

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2825

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the United States Army Dustoff crews of the Vietnam War, collectively, in recognition of their extraordinary heroism and life-saving actions in Vietnam.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 14, 2023

Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Ms. WARREN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. CRUZ, Mr. CASEY, Mrs. BLACKBURN, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. DAINES, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. THUNE, Mr. WELCH, Mr. MORAN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. KAINE, Mrs. SHAHEEN, and Mr. PETERS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the United States Army Dustoff crews of the Vietnam War, collectively, in recognition of their extraordinary heroism and life-saving actions in Vietnam.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Dustoff Crews of the
5 Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 The Congress finds that—

3 (1) a United States Army Dustoff crewman, in-
4 cluding a pilot, crew chief, and medic, is a helicopter
5 crew member who served honorably during the Viet-
6 nam War aboard helicopter air ambulances, which
7 were both nondivision and division assets under the
8 radio call signs “Dustoff” and “Medevac”;

9 (2) Dustoff crews performed aeromedical evacu-
10 ation for United States, Vietnamese, and allied
11 forces in Southeast Asia from May 1962 through
12 March 1973;

13 (3) nearing the end of World War II, the
14 United States Army began using helicopters for
15 medical evacuation and years later, during the Ko-
16 rean War, these helicopter air ambulances were re-
17 sponsible for transporting 17,700 United States cas-
18 ualties;

19 (4) during the Vietnam War, with the use of
20 helicopter air ambulances, United States Army
21 Dustoff crews pioneered the concept of dedicated
22 and rapid medical evacuation and transported al-
23 most 900,000 United States, South Vietnamese, and
24 other allied sick and wounded, as well as wounded
25 enemy forces;

1 (5) helicopters proved to be a revolutionary tool
2 to assist those injured on the battlefield;

3 (6) highly skilled and intrepid, Dustoff crews
4 were able to operate the helicopters and land them
5 on almost any terrain in nearly any weather to pick
6 up wounded, after which the Dustoff crews could
7 provide care to these patients while transporting
8 them to ready medical facilities;

9 (7) the vital work of the Dustoff crews required
10 consistent combat exposure and often proved to be
11 the difference between life and death for wounded
12 personnel;

13 (8) the revolutionary concept of a dedicated
14 combat life-saving system was cultivated and refined
15 by United States Army Dustoff crews during 11
16 years of intense conflict in and above the jungles of
17 Southeast Asia;

18 (9) innovative and resourceful Dustoff crews in
19 Vietnam were responsible for taking the new concept
20 of helicopter medical evacuation, born just a few
21 years earlier, and revolutionizing it to meet and sur-
22 pass the previously unattainable goal of delivering a
23 battlefield casualty to an operating table within the
24 vaunted “golden hour”;

1 (10) some Dustoff units in Vietnam operated so
2 efficiently that they were able to deliver a patient to
3 a waiting medical facility on an average of 50 min-
4 utes from the receipt of the mission, which saved the
5 lives of countless personnel in Vietnam, and this leg-
6 acy continues for modern-day Dustoff crews;

7 (11) the inherent danger of being a member of
8 a Dustoff crew in Vietnam meant that there was a
9 1 in 3 chance of being wounded or killed;

10 (12) many battles during the Vietnam War
11 raged at night, and members of the Dustoff crews
12 often found themselves searching for a landing zone
13 in complete darkness, in bad weather, over moun-
14 tainous terrain, and all while being the target of in-
15 tense enemy fire as they attempted to rescue the
16 wounded, which caused Dustoff crews to suffer a
17 rate of aircraft loss that was more than 3 times that
18 of all other types of combat helicopter missions in
19 Vietnam;

20 (13) the 54th Medical Detachment typified the
21 constant heroism displayed by Dustoff crews in Viet-
22 nam, over the span of a 10-month tour, with only
23 3 flyable helicopters and 40 soldiers in the unit,
24 evacuating 21,435 patients in 8,644 missions while
25 being airborne for 4,832 hours;

1 (14) collectively, the members of the 54th Med-
2 ical Detachment earned 78 awards for valor, includ-
3 ing 1 Medal of Honor, 1 Distinguished Service
4 Cross, 14 Silver Star Medals, 26 Distinguished Fly-
5 ing Crosses, 2 Bronze Star Medals for valor, 4 Air
6 Medals for valor, 4 Soldier's Medals, and 26 Purple
7 Heart Medals;

8 (15) the 54th Medical Detachment displayed
9 heroism on a daily basis and set the standard for all
10 Dustoff crews in Vietnam;

11 (16) 6 members of the 54th Medical Detach-
12 ment are in the Dustoff Hall of Fame, 3 are in the
13 Army Aviation Hall of Fame, and 1 is the only
14 United States Army aviator in the National Aviation
15 Hall of Fame;

16 (17) Dustoff crew members are among the most
17 highly decorated soldiers in United States military
18 history;

19 (18) in early 1964, Major Charles L. Kelly was
20 the Commanding Officer of the 57th Medical De-
21 tachment (Helicopter Ambulance), Provisional, in
22 Soc Trang, South Vietnam;

23 (19) Major Kelly helped to forge the Dustoff
24 call sign into history as one of the most welcomed

1 phrases to be heard over the radio by wounded sol-
2 diers in perilous and dire situations;

3 (20) in 1964, Major Kelly was killed in action
4 as he gallantly maneuvered his aircraft to save a
5 wounded United States soldier and several Viet-
6 nameese soldiers and boldly replied, after being
7 warned to stay away from the landing zone due to
8 the ferocity of enemy fire, “When I have your
9 wounded.”;

10 (21) General William Westmoreland, Com-
11 mander of the Military Assistance Command, Viet-
12 nam from 1964 to 1968, singled out Major Kelly as
13 an example of “the greatness of the human spirit”
14 and highlighted his famous reply as an inspiration to
15 all in combat;

16 (22) General Creighton Abrams, successor to
17 General Westmoreland from 1968 to 1972, and
18 former Chief of Staff of the United States Army,
19 highlighted the heroism of Dustoff crews, “A special
20 word about the Dustoffs Courage above and
21 beyond the call of duty was sort of routine to them.
22 It was a daily thing, part of the way they lived.
23 That’s the great part, and it meant so much to every
24 last man who served there. Whether he ever got hurt
25 or not, he knew Dustoff was there.”;

1 (23) Dustoff crews possessed unique skills and
2 traits that made them highly successful in
3 aeromedical evacuation in Vietnam, including indom-
4 itable courage, extraordinary aviation skill and
5 sound judgment under fire, high-level medical exper-
6 tise, and an unequaled dedication to the preservation
7 of human life;

8 (24) members of the United States Armed
9 Forces on the ground in Vietnam had their con-
10 fidence and battlefield prowess reinforced knowing
11 that there were heroic Dustoff crews just a few min-
12 utes from the fight, which was instrumental to their
13 well-being, willingness to fight, and morale;

14 (25) military families in the United States knew
15 that their loved ones would receive the quickest and
16 best possible care in the event of a war-time injury,
17 thanks to the Dustoff crews;

18 (26) the willingness of Dustoff crews to also
19 risk their lives to save helpless civilians left an im-
20 measurably positive impression on the people of
21 Vietnam and exemplified the finest United States
22 ideals of compassion and humanity; and

23 (27) Dustoff crews from the Vietnam War
24 hailed from every State in the United States and

1 represented numerous ethnic, religious, and cultural
2 backgrounds.

3 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

4 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
5 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
6 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
7 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a single
8 gold medal of appropriate design in honor of the Dustoff
9 crews of the Vietnam War, collectively, in recognition of
10 their heroic military service, which saved countless lives
11 and contributed directly to the defense of the United
12 States.

13 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
14 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
15 of the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Sec-
16 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
17 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
18 retary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense.

19 (c) U.S. ARMY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT MUSEUM.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
21 gold medal in honor of the Dustoff Crews of the
22 Vietnam War, the gold medal shall be given to the
23 U.S. Army Medical Department Museum, where it
24 will be available for display as appropriate and avail-
25 able for research.

1 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
2 Congress that the U.S. Army Medical Department
3 Museum should make the gold medal awarded pur-
4 suant to this Act available for display elsewhere,
5 particularly at appropriate locations associated with
6 the Vietnam War, and that preference should be
7 given to locations affiliated with the U.S. Army
8 Medical Department Museum.

9 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

10 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
11 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
12 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
13 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

14 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

15 (a) NATIONAL MEDAL.—Medals struck pursuant to
16 this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51
17 of title 31, United States Code.

18 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
19 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
20 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

21 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
22 **SALE.**

23 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
24 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
25 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-

1 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
2 this Act.

3 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
4 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
5 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
6 Enterprise Fund.

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