

STATEMENT OF THE  
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND  
REGARDING COMPROMISE AGREEMENT

December 14, 1982

There has been much erroneous information regarding the provisions of the "compromise agreement" by which the flag pole and sculpture were added to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We wish to set the record straight regarding what we did and did not agree to in order to get the memorial built.

At the January 27th, 1982, meeting with the opponents of the basic design of the memorial, chaired by Senator John Warner, the representatives of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund agreed to do three things. First, we agreed to modify the planned inscription for the walls of the memorial to read as it does today, by the substitution of the word "honors" in the epilogue for the planned word "remembers". Secondly, we agreed to use our best efforts to add a sculpture of a single serviceman in the area bounded by the two walls of the memorial. Finally, we agreed to use our best efforts to add a flag staff at the site, with no location specified. We stated that we could not guarantee that these elements would be added or what their locations would be, because their addition to the memorial was subject to the approval of the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) as well as the Secretary of the Interior. We made it clear that CFA approval was needed.

The opponents of the design agreed to cease their political effort to block approval of the design and to allow the planned March 1st groundbreaking to occur on schedule. It was also agreed at the meeting that the same group would reconvene at some later time to consider various alternative designs for the sculpture. VVMF agreed to cull from the slides of entries in the design competition all those containing works of figurative sculpture, to reproduce sets of these slides, and to distribute them to principal attendees for their review prior to the next meeting.

The agreements regarding the inscription, the sculpture and the flag staff were subsequently ratified by the VVMF Board of Directors. VVMF duly researched the slides of all competition entries and reproduced and distributed sets of those containing works of figurative sculpture.

On February 4, 1982, VVMF reported its agreements to Secretary of Interior Watt, who indicated his satisfaction with them. Because he did not have sole authority to approve the design and plans for the memorial, Secretary Watt on February 25th wrote to CFA and NCPC regarding the substance of the agreement and requested their concurrence in the concept of the additions as a precondition to his issuance of a permit for construction to begin. His letter noted that the precise locations of the flag staff and sculpture were yet to be decided. CFA, which approved the concept of the additions at its meeting on March 9, 1982, suggested in its report that the two additional elements might be located at the entry area to the memorial. NCPC had approved the concept of the additions at its meeting on March 4, 1982, and Secretary Watt, by a letter of March 11, 1982, issued final approval of the design and plans of the memorial in accordance with Public Law 96-297. The letter, which VVMF received shortly after noon on March 11th, stated that approval was given "with the express understanding that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will add better and proper language bringing honor to all 2.7 million Americans who served in Vietnam as well as design refinements, by separate submittal, for a flag staff at the site and a statue of a serviceman."

Coincidentally, the second meeting between opponents and VVMF representatives had been scheduled for that same day, and was convened by Senator Warner at 3:00 p.m. Just prior to the meeting, VVMF was informed that Ross Perot, the organizer of the main group of opponents who had attended the January meeting, wished to change the agenda from one of considering alternative designs for the sculpture to one of determining exactly where the sculpture and flag staff would be located. Mr. Perot subsequently caused votes to be taken by a show of hands on these issues. As at the prior meeting, the handful of VVMF representatives were far outnumbered by the group of opponents which Mr. Perot and others had organized to attend the meeting. Most of these individuals had done nothing to support the memorial effort. Not surprisingly, the votes indicated that the majority of people in the room desired the flag staff to be located directly at the vertex of the walls of the memorial and the sculpture to be located within the triangular area bounded by the two walls of the memorial. VVMF, which had already received Secretary Watt's final approval of the design and plans based upon the agreements reached in January, made no guarantees to locate the elements as determined by the show of hands. At that meeting, Mr. Perot also made a proposal for an additional inscription to be located at the base of the flag staff. A show of hands was taken on this proposal as well, showing that a majority of the persons in the room approved it. Finally, it was suggested that an executive committee be formed in order to develop the detailed proposals for the flag staff and sculpture.

Work at the memorial site was begun on March 16, 1982, and ground was formally broken on Friday, March 26th. In early April, 1982, VVMF, in accordance with the suggestion at the March meeting, formed a "sculpture panel", whose function it was to select the sculptor, the design of the sculpture, and the locations for placement of the sculpture and flag staff and to present its selections to the VVMF Board of Directors. The panel was equally composed of opponents of the basic design - James Webb and Milton Copulos, - and supporters - Arthur Mosley and William Jayne. Webb and Copulos felt that they were bound by, or at least had to honor, the votes at the March meeting. The sculpture panel asked Frederick Hart to develop preliminary design concepts for the sculpture. During development of these concepts, VVMF allowed consideration of a grouping of three servicemen rather than just one. On the basis of the panel's recommendation, VVMF contracted with Mr. Hart on July 1, 1982, to develop a scale presentation model, showing three soldiers, which was publicly unveiled on September 20th. In early October the sculpture panel completed its proposals for the locations of the flag staff and sculpture and a proposal for an inscription to be placed at the base of the flag staff. The VVMF Board of Directors determined, as a demonstration of good faith, to forward for Federal approval the sculpture panel's proposals without modification. The panel's proposal was in part approved and in part rejected by the Fine Arts Commission on October 13, 1982.

With its endorsement of the sculpture panel's proposals for the design of the sculpture, the locations of the flag staff and sculpture and the addition of an additional inscription, and its efforts to have these proposals approved by the Federal agencies, VVMF completely fulfilled the spirit and letter of its original and only agreement, made on January 27th, 1982, regarding a sculpture and a flag staff. VVMF had previously fulfilled its agreement to modify the planned inscription for the walls. Above and beyond the agreement, VVMF has made two additional accommodations to the opponents. First, VVMF agreed to a sculptural grouping containing three figures as opposed to a single serviceman originally agreed upon to be added to the site. Secondly, VVMF allowed for the addition of an entirely new inscription for the memorial, on the base of the flag staff.