

# Dedication ceremony set for monument honoring Vietnam helicopter pilots, crews

By: [Charlsy Panzino](#)

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Army UH-1D Iroquois helicopters airlift members of the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment from the Fihol Rubber Plantation to a new staging area

during Operation Wahiawa, a search-and-destroy mission conducted by the 25th Infantry Division northeast of Cu Chi, Vietnam. (Sgt. 1st Class James K.F. Dung/Army)

Those who wish to honor the helicopter pilots and crew members killed in [Vietnam](#) can do so on April 18 at [Arlington National Cemetery](#).

After four years, these [service members](#) will have their own monument at the Virginia cemetery.

The [Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association](#) spearheaded the effort, working with Arlington National Cemetery and Congress to get the monument approved.

At first, the [cemetery](#) was hesitant because of the ever-shrinking space for grave sites, but supporters of the monument wrote to Congress and gained attention.

Eventually, a compromise was made, and the cemetery approved the monument.

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument will be placed in Section 35 along Memorial Drive, not far from the Tomb of the Unknowns. It honors the nearly 5,000 helicopter pilots and crew members who were killed during the [Vietnam War](#).

The war was known as the “helicopter war” because the United States relied heavily on the aircraft to transport troops and provide close-air support.

The dedication on April 18 at 4 p.m. Eastern time is open to anyone who wants to attend and will feature Vietnam veterans along with Gold Star families.

Event highlights include speeches, a wreath laying and a flyover.



**Retired Lt. Col. Forrest "Frosty" Price, a Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association member, stands with the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Monument. (Courtesy photo)**

Retired Air Force Lt. Col. Bob Hesselbein, who flew AH-1 Cobra gunships in Vietnam, said there should be a balance in Arlington National Cemetery.

"I think the American people expect Arlington to be a combination of grave sites and memorials such as this," Hesselbein told Army Times.



## **Monument honoring Vietnam helicopter crews approved for Arlington Cemetery**

It took three years, but the pilots and crew members who died will be honored.

**By: Charlsy Panzino**

### **‘We just didn’t talk about it’**

Julie Kink first discovered the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association while trying to find information about her brother.

Kink was 8 when her 19-year-old brother David died after his helicopter crash in Vietnam in 1969.

“I grew up not really knowing too much about my brother because of our age difference,” Kink told Army Times. “I always wanted to find out more about what he did in Vietnam. What kind of person was he?”

She discovered the association in 1996 and has been attending reunions and volunteering ever since.

“That led to me finding some of the guys who trained with David and flew with him,” Kink said.



The Vietnam War is known as the helicopter war. (Army)

Kink assumed she was the last person to learn details about the Vietnam War, but she soon realized that wasn't the case.

“As families of Vietnam losses, for most of us the story is almost always the same,” she said. “We just didn't talk about it. We had no connections and no way to find out anything more.”

It was “neat to be welcomed and to be in a reunion of guys who are celebrating the good things that they did,” she said.

Kink, who will speak during the dedication ceremony, said the monument is not just for the pilots and crew members who were lost in Vietnam, but for the troops who survived and came back.

“The bond between the guys who were aviators in Vietnam and the men that they lost is incredibly strong,” Kink said. “They loved them the same that we families loved them.”

Kink uses the association's database of pilots who were killed or missing in action to track down any remaining family members.

"It's not 100 percent complete, but I use that database and look for online tributes, parents' obituaries that would give indication of siblings and where they live now," she said. By doing this, Kink found a family connection for more than 1,000 of the pilots who were killed. At the moment, there's no database for crew members.

The dedication ceremony is going to be "electric," with veterans, family members and friends all sitting together, she said.

"I hope [people] will realize that it's okay to talk about Vietnam," Kink said. "That we can remember and grieve simultaneously as we celebrate those guys' lives and what they did."