Music.

Joe Mullins: The Veterans Memorial for the State started out as an idea with a group of Veterans. They approached the Legislature and Arch Moore, the governor at the time got involved, and it was determined that the State would have a Veterans Memorial. The parameters were that we were to build a Memorial that recognized the four major conflicts of this century; which of course were World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam. My idea was to create four separate but interlocking individual memorials that would be brought together into one memorial. Behind this is the idea that everyone is serving the Constitution, those who died end up in this inner sanctuary of names. Memorials are really two things, they are public art projects. They represent the government’s efforts to recognize the service of its citizens. And they are also very private things because each of those individual names is a name that is supremely important to an individual. So I tried to have a memorial that from the outside had a bit of grandeur to it, a bit of public space, public art. And I wanted the interior which is rather dark and enclosed to be a much more private place. We tried to represent each of the major branches of the service so there’s a sculpture representing the Navy. There’s one representing the Army, the Air Force and the Marine Corps. What you see is that we’ve assigned those to the various Wars. World War II has the sailor, Korea has the flyer, World War I has the Army Infantry solider and Vietnam has the Marine.

Music.

JM: The sculpture generally is about a six month process, for me. The Vietnam era one took longer than that, the machine gun alone for the Vietnam era was about a two month project. It’s a M60 machine gun, one of the early ones. I never liked the M16; I always thought aesthetically it was horrible. And so I spent the extra two months at least with my assistant building a machine gun. It was very important to me to have these things correct and one of the things I did as I acquired the equipment to be copied for the Memorial, period uniform pieces and things like that. I kept them all for manufacturing dates to make sure they were the right dates because uniforms change subtly over periods. I also tried to see as many pictures as I could and get a feel for the era and a get a feel for the way things were done. Subtle things like the way the sailors wear their hat. I would hope that they are general enough that they would embody the person from that period; I tried to do the Vietnam era Marine as quite a young man. World War II sailor is quite a bit older. World War I, I tried to sort of capture the look of that period, there’s some subtleties that sort of capture that look. And then with the Korean flyer I made sort of an older, slightly more mature person. I wanted to represent them as combatants; I thought it would be ingenious to put parade grounds, service personnel on the Memorial. I thought they should be seen in a fashion that they would have likely been in during their service and they largely represent the people in the Memorial, the names listed there specifically. And of course they represent everybody indirectly who served in the military. I have friends who served in the military. As a matter of fact there is a good friend of mine, Larry Lucas, who is on the Wall. Grew up around the corner from me, I used cut his grandmother’s grass.

Music.

JM: Each of those individuals are often the best and the brightest and the youngest and the most handsome people out of each of the families. And every one of those names represents a tragedy as big, if not bigger, than having your son or daughter killed on graduation night from high school. I think it’s about the only thing that can really match the sort of thing that happened by losing somebody in the military. One doesn’t appreciate the idea of that some mother who had just some kid and goes through all the pains to raise that child; from changing diapers and snotty noses and making lunch and sending them off to school, gets them up to the age of 18 years old and the government decides they need to borrow them for a couple of years and they send them somewhere and they get killed.

Music. Machine gun fire. “Taps” playing.

JM: So it’s a tremendous, tremendous sacrifice on the behalf of these families to send these people off for these purposes. Knowing anyone outside of that fraternity can even begin to appreciate the sacrifices.

“Taps” playing.