

I WANT TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO ALL OF YOU PERSONALLY AND ON BEHALF OF COUNTLESS VIETNAM VETERANS AND OTHER AMERICANS FOR BEING HERE TODAY. ONE OF THE GREATEST STRUGGLES FACED BY THE VETERAN WHO HAS BEEN PROUD OF HIS SERVICE HAS BEEN THE CONSISTENT DIFFICULTY OF PLACING BEFORE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, THROUGH THE MEDIA AND OTHER MEANS OF ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC FORUM, THE MESSAGE OF PRIDE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE.

I HAVE BEEN ASKED BY MANY, MANY VETERANS SINCE THE FINE ARTS COMMISSION MEETING A SHORT WHILE AGO, TO INSURE ^{That} THE HISTORIC MESSAGE PRESENTED TO THE WORLD BY THE MEMORIAL CONTAINS THOSE ELEMENTS ORIGINALLY AGREED UPON BY ALL THOSE WHO HAVE WORKED SO HARD TO SEE IT BECOME A REALITY. IN SHORT, WE HAVE BECOME FEARFUL THAT THE AMERICAN FLAG, THE VERY IMPORTANT INSCRIPTION ON THAT FLAG'S BASE, AND THE SCULPTURE SO BASIC TO WHAT THE MEMORIAL SHOULD CONVEY, MAY BE REMOVED AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE HONOR ROLL DESIGN THAT HAS BEEN PLACED ON THE WALLS.

ALLOW ME TO QUOTE TO YOU FROM THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS, #632 OCTOBER 18, 1982:

" LAWRENCE CONTRASTED THE 'OPEN, CAREFUL PROFESSIONAL DESIGN COMPETITION PROCESS' THAT SELECTED LIN'S DESIGN LAST YEAR WITH THE 'CLOSED, POLITICIZED NON-PROFESSIONAL PROCESS' THAT LED TO THE PROPOSED 'COMPROMISE' THIS YEAR.

" HE NOTED THAT THE COMMISSION NOW IS BEING ASKED TO APPROVE A TOTALLY DIFFERENT DESIGN FOR A MONUMENT COMMEMORATING AMERICA'S 2.7 MILLION VIETNAM WAR VETERANS.

" THE ORIGINAL DESIGN, STRIKING IN ITS SIMPLICITY AND POWER, IS POSED AGAINST A NEW DESIGN WHICH USES THE ORIGINAL AS A BACKGROUND FOR STATUARY AND A FLAGPOLE,' LAWRENCE OBSERVED. 'THE NEW DESIGN IS NOT A MODIFICATION OR AN ADDITION TO THE ORIGINAL COMPETITION-WINNING DESIGN, IT IS A NEW DESIGN ALTOGETHER.' "

Reproduced from the Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

MR. LAWRENCE IS CORRECT, WE WISH TO SUPPORT HIS THESIS THAT THIS DESIGN WITH THE ADDITION OF FLAGPOLE, STATUE AND INSCRIPTION CHANGES THE MEMORIAL DESIGN SIGNIFICANTLY. IN FACT, IT BASICALLY ALTERS THE MESSAGE THAT THE ORIGINAL DESIGN PRESENTED, AND THOUGH IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT, MR. LAWRENCE WAS ALSO CORRECT WHEN HE REFERRED TO THE 'POLITICIZED NON-PROFESSIONAL PROCESS THAT LED TO THE PROPOSED 'COMPROMISE' THIS YEAR.

HE IS NOT CORRECT WHEN HE SAYS THAT IT WAS A CLOSED PROCESS. THE REASON WHY THE ORIGINAL DESIGN WAS MODIFIED WAS SIMPLY BECAUSE IT DID NOT CONVEY A MESSAGE OF HONOR, RESPECT, AND SACRIFICE FOR A PROPER PURPOSE THAT LED TO THE AGREEMENT FOR CHANGES IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL, WITHOUT THE ADDITION OF THESE SIGNIFICANT, SYMBOLIC, ARTISTIC AND DESCRIPTIVE REFERENCES, I.E. INSCRIPTION, FLAG AND STATUE, IS NOT A MONUMENT TO VIETNAM VETERANS. IT WOULD RATHER BE AN AMELIORATION AND A SUPPLICATION TO THE VERY POINT OF VIEW WHICH HAS MADE IT SO DIFFICULT TO HONOR THESE MEN AND WOMEN FOR HAVING FOUGHT AND SUFFERED FOR A PROPER CAUSE. DIFFICULT BECAUSE OF POLITICAL DIFFERENCES WHICH PERSIST SURROUNDING THE MEMORIAL. POLITICAL DIFFERENCES WHICH RECENT HISTORY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA SHOULD HAVE WASHED FROM ANY DISSENTER'S MIND NOW.

WE DO NOT WISH TO POSTPONE OR INTERFERE WITH THE DEDICATION OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL BUT WE DO WISH TO CONVEY VERY STRONGLY TO THE FINE ARTS COMMISSION OUR VERY STRONG FEELINGS THAT AESTHETICS ALONE ARE ONLY PART OF THE SELECTION PROCESS. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE ADDITION OF INSCRIPTION, FLAG AND STATUE WOULD INDEED CHANGE THE FACE OF THE ORIGINAL DESIGN, BUT HARDLY VIOLATES THE AESTHETICS OF THE ORIGINAL DESIGN EXCESSIVELY AND, IN FACT, FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF VIETNAM VETERANS, IS A MINIMAL CHANGE IN LIGHT OF THE DESIRE TO BUILD A MEMORIAL THAT RECOGNIZES THAT THESE PEOPLE FOUGHT FOR A PROPER CAUSE, AND THAT THE SITE SHOULD PROVIDE A SYMBOLIC MEETING GROUND FOR THOSE WHO STILL WISH TO SEEK JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR OPPOSITION TO THOSE WHO HONORABLY SERVED AND FOUGHT.

I HAVE HERE A LUCITE EMBODIMENT WHICH CONTAINS A PIECE OF PAPER THAT I WOULD INVITE ALL OF YOU TO READ. IT ENDS THIS WAY:

" BUT HOW MANY MORE HAD FALLEN ON THE BATTLEFIELD BEFORE THEY COULD SPEAK OUT WHAT THEY FELT IN THEIR CONSCIENCE AGAINST THE DIRTY WAR IN VIETNAM?"

THIS PIECE OF PAPER I PICKED UP OFF THE GROUND IN THUY THIEN PROVINCE IN VIETNAM IN EARLY 1969. IT HAD BEEN IN THE POSSESSION OF A NORTH VIETNAMESE MAJOR, A POLITICAL OFFICER, WHO WAS A PARTICIPANT IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT ON MY LIFE AND THAT OF MY FELLOW SOLDIERS IN THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION. THE STATEMENT WAS MADE BY SENATOR WAYNE MORSE. IT WAS ONE OF MANY PROPAGANDA LEAFLETS AND IT BEST CHARACTERIZES THE CRUEL AND BITTER OPPOSITION FACED BY ALL OF US WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM.

THE LEGACY OF THAT WAR IS NOW BEING WRITTEN. THE WAR IS NO LONGER REFERRED TO AS THE "DIRTY WAR". THE DIRTY SIDE OF THE WAR WAS THE SIDE PERSUED BY THOSE HERE IN THIS COUNTRY WHO FRUSTRATED OUR EFFORTS TO FREE A STRUGGLING NATION. THE LEGACY OF BOAT PEOPLE AND GENOCIDE, OF SIBERIAN FORCED LABOR AND IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION AGAINST NEIGHBORS IS NOT THE LEGACY OF AMERICA'S VIETNAM VETERANS.

IT IS, HOWEVER, THE REWARD THAT MUST BE ACCEPTED BY THOSE THAT FLED TO CANADA AND THOSE THAT OPPOSED THE WAR HERE AT HOME. BUT THE VIETNAM VETERAN WAS A PAWN IN THAT PROPAGANDA BATTLE, AND THE ~~LEGACY~~^{OPINION} THAT THE VIETNAM VETERANS FACED^{HERE} WAS A SERIES OF NEVER ENDING INCANTATIONS THAT THE WAR WAS IMMORAL, THAT IT WAS BAD, THAT THE VIETNAM VETERAN WAS A KILLER, NOT A SOLDIER, OR WAS A DUPE OR A FOOL BEING USED BY A GROUP OF AMERICAN INDUSTRIALISTS AND/OR POLITICIANS WHO REALLY COULD CARE LESS ABOUT THE FREEDOM OF THE PEOPLE IN THAT FARAWAY LAND.

HISTORY HAS PROVEN THAT VIEWPOINT WRONG.

THE DESIGN OF THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO INSTITUTIONALIZE OR ACCOMMODATE WHAT HAS CLEARLY BEEN PROVEN TO BE A CRUEL AND INHUMANE POINT OF VIEW AT THE EXPENSE OF THOSE, AS IT HAS NOW TURNED OUT, FOUGHT TO ACHIEVE A PROPER END. WE DO RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT OPINIONS ABOUT THE WAR WILL CONTINUE TO DIFFER

AS LONG AS THE HUMAN POWER TO RATIONALIZE REMAINS, AND WE ALSO REALIZE THAT THE WAR WILL BE REFOUGHT MANY, MANY TIMES IN PUBLIC FORUMS ALL ACROSS THE WORLD. BUT WHAT WE OBJECT TO IS THE USE OF OUR COMRADES' NAMES AND THEIR ULTIMATE SACRIFICES SERVING AS A VEHICLE TO ASSUAGE THE FEELINGS OF THOSE WHO ORIGINALLY ABUSED THEM, WHEN ADVANCING THEIR OWN POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW.

WE ALSO OBJECT TO AN INSENSITIVE ATTACHMENT TO AESTHETIC PURITY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MEMORIAL'S REAL PURPOSE--TO HONOR AND ACKNOWLEDGE.

THE MEMORIAL WITHOUT THE ADDITIONS AGREED UPON IS EXACTLY WHAT WAS FIRST INTENDED--A MONUMENT DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO AVOID CARRYING ANY POLITICAL MESSAGE. UNREALISTIC, BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, SUCH AN APPROACH IS WRONG.

FOR ALTHOUGH THE ADJECTIVE POLITICAL MAY BE MISUSED, THE FACT THAT THE MEMORIAL WOULD CARRY NO CLEAR MESSAGE OF RESPECT IS AN ULTIMATE INSULT AND IS A CROWNING BLOW TO THE ASSAULT ON THEIR PRIDE AND SELF-RESPECT, WHICH VIETNAM VETERANS HAVE SEEN IN THIS NATION DURING THE WAR AND SINCE ITS CONCLUSION.

WE THEREFORE SHALL TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 1) WE RESPECTFULLY IMPLORE THE FINE ARTS COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE DESIGN AS MODIFIED AND SPECIFICALLY DISSENT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW PRESENTED IN THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS NEWSLETTER, THAT SO GROSSLY DISTORTS THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS IN THE OVERALL DESIGN.
- 2) WE SHALL REQUEST OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES A PLACEMENT OF FLAG AND INSCRIPTION BY PROCLAMATION, AT A POINT NO LESS CLOSE TO THE ORIGINAL DESIGN THAN WAS REACHED IN THE COMPROMISE.
- 3) WE SHALL REQUEST THE SAME FOR THE STATUE BECAUSE OF ITS BASIC ROLE IN THE MESSAGE OF THE MEMORIAL.
- 4) FAILING THE ABOVE, WE SHALL INTRODUCE AND FIGHT DURING THE LAME DUCK SESSION, FOR A CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION, IF NECESSARY, TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS.

5) IF THESE EFFORTS FAIL, AND SHOULD THE MESSAGE OF THE MEMORIAL NOT CONVEY A CLEAR MESSAGE OF HONOR AND RESPECT, WITH A REFERENCE TO THE PROPER REASONS WHY VIETNAM VETERANS FOUGHT AND STRUGGLED, THEN WE HAVE DECIDED THAT WE WILL BEGIN EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE SOMEWHERE A PIECE OF LAND. ~~_____~~

~~_____~~ WE WILL BUILD A VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL AS A COMPLETELY AND TOTALLY PRIVATE VENTURE, THE AIM AND GOAL OF WHICH WILL BE TO STAND IN CONTRAST TO THE ORIGINAL DESIGN OF THIS MEMORIAL, AND THAT WILL PRESENT CLEARLY TO THE WORLD A MESSAGE TO THE EFFECT THAT VIETNAM VETERANS ARE PROUD OF THEIR SERVICE, THAT THEY SHARE A DEEP FEELING OF COMRADERIE AND RESPECT FOR THE LIVES OF THEIR FELLOW VETERANS AND THE AMERICAN NATION, THAT WE DO NOT HARBOUR BITTERNESS OR RESENTMENT AGAINST ANYONE, BUT THAT WE ARE DETERMINED THAT THE LESSON OF HISTORY AND THAT THE MESSAGE TO THE WORLD WILL CONVEY THE VERY STRONG FEELING THAT WE FOUGHT AND SERVED ON BEHALF OF FUNDAMENTAL DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES, THAT WE FOUGHT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY, LIBERTY AND FREEDOM. THAT HISTORY WILL SHOW THAT OUR EFFORT WAS NOT IN VAIN, AND THAT WE GAVE IN THE FACE OF HUGE AND SOMETIMES SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES THE GREATEST SACRIFICE THAT HUMAN BEINGS CAN GIVE FOR DEMOCRACY, FOR THE BROTHERHOOD OF FREE MEN EVERYWHERE.

A MEMORIAL LEAVING THESE THINGS OPEN TO QUESTION BY DIRECT DESIGN, WHETHER WELL INTENTIONED OR NOT, IS AN ULTIMATE ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY AND LEGITIMIZE BY OMISSION, BY DELIBERATELY REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE OR ACKNOWLEDGE WHY THESE YET UNHONORED VETERANS HAVE SACRIFICED, THE VIRULENT OPPOSITION WHICH HAS CAUSED THIS EFFORT TO UNFOLD SO BELATEDLY. WE CANNOT BE HONORED IF INDEED WE PARTICIPATED IN AN IMMORAL ENDEAVOR, UNLESS WE ARE EXCUSED AS VICTIMS. WE WERE NOT VICTIMS: RATHER WE DID FIGHT FOR PROPER POLITICAL GOALS, FOR PROPER HUMAN AND NATIONAL GOALS. THE MEMORIAL CANNOT HONOR US WITHOUT EXPRESSLY RECOGNIZING WHAT HISTORY HAS FINALLY TAUGHT US. THE INSCRIPTION, FLAG AND STATUE AS AN INTEGRAL PART AND AS THE FACE OF THE DESIGN CLEARLY CONVEYS THE MESSAGE OF PROPER, DECENT AND MORAL SERVICE TO MANKIND AND THE NATION.