

"Healing Wall:" An Education for Younger Generation

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -- Creators of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall here hoped a wall of names would help survivors heal emotionally and be America's tangible recognition of the sacrifices made by those who served.

The concept worked, said Jan Scruggs, one of the principal leaders in getting the memorial built. More than 4.7 million people from around the world walked the memorial grounds last year, making it the most visited monument in Washington.

Scruggs said many Vietnam veterans call the "Healing Wall" their welcome home. "It's sort of a societal symbol by the country that service was recognized and appreciated," he said. "That's the important thing."

Now, 17 years after its dedication, the memorial is fast becoming an educational device for the younger generation, he said. "It touches so many people," he said, especially those who are too young to have gone to Vietnam and too young to know anything about the war.

The memorial was dedicated on Nov. 13, 1982, and initially had the names of 57,939 Americans killed in the war inscribed on its shiny black granite wall panels. The theater of operations and service dates were redefined and expanded over the years, so the number of names increased to 58,209 by Memorial Day 1997.

The names of the memorial's honored dead include eight women nurses -- seven Army and one Air Force -- 151 Medal of Honor recipients, and 16 chaplains -- seven Catholic, seven Protestant and two Jewish.

The \$8.4 million raised to build the memorial came from private donations. No federal funds were used.

People's reaction to the memorial has changed since 1982 as American culture has changed, Scruggs said. "It continues to mean a lot to people, not just the military veterans," he said. Its design and its messages of service, sacrifice and the tragedy of war touch everybody, he said.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is one in an American tradition that honors and preserves the memory of its fallen defenders. Other sites of interest on the Internet include:

The [National Parks Service's National Mall Web site](#) is a starting point for links to the Vietnam and Korean War memorials and others on the Mall in Washington.

The [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation Web site](#) includes histories of the war and the memorial fund drive, photos, a searchable index of names inscribed on the memorial and a host of additional hyperlinks.

The [Korean War Veterans Memorial](#) was dedicated in 1995 and is the most recent of war memorials added to the Mall.

The nation has many World War II memorials, but ironically no national one. The effort to build one on the National Mall, its design and fund-raising information are treated on the [World War II Memorial Web site](#).

[The American Battle Monuments Commission](#) administers, operates and maintains 24 permanent U.S.

military cemeteries and 27 memorials in 15 countries around the world, including five in the United States.