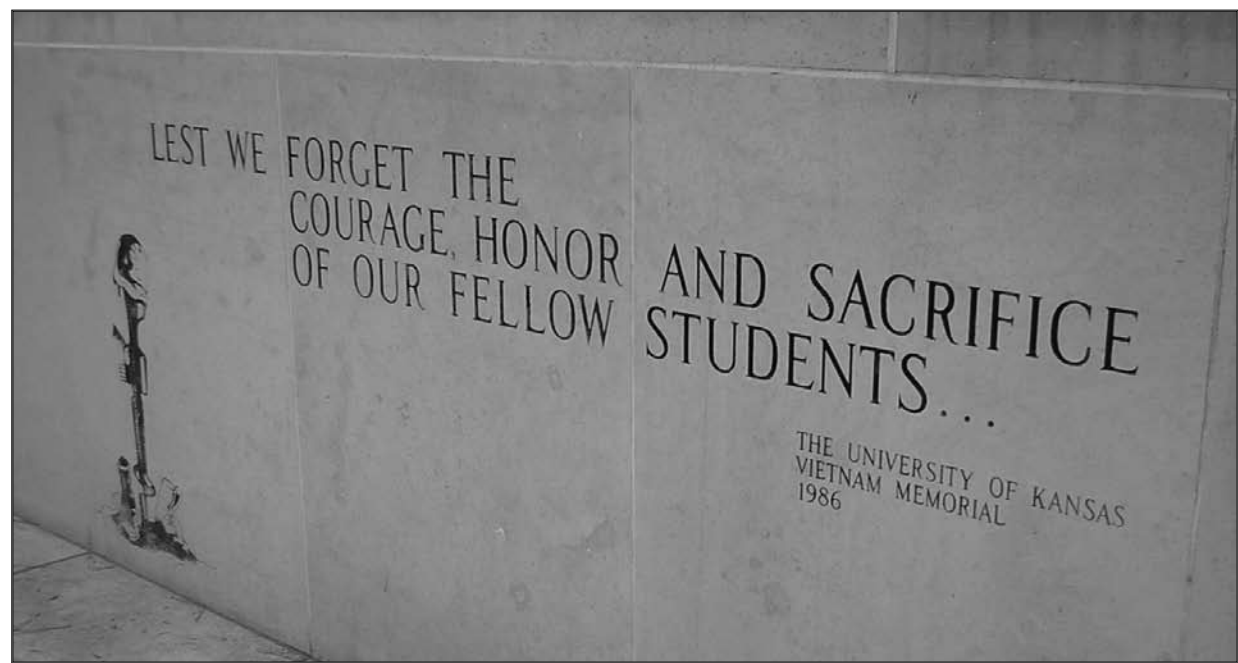


“LEST WE FORGET”



Vietnam Veterans Memorial, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Building the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at the University of Kansas

by Deborah C. Kidwell

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 30 (Autumn 2007): 178–191

In the twenty-five years since the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., the presence of the “wall” has seared the American consciousness. Over four million people visit each year. More than fifty-eight thousand names, carefully carved into the surface of the granite, unfold over two chevron-shaped sections, each 246 feet long. The long black granite wall, comprised of 144 engraved panels forty inches wide, gradually increases in height to over ten feet at its vertex.¹ The memorial is an ambiguous and abstract representation of a controversial conflict; as public history, it supports both political consensus and individual interpretation. The memorial, marking a turning point in the commemorative pattern of the war, is the product of a reconsideration of the veterans’ image within the context of the conflict. Moreover, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial set precedents in purpose, design, location, and funding that became extremely influential on memorials constructed after 1982.²

The successful national effort to honor Vietnam veterans with the construction of a memorial in the nation’s capital reflected the nationwide trend toward reconsideration of American military involvement in Southeast Asia, specifically the country’s negative image of veterans. Popular literature, movies, and scholarly research mirrored and molded this change. But the construction and planning process for the memorial was not without controversy. Individuals and groups within the Washington power structure supported and opposed the monument. In the end, these interests reached a compromise that allowed for construction, even though the final design did not entirely reflect their initial expectations. Likewise, interest groups that opposed the memorial eventually accepted its presence on the National Mall.

Historians have disagreed over who ultimately controls commemorative patterns, although they have clearly identified significant elements in the process of creating memorials. Historian John Bodnar illustrated how official interests—government, business, and social leaders—can exert profound influence. Alternatively, historian Kurt Piehler maintained that the pluralistic influences present in the diverse culture of the United States consign the memorialization of American military conflict to vernacular interests.³ As communities constructed Vietnam memorials in the shadow of the “wall” in Washington, compromise became crucial—controversies over memorial design, location, and funding were perhaps inevitable. Often, vernacular influences to honor and to remember Vietnam veterans seemed to inspire the builders. Official and institutional influences, however, largely defined the characteristics of the finished product, particularly as communities began to use public funds and to choose prominent locations for Vietnam

Deborah C. Kidwell, *assistant professor, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, received her doctorate in history from the University of Kansas and is author of Public War, Private Fight? The United States and Private Military Companies (2005). Her research interests include American and military history, the Vietnam War, and the history of commemoration.*

1. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, “The Memorial,” www.vvmf.org/index.cfm?sectionID=4; The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, “The Wall-USA,” www.thewall-usa.com/.

2. Nicholas Capasso, “The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Context: Commemorative Public Art in America, 1960–1997” (Ph.D. Diss., Rutgers University, 1998).

3. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1995).



The successful national effort to honor Vietnam veterans with the construction of a memorial in the nation's capital reflected the nation-wide trend toward reconsideration of American military involvement in Southeast Asia, specifically the country's negative image of veterans. Today the national monument receives over four million visitors each year. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

memorials. Arguments that appeared to be petty political squabbles over trivial design elements or funding resources instead spoke to a fundamental issue: the resolution of these conflicts determined the purpose for the memorial. The construction of the University of Kansas (KU) Vietnam Veterans Memorial illustrates the process of compro-

mise typical of Vietnam memorials constructed after 1982.⁴

In the fall of 1983 two Vietnam veterans, Thomas Berger and John Musgrave, along with KU student body president Lisa Ashner and five other current and former student officials, formed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee for the purpose of erecting a Vietnam memorial on the campus. With the Washington, D.C., memorial as a precedent, Student Senate Bill No. 1983-016 allocated ten thousand dollars "towards the construction of a memorial fountain and plaque in the Chandler Courtyard of the Burge [Student] Union to honor KU students who served and lost their lives during the Vietnam Conflict." The bill, which provided for funding through campus events, stated that "students . . . have shown an interest" in the project. It was approved in early October 1983, and the committee initiated an "open student competition" to provide alternative designs for the memorial "fountain."⁵

Although seemingly uncontroversial, the initiative suggested a profound change in the popular image of the Vietnamese conflict and its veterans. An earlier attempt led by a veterans' group in 1979 failed to gain widespread support. Though the archives contain little regarding this earlier effort the university magazine, *Oread*, later reported that Ashner had learned of the previous proposal, and her research indicated that "the idea fell apart when the group [Vietnam Veterans Association] fell apart."⁶ The political polarization and activism surrounding American military action in Southeast Asia that had occurred at the university during the years 1969 through 1973 remained familiar to many students, faculty, and university officials.

Political activism on the Lawrence campus was pervasive, particularly in 1969 and 1970. Although fo-

4. Deborah C. Kidwell, "Remembering and Forgetting War: Vietnam Memorials and Public Memory" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 2006).

5. Student Senate Bill No. 1983-016, Vietnam Memorial Building File, Record Group 0/22/178, University of Kansas Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Lawrence (hereafter cited as "Vietnam Memorial Building File").

6. "What passing bells for Vietnam War dead?," *Oread*, November 4, 1983. See also, Allen Wiechert (Director of Facilities Planning) to Keith Lawton and Al Thomas, March 29, 1979; Lawton to Wiechert, April 17, 1979; Delbert M. Shankel to Frances Degen Horowitz et al., May 24, 1979; and Delbert M. Shankel to David Ambler et al., June 28, 1979 in the Vietnam Memorial File, Record Group 0/24/01, University of Kansas Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Lawrence (hereafter cited as "Vietnam Memorial File").



A KU student recalled, "It was almost impossible, in 1969, to get through a day without being confronted by a leaflet, a literature table in one's path, the chance to applaud or harass a speaker, a rally or a march." Image courtesy of the University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

cused on racism and university governance, among other issues, students also expressed strong anti-war sentiments. Chancellor Laurence Chalmers, speaking soon after his 1969 appointment, acknowledged the anti-war sentiment he believed to be prevalent among students: "There have always been people who objected to every war this country fought, but the war in Vietnam is perceived by our students as politically unjustifiable and morally indefensible, and I agree with them on both counts."⁷ One student later recalled, "It was almost impossible, in 1969, to get through a day without being confronted by a leaflet, a literature table in one's path, the chance to applaud or harass a speaker, a rally or a march." The college yearbook for 1970 included numerous anti-war poems, stories, and other material; editors stamped the slogan "GIVE PEACE A CHANCE" into *The Jayhawker's* back cover.⁸

In the spring of 1970, the campus was the site of several acts of violence that resulted in a restricted university schedule. In April the Kansas Union was the scene of

7. Laurence Chalmers, quoted in Virginia Adams et al., compilers, *On The Hill: A Photographic History of the University of Kansas*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 199. For a sense of the tension that existed on campus and throughout the community, see Rusty L. Monhollon, "This is America?": *The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

8. The student, Lynn Anderson, is quoted in Adams et al., *On the Hill*, 200; *The Jayhawker*, 1970.

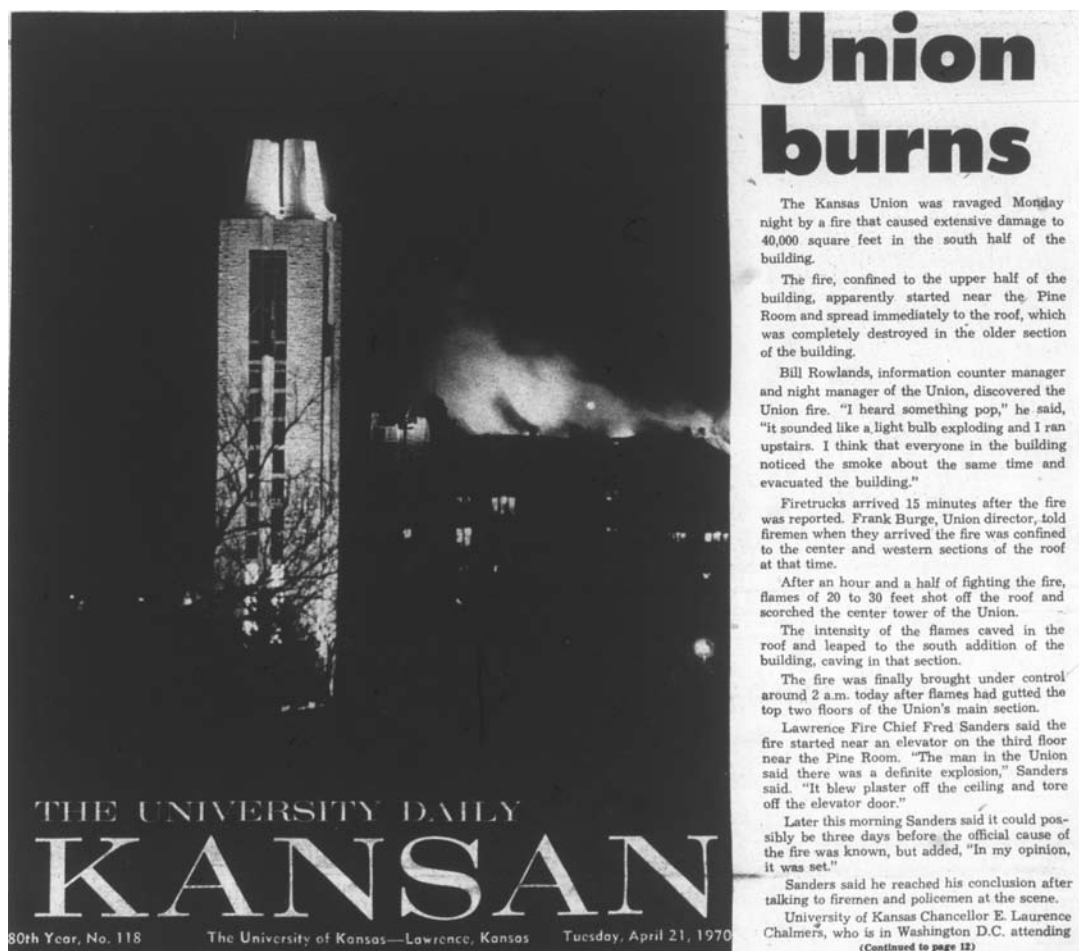
a devastating fire; officials later determined that arson was the cause. As the violence spread into the community, Lawrence was put under a three-night curfew, during which police and fire fighters were repeatedly called to campus. "On at least one fire run," observers alleged, "firemen were shot at by a sniper."⁹ At one point, as many as eight hundred people gathered for a rally in front of Strong Hall, the administration building, and a reported two to three hundred assembled near the military science building. The university enacted a restrictive curfew, and police made arrests and thwarted arson attempts. Several faculty members volunteered to serve as unarmed guards for campus buildings.

In May 1970 university officials took action to avoid such confrontations. Chancellor Chalmers proposed a "modified academic procedure" for students, which allowed some to leave campus early, in an attempt to diffuse possible unrest.¹⁰ The *University Daily Kansan* quoted Chal-

9. *Kansas Alumni* 69, no. 40 (May 30, 1970).

10. *Ibid.* Most of the arson attempts were dumpster and trash can fires, although one serious incident in the ROTC building was later attributed to a custodian. Students had the choice of skipping the last three classes and taking the final, taking an incomplete and finishing the work later, taking the letter grade already earned, taking credit/no credit for the class, or attending classes and taking the final as usual. The author can only speculate that a significant number of students readily agreed to take the grade already earned, thereby avoiding the final and leaving for summer vacation early. However, some faculty refused to comply.

In April 1970 the Kansas Union was the scene of a devastating fire; officials later determined that arson was the cause. As the violence spread into the community, Lawrence was put under a three-night curfew, during which police and fire fighters were repeatedly called to campus. Headline from the University Daily Kansan, April 21, 1970.



mers: "It may be impossible for many citizens to understand . . . but the university was continuously confronted by law enforcement authorities, threats and students these past few weeks." In addition, he continued, "I am confident that thousands are now really concerned about the issues of Cambodia and the Kent State incident." Other university officials agreed. The business school dean, Clifford Clark, affirmed, "I personally think this came out of the Cambodian thrust and the killing of the Kent State students. This move is nationwide." Dean Dale Scannell, of the School of Education, approved of the modified procedures: "I thought it provided the best alternatives for people who are concerned about present events to express their feelings without continuing business as usual or alternatives the university would not approve of."¹¹ Although some violence did occur—broken windows, small fires, and the like—many students adapted to the proposed forum and

organized an "Action for Peace Movement Calendar." This calendar listed twenty-two separate events, workshops, discussions, and organized political activities to express "discontent with Nixon's foreign policy, local disorder and the threat of violence."¹² The groups Students Mobilized for Peace and the KU Committee for Alternatives helped organize the calendar as an effective method to air student concerns. Little evidence of this anti-war sentiment remained some thirteen years later when students proposed building a campus memorial to honor veterans.

In this respect, students in Lawrence, often considered to be an example representative of middle-American values, reflected national trends. By the early 1980s, this reconsideration of the veterans' image was evident in literature, feature films, and television series. The negative images that historian Lawrence H. Suid observed in early Vietnam

11. "Deans Endorse Resolution," *University Daily Kansan*, May 11, 1970; "Chancellor Reviews Week," *University Daily Kansan*, May 12, 1970.

12. "Action for Peace Schedules Workshop Discussion Classes" and "Students, Faculty Band and Explore Education," *University Daily Kansan*, May 11, 1970.



By 1983, while the war itself remained controversial, the dominant image of veterans had changed from perpetrators to victims of the war. One veteran acknowledged this when he told the *University Daily Kansan*: “When we returned we either met indifference or hostilities. It’s kind of nice to see that sentiments have changed.” Photograph of an observance at the KU memorial courtesy of the University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence and the Lawrence Journal-World.

films such as *Rolling Thunder* (1977) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), indicating that “all [veterans] return[ed] from the war scarred mentally or physically by their experiences,” had softened with characters like Sylvester Stallone’s John Rambo and Chuck Norris’s Braddock in the *Missing in Action* trilogy.¹³ The veterans’ image was further rehabilitated with the films *Hamburger Hill* (1987) and *The Hanoi Hilton* (1987). The writers of the television series “Magnum, P.I.” identified their main character as a Vietnam veteran, and by 1987 the series “Tour of Duty” depicted a likeable cast as a platoon of young U.S. soldiers during their one-year tour of duty in Vietnam in the late 1960s.

Popular literature also began to reflect this more balanced portrayal. After the publication of the honest, hard-hitting reflection of former Marine officer Phillip Caputo (*A Rumor of War*, 1977), other works delved into more

13. Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 322–23. See also *First Blood* (1982); *Rambo: First Blood Part Two* (1985); *Missing in Action* (1984); the prequel *Missing in Action 2: The Beginning* (1985); and the sequel *Braddock: Missing in Action 3* (1988). These films presented veterans as victims of their war experience, in contrast to many earlier films depicting them as primarily drug-addicted murderers.

complex—and less negative—observations of veterans and the conflict.¹⁴ Veteran and popular writer Tim O’Brien criticized as media myth the depiction of the Vietnam veteran as, “well, *wacko*, deeply disturbed.” O’Brien described the typical Vietnam veteran as “Caucasian, male, thirty-three years old, employed, honorably discharged, a high school graduate with some college, an income of \$12,680 a year (versus \$9,820 for his non veteran peers), no prison record, no drug or alcohol dependence.”¹⁵ While the popular image of the troubled and forgotten veteran remained pervasive, a critical reassessment occurred, particularly after 1982, in direct response to commemorative impulses. With this precedent, the process of reconsidering the Vietnamese conflict and its veterans also took place on the local level across the country.

14. Phillip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1977); James Webb, *Fields of Fire* (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1978); Al Santoli, *Everything We Had* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981); see also C. D. B. Bryan, *Friendly Fire* (New York: Putnam, 1976), who recounted the experiences of the parents of an American soldier mistakenly killed by other American forces, which was subsequently covered up. Bryan—like many Americans—concluded that perhaps no one was to blame for the tragedy that Americans remembered as Vietnam.

15. Tim O’Brien, “The Violent Vet,” *Esquire* (December 1979): 96, 99.

University of Kansas officials gave their initial support to the memorial project in late 1983 and worked to complete the memorial. Chancellor Gene Budig approved the proposal in October, and Dale Seufferling of the University of Kansas Endowment Association established a fund to collect donations.¹⁶ Student body president Ashner wrote Navy ROTC Captain Alan Crandall to initiate the procedure necessary to obtain the names of former students who perished in the conflict. Ashner also contacted Anderson Chandler, a prominent donor and alumnus, to secure his approval of the proposed site for the memorial: the Chandler Courtyard of the Burge Union. Matt Gatewood, the Memorial Committee's fundraising chairman, noted, "There's a little different feeling in the community than even four or five years ago. . . . We can look at the memorial without bringing up any political considerations."¹⁷

Opposition, however, quickly surfaced, though opponents expressed their sentiments via editorials, leaflets, and posters, rather than the strong protest activities that caused university officials to fear violence in 1969 and 1970. Some campus leaders articulated the importance of supporting the memorial without viewing its construction as an acceptance of the war or the foreign policies that led to military conflict. Others maintained, "What this will come to symbolize is an endorsement, a glorification of the Vietnam War—which was an immoral, unjust war, a war that was fundamentally wrong."¹⁸ Another student claimed to speak for the majority when he expressed opposition to the memorial. His letter to the editor of the campus newspaper argued that it was shocking for the university to spend twenty thousand dollars on a Vietnam War memorial, especially while it was experiencing financial problems. "It is hard," he remarked, "to imagine the train of thoughts that could lead a rational student to the conclusion that we should spend money on a fountain dedicated to the victims of a colossal foreign policy blunder."¹⁹ Although the war

itself remained controversial, the veterans were less so. A university employee, who was also a Vietnam veteran, acknowledged a significant change in the dominant image of veterans—from perpetrators to victims of the war—when he told the *University Daily Kansan*: "When we returned we either met indifference or hostilities. It's kind of nice to see that sentiments have changed."²⁰ This change implied that the university community had begun to reconsider popular perceptions of veterans and the war.

Many local citizens, students, and university staff articulated their strong support for the memorial. The *Lawrence Journal-World* editorial staff wrote, "It is a worthy plan that should not resurrect the politics of the war but serve to recognize the sacrifice of those who gave their lives." The memorial, they maintained, should not reopen the intense controversy "about whether the war was wrong or right."²¹ Some students wrote to denounce the memorial's critics. One asked: "How can someone be so callous as to deny the need for the acknowledgment of the American Vietnam veteran and his sacrifices?" The *University Daily Kansan* editorial board described the memorial as "a fitting tribute . . . simply a remembrance of those students who died," and noted that commemoration would not legitimize the war.²²

Fundraising activities throughout the project showed the willingness on the part of many students, university officials, campus visitors, and the public to listen to veterans and perhaps reconsider their individual perceptions regarding the war and its veterans. The Memorial Committee scheduled "Special Events" during the week of November 7–11, 1983, that included films, speakers, button sales, and other activities.²³ They aired the PBS *Frontline* documentary on the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.; *Marines in '65*, a training film used by the United States military to explain the necessity of intervention in Vietnam; and *Hearts and Minds*, an anti-war documentary sympathetic to the North Vietnamese cause. Veterans at a brown-bag luncheon recounted their

16. Pete Wicklund, "War Memorial a Step Closer as Chancellor gives Approval," *University Daily Kansan*, October 12, 1983; Dale Seufferling to Terry Frederick (Treasurer of the Office of Student Senate), October 6, 1983, Vietnam Memorial Building File. Officials involved included Jim Long, director of the Kansas Union, Max Lucas of the Department of Architecture and Urban Design, and Robin Eversole, the director of university relations, among others.

17. "What passing bells for Vietnam War dead?," *Oread*, November 4, 1983.

18. Doug Hitchcock, "Disputes Brewing over KU Memorial," *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 30, 1983.

19. *University Daily Kansan*, October 7, 1983. The letter's author proposed, rather than a fountain, the memorial should take the form of a lec-

ture series that would "inform Americans about the issues surrounding potential Vietnam-like wars that the United States may fight."

20. Wicklund, "War Memorial a Step Closer," *University Daily Kansan*, October 12, 1983.

21. "A Gesture to Share the Loss," *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 11, 1983.

22. "Cost of Vietnam Memorial Small Price to Pay," *University Daily Kansan*, October 11, 1983; "A Fitting Tribute," *University Daily Kansan*, October 3, 1983.

23. "KU Vietnam Memorial 1984 Special Events, November 7–11," events flyer, Vietnam Memorial Building File; see also "Programs to Observe Veterans Day," *University Daily Kansan*, November 7, 1983.

experiences, spoke to the Inter-fraternity Council, and led discussions following the films and presentations. Other fundraising activities included information tables outside the university theater's presentation of the musical *Hair*, where supporters sold lapel buttons. Cast members donated a portion of their proceeds to the Memorial Committee and dedicated their performance to Vietnam veterans. Although attendance figures for these events are incomplete, it is significant that the university community was receptive and attentive to diverse perspectives.²⁴

Supporters conducted additional fundraising activities throughout the spring of 1984 and beyond. The publicity given to the memorial project prompted private contributions from veterans, their family and friends, and other interested parties. The Memorial Committee solicited donations from fraternities and sororities, campus residence communities, local veterans groups, and others. The Association of University Residence Halls donated fifty cents for each resident, or \$2,216.²⁵ The Lawrence community also supported the project. Early in 1984, the Student Senate and the city of Lawrence declared the week of April 2–6 as "POW/MIA-Vietnam Memorial Awareness Week," sponsoring films, speakers, and other presentations. Approximately three hundred people attended a speech given by Air Force Lieutenant and former POW General John Flynn.²⁶ Although records of the financial contributions are incomplete, these activities continued to generate enough publicity to bring in steady contributions.

An informational article in the *Kansas Alumni* prompted a few alumni to affirm the project with moral and economic support. Several of the donors were also Vietnam veterans and they, in particular, were "astonished" and "pleased" to learn of the plans for the proposed memorial. Although available donation records fail to reflect how many contributing alumni were veterans themselves, more than one con-

tributor noted that the effort suggested a "radical shift" in opinion within the university community since the 1970s.²⁷ Former Marine and anti-war activist Musgrave observed during "POW/MIA-Vietnam Memorial Awareness Week" that while the American people may have perceived veterans as supporters of the war, "there is a difference between serving your country and believing in the policies of the administration. . . . People must 'learn to separate the war from the warrior.'" He reported being "insulted, spat on and ridiculed" in the years immediately following his return from Vietnam. By the time Musgrave spoke in April 1984, the changed community was more receptive to his perspective and personal experience.²⁸

The changing image of veterans and the reconsideration of the conflict's historical context, along with the financial and emotional support of students, university officials, and local citizens did not guarantee success of the project. Two major controversies threatened to prevent the memorial's construction. One disagreement occurred over the location of the memorial on KU's campus; another point of conflict concerned the physical design of the memorial. These controversies polarized the university's bureaucracy, professional groups, and students. The process of resolving the conflicts further illustrated the tension between the groups, although they eventually reached a compromise. While each group achieved its primary goal in the constructed memorial, it relinquished other elements of its vision. What they created together allowed the university community to place the Vietnam era and their own local experience into an acceptable public narrative.

The Vietnam Memorial Committee announced a competition that would determine the formal design of "a memorial fountain to honor and remember" students who lost their lives in Vietnam, and chose a panel of twelve judges that included four faculty members, "two community leaders," and "six students, two of whom were Vietnam veterans."²⁹ The committee accepted ten contest entries from October 1, 1983, until January 15, 1984, and announced the selection of a winning design on February 7, 1984. John Onken, a junior architecture student, envisioned a series of limestone fence posts, which he suggested would take on "many meanings: a line of tombstones, a line of soldiers,

24. One week after special events week, a group of one hundred and fifty people marched through downtown Lawrence to protest the current government's actions in Grenada, an indication that opposition to military intervention still existed. See Ana Del Corral, "Protesters Criticize U.S. Intervention in Central America and Caribbean," *University Daily Kansan*, November 14, 1983.

25. Lisa Ashner and Matt Gatewood to the presidents of fraternities, sororities, residence halls, and scholarship halls, November 11, 1983, Vietnam Memorial Building File; "AURH Approves Memorial Donation," *University Daily Kansan*, December 2, 1983.

26. David Longhurst (mayor of Lawrence) to John Musgrave and Margaret Berlin, December 30, 1983; Student Senate Resolution No. 1984-001, January 18, 1984; Proclamation, Office of the Mayor of the City of Lawrence, March 27, 1984; and "POW/MIA Vietnam Memorial Awareness Week, April 2–6, 1984," promotional flyer, in Vietnam Memorial Building File. See also, *University Daily Kansan*, April 5, 1984.

27. C. Roch Thornton to Daniel Reeder, May 17, 1984; see also Lynn E. Steele to Lisa Ashner, April 3, 1984, Vietnam Memorial Building File.

28. *University Daily Kansan*, April 5, 1984.

29. David Fidler (chairman of the Design Selection Committee), press conference, February 7, 1984; and "Announcement of Memorial contest," in Vietnam Memorial Building File.

a procession, etc.” He also proposed two slabs, engraved with a dedication and a relief, as well as a fountain consisting of two pools. The planning committee recommended changing the inscription on one of the limestone slabs, and including a “relief or cut-out sculpture of three American soldiers similar to the sculpture idea of . . . [the contest’s] second place design.”³⁰ The *University Daily Kansan* also noted that the cost estimate had increased significantly—from twenty to thirty thousand dollars. Onken described his representation as a “low-keyed remembrance,” and maintained “the idea was not to build a typical memorial. We’re not recalling great victories won. We’re recognizing men who did their best regardless of the politics that sent them there.”³¹ The design selection convinced supporters that the memorial would soon become a reality.

With the design apparently finalized, the Vietnam Memorial Committee expanded its fundraising activities to include “soliciting off-campus donations from businesses and civic groups.”³² The committee issued an open invitation to a February 26, 1984, reception that featured the schematic drawings of the selected design. Construction was set to begin in May. Just as all parties seemed to reach consensus, however, the site of the memorial came under intense discussion.

This controversy represented another issue that would require compromise if the memorial was to be completed. The designated (and previously approved) site was the Chandler Courtyard near the Burge Union, although some university officials had voiced concern with this location due to Athletic Department plans to build an indoor football practice area nearby.³³ Moreover, in April 1984 the University Committee on Art in Public Spaces articulated several objections in a letter written to the executive vice chancellor. This committee expressed dissatisfaction concerning the procedure through which the project had been attempted, the approved site, and the design chosen. Committee members believed they had been excluded from the

30. Fidler, press conference, February 7, 1984. The second and third place winners were Bud Bortner and Paul Pannier, respectively. It is interesting to note that Frederick Hart, the third-place finisher in the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial design contest created the sculpture eventually included near the memorial in Washington, D.C., “The Three Servicemen.” Like the compromise reached in building the KU memorial, this is an indication of just how important consensus building was to completing memorial projects after 1982.

31. *University Daily Kansan*, February 8, 1984, and January 17, 1984.

32. *University Daily Kansan*, February 8, 1984.

33. “Announcement of Memorial contest,” Vietnam Memorial Building File.

early decision-making process and objected to the previously agreed-upon location as it was “a visually tucked-away corner of a relatively tucked-away building” too close to the Union party room. Furthermore, the committee was critical of a lack of design cohesion and scale, the sculpture’s “questionable artistic merit and technical quality,” and excessive costs. The letter noted “serious reservations regarding the final design” and recommended that “the University not proceed with implementation of the current proposal.”³⁴ The letter shocked the Vietnam Memorial Committee.

Understandably, the position of the Committee on Art in Public Spaces created considerable consternation within the university administration as well. In June, however, the *University Daily Kansan* reported that the Memorial Committee had reconsidered. One member observed that locating the structure near the Union’s party room could possibly undermine the memorial’s “sacredness.”³⁵ Still, some university officials pressured the Vietnam Memorial Committee to “move ahead on this project in a timely fashion.” Student body president Ashner responded with a letter to donors in July that explained: “According to University spokespersons, there are several technical problems dealing with the size and campus location of the Memorial that need to be resolved before construction can begin.”³⁶

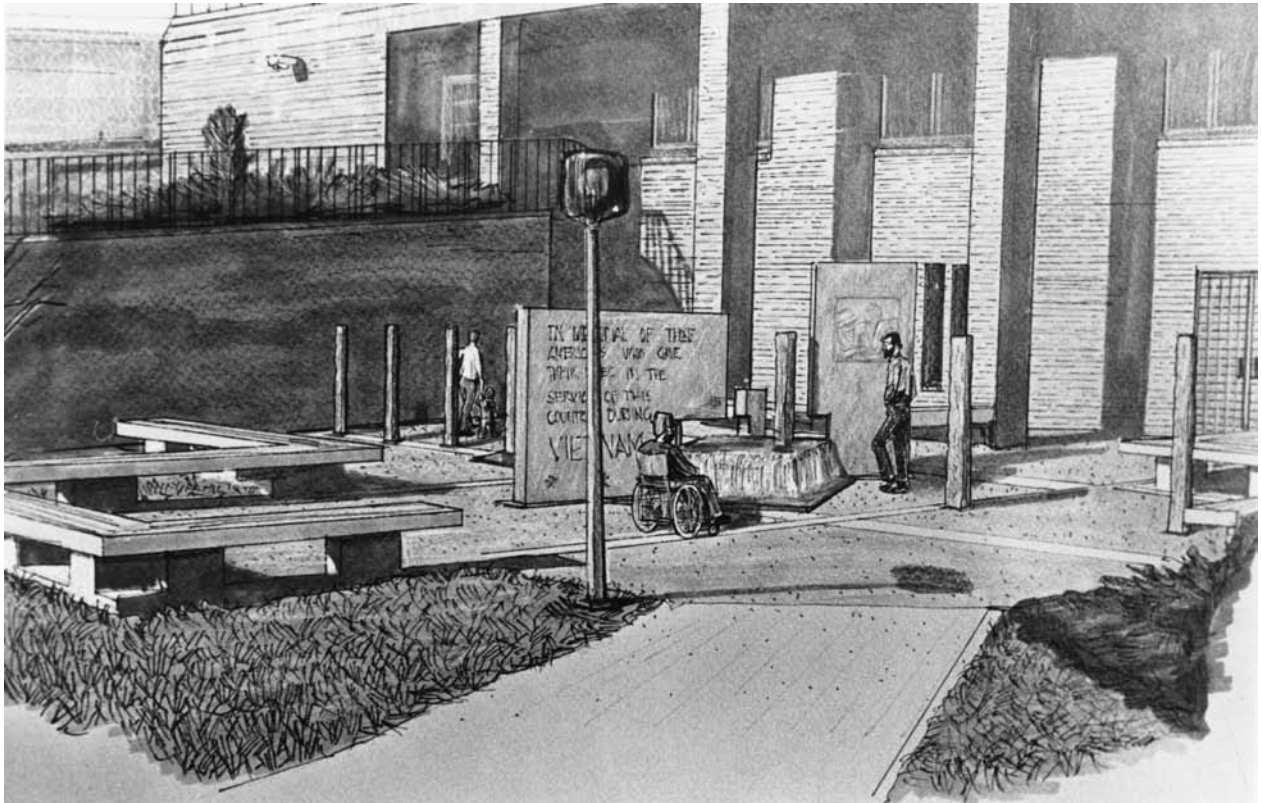
At this point, even memorial supporters had become polarized. The students had conceived the project and contributors had supported their efforts. University officials, however, held the power to approve the memorial design and location. In mid-July, the university imposed conditions on the conflicting groups and individuals, while leaving open the possibility that the parties could still reach agreement. Executive vice chancellor Robert Cobb established four important parameters: select another site; allow the contest winner to have a “major role” and the second place designer to have “some role”; use available funds; and make sure the design meets with the approval of the Committee on Art in Public Spaces.³⁷ The Vietnam Memorial Committee was open to negotiations concerning the first and third requirements. With the second stipulation, the university, in essence, supported the judgment of the

34. Stephen Grabow to Robert Cobb, April 17, 1984, Record Group No. 5/2, Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor, Robert Cobb, University of Kansas Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Lawrence (hereafter cited as “Record Group No. 5/2”).

35. Tom Berger, quoted in the *University Daily Kansan*, June 13, 1984.

36. Lisa Ashner to “Dear Friend,” July 4, 1984; Dale Seufferling to Lisa Ashner, June 29, 1984, Vietnam Memorial Building File.

37. Robert P. Cobb to Allen Wiechert, July 12, 1984, Record Group No. 5/2.



John Onken, the winning designer and a junior architecture student, envisioned a series of limestone fence posts, which he suggested would take on “many meanings: a line of tombstones, a line of soldiers, a procession, etc.” He also proposed two slabs, engraved with a dedication and a relief, as well as a fountain consisting of two pools. Design plan from the *University Daily Kansan*, February 8, 1984.

Committee on Art in Public Spaces. The fourth proviso, however, virtually guaranteed that the memorial design and its location would not be decided by students or their delegated panel of judges.

The University Office of Facilities Planning, after consultation with a “small committee” (consisting of one representative each from the memorial and the Art in Public Spaces committees, as well as the memorial’s designer), suggested an alternate site.³⁸ Their recommendation was to construct the memorial in Marvin Grove, a wooded, park-like acreage located between the Helen Foresman Spencer Museum of Art and the Memorial Campanile, a bell tower dedicated to veterans of World War II. The *University Daily Kansan* reported that members of the new committee gave various reasons for their decision to change the memorial location, as did university officials. A

38. Allen Wiechert to Robert Cobb, October 11, 1984, Record Group No. 5/2.

facilities planning official said, “We really want this to be a fine memorial. That’s the reason for the hesitation toward charging in on the project.”³⁹ Another observed that nearby construction and the somewhat isolated location of the original site warranted the change of location. Onken and the Vietnam Memorial Committee eventually approved the new proposal. Berger noted that it was appropriate to locate the structure near similar memorials on campus, that a scaled-down version of the original design would reduce projected costs, and that the location “is so peaceful and serene and it’s a nice area with trees.”⁴⁰ Thus, while the location of the memorial seemed assured, its final design was still very much at issue.

The Committee on Art in Public Spaces continued to object to the student-designed memorial. After viewing a scaled-down version, the committee reported, “this scheme has now drifted too far from the original (and desirable)

39. *University Daily Kansan*, October 17, 1984.

40. Berger, quoted in *University Daily Kansan*, October 17, 1984, and *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 5, 1984.

The L-shaped wall of the memorial, which is located near the intersection of West Campus Road and Memorial Drive, is made of concrete overlaid with native Kansas stone, approximating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., although on a much smaller scale.



[sic] idea." It recommended that the university: 1) establish a clear procedure to initiate and plan campus projects; 2) develop a budget estimate to guide the final design selection; 3) create a committee to determine the site of this and all permanent additions to campus; and 4) contract "a professional designer" to create a "permanent installation on campus."⁴¹ In essence, these recommendations would require the Vietnam Memorial Committee to resubmit the project for approval. Soon thereafter university representatives took actions that insured students would not design the memorial. Stephen Grabow, chairman of the Committee on Art in Public Spaces, offered Onken a two thousand dollar check "as a token of the University's appreciation," after informing him that the university would not use his design. The chairman also suggested that the Vietnam Memorial Committee's Berger (who was also employed in the chancellor's office) "meet with the Vietnam Veterans Committee and convince them of the wisdom of this approach."⁴² When university officials notified the Vietnam Memorial Committee of their action, the controversy escalated.

Although facing continued pressure to finalize its plans, the Vietnam Memorial Committee continued to press for the implementation of the original design and to defend its actions. In May 1985, in a highly critical letter that appears on "KU Vietnam Memorial 1984" letterhead, the committee addressed its concerns directly to the Committee on Art in Public Spaces: "Late last week we were informed that the most recent design proposal for the . . . Memorial has again been rejected." The committee charged that the "nature and purpose of the memorial

. . . has been largely forgotten because of the Art in Public Spaces Committee's concerns over student design competitions and student designers," and further lamented "we are now of the opinion that, like the National Vietnam Memorial, the technical details of the KU Memorial have themselves become so muddled and politicized internally that a successful solution may be difficult."⁴³ The controversy continued to threaten the memorial's construction.

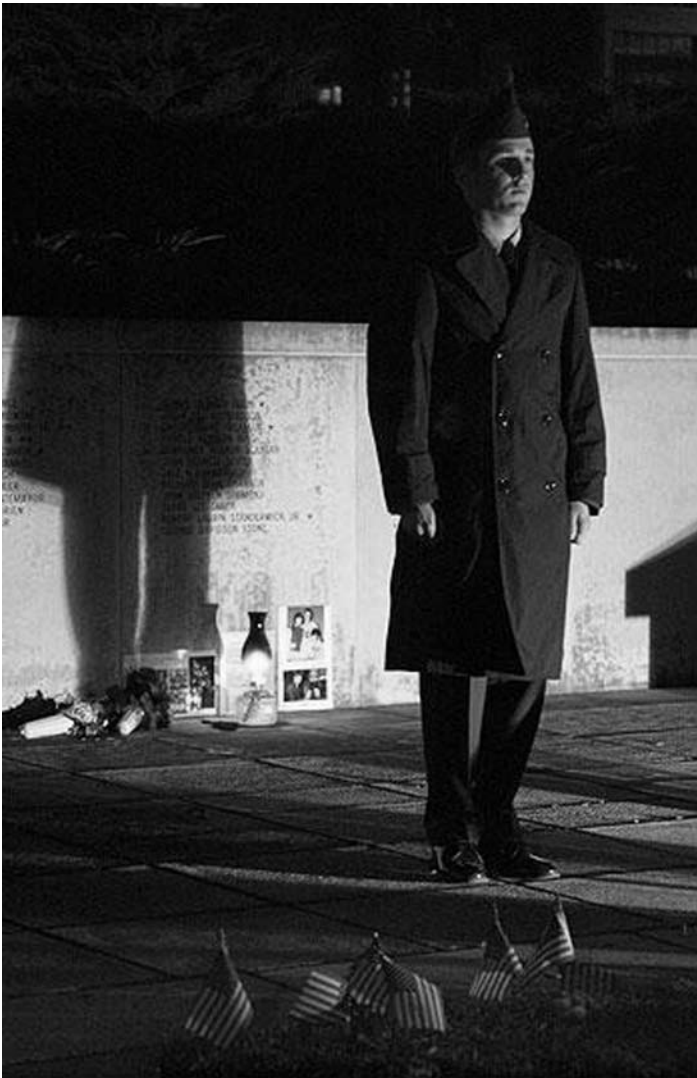
Students systematically answered each criticism made by the Committee on Art in Public Spaces and posed a few pointed questions of their own. They maintained that they had followed university procedure in submitting a formal, detailed proposal in 1983, which addressed the budget and design contest. University officials had approved their plans. The Memorial Committee followed the proposal, students alleged, raising thirty-four thousand dollars (as of May 1, 1985) for the project according to the parameters established by the university. Further, the student-led group obtained approval from the Committee on Art in Public Spaces for the site in Marvin Grove in October 1984 and adjusted the proposed design in an attempt to accommodate the committee's recommendations. The Memorial Committee asked why the Committee on Art in Public Spaces had suggested and agreed to the site in Marvin Grove if that location and the design were unacceptable. Members of the Vietnam Memorial Committee concluded: "The . . . Memorial project was conceived by KU students to honor KU students, in a fitting tribute designed by a KU student and financed largely by KU students past and present. In keeping with this notion, the . . . Memorial Committee cannot accept the A.P.S. Committee's recommendation that a professional designer be contracted."⁴⁴ The students' solution

41. Stephen Grabow to Robert Cobb, April 23, 1985, Record Group No. 5/2.

42. Stephen Grabow to Robert Cobb, April 29, 1985, Record Group No. 5/2. The original prize for winning the design contest was \$250. See also *University Daily Kansan*, February 8, 1984.

43. KU Vietnam Memorial Committee to Committee on Art in Public Spaces, May 1, 1985, Vietnam Memorial Building File.

44. *Ibid.*



At the memorial's dedication, the father of one honored soldier observed that the monument "means quite a lot being he's gone." Twenty years later a member of KU ROTC participates in the annual Veterans Day vigil at the memorial. Photograph courtesy of the (KU) Oread.

was that the university should continue plans to build the memorial according to the original, although scaled-down, winning design.

In October 1984 all parties appeared to be near compromise; by May 1985 no one, it seemed, agreed. The *University Daily Kansan* reported that the Committee on Art in Public Spaces had rejected the latest memorial plans, and Onken observed: "I respect their decision . . . I'm just sadder and wiser now."⁴⁵ The Endowment Association expressed se-

45. "Plans for Vietnam Memorial rejected again," *University Daily Kansan*, May 2, 1985. Onken went on to say, "My design was just too

rious concern over a lack of action on the memorial and considered reporting to donors on the delays. The executive vice chancellor assured the association that the original designer "has completed the scaling down of his design so that the project is both doable and doable within the funds available . . . the memorial will be built and will be completed as expeditiously as possible."⁴⁶ While archival sources refer to a meeting of concerned parties on August 9, 1985, meeting records have not been preserved. Subsequent correspondence, however, indicated the nature of a proposed compromise and described movement toward resolution. In September the Vietnam Memorial Committee's Berger provided the Committee on Art in Public Spaces with a list of names and a proposed memorial inscription.⁴⁷ Once again, it seemed that a successful compromise would allow memorial construction to begin.

By fall 1985 the memorial project was nearing completion. In October, Berger invited "Friends of the KU Vietnam Memorial" to a "consecration" of the site on November 11, Veterans Day, with construction to begin "shortly thereafter." About two dozen Vietnam veterans and relatives of the deceased or missing attended this ceremony, along with several ROTC officers and cadets, staff members from the chancellor's office, and current and past student body presidents, William Easley and Lisa Ashner. As the carillon in the Campanile chimed three times, Berger removed a covering from an artist's rendition of the newly designed memorial. The drawing revealed not a fountain, but a stone bench and an L-shaped wall, which Memorial Committee member Musgrave called "extremely significant . . . because it is the first of its kind to be built on the grounds of a college . . . where the anti-war movement was very strong."⁴⁸ The construction took place throughout the spring of 1986.

On Sunday of Memorial Day weekend in 1986, a group of nearly two hundred university officials, students, veterans, and family members attended the dedication of the memorial, even though many students had departed

much—not as subtle as they wanted. The committee is looking for something more traditional."

46. Robert P. Cobb to Dale Seufferling, May 31, 1985, Vietnam Memorial Building File; Seufferling to Cobb, May 28, 1985, Record Group No. 5/2.

47. Tom Berger to Stephen Grabow, September 20, 1985, Vietnam Memorial Building File.

48. David Toplikar, "Viet War Remembered at Campus Site," *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 12, 1985; Thomas Berger to Friends of the KU Vietnam Memorial, October 1985, Vietnam Memorial Building File. See also, in regards to the August 9 meeting, Tom Berger to Dale Seufferling, July 12, 1985, Vietnam Memorial Building File.

"The memorial was not to honor the war," Tom Berger (far right) told the *University Daily Kansan* after the memorial's completion, "I think it's important for people to understand that there is a difference." Beside Berger at the consecration of the memorial site stands student body president Lisa Ashner and John Musgrave, both of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee. Image courtesy of the University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.



Lawrence for the summer break.⁴⁹ After the carillon rang fifty-five bells—one for each soldier-student who died in the war—a bugler played "Taps." Lieutenant Colonel Hugh I. Mills, a Vietnam veteran then stationed at Fort Leavenworth, delivered the keynote speech. Local florists cloaked the memorial in beautiful spring flowers. Chancellor Gene Budig remarked to those gathered, "This memorial will keep their sacrifice before us always." The father of one honored soldier observed that the memorial "means quite a lot being he's gone."⁵⁰ To this day, ROTC cadets hold vigil at the memorial to honor their fallen comrades.

The original proposal of the Vietnam Memorial Committee, although approved initially by university officials, did not produce the final memorial on the Lawrence campus; the structure eventually built did not use the design of the original contest winner. The L-shaped wall of the memorial, which is located near the intersection of West Campus Road and Memorial Drive, is made of concrete overlaid with native Kansas stone, approximating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., although on a much smaller scale. The walls of the memorial in Lawrence vary from three to five feet in height. On one wall is a relief sculpture that depicts a combat-zone grave

49. *University Daily Kansan*, June 4, 1986. Of this number, the paper estimates fifty-five ROTC or affiliated personnel in attendance; see also the Vietnam Memorial File and University Archives for correspondence from several politicians indicating their inability to attend.

50. Chancellor Budig and the father, Edward Bowman, quoted in Wayne Price, "Memorial honors Vietnam Sacrifice," *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 26, 1986.

marker—combat boots near a rifle in the ground with a helmet atop the stock—and the inscription "Lest We Forget the Courage, Honor, and Sacrifice of our Fellow Students." The fifty-seven names of former KU students who died in Vietnam adorn the opposite wall. The designer of record was student Doran Abel, assisted by the university's landscape architect and the chairman of the Committee on Art in Public Spaces.⁵¹ The memorial had been built in spite of the changes made to the original concept.

Three incidences of vandalism occurred during the construction and dedication process, which indicated that the memorial still held the promise of provoking controversy and a variety of emotional responses. Shortly before the site consecration, thieves stole the pole set to hold the artist's plaque. Maintenance crews worked quickly to install a replacement in time for the ceremony. The next day, the plaque disappeared. On July 4, 1986, shortly after the memorial's dedication, vandals wrote, "While waging a genocidal war for U.S. imperialists" on the wall in black marker.⁵² University personnel were able to remove the graffiti, leaving only a light stain for the sun and time to bleach away. Even so, Memorial Committee member Berger, when asked for comment, felt compelled to provide additional explanation: "The memorial was not to honor the war," he

51. *University Daily Kansan*, August 27, 1985; *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 12, 1985. Initially fifty-five names were placed on the memorial. Two names were added to the memorial after its dedication, when confusion regarding the states of residence at the time of these soldiers' deaths was cleared up.

52. *Kansas City Star*, July 8, 1986.

