

118TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 2825

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## AN ACT

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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

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

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 The Congress finds that—

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

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

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

22 (4) during the Vietnam War, with the use of  
23 helicopter air ambulances, United States Army  
24 Dustoff crews pioneered the concept of dedicated  
25 and rapid medical evacuation and transported al-  
26 most 900,000 United States, South Vietnamese, and

1 other allied sick and wounded, as well as wounded  
2 enemy forces;

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

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

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

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

20 (9) innovative and resourceful Dustoff crews in  
21 Vietnam were responsible for taking the new concept  
22 of helicopter medical evacuation, born just a few  
23 years earlier, and revolutionizing it to meet and sur-  
24 pass the previously unattainable goal of delivering a

1 battlefield casualty to an operating table within the  
2 vaunted “golden hour”;

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

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

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

22 (13) the 54th Medical Detachment typified the  
23 constant heroism displayed by Dustoff crews in Viet-  
24 nam, over the span of a 10-month tour, with only  
25 3 flyable helicopters and 40 soldiers in the unit,

1       evacuating 21,435 patients in 8,644 missions while  
2       being airborne for 4,832 hours;

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

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

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

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

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

1           (19) Major Kelly helped to forge the Dustoff  
2 call sign into history as one of the most welcomed  
3 phrases to be heard over the radio by wounded sol-  
4 diers in perilous and dire situations;

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

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

18           (22) General Creighton Abrams, successor to  
19 General Westmoreland from 1968 to 1972, and  
20 former Chief of Staff of the United States Army,  
21 highlighted the heroism of Dustoff crews, “A special  
22 word about the Dustoffs . . . . Courage above and  
23 beyond the call of duty was sort of routine to them.  
24 It was a daily thing, part of the way they lived.  
25 That’s the great part, and it meant so much to every

1 last man who served there. Whether he ever got hurt  
2 or not, he knew Dustoff was there.”;

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

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

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

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

1           (27) Dustoff crews from the Vietnam War  
2           hailed from every State in the United States and  
3           represented numerous ethnic, religious, and cultural  
4           backgrounds.

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

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

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

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

22           (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the  
23 gold medal in honor of the Dustoff Crews of the  
24 Vietnam War, the gold medal shall be given to the  
25 U.S. Army Medical Department Museum, where it

1 will be available for display as appropriate and avail-  
2 able for research.

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

11 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

12 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
13 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price  
14 sufficient to cover the costs thereof, including labor, mate-  
15 rials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

16 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

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

20 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections  
21 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals  
22 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic  
23 items.

1 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**  
2 **SALE.**

3 (a) **AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.**—There is  
4 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint  
5 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-  
6 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under  
7 this Act.

8 (b) **PROCEEDS OF SALE.**—Amounts received from the  
9 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section  
10 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public  
11 Enterprise Fund.

Passed the Senate May 9, 2024.

Attest:

*Secretary.*



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