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The Navajo Nation's Veteran's Memorial

Window Rock, AZ - It is more than just your ordinary "service person's memorial" if you knew the story interlaced with its architectural design you would see that it is indeed something worthwhile to visit and an area every American should pay respect to. Its significance and story is one that can easily measure up to Washington D.C.'s Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, endearingly called "The Wall".

This park is significant because it was designed and built by the Navajo, it is their "living" Veteran's Memorial. The idea for the Memorial evolved from within a group of Native Vietnam Veterans, Navajo Code Talker's, and culturally important, Navajo medicine men. After much deliberation the preliminary sketches and designs for the Memorial were drawn out. The park is in the shape of a medicine wheel. Which to many Native Americans including the Navajo is a primary representation of the four cardinal directions, the four sacred colors, the circle of life, and at the center – the eternal fire.

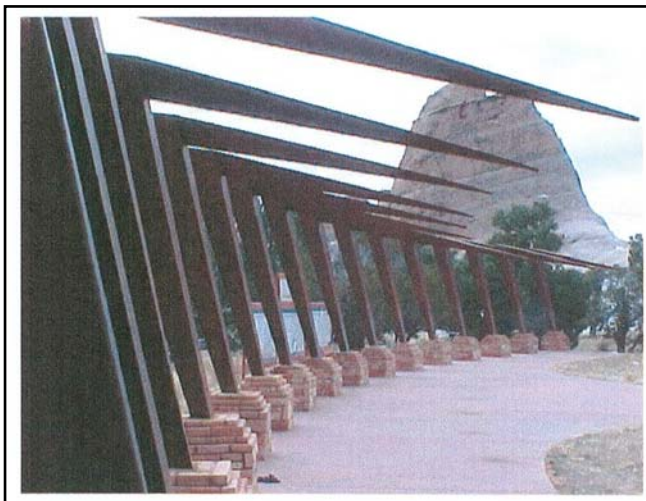


Medicine Wheel

Design Consultant and Vietnam Veteran Virgil Gatewood worked closely with the Navajo Nation's Design and Engineering Services in Window Rock, Arizona. The collaboration and coordination was vital in order to get every symbolic aspect of its architecture correct and true to its ultimate meaning and purpose. A major step in the developmental phase was to establish a specific location for the Memorial. Influentially from elderly Navajo medicine men (there is a common supposition about the natural rock formation, Window Rock) it was approved to reside where it is now.

A highlight of the memorial, a favorite that captures the awe of every visitor, are the 16 steel bayonets. The original designs featured glass panels atop and between each bayonet. Each glass pane was to have the name of soldier's killed in action etched on the surfaces. The projected scenario, as a person walks beneath the pillars the sun light shines through the etched mirror imaged names, "The dead shield the living as they look skyward to forever, as the sun moves, so too do the names onto the earth, the land, then the stone"- author unknown-. As of now the Memorial is somewhat incomplete. Yet it can still resonate the sacredness it was meant to.

The Veteran's Memorial is an embattled warrior's catharsis, to their families and loved ones as well, "The Gold Star Mother looks up to see her son's name float heavenly, then the boy's given name will be cast across the stretched hands of his mourner. Healing has begun"-author unknown-. Visitors can follow the circular path and feel the spiritual presence it has been consecrated to bestow upon her warriors both past, present and future.



The sixteen bayonet's on the eastern side of the park



The natural rock formation, Window Rock, behind the park