

# Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember



## Monument Dedication



Arlington National Cemetery | April 18, 2018

*"The aviation units were the sole combat element...that did not come apart under the stress of the war in Vietnam...whether it was the oneness of man and the acrobatic flying machine, whether it was the equally shared risk of officer pilot and enlisted crew member, whatever the reason, the men of the helicopters kept their discipline and their spirit."*

**Neil Sheehan – Author**



## The Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument Dedication Ceremony

Wednesday, April 18, 2018 — 4:00 p.m.  
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia

### **ORDER of SERVICE**

Posting of Colors:	United States Army Color Guard
National Anthem	
Invocation:	Reverend Jerome R. Daly
Opening Music:	United States Army Band Brass Quintet
Introduction of Speakers:	Robert Hesselbein, Chair, Legacy Committee
Welcome:	Mike Sheuerman, President VHPA
Remarks:	Carl H. McNair Jr., USA, MG, Retired
Remarks:	Julie Kink, Gold Star Sister
Keynote Address:	Congressman Mark Amodei
West Point Alumni Glee Club:	"Mansions of the Lord"
Retiring of the Colors	
Wreath Laying Procession to Monument	
Taps	
Amazing Grace:	Jim McDaniels, USA, LTC, Retired John McDowall, Kenneth Scroggie



## The Helicopter War

As the Vietnam War began, helicopters were being used by each service branch to perform specific missions. But no one envisioned the diverse uses or sheer numbers of these aircraft that would ultimately be deployed.<sup>1</sup>

Performing missions both day and night in challenging weather over all types of terrain was indeed a risky undertaking. Operating inside a thin aluminum skin, with no protection for vital components and little or no personal protection, pilots and their crews often flew at altitudes well in range of small arms fire, presenting a stationary target at times. During these daring missions, 2,197 pilots and 2,704 crewmembers lost their lives. The Bell UH-1, depicted on the monument, represents 7,013 of the total helicopters utilized, of which some 3,300 (47%) were destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Helicopter operations resulted in tragic losses, but their presence saved countless lives.

Of the 11,827 helicopters operating in Vietnam, 5,086 (43%) were destroyed by combat or accidents.

Helicopters performed more than 850,000 medical evacuations, transporting both civilian and military patients and boosting the survival rate for wounded from 10% in prior conflicts, to 99% for the Vietnam War. Lessons learned on the battlefield resulted in revised tactics, improved

personal protection and important aircraft modifications.

Recovering downed pilots, resupplying troops with desperately needed supplies and ammunition, extracting small units faced with numerically overwhelming odds, providing armed support - these were everyday tasks for the helicopter crews. Even delivering Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners was part of the job description. The common thread for all these activities was the simple yet profound motivation: **to support those on the ground.**

A typical example of this tenet was displayed by an Aircraft Commander who said, when faced with a difficult mission: "*They are completely out of food and water and almost out of ammo. We've gotta get this stuff in there to them. Let's go.*"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1965, the Army had 248 helicopters.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics provided by the VHPA.

<sup>3</sup> Just Let Me Walk Away by Ray Kenneth Clark.

## **The Monument and Arlington National Cemetery**

Since the first military burial on May 13, 1864, Arlington National Cemetery has symbolized our country's respect and appreciation for the sacrifices made by her armed service members. It represents the grieving heart of a nation. There are more helicopter pilots and crewmembers interred here than in any other single location.

In 2015, the VHPA placed a red maple tree in memory of the brave helicopter pilots and crews who lost their lives. While the tree is a living memorial, the VHPA felt that almost 5,000 combat deaths and 13 years of war justified a permanent monument. With the support of other veterans' organizations and Gold Star families, the VHPA sought permission to place a granite monument near the tree, a process that took time, energy and the cooperation of Arlington National Cemetery staff.

The monument is carved in Barre granite quarried in Vermont. It is located in section 35, near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. At 2 feet 8 inches wide, it stands 1 foot 10 inches tall and is stabilized by a five foot concrete footing.

The aircraft profile is that of the UH-1 or "Huey" used by all branches of the military in the Vietnam War. The art is a product of collaboration between Joe Kline, a renowned aviation artist as well as a veteran helicopter crewmember, and Dana Morissette, Chief Designer for Barre Drafting and Granite Sales.

## **The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association**

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the legacy of rotary-wing aircrews that flew in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam Era, and to honoring the fallen and their families. Families of the fallen are welcome to attend reunions and to subscribe to the Association newsletter, [The Aviator](#).



### **U.S. Representative Mark Amodei (R-NV)**

Congressman Mark Amodei is the United States Representative for Nevada's 2nd Congressional District. Amodei was born in Carson City, Nevada, and is a graduate of the University of Nevada, receiving his law degree from the University of the Pacific's McGeorge Law School. A U.S. Army veteran, he served in artillery units and later in the Judge Advocate General Corps. His military awards include the Army Achievement Medal, the Army Commendation Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal.

Amodei was an early champion of the effort to establish a monument for Vietnam War helicopter pilots and crews. He introduced H.R. 4298, the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmember Memorial Act, along with 38 original cosponsors. Companion legislation was introduced in the Senate by U.S. Senators Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). A resident of Carson City, Nevada, Congressman Amodei was elected to the 112th Congress in 2011.

*"With more than 40 years having passed since the end of the Vietnam War, I'm pleased to know this group of deserving veterans will finally receive proper recognition – an honor that is long overdue," the Congressman said. "It's been a pleasure to work alongside the dedicated group of people at the VHPA, who have worked tirelessly to see this through to fruition."*





## Legacy Committee Members

Robert Hesselbein, USA/USAF, LTC, Retired  
Committee Chairman

Barb Tivnan

Bill "Moon" Mullen

Carl H. McNair Jr., USA, MG, Retired

Dan Dennison, USA, COL, Retired

Don Agren

Forrest "Frosty" R. Price, USA, LTC, Retired

John W. Powell, USA, LTC, Retired

Julie Kink, Gold Star Sister

Ken Paulson

Mike Sheuerman, President VHPA

Ronald "Ron" E. Markiewicz, USA, MAJ, Retired

Russell W. Chung

Sherry Rodgers, VHPA HQ Manager

Thomas A. Hirschler, USA, CW4, Retired

Thomas J. Kirk, USA, CW4, Retired

Thomas Marshall

Thomas E. Seybold



## To Those Who Made This Dedication Possible

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association expresses its gratitude to the people and organizations that made the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument and Dedication Ceremony possible. Many contributed to this accomplishment: veterans' organizations, members of Congress, the United States Armed Services, the Military District of Washington, D. C., and the staff and leadership of Arlington National Cemetery. In addition to the VHPA, hundreds of individual donations and a corporate donation from Bell provided funding for this event. We thank the Women in Military Service for America Memorial for their generous support and assistance and the VHPA North Carolina Chapter for providing a restored UH-1 "Huey" Helicopter.

## To the Friends and Families

The men who lost their lives operating helicopters in the Vietnam War will always be remembered by those who confronted the same risks and survived the dangers of combat aviation. That shared experience, forged in fire, formed bonds that transcended death. For generations to come, the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument will preserve and hallow this extraordinary bond.

Most importantly the placement of the monument communicates to the families-and the American people-the courage of those who died flying rotary-wing aircraft, their unwavering commitment and tenacity under fire. The monument recognizes the sacrifice of the many thousands, signifying to all the valor they displayed in service to their nation.

It is our hope Gold Star Families in attendance today will take this opportunity to speak with combat veterans in the audience who served as helicopter pilots and crewmembers.

For more information on the VHPA visit our website [vhpa.org](http://vhpa.org) or call our headquarters at 800-505-8472.

