

The Moving Wall

Eve Bunting's book, *The Wall*, or any other excellent fiction or nonfiction book about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, attempts to give readers a better understanding about the significance of this memorial. However, even the best written or illustrated book could never compare with an actual visit to this very sobering memorial. Thousands of Americans have visited the Wall in Washington, D.C. They go to view, touch, and make rubbings of the names, as well as place flowers and other items at the base of the Wall. Unfortunately, many Americans may never have the opportunity to experience the Wall. John Devitt, a Vietnam veteran from California, came up with a plan to bring the Wall to them. In October 1984, a half-size portable replica of the actual Vietnam Veterans Memorial was completed. The Moving Wall was paid for by public contributions and is maintained by the Vietnam Combat Veterans, Ltd.

The Moving Wall is exactly what the name implies. It is a portable replica that is displayed throughout the United States giving many people an opportunity to show their respect for veterans who lost their lives during the Vietnam Era. Even though the Moving Wall is only half the size of the actual memorial in Washington, D.C., the information is identical to that of the original. A total of more than 58,000 names are listed on the Wall. Approximately 1,300 names are listed on the Wall as prisoners of war or missing in action. There are no civilian names listed since the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was constructed to honor only those who served in the United States military.

The Moving Wall consists of panels. The east wall lists casualties from the beginning of the Vietnam War, while the west wall contains those from the end of the war. Directories are available that tell visitors on which panel a specific name is located. Panels are numbered 1E through

70E and 1W through 70W. White dots in the margins of the panels mark 20-line intervals.

There are other symbols placed by some of the names on the Wall. The names of service members who have remained listed as missing in action or prisoners of war are marked with pluses. A diamond is placed after the names upon confirmation of that person's death. In the rare instance that a service member returns home alive, a circle is placed by the veteran's name, which symbolizes "the circle of life."

As with the actual memorial in Washington, D.C., many flowers, photos, letters, and other items are left at the Moving Wall. These are collected and stored at a warehouse. When the Moving Wall eventually becomes a permanent exhibit, a museum will be built to display these items.

When the Moving Wall visits a specific city or state, special ceremonies are often held to honor the veterans from that state whose names appear on the Wall.