for the wall came from [Bangalore](#), Karnataka, India, and was deliberately chosen because of its reflective quality. Stone cutting and fabrication was done in [Barre, Vermont](#). Stones were then shipped to [Memphis, Tennessee](#) where the names were etched. The etching was completed using a [photoemulsion](#) and [sandblasting](#) process. The negatives used in the process are in storage at the [Smithsonian Institution](#). 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, read the names, make a [pencil rubbing](#) of a particular name, or pray.

Inscribed on the walls with the Optima typeface are the names of servicemen who were either confirmed to be KIA (Killed in Action) or remained classified as MIA (Missing in Action) when the walls were constructed in 1982. They 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. Symbolically, this is described as a "wound that is closed and healing." Information about rank, unit, and decorations are not given. The wall listed 58,191 names when it was completed in 1983; as of May 2011, there are 58,272 names, including 8 women. Approximately 1,200 of these are listed as missing ([MIAs](#), [POWs](#), and others), denoted with a cross; the confirmed dead are marked with a diamond. If the missing return alive, the cross is [circumscribed](#) by a circle (although this has never occurred as of March 2009); if their death is confirmed, a diamond is [superimposed](#) over the cross. 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."^[5] Directories are located on nearby podiums so that visitors may locate specific names.

Beginning and ending timeline for those listed on the wall

- November 1, 1955 – [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) deploys [Military Assistance Advisory Group](#) to train the South Vietnamese military units and secret police. However, the U.S. Department of Defense does not recognize such date since the men were supposedly only training the Vietnamese. The officially recognized date is the formation of the Military Assistance Command Viet-Nam, better known as MACV. This marks the official beginning of American involvement in the war as recognized by the memorial.
- June 8, 1956 – The first official death in Vietnam is U.S. Air Force Technical Sergeant [Richard B. Fitzgibbon, Jr.](#) of [Stoneham, MA](#) who was murdered by another U.S. airman.
- July 8, 1959 – [Charles Ovnand](#) and [Dale R. Buis](#) are 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.

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- 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 Marines 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.



The Three Soldiers

A short distance away from the wall is another Vietnam memorial, a [bronze statue](#) named *The Three Soldiers* (sometimes called *The Three Servicemen*). Negative reactions to Lin's design created a controversy; a compromise was reached by commissioning [Frederick Hart](#) (who had placed third in the original design competition) to produce a bronze figurative sculpture in the heroic tradition. Opponents of Lin's design had hoped to place this sculpture of three soldiers at the apex of the wall's two sides. Lin objected strenuously to this, arguing that this would make the soldiers the focal point of the memorial, and her wall a mere backdrop. A compromise was reached, and the sculpture was placed off to one side. The statue, which was unveiled in 1984, depicts three soldiers, purposefully identifiable as [White 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 impact of the addition on Lin's design.

Vietnam 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. The woman looking up is named Hope, the woman praying is named Faith, and the woman tending to a wounded soldier is named Charity. It is part of the [Vietnam Veterans Memorial](#), and is located on [National Mall](#) in [Washington DC](#), a short distance south of [The Wall](#), north of the [Reflecting Pool](#).

The model for the wounded male is named Michael Webb.

It was designed by [Glenna Goodacre](#) and dedicated on November 11, 1993. There is a scale model of the statue at the [Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park](#) in [Angel Fire, New Mexico](#).

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 feet (0.91 m) by 2 feet (0.61 m), 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 Universi](#)

The Moving Wall

Vietnam veteran John Devitt of Stockton, California, attended the 1982 dedication ceremonies of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Recognizing what he saw as the healing nature of the Wall, he vowed to make a transportable version of the Wall, a "Traveling Wall" so those who were not able to travel to Washington, D.C. would be able to see and touch the names of friends or loved ones in their own home town.

Using personal finances, Devitt founded Vietnam Combat Veterans, Ltd. With the help of friends, the half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, named The Moving Wall,^{[[bi](#)]} was built and first put on display to the public in [Tyler, Texas](#), in 1984.

[The Moving Wall](#) visits hundreds of small towns and cities throughout the U.S., staying five or six days at each site. Local arrangements for each visit are made months in advance by veterans' organizations and other civic groups. Thousands of people all over the US volunteered their time and money to help honor the fallen.

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Desire for a hometown visit of The Moving Wall was so high that the waiting list became very long. Vietnam Combat Veterans built a second structure of The Moving Wall. A third structure was added in 1989. In 2001, one of the structures was retired due to wear.

By 2006, there had been more than 1000 hometown visits of The Moving Wall. The count of people who visited The Moving Wall at each display ranges from 5,000 to more than 50,000; the total estimate of visitors is in the tens of millions.

As the wall moves from town to town on interstates, it is often escorted by [state troopers](#) and up to thousands of local citizens on motorcycles. Many of these are [Patriot Guard Riders](#), who consider escorting The Moving Wall to be a "special mission", which is coordinated on their website. As it passes towns, even when it is not planning a stop in those towns, local veterans organizations sometimes plan for local citizens to gather by the highway and across overpasses to wave flags and salute the Wall.^[a]

The Wall That Heals

The Wall That Heals is a traveling three-fifths size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial started in 1996 by the [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund](#). A 53-foot [tractor-trailer](#) transports the 250-foot wall and converts to a museum at each stop, showing letters and other items left at the original wall, and more details about those whose names are shown. Lisa Gough of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund said that the exhibit goes to around 20 cities each year and traveled 33,534 miles in 2010. Organizations in each location pay \$5,000 of the cost, with national sponsors paying the rest. Gough says seeing the wall is "emotional" for veterans and seeing it in the "comfort and security of their own hometown" can be helpful.

Located across Ocean Avenue from the Wildwoods Convention Center, New Jersey, the memorial was unveiled and dedicated on May 29, 2010. The memorial wall is a half-size granite replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the only permanent memorial in the Northeast, other than the Memorial in the National's Capital.

The first US memorial to an [ongoing war](#), the [Northwood Gratitude and Honor Memorial](#) in [Irvine, CA](#), is modelled on the Vietnam Veterans memorial in that it includes a chronological list of the dead engraved in dark granite. As the memorialized wars (in Iraq and Afghanistan) have not concluded, the Northwood Gratitude and Honor Memorial will be updated yearly. It has space for about 8000 names, of which 5,714 were engraved as of the Dedication of the Memorial on November 14, 2010.

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.

Items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are collected by National Park Service employees and transferred to the NPS Museum and Resource Center, which catalogs and stores all items except perishable organic matter (such as live flowers) and unaltered US flags. The flags are redistributed through various channels.

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 US POWs and MIAs from the conflict.

Other items in collection 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. It also contains the [Medal of Honor](#) of [Angelo Liteky](#), who renounced it in 1986 by placing the medal at the memorial in an envelope addressed to then-President Ronald Reagan.

From 1992 to 2003, selected items from the collection were placed on exhibit, at the [Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History](#) as "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation".



Panorama of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial