

American Warrior

Autumn's Wall: My November journey to The Wall

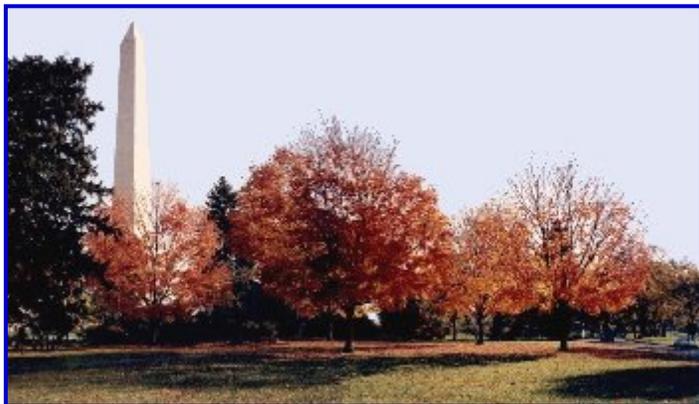


The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, [Constitution Gardens](#), Washington, D.C.

I was in Baltimore, Maryland to attend a seminar. Realizing that *the* memorial is only a short drive from Baltimore, I arranged my flight to arrive a day early to allow a whirlwind tour of Washington's memorials. Having visited [The Moving Wall](#) at Riverside's National Cemetery, I wanted to see the actual Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and two special names of killed-in-action buddies I served with, plus family names and cousins.

My plane landed in Baltimore at 0630 hours, and I quickly picked up my rental car for the hour's drive to Washington. It's 40 degrees, and the weather is predicting rain tonight and snow tomorrow. My map was your basic big-picture that showed where the planet earth is and nothing smaller than Texas. I scan down to the bottom and read, "*Turn the map over dummy.*"

Driving around downtown, near the colossal Capitol building, I ask for directions. "What'd I look like'ta ya--information booth?" An older guy standing nearby makes eye contact and points to the west. Without a word exchanged, I know that he too was *there*.



I drive on past the 550 foot tall Washington Monument and find a place to park along the Potomac River. Having spotted the Lincoln Memorial's familiar profile, I realize The Wall is nearby. I will return if time permits for the other Monuments. An enthusiastic soccer game is in progress in the Potomac's grassy park, and I feel guilty scurrying across the field while the play is at the other end--the goalie yells an expletive greeting.



The Wall draws me like a magnet. I enter the memorial park area from the south, walking past the Korean War Memorial, and see the milling crowd of old fossils. Realizing they're only a decade older than I . . . and upgrade their status to *distinguished*

gentlemen

and friends.

Skateboarders are surfing off the Lincoln Memorial's massive marble stairs, clacking down toward the reflecting pond. Offended at first, then I actually see the appropriateness of youngsters playing in the park that echoes past battlefields of our nation. I watch the ducks paddling near the shore of the infamous reflecting pond. An old gentleman is kneeling with hand extended toward them. He is alone, and crying softly. The Wall again tugs at me, as if impatient to share its power.



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