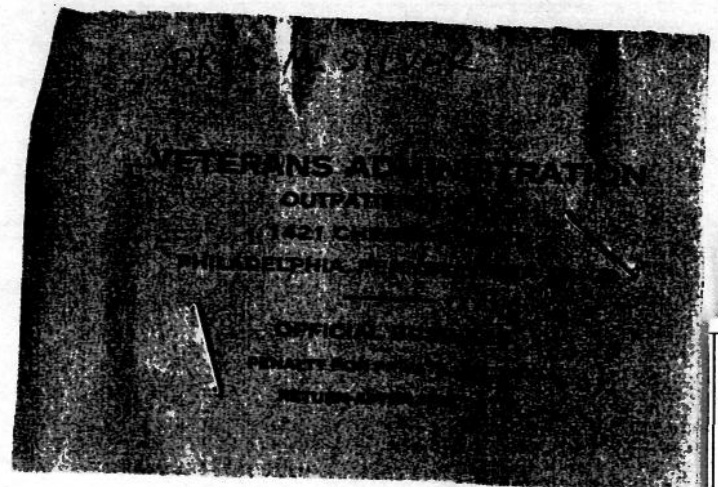


Revised



Bob Doubek
VVMF
1110 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Suite 308
Washington, D.C. 20005

7 Jan. 1983

Dear Bob:

Enclosed you will find a copy of the testimony that I would be prepared to give, if and when. I thought you folks would like an advance copy. If for some reason the hearings get so messed up that it becomes impossible for anyone to testify further, perhaps it would be possible to pass on the testimony in its written form "for the record", though I'd still be honored to come on down and deliver it in person.

I'm dropping a short note to Maya Lin and sending her a copy of it as well--with all the controversy, perhaps she would be interested in some supportive comments in addition to the flak.

Time permitting, I'd be willing to consider any suggestions you might have.

We're still interested in obtaining a directory for the Memorial for use on our ward. Our plan is to bring down a van of 'Nam vets every other month--the next trip is going to be on the 18th of this month. We would also like to get our hands on as many of those pins ("marching along together again"); I've noticed that every man in the program has managed to obtain one and they wear them all the time. Helps group cohesion.

If there's anything else I can do, please feel free to call on me. I think you know how much I appreciate the work you folks have done thus far. Don't let the emotional storm burn you out--you all are really not the targets. You just happen to be close to the lightning rod.

How about a Constitutional amendment as follows: "Before any President may commit American forces to combat, and before any member of Congress may vote on a declaration of war, said President or member is required to read aloud the names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial". Maybe get 'm to think a bit next time...

Take care.

Steve Silver
PTSD Program (59 BW)
Coatesville VAMC, PA 19320

TESTIMONY OF STEVEN M. SILVER, PH. D.

before the

U. S. Commission of Fine Arts

Mister Chairman, Members of the Commission:

I am Dr. Steven M. Silver. I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the current proposal. I am Program Psychologist for the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Program at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Coatesville, PA. I hold bachelor's and master's degrees in American History and a master's degree in Counseling, all from Miami University of Ohio. My doctorate in Psychology was awarded by Temple University.

I am a combat veteran of the Vietnam War, serving as an Officer of Marines with Marine Fighter Attack Squadrons H15 and 122 in 1969 through 1970. I was a Naval Flight Officer in F-4 Phantom II's, flying 316 combat missions, and earned two Single Mission Air Medals, 20 Strike/Flight Air Medals, the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V", and other awards.

I speak to you today, then, as an historian, Vietnam veteran, and perhaps most importantly as a psychologist who has worked with Vietnam veterans and their families since 1972. I am not an artist, but it is clear to me the emotions shown over the Memorial have little to do with aesthetic fine points.

It is virtually a cliché to state that the American people have gone through a period of repressing their country's Vietnam experience. It is likewise well understood that, in their agony and trauma, the people of this country tried to ignore reminders of the war; this unfortunately included the most obvious reminders, those who participated directly in the conflict. We are beginning to see an end to this repression--our gathering here is

an example of the change taking place in the national psyche.

As repression ends, the buried thoughts and feelings come boiling, sometimes exploding, to the surface. Whether taking place on the individual or the national level, such surfacing can be painful, terrifying, exciting, joyous, or cathartic--above all, it is necessary.

That the Memorial serves to help this process was demonstrated to me through several events. The first of these is my own powerful experience of the first morning I walked before those polished black slabs and began to find my friends' names. The second of these is the contact I have with my sisters and brothers of Vietnam and the sharing of our feelings about Maya Lin's gracefully awesome work. The third of these are the reactions of the veteran patients from our program who were brought down for the dedication ceremonies. These men, all Vietnam veterans, endured some of the more severe traumas the war provided and the especially profound aftereffects.

The Memorial served magnificently in eliciting much which was buried within them. Our treatment staff was so impressed by the results that we decided to regularly bring new groups of program residents to Washington to view the Memorial as a way for them to help find their pasts and their presents. This reality holds for other Vietnam veterans with whom I am in contact.

The Memorial is as effective as it is because it does not overimpose an image or concept on the viewer. Like a Rorschach inkblot test, the Memorial provides a minimum amount of structure; the individual projects onto it his or her own feelings, many of which may have been hidden from conscious awareness. From another point of view, the Memorial is an empty vessel into which the viewer pours whatever it is she or he carries.

The structure provided is sufficient--those carved names permit no denial, no hiding. To make that structure more specific would begin to weaken its

power. As is understood by both Western psychology and Eastern Zen, the greater the effort to portray a specific reality, the less real the portrayal becomes because of what is forced to be excluded. Perhaps an example would clarify this point.

My former service, the Marine Corps, has a memorial which is world famous. Based on the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi in World War II, the statue is very detailed and photographic in its portrayal of the men involved. It is heroic and glorious and I can recall as a newly commissioned lieutenant feeling deeply stirred upon viewing it for the first time. It is a very powerful monument, and it is a very incomplete monument. In striving to capture the pride of the Corps the agony and the price of glory were weakened. The World War II Marines shown dominate the memorial to the extent that it is easy to lose sight of the other battlefields listed. Further, the figures tend to focus on a part of the Corps, the infantry, and speaks less directly to the efforts and sacrifices of other Marines such as aviators and artillerymen; omitted are women Marines. This is not to say the Marine memorial was designed to be either limited or exclusionary; this is the result of a decision to emphasize a particular part of the Marine Corps experience. This act of specificity leaves little room for much else.

Turning to the Vietnam Memorial, we have a structure which does not try to emphasize one aspect of the experience over another, no service over another. There is no escaping what it is about--those magnificent names guarantee that. But there is no limiting or restricting what the Memorial may elicit in the viewer. To impose figures in front or atop the Memorial would do exactly that.

I have seen the model of the three figures. Though not all Vietnam veterans were infantry, nor were they all men, to encounter those figures

while coming towards the Memorial may be for some an addition to the experience. To place them in front of the Memorial would lessen the impact of the granite wall by attempting too specific an image.

On the other hand, to place the statue so that it introduces the rest of the Memorial could meet the needs of those who feel they need specificity.

As an historian, I find it particularly appropriate that these three warriors would be placed next to the path from Lincoln's Memorial. As I view the proposed drawings, they would be looking in his general direction. Of all our national leaders, that most compassionate man undoubtedly would have had the greatest understanding of the sacrifices mad by our nation's veterans; he would also have the greatest understanding of the tears in the national fabric which a divisive war can cause. The appropriate symbology of the soldiers serving as the link, guides, and introduction for the transition from Lincoln's Memorial to ours is clear and historically appealing.

But even if this link is ignored, it would still be important to avoid anything which would lessen the impact of the Memorial as it now stands. It is clear the level of emotion stirred by the Memorial and its structure is indicative of its power and success. From a psychological point of view, this process of catharsis is long overdue and the Memorial serves to help this needed process.

I thank you for your attention.