

The First Vietnam Veterans National Memorial Constructed 1968 ~ 1971

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was the first major memorial to the Veterans of the Vietnam War. The memorial is located off U.S. Highway 64 in Angel Fire (Colfax County) in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on the Enchanted Circle of northeastern New Mexico. This memorial is now part of the New Mexico State Parks System.



The Memorial was begun by Victor and Jeanne Westphall, the grief-stricken parents of ***Marine First Lieutenant David Westphall, III***, who was among sixteen young men in his unit killed in an ambush in 1968 in Vietnam. The Westphalls used their son's insurance policies to begin construction of the [Peace and Brotherhood Chapel](#), which is surrounded by white stone in a pyramid shape. The chapel is open twenty-four hours a day all year.

The David Westphall Veterans Foundation has supported the operation of the memorial since 1979, which was opened without charge to the public. At the time of its construction, the site received national media attention and helped to inspire the establishment of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., completed in 1982. In 1987, the United States Congress recognized Angel Fire as a

memorial of national significance. The park hosts thousands of annual visitors, many moved emotionally by the sacrifice of the Vietnam veterans.

The Visitors Center:

The 6,000 square foot Visitors center was dedicated in 1986. It was constructed to provide various displays and services for visitors and to house the Foundation's offices. It now houses State Parks offices as well. In 2010 the visitor center was completely renovated adding approx. 2,000 sq. ft. This includes a gift shop, library and room for rotating exhibits. Also on display is the 1987 proclamation by President Ronald Reagan and the United State Congress that recognizes the Memorial as a monument of national significance.

Major features of the Visitors Center are photographs from some of the 210 units which served in Vietnam. There is a media room that has a large screen onto which movies or slide presentations can be projected. Regularly shown is the lengthy Home Box Office documentary film ***Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam***. The film is based on the book of the same name edited by Bernard Edleman.

The center seeks to educate Americans about Vietnam and to maintain a haven for healing and reconciliation.

Located on the grounds, the memorial maintains a statue by artist Doug Scott of Taos, entitled "Dear Mom and Dad". It is a depiction of a soldier with his rifle slung over his shoulder taking time to write a letter home to keep in touch with his family and friends. In addition to this statue there are several reduced scale bronzes including one of the original Vietnam Women's Memorial, unveiled on the Washington Mall in 1993 by the Lubbock, Texas-born sculptor Glenna Goodacre of Santa Fe.



The Huey Helicopter:

The memorial includes a Huey helicopter (Bell UH-1 Iroquois aircraft) known originally as "***Viking Surprise***", one of the first smoke ships to be deployed in Vietnam. On March 26, 1967, while rescuing service personnel, the copter was so badly damaged – 135 bullet holes -- the helicopter was returned to the United States for repairs. The copter redeployed to Vietnam and was later sent to the New Mexico National Guard, which in turn donated it to the Angel Fire Memorial. The Huey was important to Vietnam veterans as a means of

transportation in a variety of situations, many involving life and death. The dedication of the Huey was attended by CWO-4 Larry McDonald, USA retired, and who was one of the many Army pilots that flew the aircraft in Vietnam.

The Chapel:

The Chapel was constructed beginning in September of 1968 by Dr. and Mrs. Victor Westphall, following the death of their son in Vietnam. This unique and beautiful building was designed by Santa Fe architect Ted Luna. It was the first effort on a national scale to honor Vietnam Veterans. Building a memorial to honor Vietnam Veterans was not popular at the time, so the Westphall family had to rely primarily on its own financial resources. However, the family persevered and the Chapel was dedicated on May 22, 1971 -- the third anniversary of the death of **Lt. David Westphall, USMC.**

Photos of Vietnam War dead:

Located in the library is a gallery of photographs of those whom have died in the Vietnam War. Families and friends have been donating these photographs to the Memorial since 1968. Often, people have made a pilgrimage to the Memorial to deliver a photograph in person. Others have been sent by mail, and a few were simply left in the Chapel. The Memorial continues to accept additional photographs, and will process them for display promptly. The library also houses various research computers, scrapbooks, and books available for loan.



Exhibit Area:

In this room, you will find large, dramatic pictures of events from the Vietnam War. Included are scenes from combat as well as scenes showing everyday life in Vietnam. There are panels with facts about the Vietnam War or with poignant thoughts about the Vietnam experience.

Run For The Wall:

Parts of Rolling Thunder, this event starts from various locations on the west coast and arrive in Washington, DC, on Memorial Day for the big parade. This event is setup with 3 or 4 routes from the west coast, not all of the riders see this memorial. Some of these riders choose to travel the south central route which comes through Angel Fire and makes a stop at the memorial. This past year there were around 500 plus motorcycles in this part of the event. The riders then continue on north to Eagle Nest NM for the night. After the "Run"

stops for the night, they continue to Washington, DC. On Memorial Day, all of the groups meet up and there is a large parade through Washington DC. This year (2008) the estimate was 500,000 plus motorcycles. This means with 2 up on a bike, the total number of people could have easily been 1,000,000 participating. Then in the fall, a group of New Mexico area riders return to the Memorial to perform repairs, grounds clean up, laying in new memorial bricks etc., each year.



The Blue Star Memorial Byway:

One major feature on the grounds of the Memorial is a garden built and maintained by the Angel Fire Garden Club as a tribute to America's armed forces. The Memorial's garden has a water feature and includes a wide variety of colorful plants. Nearby are two beautifully made benches on which visitors can sit and reflect upon the garden, the Chapel, and the beautiful mountain setting in which the complex is located.



HOURS OF OPERATION OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL STATE PARK:

Visitors Center: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 7 days a week.

Chapel: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

To contact the Foundation at:

New Mexico State Parks

P.O. Box 242

Angel Fire, New Mexico 87710

Telephone Number: 575-377-6900

Fax number: 575-377-3223

<http://www.vietnamveteransmemorial.org/>



The David Westphall Story In Vietnam

An early-morning patrol by *India Company, 3/3 Marines*, came across a company sized NVA unit near the destroyed hamlet of Lao Son near Con Thien. Some of the NVA soldiers were still sleeping, others were going about their morning routine - and all were disturbed when India 3/3 attacked their encampment. It was soon clear that India needed reinforcements, and the CG 3rd Mar Div. undertook to provide them. Lima 3/3 was sent to help India, which was attacking to the south, and the 1/4 Marines were directed to send two companies with tank support eastward along the trace to take the NVA units from their rear. Elements of the 1/9 and 3/9 Marines were directed to establish blocking positions to east and west of the engagement in order to cordon the area.

The 1/4 Operations Log for 22 May says the 1/4 contingent departed 1245, with Bravo 1/4 and a tank element in the lead and Alpha 1/4 in trace. A deliberate engagement by Bravo 1/4 began at 1610; Alpha moved to assist. The NVA, caught between 1/4 to the south and 3/3 to the north, seemed to become confused and lost heavily to supporting air and artillery fires - but they didn't stop fighting.

At nightfall the two 1/4 companies withdrew slightly and established an NDP. At that point Alpha 1/4 had 2 KIA and 7 WIA; Bravo 1/4 had 12 KIA (6 known KIAs could not be recovered on the 22nd), 19 WIA, and 2 MIA. The 3/3 elements had fared better; India 3/3 lost two men killed, while both India and Lima had a number of wounded.

Both elements resumed the assault on 23 May. The 1/4 Marines encountered little resistance and had only 5 WIA. Alpha 1/4 was able to find and recover the bodies of the 8 members of Bravo not recovered on the 22nd (6 KIA, 2 MIA). The NVA repeatedly were caught in the open and supporting arms fires took a heavy toll.

Most of the surviving NVA were moving north in an effort to gain sanctuary in the Demilitarized Zone a few kilometers away - but had to evade the 3/3 Marines, who were still moving south. By late afternoon the area was cleared of live NVA, but 3/3 had lost seven more men.

Although 1/9 and 3/9 established blocking positions as ordered they were not actively involved in the engagements and suffered no KIAs / DoWs.

Several hundred NVA bodies were strewn over the area, most killed by air and artillery fires, and a wealth of equipment and supplies was captured - but the two-pronged attack had cost the lives of 25 Marines:



3rd Bn, 3rd Marines - Lao Son 22-23 May:

Cpl Benjamin H. Reid, Atlanta, GA, India 3/3
 LCpl John H. Halman, Ashtabula, OH, India 3/3
 LCpl Russell U. West, Orange, CA, India 3/3
 LCpl Leonardo Ramos, San Antonio, TX, Lima 3/3
 LCpl Kenneth C. Shemory, Mifflinburg, PA, Lima 3/3
 Pfc Michael W. Williams, Artesia, CA, India 3/3
 Pfc David E. Gore, Manteca, CA, H&S Co
 Pfc James R. Corder, Wolf Summit, WV, India 3/3
 Pvt Ralph B. Fecteau, Cornish, NH, India 3/3

1st Bn, 4th Marines - An Dinh, 22 May:

Capt Robert E. Harris, Russell, KY, Bravo 1/4
1st Lt Victor D. Westphall, Albuquerque, NM, Bravo 1/4
 SSgt Edmund J. Kelly, Wilson, NC, Alpha 1/4
 Sgt Roger W. Boyd, Decatur, IL, Bravo 1/4
 LCpl Denver J. Berkheimer, Streetsboro, OH, Bravo 1/4
 LCpl Rolando Hernandez, Corpus Christi, TX, Bravo 1/4
 LCpl Charles S. Kirkland, Kennett, MO, Bravo 1/4
 LCpl Duane F. Horgan, Lakewood, CO, H&S 1/4 (with Bravo)
 Pfc Davis F. Brown, Winter Park, FL, Bravo 1/4
 Pfc Carlos A. De La Hoz, Yonkers, NY, Alpha 1/4
 Pfc Alejandro Diaz, New York, NY, Bravo 1/4
 Pfc William B. Hamacher, Gloucester, NJ, Bravo 1/4
 Pfc Clyde R. Hamby, Hayward, CA, Bravo 1/4
 Pfc James E. Joshua, Gadsden, AL, Bravo 1/4
 Pfc Raymond B. Ralls, Philadelphia, PA, Bravo 1/4
 Pfc Ray Williams, Atlanta, GA



1998, the DAV gave the entire Memorial Complex to the David Westphall Veterans Foundation.

Victor Westphall, PhD, 89, founder of the Vietnam Veterans National Memorial in Angel Fire, New Mexico passed away on July 22, 2003. His funeral service was held on Saturday, July 26, 2003, at 10 AM at the Vietnam Veterans National Memorial, Angel Fire, New Mexico, and he was buried on the Memorial grounds alongside his wife Jennie.

After their son's death, Victor and Jeanne Westphall, assisted by their second son Walter, determined they would build a memorial to all servicemen who were dying or being maimed in body or spirit in Vietnam. Using 1st Lt. Westphall's SGLI payment as seed money, they engaged a young Santa Fe architect, Ted Luna, to design the Memorial Chapel.

One must recall that this was not a popular project at the time, and when completed in 1971 the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel was the first - and for many years the only - memorial to our Vietnam servicemen. Over the years the Angel Fire Memorial became better known and attracted attention from the media, veterans' organizations, and the general public ... but the only organization to offer financial support was the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), which in 1977 granted \$100,000 over a ten year period. In 1979 Jan Scruggs of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund publicly promised financial support; none was forthcoming. In 1980, Congress declined support, favoring the proposed memorial to be built in Washington over the Angel Fire memorial in the New Mexico outback.



This video was created by Robin Michael, Tryon, NC. All pictures were taken during the Fall of 2006, 2008, 2010 & 2013 trips to this very special memorial. The video is on line at these web addresses: www.afdasf.org or www.polkcounty.org.



But in 1981 the DAV expanded their support, forming DAV Vietnam Veterans National Memorial, Inc, which in 1982 accepted title to the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel and oversaw a \$2 million dollar effort to expand the Angel Fire complex. On November 13th, 1987, the United States Congress recognized the Memorial as a memorial of national significance; on the same day President Ronald Reagan signed a proclamation to that effect. A decade later, on 9 Nov

