



DAVID WESTPHALL VETERANS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

David Westphall Foundation Board of Directors

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The Chapel, built privately by the family of Marine Lt. David Westphall who died in combat in Vietnam in 1968, was dedicated on May 22, 1971 on the 3rd anniversary of the death of 1st Lt. David Westphall. It was the first major memorial created to honor the veterans of the Vietnam War. It inspired the establishment of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., which was completed over ten years later, in 1982.

The Foundation was created to support the Westphall family in making the Chapel available to the public.

The state of New Mexico assumed ownership of the Memorial at the request of the Foundation in order to preserve its presence following the deaths of Dr. and Mrs. Westphall.

The Foundation continues to support the Memorial in working with the NM Department of Veterans Services on behalf of veterans and all visitors.

IN THE BEGINNING...



Angels Near and Far....

It was a tough year. In a tough place. It was 1968 and the place was northern I Corps in Viet Nam. The largest percentage of the 12,000 military lives lost in Viet Nam that year happened in northern I Corps. While the news focused on Khe Sahn, the action all along the DMZ in the area was intense. After Tet failed militarily but succeeded politically the NVA continued with an on-going plan to infiltrate thousands of soldiers into northern I Corps for a large-scale assault on the river route that supplied all the DMZ installations supported through the 3rd Marine Division's Dong Ha Combat Base. The April/May Battle of Dai Do/Dong Ha was little known, the Marines with support from the Army, Naval gunfire, USAF/Navy/Marine attack aircraft, left the North Vietnamese Army units involved with up to 2,000 of their soldiers killed in action. The rest retreated. But the NVA kept up pressure on the area and in late May, 1968, ambushed a Marine unit operating near the Alpha 4 outpost at Con Thien.

The United States began assisting South Viet Nam in the 1950s following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Large scale combat operations ramped up in the mid-1960s and the country was deeply divided over the war by 1968. So much so that it forced the President to decline a run for a second term. Strangely, opposition to the war focused on the people sent to fight it. As the war continued, no official memorials to the thousands of military lives lost had been created. None were in planning stages.

This began to change on May 22, 1968 with the ambush that killed Marine Lt. David Westphall and sixteen other Marines. His parents were developing property in northern New Mexico near the village of Angel Fire. They decided to do something no one else had done...create a Memorial to those who were dying halfway around the world. The soldiers, sailors, airmen and civilians ---- Americans and Vietnamese lives that the

(continued next page)

In The Beginning – (continued)

combat was destroying. But mainly to respect the sacrifices of the all-but-forgotten US military casualties along with those who came home to be reviled by many of the people they had signed up to serve. “Doc” and Jeanne Westphall chose a spot atop a hill overlooking the stunning Moreno Valley and worked with a Santa Fe architect to design the Peace and Brotherhood Chapel. Much of the funding came from Lt. Westphall’s military insurance.

The Chapel was dedicated in 1971 and has been open ever since. After ‘Doc’ Westphall and his wife passed away in 2003 and 2004 respectively, the Westphall Foundation – headed by vets and David’s brother Walter – convinced the State of New Mexico to take over the operation and maintenance of the Angel Fire Memorial in perpetuity as a state site. The state took over in 2005. Until then, support had come from the family and the donation jar at the door. For several years in the 1980s, the Disabled American Veterans became involved and added the visitors center. After DAV left, the burden was fully on the Westphall family and volunteers to keep the Memorial open until the Westphalls passed away.

Although the Memorial is operated and maintained by the state, the Westphall Foundation remains active in support of programs that take place at the Memorial for many of the nearly 50,000 veterans and others who visit annually. This effort has never involved organized fund-raising. Obviously, this limits what the Foundation can do with events like Veteran’ Day, Memorial Day and other opportunities to create vet-centered activities.

Since the Memorial is now an important function of the NM Department of Veterans Affairs, and since the Memorial plays a significant role in area tourism and since the Memorial is now widely recognized as the impetus behind the Wall in Washington, D.C. which was dedicated a decade after the Memorial opened – the Foundation is seeking support from the State of New Mexico to fund an organized fund-raising program aimed at acquiring many small donations from individual vets across the nation through social media and online sites aimed at vets. This effort would greatly expand the Foundation’s work and would bring additional attention to New Mexico as the place where – following the Viet Nam War – veterans once again began receiving public respect for their service.

MEMORIAL CHRONOLOGY

Walter Westphall

The chronology below shows the major events of the founding and early years of the Memorial, but also shows many of the major subsequent events.

The early events in the chronology are based on the handwritten record maintained by Dr. Victor Westphall. The David Westphall Veterans Foundation maintained an assortment of other records from which the rest of the chronology is compiled.

October 31, 1967-Lt. Victor David Westphall arrives in South Vietnam.

May 22, 1968-David Westphall and 15 other Marines of Bravo Company are killed in an NVA ambush near Con Thien, South Vietnam.

May 27, 1968-Victor and Jeanne Westphall are told by two Marine officers that their son, David Westphall, has been killed in Vietnam.

June 6, 1968-the body of Lt. Westphall is delivered to a funeral home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

June 10, 1968-Lt. Westphall's remains are interred at the Santa Fe National Cemetery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

June 12, 1968-Jeanne Westphall proposes creation of the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel at Angel Fire, New Mexico.

June 15, 1968-Initial contact with architect Ted Luna of Santa Fe, New Mexico regarding Chapel proposal.

July 2, 1968-Agreement signed with architect Ted Luna for design and construction of Chapel.

July 7, 1968-Ted Luna presents his design for the Chapel to Dr. and Mrs. Westphall. They are totally pleased with the concept.

September 3, 1968-Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel incorporated as a non-profit corporation.

September 10, 1968-Excavation started for the Chapel.

May 22, 1971-Although not quite completed, the Chapel is dedicated. John Kerry is the principal speaker.

November 15, 1973-Temporary quarters and office for Dr. Westphall completed on site.

August 5, 1977-Disabled American Veterans issues first of a series of \$10,000 checks to help operate and maintain the Memorial.

September 6, 1982-Chapel is deeded to DAV Vietnam Veterans National Memorial, an organization affiliated with the national DAV.

May 31, 1983-Chapel rededicated.

May 28, 1984-Ground breaking for Visitors Center.

May 26, 1986-Visitors Center dedicated.

May 26, 1986-Visitors Center dedicated.

November 16, 1987-United States Congress and President Ronald Reagan recognize the Chapel as a monument with national significance.

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Chronology Continued

November 9, 1998-DAV deeds the Memorial to the David Westphall Veterans Foundation, the successor to the Vietnam Veterans Chapel.

July 22, 2003-Dr. Victor Westphall dies and is later buried on the Memorial's grounds.

August 1, 2004-Jeanne Westphall dies and is buried at the Memorial.

November 11, 2005-Memorial is deeded to the State of New Mexico to be operated as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park. In 2025, the Memorial was transferred to the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services.

Principal features of the Memorial

Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel (open 24 hours).

Westphall Visitors Center:

- Underground facility so as not to distract from other features.
- Museum that depicts many aspects of Vietnam War.
- Display of photos of Vietnam War dead and their biographies.
- Theater room.
- Vietnam War library.
- Computers for research on Vietnam War and casualties.
- Conference room.
- Westphall Foundation Gift Shop.
- Offices for New Mexico State Parks.
- Open-air amphitheater for ceremonies.
- UH-1 ("Huey") helicopter that was used in Vietnam combat.
- Veterans memorial gardens.
- "Dear Mom and Dad" sculpture.
- Graves of Dr. and Mrs. Victor Westphall.
- Monument commemorating Dr. Westphall's 1994 trip to Vietnam.
- Memorial brick walkways for American and allied soldiers.
- Medal of Honor recipient memorial bricks.
- Entrance pillars that depict Dr. Westphall during visit to Vietnam in 1994 and Lt. Victor David Westphall during his combat tour in Vietnam.
- Circular walkway around the Chapel.
- Picnic tables.
- Upper and lower parking lots.

Website: www.vietnamveteransmemorial.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/AngelFireMemorial

BOARD NEWS



Jack Fox re-elected to Board

Retired Brig. Gen. Jack R. Fox has been re-elected to the David Westphall Foundation Board of Directors.

He has served on the Board for six years and is vice president of the Foundation, which supports the New Mexico Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Fox served as cabinet secretary of the state Department of Veterans Services from January 2015 to December 2018.

Before that, he served in the Army, Army Reserve, and New Mexico National Guard for 30 years. His service has included commanding an infantry company, an airborne company, an air defense battery, and an air defense battalion.

Fox also served as commandant of cadets at New Mexico Military Institute and president of St. John's Military School.

He was deputy adjutant general of the New Mexico National Guard from 2007-2010 and served as the Guard's chief of staff.

Fox and his wife, Marvine, have been married for 58 years.
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(Board News Continued)

Gen. Nava Elected to Foundation Board



Kenneth A. Nava

Retired Maj. Gen. Kenneth A. Nava has been elected to the David Westphall Veterans Foundation Board of Directors.

Nava served as New Mexico adjutant general from 2017 until his retirement on Dec. 31, 2021.

He succeeds Richard “Dick” Dickerson on the Westphall Board.

Nava was commissioned as an Air Defense Artillery officer upon graduation from the New Mexico National Guard Academy in Roswell in August 1992.

He served in various Guard positions throughout the state.

Nava and his wife, Dawn, have been married for 34 years. The couple has three children and seven grandchildren.

His cousin, Marine Cpl. Francis X. Nava was the first person from Santa Fe killed during the Vietnam War, on Sept. 10, 1966.

“My uncle, Staff Sgt. Frank Arrey Jr., was killed 11 days later on Sep 21, 1966,” Nava said.

Nava served as a battalion commander in Iraq. He recalled that “Vietnam Veterans were the first to greet my soldiers and me when we returned from their one-year combat tour in 2010.

“It is an understatement to say that our Vietnam veterans and Gold Star families have a special place in my heart,” he said. “I am honored to have been selected to serve on this Board, and I look forward to whatever I can contribute.”

Steve Garcia Elected to DWVF Board



Col. Steve Garcia

Currently, Steve Garcia serves as the Director of Business Development for Brycon Corporation here in Albuquerque, NM. His duties include serving as the primary link to new business and relationship development by networking with local and regional businesses, business associations and business leaders who may have a positive impact on future business opportunities. He supports his local and corporate Marketing Department in all marketing, advertising and branding efforts. He maximizes his vast network capabilities as a Community Partner Representative for Brycon, identifying opportunities to improve the lives of our citizens.

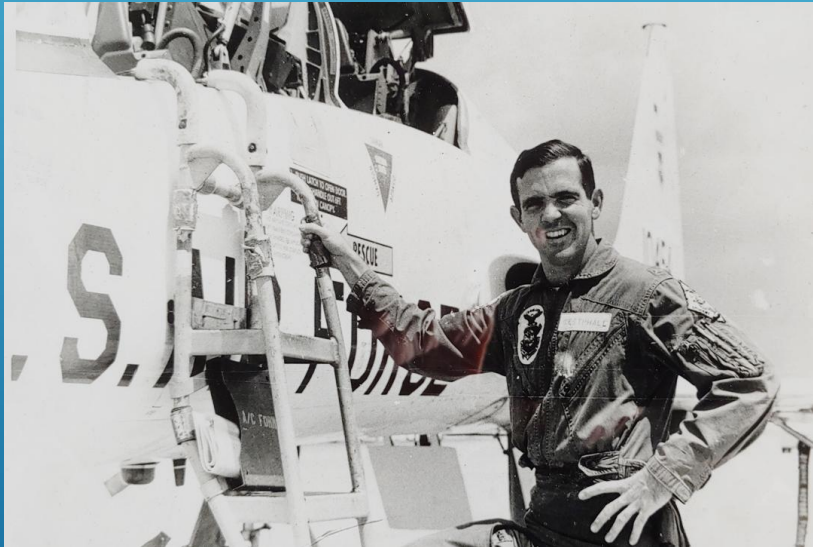
COL (Retired) Steve Garcia's military service in the New Mexico Army National Guard spanned almost 34 years. COL Garcia's final assignment was the Chief of Staff for the New Mexico National Guard, serving as the principal advisor to the Adjutant General on key staff integration and management of the joint forces headquarters of the New Mexico National Army National Guard. He is a veteran of Operation Noble Eagle in the National Capital Region as an air defense battle commander, and a combat veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom / Afghanistan as the principal law enforcement advisor to the deputy Commanding General of the Ninth Afghanistan National Police Corps.

COL (Ret.) Garcia entered military service in the New Mexico Army National Guard in the summer of 1985 as a private. He served as a combat medic until receiving his Commission from the University of New Mexico's Army ROTC program as second lieutenant in December 1989.

Steve Garcia and his wife Angelique received their Bachelor's degrees from the University of NM in 1992. In May of 2013, he earned a Master of Business Administration in Project Management from Grantham University. In June 2014, he graduated from the Inter-American Defense College in Ft. McNair, VA, where he earned a Master of Science degree in Inter-American Defense and Security. Concurrently, he earned a Master's degree in Defense and Security Studies of the Americas with Distinction from the National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies in Santiago, Chile.

Foundation Highlights

Walter Westphall Elected Director Emeritus DWVF



Lt. Walter Westphall stands in front of a T-38 jet trainer at Craig Air Force Base, Ala., May 1969.

Walter Westphall has been elected director emeritus of the David Westphall Veterans Foundation by the Foundation's Board of Directors. Westphall co-founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire, along with his parents, Dr. Victor Westphall and Mrs. Jeanne Westphall.

The Memorial was founded in July 1968 following the death of his brother, Marine 1st Lt. Victor David Westphall, who was killed in action in South Vietnam on May 22, 1968.

Walter was a board member of the Westphall Foundation and its previous incarnations from the beginning. The Foundation donated the Memorial to the State of New Mexico in November 2005. It is operated by the New Mexico State Department of Veterans Services.

Walter served on active duty in the Air Force for 9 years. As an enlisted man, he served as a weapons release systems mechanic on F-105 and F-4 aircraft. Walter was commissioned in the Air Force through the Airman Education and Commissioning Program.

He became an Air Force pilot in October 1969 and was assigned to duty as a KC-135 pilot. His assignments included TDYs to Southeast Asia in the fall of 1970 and the fall of 1972, which involved air refueling of B-52s, RC-135s, F-105s, and F-4s. Following military service, he worked as a financial institution examiner and retired from federal government service in 1993.

Walter has a bachelor's degree from Indiana University and an MBA from the University of Denver. Walter and his wife, Dorothy, have a daughter, Kimberly, and a son, David.

"There have been a lot of painful experiences given the difficulties in creating and perpetuating the Memorial, but the years since ownership by the State of New Mexico, starting in 2005, have brought a lot of relief, even joy," Walter said.

"My parents died over 20 years ago and did not live to see the project free from financial stress and administrative turmoil.

"That is sad, but I also realize that on a daily basis, they were able to witness how their efforts were appreciated by veterans and the public alike," Walter said. "I was blessed to be a part of a project that ensured Vietnam veterans, including my brother, are honored rather than forgotten."

VISITING VET THOUGHTS

Josh Tracy “Felt Blessed” when visiting Angel Fire with his wife, Stephanie Marin Tracy. He sent this note to a close friend, sharing his feeling at the Memorial and encouraging a visit.

Honoring Our Heroes at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire, NM

Every time I come across a military war memorial, I make it a point to stop, pay my respects, and reflect on the sacrifices made. But this one... this one truly blew me away. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire, NM is one of the most powerful and well-put-together tributes I’ve ever seen.

Built by Dr. Victor Westphall in honor of his son, Marine Lt. Victor David Westphall III, who was killed in action in 1968, this memorial stands as the first major Vietnam War memorial in the U.S. It was created out of deep love and loss, long before the nation fully recognized the sacrifices of those who served.

Walking through, I was deeply moved by the personal stories and the raw emotion captured in every part of the memorial. The suffering, the courage, and the treatment these men and women endured—both overseas and when they came home—is something we should never forget. It was an honor to share this experience with my family, to help them understand the price of freedom and the respect our veterans deserve.

Forever grateful for my buddy, **Felix Torres**, for his service and sacrifice in Vietnam.

Known you for a long while brother and honored to serve with you in the guard!

If you ever find yourself near Angel Fire, I highly recommend stopping by and paying your respects. It’s a place of reflection, honor, and healing—a reminder of the cost of service and the gratitude we owe those who gave so much.

Forever grateful. Never forgotten.

FIRST TIME

What's That White Thing?

Lanny Tanning DWF Board Member



My time in the military introduced me to New Mexico in 1969. Cannon AFB in Clovis, NM. I left USAF in 1970 and headed to Atlanta for work. But I couldn't get New Mexico out of my mind. When I returned for good in early 1972, it had only been three and a half years since getting back stateside from my duties in Vietnam. I had been back in civilian life for almost two years. I was still trying to blend in. Like all vets, forgetting is simply not possible. What you try to avoid is dwelling on those times in the past that burned unpleasantly into your memory. If you're lucky, you can start shifting from the bad memories to recollections of the less bad times during the 'experience'. Another tactic is to flood your consciousness with new and vastly more positive experiences. While I was fortunate in not being combat infantry or some other direct combat duty, my unit's proximity to the Demilitarized Zone put me front row center in the theater of horrors that combat in Northern I Corps created.

My path to finding new experiences in New Mexico led me to doing as much back country exploring, hiking, skiing and camping in my adopted home state as possible. With fully a third of New Mexico being public land...lots to explore. With ancient cities unlike anything anywhere in the nation along with towns and villages still inhabited by their Native American descendants...more to explore. With other small towns and villages that could have been airlifted intact out of 15th century Spain...what a feast for the curious mind!

So it was that some time in the early '70s on a back-road safari with my friend Mark...the road from Mora to Angel Fire beckoned. A rough, gravel road twisted up into the mountains north of Guadalupita. Eventually it topped out at the south end of a beautiful mountain valley. We continued on. I had just taken up skiing and was curious about the skiing set up at Angel Fire. The dirt turned again to pavement as we passed a neighborhood of new homes around a lake. Then we passed a golf course. Hmmm... The club house looked like it was still under construction. Then a much larger valley opened up before us. A small shopping center on one side of the road and lodges and condos on the other lay beneath the ski runs. Aha!

Then I spotted a runway running along the valley floor. As a fledgling pilot, it grabbed my attention. I looked at the surrounding hills thinking that landing at Angel Fire might be challenging. Then I saw a white structure swooping up to a point atop a hill north of the runway. "What's that white thing?"

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Off we went to explore. That ‘white thing’ turned out to be the Vietnam Memorial Chapel. What? Someone had done this despite the widespread opposition to the war and often to anyone who had been involved in it? The Chapel door was unlocked. We walked in not knowing what to expect.

The interior followed the same soaring lines as the outside. Curved bancos for seating stepped down the floor line following the hillside to the base below the highest point of the ceiling. Numerous mementos and flowers and hand-written notes were sitting on the floor by the bottom of a narrow stained-glass window that reached to the ceiling’s peak. Beyond stunning.

Turning to leave, I saw a line of photographs on the back wall between the side entrance doors. In the center was a picture of a Marine lieutenant. The text identifying Lt. David Westphall explained that he had been killed in an ambush on May 22, 1968 during an operation just east of Con Thien and north of Cam Lo. And a lot went through me. I had been at my duty station several miles away at the time. I had been to Con Thien. I had been to Cam Lo. I had lived next to Delta Med, the main field hospital for the 3rd Marine Division handling the hundreds of Marine casualties that came in every week from the constant combat along the DMZ in 1967 and 1968. I had been to the Graves Registration unit at Delta Med and seen the huge pile of combat gear removed from the marines killed in combat. Oh, man.

Reading further, I learned that Lt. Westphall’s father and mother had started planning to build the memorial shortly after the military representatives visited David’s family to deliver the sad news. He used his son’s military death benefit to get the project started and the rest he did with money he had made as a contractor. The memorial became their life and gift to those who had survived and to the families of those who hadn’t. And to the Vietnamese who had endured the war. He called it the Peace and Brotherhood Chapel. From that point, I knew that forgetting was not only not possible but that remembering in a positive way as Dr. Westphall had done in honor of his son was in the cards. I had been, after all, an officer. That was a position of leadership that had been given to me. I had no idea how I could honor it in coming years as a civilian, but I could not ignore it. Again, New Mexico and its people – fiercely independent and self-assured – had shown me I was in the right place. Ten years later I found myself at the dedication of The Wall – the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. Our little “one of our states is missing” New Mexico had led the way toward the nation removing the blame for the war that had been placed by some on the people who had been sent there to fight. It was OK to be a vet again.

As time went on, I visited the chapel again...and again. I got to know Doc Westphall and met a lot of vets who had found a refuge near Angel Fire, New Mexico that let them know they were not alone. By the way, Con Thien translates into “The Place of Angels.” Coincidence? I think not.

A Century of Service

American Gold Star Mothers, Inc



On June 4, 1928, at the request of some 35 Gold Star Mothers, the first meeting of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. was held at the Hotel Hamilton in Washington, D.C. A Gold Star Mother is a mother who has lost a child while they were serving in the military or died from wounds because of their service. The mission of AGSM is to support and serve our Veterans, active duty military and other Gold Star Families. The mission continues from those original mothers, led by our Founder, Grace Darling Seibold. Those original Mothers served tirelessly by visiting the hospitals in Washington, D.C. and spending time with the wounded. Grace realized that grief held within was destructive and through service the wounded and the Mothers would benefit. Today we have Chapters of Gold Star Mothers from coast to coast who volunteer in VA Hospitals, VA Clinics, State Veterans Nursing Homes and other Veteran facilities. We are a Veterans Service Organization (VSO) chartered by Congress.

The first Chapter of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. was formed in the Albuquerque area in 1948. The WWI Mothers led and the WWII moms followed with mothers continuing the service today. New Mexico has had two National Presidents of AGSM since its formation. Mary Sanchez Teeter from Albuquerque was the mother of Wayne Simmons who died in Vietnam and was the recipient of three purple hearts and seventeen other medals. Mary served as National President from 1981-1982. Mary was very involved with the David Westfall Memorial and was a good friend of the Westfall's. Becky Christmas from Wagon Mound served as the National President of AGSM from 2018-2019 and served on the National Executive Board for eight years in various offices. Becky is the mother of CPT Todd Christmas who was killed 29 November 2004 in a Black Hawk helicopter crash killing all seven aboard, including GEN Ben Allen for whom Todd served as Aide-de-Camp. Todd was the recipient of a Bronze Star for his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and several other military awards. Becky serves on the David Westfall Veterans Foundation board currently.

In 2024 the New Mexico Gold Star Mothers began a mission of placing Gold Star Memorial Plaques around New Mexico. These beautiful bronze markers were created by the National Garden Clubs. Inc. There is a Blue Star marker-A Blue Star Mother is one whose child is actively serving in the military-and a Gold Star Families marker. On September 23, 2024 the Gold Star Families marker was dedicated with Gold Star Families attending, along with New Mexico Garden Club members, Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera, Edward Mendez DVS and many veterans and members of the Angel Fire community. Two other Gold Star markers have been placed in New Mexico: one at Veteran's Park in Albuquerque and one in Clovis. Plans are in place for one in Roswell and other areas around the state.

These markers bring awareness to military service and also serve as a reminder that Freedom Is Not Free. Something Gold Star Families know all too well.



Getting The Word Out



Bob Wooley (left) and Jack Swickard were presented with Rotary mugs after speaking to the Roswell Rotary Club on Jan. 23 about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire.

Board members address Rotary

ROSWELL — Bob Wooley and Jack Swickard gave an overview of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to Roswell Rotary Club members on Jan. 23.

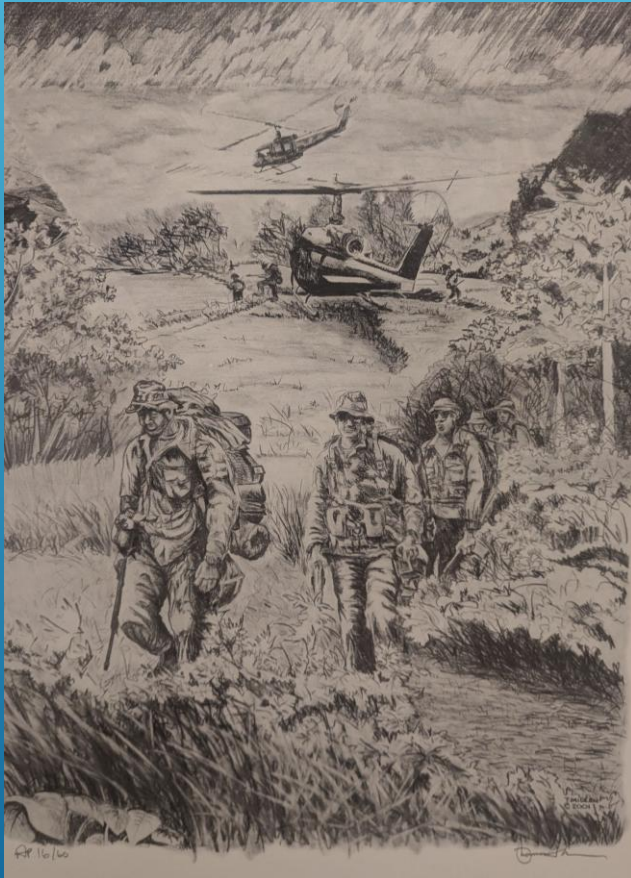
Wooley and Swickard are longtime members of the David Westphall Veterans Foundation.

In their talk to the Rotary club, they presented a history of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire, from its beginning as a memorial to Marine Lt. David Westphall, who died in combat during the Vietnam War.

Wooley also spoke about the renovation — which he spearheaded — of the UH-1H Huey, a centerpiece of the Memorial at Angel Fire.

Swickard flew the Huey in combat during the Vietnam War when it was assigned to the 118th Assault Helicopter Company at Bien Hoa, RVN.

In Memory – A Gift to The Memorial



This print was donated to the Angel Fire Memorial by Theresa Shaw. Ms. Shaw is the sister of US Marine Richard Stirling Shaw, Jr. (RIP) Howard Bunte arranged for the print to be sent from Ms. Shaw's home in California following Richard's passing.

Richard Stirling Shaw, Jr. – January 17, 1944 – November 12, 2023

Enlisted in USMC February 10, 1964

Served in Viet Nam July 1965 to July 1966

Unit - 1st MarDiv – 2/7 – Second Battalion/7th Regiment (Magnificent Seventh)

Base Station In-Country - Chu Lai

Rank – Corporal E-4

Specialty – 2531 – Field Radio Operator

Also served at Camp LeJeune, Okinawa, Guantanamo

After Viet Nam attended and completed Airborne Course, Ft. Benning, GA. August 1966

USMC Reserve – January 21, 1967

Medals and Commendations –

Viet Nam Service Medal

National Service Medal

Rifle Sharpshooter Badge

Pistol Expert Badge

Basic Parachute Insignia

Medal of Honor Recipient Comes Home To Angel Fire



For many years, this bust of Richard Rocco stood outside the South Valley Community Center in Albuquerque.

The Following Story Appeared in The Albuquerque Journal

Rather than let an important bit of history get lost in the mists of time, Bernalillo County has helped keep the story of Richard Rocco alive.

Last week, the county commissioners approved the transfer of a bust of Richard Rocco to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire. For several decades, this bronze bust has been on display at the South Valley Community Center where a monument recognizing Rocco is flanked by flags. The monument and the bust were provided to the Community Center site by local veterans back in the 1980s.

Vietnam was long ago and far away. And stories like Richard's often fade away. Not this time. The county's action allows the story to be retold.

Decades ago, local vets in Albuquerque took the initiative to honor a man whose service reflected the courage New Mexicans so often show in service to our nation. New Mexicans tend to take such initiatives.

Many New Mexicans know that the first significant memorial to those who served in Vietnam was established in Angel Fire, following the death in combat of Marine Lt. David Westphall in 1968. The memorial's Peace and Brotherhood Chapel was built by his parents and was completed and opened less than two years after he died.

It was another 10 years before the Vietnam Memorial — The Wall — in Washington, D.C. was created.

In Albuquerque, local vets decided to honor their fellow vet, Richard Rocco.

Like a lot of young guys, Richard found himself in a bit of trouble with the law. It happens. In this case, the judge gave Richard the option of going to jail or going into the military. Remember, this was when Vietnam was in the news every day as the battles raged and the casualties mounted. Not an easy choice, but Richard chose the military.

(continued next page)



(Rocco – continued)

As a tough young guy, he served his fellow soldiers well. And in one instance, repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to pull several wounded soldiers back out of the kill zone during a fire fight. Long story short, in recognition of that selfless act, Richard was awarded the Medal of Honor — our nation's highest military decoration.

Local vets wanted people to know about Richard and created a memorial stone. Bernalillo County permitted installation of this monument outside the Westside Community Center on Isleta — Richard being a South Valley kid.

Subsequently, vets had a bronze bust of Richard made and the county placed this in the Community Center for people to see and to learn more about the man the memorial stone outside honored.

To allow more people to know Richard's story, local vets recently sought permission to move the bronze bust up to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire for permanent display in the visitor's center. The county graciously agreed.

Thousands of people from all over the country visit the Angel Fire Memorial each year. The county's role in honoring Richard Rocco due to the history of the bust will now be part of the Medal of Honor display in Angel Fire. The Rocco stone monument remains at the South Valley Community Center.



Photos – top – Memorial Manager D.B. Herbst brings bust of Richard Rocco into visitors center when vets transport it to Angel Fire.

Bottom – Richard's bust on display in Visitors Center

DWVF Update



Franchesca Zoppe

Zoppe Named Executive Manager of DWVF

Franchesca Zoppe has been named executive manager of the David Westphall Veterans Foundation.

The Foundation is the support organization of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Chapel at Angel Fire.

As executive manager, Zoppe will supervise the Memorial Gift Shop and its employees and work closely with the Foundation's Board of Directors.

She also will coordinate with the state Department of Veterans Services, which owns and operates the Memorial and Chapel.

Zoppe previously was CEO, salesperson, and buyer for CFT Decor & Gifts in Taos.

She retired from a successful career of 35 years in high technology, working with companies such as Cisco, EMC, and Dell Technologies, as vice president, product management, program manager, quality assurance manager, and security director.

Zoppe also currently serves as financial director of Friends of the Angel Fire Dog Park.

She is a Navy veteran and holds a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and an MBA.

New Mexico DVS News

Memorial Day Ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire Monday, May 26th, the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) will honor and mourn those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in our nation's service at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire, New Mexico. For the last 54 years, Memorial Day weekend has been an emotional and healing time for Veterans and their families at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. NM DVS Deputy Secretary Eric James will be one of the speakers at the ceremony in the Memorial Amphitheater with this year's keynote speaker, Mr. Steven Trout, professor at the University of Alabama and author of "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire: War, Remembrance and an American Tragedy," published in 2020.

This year's Angel Fire Memorial Day activities include the "Run For The Wall Riders" on Friday, May 16th, at 3:30 p.m. The annual cross-country motorcycle ride to Washington, D.C. stops at the Memorial and the half-scale replica of the Vietnam Wall located across the road from the Chapel.

On the eve of Memorial Day, Sunday, May 25th, starting at 6:00 p.m., a remembrance vigil for Veterans who have passed will include a performance from the New Mexico National Guard's 44th Army Ensemble Band, a flag presentation by the Vietnam Vets Legacy Vets Motorcycle Club, a presentation by the Woman Veteran Warriors Color Guard, and special guest speaker Carla Dean of Gold Star Spouses of America Inc. The Memorial Day Ceremony begins at 9:00 a.m. with the annual flag march starting at the corner of US Highway 64 and Highway 434 and concludes at the Memorial. The ceremony will feature special guests and a musical performance by the 44th Army Band Ensemble starting at 10:45 a.m. It will also feature a rifle volley by Tsidi Toii Veterans Organization, the presentation of colors by the Women Veteran Warriors Honor Guard, and a static display of a UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter.

NMDVS manages the Memorial which now features the newly dedicated half-scale replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall. The 123-foot-long black granite wall is engraved with the 58,318 names of every American Service member known to have been killed in Vietnam, including those of 400 New Mexicans. The memorial also includes a museum, library, visitor center, memorabilia exhibit, artwork, and sculptures that provide a glimpse into the daily lives of our military history. The Memorial amphitheater, memorial walkway, and memorial gardens provide a space for reflection and remembrance. The Memorial overlooks the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery, which opened in July 2020. Approximately 45,000 individuals visit each year. The Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Vietnam Memorial Wall are at 34 Country Club Rd. Angel Fire, NM 87710. For more information, visit the NMDVS website at <https://www.nmdvs.org/nm-memorials/> and the David Westphall Veterans Foundation at <https://www.vietnamveteransmemorial.org/>