

Tom Carhart
7304 Dartford Dr.
McLean, Va. 22102

STATEMENT TO THE U.S. FINE ARTS COMMISSION,
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My name is Tom Carhart. I graduated from West Point in 1966 and received a law degree from the University of Michigan in 1972. I am employed as a government bureaucrat, but I appear today as a private citizen. In 1968, while serving as an Infantry platoon leader in Vietnam, I was awarded two Purple Hearts for wounds suffered in combat. I am proud to have so served my country, and proud of all who served in Vietnam, especially those who gave their li

When I came to Washington in March of 1980, I immediately joined the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, or VVMF, wanting, as I did, to help in the establishment of a Memorial not only to my fallen brothers and sisters, but also, more broadly, to the noble sacrifices of all those who served in a misunderstood war in a strange and distant land. Robert E. Lee once said: "To be called to serve one's homeland is a high call; to be called to serve one's homeland under arms in time of war is the highest call." The intention of this Memorial, as I understand it, is to honor all those men and women who answered the call of this, their homeland, and served her under arms in time of war in Vietnam. It is also clear that this Memorial will convey to posterity, through symbolic imagery, some sense of the meaning of our Vietnam experience. President Reagan has called our Vietnam experience a "noble cause", and I believe that perception is shared by virtually all Vietnam veterans. When I went to Vietnam, I was a young man. I didn't know much. I believed that we were fighting to protect the freedom of the South Vietnamese people. I still believe that today. I recognize that differences of opinion still exist over that war, and so I applauded the apolitical stance of the VVMF when I joined their ranks.

One of the immediate problems that the organization faced at that time was a lack of funds to finance a first campaign mailing. Within a few weeks, I was able to arrange an unsecured loan of \$45,000 to VVMF from a local bank. Over the next year and more, I contributed considerable time and effort in areas that ranged from hard physical labor to tedious administrative matters. I mention these things for no reason other than to show that I have been both active and strongly dedicated to the goals of VVMF. When the design competition opened, I submitted a very amateurish design - the first I have ever done, with the first statue I have ever sculpted as the centerpiece - out of love for the whole effort, and in order to participate in the fullest way possible. I was not competitive, but I didn't expect to be. Indeed, when I went to the display of the thousands of entries at Andrews Air Force Base, I was very impressed by the level of thought and effort that had gone into most of the designs that were submitted. But when I saw the winning design, I was truly stunned. I felt that design to be very directly and intentionally insulting to all those who served in Vietnam. Initially, I thought it better to keep my opinions to myself, realizing that any objection I might make could be quickly and easily dismissed as "sour grapes". But since that time, I have realized that this is too important an issue to our entire nation for me to be deterred by concern that my motives might be misconstrued.

The jury which selected the winning design was composed exclusively of individuals who not only never served in Vietnam, but who also, I understand, have never rendered any military service to America. The jury was made up of artists, sculptors, and architects, but it did not include any laymen to give the "man in the street" opinion, which I have learned is the commonly accepted safety valve on juries of this sort. I don't know how the members of the jury were selected, but I do know that when the Chairman of the Board of VVMF was asked by one of my friends why there were no Vietnam veterans on the jury that selected the winning design, he answered that no Vietnam veterans were qualified.

That's a very astounding thing for any knowledgeable Vietnam veteran to say.

Part of VVMF's official statement on the selection of the jury reads:

"The purpose of the Memorial is not to literally depict the experience and motivation of Vietnam veterans, but to express America's honor and recognition of them. We realized that the important skill of a juror was not so much having an experience or feeling, but the ability to interpret how well a particular design expressed that experience or feeling."

In order to interpret how well a particular design expresses an experience or feeling, an important qualification (when possible) would seem to be to have actually had that experience or feeling. Many Vietnam veterans are undeniably fine artists, sculptors, and architects. Why weren't some of them appointed as jurors, since they clearly had the best qualifications for this competition? What went wrong?

Some five hundred years before the time of Christ, a Chinese philosopher named Sun Tzu wrote that fighting was the crudest form of warfare. He advised instead that warfare be differently pursued, particularly against a stronger enemy. He wrote:

"Break the will of the enemy to fight and you accomplish the true objective of war. Cover with ridicule the enemy's traditions. Exploit and aggravate the inherent frictions within the enemy country. Agitate the young against the old. Prevail if possible without armed conflict."

It is self-evident that North Vietnam adopted Sun Tzu's policies in fighting against the United States. The result was two wholly distinct and totally different wars. The first war was a military war. It was fought in the rice paddies and the jungles of South Vietnam. The adversaries were the Americans and the South Vietnamese on one side, against the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese on the other side. VVMF has been licensed, by Congress and the President, to memorialize this war on the Mall. The names of the 55,000 men and women who died in this war will be inscribed on the Memorial. The second war was a political war. It was fought

on the college campuses, on television, and in the newspapers here in America. The adversaries were the formal American governmental structure and the older and more generally conservative citizens on one side, against many of the young, particularly students, and writers, artists, newspaper and television people, and the more generally liberal citizens on the other side. Because of the open nature of our society, the North Vietnamese were able to implement the precepts of Sun Tzu in our homeland, through their allies, with impunity. We who wore the uniforms often became the enemy to the people on one side of this second political war. When I came home from Vietnam in December 1968, I was literally spat upon as I walked through the Chicago airport in my uniform, by a young girl in a band of hippies, this ~~some~~ six months after the Chicago Democratic Convention riots. I didn't like that feeling. That spit went through me like a spear. Welcome home. I hadn't said anything, but I was a target, I was the enemy. Naturally, I buried my Vietnam experiences for a long time : I didn't want to be spat on again.

That was many years ago, of course, and now, at last, America seems ready to honor her Vietnam dead with a Memorial. It's no surprise to me that few people want to talk about Vietnam or Cambodia anymore. After all, their new communist governments have not exactly shown themselves to be the bands of angels they had once been portrayed to be. And now both sides of that political war here in America are confused and frustrated and embittered. A few lines from Kipling say it all :

"And the end of the fight is a tombstone white,
with the name of the late deceased,
And the epitaph drear, 'A fool lies here,
who tried to hustle the East.'"

That's the real lesson of Vietnam, of course - not that we shouldn't fight against popular revolutions, nor that we should adopt the tactics of the enemy, nor even that we used the wrong weapons for the wrong war - the lesson is, for all our sophisticated technology, and our bottomless treasury, and our deeply principled commitment to concepts of personal freedom, we, the veterans of the military war in Vietnam and both sides in the political war here at home, simply got outhustled by the East.

I never really felt good about my Vietnam experiences until March of 1980, when I joined VVMF, There we were, a group of veterans of the military war in Vietnam, who simply wanted to honor our dead and all those who served on our side. We won the overwhelming support of Congress and the White House, and the money started rolling in. Those were good times, and a sense of brotherhood quickly sprang up, or rather, was reawakened after a long slumber. I feel those bonds still, and support the goals of VVMF still, even though I now speak out strongly against the design that won the competition. I don't blame the individuals at VVMF, of course; I simply believe they got outhustled. Now, having committed themselves so totally to the concepts of "professional" judging of the competition by non-Vietnam-veterans, it is unlikely that they will agree with views that differ from their institutional position.

When we Vietnam veterans sought to actually build the Memorial to our experience, we needed some professional artistic assistance in selecting an appropriate design from among those submitted to the competition. Unfortunately, VVMF somehow got talked into allowing the selection to be made by a jury of professional artists with no Vietnam or other military experience. Can there be any doubt that the jury chose a design that reflects only their interpretation of the war they saw here at home? It may be that black walls in a hole conveying shame and degradation to future generations are an appropriate statement of their perception of the political war, which is the only one they could possibly know. But that is not our military war, and it is our military war that we here seek to memorialize. Are we to honor our dead and our sacrifices to America with a black hole?

I don't care about artistic perceptions, I don't care about the rationalizations that abound. One needs no artistic education to see this design for what it is, a black trench that scars the Mall. Black walls, the universal color of shame and sorrow and degradation. Hidden in a hole in the ground, with no means of access for those Vietnam veterans who are condemned to spend the rest of their days in a wheelchair. Perhaps that's an appropriate design for those who would spit on us still. But can America truly mean that we should feel honored by that black pit? In a city filled with white monuments, this is our reward for faithful service.

There are presently three monuments that could be called "black" in Washington, and they are all on the other side of the river, on the edge of Arlington Cemetery. The first is the SeaBee Memorial, a statue of a man on top of a pedestal, cast in black metal and looking out over the horizon. The second is the 101st Airborne Division Memorial, and it is again a black pedestal some ten feet high, atop which is a bronze eagle with wings spread, soaring in flight. The third is the Marine Corps Iwo Jima Memorial - a cluster of Marines cast in now-green bronze, atop a black stand ten feet high, raising a staff with the Stars and Stripes on the end. But these are all heroic images. And then we have this proposed design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a black gash of shame and sorrow.

It is important that this matter be very carefully and rationally considered, for we are here making history. If a design were chosen from among the thousands of entries by a jury of Vietnam veterans who were qualified as artists, sculptors, or architects, I assure you that they would choose something white and graceful and above ground that would both be unobtrusive and serve to honor those who fought, and especially those who died, in Vietnam. We Vietnam veterans don't want to divide society, we want to rejoin it, we're still waiting to be welcomed home! We want peace and acceptance and closure. The other option is to allow the design that was chosen by the jury of non-Vietnam-veterans to be built. If you do that, you will only add fuel to a fire that we want to put out. One hundred years from now, long after we're all dead and gone, visitors to the Mall will see only one thing - a black wall in a trench with a random scattering of names on it, such that brother, father, friend or loved one could never be found. No flag. No ins-

cription. They will see this as the Memorial established long ago by America to those who served in Vietnam, and they can only see that as some ugly, dirty experience of which we were all ashamed.

Over the past weekend, people in VVMF got wind of my intention to speak to you today, and I received several phone calls from intermediary friends. What would it take, I was asked to call you off? What is it that you want that would keep you from attacking the design? You say you want an inscription? That's okay, we can take care of that. You say that you want a flag? We can talk about that. But please, don't attack this design.

My answer to them is the statement I give here today. Cosmetic changes are not enough. I am tired of the implication that we should be apologetic for our service to America. I am tired of being made to feel that all of us who served in Vietnam are losers. The only thing we lost over there was the support of our countrymen back here. I am proud that I fought for my country. I am proud that I bled for my country. I am prouder still of the men and women who gave their lives in Vietnam for America. I do not regret my actions, and I will not apologize !

Are we Vietnam veterans so blind? Are we so dumb? Will we be out-hustled once again?

I will not stand idly by while the experiences of those who served in Vietnam, the living and the dead, are memorialized on some sunken black wall of shame. This is the wrong Memorial, chosen by the wrong jury, for the wrong reasons, for the wrong war.

Please extend to us the grace and the dignity to choose our own Memorial that will fairly represent our Vietnam experience to posterity. None of us want to be memorialized as a black spot in American history. Let our own artists and sculptors and architects select the most appropriate design. As a Vietnam veteran who feels dishonored by the design that was declared the winner of the VVMF competition, I call on the United States Fine Arts Commission to reopen the selection process of the design competition, and to require that the winning design be chosen by a jury composed exclusively of Vietnam veterans, for only they are truly qualified to judge. I hope that you will allow us this chance to recapture our rightful position of honor in our nation's history.