



Art courtesy Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund of Texas

Today is the ground breaking for Texas' Vietnam Veterans Memorial, located at the Texas State Fair Grounds in Dallas. The memorial will honor 3,243 Texans, including 100 former Texas A&M students, who died in Vietnam. Also honored are 162 Texans who are still missing.

Memorial honors Texas vets

By Scott Redepenning
Reporter

Eleven years ago, the last U.S. helicopter left Vietnam, ending a turbulent period in American history.

The passengers on that helicopter were lucky enough to make it out alive. The Vietnam War claimed the lives of 58,022 Americans and has left more than 2,400 still missing.

Undoubtedly, some would rather forget the events surrounding the U.S. involvement in the 16-year conflict. Yet, others say it's important to remember the Vietnam War and honor those who served in it.

One such person is Neal Pointer, a Vietnam veteran from Dallas.

He wanted to honor the many Texans who served in the war with some sort of monument. Influenced by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., he decided on a similar memorial for Texas, which would list the names of the 3,243 Texans who gave their lives in Vietnam as well as the 162 who are still missing.

Just a thought in the back of his mind only two years ago, today Pointer's idea will take a major step toward becoming a reality when the first scoop of earth will be overturned to begin construction of the memorial, which will be on the Texas State Fair Grounds in Dallas. It is targeted to be finished and opened to the public May 30, Memorial Day.

Although the ground will be broken today, this event by no means marks the birth of the project. Pointer's idea began to materialize in 1984 when he started the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund of Texas. The fund, now only \$600,000 away from its \$2.5 million goal, will finance the building and perpetual care of the memorial.

With the project so near to being completely paid for, today's ceremony

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— Roger Thomson,
S&A Restaurant Corp.

actually marks the final stages of its development.

Before any ground could be disturbed for the project, the fund's board of directors had the hard work of planning.

The first decision to be made was location of the memorial. The state fair ground site was chosen because the board says the area is the most-visited tourist attraction in the state and provides the optimum opportunity for Texans to see the memorial.

The memorial will encompass 12,000 square feet and be surrounded by two acres of landscaped lawns. Entering through one of two tall arches guarding each end, visitors will see four large tablets of the 3,243 Texans who were killed in action. Two reflection pools will encircle the tablets, and, in the west arch, an eternal flame will keep vigil over a fifth tablet listing the names of the 162 Texans still missing in action.

Two arbor-covered areas will provide seating for small groups, and the surrounding lawns will be used for ceremonies celebrating Veterans Day, Memorial Day and other such occasions.

To attract people to the site, the board has been running events to create awareness and raise money for the fund for quite some time.

The fund ran two booths at the State Fair of Texas. One featured replicas of the five memorial tablets. Visitors could sponsor a veteran for \$5 and have a star placed on the replica beside that veteran's name. The sponsorship will cover the cost of engraving the name when the actual tablets are made.

The other booth featured a scale model of the memorial and sold commemorative items such as T-shirts, hats and lapel pins as fund-raisers.

Steve Kemble, public relations director for the fund, says the public responded generously to the booths. He says hundreds of commemorative items were sold, and more than 2,000 of the 3,405 veterans have been sponsored.

In addition to the booths, the fund held its own special veterans day and MIA Day to promote the memorial. On the veterans day, a special ceremony was held, at which 3,405 red, white and blue balloons were released accompanied by a military fly-over. The Marine Drum and Bugle Corp topped the ceremony with a performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

On MIA day, 162 American flags were placed on the memorial site, and a candlelight service was held in honor of the missing Texans.

Kemble says that, like the booths, these events were quite successful. He

says the public's generous support contributed dramatically to the fund. These contributions, as well as many private ones, have been the backbone of the project, he says.

The largest contribution is a \$250,000 match grant from the Meadows Foundation, a Dallas institution that funds art and civic projects. Kemble says his organization must raise an equal amount of money by January to receive the full grant. This would leave the fund only \$100,000 short of its goal.

Other large contributors were Texas businessmen John Stemmons, Roger Thomson and Trammell Crow who each pledged \$50,000. All three say they feel a Texas' Vietnam veterans should be honored.

"It was our war, whether we liked the damn thing or not," says Stemmons, who is chairman of the board for Dallas-based Industrial Properties Inc. "We've been negligent in not doing something like this before. We owe it to these men to go ahead and get this job done."

Thomson, executive vice president of S&A Restaurant Corp., says any moral issues behind the war don't matter.

"The men serving (in Vietnam) didn't necessarily agree with the war, but they felt it was their obligation," he says. "We too have an obligation. . . . Whether the Vietnam War was right or wrong is really irrelevant to what we're doing."

Crow, founder of the industrial giant Trammell Crow Co., says Americans harbor deep emotions regarding Vietnam, and the memorial will help focus these feelings.

Crow's message is right on target in summing up the purpose of the memorial.

"We should remember, applaud and honor the men who served our country," he says. "We shouldn't forget these brave men." ★