MINNESOTA
VIETNAM
VETERANS
MEMORIAL

DEDICATION CEREMONY
State Capitol Grounds
Saint Paul, Minnesota
September 26, 1992
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There was a woman who lived on a farm outside Stillwater, one of her sons commanded an armored personnel carrier in Vietnam. On a cold March day in 1969, she saw a military car approach slowly down the long gravel driveway. Instinct told her why it had come. This same event was repeated hundreds of times between 1962 and 1975 for families all over Minnesota. As the colonel approached the house, the woman locked the door and said, "No, you can't come in."

"We buried our dead, but we never ever said thank you. Now it's time."
Gary Wohar, Vietnam veteran

"I have never been solemnized of you and what happened in Vietnam. I am ashamed of the way the American people treated the Vietnam veteran. I am the only one who visits your grave on Memorial Day."
Tony Sherick, son of James John Sherick, KIA

The young dead soldiers do not speak.

Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses: who has not heard them?

They have a silence that speaks for them at night and when the clock counts.

They say: We were young. We have died. Remember us.

They say: We have done what we could but until it is finished it is not done.

They say: We have given our lives but until it is finished no one can know what our lives gave.

They say: Our deaths are not ours; they are yours; they will mean what you make them.

They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say; it is you who must say this.

They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.

We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.

"The Young Dead Soldiers" by Archibald MacLeish. Copyright © 1969, 1976 by Archibald MacLeish. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.
Why We Are Here Today

For more than 10 years during the 1960s and '70s we sent our young men and women to fight a war for this country. In the words of Archibald MacLeish, they did what they could. Many of them gave their lives.

Now we have an obligation to remember these soldiers and to make sense of their deaths. It is the least we can do. It is all we can do. The responsibility we gave to them has now come back to rest with us.

What were the meanings of their lives? They never had the chance to find out for themselves — their average age was only 19. As Robert F. Kennedy asked in a 1968 speech, "Which of them might have written a poem? Which of them might have cured cancer? Which of them might have played in a World Series or given us the gift of laughter from the stage or helped build a bridge or a university? Which of them would have taught a child to read? It is our responsibility to let these men live . . . ."

We are here today knowing that we cannot make them live. But we can at least make their names live. We can let their names forever remind us that the price of war is high, that people lose their lives, their wholesomeness, their innocence. And we can give their deaths meaning, respect and honor.

We are not here to make political statements about the war, to say whether it was good or bad, right or wrong. We are here, rather, to accept that the war happened. That 68,000 Minnesotans went to help fight it. That 1,077 of them were killed. And that 43 are still missing.

This Memorial will be a lasting reminder of what those Minnesotans gave. It will say that the people of this state will not let their soldiers be forgotten, that the deaths of these young people had meaning, and that we are grateful for the sacrifices made by all.

The Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial is also for those who live: the veterans, the surviving family members, the friends, and most of all the future generations who will come here and ask, Who were these people whose names are on this wall? Where were they from? Why did they have to die so young?

We are here today to affirm with our words, our tears and our love that from the sacrifices made in Vietnam can come the miracles of reconciliation and healing. Though this path may prove long and painful, we must follow it with the same courage and determination as those who served in Vietnam.

As the poet says, the deaths of the soldiers named on this wall are ours. It is up to us to remember them, to give their deaths meaning. Were they for "peace and a new hope"? It is up to us to say.
The Memorial

Design Goals

The Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial was designed to evoke a reflective mood rather than make a political statement. It was designed to express honor and remembrance, while acknowledging valor and service, and affirming the need to grieve as well as to experience an earlier time of innocence before the war. It was designed also to remind us that the price of war is high: young men and women die, and others have their lives forever altered.

"Lakefront DMZ," created by artists and architects Nina Ackerberg, Stanton Sears, Jake Castillo and Rich Laffin of the Twin Cities, won the national design competition because it best met those goals. Every element of the Memorial, from the trees and shrubs to the selection of the stone, is imbued with layers of meaning for Minnesotans.

We hope your visits to the Memorial do not end today. We hope you come again on winter evenings after heavy storms, when wet snow clings to the names on the wall and the only footprints on the plaza are your own. We hope you come in the heat of August when oppressive humidity gives you some sense of what it must have felt like in the jungles of Indochina. And we hope that every time you come you gain a new understanding, not just of the Vietnam War, but of the giving and taking of human life.

A Walk Through the Memorial

1. A red granite map of Indochina forms the entrance to the Memorial.  
2. A winding concrete pathway literally brings you home from Southeast Asia.  
3. A directory will help you find a particular name.  
4. The main plaza is surfaced with 68,000 granite squares, each representing a Minnesotan who served. 1,120 of the squares are dark green — these mark the hometowns of the Minnesotans who did not return.  
5. All 1,120 names of Minnesota's KIAs and MIAs are engraved in this dark green granite wall. A limestone representation of a house facade furthers the theme of homecoming.  
6. Minnesota dolomitic limestone walls echo the feel of our many limestone riverbanks.  
7. Pools, streams and native Minnesota trees and shrubs add to the sense of coming home.

How to Locate a Name

The horizontal rows of names are arranged chronologically within each year by date of casualty. The names are identified by first name — middle initial — last name. A chiseled square after the name signifies killed in action; an outlined square signifies missing in action. If you know only the name, the directory can help you find it on the wall.
History of the
Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial

When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was built in Washington, D.C., it occurred to some people here that Minnesota should have a memorial for its own Vietnam vets. One of those people was Teresa Vetter.

A high school student during the final years of the war, Teresa was scarcely old enough to comprehend the full meaning of the reports she heard on the news: the live footage of battles in rice paddies and jungles, the protests. She was, however, aware of the sacrifices made by her brothers who were sent to Vietnam and didn't come back. But next time it could be her.

The first big breakthrough came in 1989, one year after she had originally hoped to dedicate the Memorial. Doug Carlson, state representative from Sandstone and brother of a Vietnam veteran, introduced a bill in the legislature to authorize state support. Within ten days the legislature appropriated $300,000 and set aside a 2.4-acre site on the Capitol grounds.

In early 1990, deciding that a Minnesota memorial should be unique to Minnesota, the MVVM and the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board held a national design competition. Ralf Laffin, Nina Ackerberg, Stanton Sears and Jake Castillio of the Twin Cities won the competition with their design, “Lakenfront DMZ.” No longer a vague dream, the Memorial suddenly had a life of its own. It was all ready to lay out, pour, chisel and plant. It was almost real.

Almost. Though it had won much support, the Memorial was a far larger project than anyone had imagined. Costs seemed to rise every day — by 1991, they had reached $1.2 million — while fund-raising slowed to a crawl. To complicate matters, nearly four years of total devotion to the project had left many volunteers exhausted. And $73,000 was still needed just to begin construction.

But then the second breakthrough came. Sally Adams, a grandmother from Delano and mother of a shattered vet, provided discounted materials and services. They broke ground in April and worked all summer to create what you see here today: a dream made real.

MVVM Board of Directors

Teresa Vetter, President

Teresa grew up in Mankato and now works for Alliant Technologies in Hopkins. "We need to think long and hard before we send our 18- and 19-year-olds off to fight wars halfway around the world," she says. "It was not one of my brothers who was sent to Vietnam and didn't come back. But next time it could be her."

Gary Lindsay, Vice President

Gary served in Vietnam from 1962 to 1964 with the Special Security Detachment. He returned twice more between 1965 and 1971 to work as a civilian. Today he is a computer software consultant. About the Memorial, he says, "Those who were not proud of the war may at least say that they are proud of the warriors, and the warriors whose names are on the Memorial would be able to say that they are proud of the people they died for."

Gary Holthaus, Secretary

Gary served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 and returned home with a Purple Heart. He has worked for the Osseo School District for 31 years. "Being a 'Nam vet, " he says, "I felt it was my duty to get involved."

Tom Asp, Treasurer

Tom served in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, from 1970 to 1971. He currently works for the State of Minnesota. "The Vietnam War was not just the serviceman's nightmare. It was everyone's. For each name on this Memorial there is a family left behind — friends, neighboors, school chums. MVVMs needed a restful spot to gather and reflect on this past sacrifice, a place to go and embrace our feelings, a healing destination. It was my duty to help."

Carol Holthaus

Carol has worked for the Prudential Insurance Company for nine years. "I come from a military family. My father and three uncles served in WWII and a cousin served in Korea. My brother and husband both served in Vietnam. I have dedicated the last five years of my life to building this Memorial because my life and my family's life have been greatly affected by the Vietnam War."

Joanna Koski

Joanna has been volunteering time to the Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial since 1986. She is currently Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Board for Little Six, Inc. "If I could help one person be at peace by being a part of this Memorial project," she says, "then I would feel that I had accomplished much."

Sally Adams

Mother of three boys and grandmother of 12, Sally got involved with the Memorial because her son is a Vietnam vet. "We came home alive," she says. "But something inside him had died."

Gary Wisbar

A highway architect with Washington County since 1972, Gary served as a Navy crew chief with the 11th Assault Helicopter Company (Hornets) at Cu Chi from 1967 to 1968. He resides in Stillwater with his wife, Mary, and their two children. "The Memorial was a way to pay a long-overdue debt," he says, "a debt of honor and respect. We buried our dead, but we never even said thank you. Well, now it's time."

Tom Asp of the Twin Cities won the competition with their design, "Lakenfront DMZ." No longer a vague dream, the Memorial suddenly had a life of its own. It was all ready to lay out, pour, chisel and plant. It was almost real.

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The Vietnam War: A Chronology

1959
U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) trains
Vietnamese forces under Lieutenant General Samuel Williams.

July 8: The Vietnam War claims its first American casualties.

1960
John F. Kennedy elected President; he presses for expansion of
U.S. Special Forces.

Lieutenant General Lionel McPherson assumes command in Vietnam.

1961
First U.S. Special Forces deployed to Vietnam.

Major General Charles Timmes assumes command in Vietnam;
U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group trains
U.S. Special Forces.

February 8: Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV)
First U.S. Special Forces deployed to Vietnam.

Lieutenant General Lionel McPherson assumes command in Vietnam.

1962
November 1: Overthrow of Diem government; assassination of
Diem and his brother Nhu.

November 22: John F. Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon Johnson
becomes President.

1963
Two Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

November 1: Overthrow of Diem government; assassination of
Diem and his brother Nhu.

November 22: John F. Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon Johnson
becomes President.

1964
April 1: Last American POWs released by North Vietnam arrive
at Clark Air Force Base.

April 30: U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invade Cambodia.

May 4: Four Kent State students killed by National Guard troops.

May 8: Haiphong Harbor mined, bombing of North stepped up.

March 2: Operation Rolling Thunder begins.

March 31: President Johnson restricts the bombing of North
Vietnam and announces he will not seek re-election.

April 5: Siege at Khe Sanh broken.

May 11: Paris Peace Talks begin.

June 10: General Creighton Abrams assumes command of U.S.
forces in Vietnam.

June 24: Vietnam becomes the longest armed conflict in
U.S. history.

August 26-29: Police and anti-war demonstrators clash violently
outside Democratic convention in Chicago.

November 6: Nixon elected president.

December 31: 540,000 Americans are in Vietnam.

1965
Two Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

June 8: Nixon withdraws 25,000 American troops.

December 31: U.S. troop strength drops to 480,000.

244 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1966
March 16: My Lai 4 incident occurs.

March 31: President Johnson restricts the bombing of North
Vietnam and announces he will not seek re-election.

April 5: Siege at Khe Sanh broken.

May 11: Paris Peace Talks begin.

June 10: General Creighton Abrams assumes command of U.S.
forces in Vietnam.

June 24: Vietnam becomes the longest armed conflict in
U.S. history.

August 26-29: Police and anti-war demonstrators clash violently
outside Democratic convention in Chicago.

November 6: Nixon elected president.

December 31: 540,000 Americans are in Vietnam.

332 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1967
April 30: U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invade Cambodia.

May 4: Four Kent State students killed by National Guard troops.

December 31: U.S. troop strength falls to 280,000.

12 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1968
January 27: Agreement reached between U.S. and North Vietnam
to end the war.

March 29: U.S. ceases offensive ground operations; majority of
U.S. troops leave South Vietnam.

April 1: Last American POWs released by North Vietnam arrive
at Clark Air Force Base.

Three Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1969
April 30: U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invade Cambodia.

May 4: Four Kent State students killed by National Guard troops.

December 31: U.S. troop strength drops to 140,000.

49 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1970
March 3: Operation Rolling Thunder begins.

March 30: Easter Offensive begins.

December 31: U.S. combat troops number less than 30,000.

12 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1971
January 27: Agreement reached between U.S. and North Vietnam
to end the war.

March 29: U.S. ceases offensive ground operations; majority of
U.S. troops leave South Vietnam.

April 1: Last American POWs released by North Vietnam arrive
at Clark Air Force Base.

Three Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1972
May 1: Haji Hong, Harbor mined, bombing of North stepped up.

March 30: Easter Offensive begins.

December 31: U.S. troop strength drops to 30,000.

12 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1973
January 27: Agreement reached between U.S. and North Vietnam
to end the war.

March 29: U.S. ceases offensive ground operations; majority of
U.S. troops leave South Vietnam.

April 1: Last American POWs released by North Vietnam arrive
at Clark Air Force Base.

Three Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1974
April 30: Saigon falls to North Vietnamese forces; the war ends.

Total American military personnel killed or declared missing: 58,183.

Total Minnesotans killed or declared missing: 1,720.

A Final Thank You

Time and again the effort to build the Minnesota
Vietnam Veterans Memorial has drawn to it people who have given generously of their time, talents, energy and
money. To thank all of those who have contributed is
impossible. The true thanks, especially for those with
several years of their lives in this effort, will come in their
knowing that this Memorial is here because of what they
did. This Memorial that the people of Minnesota
dedicate and give to the family members and veterans
today seems small in comparison to what these soldiers
gave to their country some 20 years ago.

Take one last look before you leave today and shed
one last tear. Know that Minnesota has not forgotten its
fallen and missing soldiers. Take one final glance and
recapture the spirit of a day, a time, a place that takes
you back to all that is behind a name on this wall. Let the
pain enter your heart, and then rest and know that they
have not died in vain.

We will never forget, and we must never let it
happen again.

Teresa Vetter
President,
Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial
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