



MEMORANDUM

FROM: Jan C. Scruggs, President

SUBJECT: PROCESS FOR SELECTING DESIGN FOR  
NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

DATE: December 14, 1981

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This memorandum provides information regarding the process by which the design for the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial was selected. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) is a private not-profit charitable corporation, which was founded by Vietnam veterans for the specific purpose of establishing a national memorial to the Americans who served in the Vietnam War. The VVMF was authorized by a unanimous joint resolution of the Congress (Public Law 96-297), signed on July 1, 1980, to establish the memorial on a two-acre site in Constitution Gardens.

As a method of selecting a design the VVMF chose a national competition, open to any U.S. citizen over eighteen years of age. While all design criteria and the competition rules were set by the VVMF, a group of eight internationally known experts in the design field was commissioned by VVMF to evaluate the entries and recommend one to be constructed.

This memorandum details how and why we chose the competition method, how we chose the jury, and how the competition was conducted. The attachments referred to are available for inspection in the VVMF offices.

CHOICE OF COMPETITION METHOD

We considered various alternative methods to select a design, within the basic criteria that we had developed. These included designing it ourselves; selecting one architect, artist or designer to prepare a design; and conducting a limited competition, *i.e.*, inviting a limited number of designers to submit proposals. Yet upon deeper analysis, three basic considerations stood out: the tremendous number of inquiries we had already received from artists and designers interested in submitting proposals, the limits of our own knowledge in the areas of art, architecture and design, and the necessity to have a selection process befitting the importance of a national memorial and the significance of its purpose. After discussions with the staff of the National Endowment for the Arts, we concluded that the most appropriate process was a national competition to be open to all American citizens whether professional designers or not.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc.

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### PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR

Our first task was to select a professional advisor, experienced in the unique workings of the competition method, to counsel and assist in the planning, organization and execution of the competition. After interviewing five candidates, we selected Paul D. Spreiregen, FAIA, a Washington, D.C. architect and planner, and began actively planning in July, 1980. Mr. Spreiregen was formerly chairman of the competitions committee of the American Institute of Architects and is the author of Design Competitions (McGraw Hill, 1979).

### ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

The VVMF board, staff, and volunteer advisors considered all details, such as the amount of the entry fee, the design criteria, the rules and presentation requirements, the question of a "one stage" versus a "two stage" competition, and the schedule of events. The entire competition was planned according to guidelines developed by the American Institute of Architects. Our desire was absolute fairness and objectivity in all its aspects.

At the same time, the VVMF, with Mr. Spreiregen's counsel, began developing the documents necessary for the competition: (1) a poster to announce it (Attachment A), (2) a booklet containing a statement of the memorial's purpose and philosophy, the competition rules, and registration forms (Attachment B), (3) the design program, containing a detailed description of the memorial site and environs, the design criteria, and presentation requirements for entries. A set of maps to accompany the design program was also prepared (Attachment C).

### SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF JURY

As with our selection of the overall method, we considered various alternatives for constituting the jury. One was to have a jury composed of representatives of the various groups most affected by the war, e.g., Vietnam veterans, Gold Star parents, wives of those remaining missing. A problem presented by this option was finding credible representatives with the necessary skills. After due consideration, we decided that the jury should be constituted primarily of the most expert and experienced artists and designers we could enlist, under the proviso that their discretion would be limited by specific evaluation criteria. We concluded that the most important skill for a juror was the ability to evaluate solutions to a design problem, which in this case was how well an entry met the criteria for the design and expressed the memorial's purpose of honoring Vietnam veterans. This skill is one developed through years of experience with both creating design solutions and evaluating the merits of those created by others. It is the very maturity gained from this experience that would insure that the chosen design would stand the test of time and be suited for a location alongside our most treasured national shrines. Among the factors that the jurors had to consider were whether a design was "buildable" as a practical matter, and whether it could be built for a given budget.

More practical considerations affected our decision to select a professional jury. We wanted to attract the nation's best designers to the competition; the prestige of the forum was dependent on the reputations of the judges. Also, since the design was subject to the approval of three separate Federal agencies, the jury had to be sensitive and knowledgeable about the requirements of the approval process as well.

Ultimately the jury which we selected was comprised of two architects, two landscape architects, three sculptors, and a writer/editor on urban development and landscape. All were of international reputation. A brief biography of each is attached for your information (Attachment D).

While we could assess the professional qualifications of each juror from his written biography and references, we nevertheless selected none until we were satisfied that he was personally sensitive and committed to our nation's need at last to pay tribute to its Vietnam veterans. We brought each potential juror to Washington for a personal interview with our directors, staff and volunteer advisors.

To insure that the jurors understood what American servicemen experienced in Vietnam and upon their return home, we required each juror to read an extensive list of literature authored by Vietnam veterans, including the symposium of the new book, The Wounded Generation, James Webb's Fields of Fire, and Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War.

#### CONDUCT OF COMPETITION

We publicly announced the competition in October 1980, and the names of the jurors in a special release on November 10, 1980. We received over 5000 inquiries from all states and territories of the Union. In response to each we sent a copy of the booklet containing the memorial's philosophy, the competition rules, and registration forms. By the December 29, 1980 registration deadline, 2573 individual and team competitors had submitted the registration forms with the \$20.00 fee. Including team members, over 3800 individual U.S. citizens participated in the competition. They came from all walks of life, with only approximately half identifying themselves as professionals in design fields.

In early January the design phase of the competition began with the mailing of a copy of the Design Program and a set of maps to each of the registrants. Each was then allowed until January 30th to submit questions regarding any aspect of the competition. Over 180 competitors did so, and a compilation of 230 questions and answers was mailed to each registrant on February 10th (Attachment E). The deadline for entries was March 31st; 1421 were received, making the competition the largest of its kind ever held in the United States and Western Europe.

Design entries were presented through two dimensional renderings on flat panels of uniform size. Each panel was identified only by a number, to preserve the anonymity of its author. All were hung in rows at eye level in a large hangar at Andrews Air Force Base.

#### JUDGING

The jurors arrived in Washington on Sunday, April 26th, and were charged by the VVMF with selecting a design that best fulfilled the purpose of the memorial consistent with the design criteria. Thereupon there was no further communication between the jury and the VVMF during their evaluation of the design entries.

On the morning of Friday, May 1st, the jury informed the VVMF project director that it was ready to make its presentation. Eight VVMF directors, executive and professional staff members and volunteer advisors assembled at the hangar. All but one of us served in Vietnam. We included both officers and enlisted men from the Air Force, Army and Marine Corps and Purple Heart recipients. The foreman described the procedure that the jury had developed to manage its deliberations. He then read from the notes that he kept during the course of the week to outline the development of the jury's thinking and deliberations as it narrowed the field of designs under consideration. Finally, upon his conclusion they presented the designs chosen by the jury for third, second and first prizes. The foreman and jury members explained the merits and values of each of the three. The jury further explained that the winning design had been their unanimous choice. The jury then presented its final written report (Attachment F).

#### VVMF ACCEPTANCE OF JURY RECOMMENDATION

The VVMF alone had the authority to present the winning design to the Federal agencies for approval and to proceed with its development and construction. Our panel's acceptance of the jury's recommendations was unanimous. It was our consensus that the chosen design embodied genius.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT OF DESIGN AND EXHIBITION OF ENTRIES

The design chosen for the memorial was announced publicly on May 6th. Since then, it has received widespread praise and support from every sector of American society, including veterans organizations, journalists, professionals in the fields of art and architecture, and government officials. Both the entrants and professional commentators have praised the competition for the professionalism, objectivity and fairness of its planning, execution and judging.