

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED • BY • CONGRESS • MAY • 17, 1910

708 JACKSON PLACE, N.W.

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

202-566-1066

15 July 1988

Dear Mrs. Oakar:

I have just returned from an absence abroad which unfortunately kept me from attending your hearing on 21 June. I hasten, however, to reply to your letter of 8 July 1988, and, as requested, I enclose a copy of the Commission's minutes of its 22 October 1987 meeting at which time the proposed addition of a statue of an army nurse to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was considered and disapproved. According to our staff, your office was sent a complete transcript of the proceedings shortly after our hearing, but we are delighted to send you another for your information. As to the other questions you raise in your letter, let me try to answer them as succinctly as possible, remembering that the issues themselves are fairly complex.

First let me say that following the Commission's approval on July 7, 1981 of the original memorial design and the subsequent dissension that developed, the Commission was not involved in the negotiations between the VVMF and the opponents of the Maya Lin design that eventually led to the proposed addition of the statue and the flag. I understand the Secretary underscored this fact at your 21 June hearing. Not until after the so-called compromise had been reached between others did the Commission consider the matter.

On 9 March, 1982 the Commission first reviewed the concept of adding the two new elements of flag and statue, in response to a threat by Secretary of the Interior Watt that he would withhold the building permit if the Commission would not agree in principle to the additions. After considerable discussion, the idea of adding such elements was approved so as to save the impressive memorial designed by Maya Lin, for which the stone had already been quarried; but no determination was made concerning locations or designs, which had not been submitted to the Commission. I am enclosing a copy of our letter to Secretary Watt reporting the action, which offers a useful summary of our position, and the minutes of this meeting.

On 13 October 1982 the Commission was presented with the actual designs of the statue of the three soldiers, along with the applicants' preferred site for it and the element of the flag. After lengthy testimony both pro and con, followed by a careful on-site inspection, the Commission concluded that the

specific sculptural group, at least as proposed in model form, was of sufficient artistic quality to be approved, but the proposed sites of sculpture and flag on the center axis of the memorial were inappropriate, and recommended that another location be considered near the southwest entrance in an existing grove of trees. Again, I enclose a copy of our subsequent report to Secretary Watt, and the minutes from this meeting.

Finally, on 8 February 1983, final sites and designs for the statue and flag were approved, although various details of each were also reviewed at later meetings.

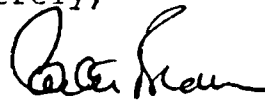
As to the question you raise in the fourth paragraph of your letter regarding the Memorandum of Conveyance, the Commission is not in a position to interpret the document legally, but, as a layman, my impression is that the Interior Department does not need actual approval of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, but rather is only obliged to keep them informed in writing of any proposed changes to the memorial and to give them the opportunity to discuss it.

In addition to the letters and minutes we are furnishing, we publish a digest every four years of the highlights of the Commission's actions, along with a brief history in our role in the design of the Capital since the Commission was established in 1910. I am sending you our latest edition, published in 1985, which contains a fairly good description of the events surrounding the Vietnam Memorial as seen from our perspective.

I think that, in sum, the record shows the sort of attention to the design elements that is required to make a memorial the kind of success that the Vietnam Memorial ended up being. Please let me know if any additional questions arise in the course of your review of the current proposal. The Commission is grateful to you and your Committee for your interest in this undertaking.

With all best wishes,

Sincerely,



J. Carter Brown
Chairman

The Honorable Mary Rose Oakar
Chairperson House Subcommittee on
Libraries and Memorials
U.S. House of Representatives
720 H.O.B. Annex 1
Washington, D.C. 20515