Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Washington, D.C., U.S. Maya Lin. 1982 C.E. Granite (2 images)

- Video and article at Khan Academy
- A 2-acre (8,000 m²) national memorial in Washington, DC. 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 Servicemen Memorial, the Vietnam Women's Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, which is the best-known part of the memorial
- The Memorial Wall is made up of two 246 feet 9 inches (75.21 m) long gabbro (basalt/volcanic rock) 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
- The names are listed in chronological order
- 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
- 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
- Items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are collected by National Park Service employees and transferred to the NPS Museum Resource Center, which catalogs and stores all items except perishable organic matter (such as fresh flowers) and unaltered U.S. flags. The flags are redistributed through various channels.
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" including the Medal of Honor of Charles Liteky, who renounced it in 1986 by placing the medal at the memorial in an envelope addressed to then-President Ronald Reagan.

- 1980: Congress announced a design competition (8.5 million had been raised to create a memorial): 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 selected design was very controversial, in particular its unconventional design, its black color and its lack of ornamentation.