

As a Vietnamese-American citizen, I have always felt a sense of connection to the Vietnam War, despite being born decades after its conclusion. My parents were immigrants to the United States during the war era, and I grew up hearing stories of their experiences and the impact that the conflict had on their lives. But it wasn't until I visited the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and Vietnam Era Museum that I truly began to understand the complexity and gravity of the war and its lasting impact on both American and Vietnamese society.

One of the most impactful aspects of the memorial was the "In Memory" program which honors the veterans who died after the war as a result of their services, such as from Agent Orange exposure or PTSD-related suicides. As an EMT volunteer, I have seen firsthand the impact that loss can have on families, and I believe that this is essential for encouraging healing because it provides families and friends a sense of closure through heartfelt tributes.

Another monument that had a strong impact on me was "The Wall," which lists the names of all 1,563 New Jerseyans who died in the Vietnam War. Seeing the sheer number of names was overwhelming, and it brought home the scale of the tragedy that had occurred. I was struck by the fact that many of these soldiers were not much older than my parents were at the time of the war, and it was a reminder of the sacrifices made by both American and Vietnamese families during this difficult period.

Perhaps the most impactful monument for me was the Vietnamese American Memorial, which honors the sacrifices of those Vietnamese who fought alongside American forces. As a child of Vietnamese immigrants, this resonated with me deeply. It reminded me of the sacrifices made by my own family during the war and the ways in which the conflict had shaped their lives and mine. The memorial also highlighted the fact that the Vietnam War was not just a conflict between nations, but a tragedy that affected individual families and communities on both sides. It

was a reminder that the war had caused immense pain and suffering on both sides and that the only way to move forward was through understanding.

Visiting the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and Vietnam Era Museum was a powerful experience that helped me to better understand the impact of the war on both communities. The monuments and exhibits provided a space for reflection, while also encouraging visitors to grapple with the complexities of the conflict and its aftermath. Given my ethnic background, the visit was particularly impactful for me. It allowed me to connect with my heritage in a meaningful way, while also gaining a deeper understanding of the sacrifices made by both American and Vietnamese families during the war. It was a reminder that the legacy of the war continues to be felt today and that it is only through education and remembrance that we can move forward toward a more peaceful future.

The New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and Vietnam Era Museum is an important space for remembrance, not just for those who lost their lives during the war, but for all those who have been affected by its legacy. The monuments and exhibits serve as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by both American and Vietnamese families, and the need for continued efforts toward reconciliation. Such sacrifices have expanded our freedoms as U.S. citizens, but one must never forget: freedom is not free, but a triumphant right to preserve our history and protect our democracy.