

119TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 5939

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to United States Marines who served as part of helicopter support missions in the Vietnam War.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 7, 2025

Mr. DAVIS of North Carolina (for himself and Mr. MURPHY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

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## A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to United States Marines who served as part of helicopter support missions in the Vietnam War.

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 “USMC Helicopter Sup-  
5       port in Vietnam Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6       **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7       (a) By the end of the war in Vietnam in 1975, there  
8       had been approximately 391,000 U.S. Marines and 10,000  
9       Navy Corpsmen who had served in Vietnam. Out of all  
10      of these men it is estimated that roughly 90 percent of

1 them served in either the First or Third Marine Division,  
2 while the remaining 10 percent served in the First Marine  
3 Air Wing (1st MAW).

4 (b) The 1st MAW itself consisted of both fixed-wing  
5 and helicopter (rotary) Marine Air Groups (MAG), and  
6 over 60 percent of the Marines and Corpsmen who served  
7 in the 1st MAW were assigned to the MAG.

8 (c) During Vietnam's 13 years of war the 1st MAW  
9 saw 25 of its helicopter squadrons deployed to Vietnam,  
10 and by January 1968 there would be 11 squadrons flying  
11 in the country on any given day until mid-1971.

12 (d) The first Marine helicopter squadron to be de-  
13 ployed to Vietnam was HMM-362 on April 15, 1962.  
14 Their mission in Vietnam was to both advise and train,  
15 transport troops, passengers, and cargo, and to provide  
16 aeromedical support to the troops of the Army of the Re-  
17 public of Vietnam (ARVN).

18 (e) 5 months later, at the request of the United  
19 States Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, and with  
20 the Marines having much more capable aircraft and in-  
21 strument-qualified pilots in country, the squadron that re-  
22 placed HMM-362, HMM-163, was relocated to the airfield  
23 in Da Nang. 21 days later, tragedy struck when one of  
24 their helicopters flying on a medical support mission  
25 crashed into a mountainside due to a mechanical problem,

1 killing 7 of the 8 men aboard. The casualties would in-  
2 clude the first Navy Corpsman, first Navy Flight Surgeon,  
3 and the first Marine aircrew members to die in Vietnam.

4 (f) 1 year later while flying on a search and rescue  
5 mission, 2 helicopters from yet another Marine Squadron,  
6 0 HMM-361, collided in mid-air while trying to avoid  
7 ground fire, killing 12 men. The casualties in this mishap  
8 included the first Hispanic, and the first African-Amer-  
9 ican Corpsmen to die in Vietnam, as well as another Navy  
10 Flight Surgeon and 9 Marines.

11 (g) In March of 1965, upon the orders of President  
12 Lyndon Johnson, 3,500 Marines of the 9th Marine Expe-  
13 ditionary Brigade made an amphibious landing on Red  
14 Beach, 9 miles north of Da Nang, making them the first  
15 United States combat troops to be deployed to Vietnam.  
16 With their arrival came the need for a much larger, and  
17 more diverse system of helicopter support.

18 (h) By the time the last United States Marine ground  
19 troops were pulled out of Vietnam, the number of Marines  
20 having served in the country was estimated to be between  
21 81,000 and 85,000. It was because of who and what they  
22 were, that they were tasked with conducting both large  
23 and small scale ground operations, search and destroy  
24 missions, counterinsurgency operations in both rural and  
25 urban settings throughout the 10,540 square-miles of

1 what was known as the ICTZ, or the I-Corps Tactical  
2 Zone.

3 (i) Comprised of the perhaps the 5 most hotly-con-  
4 tested provinces in all of South Vietnam; Quang Tri, Thua  
5 Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai, the Ma-  
6 rines often found themselves engaged with the enemy in  
7 places whose names became synonymous with the horrors  
8 of the war. These were places like Khe Sanh, Hill 881S,  
9 Mutter's Ridge, The Rockpile, Dong Ha, Con Thien, A  
10 Shau Valley, Phu Bai, Hue, Marble Mountains, Hill 55,  
11 the Que Son Mountains, LZ Baldy, LZ Ross, An Hoa,  
12 Hoi An, Liberty Bridge, Chu Lai, and Go Noi Island.

13 (j) These became the very places where Marine heli-  
14 copter aircrews flew into, and always hoped that they  
15 would leave again. And not fearing to do so, some of these  
16 places became the same places where the Marines decided  
17 to establish some of their helicopter bases.

18 (k) From these bases the helicopter aircrews would  
19 support those on the ground by flying large troop inser-  
20 tions or extractions, as well as large civilian relocation.  
21 They also inserted or extracted small reconnaissance  
22 teams, flew life-saving medical evacuations or participated  
23 in search and rescue missions, delivered much needed am-  
24 munition, food, water, medical supplies, or mail from home  
25 which to those on the ground proved crucial because it

1 impacted both their morale and emotional well-being.  
2 Other missions flown were because someone needed an  
3 overhead escort, aerial reconnaissance, target spotting, a  
4 night time flare drop, or because a VIP needed to be flown  
5 around.

6 (l) No matter what the mission was, or who it was  
7 for, or where it was needed, there were always great risks  
8 involved. It might be from the automatic weapons or small  
9 arms ground fire, mortars, rockets, landmines in the land-  
10 ing zone, RPG's that the enemy used, or perhaps because  
11 of something as simple as a barbed wire entanglement or  
12 a triple canopy forest. Mountains, the weather, pilot error,  
13 a mechanical, electrical, or fuel problem, basically you  
14 name it and it could kill you. But the aircrews flew any-  
15 way.

16 (m) There was one mission flown by helicopters, how-  
17 ever, that not only carried these same risks, but was also  
18 known by intelligence and the aircrew members themselves  
19 to be much more of a prize target to the enemy, the  
20 Medevac.

21 (n) Flown by an exceptionally skilled, calm, decisive,  
22 dedicated, compassionate and both physically and mentally  
23 resilient crew consisting of a pilot and co-pilot, crew chief,  
24 two gunners, and a skilled combat-trained Navy Corps-  
25 man, they were ready to fly anywhere and anytime, 7 days

1 a week. Of note is the fact that the corpsman and gunners  
2 all volunteered to fly medevac missions.

3 (o) These medevac aircraft were normally accom-  
4 panied by a “chase” ship (minus a corpsman) that shad-  
5 owed them, and 2 gunship escorts that would accompany  
6 them into what many aircrew members described as “hell  
7 and back”.

8 (p) This “medevac package” of 4 helicopters and  
9 their crews demonstrated the foresight that the Marines  
10 had put into these packages in that they were strategically  
11 located throughout the ICTZ and were always ready to  
12 go. To have such a package on standby and already in  
13 place when a mission was called was considered better  
14 than trying to piecemeal one at the last minute, thus en-  
15 dangering the life of a casualty. Bullets could kill, but so  
16 could a delay in launching.

17 (q) Medevac helicopters often flew into some of the  
18 most formidable, dangerous, and hostile environments in  
19 all of Vietnam. And as a result of where they went, and  
20 what they were doing, there would be 26 Medevac Corps-  
21 men who were killed in the line of duty.

22 (r) There were however, times when a medevac heli-  
23 copter was not readily available, which in time served as  
24 the impetus for creating a plan where another nearby heli-  
25 copter that was already tasked with another type of mis-

1 sion would be re-tasked to conduct the much needed evac-  
2 uation instead. This was what the aircrews considered to  
3 be a “flight of opportunity”.

4 (s) Those who were being evacuated were usually  
5 United States Marines, South Korean Marines (ROKs)  
6 ARVN Troopers, or the occasional Vietnamese civilian  
7 who was sick, wounded, or oftentimes deceased. Some  
8 evacuees were carried on, while some walked on, and there  
9 were also those who had to be hoisted up into the heli-  
10 copter in a stretcher, or on a jungle penetrator. In any  
11 case, because the pilots were always aware of the “golden  
12 hour” they would often inform the corpsman in the back  
13 how soon it would be until they would touch down.

14 (t) Depending on the circumstance of the evacuation,  
15 the evacuee or evacuees would either be flown to the 700-  
16 bed Naval Support Activity hospital in Da Nang, or to  
17 whichever United States Navy hospital ship like the 750-  
18 bed Repose, or the 786-bed Sanctuary, either which was  
19 in the Da Nang harbor at the time. Sometimes it was to  
20 either the 1st or 3rd Medical Battalion, or the civilian hos-  
21 pital in Da Nang. It is difficult to forget that amongst  
22 all of the other missions that the aircrew members flew,  
23 those were those missions that carried the bodies of many  
24 of the 18,844 Marines and 645 Navy Corpsmen who lost

1 their lives in Vietnam. These missions would take them  
2 directly to Graves Registration.

3 (u) The aircrews believed that those who were on the  
4 ground expected helicopter support, that they needed heli-  
5 copter support, and because of this, they made sure that  
6 they received helicopter support.

7 (v) There was a saying that went that those who flew  
8 did so “outside the wire” while those who never flew  
9 stayed “inside the wire”. These were those young men,  
10 who in their own specialized way, supported both those  
11 Marines who flew and those Marines who were out in the  
12 bush.

13 (w) These were the forgotten heroes of the 1st MAW.  
14 They were the men who maintained, serviced, and repaired  
15 the helicopters, fueled them and armed them, worked in  
16 air traffic control, maintained the runway, the hootches,  
17 the admin buildings, the clubs, cooked the meals, did the  
18 paperwork, studied the intelligence, worked in base secu-  
19 rity, drove the vehicles on and off base, and like the chap-  
20 lains, prayed for everyone.

21 (x) By the end of the war, the Marines would lose  
22 280 of their helicopters and 845 of their helicopter crew  
23 members and passengers in Vietnam. Not quantified any-  
24 where, however, is the exact number of those Marines on  
25 base who were killed and did not fly.

1       (y) The helicopter aircrews of the 1st MAW who flew  
2 in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 transported more  
3 than 3,210,000 troops and passengers, flew more than  
4 1,600,000 various sorties, delivered more than 338,000  
5 tons of cargo, and medically evacuated approximately  
6 189,000 patients.

7       (z) But it was the former Commandant of the Marine  
8 Corps, General Leonard F. Chapman, who best summa-  
9 rized what helicopter support meant to the Marines on the  
10 ground in Vietnam when he stated that “When a Marine  
11 in Vietnam is wounded, surrounded, hungry, low on am-  
12 munition or water, he looks to the sky, he knows the chop-  
13 pers are coming”.

14 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

15       (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of  
16 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-  
17 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements  
18 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a single  
19 gold medal of appropriate design in honor of the Medevac  
20 Marines and Navy Corpsmen of the Vietnam War, collec-  
21 tively, in recognition of their heroic military service, which  
22 saved countless lives and contributed directly to the de-  
23 fense of the United States.

24       (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the  
25 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary

1 of the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Sec-  
2 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,  
3 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-  
4 retary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense.

5 (c) UNITED STATES NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT  
6 MUSEUM.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the  
8 gold medal in honor of the Medevac Marines and  
9 Navy Corpsmen of the Vietnam War, the gold medal  
10 shall be given to the National Museum of the United  
11 States Navy, where it will be available for display as  
12 appropriate and available for research.

13 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of  
14 Congress that the National Museum of the United  
15 States Navy should make the gold medal awarded  
16 pursuant to this Act available for display elsewhere,  
17 particularly at appropriate locations associated with  
18 the Vietnam War, and that preference should be  
19 given to locations affiliated with the National Mu-  
20 seum of the United States Navy.

21 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

22 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
23 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price  
24 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,  
25 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

1 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

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

5 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section  
6 5134 and section 5136 of title 31, United States Code,  
7 all medals struck under this Act shall be considered to  
8 be numismatic items.

9 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS, PROCEEDS OF**  
10 **SALE.**

11 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is  
12 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint  
13 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-  
14 essary to pay for the costs thereof struck under this Act.

15 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the  
16 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section  
17 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public  
18 Enterprise Fund.

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