

I am confident that, compared to most in my generation, I have not only a great deal of experience with the Vietnam War, but also with the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. This background is largely attributed to my pop, John Minor. With my pop, I've attended numerous events, toured the facilities of the memorial, and even looked on during the restoration of the Huey helicopter placed at the memorial's entrance. However, until now, these experiences have been largely specific to my family. That is what made this recent experience different for me. Given the opportunity to again tour the facility, I reached two conclusions about the memorial: the facility directly ties the past to the present by symbolically placing its visitors in a bygone era, and the diverse nature of the grounds accurately honors the complex legacy of the war.

At the root of the term "memorial" is the Latin "memoria," the same derivative of the word "memory." Memorials are supposed to be places where the community gathers to remember those before them. It is for this reason that the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial seeks to create a symbolic link between past and present, a continuity that stood out to me more than anything else. Before stepping foot in the main memorial complex, visitors pass the Crawford Family Cemetery. Although seemingly unrelated to the organization's mission, the placement of the memorial on this site serves as an advantage. This location positions visitors alongside those who came before them, and even if those individuals had no role in the conflict, they remind all those entering the facility that they are stepping into history.

At this point, one has entered the memorial. They are now able to experience the portion of the facility that truly places them in the past and that which stuck with me the most: reflection. Amidst the names engraved in the granite of the memorial walls, visitors see themselves staring back. The conscious decision to emphasize reflection makes the conflict more personal to visitors. That is to say, this reflection serves as a reminder to all those who pass through the facility that they or someone very much like them could have been lost.

As important as it is to remember any conflict, it is equally important to remember one accurately. It is for this reason that, following my tour, the complexity with which the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial presents the conflict stuck with me. For example, if, before my tour, one told me that the memorial was designed by a Vietnamese artist, I would be confused. However, this decision both makes perfect sense and remains with me as a reminder of the past's complexity. In an effort to honor the New Jerseyans lost in the conflict, the foundation employed Hien Nguyen, a Vietnamese-born architect. This decision provides the depth needed to truly understand the conflict because, just as the war resulted in great strife on the American front, it also inflicted irreversible damage on the people of Vietnam.

The facility is similarly accurate in displaying the conflict by including the diverse groups who sacrificed during this era. While the books note those who lost their lives in the conflict, they often neglect to mention the others involved. Therefore, the memorial's inclusion of these other groups stood out to me. Alongside the main memorial, guests are given the opportunity to visit the Women Veterans Meditation Garden, dedicated to not only women on the front lines, but also the medics, nurses, and supporting individuals who sacrificed for the war's

cause. In a similar way, the nearby New Jersey Gold Star Family Monument reminds visitors of the loss endured by the loved ones of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam as well as those who continue to do so. While some may argue that these specific sites are mere additions to the main memorial, I believe that they are crucial factors in explaining the conflict with proper depth.

If the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial is one thing, it is immersive. During my tour, I did not just learn about a distant era, but instead experienced it through a symbolic journey. This immersion challenges visitors like myself. It sends us out from the memorial grounds with a mission of remembering those lost. It tasks us with ensuring that the legacy of the conflict is properly passed on. Most of all, it motivates us to act so that the events of Vietnam are not repeated.