

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5248

To award a Congressional gold medal to the 369th Infantry Regiment, commonly known as the “Harlem Hellfighters”, in recognition of their bravery and outstanding service during World War I.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 21, 2019

Mr. SUOZZI 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 369th Infantry Regiment, commonly known as the “Harlem Hellfighters”, in recognition of their bravery and outstanding service during World War I.

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 “Harlem Hellfighters
5 Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) When the United States officially entered
2 World War I in April 1917, the Armed Forces were
3 still segregated, even though African-American sol-
4 diers had served and distinguished themselves in
5 every war since the Revolutionary War.

6 (2) The 15th New York National Guard Regi-
7 ment was mobilized in 1917 as the 369th Infantry
8 Regiment and called into Federal service on July 25,
9 1917.

10 (3) The 369th completed its basic military
11 practice training at Camp Whitman, New York.

12 (4) To receive combat training, the 369th re-
13 ported on October 8, 1917, to Camp Wadsworth,
14 South Carolina, where the 369th experienced many
15 incidents of racial discrimination.

16 (5) Because many White soldiers refused to
17 perform combat duty with Black soldiers, members
18 of the 369th were initially assigned manual labor
19 tasks, such as loading and unloading supplies, and
20 constructing roads and railroads.

21 (6) To escape such prejudice, the Regiment
22 shipped off to France in early 1918 and, on April
23 8 of that year, was assigned to the French Army for
24 the duration of American participation in the war.

1 (7) On September 25, 1918, the Fourth French
2 Army went on the offensive in conjunction with the
3 American drive in the Meuse-Argonne where the
4 369th captured the important village of Sechault de-
5 spite sustaining severe losses.

6 (8) The 369th was also present in the Cham-
7 pagne-Marne, Meuse-Argonne, Champagne 1918,
8 and Alsace 1918 campaigns, and fought in the Bat-
9 tles of Belleau Wood and Chateau-Thierry.

10 (9) On November 26, 1918, the 369th reached
11 the banks of the Rhine River, the first Allied unit
12 to do so.

13 (10) The 369th was relieved of its assignment
14 with the French 161st Division on December 12,
15 1918, then returned to New York, and was demobi-
16 lized on February 28, 1919.

17 (11) The 369th received a parade down 5th Av-
18 enue in New York on February 17, 1919, receiving
19 applause and cheers from hundreds of thousands of
20 onlookers.

21 (12) For his courageous and patriotic service,
22 Private Henry Johnson of the 369th received the
23 French Croix de Guerre, with Palm, for extraor-
24 dinary valor, the first American to be awarded this
25 honor. He also belatedly received a Purple Heart,

1 was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, and in
2 2015 was awarded the Medal of Honor.

3 (13) Over 170 individual members of the 369th
4 received the Croix de Guerre, many, the Distin-
5 guished Service Cross, and the 369th was awarded
6 a unit citation.

7 (14) The 369th was dubbed the “Harlem
8 Hellfighters” by German soldiers, who found the
9 men to be incredibly determined and courageous in
10 battle.

11 (15) The 369th was one of the first regiments
12 of African Americans to serve with the American
13 Expeditionary Forces during World War I and one
14 of the first units in the United States to have Black
15 officers lead enlisted men.

16 (16) Altogether, the 369th spent 191 days on
17 the front line in World War I, more than any other
18 American unit.

19 (17) The 369th never lost a foot of ground or
20 had a man taken prisoner, despite suffering greater
21 losses than any other American regiment, with over
22 1,500 casualties.

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

24 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
25 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore

1 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
2 award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal
3 of appropriate design to the 369th Infantry Regiment,
4 commonly known as the “Harlem Hellfighters”, in rec-
5 ognition of their bravery and outstanding service during
6 World War I.

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

12 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
14 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
15 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
16 it will be displayed as appropriate and made avail-
17 able for research.

18 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
19 Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should
20 make the gold medal received under this Act avail-
21 able for display elsewhere, particularly at other loca-
22 tions and events associated with the Harlem
23 Hellfighters.

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

2 Under such regulations as the Secretary of the Treas-
3 ury may prescribe, the Secretary may strike and sell dupli-
4 cates in bronze of the gold medal struck under section
5 3(b), at a price sufficient to cover the costs of the medals,
6 including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and
7 overhead expenses.

8 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

9 Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national med-
10 als for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States
11 Code.

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