

The Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation

During the Vietnam era, over 265,000 women served their nation in uniform and in civilian support roles. Nearly 11,000 women served in country. They completed their tours of duty and made a difference. Some gave their lives. Eight military women and 59 civilians died during the Vietnam War.

The dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall) in 1982, and two years later the Three Servicemen statue, started a nationwide movement toward healing the wounds of the Vietnam War. Noticeably absent in those Memorials was a recognition of the vast and essential role of women during that trying period. Incorporated in 1984, the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project sought to promote the healing of women veterans of Vietnam through the placement of a Memorial on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. The Project's mission also included identifying the military and civilian women who served during the

Vietnam War, educating the public about their roles, and facilitating research on the physiological, psychological, and sociological issues related to their service.

There were enormous barriers to the Project's success. Many did not understand, or appreciate the contribution of the women who served in such roles as nurses, physicians, air traffic controllers, transportation and supply workers, USO entertainers, Special Services, and Red Cross workers. Many could not understand why a memorial was needed and why the existing memorials did not adequately reflect the historical reality of women's service or recognize their contributions. The Three Servicemen statue, without a woman, underscored the prevailing national belief that only men served: that only men bear the wounds of war. It took an exhausting campaign to educate the public, their representatives in Congress, journalists and government agencies that the existing memorials were incomplete without recognition of the role of women.

A Legacy of Healing and Hope



Vietnam Women's Memorial
Washington, DC
© 1993 VWMF, Glenna Goodacre, Sculptor
Illustration: Ernest Goodreau

Hundreds, even thousands joined the campaign led by the women themselves. The Project gave women veterans a voice. It helped them tell their stories through print and electronic media as well as in person. As more and more women read and heard their sisters' stories, they came forward themselves. Many of these women had never before shared their personal stories with others – the pain was too deep.

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush signed legislation authorizing placement of the Vietnam Women's Memorial on the Mall. Following a design competition and multiple reviews by government bodies, New Mexico artist Glenna Goodacre's design was finally approved. On November 11th, 1993, the first memorial recognizing the service of women during wartime was dedicated on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial is a bronze sculpture in the round portraying three Vietnam-era women, one of whom is caring for a wounded male soldier. It stands 6'8" tall and weighs one ton. The Memorial's sculptor deliberately portrays these figures in a manner open to the interpretation of those experiencing it. While one woman may be caring for a soldier, the others may represent many different types of roles, perhaps looking to the sky for air evacuation helicopters. One figure kneels with a helmet. The sculptor says this of the figures:

"The kneeling figure has been called 'the heart and soul' of the piece because so many vets see themselves in her. She stares at an empty helmet, her posture reflecting her despair, frustrations, and all the horrors of war. The soldier's face is half-covered by a bandage, creating an anonymous figure with which veterans can identify. Even though he is wounded, he will live. I want this to be a monument for the living."

Eight yellowwood trees surround the Memorial representing the eight military women who died while serving in Vietnam.



Eight military women died in Vietnam and are placed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall). 1LT Sharon Lane was the only woman who died as a result of hostile fire.



The Memorial is revealed at the Dedication November 11th, 1993



Glenna Goodacre prepares the Memorial in clay at her Santa Fe studio.

The Memorial itself faces the apex of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial completing the circle created by the Wall, Three Servicemen, and The Vietnam Women's Memorial. In addition to recognizing the role of women, the Memorial serves the families of the fallen, and the men who served as well because it acknowledges that women provided comfort, care, and a human touch for those who were suffering and dying.

The Project's mission continues beyond the dedication of the Memorial. Now named the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation, this 501c(3) non-profit relies on donations from the public to continue its missions to



Vietnam Women's Memorial, Copyright 1993, Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation, Inc., Glenna Goodacre, Sculptor.



sustain the Vietnam Women's Memorial, to identify and honor the hundreds of thousands of American military and civilian women who served, to educate the public about women's roles, to facilitate research on these women and their families regarding the effects of their service, and to promote healing. Each Memorial Day and Veterans Day, the Foundation presents Vietnam: In Their Own Words - Storytelling at the Vietnam Women's Memorial. On those days of remembrance of those who served the nation during wartime, hundreds gather at the Memorial to hear selected women, men, family members, and many others tell their stories and discuss the meaning of the Vietnam Women's Memorial to them. Anyone interested in sharing their story should contact the Foundation at vwmfdc@gmail.com or call toll free 866.822.8963.

Over 13,000 Vietnam era women have identified themselves to the Foundation providing contact and service information. While guarded closely for privacy, this information enables the Foundation to assist organizations seeking women to participate in public or educational events. Through this database women have found the friends with whom they served, veterans have found women who cared for them when they were wounded, and veterans groups have been able to notify their members of reunion opportunities. This strengthening network of those who served plants the seeds of healing among the men and women who served and bear the scars of their service, and all of those who lost loved ones or who live today with someone coping with the scars of service.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation is the voice of the women who served. We advocate for veterans services for women. We represent the women to government agencies and the media. We respond daily to queries from media, educators and

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Mementos left at the Memorial are archived at the Smithsonian Institute.

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students, film-makers, and veterans groups regarding women's service during the Vietnam era. Through our efforts women's stories are publicly shared with historical accuracy. An unanticipated effect of the Vietnam Women's Memorial has been its role as a catalyst to the study of the role of this Memorial in shaping the national conscience.

The Foundation assists researchers from around the world as they study the effects of wartime service on the women and their families. We are committed to ensuring that all possible effort is made to learn from experience so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past and that women receive the services they need to ensure their health and well being. Early research by the Centers for Disease Control did not include women in their studies. We've collaborated with

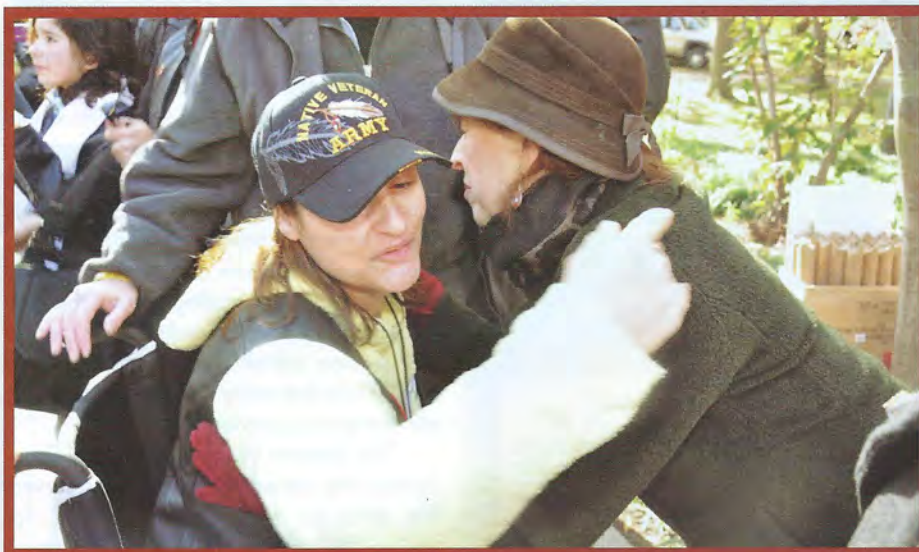
academic and government researchers to ensure women are studied. Today's war on terror magnifies this imperative. A new gen-

eration of women veterans is returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Proportionally, their numbers are much higher than during Vietnam because so many additional occupational specialties are open to women than in the 1960's and 1970's. Many have seen combat. They look to women veterans of Vietnam for guidance as they readjust to postwar life. The Foundation includes veterans of the Global War on Terror in its activities at the Vietnam Women's Memorial and works with others at every opportunity to assist this new generation of warriors.

Vietnam veterans ascribe to one universal truth. Never again will the warrior pay the price for an unpopular war. They stand with today's warrior as he or she fights for readjustment services, for health care, for rights and privileges that enable them to return to their pre-war status physically, emotionally, and economically healthy. The efforts of Vietnam veterans have opened doors for today's veterans. Women's centers in Veterans Administra-



The Memorial honors the women, military and civilian, who served during the Vietnam era. These veterans of Army Special Services march at the Memorial during its 15th Anniversary.



Foundation President, Diane Carlson Evans embraces a woman wounded in Iraq during the recent celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the dedication of the Memorial.

tion hospitals didn't exist after Vietnam, they do now. Counseling services were not open to women immediately after Vietnam, they are now. The history of women's service was not included in the historical lessons of the War; it is now. During Vietnam, veterans returned to their homes through a gauntlet of ridicule and hostility, today's veterans are honored. Vietnam veterans vow, never again, and through their efforts, this nation strives to keep that vow.

You can help the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation support the women who served in Vietnam and the women who are serving today through your donation. Contact the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation at 1735 Connecticut Av. NW 3rd Floor, Washington, DC 20009, 866.822.8963, vwmdc@gmail.com. Visit our award winning website: www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org.