

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Turns 35

VFW has supported all endeavors of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund — from The Wall to its yet-to-be-built education center.

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The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated 35 years ago on Nov. 13, 1982. Since then, more than 100 million people have visited the iconic structure, according to Jan Scruggs, founder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. The National Parks Service noted that nearly 5.6 million people visited in 2016, making it the nation's second-most popular memorial or monument. The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., was the top attraction with nearly 8 million visitors last year.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is more popularly known as “The Wall” because its central feature is a long black granite wall that lists the names of all 58,318 (as of May 2017) U.S. troops who died in the Vietnam War.

Donations from more than 275,000 individuals and other entities paid for the wall's construction. VFW contributed more than \$300,000 and was one of its earliest champions.

Scruggs, a Vietnam War veteran and member of VFW Post 341 in Washington, D.C., said VFW “never wavered” in its support of The Wall when other organizations were against its design.

Here are some facts about one of the most popular memorials in America:

ITEMS LEFT AT THE WALL

More than 400,000 items have been left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial since 1982. Many of these items — ranging from letters to service members on the wall to service medals and ribbons — are displayed online at www.vvmf.org/items. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund plans to display about 4,000 to 6,000 items left at the wall at the yet-to-be-built Education Center at The Wall.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

The Wall was designed to place the names of service members killed in Vietnam in chronological order of death rather than alphabetical order.

Air Force Technical Sgt. Richard B. Fitzgibbon Jr. is the first American service member killed in the Vietnam War. He died June 8, 1956, but his name was not on The Wall until May 31, 1999. His son, Richard B. Fitzgibbon III, also was killed in the Vietnam War on Sept. 7, 1965.

The last name on the wall belonged to Air Force 2nd Lt. Richard Vandeger, who died on May 15, 1975. Vandeger was killed on Koh Tang Island off Cambodia during an attempted rescue mission. Some of Vandeger's remains were buried in Arlington National Cemetery in May 2013, according to The Plain Dealer, a newspaper in Cleveland.

VIETNAM WALL FAST FACTS:

- Maya Lin, the designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, earned only a B for her design in a class at Yale. However, Lin's design was chosen over her professor's entry by a group of architects assembled by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, according to the book *Maya Lin* by Tom Lashnits.
- The average age of the service members on The Wall is 22 years, 9 months.
- VFW so far has contributed nearly \$650,000 toward the construction of the memorial's yet-to-be-built education center. It will be called The Education Center at The Wall. The plan is for the center to be an "interactive learning facility" in Washington, D.C., according to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. Visit www.vietnamera.org.

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