

116TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 3748

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

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 14, 2020

Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Ms. WARREN, Mr. COTTON, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. MORAN, Mr. COONS, Mr. TILLIS, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. PERDUE, Ms. MCSALLY, Mr. CRUZ, Mr. TESTER, and Mrs. LOEFFLER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

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## A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the United States Army Dust Off 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 “Dust Off Crews of  
5 the Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds that—

1           (1) a United States Army Dust Off crewman  
2           (pilot, crew chief, and medic) is a helicopter crew  
3           member who served honorably during the Vietnam  
4           War aboard a helicopter air ambulance often under  
5           the radio call sign “Dust Off”;

6           (2) Dust Off crews performed aeromedical evac-  
7           uation for United States, Vietnamese, and allied  
8           forces in Southeast Asia from May 1962 through  
9           March 1973;

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

16          (4) during the Vietnam War, with the use of  
17          helicopter air ambulances, United States Army Dust  
18          Off crews pioneered the concept of dedicated and  
19          rapid medical evacuation and transported almost  
20          900,000 United States, South Vietnamese, and other  
21          allied sick and wounded, as well as wounded enemy  
22          forces;

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

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

7           (7) the vital work of the Dust Off crews re-  
8           quired consistent combat exposure and often proved  
9           to be the difference between life and death for  
10          wounded personnel;

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

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

23          (10) some Dust Off units in Vietnam operated  
24          so efficiently that they were able to deliver a patient  
25          to a waiting medical facility on an average of 50

1 minutes from the receipt of the mission, which saved  
2 the lives of countless personnel in Vietnam, and this  
3 legacy continues for modern-day Dust Off crews;

4 (11) the inherent danger of being a member of  
5 a Dust Off crew in Vietnam meant that there was  
6 a 1 in 3 chance of being wounded or killed;

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

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

23 (14) collectively, the members of the 54th Med-  
24 ical Detachment earned 78 awards for valor, includ-  
25 ing 1 Medal of Honor, 1 Distinguished Service

1 Cross, 14 Silver Star Medals, 26 Distinguished Fly-  
2 ing Crosses, 2 Bronze Star Medals for valor, 4 Air  
3 Medals for valor, 4 Soldier's Medals, and 26 Purple  
4 Heart Medals;

5 (15) the 54th Medical Detachment displayed  
6 heroism on a daily basis and set the standard for all  
7 Dust Off crews in Vietnam;

8 (16) 6 members of the 54th Medical Detach-  
9 ment are in the Dust Off Hall of Fame, 3 are in the  
10 Army Aviation Hall of Fame, and 1 is the only  
11 United States Army aviator in the National Aviation  
12 Hall of Fame;

13 (17) Dust Off crew members are among the  
14 most highly decorated soldiers in American military  
15 history;

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

20 (19) Major Kelly helped to forge the Dust Off  
21 call sign into history as one of the most welcomed  
22 phrases to be heard over the radio by wounded sol-  
23 diers in perilous and dire situations;

24 (20) in 1964, Major Kelly was killed in action  
25 as he gallantly maneuvered his aircraft to save a

1 wounded American soldier and several Vietnamese  
 2 soldiers and boldly replied, after being warned to  
 3 stay away from the landing zone due to the ferocity  
 4 of enemy fire, “When I have your wounded.”;

5 (21) General William Westmoreland, Com-  
 6 mander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam  
 7 (1964–1968), singled out Major Kelly as an example  
 8 of “the greatness of the human spirit” and high-  
 9 lighted his famous reply as an inspiration to all in  
 10 combat;

11 (22) General Creighton Abrams, Westmore-  
 12 land’s successor (1968–1972), and former Chief of  
 13 Staff of the United States Army, highlighted the  
 14 heroism of Dust Off crews, “A special word about  
 15 the Dust Offs . . . Courage above and beyond the  
 16 call of duty was sort of routine to them. It was a  
 17 daily thing, part of the way they lived. That’s the  
 18 great part, and it meant so much to every last man  
 19 who served there. Whether he ever got hurt or not,  
 20 he knew Dust Off was there.”;

21 (23) Dust Off crews possessed unique skills and  
 22 traits that made them highly successful in  
 23 aeromedical evacuation in Vietnam, including indom-  
 24 itable courage, extraordinary aviation skill and  
 25 sound judgment under fire, high-level medical exper-

1       tise, and an unequalled dedication to the preservation  
2       of human life;

3           (24) members of the United States Armed  
4       Forces on the ground in Vietnam had their con-  
5       fidence and battlefield prowess reinforced knowing  
6       that there were heroic Dust Off crews just a few  
7       minutes from the fight, which was instrumental to  
8       their well-being, willingness to fight, and morale;

9           (25) military families in the United States knew  
10      that their loved ones would receive the quickest and  
11      best possible care in the event of a war-time injury,  
12      thanks to the Dust Off crews;

13          (26) the willingness of Dust Off crews to also  
14      risk their lives to save helpless civilians left an im-  
15      measurably positive impression on the people of  
16      Vietnam and exemplified the finest American ideals  
17      of compassion and humanity; and

18          (27) Dust Off crews from the Vietnam War  
19      hailed from every State in the United States and  
20      represented numerous ethnic, religious, and cultural  
21      backgrounds.

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

23          (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of  
24      the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-  
25      pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements

1 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a single  
2 gold medal of appropriate design in honor of the Dust Off  
3 crews of the Vietnam War, collectively, in recognition of  
4 their heroic military service, which saved countless lives  
5 and contributed directly to the defense of our country.

6 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the  
7 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the  
8 Treasury shall strike the gold medal with suitable em-  
9 blems, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the  
10 Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense.

11 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the  
13 gold medal in honor of the Dust Off Crews of the  
14 Vietnam War, the gold medal shall be given to the  
15 Smithsonian Institution, where it will be available  
16 for display as appropriate and available for research.

17 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of  
18 Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should  
19 also make the gold medal awarded pursuant to this  
20 Act available for display elsewhere, particularly at  
21 appropriate locations associated with the Vietnam  
22 War, and that preference should be given to loca-  
23 tions affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution.



1 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

2       The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
3 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 3  
4 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at  
5 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,  
6 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses,  
7 and the cost of the gold medal.

8 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

9       The medal struck pursuant to this Act is a national  
10 medal for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States  
11 Code.

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