

## **PRESIDENT OBAMA JOINS THOUSANDS TO DEDICATE THE AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE MEMORIAL**



*Photo by Bryan Steingard/AVDLM*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (Oct. 8, 2014)** -- President Barack Obama led an assembly of more than 3,000 disabled veterans, veterans, guests and dignitaries on October 5 for the dedication of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C., the first such tribute in the nation to specifically honor veterans who were injured in military conflicts throughout the nation's history.

Reflecting the significance of this Memorial to the nation's four million living disabled veterans as well as their caretakers and the hundreds of thousands of deceased disabled veterans, the Memorial dedication also drew national leaders who spoke during the ceremony, including Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, and actor and musician Gary Sinise, national spokesman for the Memorial.

President Obama acknowledged that with the Memorial, "Today, we take another step forward. With this memorial we commemorate, for the first time, the two battles our disabled veterans have fought -- the battle over there, and the battle here at home -- your battle to recover, which at times can be even harder, and certainly as longer.

"You walk these quiet grounds -- pause by the pictures of these men and women, you look into their eyes, read their words -- and we're somehow able to join them on a journey that speaks to the endurance of the American spirit. And to you, our veterans and wounded warriors, we thank you for sharing your journey with us."

A musical prelude by the United States Army Band "Pershing's Own," conducted by First Lieutenant Joel DuBois, and a video about the making of the Memorial, "Vision to Reality," officially opened the event. The Honorable Ray LaHood, former Secretary of Transportation, who welcomed the assembled crowd and served as master of ceremonies, was then followed by an Invocation given by Chaplain Michael McCoy, Acting Director of the National VA Chaplain Center.

Mr. Roberto Barrera, a director of the Disabled Veterans Life Memorial Foundation (DVLMF), which raised the private funds as it guided the Memorial from conception 16 years ago to

completion, led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance. The United States Army Band "Pershing's Own" followed with the national anthem.

Mr. Sinise, a favorite of the veterans community due to his deep commitment to raising funds on their behalf, spoke of the need to remember the sacrifices of wounded veterans. "Today, and from this day forward, with the opening of this national monument, we honor millions of our heroes living with the wounds of war, with a place of healing, remembrance, and gratitude for all they have given, and by so doing, we help to ensure that our nation will endure for generations to come. For if we do not remember our defenders, our heroes, how can we expect future generations to step up to serve?"

Also speaking was Arthur H. Wilson, DVLMF Co-Founder and President, and retired National Adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans, who served in Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan:

"We honor our fallen. We honor every branch and the battles and the bold. But until this day, this very day, we have not remembered those who lived and whose lives were forever changed by the sacrifices they made in uniform.

"And yet, without their stories and the experiences of their loved ones, we as a people cannot know the true cost of war. Without acknowledging their sacrifices, we forget the courage that ensures our freedom and the promises we make with those who defend our land.

"The experiences etched on these walls remind us that, for those who serve and their families, wars often continue long after the final bullet is fired. The most difficult fight often begins after an injury is sustained."

DVLMF Director and Secretary Dennis Joyner, awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his service in Vietnam, added his deeply personal experience as a disabled soldier. "We are not unique in our story," he said. "We are just an example of the thousands of lives affected by life-long disabilities that are the terrifying consequences of war.

"Although I've been blessed with many achievements in life, the achievement I am most proud of is this Memorial. A Memorial that gives me, and the many thousands of other disabled veterans like me, a sense of contentment knowing that what we gave, what our families gave, and what we will continue to give, will be forever remembered here in our nation's capital."

The Memorial was completed 14 years after President Bill Clinton signed the federal legislation approved by Congress into law in October 2000. Since then more than 200,000 courageous men and women have returned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with life-long disabilities.

"These walls and sculptures stand as symbols that our disabled veterans have not been forgotten and serve as reminders that the cost of war does not end when the guns are silenced. Disabled veterans continue to battle every day with their physical and mental disabilities - to reintegrate into society - to adjust to new family life and professional realities. Our respect and recognition of their struggles are long overdue," said Foundation co-founder and chairman Lois Pope, who was instrumental in launching the Memorial campaign with Wilson and the late Jesse Brown, former U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The dedication ceremony concluded with vocalist Vicki Golding singing "God Bless America" and the United States Army Band "Pershing's Own" playing "Order of the Purple Heart March."

Situated on a 2.4-acre triangular site adjacent to the U.S. Botanic Garden and south of the U.S. Capitol, the Memorial will now be operated by the U.S. Park Service. Designed by landscape architect Michael Vergason, the Memorial conveys a combination of strength and vulnerability, loss and renewal. Its focal point is a star-shaped fountain with a single ceremonial flame, which flows into a triangular-shaped reflecting pool. A grove of trees beside the pool signifies hope. Three walls of laminated glass panels with embedded text and photographs and four bronze sculptures by noted sculptor Larry Kirkland, display the universal story of disabled veterans' pride of service, trauma of injury, challenge of healing and renewal of purpose.

Major contributors to the Memorial included Disabled American Veterans (DAV); Lois Pope & The Lois Pope Life Foundation; H. Ross Perot, Sr. and the Perot Foundation; Leaders In Furthering

Education, Inc. (LIFE); Leo Albert and The Leo & Anne Albert Charitable Trust; AT&T Foundation; Kirkland & Ellis, LLP (pro bono); Fifth Third Foundation; Ford Motor Company Fund; State of Maryland; Downey McGrath Group (pro bono); Gary Sinise Charitable Foundation; Norman & Irma Braman; Peter C. Peterson; TriWest Healthcare Alliance; and more than one million additional donors.

For photos of the dedication and to learn more about the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, visit [www.avdlm.org](http://www.avdlm.org).

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**Editor's Note: Images from the Memorial Dedication Ceremony can be downloaded at:**

**<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vw6pkaodvs9mk5t/AAA29UdD5EPB47DasMDjXdcfa?dl=0>**

**Photo credit to: American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial**