

PROPOSED NEW VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL
JUNE 5TH 2009

To all United States Veterans, active duty service men and women, and those who are associated with them:

On June 9, the Wichita City Commission intends to vote on a proposal to place a memorial in Veteran's Memorial Park to honor, among others, South Vietnamese soldiers who fought against the North Vietnamese and other communists in the Vietnam war while wearing the uniform of South Vietnam, serving under the flag of South Vietnam and owing allegiance to the government of South Vietnam. While we respect the military service of these men to their own country, the issue is not the quality of these soldiers nor their service to their own county. The issue is whether the Veteran Park is properly reserved for memorials only to those who served the United States in the American armed forces, in an American uniform and under oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. We believe that it is.

We ask that you join us and make your voice heard. There are three things you can do. First, on Friday, June 5, 2009 and Monday, June 8, 2009 **call and email** the Mayor and Council members of the Wichita City Commission to let them know where you stand. They want to hear specific reasons for your objections; these are personal to you. Material is provided below to help you learn about the issues. The phone numbers to call are:

Wichita City Commission – Office of the Mayor phone number 316-268-4331
Wichita City Commission – phone number 316-268-4331 ask for your own representative if you are a resident of Wichita and speak with or leave a message. If you are not a resident of Wichita, this is still the regional Veteran's Park and you are entitled to have an opinion, leave a message for the mayor, Sue Schlapp or any of the other commissioners.

Email Call the city council office (phone number 316-268-4331) to find out what district you are in then email your representative and the mayor, or email the mayor.

Mayor Carl Brewer: cbrewer@wichita.gov
District One Representative Lavonta Williams: lwilliams@wichita.gov
District Two Representative Sue Schlapp: sschlapp@wichita.gov
District Three Representative Jim Skelton (vice mayor) jskelton@wichita.org
District Four Representative Paul Gray: pgray@wichita.org
District Five Representative Jeff Longwell: jlongwell@wichita.org
District Six Representative Janet Miller: jmiller@wichita.org

Second, **Attend the Wichita City Commission meeting on June 9, 2009 at 9:00 am.** The City Building is located at 455 N. Main; the meeting is on the first floor. Park in the parking garage and the City will validate your parking lot ticket. Although the agenda was not yet published, we were able to discover from the city clerk that the proposal for

the memorial is the first item on the agenda as “old business.” Those in attendance will be able to speak, if they wish, or just stand up and be counted. The numbers of attendees is very, very important to show the Commissioners that we care about this issue. Again, they want to hear the reasons for our objections. Please read the material below for information.

(The Park Board took attendance into consideration two years ago when they determine whether they would recommend to the City Commission a memorial that includes foreign nationals fighting in the uniform of a foreign country and under oath to support a foreign government. Although a few veterans spoke at that meeting two years ago, not enough veterans appeared. Those who spoke in favor of the proposed memorial were better organized and showed up at the meetings in greater numbers.)

Third, **call and email this to your family and friends** who care about veterans, ask them to call, email and attend.

We have a strong voice, but we will be heard only if we choose to raise our voices in unison. We are not asking for funds or special consideration. We are asking that respect be shown to our dead soldiers and our traditions as military veterans and active duty American service men and women.

See www.alr136.org for a statement of the position American Legion Post 136 takes on this issue.

The following are some of the various issues that have been raised by veterans for you to consider:

1. There is a Charter or Dedication for Veterans Park, but the park board which has proposed this memorial, cannot find it. We want to see the original charter or dedication of Veteran’s Park.
2. Without the Charter or Dedication, we may presume the intent of those who established Veteran’s Memorial Park by observing what is there now. The memorials currently in Veteran’s Park, without exception, honor only American service men and women and American veterans. While there are statistics about various wars including numbers of participants and war casualties on all sides, there is no language on any of the plaques that memorializes or commemorates the service of any foreign soldier.
3. The statement has been made that this memorial is not intended to honor the South Vietnamese soldiers. This statement is incorrect. The proposed memorial contains these words in the first line on the plaque “We, the Vietnamese American Community of Wichita, Kansas dedicate this plaque in memory and honor of American, Vietnamese and Allied soldiers who fought to resist the North Vietnamese aggression....”

4. The most prominent and central feature in the proposed memorial is a Vietnamese ceremonial urn in which the Vietnamese community has stated that it intends to burn incense during ceremonies. The burning of incense is part of their religious ceremonies. There are no other religious relics or features in Veterans Park. There is no doubt that the intention of burning of incense in the urn is to honor the religious beliefs of the majority of the South Vietnamese soldiers and their families.

5. This decision directly concerns us, as veterans, American Legion Members, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Purple Heart Veterans, Disabled American Veterans and active duty service men and women who will become veterans. As Darkhorse, (Terry Houch) pointed out to Mayor Brewer at the Thursday meeting with the Mayor and City Commissioner, Sue Schlapp, not a single federally-sanctioned veteran's organization was consulted or even notified regarding the proposed monument. Neither the City nor the Vietnamese community has asked the official representatives nor the rank and file of veterans or active duty service men and women for their input. It is of deep concern to us that the veterans and those who represent them are apparently invisible to those who are making decisions that affect us.

6. One of the reasons presented to us at the meeting with the Mayor and Sue Schlapp for allowing the memorial to South Vietnamese soldiers in Veterans Park was to foster an inclusive community and to give the Vietnamese people a presence and stake in that community. We believe that the right to be memorialized in the Veteran's Memorial Park is earned by honorable service in the United States Military, and by nothing else. The diminishment of the respect and honor shown for the service of our American soldiers and sailors is not a bone to throw to diversity. The American military is one of the most diverse and inclusive organizations in the world and one in which men and women of all races, faiths, colors, and national origins serve and die together as equals with equal honor and equal responsibilities.

7. We discovered, only accidentally, that the proposal was to be heard next Tuesday, on June 9. When we called the City Clerk's office on Friday, May __, we were told that no information would be available until the agenda for the June 9th meeting was published. We were told that the proposal was suppose to be officially placed on the City Commission agenda on Thursday, June 04, 2009 for the meeting on Tuesday, June 9, 2009. That agenda was not yet out on June 4, 2009 at 4:00 PM. As you can see, we have been given a very, very small window of time to gather and distribute information. We cannot let this lack of advance notice silence our voices.

8. Mayor Brewer conceded that approval of this memorial to the South Vietnamese soldiers will set a precedent that might open the door to memorials to soldiers of other foreign governments. This precedent would show disdain for the

idea that American Service men and women, because of their faithful service to America, have a right to special place of honor in American hearts and minds.

9. This precedent would mean that Iraqi, Afghani, Pakistani, and soldiers of other nations where the U.S. servicemen and women have fought and lost their lives, could also claim the right to be “honored” and “memorialize” in our Veteran’s Park, although when they were soldiers they were not serving in the America military, were not under allegiance to the American flag, and, were not risking their lives to defend our Constitution and our American way of life.

10. This precedent would mean that the French, British, Canadians, Spanish, various South American countries, as well as Japanese, and many others, who have been our allies in military actions in foreign lands, could also claim the right to be memorialized in the same way as is proposed here for the memorial to the South Vietnamese soldiers.

11. Any memorial to the service of a foreign national’s service to a foreign country would be dismissive and disrespectful of the loyal service and sacrifice of our own veterans. Wichita can do better by its service men and women than to have the city fathers create a “hodge podge” of memorials to soldiers and sailors of all nations.

12. It has been suggested that because a Vietnamese flag is already flying in Veterans Memorial Park, that “the cat is out of the bag.” The Vietnamese flag flying above the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the Park marks the country where American soldiers and sailors fought and died in combat and is not a memorial to the soldiers of that country.

13. There is already a prominent memorial to the Vietnam veterans in Veterans Park. No memorial to the WWII veterans yet stands in the park, nor one to the Desert Storm or Iraqi Freedom veterans. It would be reasonable to assume that America will continue as a strong military power and that we will be required to engage in future wars. While Veteran’s Park is not yet crowded, it is not a large park and the space is finite. We want to be sure that we have space to erect memorials to honor the service of all American Veterans to our country.

14. Over-emphasizing the service of the veterans of one era to the exclusion of the veterans of other eras is not in keeping with the sense of equity and equal recognition that permeates the American armed forces and the veteran’s organizations. The American Vietnam veterans, their sacrifice and their service are well recognized and honored by our own citizens who do not identify themselves by a distinct ethnic group. Another memorial to American troops in a Vietnamese memorial to South Vietnamese soldiers does not add honor to the memory of the American troops. We are concerned that suggesting that this is a memorial to American Vietnam vets was a necessary expediency to raise a memorial to the South Vietnamese soldiers.

15. The Director of Parks, Mr. Kupper, stated that the Korean War Memorial was like the proposed Vietnamese memorial in that it memorializes the South Korean soldiers. He was incorrect, either inadvertently or intentionally, the Korean Memorial states the war dead and wounded on all sides of the conflict, it does not memorialize the South Korean soldiers, but states “To imprint deeply in history, we, the Kansas Korean Americans, dedicate this bronze panel honoring the sacrificial spirit of the American heroes who fought the Korean war to preserve freedom and world peace.”

16. We believe that public recognition of the service to our country and the sacrifice of the men and women of the American military is the sole purpose of Veterans Park. The very foundation of that service and sacrifice is the oath each serviceman and woman takes to defend the Constitution of the United States with his or her life. There is no duration defined in that Oath. Once taken, it is a lifetime obligation. No foreign soldier pledges to uphold our Constitution, our American values and way of life. Foreign soldiers who were fighting for their own country, however admirably, are not entitled to a monument in our American Veteran’s Park.

We support the proposition that the Veterans Memorial Park is sacred ground dedicated to the memory of American service men and women who served our county in the American uniform and who each took the enlistment oath “to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic;” and to ...” bear true faith and allegiance to the same.” These American service men and women faithfully served the United States of America and her interests and, in some cases, offered up their lives to fulfill this oath. Their dedication to their oath sets the American soldier, sailor, marine, and airman above all other foreign national combatants, and entitles their service to be recognized, honored and memorialized, separate and independent from the service of foreign nationals who fought while wearing the uniform of a foreign country.

Prepared from comments of many contributor by Dennis Scuffham and Linda Kirby.