

CONGRESSWOMAN MARCY KAPTUR

HVAC Members Day Testimony

June 22th, 2023

REP. KAPTUR: “Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee today and I look forward to working with you to reform these proposals. As a former Member of this Committee, I am grateful for the critical work this Committee undertakes to ensure that the brave men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces are afforded the respect and recognition their service has earned when they return home as distinguished veterans.

I wish to address two issues for which I seek inclusion as your Committee develops its 118th Congress authorizing legislation—first, to authorize the Administration to:

- 1) Strike a new service medal entitled “Last Servicemember Standing”; and

2) To authorize an unmarried, only child of lifelong service members the opportunity, at their own expense, to be cremated or conventionally interred above or alongside their career military parents who are interred in military cemeteries.

First, on the Medal I seek your Committee's endorsement and collaboration for the Administration to perform the necessary research and create criteria—including character, circumstance, nature of the battle, war wounds and medical records—to define, strike, and administer the award of a new category of Service Medal acknowledging the heroism and exceptional valor of the "Last Servicemember Standing."

Presently, the military only processes medals for servicemembers who have served in battle if there are two living witnesses, that can verify their service. For soldiers who served in horrific battle with all soldiers dead but one remaining alive and critically wounded and yet standing ground, this regulation simply makes no sense.

In furtherance of this objective, I have the distinct privilege and responsibility of sharing a story with your Committee, that serves as an example of the situation that would warrant the Medal I am proposing. It both will acknowledge enormous loss of life in battle but does not deny the “Last Servicemember Standing” the meritorious medal award they are due for extraordinary service. I respectfully ask for this soldier’s story’s inclusion for the Record. It is a true story of the late Army Cavalry Platoon leader and Vietnam War veteran Sergeant John Eade of Toledo, Ohio. His story well illustrates why I believe such a Medal deserves a place in our nation’s military service awards.

His meticulous, handwritten maps and battle notes methodically recount his recollections as an Army combat soldier who fought against the Vietnamese Regular forces at LaDrang Valley/Landing Zone Albany, beginning November 17, 1965. That battle is recorded as the costliest battle of the Vietnam War.

His notes state: “There is controversy about this battle. My statement does not engage these issues. The lack of intelligence, our sketchy mission order, timely transport helicopters were unavailable, why hours passed with no air or artillery support, why did the Brigade Commanders believe as they did...there are a thousand questions. I can only say that more than 1000 American and North Vietnamese infantrymen died in what is called the most savage one day battle of the Vietnam War.”

In his detailed war notes, Sgt. Eade remains precise and passionless. Having had the privilege of knowing his character and despite his severe, lifelong physical infirmaries, his dignified, soldierly bearing always radiated strength and composure. Our community is very proud he is a son of our hometown of Toledo, Ohio. He was its Golden Gloves champion of 1962, as well as Phi Beta Kappa and Summa Cum Laude baccalaureate graduate of the University of Toledo then earning a Master’s degree in Architecture from Miami University in 1984 with Alpha Rho Chi medal. Despite his medical challenges, he became the chief inspector for the City of Boston, Massachusetts.

For his valor in battle at age 21, as a fire team leader in 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, on November 14, the single deadliest day for American forces during the war, Sergeant Eade and his team became pinned down in ferocious hand to hand combat, badly outnumbered in the jungle at Landing Zone Albany. Poor intelligence placed them all in harm's way as the enemy proved to be the North Vietnamese regular forces, not the Vietcong. By the end of the day, Sergeant Eade was the only surviving member of his platoon. He had sustained lifelong disabling injuries with shrapnel wounds to his legs, was struck by napalm, and had been shot in the shoulder, abdomen, and face—resulting in the loss of his eye, with nasal throat, and vocal chord impairment, with grenade shrapnel in his leg and foot making walking impossible.

Sergeant Eade refused to withdraw, continuing the battle, and repeatedly exposing himself to the onslaught, exhausting his ammunition. His

resolve and determination ultimately ensured U.S. forces held the southwestern flank.

Sergeant Eade was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star, but he was not eligible for additional medals because DoD regulations state “there were not two living witnesses who survived” to attest to his fierce fight to subdue the enemy and protect his platoon. All were dead as the unit was overwhelmed by superior enemy forces and forced to fight hand-to-hand combat for hours exhausting their ammunition. Left for dead, he was discovered, rescued, and flown out by US forces three days later. His initial recovery in US military hospitals took over a year as he bore serious war wounds lifelong. I never heard him complain once.

Secondly, on the request for burial of unmarried children of a career veteran U.S. soldier and spouses buried in military cemeteries. The unmarried, only child should be afforded burial rights if the applicant pays for burial expenses. My proposal suggests that on a case-by-case basis the cemetery would make decisions on space constraints and

whether cremation or traditional burial is suitable and whether a nameplate of the child could be affixed to the parent's grave marker.

Current law prevents them from having the chance to be buried with their closest and only family members. Our national cemeteries are dedicated to the brave men and women who have fought and died for our nation's freedom, and that of their families and future generations. It is morally unjust to prevent loved ones from being buried with them when there are no other surviving family members.

Thank you, Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano, for the opportunity to speak to your committee today about these vital matters. I look forward to working with you and your staff to develop these proposals and move them across the finish line.