

“A common field one day. A field of honor forever.”

The Flight 93 National Memorial: Into the Second Decade

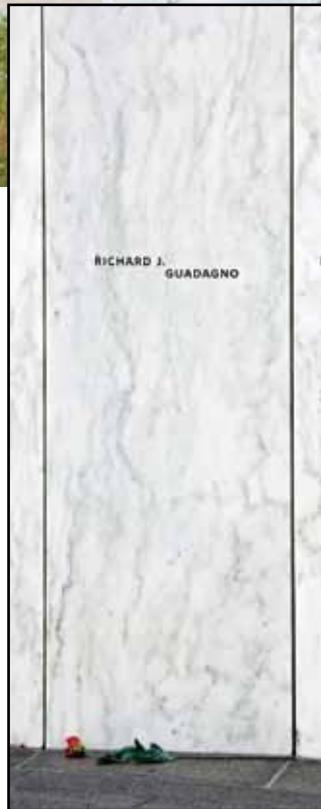


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Above: The entrance sign to the Flight 93 National Memorial.

Right: The Wall of Names to honor the 40 men and women who lost their lives on Flight 93.

Inset: Close-up of one of the engraved marble panels of the wall.



More than a decade has passed since the horrific events of September 11, 2001, when the United States became the target of a carefully planned terrorist attack using four hijacked jets. All evaded sophisticated air defense systems, yet one aircraft, United Airlines Flight 93, failed to reach its intended destination – likely the U.S. Capitol Building, where Congress was in session – thanks to intervention from passengers determined to thwart the terrorists after hearing news reports of the attacks. All 40 died when the aircraft, flying upside down at more than 500 miles per hour, slammed into a field in rural Somerset County, Pa.

Amidst the shock and grief, the story of Flight 93 stood out as one of heroism and sacrifice to prevent an even greater loss of life. Soon visitors began coming to the crash site to pay their respects; many left mementos and other forms of tribute. Local officials and volunteers

created a temporary memorial, but it was soon clear that something more was needed.

In 2002, Congress authorized the development of a permanent Flight 93 National Memorial. A partnership including the Families of Flight 93, the National Park Service, and a federal advisory commission concluded that a design competition open to all would be the most appropriate way to create a national memorial honoring the sacrifice made by ordinary Americans who made an extraordinary choice. Recognizing the site as the final resting place for the passengers and crew, a motto of sorts emerged: “A common field one day. A field of honor forever.” A design by Paul Murdoch Architects was eventually selected among entries from around the world, and work began on the first phase: a new entrance road from Route 30, the Visitors Shelter, the Memorial Plaza, and the Wall of Names and Flight Path. The Memorial was formally dedicated by Vice President Joe Biden



Left: This boulder was placed at the actual impact site of Flight 93 and is covered with flags and mementos. The mowed area shows the crash path.

Right: The wall and walkway leading to the Wall of Names.

Inset: One of the recesses in the wall where visitors leave tokens of observance and expression.

on September 10, 2011, with remarks from Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, and other dignitaries in attendance.

Public response has exceeded expectations, with visitor numbers already double those of previous years. A 2010 economic impact study indicated that about 135,000 visitors that year spent an estimated \$6 million in the region. Park Superintendent Jeff Reinbold believes that number could surpass 300,000 this year, partly due to a surprising number of bus tours.

Visitors to the Memorial soon notice that it's different from most national memorials. "It's a landscape memorial, somewhat like Gettysburg in scale," says Reinbold. "It's meant to be a memorial that you inhabit; it's sensory," he adds. "The architect sought a simple design using white, black and grey materials accented by color from the skies and multiple phases of flower blossoms throughout the

seasons." Reinbold also recommends checking weather conditions before visiting the Memorial, an often windy site with little shade and sometimes cooler temperatures.

The design includes plans for the reclamation of what had been a mining site. "We felt strongly that rural Pennsylvania is the backdrop for the Memorial," Reinbold notes, mentioning that deep mining was taking place on site during the morning of the crash. A reforestation effort began last April that involved the planting of 13,000 seedlings to provide wildlife habitat and serve as a windbreak for the Memorial Groves, with 40 rows of native Pennsylvania trees planted alongside the Entrance Road to commemorate each of the passengers. Several ponds along the road offer sanctuary to ducks, geese and herons. Ongoing restoration plans include wildflower meadows with native species and underbrush.

One year later, more than a decade since 9/11, Reinbold and park rangers have observed that visitors feel more comfortable asking questions about what happened and why, after an earlier phase when they came primarily to pay their respects and honor the deceased. Consequently, the National Park Service is focusing on education and interpretation with several initiatives:

- 1) The construction of the Visitors Center, which will serve as the educational hub of the Memorial, featuring traditional and interactive exhibits, primary source materials, photos, and stories from eyewitnesses. A selection of memorabilia left by visitors will also be on display. Planned to sit atop a hill above the impact site, the Center will be oriented along the flight path.
- 2) The Dial and Discover Orientation Tour, now available by calling 814-619-2065 or by scanning a cell phone barcode.
- 3) The implementation of interpretative programs to include ranger talks, special events and oral history programs, as well as programs to help children and their parents cope with the challenge of understanding what happened. The Memorial staff is working with the Fred Rogers Center and several area universities to create special programs and Junior Ranger booklets for children, especially those from kindergarten through 3rd grade.

The Flight 93 Memorial Ambassadors, a volunteer group that formed shortly after the crash, assist the Memorial staff by welcoming, assisting, and educating visitors. Their service is a testimonial to the strong support extended by the local community to visitors and family members of the deceased. In 2008, the group received the National Park Service's highest volunteer award.

Recognized as the official support group for the Memorial, the Friends of Flight 93 include family members of the passengers and crew, first responders, Ambassadors, and others supportive of the Memorial's mission. Membership is open to the public. Friends provide much needed help with fundraising, cleaning, weeding and greeting visitors.

With 2,200 acres of ground, the Memorial can accommodate a lot of visitors while allowing each one to

have a personal experience. The atmosphere among them is quiet, even reverent, and voices are hushed as they ask questions of the rangers and volunteers on duty.

"At heart, it's a resting place for the passengers and crew," Reinbold says. "The approach to the crash site is intentionally gradual and the scene for mourning kept simple." The aggregate material used to construct the pathway to the Wall of Names purposefully resembles coal as a reference to previous mining at the site. Diagonal markings along the path and the wall to its left echo hemlock branches, an allusion to the Hemlock Grove hit by the fireball resulting from the crash. The Impact Site is marked by a boulder, visible above the pathway wall. For a more intimate view, visitors can peer through a gateway, located between that wall and the Wall of Names, constructed of eight carved pine pillars, each marked with 40 notches to symbolize the 40 who perished.

Plans and fundraising to complete the Memorial continue, with another \$5 million needed to meet the \$30 million goal for donations from private sources. Sometimes described as "a modern day barn-raising," this grassroots campaign has benefited significantly from donors worldwide who have contributed small amounts of money. "Many people have expressed a sense of helplessness and ask what they can do," says Reinbold, "and so they donate as a tribute and contribution." The total cost to complete the Memorial is estimated at approximately \$70 million, with over \$18 million each coming from both the federal government and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Some elements such as a walkway alongside the 40 Memorial Groves, a Return Road, and the Tower of Voices (to contain 40 wind chimes as a tribute to the deceased, near the Route 30 entrance), will be completed over time and through donations, in-kind contributions, and small-scale fundraising initiatives.

Reinbold observes that the Memorial's identity as an historic site will be tested over time. "It's a frame of reference for terrorism, which is an evolving story." Part of that story will depend on how we, as a nation, address a question posed by a young boy upon viewing a sign at the Memorial Plaza that proclaims, AMERICA ATTACKED: "What happened right there?"

Note: Flight 93 National Memorial is located near Somerset, Pennsylvania and less than an hour drive from the Deep Creek Lake, Maryland area. Also visit www.laurelhighlands.org.