



Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Update

April 27, 2015

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) effort to install a meaningful, permanent memorial within Arlington National Cemetery continues to progress. The Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial was proposed by the VHPA when it became clear that *no national memorial exists* honoring all helicopter pilots and crewmembers who died in the Vietnam War. The separate military branches and some units have individual memorials, but nothing exists to honor all who served and died flying rotary-wing aircraft in what is commonly described as “The Helicopter War.”

The memorial-building effort commenced in early 2014 with a goal of having the proposal completed and approved in time for an August 28th, 2015 dedication in conjunction with the 2015 VHPA Annual Reunion being held in Washington, DC, August 25-29. Our organization began this activity based on faulty guidance provided by the Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) staff who suggested submitting a complete proposal (a difficult undertaking due to the complicated proposal requirements) by early September, 2014 would lead to a final approval by February, 2015.

The VHPA complied with all procedures and on September 3, 2014 delivered the first complete memorial proposal received by ANC in many years. Following a long wait for internal actions by the ANC staff, the VHPA was invited to make a presentation to the Arlington National Cemetery Advisory Committee (ANCAC) on March 26, 2015. At this time the VHPA provided a compelling presentation justifying the placement of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots and Crewmember Memorial (presentation is attached). The Vietnam Veterans on the ANCAC fully supported the memorial, but surprisingly, others on the committee voted against it believing all space within ANC should be reserved for burials, not memorials. The result was a deadlocked vote, 3/3. This did not end the proposal process, however, as the ANCAC only *advises* the Secretary of the Army.

The Secretary of the Army will make the final decision as to whether this memorial moves forward or not. The ANCAC sends a report of their findings within 60 days of March 26, and then the Secretary of the Army has an additional 150 days to make his decision. It is during this 150-day window that we are asking our fellow military associations and federal legislators to contact and encourage the Sec. of the Army to approve. I am happy to report we are getting the support of other veteran groups in this endeavor, and it remains vitally important for all of us to act. His address: John M. McHugh. **Secretary of the Army**, 101 Army Pentagon, Washington, DC 20310-0101.

Some have already contacted their Washington representatives, and we encourage you to do so, as well. The legislators should request Secretary of the Army John McHugh approve the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial Proposal. A letter from your representative to the Secretary of the Army will carry strong weight to move the approval process to a positive outcome. To find your representative's contact information, go to: <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>.

When you contact your representative, remind them Arlington National Cemetery is the single, most appropriate place to honor the helicopter pilots and crewmembers who gave the full measure of devotion to their nation during the Vietnam War. It holds the remains of hundreds of pilots, crewchiefs, door gunners and medics who died during the war; it is the burial place of helicopter pilots who earned the Medal of Honor; and it is the final destination of whole helicopter crews whose remains continue to be recovered decades after the end of the Vietnam War. Tell them NOW is the time, during the 2015

50th Commemoration of the Vietnam War, to recognize those many thousands who died flying helicopters during the "Helicopter War."

Although it is unlikely we will dedicate the stone monument in August, the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association will dedicate a living tree to honor the sacrifice of the almost 6,000 helicopter pilots and crewmembers that died in the Vietnam War at 10:00 AM, August 28, 2015 at the Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Amphitheater. A scheduled part of the 2015 VHPA Annual Reunion, this will be a somber experience appropriate for the 50th Commemoration of our war.

All are welcome to attend this event, and the VHPA will extend special invitations to many fellow veteran organizations and friends. The list is long, but it will include our friends, the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Member Association, the Jolly Green Association, the Seawolf Association, Gold Star Families, the Order of Daedalians and many more.

The challenge to placing a memorial within the sacred walls of Arlington National Cemetery is difficult, but we have proven in harsh combat the persistence needed to support our comrades-in-arms. This effort is no different. We will not let their ultimate sacrifice be forgotten, and we will convince the Secretary of the Army to approve the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Hesselbein".

Bob Hesselbein, President,
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