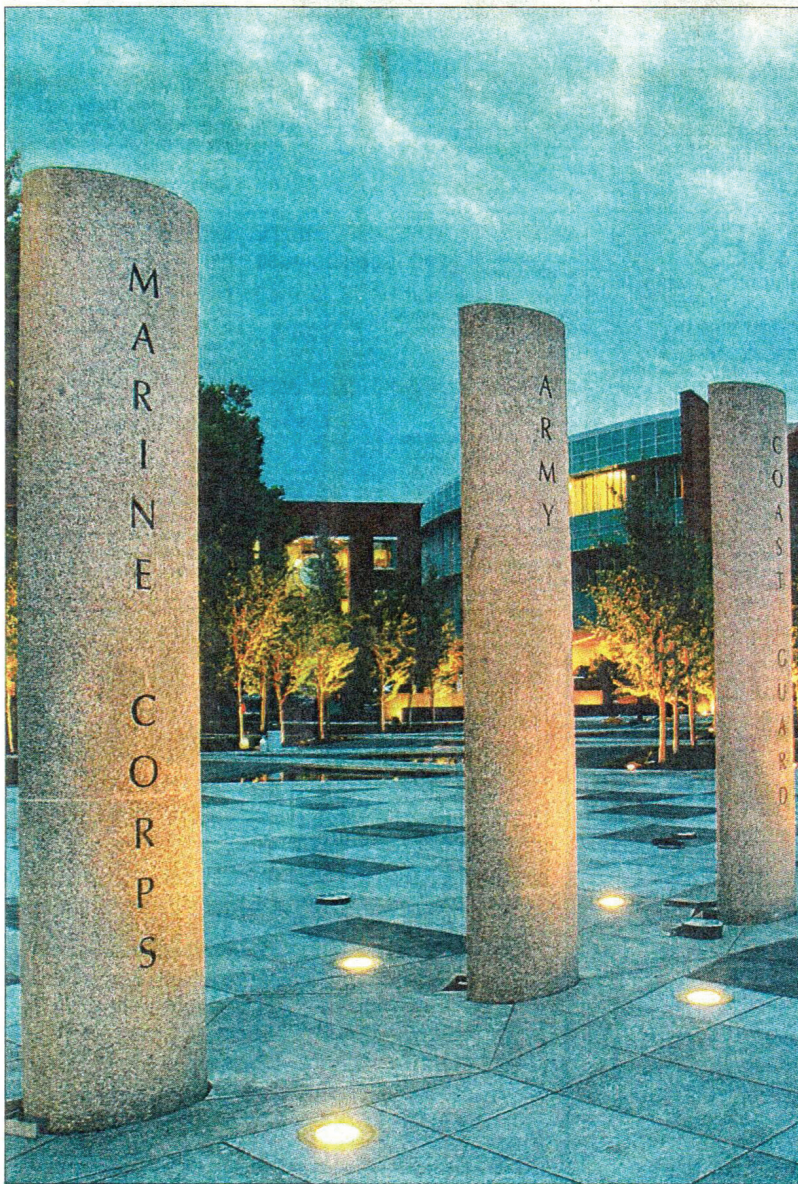




Contra Costa Times, May 31, 2004 "Honoring All Who Served," by Robert Taylor, A1, A6.

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED



Memorial sites offer a public counterweight to wars' ravages

By Robert Taylor
TIMES STAFF WRITER

When Veterans Memorial Plaza is dedicated next to Walnut Creek's City Hall at noon today, it will be another example of a monument designed not for visitors to stand and stare at, but to enter a space to contemplate its meaning, to reconcile conflicts, perhaps to heal emotional wounds.

On this Memorial Day and in the days to come, visitors are asked to define the memorial by becoming a part of it.

"I don't know if a general on a horse on a pedestal needs any definition," explains the plaza's designer, artist Cliff Garten, recalling the traditional monuments of this nation's first century.

Since the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was completed in 1983 on the Mall in Washington, D.C., more and more American monuments have been planned as tribute environments.

The World War II Memorial, dedicated Saturday, is the latest big, open project on the Mall. For visitors, the discovery, the exploration, even the empty space can intensify the impact.

But these tributes have fo-

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DEDICATION

■ **VETERANS MEMORIAL PLAZA:** Officials will dedicate the plaza in ceremonies beginning at noon today at Civic Drive and North Broadway, Walnut Creek. The program includes remarks by World War II Army veteran Bob Tharratt, a presentation to Army Cpl. Carl Covington II, who received the Purple Heart in Iraq, performances by the Walnut Creek Concert Band and an Armed Forces medley by the Song Sirs vocal group. Admission is free.

THE NEW VETERANS MEMORIAL PLAZA stands at Civic Drive and North Broadway by downtown Walnut Creek. Its dedication today is expected to draw hundreds of vets and families for Memorial Day. DEAN COPPOLA/TIMES

Memorial

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cused on individuals, such as the Vietnam memorial's 58,245 war dead, a new total that will be made official in another ceremony today. That's an element the Walnut Creek plaza avoids, broadening its scope beyond war casualties or even war veterans.

"Dedicated to the veterans of the Armed Forces of America, their families, and all who gave of their lives that we may live free," reads the inscription on the wall facing the plaza's reflecting pool. The pool and walkways are embraced by a thick grove of white birch trees, along with granite pillars representing the five branches of the armed services.

Service to the nation, in war and peace, is the over-reaching theme of this new civic plaza. It avoids the potential controversy of contemporary public art and displays of military might.

Today's ceremonies may need that focus to push away, for an hour or two, the current debate over the conduct of some American troops and the campaign to bring peace to Iraq. Last week, a Field Poll reported that only 31 percent of Californians believe the war has been worth the lives lost and other costs.

The veterans taking part in today's events, some of whom fought in World War II, might see the Iraq war in a different light. As of Sunday, more than 800 American troops had lost their lives in the current conflict, in what war memorials depict as "the last full measure of devotion."

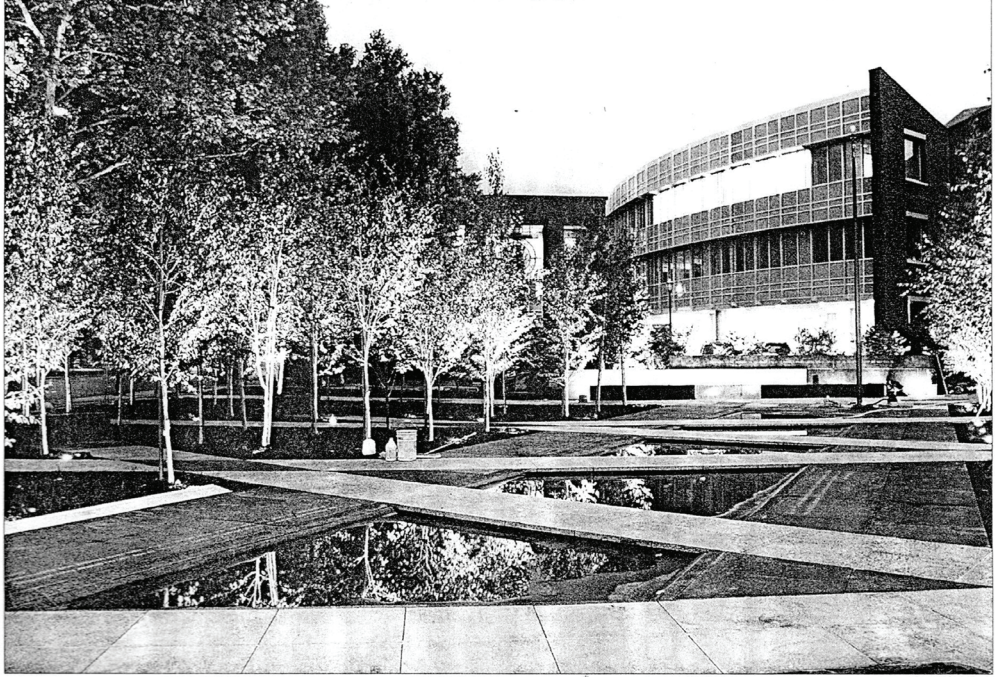
After today's event in downtown Walnut Creek, which will include the Honor Guard from Travis Air Force Base and a 21-gun salute, the memorial plaza is expected to become a quieter focal point and a comforting environment at the busy intersection of Civic Drive and North Broadway.

The effect could parallel the more pointed symbolism of the healing circle and the statue titled "To the Healing Place" at the future All Wars Memorial in Danville's Oak Hill Park.

But the design and community focus aren't the first priority of Chris Satterthwaite of Walnut Creek, a retired Navy captain and World War II fighter pilot taking part in today's event.

"Finally, this has come to fruition — I think it's high time," Satterthwaite, 82, said. "Principally it's a memorial to remind people of the veterans and what they've done. I don't think the teenagers know a thing about the sacrifice that their fathers and mothers and ancestors made."

In the Bay Area, the first big wave of monuments followed World War I, that "war to end all wars" in which more than 100,000 Americans died. One noble example is the Soldiers Memorial dedicated in 1927 and now located at Contra Costa Boulevard and Boyd Road in Pleasant Hill.



WALNUT CREEK'S new memorial plaza includes 95 white birch trees lighted from below, reflecting pools and pillars bearing insignias of the U.S. military's five service branches. DEAN COPPOLATIMES



ARTIST CLIFF GARTEN pauses Wednesday between lighting tasks at Walnut Creek's Veterans Memorial Plaza, which he designed.

This stylized, modernistic tower, featuring bas-relief panels depicting soldiers and grave markers, has been carefully restored, and is surrounded by manicured planting beds. Yet it remains hidden in plain sight in the corner of a hotel parking lot.

While it was originally designed specifically to honor the men and women of World War I, it has taken on a broader mandate with new plaques and rededications. The latest, in 1998, honors "the sacrifices of all those men and women who have served, and continue to serve, in the armed forces of this great nation."

Atop a windswept hill in Newell Community Park south of Clayton Road, the Concord Vietnam Memorial provides a

quiet environment to ponder the meaning of other lives lost. Reached by a long, winding gravel path, the oval lawn and flagpoles are surrounded by sturdy trees. It is marked by a modest plaque with 32 names and a heartfelt message, arranged not quite in verse:

"Forgotten by some, this may be ... but for each one lost we plant a tree ... so all who pass this land may see ... these mighty oaks stand because this land is free."

In a way, the new Walnut Creek plaza seeks to merge the effect of these two notable memorials: the central access of the Soldiers Monument (sur-

rounded by nearly as much traffic) and the thoughtful environment of the Concord Vietnam Memorial.

"You have to look at the memorial as a sculptural landscape," says designer Garten. It's really more about the spaces between the elements. I'm trying to set up a situation where people can come together in public, either alone or together, and contemplate the meaning of our armed forces, the meaning of service. People can reflect on their own experiences, their own loss, their own commitment."

Garten said memorials in America have become more inclusive, less exclusive and, in de-

sign, more horizontal than vertical. A resurgence in memorials suggests the American people are looking for a way to define themselves.

"I think the memorial is an interesting artifact, a messenger for so many things that are happening in our culture," Garten said. "How do we regard the armed forces now? The purpose is to honor those who sacrificed, not to perpetuate war."

Mitchell Schwarzer, chairman of the Visual Studies Department at California College of the Arts in Oakland, said American memorials have changed from depicting individuals to honoring military regiments to listing the names of those who served and died.

"It is part of the overall swing toward individualism in the 20th century," he said.

Schwarzer, who has written extensively about landmarks and memorials, said the unpopularity of wars since Vietnam hasn't halted the design and construction of veterans' memorials. He pointed out that there was also opposition to American entry into World War II, and a "vehement anti-war movement" at the time of World War I.

The individual Americans lost in the Vietnam War became the focus of the memorial in Washington designed by Maya Lin. "That draws people together, the feeling of loss, not the larger issues of what happened and why it happened," Schwarzer said. "We can agree on the need to mourn our deaths, and little else."

Some of the most successful memorials are on the sites of tragic events and provide a larger historical picture, Schwarzer said. Among them are Holocaust memorials in Eastern Europe, the Wounded Knee massacre in

South Dakota, and monuments to the civil rights struggles in Memphis, Tenn., and Birmingham, Ala.

Will there be memorials to the casualties in the war in Iraq?

"Veterans are like policemen: You're in a brotherhood," Schwarzer said. "As long as there are wars and soldiers fighting and dying, and soldiers surviving to become veterans, they will want to memorialize their fallen brothers."

The war memorial to be built in Danville was first envisioned by three Vietnam War veterans. But they decided to expand its scope to honor families and compassionate friends at home and others who serve the country.

The All Wars Memorial is expected to be dedicated Veterans Day, Nov. 11, honoring "all who served, supported and sacrificed for freedom." The theme is reconciliation and healing.

The memorial, true to its name, will indeed cover all wars in which Americans have taken part — some of them not yet fought. One of five bronze "Liberty Panels" on the path to the healing circle will include United States military action from the Vietnam War onward, through the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

A member of the All Wars Memorial Foundation, Larry Sauers, said planners will make note of regional wars and wars on terrorism, and the sacrifices made counteracting "people who are trying to take away our freedom." Asked if they are leaving room for future wars, he responded, "We are, we are."

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AN EMBLEM representing the United States Navy graces a memorial pillar at the Walnut Creek veterans memorial. The plaza's dedication today is expected to draw hundreds.

DEAN COPPOLA/TIMES



INSCRIPTIONS

Six quotations are inscribed in the granite paving stones around the reflecting pool of Veterans Memorial Plaza in Walnut Creek. The sources are four American presidents, a 19th-century anti-slavery activist and a Marine who served in the Vietnam War:

“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.”

— George Washington, 1789

“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

— Wendell Phillips, 1852

“Let us ever remember our interest is in concord not conflict, and that our real eminence as a nation lies in the victories of peace, not those of war.”

— William McKinley, 1901

“The history of free men is never really written by chance but by choice — their choice.”

— Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1956

“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty.”

— John F. Kennedy, 1961

“A few lines to let you know I still exist in the world. But, believe me, I am in a different world ... I didn't know the Lord could change your life in 10 minutes. But He can. If you ever held somebody that was dying you would understand ... ”

— Butch Cecil, 1967