

# AIR FORCE MEMORIAL

## Architect's Statement



### **James Ingo Freed**

The Air Force Memorial is rooted in the necessary symbolic transition of making the medium of the Air Force visible. The Navy has the medium of water, which can always be shown in fountains, and the Army has the medium of land, which can be referenced with mountains and plains; the Air Force has the medium of air, which is very difficult to show. The core of this effort lies in making air tangible, making technology felt. But, before the Memorial could take shape, the critical component, the site, had to be analyzed for its informational and formational impact. In this case, the promontory overlooking Washington brings to bear the possibility of launching the Memorial through the edge condition it presents.

The Memorial itself is 270 feet high and appears to be soaring; its array of arcs against the sky evokes a modern image of flight by jet and space vehicles. At the same time, it enshrines the past in permanent remembrance of the pioneers of flight who came before, and pays homage to those of the future.

Once the decision was made to have vertical elements, the number three became important, three being resonant with significant associations for the Air Force, including the three core values of today: Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do. It is also the smallest number of elements needed to define and enclose a space. The spires are asymmetrical, dynamic, each a different height so that the view of the Memorial changes from every angle.

The Memorial is scaled for visibility over street infrastructure, its height determined to be at least equal to building heights visible on the Arlington horizon from both near and distant views. The proportional relationship of the height of the spires to the width of the Memorial space at their base grows from the need to make the Memorial material in space and stand out as a marker at the gateway to the I-395 entry to Washington. At the same time care is taken not to diminish the view of the nation's capital beyond.

A metallic surface, stainless steel, forms the equilateral triangles which that form the Memorial spires. Jointing details are minimized. Each spire will be illuminated by its own light source.

A path parallel to the western edge of the site, paved in bluestone, joins two events, its southern and northern ends creating the necessary poles for experiencing the total Memorial. At the entrance from the west stands the Honor Guard, symbolizing patriotism and power. From here, the bluestone path moves north to the Glass Contemplation Wall, a glazed, independent, panel with meditative inscriptions. It symbolizes the presence of all of those who are gone. Halfway on the journey back and forth, one finds the heart of the Memorial, a triangular prow bounded by the three spires. Standing within the soaring forms, one can see the Washington Monument. A stepped stone plinth runs parallel with the pathway and can act as seating for special events as well as for the “trooping of the colors”.

The landscaping edges the active site with thick rows of mature trees, welcomed for their shade, lined mostly along the west of the complex and carefully shaped to intensify the Memorial experience.

James Ingo Freed  
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