

114TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 2268

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

NOVEMBER 10, 2015

Mr. CORNYN (for himself and Mr. MANCHIN) 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 is  
2 a helicopter crew member who served honorably in  
3 the Vietnam War aboard a helicopter air ambulance  
4 under the radio call sign “Dust Off”;

5           (2) Dust Off crews performed aeromedical evac-  
6 uation for United States, Vietnamese, and allied  
7 forces inside South Vietnam from May 1962 through  
8 March 1973.

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

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

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

24           (6) highly skilled and intrepid, Dust Off crews  
25 were able to operate the helicopters and land them

1 on almost any terrain in nearly any weather to pick  
2 up wounded, after which the Dust Off crews could  
3 provide care to these patients while transporting  
4 them to ready medical facilities;

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

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

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

21 (10) some Dust Off units in Vietnam operated  
22 so efficiently that they were able to deliver a patient  
23 to a waiting medical facility on an average of 33  
24 minutes from the receipt of the mission, which saved

1 the lives of countless personnel in Vietnam, and this  
2 legacy continues for modern-day Dust Off crews;

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

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

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

22 (14) collectively, the members of the 54th Med-  
23 ical Detachment earned 78 awards for valor, includ-  
24 ing 1 Medal of Honor, 1 Distinguished Service  
25 Cross, 14 Silver Star Medals, 26 Distinguished Fly-

1       ing Crosses, 2 Bronze Star Medals for valor, 4 Air  
2       Medals for valor, 4 Soldier's Medals, and 26 Purple  
3       Heart Medals;

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

7           (16) 5 members of the 54th Medical Detach-  
8       ment are in the Dust Off Hall of Fame, 3 are in the  
9       Army Aviation Hall of Fame, and 1 is the only  
10      United States Army aviator in the National Aviation  
11      Hall of Fame;

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

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

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

23          (20) in 1964, Major Kelly was killed in action  
24      as he gallantly maneuvered his aircraft to save a  
25      wounded American soldier and several Vietnamese

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

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

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

20 (23) Dust Off crews possessed unique skills and  
21 traits that made them highly successful in  
22 aeromedical evacuation in Vietnam, including indom-  
23 itable courage, extraordinary aviation skill and  
24 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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