

This Day in History... July 27, 1995

Opening of Korean War Veterans Memorial

The Korean War Veterans Memorial was officially dedicated on July 27, 1995, the 42nd anniversary of the armistice that ended the Korean War.

Plans for the memorial wall date back to the 1980s. Congress officially approved it on April 20, 1986, with the project managed by the Korean War Veterans Memorial Advisory Board and the American Battle Monuments Commission.

The board then held a design competition and President George H.W. Bush oversaw the groundbreaking on June 14, 1993. The construction took about two years.



Based on 1950 photo of US troops retreating from Chosin Reservoir.

The memorial consists of several different parts. The main feature is the 164-foot-long Mural Wall in the shape of a triangle. The wall was sandblasted with over 2,500 photographs of troops serving on land, sea, and in the air.

Within this triangle are 19 stainless steel statues that range in height from 7 foot 3 inches to 7 foot six inches. These figures represent each of the branches of the armed forces – 14 from the Army, three from the Marines, one from the Navy and one from the Air Force. They each wear full combat gear and appear to be walking through bushes representing Korea's terrain.

North of these statues is the United Nations Wall, which lists the 22 member nations that provided troops or medical support during the war. At the top of the triangle wall is a pool of remembrance surrounded by linden trees and benches. Here there are inscriptions of the number of troops killed, wounded, missing in action, and held as prisoners of war.

The memorial was officially dedicated on July 27, 1995, with US President Bill Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young Sam in attendance. Eight years later, the USPS issued a stamp honoring the memorial (#3803, shown above). The stamp features a photo of the statues on a snowy day, taken by a Marine. The stamp was later at the center of a federal court case!



From the Celebrate the Century: 1950s stamp sheet

The sculptor of the statues wanted compensation for the commercial use of his art, because he didn't sign away his intellectual property rights. The USPS tried to argue that it was actually architecture, that he alone didn't design them, and that the photo was "transformative," but he ultimately won the case.

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