

Veterans For Peace: Memorials to the Fallen

Organized Locally. Recognized Nationally. Exposing the true costs of war since 1985.

Arlington West and Memorial Display - How To

'Arlington Memorial' displays are an ongoing project of VFP. Their purpose is to remember the fallen and wounded, to provide a place to grieve, to acknowledge the human cost of war, to encourage dialogue among people with varied points of view and to educate the public about the needs of those returning from war. Arlington displays are now regularly created by VFP chapters across the country. The following guidelines are intended to help chapters organize similar displays and memorials.

Permits and Permissions

We are very fortunate to have a progressive and tolerant city government in Santa Barbara, CA. We have always gotten permits when needed. The permits did cost money and contributions from visitors paid for the permits and material for the crosses. When asked by people if they could contribute, we say yes we have expenses. Remember that this is an expression of free speech. The crosses are also a religious symbol. Any static from anyone might be good publicity for your project. BE PATRIOTIC AND RESPECTFUL. We had a few comments and discussions about no Jewish, Muslim or other grave markers. It was too much for us to deal with and stayed with crosses only. There is no mention in the government casualty lists about religion.

The Names

For the first few Sundays we had visitors add the name of a fallen troop to a card and most attached the name to a cross themselves. They were free to add comments and whatever information about the soldier. The cards were cut by band saw to fit the horizontal part of the cross. They could be cut with a paper cutter. They are attached with two rubber bands that we leave on the crosses, but remove the names to protect them while handling the crosses. Many felt pens and a readable list help the process. Be sure to check off a name after it has been entered. Names can be gotten from the DOD web site, Fox News and Goggle, "Iraqi war dead".)

Post Cards

Taking pictures of displays and memorials is a great way to let people take a piece of the memorial home with them. You can turn the pictures into post cards that can be handed out to anyone lingering by the memorial. The best deal and quickest service we found at Kinkos, a business oriented copy shop. They supply 4-1/4" x 5-1/2" post cards by the thousands and will simply require the picture in a digital form. Approach people at the display and ask, "Have you got a post card yet?" "Or did you get a post card"?

Some people ask about the cost of the post card. We say, "Nothing, they already paid" pointing to the crosses. We do take donations to pay costs, but make it clear that we are NOT selling postcards. Most people take them especially if you walk on to others and don't wait for a donation or payment.

Our post cards say, "Every Sunday the Santa Barbara Town Hall Activists and Veterans for Peace set up 470 (and growing) crosses to commemorate our fallen troops in Iraq and bring attention to the terrible price we are paying for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. These veterans are appalled at the treatment of our wounded, especially the National Guard. They are protesting the slashing of veteran's benefits and closing of veteran medical facilities."

The Signs

The wording of the signs that explain what it is all about is important. We have a sign that if we included Iraqi war dead, that there wouldn't be enough room on the beach. To keep politics out of the event, we don't allow political campaign shirts and buttons. We try to carry on civilized conversations with everyone no matter what their point of view. Some just walk away. Remember to keep the tone respectful to those who have fallen, even if someone disagrees with the display or cause.

The Wall of Fallen

It is a 20-foot long list of the dead, something like the Vietnam Wall in shape and design. The names come from the government. It takes some ingenuity to support the panels of names. We support them on 8' sections of 1" or quality 3/4" plywood.

Candle Light

We lit the crosses one evening with a candle in a red plastic cups at every cross for an evening event where boats were lit with Christmas lights in the harbor behind our display. The bottoms were cut out of the red plastic beverage cups and votive candles in little aluminum cans were the candles. We bought candles at Smart and Final. A crew lighted them just after the sun went down with butane lighters. The best time to photograph them is when there is still enough light in the sky and on the crosses to expose well. What you see by eye is not what will photograph well. There is an exact time when the light balance is right. A tripod is absolutely necessary. What you see by eye is not what will photograph.

Some Thoughts

A mini Arlington West could be considered with a Wall of Fallen, flags at half-mast and a simpler grave marker display. Maybe pictures of wounded, head stones not stuck in ground, maybe names to be attached to a large plaque (mini Vietnam Wall) by visitors

VFP POLICY FOR ARLINGTON AND OTHER MEMORIALS TO THE FALLEN

Arlington Memorials are important and effective initiatives by local VFP chapters. These memorials are conducted to make the consequences of war real and to allow people to express their grief, respect and thoughts. As a result of the power of these memorials and our stance against war, VFP has come under attack from some time, mostly people who support the ongoing wars. However, VFP has also received a few complaints from Gold Star family members. These wishes should be taken into consideration when conducting the Arlington Memorials, thus the following policy has been adopted by the National Board of Directors. The Directors request that all VFP chapters and affiliated memorials follow these guidelines for the use of the names of the fallen and recognition of the deaths of other victims of war.

POLICY: The names of the fallen are released by the Department of Defense and they are published weekly throughout the country as part of the public record. Several VFP memorials and vigils list a number or all of the names of the fallen on name tags, or other means and post them on crosses, tombstones, boots or other items to represent those service members who have lost their lives in the occupation and war in Iraq. VFP conducts these events to remember and honor those who have given their lives in their country's service, and to offer friends, relatives and those who served in the military with the deceased an opportunity to pay their respects.

If an immediate family member (mother, father or spouse) personally requests that we not post a person's name publicly, VFP chapters and members should (1) honor these requests and the name of the person should be kept on file, so that visitors wishing to honor that person may do so in a manner of their own choosing and (2) get this request in writing and contact the national office so that the information is given to all memorials affiliated with VFP.

The Arlington memorial and other memorials are primarily in honor of fallen U.S. service members. However, in accordance with the mission of VFP, to increase the public awareness of the cost of war and to seek justice for veterans and victims of war, it is equally important to remember the civilian lives lost. When possible, shoes, photographs or other appropriate images or symbols should accompany the memorials or vigils in remembrance of the Iraqi and other civilian deaths.

NAMES: The National Office has a list of names compiled that we know have been requested by Gold Star Family members to no longer post. If you know of other names, please secure the request in writing and send it to the National Office so that we may disseminate it the information. If you are planning a Memorial Event, please contact the National Office so we can give you the list of those names. For privacy reasons, we do not want to post them online.