

The Landscape Architect's Guide to **WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

History

Vietnam veteran Jan Scruggs, founder and president of the Vietnam Veterans Fund, was motivated to recognize his fellow servicemen. By 1979, the memorial fund was established. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation authorizing the site in Constitution Gardens for the memorial.

Maya Lin's design for the memorial was the unanimous selection in a 1981 national design competition in which there were 1,421 entries. At the time, Maya Lin was a 21-year-old undergraduate architect student at Yale.

On Veterans Day, November 11, 1982, the wall was dedicated with names of 57,692 Americans killed or missing in action. Catalogs listing where names can be found are located near each end of the memorial. Additional names have been added or status of names changed. Use patterns also resulted in changes to the memorial: night lighting, widened walkways, and post and chain.

Controversy sparked demands for additions by those who were opposed to the memorial's symbolism and modern design. In 1984, a flagpole and sculpture were added. The large diameter flagpole has a conical base with bas relief five point star, with each point representing a branch of the U.S. Armed Services—Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine, and Coast Guard. The flagpole is lighted at night, so the flag can be flown continually. A figurative sculptural group known as The Three Servicemen was intended to represent diversity within the armed forces with African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian soldiers. They are gazing at the wall.

In 1993, following a three-year process, the Vietnam Women's Memorial—located about 300 feet south east of the flagpole—was dedicated. It features three nurses, one caring for a wounded man, the second holding an empty helmet, and the third looking skyward for a rescue helicopter.

An "In Memory" plaque, dedicated in 2004, is located in the pavement near the "Three Servicemen" and honors the men and women who died as the result of their service in Vietnam.

In 2003, Congress approved the addition of a new education center for the memorial. Still in the planning and design stages, the center will be located underground, west of Henry Bacon Drive, in order to not detract from the beauty of the site.