Body Counts and Memorials

The Unexpected Effect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a Model of Memory

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Strangely, the commemorative model established by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has displaced the meaning of war away from military victory and the establishment of political goals into an emotion-filled realm, where what counts is an attempted quantification of sacrifice for the nation by specific, named persons. And though the model was invented implying, or at least permitting, a critique of that war and wars in general, it has become a model that can be applied to other wars, even a war without end and without victory as a goal, like the "War on Terrorism" in which the United States is now involved. The lessons of Vietnam were briefly embodied in the elements of the Powell Doctrine. This included "overwhelming force" applied to a winnable conflict measurable by well-defined military and political goals. It required the support of the American people, exhausting diplomatic and other solutions before going to war, and creating international consensus about the war. But these lessons can now be seen in the light of memory lessons, too, even as the Powell Doctrine fades along with Colin Powell's reputation.[1]

1 The list of elements in the Powell Doctrine is often cited. See, for example, Prados, "Wise Guys," 107. Prados cites Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 434.

Making memorials to sacrifice with no reference to the political aims of that sacrifice has become acceptable in a national context. Perhaps memorializing sacrifice always had a special potential in a society like that of the United States, where personal fulfillment is so admired. Certainly American families with the means to do so have built plenty of monuments expressing grief or loss with little or no political reference. What is new, since Vietnam, though, is the national setting for a list of the names of people who died violently or young elaborated only by categorization and quantification to become a national shrine. The role of the United States as a political force in this kind of memorial can vanish as sacrifice overbalances victory or lack of victory or any political goal.

This is an unexpected destiny for the Vietnam memorial, but it was perhaps inevitable as the lure of force in international relations proves itself to be more resilient to historical change than Carl von Clausewitz's famous dictum that "war is politics by other means." It turns out that "war is politics by other means" only if the war must some day come to an end and the warring parties must eventually come to the negotiating table. In a world of asymmetric economic means and asymmetric access to technology, the possibility of perpetual war, perpetual violent force being exerted on enemies, seems to exist.

THE BACKWARDS TIMELINE OF WAR MEMORIALS ON THE NATIONAL MALL

A chronological sketch of the memorials on the National Mall can serve as shorthand evidence for the relative importance and different qualities of the memory of different wars of the twentieth century. These memorials have evolved considerably over a century of almost continual military conflicts. Concentrating on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as the first of these memorials to be built, this article will deploy other major conflicts as supporting evidence of the shift in meaning of American military dead brought about by Vietnam. The Gulf War and the opening acts of commemoration for the present "War on Terror" will form an epilogue, but this essay argues that the way that casualties were quantified and recorded in the Vietnam War is revealing of the way in which meaning has been attached to American war dead ever since.

The first national monument to twentieth-century American wars that was constructed on the Mall was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It was predated by another project authorized by Congress as early as 1924 but this older monument was dedicated only to the residents of the District of Columbia. With the names of only Washingtonians, it was hardly a national memorial. Since 2008 a foundation has existed to transform that local monument into a national one, but that has not happened yet. The World War II National Memorial on the Mall was not approved until 1993 and not dedicated until 2004. The Korean War Veterans Memorial was authorized by Congress in 1986, designed by 1989, but dedicated only in 1993, over forty years after that war ended. The oldest was therefore the Vietnam Veterans Memorial initiated when veteran Jan Scruggs founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation (VVMF) in 1979. It became the subject of an important and controversial design competition and was dedicated twice, in 1982 and then, with modifications to allay certain controversies, in 1984.

The explanation for this reversed timeline on the Mall—first Vietnam, then Korea, then World War II, and maybe someday, World War I—follows a trajectory away from the celebration of political purpose and victory towards sorrow, memory, and loss. Expressing these emotions on the National Mall places them at the center of American culture and motivations. The first model for American war memorials in the twentieth century did not include the Mall at all. When Americans in large numbers died in wars across the world, the model was set by World War I and reaffirmed in World War II. It is in evidence across Europe, especially in France, but also in North Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines near Manila. In ten countries there are twenty-four cemeteries meticulously maintained by the American Battlefield Monuments Commission (ABMC) brought into being by Congress in 1923. Memorialization preceding this date is scattered and diverse—e.g., a monument in Mexico City commissioned in 1851 for 750 unknown soldiers from the Mexican American War. It is simply an obelisk inscribed to those "known but to God." A cemetery near Panama City contains some of the Spanish American war dead but was mostly intended for the approximately 5,000 Americans who died building the Panama Canal. The repatriated dead of the Spanish American War are scattered in different cemeteries, mostly along the Pacific coast, with no particular designation. It was World War I that brought the ABMC into being and also the typical design for an American war cemetery and monument until Vietnam.

THE WORLD WAR I AND II AMERICAN MEMORIAL MODEL ABROAD: A DEPARTURE FROM PREVIOUS PRACTICE

The American war memorials for the World Wars, in France and elsewhere, exemplifying a national model, have crosses or stars of David bearing names and marking graves with bodies in them. Unidentified bodies and names without bodies have markers and space, too. Each memorial has a statue representing some aspect of the American martial spirit. The memorials include a chapel dedicated to no particular religion and a visitor center that is informative but familiar and unthreatening, like the mayor's office of a small town. There is a monumental structure, modernist but suggesting classical models. Somewhere, carved in stone, a battle map explains the military reasons for sacrifice and graves both in local terms and in war theater terms. The Stars and Stripes flies at all times. The structures, with the possible exception of the visitors' center, are of white marble or creamy limestone. Lawns are trimmed; shrubs and sometimes trees are clipped (fig. 1).

These elaborate cemetery memorials were built abroad as signs of the desire of the United States to involve itself permanently in the affairs of other nations, especially in Europe, after World War I. They can be seen as an extension or an extra guarantee of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. The United States would join in the collective security and the self-determination of peoples and there would be *de facto* American territory, fertilized with American blood and bones, left on the fields of battle: territory to be defended along with principles. With explanatory maps and visitor centers, American History was inscribed in foreign places.

The decision to leave American soldiers in foreign fields was not without controversy. The most visible military cemeteries in the United States were those of the Civil War at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, at Shiloh in Tennessee, at Antietam in Maryland and other battlefields and, of course, at Arlington, Virginia, just across the Potomac from Washington, DC. All were within the territory of the United States. In the fifty years between the Civil War and World War I, those cemeteries had become important sites of national mourning where people from both the victorious North and the defeated South could participate in what one Civil War historian has called a republic of suffering. The pain of the Civil War, shared by the white population of North and South, was an important element in rebuilding the na-

tion in its aftermath.[2] During that war, it had seemed natural that families with the means would repatriate their own dead to family and parish burial plots across the United States and that municipalities would build monuments to the Civil War dead on town squares while the states, according to their abilities, built monuments to their dead on the various battlefields. There was thus a communication of suffering between families, the states in which they lived, and the federal government that undertook to memorialize the great battlefields.[3]

The dead of World War I were too far away for this *ad hoc* and mixed practice. The war effort had been undertaken by the United States, not by the individual states. The cemeteries and monuments built in France were to be emphatically national cemeteries and monuments. Missouri and Pennsylvania built monuments to their dead in France in the early 1920s, but Congress made a law prohibiting the practice. The majority of those in favor of large monuments abroad saw them as part of international relations, a realm reserved for Washington, DC, not the states.[4]

Some citizens objected to their soldier sons being subsumed to the national purpose. In the isolationist spirit that rejected the League of Nations and rejected Woodrow Wilson's handling of the Versailles treaty, they insisted that it was the duty of the War Department to bring the bodies home. In the end, about half the bodies of those who died in battle were repatriated. Some were put in national cemeteries such as Arlington, but most found their way to grave plots near their families. The emotional claim that parents should be able to visit soldier graves was strong enough that Congress eventually appropriated money to send a family member, usually the mother, to visit all the graves left in France. Thus a Civil War model in which

2 Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* and *A Riddle of Death*. Faust makes a study of this shared pain and its representations, but the phenomenon is readily discernible in memorial works produced much closer to the war and intended for consumption in both North and South. See, for example, Miller, *The Photographic History of the Civil War*. The editors were careful to include a great many photographs of the dead of both sides and to write about loss on both sides. D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) mirrors death in a family from the North with one from the South for the same purpose. *The Birth of a Nation* also emphasizes a shared racism and growing consensus on the subject of segregation, another legacy of the Civil War.

3 See Fahs and Waugh, *Memory of the Civil War*, especially Stuart McConnell, "Epilogue: The Geography of Memory," 258–65.

4 Becker, "Les Deux rives de l'Atlantique."

Figure 1: Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial at Omaha Beach

The "classical" structure, the statue, the park-like setting, the white grave markers and the flags are all visible. The statue is hardly military, but it might be interpreted as an expression of a free youthful spirit entirely in harmony with an ideal of American GIs. US National Archives, ARC Identifier 6003593.

memorial responsibility was shared by citizens, the states, and the United States was adapted to an overseas war in a way that moved the meaning of the dead, with some resistance, towards the purposes of national and international policy. If half the war dead were returned home, half stayed in the magnificent American memorials in France.[5]

The memorials of World War II expanded and confirmed this model of American military memory. Cemeteries at Omaha Beach in France, near Anzio in Italy, in Tunisia and near Manila commemorate the sacrifice of American soldiers during the Normandy landings, Monte Casino, the North African campaign and the Pacific, during World War II. The World War I cemeteries, left partly empty by the repatriation of soldier bodies, were

5 Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 143–87; Piehler, "War Dead"; see also *History of the American Graves Registration Service*.

filled later by World War II dead. The model of white crosses and Stars of David, each one spaced from the others so that every marker is part of a large grid pattern, but also so that each grave maker is the center of a star pattern when a mourner stands by it, became fixed in the minds of Americans and attached, after World War II, to a victory in an unambiguously successful war that implied an ongoing commitment to international systems of collective security. Even the Punchbowl, now inside Hawaii, the 50th state, was outside the United States at the time of its creation, and given the nature of the Pearl Harbor attack, the memorial could be seen as a token of commitment to threatened territory.

Monuments to the war in the Pacific innovated in ways that foreshadowed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. "Walls of the missing," at the cemetery near Manila and at the Punchbowl, near Honolulu, complete a process of naming at those cemeteries. Each cross and Star of David usually bears the name attached to a body buried beneath it. But the body can be missing under the cross or there can be a body marked by a Star of David but no name. Thus the World War I and II memorials took care of these eventualities. Furthermore, for both World Wars I and II, there is an "Unknown Soldier" monument at Arlington to acknowledge when names were severed from bodies and to turn that sense of loss into a national message about the political war aims that prevailed.[6]

INNOVATIVE MEMORIALIZATION OF THE KOREAN WAR WITHOUT A MEMORIAL MODEL

The dead from the Korean conflict might have been treated according to this existing model. After all, if American cemeteries existed around the world to advertise an American willingness to intervene on behalf of international order even when a conflict did not threaten American soil, Korean War dead could fit in that model. Some of the Korean War dead are in the 146 cemeteries around the United States that bear the designation "United States National Cemetery." These do not include the twenty-four cemeteries abroad maintained by the ABMC that include Manila where some Ko-

6 Hawley, *Remains of War*, 199. For his description of the Puchbowl, Hawley quotes Mayo, *War Memorials*, 105.

rean War dead are buried. Some of the dead from the Korean War fill out the pattern established in these places set after World War II. But most went to family graveyards. Of all those National Cemeteries and Monuments not one was specifically designated for Korean War dead. A small number of unidentified American dead were buried in the United Nations cemetery at Tanggok within the Pusan perimeter, the southeast corner of Korea that the United Nations and the United States never lost control of during the war. That United Nations cemetery has soldier dead from all United Nations forces participating in the defense of the Republic of Korea. The existence of the cemetery, and its dedication by General Matthew Ridgway during the war, can be seen as a high water mark of American memorial participation in international war efforts. Even before the end of 1950, before Ridgway gave his dedication speech at that UN cemetery, the decision had been made to remove all American dead from Korea, even during hostilities, something that had not been done before. *The Quartermaster Review* of March and April 1953, recounted with understandable pride, the accomplishments of the American Graves Registration Service during this war of sweeping movements in harsh conditions.[7]

Initially, as they must, commanders had taken care of the United Nations dead at the divisional level and lower, by quick burial. During the initial advances of the North Korean army when the UN forces were forced well south of Seoul into the Pusan district of the southeast, several of these divisional cemeteries had been lost. They were recovered at the time of the Inchon Beachhead and the breakout from the Pusan perimeter. Upon recovery, graves registration personnel took over the job of looking after those cemeteries and of locating burial sites scattered across the hills and rice paddies of Korea's rugged terrain. The fighting swept north almost to the Chinese border at the Yalu River leaving new hastily dug graves. Those graves and some older ones again fell into communist hands when North Koreans and Chinese forces, advanced south, and pushed United Nations forces below the 38th parallel at the end of 1950. The Americans and UN forces eventually moved north of the 38th parallel again before the armi-

7 Cook, "Graves Registration."

stice, signed by the United States but not by South Korea, reestablished that line of latitude as the border between North and South Korea.[8]

The decision to disinter American dead from their graves in the path of an advancing army in foreign territory was an innovation in Korea and contrary to previous practices. In other wars, the resources to dig up bodies and move them from temporary battlefield graves to well-arranged permanent cemeteries were only available when hostilities had stopped. Graves Registration personnel did it because they realized that in the advance beyond the 38th parallel, they had taken territory and buried men in ground that the United States and its allies would not continue to hold. Given the back and forth sweep of the war, the idea of permanent memorials must have seemed remote indeed. In addition to the shifting battlefield, the perceived implacable nature of the communist enemy must have played a role in the decision. According to George Kennan's famous analysis of 1946, no real reconciliation would ever be possible with communists.[9] And, in fact, after the armistice, the war continued by other means including negotiations over prisoners and bodies.

Though the United States did not lose the war in Korea, it did not win control over territory, and in the Cold War manner described first by George Kennan, the implacable enemy was not interested in making concessions. Perhaps communist North Koreans understood or guessed the self-torture Americans were capable of in the face of ambiguity over the fate of individual soldiers in an ideological war. As POWs American soldiers made 250 broadcasts from North Korea praising communism. Prisoners wrote letters home asking their families to work for peace. They wrote letters to newspapers accusing the United States and capitalism of being at fault in the war. When soldier prisoners were returned from North Korea in operation Big Switch after the armistice, only about half the expected num-

8 I have consulted a number of internet sources for this information and make no claims for having done definitive research on the Korean War dead. See the report of quartermaster Cook, "Graves Registration." Good photographs of the Kanggok United Nations Memorial are posted as part of "United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Korea (Busan)," Wikimapia, last modified ca. 2010. http://wikimapia.org/3997112/United-Nations-Memorial-Cemetery-in-Korea. The Australian Department of Veteran Affairs lists cemeteries and other sites with Australian Korean War dead.

9 George Kennan's "Long Telegram" of 1946 was published as "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947. Originally, it was signed "X."

ber was still alive. Twenty-three of the 3,958 American soldiers returned opted to go to China rather than the United States. Meanwhile of the 98,427 Chinese and North Koreans returned from South Korean camps, 22,604 went to Taiwan.[10] The options had been insisted upon by American military and State Department officials to permit Nationalist Chinese among Chinese prisoners to choose to go to Taiwan rather than to communist China. The huge numbers choosing Taiwan should have been a propaganda success for the United States, but in the poisoned atmosphere of the McCarthy era, the 23 Americans who chose China weighed heavily on American consciousness. When two of those 23 went to the United States after all, they were convicted by well-publicized tribunals in the US as collaborators with the enemy. All other returned American prisoners were treated as suspects.

Obvious defenses for having shown signs of collaboration were strangely denied these men. Coercion and miserable treatment, visible in the statistics, had taken a toll too. The category "Missing in Action – Declared Dead – No Remains" on the Congressional casualty lists now numbers 4,549. Some of these might have been presumed captured. The category "Captured – Declared Dead – No Remains numbers 1,891."[11] What happened to these men in communist control is unknown. Obviously, some sort of bargaining may have taken place even if it was a matter of exchanging a letter or radio broadcast against food or medical treatment. In the popular imagination brain washing was a strong possibility. But army authorities preferred to deny the possibility of brainwashing, fearing the psychological damage for the whole United States should they admit the possibility of sleeper "Manchurian Candidates."[12] The press actually accused a whole post-World War II generation of being too soft to resist. As a result, other returned prisoners and other veterans did not wish to make demands on the United States government for any sort of memorial or recognition. In the shadow of World War II that left images of liberating GIs, veterans of the Korean War preferred silence. They had not won; after all, some of them seemed to have collaborated. The ambiguous categories—"Captured – Declared Dead – No Remains 1,891; Missing in Action – Declared Dead – No

10 Keene, "Lost to Public Commemoration," 1101.
11 Leland and Oboroceanu, "American War," 10.
12 Keene, "Lost to Public Commemoration," 1103. *The Manchurian Candidate* is a 1963 film in which a returned POW from Korea is "programmed" to assassinate a presidential candidate.

Remains 4,549"—meant shame in mid-1950s.[13] These were forgotten soldiers in a forgotten war.[14] Many fewer soldiers in these ambiguous categories would have an entirely different effect on Vietnam commemoration.

During the McCarthy era when ambiguity translated into shame, it is hardly surprising that American authorities went to such lengths to keep even the bodies of American soldiers out of the hands of North Koreans. The possibility of American war dead remaining beyond the reach of American authorities building and maintaining suitable memorials, and beyond the reach of ordinary Americans to mourn their dead, would play an important role in memorial practices in Vietnam.

FIGHTING IN VIETNAM AS IT AFFECTED MEMORIAL PRACTICES

The Vietnam War bore some important similarities to the Korean War. It was fought in a country divided between a communist regime and one connected to free markets that the United States hoped would become democratic and that, in any case, the United States could support against the advance of communism. The ongoing Cold War context made victory in "proxy" wars of this kind ambiguous. When the Soviet Union and the United States did battle in some other country's territory and with that country's population at stake, the Cold War could not be won or lost, but a United States victory in such a war could at least be read as a sign that the United States was not falling behind. By the same token, the damage to the United States due to defeat in such a conflict could be negligible in terms of economic consequences, but if prestige and anti-communist momentum were the yardsticks used, the prospect of defeat took on a disproportionate importance.

Though it lacked the sweeping offensives and counter offensives that characterized the war in Korea, continual taking and retaking of territory in Vietnam on a smaller, village-by-village scale gave the impression that no place was secure. On a couple of occasions, communist forces overran the fortress-like American Embassy in Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital.

13 Leland and Oboroceanu, "American War," 10.
14 Keene, "Lost to Public Commemoration," 2011–12.

Where, then, could any final resting place be built? In the end, the war was a defeat for the United States and it withdrew its forces in 1973. In 1975, the South Vietnamese regime ceased to exist. The next ten years in Vietnam were a chaos of communist recriminations and reeducation and economic reforms for the South that left hundreds of thousands dead and provoked an exodus of boat people that took the lives of hundreds of thousands more. There were wars with China and Cambodia, and a famine in 1988. The United States did not reestablish diplomatic relations until 1995. Any American authority interested in preserving the memory of American soldiers killed in Vietnam was correct in the decision that memorialization should take place in the United States where most of the bodies arrived, first in body bags from the battlefields, later in metal coffins. Authorities had already made a similar decision in Korea and for similar reasons.

In the absence of territory controlled and of a political regime with measurably gathering prestige and power to support, counting other things, especially bodies, became important in the Vietnam War. Winning the war could never be achieved by taking territory, because the communist Viet Cong enemy was inside the country among the population. Winning the war could not be achieved by propping up a popular democratic government or aiding it to take better control of the country, because both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations understood that the regimes they supported in South Vietnam were neither democratic nor popular. The United States had three strategic possibilities left to keep a domino nation from falling to communism and weakening the ties to the West of the potential domino countries around it. First was the hope, often dashed, that some better political regime would emerge in South Vietnam. Second was the dream of total control of South Vietnam's rural society in "Strategic Hamlets." Last came the dream of eliminating the communist threat one communist at a time, while cutting them off from resupply and reinforcement from the North. Cutting off supplies meant coercing North Vietnam by either bombing or threatening to bomb the North. At one period cutting off supplies included planting a mine field, enhanced by sound censors as well as other hi-tech devices, and hedging it with barbed wire across Vietnam at a narrow point just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that divided North from South. This "barrier," a cleared area 600 to 1000 yards wide, was to stretch from the coast to the Laotian border 30 kilometers in-

land.[15] The censors would permit American air and artillery strikes against anything moving in the area and thus prevent infiltration into the South. This McNamara Line, as it came to be called, shared with the idea of "Strategic Hamlets" the hope of territorial control in a situation in which there was no territorial control.

There was no means of measuring when some better political regime would emerge. The success of the other options, however, offered opportunities for measurement that were often illusory. How much of the population was protected in the strategic hamlets? Was the number growing? How many communists had been killed? Was that number growing? How many communists came down from the North? Was this number growing or diminishing? The possibility of measuring success by measuring the number of communists dead and alive in a military and political situation that resisted the measures of other sorts of success had proved attractive as early as September 1963, when secretary of defense Robert McNamara, after a trip to Vietnam, reported that "if enough of the enemy can be identified and killed by methods his department has been so successful in developing, there will be a time to concentrate on the political and social welfare of the people in those countries where insurgency exists."[16] Counting dead communists, in other words, had already begun to take precedence in Kennedy's cabinet, over the intransigent problem of finding a political solution in South Vietnam. Later, under President Johnson, the idea would become formalized and other notions of how to win the war would fall away. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, with the illusion it has provided of one hundred percent accuracy in the matter of who died and who went missing, is a fitting tribute to a war that has struck a chord with many Americans, and even provided a model of memorial for wars without end and without clear objectives.

Whether or not Kennedy could have resisted reduction of strategy to body counts is not certain. His assassination, soon after the coup that ended the undemocratic and repressive Diem regime in South Vietnam, will forever obscure our knowledge of what he might have done. Kennedy's participation in the plotting of the Diem coup as well as his distress at the news

15 Tucker, *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 415–16.

16 Michael V. Forrestal's report of a White House meeting, 23 September 1963, quoted by Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 386.

of Diem's death are at least indications of a preoccupation with a political solution in South Vietnam and frustration when it did not cohere.[17] Lyndon Johnson's own political skill at manipulating the American Congress, unmatched by all accounts in the history of American presidents, perhaps blinded him to the fatal results of the weak position of his political partners in South Vietnam. He was famously dismayed when he was unable to affect such a breakthrough by cutting a Great Society type deal with Ho Chi Minh in 1965, promising a billion dollars in development money to Vietnam if the North Vietnamese would stop supporting the Viet Cong in the South.[18] Cutting deals advantageous to their constituencies is what politicians did, especially weak politicians faced with strong ones like Johnson. "Old Ho can't turn me down," he said in disbelief at Ho's refusal, as if Ho were a stubborn congressman.[19] He must have expected a political breakthrough to occur at any moment. Until a solution became apparent, the United States had to appear to be winning.[20]

Lacking a winning political regime to back, Johnson's managers searched for some non-political quantitative measure. The answer lay in statistics. "No conflict in history was studied in such detail as it was being waged," wrote Stanley Karnow in his 1983 study:

> Military and civilian officials from nearly every Washington agency would sooner or later conduct surveys in Vietnam, along with specialists from dozens of private think tanks, like the RAND Corporation and the Stanford Research Institute. They included weapons technicians, economists, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, agronomists, biologists, chemists, and public opinion pollsters. They investigated the effects of defoliants, the impact of bombs, the efficiency of cannon. They scoured villages and interviewed peasants. They interrogated the enemy defectors and prisoners. They pored over captured Communist documents and scrutinized Ha-

17 John Kennedy's reaction to the news of Diem's death is described by McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 84.

18 McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 181. Lyndon Johnson's address at Johns Hopkins University, "Peace Without Conquest," April 7, 1965.

19 Quoted in Karnow, *Vietnam*, 337.

20 Recent scholarship has underlined the understanding of American administrations of the inadequacies of South Vietnamese political leadership. See Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*.

noi statements—and they produced voluminous graphs, charts, pamphlets, brochures, and books.[21]

Robert McNamara (1916–2009), Secretary of Defense under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson from 1961 to 1968, usually gets the credit and blame for this quantification of Vietnam. He had been an effective executive for the Ford Motor Company, where he and others of his "Whiz Kid" generation had streamlined management and applied sociological studies to automobiles to design lighter and safer vehicles at the close of the 1950s. He helped bring an end to the era of huge and ostentatious cars, thought till then to be a given on the American market. He is sometimes said to have applied business principles of productivity to the production of enemy dead in war. But well before he worked for the Ford Motor Company, McNamara had put his Harvard Business School degree of 1939 to use for the US military and been impressed with the power of numbers when used in a military context. In the valedictory interviews he gave to Errol Morris for the documentary *The Fog of War* (2003), McNamara recounted his military training under General Curtis LeMay during World War II, the good war, the war that provided the model of remembrance for American war dead in the twentieth century:

> MCNAMARA. LeMay was focused on only one thing: target destruction. Most Air Force Generals can tell you how many planes they had, how many tons of bombs they dropped, or whatever the hell it was.
>
> But, he was the only person that I knew in the senior command of the Air Force who focused solely on the loss of his crews per unit of target destruction. I was on the island of Guam in his command in March of 1945. In that single night, we burned to death 100,000 Japanese civilians in Tokyo: men, women, and children.
>
> ERROL MORRIS. Were you aware this was going to happen?
>
> MCNAMARA. Well, I was part of a mechanism that in a sense recommended it. I analyzed bombing operations, and how to make them more efficient.[22]

General LeMay had had the task of directing strategic bombing against Japan at the end of World War II, including the missions that dropped atomic

21 Karnow, *Vietnam*, 271.
22 See *Fog of War*.

bombs. He had adopted a plan of incendiary bombing that destroyed 64 Japanese cities, including Tokyo, reduced to ashes by the most violent bombing attack of the war that may have killed 500,000 civilians and left 5 million Japanese without homes. The question LeMay asked McNamara and that McNamara answered was whether the rate of destruction could be continued, given the losses to American forces. The destruction itself, in LeMay's analysis, was bound to be effective eventually. In the interviews of 2003, McNamara repeated LeMay's conviction that what they did to Japan would have been cause for their trials as war criminals had the war been lost, even while admiring LeMay for his single-minded determination to turn the abstract numbers of destruction into some analytical measure towards victory. McNamara's lesson of World War II, then, was how to measure the advance towards the end of a war using sheer force. McNamara's contribution to the strategy in Vietnam can be seen as essentially LeMay's thinking applied to the later war: measuring the destruction of the enemy's resources against the cost to American forces. Could the Johnson administration sustain the effort until victory?

Initially, this form of counting involved strategic hamlets. If American and South Vietnamese forces could protect the South Vietnamese peasants in large enclosures that included fields, they could essentially starve the Viet Cong who relied on the peasants for food and other kinds of support. In 1961 the project was launched. In rich agricultural districts in the South the hamlets were set up. By September 1962, the Diem regime was able to announce with improbable precision that more than 4,322,034 South Vietnamese, or 33.39 percent of the country's population, were living behind barbed wire in these huge protected compounds. This was the kind of performance that lent itself to charts and positive press conferences. A trend showing such rapid defensive organization of such a large population would have the countryside sequestered from communists in a short time. But the numbers soon proved misleading. Peasants resented being forced into strategic hamlets away from their traditional lands and the burial places of their ancestors. Some hamlets were Potemkin villages designed to impress visitors and maintain financing. It is now generally agreed that the corruption and coercion of the program actually played into the hands of the Viet Cong and helped in their recruiting efforts. When a peasant had been torn from his home and subjected to coercive prices for farm supplies from government suppliers, he had less to lose by opposing the regime in

Saigon and new motives for siding with the communist opposition. Later it was discovered that Colonel Pham Dgoc Thao, the man the Saigon regime put in charge of strategic hamlets, was a communist who carried out the plans in a brutal way with the purpose of forcing a wedge between peasants and Saigon.[23]

By the time of McNamara's information-gathering trip to Vietnam after the Diem and Kennedy assassinations in late 1963, he was only able to give very gloomy reports to the new President, Lyndon Johnson.[24] The political situation in Saigon had become chaotic. The strategic hamlets were an illusion. A change of strategy was necessary. General LeMay, now as Air Force Chief of Staff, was true to his established role as an advocate for strategic bombing and advised massive destruction in the North. The joint chiefs of staff were ready to direct the war themselves rather than play a supporting role to the Vietnamese army. They advocated "Americanizing" the war by sending in tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands of troops. By 1965 Johnson had done all these things. But could the success of any of this be measured? Robert McNamara with his background in statistics from World War II, and his businessman's sense, offered a consistent answer to this difficult question. Management techniques could supply answers to questions of progress in the war while leaving basic questions about the sustainability of the South Vietnamese regime unanswered. A war could be won even when taking visible territory could not be a measure of success and where the political aim of the war was in doubt.

General William Westmoreland, who in his early days in Military Assistance Command, in mid-1964, had advised withdrawal from Vietnam if the South Vietnamese could not undertake the fighting themselves, soon had a growing army at his disposal in search of a winning tactic and strategy. The tactic became Search and Destroy. The words referred to locating Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers and destroying them. This could only achieve strategic importance when connected to the idea that there was a finite number of communists in South Vietnam and that one could destroy them all. The iconic image of GIs or Marines moving across a grassy forest clearing or through the jungle or across rice paddies, from their helicopter drop-off spot to the location where another helicopter would come to col-

23 Karnow, *Vietnam*, 273–74.
24 Ibid., 341–42; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 105.

lect them, was the image of this mopping-up exercise. The body counts of destroyed communists were the product. The body counts and desertions of communists matched to the casualty rates of the GIs and Marines were the measure of efficiency which would eventually lead to victory. The body counts and desertions subtracted from the North Vietnamese Order of Battle, an estimate of communist forces in the South, would be a measure of how close the United States was to victory.

This Vietnam logic was criticized at the time and afterwards. If American officers received the approbation of their superiors for greater destruction, they inevitably would become creative in their counting. Old people and children might count as enemies killed rather than as collateral damage. Wrecking bicycles could become destruction of important equipment. The very efficiency of helicopter deployments and redeployments meant that American soldiers in Vietnam saw more combat time than soldiers in any other American war, contributing to the stresses, psychological and otherwise, that they suffered. Increased combat time suggests the possibility that, soldier for soldier, Americans caused more death and damage in the Vietnam War than in other wars even while their officers were emphasizing the statistics of that destruction for their own promotion. Combat stress could be mitigated by time limits on service, which meant that units were always evolving as men moved in and then out when they fulfilled their time obligation. Unit instability added another level of stress just as numbering the days until departure added another count to the memory the war. The newcomer killed before his unit could learn his name, and the friend killed within days of his scheduled departure from Vietnam became standard motifs in Vietnam memoirs. In a compounding of the body count logic, emphasis on killing and destruction could lead to the infamous phrase about a village that "in order to be saved, it had to be destroyed." And that of course led to the mentality that produced the My Lai Massacre and other similar massacres. These atrocities have left a well-documented trail in the annals of US Army investigations into war crimes, as carefully compiled by investigative reporter Deborah Nelson in *The War Behind Me*.[25]

25 Nelson, *War Behind Me*, especially chapter 3, "A My Lai a Month," 73–106, and chapter 4, "Body Count," 107–38. Appendix A, 209–24, includes 77 "Case Summaries of U.S. War-Crime Investigations Compiled by Army Staff," and 180 "Cases Closed by Army Investigators as Unsubstantiated, Unfounded, or closed "Due to Insufficient Evidence." Of the 77 "Case Summaries of U.S. War-

In his memoir, Robert McNamara referred to "Westy's attrition strategy" and distanced himself from it by listing a host of ills suffered by the South Vietnamese as a consequence of that strategy:

> It often proved difficult to distinguish combatants from noncombatants. Between 1965 and 1967, U.S. and South Vietnamese air forces dropped over a million tons of bombs on the South, more than twice the tonnage dropped on the North. Fighting produced more and more civilian casualties and squalid refugee camps. The increasing destruction and misery brought on the country we were supposed to be helping troubled me greatly . . . And it hurt any effort at building popular support for the Saigon government, which was crucial to defeating the Vietcong.[26]

But what he did not emphasize was his own contribution to this strategy, though perhaps he considered that to be understood background to anything he might write. According to General Robert G. Gard, Jr., a military assistant to McNamara from 1966 to 1968, when the Secretary of Defence was, in Nelson's words, "grasping for a more reliable system of measuring enemy losses than the inflated estimates pouring into his office from military leaders in Vietnam" who also wished to enhance their reputation for efficiency, he said, "If these reports were accurate we would have killed the North Vietnamese army twice. . . . I don't think we should be reporting enemy killed unless we have concrete evidence."[27] That, according to Gard, was how, "we got into the body counting business."[28] Search and Destroy became search and destroy and count and sometimes provide or invent proof of the count. The principle of eliminating a limited number of communists in South Vietnam had become a formalized policy.

Controversy over counting was inevitable. McNamara concentrated on improving the validity of the numbers of the killed, but the ability of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese to recruit was strangely underestimated. This was a hobbyhorse of Sam Adams, a CIA analyst who reported a growing rather than a diminishing strength among the communists. His as-

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Crime Investigations," 36 ended in General Courts Martial and of those, 19 ended in convictions of 29 individuals. The period covered is 1966–1971, the period of highest concentration of U.S. military presence in Vietnam.

26 McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 243.

27 Nelson, *War Behind Me*, 165.

28 Ibid.

sertions on television in 1982, along with those by reporters from CBS who he had assisted, resulted in one of the great post-Vietnam-era controversies. They accused General Westmoreland of deliberately misleading President Johnson into believing that by 1967 the communist threat was on its last legs, when in fact the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were planning the Têt Offensive. In a meeting with Johnson in July of 1967, after a trip to Vietnam and after briefings with Westmoreland, McNamara himself seemed to have succumbed to the general's reading of the numbers, or maybe they were McNamara's own. Either way, the Secretary of Defense reported that sticking to the strategy they were following would win.[29] The numbers involved, described by Sam Adams in his posthumously published book, were achieved by counting neither certain parts of the Viet Cong militia nor their political arm, nor, at later meetings, "new" formations in the communist Order of Battle. Military intelligence was so intent on showing progress using the tools they had available—namely, body counts—that they subtracted bodies from the units they knew and refused to imagine new units.[30]

General Westmoreland sued CBS and Sam Adams for $120 million in a libel suit that was settled out of court in 1985 with both sides claiming victory. In his memoir, Robert McNamara deplored both the suit and the aggression against the honor and integrity of the soldier William Westmoreland, while also saying that Westmoreland exaggerated the progress made against the "enemy" while he minimized the number of enemy forces. That had not mattered, argued McNamara, perhaps disingenuously, because he, the President, and everyone else had other sources upon which to draw.[31] In any case, the enemy was "a highly technical, ambiguous, and even elusive issue." But of course the strategy in this war depended on numbers in order to measure progress, and, as McNamara pointed out, measuring progress was what an executive of a motor company or of a war was supposed to do.[32] The guilt of this or that cabinet official is not so important here as the extreme forms that counting communists took. These in-

29 Tucker, *Encyclopedia*, 414; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 283. McNamara's memoir makes the contingency that the South Vietnamese government would have to perform well too.
30 Adams, *War of Numbers*, 115–218.
31 McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 239–40.
32 Ibid., 238.

cluded extreme measures to control the environment in which the counting took place. Later in the autumn of 1967, McNamara offered his resignation to Johnson. He left the Department of Defense at the end of February, 1968, after the Têt Offensive had proved just how wrong the numbers were, and just how little control he had over the Vietnamese environment.

Protecting the population became more important to American strategy after Têt, when General Creighton Abrams took over command from Westmoreland. By then, however, the presidential campaigns in the United States were debating Vietnam in terms of American withdrawal. Withdrawal would be the political goal behind any future Vietnam policy regardless of what Abrams or anyone else might do in the next five years. "Progress" in the war under these circumstances was difficult to measure or even define. Communists in South Vietnam remained under counted. And atrocities requiring court martial investigations continued. At the time of the Easter Offensive of 1971, when the North Vietnamese staged a second Têt, Sam Adams made the same criticism of American CIA and Army intelligence reporting he had made three years earlier.[33] The statistics on atrocities such as My Lai compiled in War Department documents do not demonstrate a departure from the emphasis on producing vast numbers of dead Vietnamese for the period up to 1971.[34]

BUILDING THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

The delay between American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, the defeat of the South Vietnamese Republic in 1975, and the creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation by veteran Jan Scruggs in 1979 does not seem long when compared to the duration of the war, or the time taken over withdrawal after Johnson's resignation to 1973. The time lapses between other wars and the memorials built for them on the Mall are much longer. But delay is a standard element of the Vietnam memorial narrative. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger acknowledged the delay on the day of the first dedication, Veterans Day, November 11, 1982, when he admitted, "We have finally come to appreciate your sacrifice." Ronald Reagan em-

33 Adams, *War of Numbers*, 203–206.
34 Nelson, *War Behind Me*, Appendix A, 209–24.

phasized the delay at the same ceremony. In a few words, Reagan managed to claim the building of the wall as a justification of his own brand of anti-communism and for his own interpretation of the war while he ignored the non-political ambition of the monument. Everyone is now "beginning to appreciate that they were fighting for a just cause."[35] he said wiping out years of controversy.

A major reinvention of American national war memorials took place between the end of the Vietnam War and the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The World War I model followed for most of a century had become obsolete. First, this new memorial would be inside the United States, not far away on the field of some battle where it inevitably became an extension of American prestige and power. Second, there would be no bodies present and yet it should be a place where visitors could mourn their loss. Third, it would be on the Mall where the Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Grant memorials dominated. Three of the four presidents had careers connected with important wars, but only Grant's monument emphasized war over all else. Until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Mall had not been *about war*. When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was erected, that changed.

Jan Scruggs, a wounded Vietnam infantryman who began the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund that collected money for a monument, had been inspired by Michael Cimino's movie *The Deer Hunter* (1978) that emphasized the personal, physical, and psychological damage wrought by the war, and the difficulties of honoring what soldiers sacrificed and of conveying the details of that sacrifice back in the United States. The competition for the design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was announced in October of 1980. President Jimmy Carter had signed the act allotting land on the Mall to the project in July of that year. The requirements were four: that the structure be reflective and contemplative in character; that it harmonize with its surroundings; that it contain the names of those who had died in the conflict or who were still missing; and that it make no political statement about the war. None of these requirements would necessarily disqualify any of the memorial elements evident in American military cemeteries, with the

35 Quoted in Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, "Vietnam Veterans Memorial," 378. Originally in the *Washington Post*, November 14, 1982, sec. A, p. 1, 18, 20, and *New York Times*, November 11, 1982, sec. A, p. 1.

possible exception of the explanatory military maps which would have been difficult to conceive for the Vietnam War. But the dignified individual grave markers, the classic seeming architecture, the white stone eagles, and the flags spoke of an American commitment to an international order. Repeating that architectural vocabulary on the Mall would have been profoundly political.

The memorial wall was built according to the winning design of Yale architecture student Maya Ying Lin. She included the names of the dead, as she had been instructed to do, and her minimalist design harmonizes well with the landscaping of the Mall but the traditional elements of war memorials were missing. The design called for black granite, not white marble. There was to be no flag, no statue, no chapel, no visitor center, no map—and no bodies. Maya Ying Lin's design included only the names of the dead and the missing on two wedges of black polished wall emerging from and then swallowed back into the earth.

The innovative design drew criticism. Early supporters, including H. Ross Perot who had financed the competition and based his political legitimacy partly on the support of veteran causes, withdrew aid. James Watt, President Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, refused a building permit. The winning design had been chosen during the spring of 1981. By July 1982 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund had decided that the leading sculptural entry in the competition by respected realist military sculptor Frederick Hart should be added to the memorial and by October 13, 1982, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts had approved the addition of a flagpole for what had become a memorial group. The three elements were dedicated together on November 11, 1984. On one side, people said that the integrity and elegance of the wall had been damaged by the addition of the "Three Service Men," or "Three Fighting Men," and the flag (fig. 2). There were others who pointed out that the three soldiers who were sculpted as burdened by their equipment, as if they were emerging from a forest and combat, looked confused and a little sad, like the visitors reflected in the wall, and that the modernist abstract design of the wall was strong enough to absorb this figurative addition. In any case, the VVMF had managed to add elements to the Vietnam memorial that made it more like other American war memorials while also building something strikingly different that announced a different memorial purpose from that of the World War I and II memorials that had become the norm.

Figure 2: The "Three Soldiers" sculpture by Frederick Hart seen from behind with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall designed by Maya Ying Lin beyond

The addition of the sculpture, with all its specific military and human detail from the Vietnam period, resolved the controversy caused by the abstract wall. Photograph courtesy of Professor Michael O'Malley of George Mason University, October 2012.

By any measure, the memorial has been a success. It attracts large numbers of people. It invites contemplation and elicits strong emotions. The addition of "The Three Soldiers" statue can be seen as exemplary of the Culture Wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Another statue, the Vietnam Women's Memorial to American women who had served in Vietnam was added in 1993. In 2004 a memorial plaque was also added with the names of soldiers who had died some time after the war but of wartime injuries that fell outside of Department of Defense guidelines for the status of war dead. The result is a complex memorial informed by the all-inclusive representational spirit of the notion of the "politically correct," forced onto an open-ended symbolic memorial plan that continues to draw the attention of and solicit emotional responses from many Americans.

In a sense, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is an ongoing exercise rather than a monument to an event. Attaching memory and meaning to exact numbers and exact names placed in exact categories in an attempt to adhere to a chronological order has concentrated attention on accuracy rather than any message, even one of mourning. Names are required to have their status changed if a soldier who was MIA (missing in action) becomes a KIA (killed in action) or KIA/BNR (killed in action body not recovered). The addition of the memorial plaque with the names of dead soldiers who fall outside Department of Defense categories is a symptom of the changing status accorded to claims made on behalf of specific dead soldiers, not acts of national mourning. Removing the Unknown Soldier for the Vietnam War from Arlington National Cemetery, identifying him through DNA testing and returning him to his family, is another symptom of change that affects a national message.[36] The unknown soldiers symbolized the loss of identity into service for the state. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, with its precisely carved names of all the American military dead of that war, refuses to make the transformation from individual loss to national purpose. Its specifically apolitical commission requirements demanded that this be the case and Maya Ying Lin's pristine design ensured an apolitical message—a message that purports to acknowledge the exact cost of war in American dead and does not obscure that cost behind the national purpose.

In the absence of a political message, the message of sorrow for the suffering of specific soldiers has ballooned to fill the emotional space once filled by patriotism. A considerable literature has amassed on the subject of the MIAs of Vietnam, in which the search for the dead in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, decades after the end of the war, continues as a kind of shadow story to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall. Since the imponderables of sorrow for the suffering of vanished soldiers cannot be transformed into a symbol of the national purpose, their location, wounds, and missing parts have to be made available in as much detail as possible to fill a memorial need. Earl Swift's book of 2003, *Where They Lay*, describes the expenditure, ongoing at the time of publication, of $100 million a year by the United States Army Central Identification Laboratory to recover in-

36 Sheehan, in "Missing Plane," explains the process by which the Unknown Soldier for Vietnam was first chosen, his identity obscured, and then, through advances in forensic science, inevitably revealed.

formation about 60 unrecovered bodies in Cambodia, some 1,400 in Vietnam and 400 in Laos. He asks rhetorically why this is done for these soldiers when there were 78,000 missing in World War II and 8,000 in Korea. His answer, albeit insufficient, is that Vietnam "proved to be a slow-healing wound . . . All yearned for answers."[37] A better answer would have been that in all wars the families of dead soldiers have desired news of their loved ones' death, but that the special circumstances of Vietnam—the loss of the war, the lack of access to the ground where the dead lay, the lack of a national consensus about the political meaning of the war, coupled with forensic advances that make it possible to identify a body when very little of that body is preserved, and the obsessive counting of bodies and calculation of resources as the only means of determining progress towards victory—have turned this emotional personal need into an expression of national culture.[38]

People critical of the United States' role in a foreign civil war where their country had no viable government to support, and critical of the way the United States undertook to use sheer force and body counts when other measures of success failed, greeted Maya Ying Lin's design with enthusiasm as a fitting memorial to American loss without attempting to turn that loss into a sign of national purpose. But as the memorial projects have succeeded each other on the National Mall, that point of view may seem naïve. Counting dead bodies, and bodies that are unaccounted for, can be a way of continuing the hostilities of the war. Thomas Hawley, in *The Remains of War* (2005), tried to explain the American obsession with soldiers missing in action in Vietnam. He hoped that a critique of this kind of numerical memory might call into question the choice of violence as a policy and enumerating the dead as a memorial practice.[39] He mentioned the huge disproportion in the numbers between Americans missing—varying but by no

37 Swift, *Where They Lay*, 6–7.

38 For the importance of specific news of the death of a soldier, see Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 143–87. For another example of the positive, journalistic, celebratory version of the MIA searches, see Robinson and Dunn, *Search for Canasta 404*. See also Stern, *Imprisoned or Missing*. For a critical view of the MIA controversy and the ways in which administrations, especially Nixon's, manipulated the possibility of prisoners held without record by communists in Vietnam to prolong negotiations and avoid ending the war before 1973, see Franklin, *M.I.A.*; Hawley, *Remains of War*.

39 Hawley, *Remains of War*, 36–7.

count reaching beyond 2,000—and the estimated 300,000 Vietnamese missing from the same war. But Hawley did not specifically make the connection between body counts during the war and the obsession with the numbers of MIAs after. The Vietnamese dead had been counted and recounted and overcounted as a matter of measuring the war's progress to answer McNamara's question: could the effort be sustained until every communist was dead. To answer that question in a satisfactory way during the war, American suffering had to be undercounted or minimized. American mourning practice and building memorials with names but no political explanation has turned this situation around. Jerry and Sandra Strait in a book of 1988 were able to locate and describe over 300 Vietnam memorials around the United States. Most featured the names of dead soldiers and little in the way of political statement. Since that book, some elaborate urban memorials—ones that presumably took more time and political will to build—have been dedicated, all attempting to name and categorize those who served and suffered as if by exact categorization.[40]

The authorization of the Korean War Veterans Memorial in 1986, the design competition in 1989, the ground breaking in 1992 and dedication in 1995, 42 years after the armistice that ended the war, suggests that the pain and ambiguities of the Korean war could not be expressed until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial allowed for the expression memory that is neither resolute nor triumphant (fig. 3). The memorial includes nineteen poncho-clad and heavily burdened American military men moving awkwardly over a rough terrain of granite slabs and juniper bushes. The sculptures, bigger than life size and in stainless steel, were designed by Frank Gaylord. The memorial is bounded on one side by a black granite wall with photographs sand-basted into its otherwise mirror-smooth surface. This wall of photographs, designed by Louis Nelson, showcases wartime personalities, soldiers, equipment of the times, the reflected image of anyone visiting and the reflected images of the 19 sculptures, thus doubling their number to 38. The reference to the Vietnam Memorial must have been among the intentions of the designers—Cooper-Lecky Architects. The mourning black of the granite, the faces and identities of visitors' reflections, mixed with the identities and faces of people from the war, were similarly present already on the Mall in the form of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The strong if

40 Strait and Strait, *Vietnam War Memorials.*

Figure 3: The Korean War Veterans Memorial

The photograph shows statues of American service men in their ponchos and their reflections in the black granite wall. Photograph courtesy of Professor Michael O'Malley of George Mason University, October 2012.

bewildered figures with no immediately understandable goal are a reminder of the "Three Soldiers" of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, strong but bewildered too.

A major difference from the Vietnam memorial that is designed into the Korean War Veterans Memorial is an obscure reference to the final goal of the war. The number 38, the number of sculptures increased by the number of their reflections, refers to the 38th degree of latitude which divides North and South Korea: the border between the two sections of Korea when the war started that formed the border when the war ended. The purpose of the Korean War for Americans and U.N. forces at the beginning and at its conclusion, if not always during its aggressive middle period, was to re-establish the 38th parallel as the boundary between communist North Korea and South Korea. The Korean War Veteran Memorial, built in the back-

Figure 4: National World War II Memorial

The inside of one of the triumphal arches. The Eagles seem restrained from their international purposes. Outside, several pillars representing individual states can be seen. Photograph courtesy of Professor Michael O'Malley of George Mason University, October 2012.

ward questioning shadow of Vietnam, can only draw attention to that obscure triumph in this obscure way.

The latest, and in some ways the strangest war memorial built in the Mall in Washington is the National World War II Monument (fig. 4). It is strange because, dedicated in 2004, it is the latest in the backwards chronology of wars represented on the Mall. It is also strange because it exists at all on the Mall when the great memorials to World War II include the

idea of American commitment abroad. Those war memorials have been regularly used by American military men and politicians as staging areas for diplomacy and foreign policy. Every recent president has stood at Omaha Beach amid the American war dead to renew and modify American foreign commitments. This latest monument in so prominent a place on the National Mall, however, turns inward, away from foreign engagements. Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or the Korean War Veterans Memorial, it counts the dead, even when it is made of light colored granite instead of funereal black, and even when it must do the counting 100 at a time to account for the 404,800 American dead in the war. It uses 4,048 large gold stars reminiscent of the gold stars American families were encouraged to display in their windows during the war when a family member had been killed. In half a century, this counting has moved from the realm of personal choice in a dead soldier's home to the discrete, if public, contemplative landscaping at the sides of the Mall where the Vietnam and Korean War Memorials were built; to the central axis of the Mall where it must balance the dignified Lincoln Memorial at the other end of the Reflecting Pool and the Washington Monument on a little rise behind it. Counting the war dead has changed from being an unfortunate necessity of war with an unfortunately, even catastrophically, important position in the Vietnam War when no other means of measuring progress presented itself, to the central axis of American history that includes George Washington, the nation's founder, and Abraham Lincoln, its defender. The Vietnam model of memory had this unexpected backwards effect on American history.

The National World War II Memorial consists of a large fountain surrounded by 56 menhir-like pillars decorated with metal funeral wreaths, whose rhythm is punctuated by two triumphal arches in a monumental, if unornamented, style. Each of the pillars is named for one of the 48 states in the union at the time of World War II along with eight others standing for possessions including the giant Alaska and the smaller Samoa. The two triumphal arches were named Atlantic and Pacific to indicate the European and Pacific theaters of the war. The arches contain dynamic, tense, bronze Eagles on high perches, holding funeral wreaths, sculpted by Raymond Kaskey. Crowded under these arches, they seem to be caught beating their wings in large masonry birdcages.

The monument has transformed the pedagogical explanations of the World Wars I and II memorial model into the names of oceans on the arch-

es and 24 bas relief panels depicting scenes from an imagined soldier's journey from induction through training, battle, burying the dead and homecoming. Architect Raymond Kaskey has transformed that pedagogy from a lesson in military and political history into the imagined narrative of the service of an individual for the country. The most political of the bronzes shows American and Russian soldiers shaking hands when the armies of the eastern front met the armies of the western front in Europe. If there is a political message, it is either heavily ironic sort unannounced by the rest of the monument, or a cynical act of forgetting the Cold War, for which monuments like the one at Omaha Beach were important symbols of American involvement for fifty years.

The monument was heavily criticized. The Supreme Court refused to hear a case against it and Congress passed legislation outlawing legal challenges to its design to allow its construction.[41] The critics objected to a number of design elements. First, the emphasis on individual states and territories of the country, when those states and territories were certainly subordinate to the purposes of the United States during the war, seemed misplaced at best. At worst, that emphasis seemed like a projection of the conservative Republican agenda from Ronald Reagan through the Newt Gingrich period, when the monument was proposed and the George W. Bush administration when it was dedicated, to revive states' rights and dismantle the New Deal. Second, the heavy classicism of the design by an Austrian-born American architect Friedrich St. Florian, suggesting Roman and Greek models but without specific reference to classical orders was called Nazi. The most serious critics have defended this look, pointing out that much of Washington shares a 1930s New Deal style with what remains of 1930s Rome or Berlin. It also has the look of the World War I and II monuments built around the world in the 1920s and 1940s.[42]

More important than either of those criticisms is the Vietnamization of World War II in a monument that twists the memory of loss into the conservative interpretation Ronald Reagan promulgated in his dedication

41 Michael Janofsky, "An Academic Touches the Masses with War Memorial," *New York Times*, May 26, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/arts /an-academic-touches-the-masses-with-war-emorial.html?pagewanted=2&src=pm.

42 Herbert Muschamp, "An Appraisal; New War Memorial Is Shrine to Sentiment," *New York Times*, June 7, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/07 /arts/an-appraisal-new-war-memorial-is-shrine-to-sentiment.html?src=pm.

speech of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, rather than permitting the wider interpretations of loss that the minimalist design permitted. Everyone is now "beginning to appreciate that they were fighting for a just cause," Reagan said of American dead in Vietnam. Did he mean that death in the armed services of the United States, under any circumstances, even in the benighted, mismanaged, strategically flawed Vietnam War, was death in a just cause? Can this monument to World War II, a war with a clear national and international purpose for Americans, function without reference to that international purpose while illustrating a message about personal service? "Can't we take the war for granted anymore? Do we need reminding about what it means?" Friedrich St. Florian asked during an interview in 2001 after Congress had put a stop to controversy over his design. Florian asserted that:

> The most important obligation for the memorial is to remind future generations of what the world war generation did: namely, to go to war and save the world. So that future generations feel compelled to do likewise. And that's easy to say but very difficult to do.[43]

World War II, according to Florian, was about service with young people in the United States heading out to save the world without being specific about what that meant; remembering them is designed to encourage other Americans to do the same without reflection. Memory, in other words, is to encourage, even to compel future sacrifice. Counting the dead, made grotesque by the strategy and tactics of the Vietnam War, and made infinitely sorrowful by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, has been made a sufficient reason for American involvement in any war in the future.

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