



The meditation garden's labyrinth is easy to follow from a hovering helicopter (Photo by Terry Evans)

## Worth a hover

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

# Garden 1<sup>st</sup> of the NVWM features

By Terry Evans  
[tevens@startelegram.com](mailto:tevens@startelegram.com)

A four-decade-old helicopter descended toward a spot near where thousands of pilots learned to fly in aircraft just like it.

Jerry Staggs guided the TH-55 to a landing near his buddy, Jim Messinger, touching down within yards of a garden that represents Vietnam veterans' hopes for a museum.

The Mediation Garden in the eastern corner of land that one day will be home to the National Vietnam War Museum is a labyrinth of trails. The trails wind through plants that

are as strong and resilient as the men and women who survived the episode of America's foreign conflicts.

With the help of Parker County Master Gardeners Association, Friends of the NVWM have established what amounts to a demonstration garden for water-wise landscaping.

"We used native and adapted plants to teach people what they can put into their own gardens," said Iola Messinger, the project coordinator for PCMGA and Jim Messinger's wife. "We're in a water crisis, and it's only going to get worse. So we're

encouraging people to reduce the turf grass in their landscapes. The museum board gave us permission to choose the plants. Karen Brown and Gay Larson designed the garden after the board said it wanted a labyrinth.”

Leslie Grady, PCMGA public information officer, said the Meditation Garden lends itself to easy strolling and contemplation.

“It’s a little jewel here on the highway,” she said. Iola Messinger said the garden is open all the time, but lights are limited to three flagpoles at its eastern edge.

“Right now the grasses are beautiful,” she said. The “Regal Mist Gulf Muhly is particularly attractive with its reddish color. In August, the upper [eastern] labyrinth is covered with butterflies.”

Indeed.....butterflies swarmed around the tiny blue blossoms or Eupatorium plants last week. Accents around the garden and near the flagpoles include massive boulders found in or near the old Fort Wolters site.

“Many of those boulders were at the airport until recently,” Iola Messinger said. “The manager wanted them moved, so Jerry Staggs brought them here and Gay placed them where they’d look best. The ones by the flagpoles came from the Lone Camp area on Lake Palo Pinto.”

United States and Texas flags fly over the Meditation Garden, of course, but there’s a third one: POW/MIA flag. Jim Messinger said that Vietnam veterans designed the flag and remain the major motivators behind the effort to track prisoners of war and missing in action.

Messinger and Staggs are typical of the people who remain devoted to seeing the museum established on land adjacent to Texas 180, just east of Mineral Wells and once part of the sprawling Fort Wolters. The former became a pilot there. The latter learned to fly while he was a helicopter crew chief in Vietnam.

But the museum they and hundreds of other Vietnam veterans envision will encompass far more than their experiences with an aircraft that became the war’s symbol, the Bell UH-1 Huey. It’s designed to include every facet of the American experience during that 10-year period.

And the Meditation Garden is designed to help people deal with the residual emotions piqued by recalling those experiences.

Its June 2 opening completed the first step in the first phase of the museum’s building program, said Edward T. Luttenberger, NVWM communications director.

“This was quickly followed by the Rock Creek Trail, a connector that links the museum property with the Lake Mineral Wells State Trailway, which passes behind the museum site,” he added.

Two additional projects recently begun on the museum ground include the Contemplation Garden that will contain a reconstruction of the Camp Holloway Memorial Wall, Luttenberger said.

“Camp Holloway, near Pleiku, was the largest Army aviation base in Vietnam and home to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion, the Flying Dragons, and over half of its assigned Aviation companies.” he said.

Appropriately, volunteers from the 52<sup>nd</sup> are doing the work, and hope to complete it in time for next year’s Flying Dragons reunion. Luttenberger said.

“The original Camp Holloway wall was built as the base in the 1960’s and dedicated by General William C. Westmoreland,” he said.

Messinger said that brass plaques that memorialized Camp Holloway soldiers who were killed or missing in action are believed to have been brought to the U.S. when the camp was abandoned. The wall itself was destroyed by the Vietnamese, he added.

Luttenberger said that the replica wall is based on blueprints prepared by Alliance Architects of Richardson.

“When completed, it will contain 257 brass plaques for those KIA and MIA, just as the original wall at Camp Holloway,” he said. “A dedication ceremony is also planned to mark the project’s completion.”

More information about the Camp Holloway Wall project is available on the 52<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion Website ([www.52dcab.org](http://www.52dcab.org)), and tax-deductible donations can be made through the NVWM, Luttenberger said.

The second project should be of interest to Vietnam veterans throughout North Texas and the Southwest, Luttenberger said.

The Vietnam Memorial Garden will feature a replica of The Moving Wall, a one-half scale version of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D. C.

“The museum’s wall will be constructed in a forest of Arizona Cypress trees, fronting on Highway 180, and accessed by a path of decomposed granite,” Luttenberger said. “Between the wall and the highway fence will be five flagpoles flying the service flags of the Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard.”

Timing for the completion of the Vietnam Memorial

Garden will depend on efforts to raise its estimated \$175,000 cost, Luttenberger said.

“However, our expectations are to be able to complete the project by late 2008,” he said.

Messinger said that the NVWM is a highly appropriate location for a replica wall.

“The museum brought The Moving Wall to Mineral Wells in 1998, and it’s bringing a permanent one here 10 years later,” he said.

To volunteer to assist on these or any museum projects, learn about donation opportunities, or for more information regarding the museum and the development projects, contact the NVWM at P.O. Box 146, Mineral Wells, 76068-0146, or online at [www.nationalvnwarmuseum.org](http://www.nationalvnwarmuseum.org).

*Terry Evans, 817-594-5969*



Iola and Jim Messinger admire flowers in the NVWM Meditaqion Garden. (Photo by Terry Evans)