

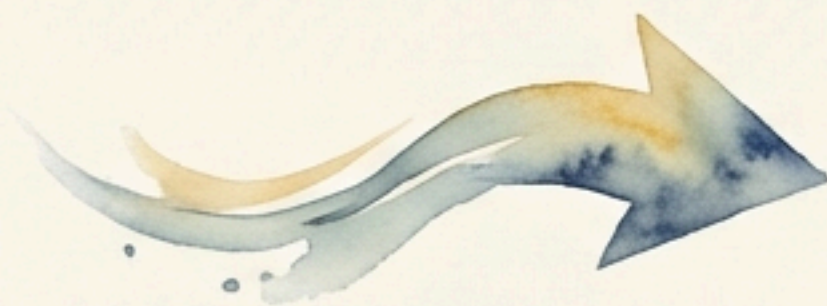


The Valor Project: How to Design a Narrative-Driven Veteran Memorial

Free Guide
DOWNLOADABLE

Standard military records only tell half the story.

A standard military obituary often reads like a service record—a clinical list of rank, unit, and medals. While these are vital markers of duty, they rarely capture the person who wore the boots.



Find the story by remembering their off-duty passions and everyday humor.

Off-Duty Passion:

If they had 24 hours of leave and no responsibilities, how would they have spent every minute?



Barracks Humor:

How did they pass the time during 'hurry up and wait'? Were they the jokester or the quiet one with a paperback?



Sensory Homecomings:

What was the first thing they asked to eat when getting home? What civilian item did they reach for?



Translate formal military citations into deeply personal civilian stories.

The Record



Exceptional
meritorious
service



The Translation

He was the one who stayed
calm when the world was loud.
She was the person everyone
looked to when a problem
seemed unsolvable.

Ask yourself: Did they carry 'military-isms' into civilian life, like keeping a 'tight ship' or 'recce-ing' a restaurant before sitting down?

Blend grit and glory by placing medals next to the tools of their life.



The Grit Factor: Include items that show the wear of their life. The battered thermos that went on every family camping trip after they retired is just as powerful as the uniform.

Reach out to old battle buddies to unearth the undisclosed stories.

Military service creates a fragmented community scattered across the country. By reaching out to those who served alongside them, you can find the missing pieces of their story.



The Undisclosed Story: At the service, invite guests to write down a memory that didn't happen in the line of duty—something from the mess hall, the motor pool, or on leave.

Use the “Digital Muster” toolkit to gather memories from the ranks.

Tips for Success

Subject: Seeking Stories of [Rank]
[Full Name] – [Unit/Division]

While we have their service records, we are missing the stories only those in the trenches, motor pool, or barracks would know...

1. Identify the Hook:
Include their nickname or quirk (e.g., “the guy who could fix any radio”).

2. Together We Served: Search this massive veteran database.

3. Unit Groups & VFWs:
Post in specific Division Facebook groups or local American Legion newsletters.

Always acknowledge the sacrifices of the home front and the silent rank.

A veteran's story is inextricably linked to those who waited. Explicitly acknowledge the "Silent Rank"—the partners who managed the household, held things together during deployments, and the children who grew up in the "military brat" culture.



Give yourself permission to choose soul over protocol.

Protocol is for the ceremony; the tribute is for the person.

It is entirely okay to be funny.
It is okay to mention their stubbornness, their quirks, or their failed attempts at cooking.



Honor the in-between years and the peace of loyal companions.

If they served for five years but lived for 80, ensure the tribute reflects the decades spent being a neighbor, a grandparent, and a friend.



For many service members, pets were their shadow and their peace. Mention the dog that slept at the foot of their bed or the cat allowed on their lap during the game.



Your tribute is a living, breathing reflection of their unique spirit.

They were more than a rank, and they were more than a uniform. By gathering their stories, displaying their tactile timeline, and honoring their whole life, you ensure the person behind the boots is never forgotten.



The background is a watercolor illustration. On the left, a portion of the American flag is shown, with the stars and stripes rendered in soft, painterly strokes. The stripes are in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The stars are white. In the upper right, there are soft, blue and white watercolor clouds. At the bottom right, there is a logo featuring a sun with rays and two birds in flight.

The Valor Project: How to Design a Narrative-Driven Veteran Memorial