



## A Crazy Idea: The Three Servicemen South Memorial in Apalachicola, Florida

BY MARC LEEPSON

*Excerpt from Vietnam Veterans of America July/Aug 2013*

You could say that the idea for the statue dedicated to Vietnam veterans at the Veterans Memorial Plaza in 2008 in Apalachicola, Florida, was born in Vietnam on May 28, 1969. That was the day that a 199th Light Infantry Brigade Company ran into an NVA ambush in

Xuan Loc. A nineteen year-old PFC from Maryland named Jan Scruggs was severely wounded that day, as was his sergeant, Jimmy Mosconis, a self described “old home-town boy” from the Florida Panhandle port city of Apalachicola.

“He was one of my guys,” Mosconis said of Scruggs, who went on to become the guiding force behind the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. “I was an E-6; he was an E-3. I ran the mortar platoon. When we were ambushed that day, he almost bled to death and I was wounded, but not as badly. Six weeks later Jan was back in the field. He had a lot of metal in him.”

The bond that Sgt. Mosconis and PFC Scruggs formed on the battlefield in Vietnam was rekindled in 2000 when Scruggs, the head of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, paid a visit to his old sergeant in his hometown of Apalachicola. The talk got around to memorials. Scruggs mentioned that Frederick Hart, the sculptor who created the iconic “Three Servicemen” bronze statue that sits next to The Wall, had expressed the desire before he died in 1999 to have a few replicas in other places around the country.

“He wanted them out there so people could see it and not have to go to Washington,” Mosconis said.

**Scruggs then asked his old sergeant if he wanted the first one in Apalachicola. “It was a crazy idea,” Mosconis said. “It was wild. I said, ‘Yes.’”**

That began an eight-year odyssey to raise the money to build the Apalachicola Veterans Memorial Plaza, a few blocks north of the city’s downtown, with the statue as its centerpiece. Mosconis started a nonprofit group, Three Servicemen Statue South, and began the fundraising. “I talked to friends and veterans and got a good team on board,” Mosconis said. “It wasn’t easy, but nothing worth doing is easy.”

All the legal and engineering work was donated. Contributions, big and small began to come in. Most importantly, a local contractor, Gulf Asphalt, sent three men with five pieces of heavy equipment to do five weeks’ worth of site work for free. “If they hadn’t done that, it wouldn’t have been done, because we had run out of money,” Mosconis said. “To this day every time I see the owner I thank him.”

Private donations ran the gamut from small to large. “We had a lot of twenty-five-dollar contributions,” Mosconis—who donated a large amount of money himself—said. “We raised a

total of \$1.2 million.” With the money in hand, a statue was made from the original Three Servicemen molds in the foundry on Long Island in New York where the original bronze was cast. It was delivered to Florida by FedEx in a twenty-eight-foot trailer after Mosconis contacted the company’s founder and CEO, Fred Smith, a Vietnam veteran. “He agreed to ship it free,” Mosconis said of Smith. “That would have cost thousands.”

The statue is what is known in art circles as a “detail.” The statue is “not the total work,” Mosconis explained, as it does not include the lower parts of the three figures. “The Three Servicemen is a national art treasure,” Mosconis said, “that’s why our version had to be a detail. It doesn’t have legs.” The statue is embedded in a nine-ton piece of granite, which gives the appearance that the fighting men are treading water or are above their knees in mud. When he heard that the statue would be a detail with the men’s legs cut off, Mosconis said, “I thought it was going to look like a bust. But placed on the black granite on an angle gives the effect that the guys are raised out of rock.”

The statue and the city-owned Veterans Memorial Plaza, which is managed by the Florida Park Service, were dedicated on July 12, 2008. Mosconis served as emcee at the dedication ceremonies. Jan Scruggs gave the keynote speech. Lindy Hart, the sculptor’s widow, also spoke.

The plaque below the statue notes that it is dedicated ***“in memory of those persons from the South who valiantly served their country during the Vietnam War (1959-1975). Their commitment to their country, to freedom and to each other will long be honored by this memorial, which represents, for all time, the human face of those who served”***.

As for Jan Scruggs’s old sarge, the experience of leading the effort to build the extraordinary memorial was one of the most meaningful in his life. “It humbles me to think about it and talk about it,” Mosconis said. “It is an honor to have the only replica of this famous statue in our town. We would not have received it without the dedication of everyone here.”



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## NEWS

806 15th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-223-5460  
TELEX: 892485 INC WSH



### A VIETNAM VISION: THE MAKING OF THE MEMORIAL STATUE

By Kathleen Keenan

War is an inevitable element in the course of human history. It stems from a potent and powerful desire to confront and conquer the malevolent forces of the world. It is a fight that has propelled the weak to be strong, the timid to be brave, the unsure to go forward in confidence. In short, it is survival at its supreme level, the unique and awesome responsibility for maintaining life in its fullest form.

The figurative sculpture that stands before you, three fighting men caught in a moment of watchful awareness, addresses the endless confrontation of man and his own mortality. These veterans stand in solitary repose, viewing from afar the long, dark wall that recounts the 58,022 names of those who have died or who are missing in battle.

They stand together and yet are separate, each displaying a distinctly different reaction to what they behold. On one face there is an expression of grave incomprehension; on another, anguish and anxiety; on a third, almost angry defiance. Their faces mirror the turbulent passage from innocence to experience, from boyhood to manhood, and their

individual reactions are reflective of the men who have passed before them.

Frederick Hart, sculptor of the statue, explains the expression he sought.

"I wanted," he said, "to get the youth and to some degree the sense of psychology of what took place, the fact that there is a kind of shadow that passes over these young faces that will never go away. I wanted to capture them at that moment when that shadow passed."

Hart spent two and a half years creating the statue. When contemplating his initial design, Hart was confronted with the problem of how to work with the refined simplicity of the wall and successfully coordinate his own figurative work with it.

His solution to the conflict was to keep the figures small in order not to compete with the scale of the wall, and, secondly, to withdraw them from the wall itself so the men would not infringe upon it.

Hart also sought to unify both the sculpture and the wall by having them interact with each other, where the figures emote and relate to what the wall represents. Therefore, the viewer is offered a myriad of experiences: the somber and reflective event of the wall, the dramatic display of the sculpture, and the meaningful interaction between the two.

After solving the question of design, Hart was then confronted with the quest for accurate details on the uniforms and weaponry.

Acutely conscious of the need for specific and verifiable details, he relied heavily on historians and was advised by members of the Army Institute of Military History and the Marine Corps Historical Society. Along with employing the help of several experts, Hart borrowed military gear from Vietnam veterans. The use of authentic materials that have the look of being used in the war was essential for a realistic representation.

The men wear cracked boots, crumpled and tightly rolled fatigue pants. Observors will note the overstuffed jacket, a worn hat and a bandolier full of bullets draped across one man's chest.

The uniforms are a composite of all the services represented in field combat and each figure wears a variety of gear. The important aspect is the uniformity and resolve of the figures, where the clothes worn by the men form a tightly woven pattern depicting the war experience.

Selection of the models for the sculpture was done in an unconventional way.

For example, Hart used three models for the black figure and each was discovered differently. The first was found when Hart was walking the streets and surveying the passers-by and saw the face he had long sought.

The second model was selected during a search through a Marine Corps barracks and the third chosen in a hospital where Hart had gone to visit a sick friend.

Representation of the ethnic groups that fought in the Vietnam war was an important consideration for the sculpture. The head of the Hispanic was modeled after Guillermo Jose Smith-Perez de Leon, a resident of Maryland who is 24 years old. The black figure evolved over the study of three men: Corporal Terrance Green of the Marines, Rodney Sherrill and Scotty Dillingham, a 15-year-old Washingtonian. The caucasian was inspired by James Connell, also a corporal in the Marines.

Each model sat for two to three hours at a time for approximately two months. The common characteristic Hart sought among all his models was that of youth and innocence, the delicate balance between childhood and manhood that is essence of his expressionistic sculpture. Hart's use of young models was sadly close to the truth of the war experience. The average age of both the Vietnam combatant and those recorded as killed or missing on the wall was 19 years old.

Often, during his sessions of sculpting, Hart would listen to Verdi's "Nabucco," an opera which depicts the enslavement of the Jews by the King Nebuchadnezzar. The piece, a highly spirited men's chorus, starts off soft and gentle as the men sing of happy memories of being free, then swells into full force in a passionate bravado reminiscent of a martial march. The passage signified the essence of what Hart was trying to convey in his work - a wistful longing for the past and an urgent beckoning to fight for the future.

To construct the clay model, Hart built an armature that would carry the skeletal structure of the figures in the pose desired. From there he added the clay in bits and pieces to form the figures. He used 2,500 pounds of green clay to make the statue, which stands seven feet high. It will be placed on a 10-inch black granite base made of the same material used in the wall.

Now that the clay model of the sculpture is complete, a complex process of casting by the foundry, Joel M. Meisner Co. of Plainview, N.Y., begins.

A plaster cast will be made here, then shipped to New York to make a rubber mold with a wax positive. From the rubber mold, a ceramic mold will be formed.

The final casting will be in bronze. The bronzing is called a "lost wax" process because when the hot bronze is poured, the wax is lost and the statue's final form takes place.

The "Three Servicemen" statue will be different than most sculptures seen in Washington. It will be finished with a rarely used "patina" process which produces surfaces with a rich variety of subtle color variations. The flesh areas will be a rich carmel bronze and the uniforms a slightly olive drab patina. Throughout the statue will be accents of high polish on the hair, eyes, buttons and pieces of military equipment.

Yearly maintenance of the sculpture will insure the patina process endurance. Therefore, the sculpture will not turn typically green or aged looking in appearance, but will retain its freshness and authenticity throughout time.

And how has the sculpture changed the sculptor who created it?

Says Hart:

"When I first got involved with this project, I was excited because the war itself was such a difficult subject philosophically, emotionally, theologically, and politically, so that in every sense it was many faceted and intriguing - a fascinating subject for study.

"A big change that came over me in these past few years is that I began to appreciate who these veterans really were, what they had been through and what they are undergoing now. I became very compassionate about their experiences and sympathetic to their feelings.

"The statue I created is meant to elevate the veteran, to say something about their experience to them, to help them be acknowledged and understood."

The "Three Servicemen" statue has been called breathtaking, moving, and memorable. It is this and more. But most importantly, it is an eloquent and realistic response to both the Vietnam War and the veterans who so courageously fought in it. It strikes at the heart with its image of youthfulness and painful poignancy and yet it speaks



of hope wherein the men's strength and loyalty lie.

This great work of art, which displays even greater men, will grace the Constitution Gardens this fall when the sculpture will be placed at the memorial site. On Veteran's Day it will be turned over to the National Park Service to rest there in honor and in peace.

# # # #

ARANT

FBI

FREDERICK E. HART  
CHESLEY  
HUME, VIRGINIA 22630

10 December 1993

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4-1-12-1993  
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TEL (703) 635-0804  
FAX (703) 636-4286

Robert Horton  
Regional Director  
National Capital Region  
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20242

Dear Mr. Horton:

This is in response to your letter of December 1, 1993 regarding the ammunition on the Three Servicemen Statue at the Vietnam memorial. Please bear in mind this was a matter considered 10-12 years ago, but I will give you my best recollection of the rationale for this (machine gun ammo) positioning as best as I remember it:

- because of the small, isolated nature of the actual combat unit within Vietnam, much diversity and individuality developed in the use of different equipment and clothing in the field. One unit, at a given time in history would do things, wear things, or use things in a totally different way from another unit in a different place at a different time.
- The result for me in trying to dress and equip the figures in the statue was initially considerable confusion because of this great diversity in the combat soldier's habits. As often as not, a veteran interviewed one day would vehemently argue that a particular piece of equipment or clothing was never worn or used in a particular way. Whereas, this information may well have been derived from another veteran source who described it as the way it was always done.
- Eventually, I came to realize that the diversity of usage was so great that the choice I made should, of course, stay within the realm of probably use, but in the final judgment should be made on the basis of artistic judgment.
- In the particular case of the M-60 bandolier, I found as many who argued as vehemently for bullets pointing up as for those who argued that they should be pointing down. The argument began to sound a little bit like the famous Ann Landers battles over which way the toilet paper roll should be placed. Further, I was advised that wearing the bandolier at all was not done since the ammo should be transported only in its case. The exception would be in a combat or near-combat situation where it might be slung over one shoulder to be able to quick-feed it into the gun. The wearing of the bandolier criss-crossed "poncho-villa" style was not particularly desirable or practical. When it was done, it was done more for looks than use.
- It was this "picturesque" use, the sense of bravura, that I wanted to use in illuminating the spirit of the Vietnam infantryman. While I did my utmost to remain faithful to realistic details, my ultimate goal was to capture the spirit of the Vietnam experience.

Given the great diversity of experiences of the many who served in Vietnam, I am sure that I cannot satisfy everyone's view as to the fidelity of detail. I hope, however, that the overall authenticity of spirit, the expression of the figures both facially and in their relationship to each other, and the portrayal of

the youth of the participants will carry forward into future generations the larger truths of the Vietnam veteran's experience.

Mr. Robert Horton  
10 December 1993  
Page Two

As regards to speaking with the rangers and volunteers, I would be happy to do so. I am, at the present time however, recuperating from heart surgery. Perhaps in the spring, we can arrange something with Mr. Goldstein.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. E. Hart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frederick E. Hart

FEH:pmf

cc: Mr. Michael Entinghe  
Senator John Glenn's Office

# A LOOK AT THE WORK AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCULPTOR

## FREDERICK E. HART

Details from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: a soldier's boot and two war-weary faces. "The contrast between their youth and the weapons of war," says Hart, "underscores the poignancy of their sacrifice."



PHOTOGRAPHS ABOVE FROM MEMORIAL BY DON HAFELLE

### THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL

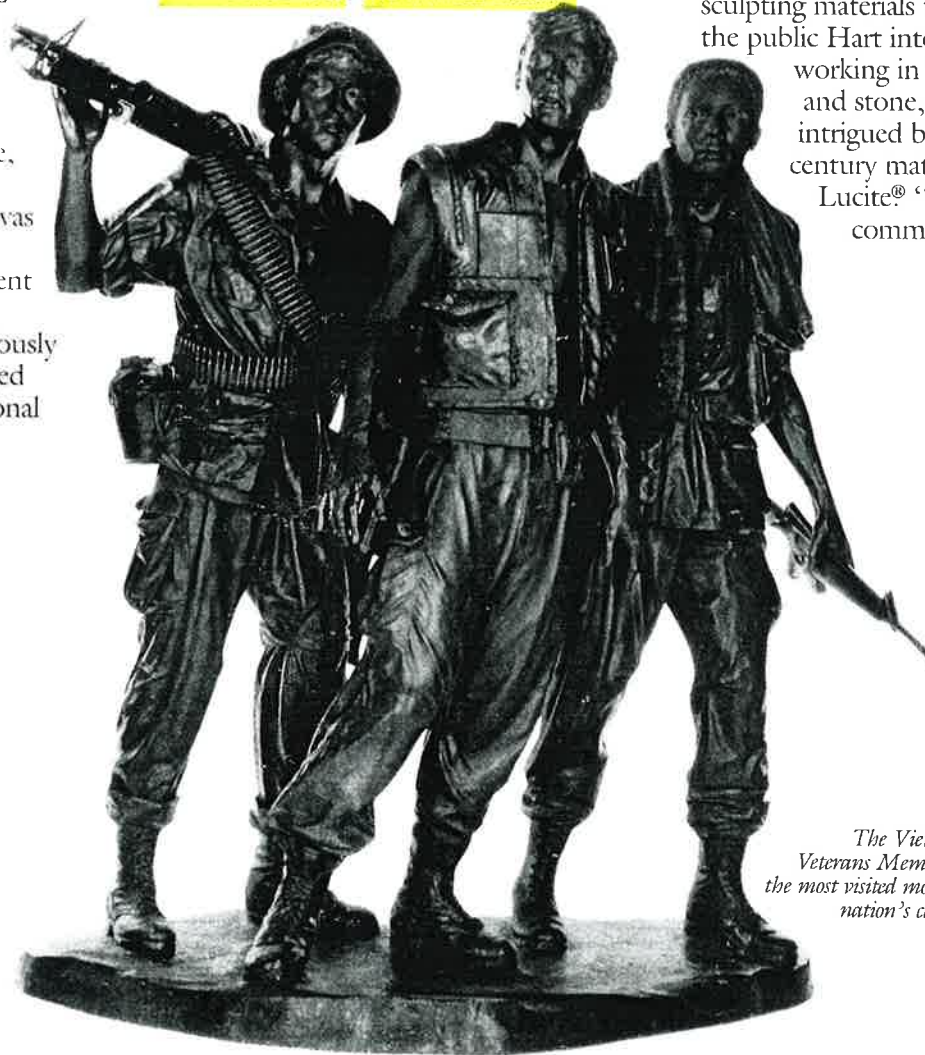
In 1982 the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial Fund decided to commission a representational sculpture for their monument, and Hart was again the choice. Cast in bronze, this historic sculpture—perhaps America's most famous sculpture—was dedicated in November, 1984, at a major ceremony attended by President Reagan and 100,000 veterans.

Creatively, it was a tremendously difficult assignment. Hart was charged with the task of conceiving a traditional

sculpture to interrelate with the pure and powerful minimalist design of the V-shaped wall. True to his creative tenets and with great artistic maturity, Hart chose to burrow into realistic detail for his larger truths. Just as the medieval carvers needed to see the angels to make the vision concrete, so Hart wanted to recall, from boonie hat to bootlaces, exactly what it was like for American foot soldiers to be tenuously alive in a particular place at a particular time.

Hart has said he would put the "folds of those fatigue jackets and pants up against the folds of any (carved) medieval angel you can find." For him, as for architect Mies van der Rohe, God is in the details.

Says Hart: "I see the wall as a kind of ocean, a sea of sacrifice that is overwhelming and nearly incomprehensible in its sweep of names. I place these figures upon the shore of that sea, gazing upon it, standing vigil before it, reflecting the human face of it, the human heart."



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is now the most visited monument in the nation's capital.

### THE PRIVATE VISION

From Hart's public commissions, with the creative heights he can scale, the monumental power he can generate: these works, for all their sublimeness and purpose, were nonetheless created at insistence of patrons. To glimpse the personal visions flickering inside Hart must turn to the private works of the public artist. Here we find an intimacy removed from the sweeping grandeur

*"The concerns of art must be rehumanized, must explore the domestic existence and capture the deep resonance of our commonality. In every sense, art again participate in life."*

FREDERICK E. HART

his public sculptures. It is this intimate delicate portrayal of the subtleties of human character, that Hart, left to his creative devices, wishes to explore.

From this deep, personal desire lay bare the inner recesses of the human psyche has come a re-evaluation of the sculpting materials themselves. For with the public Hart intends to keep on working in traditional bronze and stone, the private Hart intrigued by the call of twentieth century materials, among the Lucite® "In stone," Hart comments, "the figures