



WFAA-TV Channel 8

Texas Vets Plan Vietnam War Museum

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An old Army fort has spawned a growing campaign to build a national Vietnam War museum in North Texas. Thousands of Vietnam helicopter pilots learned to fly at Fort Wolters near Mineral Wells. Those pilots think it's a perfect spot to reflect and learn about the war.

Before they ever flew over the jungles of Southeast Asia, helicopter pilots buzzed the rocky countryside of Parker and Palo Pinto Counties. Virtually all Vietnam helicopter pilots trained at Fort Wolters. Five years ago, some of those pilots gave wings to the idea that this would be a fitting place for a national Vietnam War museum.

Jim Messinger did two tours in helicopters in Vietnam. He'd like his next tour to be through an educational Vietnam museum.

"Here's our main entrance way. Through the museum, come back out here facing the reflecting pool," said Messinger.

Messinger says the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association launched the concept. Two years ago bought land for the museum off highway 180 west of Weatherford. A few months ago, they started a nationwide fund raising campaign with help from Senator John McCain and actor Harrison Ford who hosted a documentary. The association's goal is \$20-million.

"We're tired of Vietnam memorials. We want an educational museum to teach people something, going to a memorial is not enough. You need to learn about the Vietnam era, the war, what happened and why," said Messinger.

It's an uphill battle. The war itself remains a painful memory. And, the site is not in a city close to a large population center. Messinger remains undaunted. After all, he's been in tough spots before.

"If we can do that, I think we can do this," said Messinger. "It's much more difficult than what we're trying to do here."

They hope to open their museum in 2004. That's not much time to raise \$20-million. If that sounds impossible, the Veteran pilots who are doing it will tell you they've had tougher missions.

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