

WAYS AND MEANS
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OVERSIGHT
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LETTER FROM
SENATOR CRANE
AND OTHERS



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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November 20, 1981

The Honorable James G. Watt
The Secretary of Interior
Department of Interior
C Street
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Some time ago, we all thought that we had finally taken action that would honor those who served in the Vietnam war. No matter what our individual attitudes toward that conflict may have been, we agreed that those who rendered faithful service to this nation during that trying time should be honored and recognized for their selfless, patriotic actions. Accordingly, we passed Public Law 96-297, which is attached at "A". Therein, we said that

"the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund...is authorized to establish a memorial on public grounds...in honor and recognition of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam war."

In their application of this Congressional license, however, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) seems to have somewhat twisted things. In the design competition booklet that was distributed to all registered competitors before any designs had been submitted, the ground rules of the competition were laid out. Under a section of that booklet entitled "The Purpose and Philosophy of the Memorial," the following paragraph (attached at "B") appears on page 5:

The purpose of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is to recognize and honor those who served and died. It will provide a symbol of acknowledgement of the courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty of those who were among the nation's finest youth. Whether they served because of their belief in the war policy, their belief in the obligation to answer the call of their country, or their simple acquiescence in a course of events beyond their control, their service was no less honorable than that rendered by Americans in any previous war. Those who served and died embodied values and ideals prized by this nation since its inception. The failure of the nation to honor them only extends the tragedy of our involvement in Vietnam." (Emphasis added.)

The subjects and objects of all the sentences in the above paragraph are "those who served and died", and "they", "them", and "those" pronouns which can only mean "those who served and died" - no other definition is possible. In other words, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund sought and selected a design that would be built as a memorial to the dead.

This is confirmed by the text of a letter sent by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to the Marine Corps League on 18 September 1981 (attached at "C"). On page of 2 of that letter appears the following:

"No matter how it met the foregoing criteria, the memorial was to express its purpose, which we set forth in the competition rules as follows:"

and then follows the above-quoted paragraph. While it is true that the 57,000 who died are among those who are the proposed subjects of this memorial, there are also 2.7 million others who returned to this country after faithful service in Vietnam who we seek to honor.

How did such an obvious variation on the intentions of Congress occur? Some light may be shed on that question by the last two lines of an editorial written by Jan Scruggs, now President of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, which was published in the Washington Post on 25 May 1977 (attached at "D"):

"No efforts can provide compensation, of course, to the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam. For them, perhaps, a national monument is in order, to remind an ungrateful nation of what it has done to its sons."

The result of the design competition for a memorial to the dead is a black wall sunk ten feet below ground on which the names of the dead will be carved. The widow of a Marine who died in Vietnam has compared it to the oven mouths at Dachau, and feels it is a grisly reminder of something ugly and shameful in America's past. A Navy Captain who was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for eight years feels that it will be a constant reminder to him of the daily litany he heard from his guards that described him as the "blackest of all criminals." Clearly, this is not what Congress intended when it authorized a memorial "in honor and recognition of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam war." We are proud of their selfless sacrifice for America, and we must have a memorial that clearly shows that.

Any memorial to be constructed will be for all eternity. It will become part of the Capital's visage. Delaying implementation of any design and plan for several weeks or even several months is inconsequential. Any memorial built will share the same hallowed grounds as the monument to the great American emancipator Abraham Lincoln. It is essential that any memorial constructed there be non-controversial, fitting and proper. It is important not to rush into a decision on any particular design.

As Secretary of the Interior you have authority over and responsibility for any public lands on which a memorial will be built. Indeed these lands can be considered a national trust.

It is our understanding that the proposed design has been changed several times over the last several weeks, indeed, it is changing even now. We urge you to query VVMF as to its plans for additional modifications. Further, in light of the evidence presented herein, the undersigned urge you to thoroughly examine the proposed design and plans for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Sincerely,

See Watt Letter
of 1-4-84!

Philip Crane

Philip M. Crane, M.C.

SENATE

Bill Dickinson

Bill Dickinson, M.C.

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* LIVINGSTON REMOVED HIS NAME
IN LATE NOV 1981

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