

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2281

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.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 29, 2021

Mr. KILMER (for himself, Mrs. RODGERS of Washington, and Mr. BOST) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 The Congress finds that—

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

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

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

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

25 (5) helicopters proved to be a revolutionary tool
26 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 unequaled 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 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

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

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