

Tom Marshall
(407) 496-7551

Proposal

*To the United States
Commission of Fine Arts*

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Tree Commemorative Monument



*For Placement Within
Arlington National Cemetery*

**Submitted By
The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association**

July 2, 2017



Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association

2100 N. Highway 360, Suite 907 • Grand Prairie, TX 75050-1030 • 800.505.8472 • hp@vhpa.org

June 26, 2017

Earl A. Powell III, Chairman
United States Commission of Fine Arts
401 F Street NW, Suite 312
Washington, DC 20001-2728

Subject: Proposed Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument
Arlington National Cemetery

Dear Chairman Powell:

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) is pleased to join with Arlington National Cemetery leadership in submitting the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Tree Commemorative Monument Proposal. The monument will complement the Memorial Tree donated and dedicated August 28, 2015.

At this time, no national monument exists honoring the sacrifice of all rotary-wing warriors in what was called "the Helicopter War" of Vietnam. Placing this simple granite monument within Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), some 42 years after the last combat death, will complete the tribute to the almost 5,000 American servicemembers from all branches of service who died while operating rotary-wing aircraft in the combat of the Vietnam War.

Why this cemetery? Within the grounds of ANC lie a great cluster of Vietnam War helicopter casualties: hundreds placed immediately within the cemetery upon their deaths in combat, rotary-wing medal of honor recipients, and the ongoing interment of recovered Missing in Action (MIA), both as individuals and as whole crews. The monument will give deserving tribute and express the nation's appreciation.

Simple in design, sized to effectively communicate while preserving needed space for future burials within ANC, the monument is aesthetically fitted to the purpose. The final submitted design has undergone revisions in design, art and font, and we are grateful for the informal advice of many, to include the Commission of Fine Arts staff. It is our hope you find the proposed design worthy.

Respectfully submitted,

John Shafer, President
Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association

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I. OVERVIEW

Project Purpose: The Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Tree Commemorative Monument, constructed and carved from select Barre Granite, will complete a national memorial tribute honoring the service and sacrifice of almost 5,000 American servicemen who died operating rotary-wing aircraft in the Vietnam War (see justification, page 4). Authorized by the Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) for placement in Section 35, Arlington National Cemetery, the monument will stand near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Memorial Amphitheater. Bordering the east side of Memorial Drive (see map, page 11), the simple monument will complement the Red Maple tree donated and dedicated August 28th, 2015. Combining a living tree with a suitable tree marker will complete the memorial project initiated in 2014.

History: In the spring of 2014, the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) recognized a national memorial was appropriate to honor the sacrifice of all military helicopter crews who perished in the Vietnam War, the struggle routinely described as “the Helicopter War.” Further study revealed ANC contains the largest cluster of rotary-wing casualties from the Vietnam War, and is the logical place to establish a suitable monument.

Supported by many veterans organizations and Gold Star Families, the VHPA commenced the effort. The VHPA first donated a living tree to ANC to honor rotary-wing casualties, and then sought authorization to place a descriptive, permanent monument within the cemetery grounds.

In September, 2014, a detailed monument proposal was submitted to ANC for consideration by SECARMY. The Arlington National Cemetery Advisory Committee then reviewed and forwarded the proposal to SECARMY who, in turn, authorized a tree monument for placement near the red maple tree.

Some issue was taken with the original monument size stipulated within the SECARMY letter. Following a period of discussion and reflection, satisfactory dimensions were agreed upon March 17, 2017 that led to the current design submitted within this proposal.

Monument Design: The proposed monument design possesses simple artistry, language (Government Font) and symbols to communicate the valor of those who died operating helicopters in the "Helicopter War." Sized to preserve limited cemetery space available within ANC for future burials, the monument is the logical, final element needed to complete the memorial setting.

Carved from Barre Granite quarried in Vermont, the monument dimensions are: 2'-8" face, 8" front nosing, 1'-9" depth, 1'-10" back, and a polished, 2'-1 $\frac{1}{4}$, 34-degree slant face (see design specifics, page 7). A 4,000 psi-mix concrete footer of 3'-6" depth will support the monument to ensure long term stability.

Aircraft Depiction: The monument displays the easily-recognizable side profile of the UH-1H "Huey" helicopter, the aircraft most identified with the Vietnam War, and the only helicopter operated by all branches of military service during combat operations in Southeast Asia. The depiction displays all crewmembers seated in appropriate positions for Vietnam combat operations. The design was created by Mr. Joe Kline, a military veteran and recognized aviation artist of the Vietnam War, and Mr. Dana Morissette, Chief Designer for Barre Drafting and Granite Sales.

Calendar Dates (1961-1975): The noted years define the period of U.S. military helicopter operations within the Southeast Asia conflict.

Statement: The brief words describe the nation's gratitude. Incorporating concise words from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "...gave the full measure of devotion..." the writing carefully focuses on the dedication and love of country that took the honored casualties to distant Vietnam.

Military Branch Seals: Placed in proper protocol order, the branch seals recognize all branches of the U.S. military who suffered casualties operating rotary-wing aircraft in the Vietnam War.

Conclusion: Combined elements of living tribute and information marked in stone are common within ANC. Few, however, honor service in the Vietnam War. The proposed monument and existing tree, placed together, will identify and honor a chapter of American military history by recognizing those who died operating the iconic symbol of the Vietnam War: the helicopter.

II. JUSTIFICATION

Subject: Justification for placing within Arlington National Cemetery a lasting commemorative tree monument to recognize the service and sacrifice of those who died while serving as helicopter pilots and crewmen during the Vietnam War. The monument will complement the living tree donated and dedicated August 28, 2015.

The Vietnam War, or Vietnam Era, is defined by the Code of Federal Regulations Chapter 38 Paragraph 3.2 (f). The Vietnam Era is "The period beginning on February 28, 1961 and ending on May 7, 1975, inclusive." During the Vietnam Era, approximately 58,200 U.S. military combat deaths were attributed to fighting in Southeast Asia. Of these fatalities, 4,706 were operating rotary-wing aircraft (2,002 pilots and 2,704 crewchiefs, medics and door-gunners) in direct combat or supporting combat missions.

Research by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) determined 205 Killed In Action (KIA) pilots lie buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This information was derived by crosschecking VHPA data against the Vietnam KIA database (The Wall data) maintained by the Coffelt Group, a custodian group responsible to the National Archives for records maintenance and updating.

The Coffelt Group database is the most accurate KIA data for the Vietnam War. According to this database there are 2,590 Vietnam War KIAs buried at Arlington. This is a little over 4 percent of total Vietnam KIAs, and of those KIA, pilot casualties make up over 9 percent. If one assumes non-pilot crewmember interments possess the same ratio, one can assume some 20 percent of Vietnam KIAs buried in Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) died while serving in rotary-wing aircraft. Helicopter casualties constitute a very high representation, percentage-wise, of ANC Vietnam War burials.

Within ANC rest the remains of pilots and crewmembers from all branches, including the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). The only USCG Missing in Action (MIA) from the Vietnam Era, Lieutenant Jack C. Rittichier, was buried in ANC October 6, 2003. While serving an exchange tour with the U.S. Air Force, Lieutenant Rittichier died June 9, 1968 during a courageous rescue mission while commanding a USAF "Jolly Green Giant" HH-3 helicopter.

Rittichier was killed alongside fellow pilot, Captain Richard C. Yeend Jr., and crewmembers Staff Sergeant Elmer L. Holden and Sergeant James D. Locker.

In addition to being the resting place of those killed in action, ANC holds complete helicopter crews whose remains were recovered and interred in shared graves many years after the end of the Vietnam Era. Importantly, the cemetery continues to be the ultimate destination for many who survived helicopter combat in Southeast Asia and qualify for burial in this unique, national cemetery.

Famous, decorated helicopter pilots such as Medal of Honor recipients Michael J. Novosel and Jon Swanson lie interred within the cemetery's perimeter. Novosel continued to serve his nation for many years after receiving his award, while Swanson received the award for his noble actions that led to his death.

The paramount justification for establishing a lasting monument within ANC, however, is no other exists that recognizes the shared, common valor of the pilots and crewmembers who gave the last full measure of devotion to their nation. Individual military branches have tributes to those in their particular branch who gave their lives for their country, but no one monument exists specifically honoring the pilots and crewmembers who died operating rotary-wing aircraft, despite their extraordinary contribution to what is commonly described as "The Helicopter War."

Famed author/historian Neil Sheehan, in his book, "A Bright Shining Lie (page 762)," explains why the legacy of the men who flew, fought and died flying helicopters should be remembered and honored:

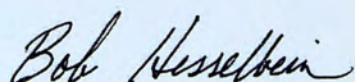
"The aviation units were the sole combat element of the U.S. Army that did not come apart under the stress of the war in Vietnam. Nearly 6,000 helicopter pilots and crew members perished, but the Army airmen never cracked. Whether it was the oneness of man and the acrobatic flying machine, whether it 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."

The comments expressed by Sheehan hold true for all who flew helicopters, whatever their particular branch of service. Marine Corps pilots and crewmembers flying H-34s, UH-1s and

CH-46s routinely provided support for their fellow Marines, U.S. Army units and non-U.S. allies. The U.S. Navy provided helicopter rescue, resupply and UH-1 Huey gunship support from the Mekong Delta to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and the U.S. Air Force flew H-3 and HH-53 rescue helicopters at great risk deep into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam to retrieve downed airmen confronting captivity or death.

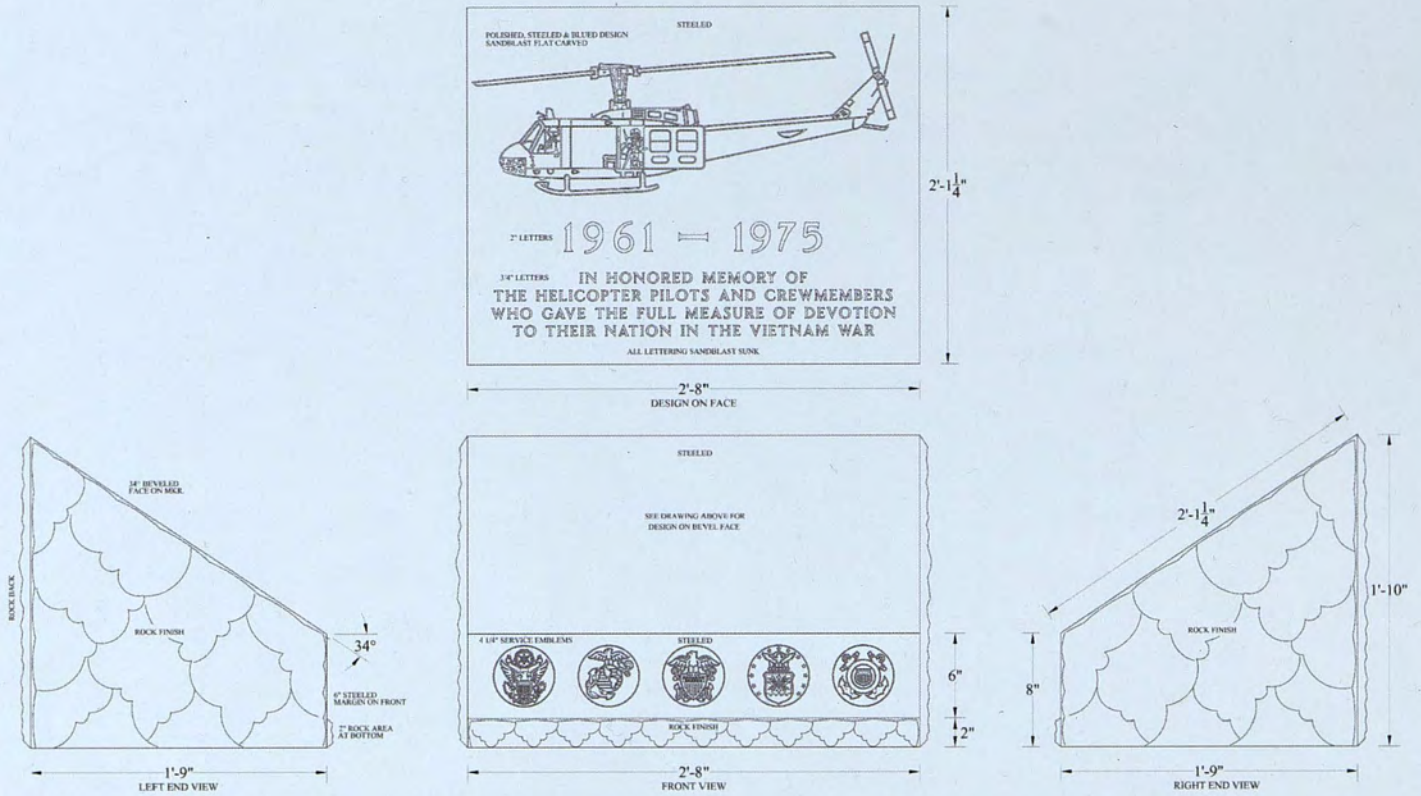
Arlington National Cemetery is justifiably the most logical, rightful place to establish a lasting memorial monument to the exceptional courage--the unfaltering commitment--of the helicopter pilots and crewmembers who gave the last full measure of devotion during the Vietnam War. As Abraham Lincoln said at the 1863 dedication of the Soldiers National Cemetery in Gettysburg, "...It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this."

Respectfully submitted,

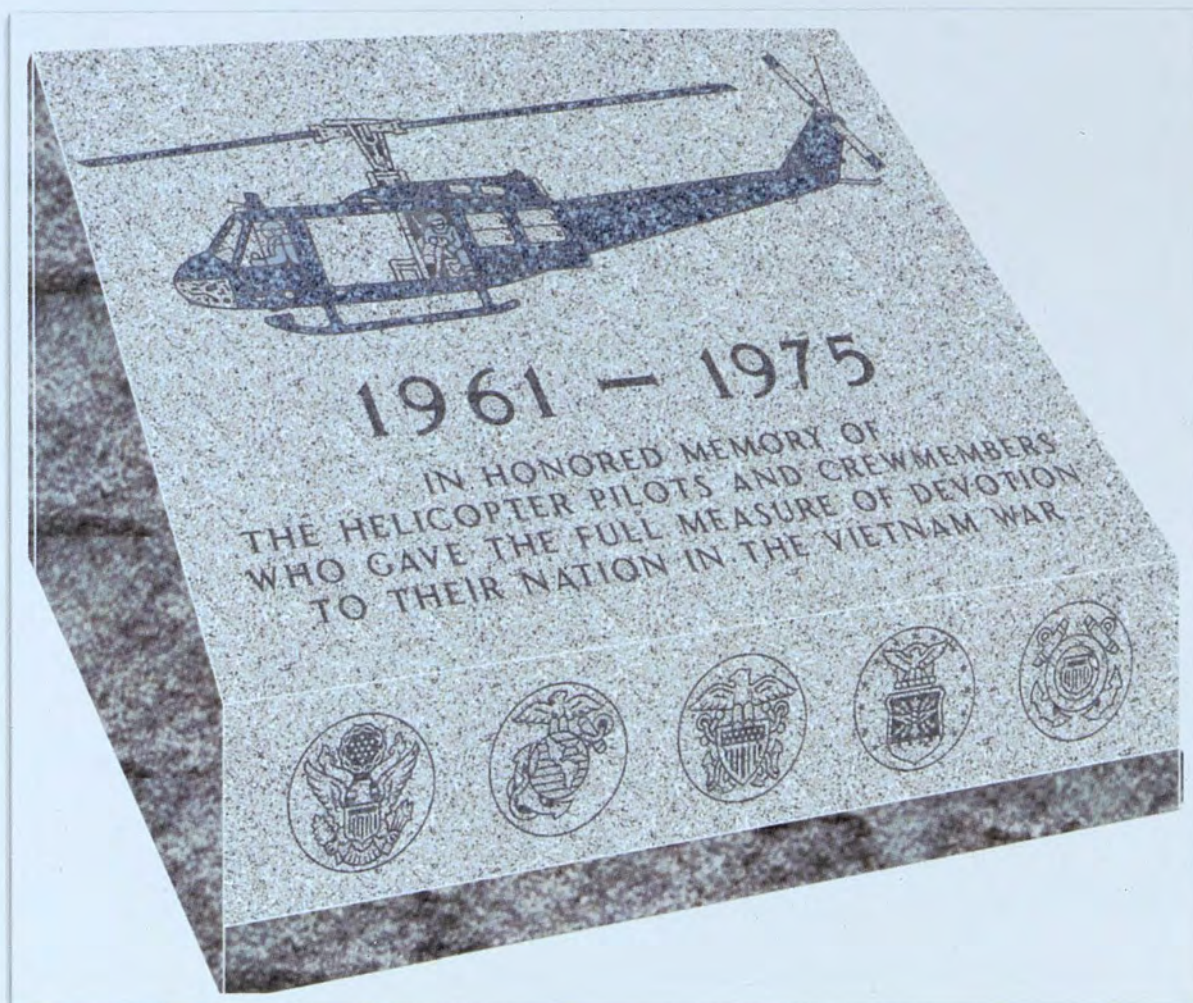
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Hesselbein".

Bob Hesselbein, Chairman
Legacy Committee
Vietnam Helicopter Pilot Association

III. MONUMENT DESIGN



IV. MONUMENT IMAGE



V. SITE IMAGES



North View

North view towards Memorial Amphitheater and Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Tree Commemorative Monument to be placed between Memorial Drive sidewalk and Red Maple tree. Distance from tree to sidewalk edge 7'-8". Monument front placed 1' from sidewalk edge.



South View

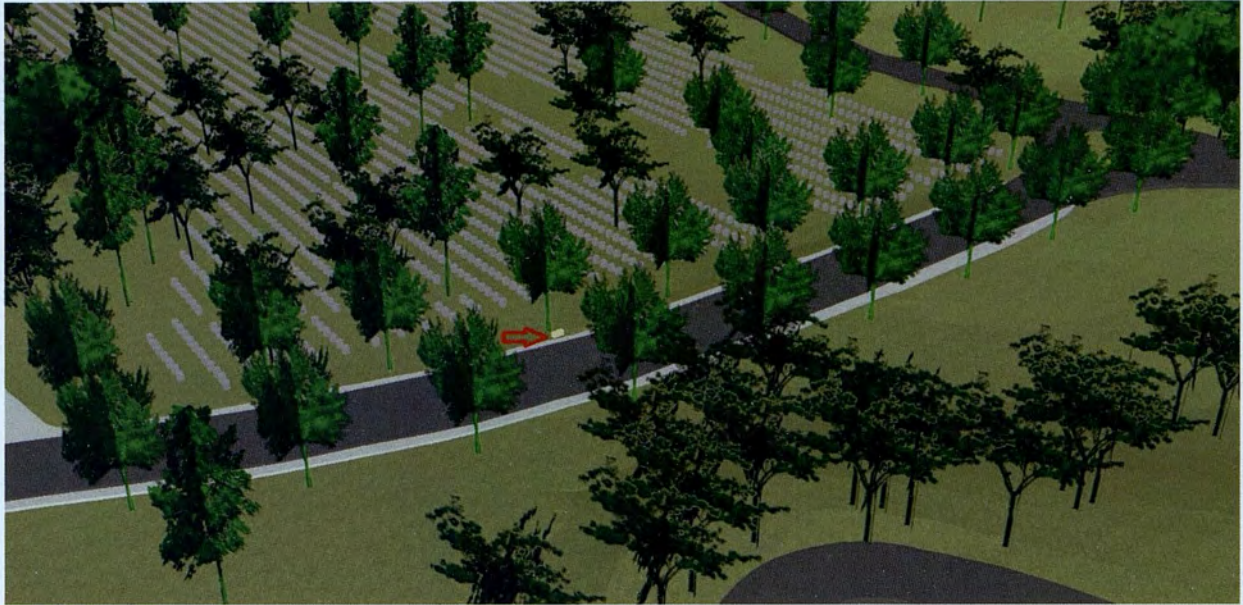
South view. Tree Commemorative Monument to be placed between Memorial Drive sidewalk and Red Maple tree. Distance from tree to sidewalk edge 7'-8". Monument front placed 1' from sidewalk edge.

IV VICINITY MAP



Cemetery Map

Monument location: Section 35, west boundary adjacent to Memorial Drive (location marked with red arrow).



Cemetery Depiction Map

Monument location: Section 35, west boundary adjacent to Memorial Drive (location marked with red arrow).

