

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2738

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, 2021

Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Ms. WARREN, Mr. MARKEY, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. CRUZ, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. PADILLA, and Mr. CASEY) 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”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds that—

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

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

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

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

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

1 (6) highly skilled and intrepid, Dustoff 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 Dustoff crews could
5 provide care to these patients while transporting
6 them to ready medical facilities;

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

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

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

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

1 utes from the receipt of the mission, which saved the
2 lives of countless personnel in Vietnam, and this leg-
3 acy continues for modern-day Dustoff crews;

4 (11) the inherent danger of being a member of
5 a Dustoff crew in Vietnam meant that there was a
6 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 Dustoff 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 Dustoff 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 Dustoff crews in Viet-
19 nam, over the span of a 10-month tour, with only
20 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 Dustoff crews in Vietnam;

8 (16) 6 members of the 54th Medical Detach-
9 ment are in the Dustoff 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) Dustoff crew members are among the most
14 highly decorated soldiers in American military his-
15 tory;

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 Dustoff
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 Dustoff crews, “A special word about the
 15 Dustoffs . . . Courage above and beyond the call of
 16 duty was sort of routine to them. It was a daily
 17 thing, part of the way they lived. That’s the great
 18 part, and it meant so much to every last man who
 19 served there. Whether he ever got hurt or not, he
 20 knew Dustoff was there.”;

21 (23) Dustoff 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 Dustoff crews just a few min-
7 utes from the fight, which was instrumental to their
8 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 Dustoff crews;

13 (26) the willingness of Dustoff 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) Dustoff 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 Dustoff
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 Dustoff 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 at
4 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
5 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

6 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

7 (a) NATIONAL MEDAL.—The medal struck pursuant
8 to this Act is a national medal for purposes of chapter
9 51 of title 31, United States Code.

10 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of chapter
11 51 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck under
12 this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

13 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
14 **SALE.**

15 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
16 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
17 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
18 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
19 this Act.

20 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
21 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
22 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
23 Enterprise Fund.

