



AVVA President Sharon Hobbs, VVA Vice President Marsha Four, and VVMF CEO Jim Knotts unveiled the In Memory Plaque on May 27.

LEE BACH PHAN

Rededication of the In Memory Plaque

BY SHARON HOBBS

The AVVA Mission Statement says: “To provide support to veterans and their families through programs, projects, and education.” The In Memory Plaque has been one of the most long-standing, endearing, and passionate projects the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America has ever undertaken. We are elated to see it modified into a respectful tribute.

The repair and remodeling of the In Memory Plaque was finished in November of 2018. The rededication took place on Memorial Day 2019. The new plaque is raised and angles toward the visitor; the lettering is gold and more legible.

The effort to upgrade the plaque has been over ten years in the making, with AVVA leading the way. In 2015 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund joined us; our combined efforts made the completion and rededication happen.

The In Memory Plaque was a vision of Ruth Coder Fitzgerald, who believed that her brother, Air Force helicopter pilot John Coder, was a victim of Agent Orange exposure. He died of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma in 1992. Ruth Fitzgerald approached AVVA and VVA in 1996 with the idea of a plaque; both organizations supported her efforts. Ruth and Barry Fitzgerald formed a committee that included some influential and determined individuals with loved ones who made it home only to die later due to their service.

The In Memory Plaque was dedicated in 2004 as part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The plaque lay flat against the ground’s surface; it was not easily seen because it blended with the paver stones. On occasion, visitors inadvertently stood on it.

VVMF has managed the plaque since 1999. An annual ceremony to induct new honorees is held the Saturday before Father’s Day. Criteria for induction and a listing of all honorees can be found at www.vvmf.org Each veteran has a personal page as part of the In Memory Honor Roll in which loved ones can post photos and leave remembrances. More than 3,600 veterans have been honored through this program; 534 veterans were inducted into the In Memory Honor Roll this June.

In an article in *The VVA Veteran* former AVVA President Mary Miller wrote: “AVVA and VVA pledged to take care of the plaque after Ruth and Barry Fitzgerald retired.” Today, with VVMF’s help, we have fulfilled that pledge. Although the repair is not what AVVA envisioned when we started this journey, it now has a presence, can be easily found, and no one will accidentally stand on it.

We consider this long-awaited completion a success, and we are grateful to Jim Knotts, CEO of VVMF. He was AVVA’s true champion in this endeavor. Our design architect, J.C. Cummings, worked diligently with the National Park Service, the Council of Fine Arts, and the D.C. Planning Commission to make this long-awaited modification happen. Knotts anticipates that lighting to spotlight the plaque will be completed soon.

VVMF paid for the production and installation of the plaque through support of generous donors. For more info, go to www.vvmf.org/inmemory or www.vvmf.org/honor-roll

Sharon Hobbs is the outgoing president of Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America. ■