



PRESS RELEASE

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Thomas H. Corey, Vietnam Veteran, Activist, Dies at 77

(Washington, D.C.) — Vietnam Veterans of America mourns the passing of Thomas H. Corey, past National President of Vietnam Veterans of America and activist who dedicated his life to fighting for veterans of all generations and their families. Corey died on Monday, June 6, in Jupiter, Florida, due to complications from injuries sustained during war. He was 77.

A native of Detroit, Corey was drafted into the U.S. Army and was sent to Vietnam in May 1967. He served as a combat infantryman and squad leader with the 1st Cavalry Division, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry. While engaged in an assault against enemy positions in Quang Tri Province on January 31, 1968, during the Tet Offense, he received an enemy round in the neck, which hit his spinal cord and left him paralyzed and a quadriplegic. He was medically retired from the U.S. Army in May 1968. Corey is the recipient of the Bronze Star Medal with V device for Valor; two Purple Hearts; the Air Medal; the Army Commendation Medal; a Presidential Unit Citation; a Valorous Unit Citation; the Republic Vietnam Gallantry Cross; and the Combat Infantry Badge.

After an extended hospitalization, Corey returned to his family in Detroit where he spent his time in and out of the local VA hospital. He relocated to West Palm Beach, Florida in 1972, where he became deeply involved in community affairs as a veteran leader and advocate.

“It is a special kind of a person who can, when faced with such enormous disabling and physical challenges, have the strength and fortitude as Tom Corey has had for so many, many years,” said VVA National President Jack McManus, longtime friend, and fellow advocate. “Veterans are truly fortunate to have had the benefit of Tom’s advocacy for these past 42 years.”

Committed to overcoming institutional obstacles and improving the conditions he had encountered while a patient in the VA healthcare system, Corey joined Vietnam Veterans of America in 1980, two years after the organization’s founding. In 1981, he started VVA Palm Beach County Chapter 25, which was renamed in his honor in 1991. His drive to care for his fellow veterans fueled his advocacy, and in 1985 he was elected to VVA’s National Board of Directors.

He never faltered from his promise “to speak up for those veterans without a voice.” In 1987, he was elected to serve as VVA’s National Secretary, a position he held for five consecutive two-year terms. In 1997, he

was elected VVA National Vice President, and again in 1999. In 2001, he was elected to serve as VVA National President; he was re-elected in 2003.

Corey was known on Capitol Hill and within the VA for his dogged determination to address the barriers to care faced by his fellow veterans. He fought for mandatory funding for veterans healthcare and services, believing that to deny adequate funding for quality healthcare and other services is to violate a sacred trust with the nation. In his role as Ombudsman and Program Specialists at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center office, he assisted his fellow veterans, giving them a voice and helping them navigate hospital life.

“Tom has been an example to multitudes of veterans, and all who have contact with him. He showed us that no matter the hardship, if you have the willpower, you can make changes for the better in people’s lives,” said McManus. “He did this every day, year after year, with commitment and compassion.”

In his commitment to achieve the fullest possible accounting of our nation’s missing from the war, Corey made 16 trips to Vietnam with VVA’s Veterans Initiative Task Force, where he met with the former enemy, sharing fate-clarifying information in search for the remains of Americans and Vietnamese who perished during the war, and discussing the effects of the thousands of tons of Agent Orange and other herbicides sprayed over much of Vietnam. As president of the Vietnam Veterans Peace Initiative, he spearheaded the building of a maternal health clinic in his efforts to provide medical support to the victims of Agent Orange.

Corey is the first recipient of the Vietnam Veterans of America Commendation Medal, the organization’s highest award for service. The citation accompanying his medal noted, “Corey is the benchmark criteria for future recipients of this award.” His many awards include the Chapel of Four Chaplains Bronze Medallion and Humanitarian awards.

“We have lost our guiding leader, and he can never be replaced,” said McManus. “He will be greeted by so many grateful friends on the other side. Bless his soul and his family.”

A visitation will be held from 5pm-7pm, Tuesday June 21 at Taylor & Modeen Funeral Home, 250 Center Street, Jupiter, Florida. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 10am Wednesday June 22, at St Peter’s Catholic Church, 1701 Indian Creek Pkwy, Jupiter. Burial will follow at South Florida VA National Cemetery, Lake Worth. In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to VVA Thomas H. Corey Chapter 25, 6436 Chasewood Drive, Unit E, Jupiter, FL 33458, in loving memory of Thomas Corey.