

WAR MEMORIAL CHAPEL



Honoring Veterans at Washington National Cathedral: War Memorial Chapel

War Memorial Chapel honors men and women who have dedicated their lives to the service of our country.

Planning for a war memorial in the Cathedral began in 1946, after the end of World War II. The chapel was dedicated in 1957 in the presence of President Eisenhower and Queen Elizabeth II. It is part of the south transept of the Cathedral, called the "Patriots' Transept."

The art of this chapel recalls individuals and symbols of freedom, sacrifice, and the struggles necessary for freedom.

In the intricately carved bookcases to the right of the altar are books of the National Roll of Honor, containing the names and dates of service of thousands of men and women who have served their country in the Armed Forces. The public is invited to enroll family and friends who have served into this registry. Forms are available in the chapel and at the west end of the nave.

Things to Look For: Flag Raising, Bell Ringing, and Amphibious Landing

The stained glass windows in this chapel are designed around the themes of freedom and sacrifice. From the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross in the altar window to the sacrifices of those who fought in the Revolutionary War and World War II, the windows highlight scenes dramatizing humanity's perpetual striving for freedom.

Some of the details include (beginning with the window above the gate to Children's Chapel):

- The Liberty Bell
- Moses leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt.
- Abraham Lincoln emancipating American slaves
- The flag-raising at Iwo Jima
- George Washington
- Paul Revere raising the alarm
- Military decorations, including the Medal of Honor
- Paratroopers landing on a battlefield
- Pilgrims landing at Plymouth
- An amphibious landing
- The Statue of Liberty
- Liberation forces marching through Paris
- The execution of Nathan Hale
- The Battle of Midway
- The phrase, "He who loses his life for my sake shall find it."



Things to Look For: Shrapnel and Bayonets

Above the altar is the powerful sculpture of the suffering Christ by British artist Steven Sykes. Torn sheets of brass in the halo simulate split brass cannon shells used in war. The thorny spikes inside the halo are of cast aluminum with a bluish cast, reminiscent of barbed wire. The copper colored rays of glory evoke the blades of bayonets. Overall, the impact of the piece is sacrifice transmuted to victory, and suffering to glory.

Things to Look For: "Iwo Jima 1945"

The boundary of War Memorial Chapel is marked by waist-high oak rails, given by U.S. Marines on the twentieth anniversary of the assault on Iwo Jima.



Things to Look For: Painted Shields

Above the wooden cases that hold the National Roll of Honor are fifteen carved and painted shields representing service ribbons. From left to right, the shields represent: World War II American Campaign Medal, World War II European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre, World War II Asiatic-Pacific Theatre, Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War (Federal Service), Indian Wars, War with Spain, Philippine Insurrection, World War I, Korean Service, World War II Asiatic-Pacific Theatre, World War II European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre, and Vietnam Service.

Things to Look For: Your State Seal

The large needlepoint hanging on the chapel's east wall uses the biblical symbol of the Tree of Life to illustrate the development of the United States and to honor the armed services. Seals of the fifty states and the District of Columbia appear in the order in which the states joined the Union. Emblems of the armed forces and the Great Seal of the United States surround the tree (the U.S. Army appears as the War Office). The border of twining ivy symbolizes the faithfulness of all who served. White crosses at the bottom honor those who died in battle.



Things to Look For: Label Mold Termination Carvings

The stones at the end of the arches over the stained glass windows are carved to represent the heads of service men and women in uniform.



Things to Look For: Needlepoint

The needlepoint kneelers are replicas of ones stitched by English women in thanksgiving for American help in World War II.

Things to look for: The Four Chaplains

A well-known incident from World War II is depicted in the stained glass window directly over the altar: the four chaplains. In 1943, the *Dorchester*, a troop ship, was struck by a torpedo. There were not enough life jackets for everyone on board to evacuate the ship. Four chaplains—Roman Catholic, Methodist, Jewish and Reformed Church in America—stood on the deck and handed out what jackets there were, including their own. Survivors report seeing the chaplains stand on deck, joining hands, and singing as they stayed with the sinking ship. The four chaplains are depicted in the lower left corner of the window.