

From: Tim Nimz, Museum Director

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Re: Military memorials in the United States

Although there appears to be no definitive hard count of military-themed memorials and monuments in the United States, my research indicates that it is safe to state that they number in the thousands. Military historians estimate that there have been more than 100,000 military engagements in the nation's 11 major wars and countless smaller actions since the late-18th century, each of them desperately important to the soldiers who fought in them, their families and loved ones, and the country they represented. Inevitably, memorials and monuments, both large and small, were erected to commemorate these conflicts and to honor the men and women who served. For example, the Civil War generated at least 1,538 military memorials; World War I produced at least 950; and the Vietnam War at least 62.

Many of these memorials are located in highly public areas. Through the first half of the 20th century, it was quite common to find a war memorial in town and city squares throughout the country. Since the end of WWII, these more generic "war" memorials have given way to monuments honoring specific individuals. Martial-themed statues, in particular, have always been very popular, dating from the time of the American Revolution through the current War on Terrorism. Most major cities, and many smaller ones, prominently display these statues in public spaces, including parks, intersections, and the grounds of government facilities. Perhaps most famous is the Minute Man Statue, commemorating the battles of Lexington and Concord which opened the Revolutionary War, located in Minute Man National Historical Park in suburban Boston. Certainly, no space in the United States is more public than the National Mall in Washington, DC. The Mall, visited by approximately 24 million people each year, hosts three major war memorials for WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

A great many of these monuments depict soldiers in uniform and carrying their service weapons, although few show the soldiers engaged in combat. The Minute Man, mentioned above, is armed with a flintlock "Brown Bess" musket (the same weapon that the opposing British Army used). Service weapons, usually sheathed or unsheathed cavalry sabers or swords, appear in many of the 56 martial-themed statues in the District of Columbia, including almost all of the equestrian statues that dominate the major street intersections. The Korean War Memorial on the Mall features statues of 19 service men in a patrol formation carrying typical military equipment, including M-1 and M-14 rifles. The Three Servicemen Statue, located next to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (the famous "wall") on the Mall, depicts three soldiers with M-16 rifles and an M-60 machine gun. The Colorado State Capitol in Denver has two military statues on the grounds, a Civil War monument/memorial with a Union soldier with gun in hand, and a statue of Joseph P. Martinez, the first Hispanic Coloradan to receive the Medal of Honor, carrying his service weapon.