

Military Women's Memorial Preserves the Stories of Female Veterans

For more than 27 years, the memorial to women veterans in Arlington, Virginia, has served as a proud reminder of the sacrifice of women who have served

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As March is set aside as Women's History Month, VFW can think of no better time to recognize the Military Women's Memorial in Arlington, Virginia.

Located at the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, the memorial opened in October 1997. VFW members donated \$70,000 toward the \$21.5 million project. The memorial is a half-circle of granite, 30 feet high and 226 feet in diameter, with the Great Seal of the United States on the ground in the center.

Seals of the armed services are set in gold leaf on the ceremonial gateway. In the center of the memorial's semicircle is a 60,000-gallon reflecting pool that represents the pooling of women's voices over the course of history.

A 33,000-square-foot education center includes an exhibit gallery which chronicles the collective story of women's service to the nation, a Hall of Honor, gift shop, and the Vaught Center, a multipurpose conference center.

The heart of the memorial is the Register, a one-of-a-kind, interactive database which tells the individual stories of women who have served. It currently houses nearly 317,000 individual records of women's service.

'INCREDIBLE GATHERING OF WOMEN VETERANS'

Last October, VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore attended the Patriot Leadership Award Gala at the Military Women's Memorial.

Representing the VFW, Whitmore and VFW Legislative Deputy Director Kristina Keenan

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joined members of Congress, leaders in the military community and others at the gala of which the Daughters of the American Revolution was the presenting sponsor.

The purpose of the gala was to recognize women and men whose actions and leadership have paid tribute to and empowered U.S. military members. This year's award recipients were actors Kerry Washington and Sean Astin.

"Award-winning actors, activists, advocates, philanthropists and steadfast supporters of our men and women in uniform as well as our veteran community, both Ms. Washington and Mr. Astin are exceptionally deserving recipients of this prestigious award," said retired Army CW5 Phyllis Wilson, the Memorial Foundation president.

Washington most recently starred in the film "The Six Triple Eight," as Army Maj. Charity Adams (Earley). Adams led the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, which was the only predominately Black Women's Army Corps unit to serve overseas during World War II. In 2022, the 6888th was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

"I felt like these women were with us in the process," Washington said during filming. "You felt their spirit all the time."

Astin served as the Army's ambassador from 1995-2005. In 2022, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth awarded Astin CASA Emeritus status — a lifetime designation — for his continued support of service members and their families.

"I hope to support the recruiting command with creativity and purpose," Astin said upon receiving the title.

Whitmore, who is on track to become VFW's first-ever female commander-in-chief this summer, said she enjoyed seeing other women warriors and hearing their accomplishments and contributions to the military.

"The highlight for me was spending time with other fellow veterans," Whitmore said. "This was especially true at the end of the evening listening to Taps played on bagpipes with my friend, Phyllis Wilson, the director of the memorial."

Keenan said a poignant moment for her was meeting former POW Shoshana Johnson, who had been captured in Iraq in 2003.

"I had the honor to spend time with her, and she spoke in detail about being wounded and captured," Keenan said. "She also described how she was rescued and said that she remains close friends with the U.S. soldiers who risked their lives to bring her to safety. Meeting her and hearing her story was one of the most memorable and moving interactions I've ever had."

“It was an incredible gathering of women veterans, particularly those who continue to be leaders in their civilian lives. We have many shared experiences, including not always being seen as ‘real’ veterans.”

Visit <https://www.womensmemorial.org> to learn about the many programs and activities offered throughout the year.

This article is featured in the 2025 March/April issue of the [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor of VFW magazine.