

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7385

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Edwin Cole “Ed” Bearss, in recognition of his contributions to preservation of American Civil War history and continued efforts to bring our Nation’s history alive for new generations through his interpretive storytelling.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 26, 2020

Mr. CONNOLLY introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Edwin Cole “Ed” Bearss, in recognition of his contributions to preservation of American Civil War history and continued efforts to bring our Nation’s history alive for new generations through his interpretive storytelling.

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. FINDINGS.**

4 Congress finds the following:

5 (1) Edwin Cole “Ed” Bearss was born June
6 26, 1923, in Billings, Montana, to Omar and Vir-
7 ginia Bearss.

1 (2) During a 40-year career with the National
2 Park Service, Mr. Bearss distinguished himself as
3 one of America’s preeminent historians, particularly
4 in the field of the Civil War, not only through his
5 work to preserve the places in which our Nation’s
6 history was forged but also through his captivating
7 interpretive storytelling about the people and events
8 that shaped those places.

9 (3) Mr. Bearss’ lifelong passion for Civil War
10 history was kindled during his youth. Even at an
11 early age, Mr. Bearss demonstrated a knack for
12 committing facts to memory, a skill that helped him
13 win school contests in history, current events, and
14 geography.

15 (4) He graduated high school in May 1941 and
16 the following year joined the U.S. Marine Corps,
17 serving with the 3rd Marine Raider Battalion during
18 the invasion of Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands.
19 He was badly wounded in gunfire at “Suicide
20 Creek”, Cape Gloucester, New Britain, while serving
21 with the 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division.

22 (5) Upon returning home, Mr. Bearss attended
23 Georgetown University, obtaining a bachelor’s de-
24 gree in Foreign Service studies, and later attended

1 Indiana University, earning a master's degree in his-
2 tory.

3 (6) It was during a fortuitous visit to the Shi-
4 loh National Military Park in Tennessee, on a tour
5 with the park historian, where the seeds were plant-
6 ed for Mr. Bearss' future career with the National
7 Park Service.

8 (7) In 1955, he landed a job as park historian
9 at the National Battlefield Park in Vicksburg, Mis-
10 sissippi, where his research helped fill in missing
11 pieces of Civil War history. None were more signifi-
12 cant than the discovery of the USS Cairo, a long-
13 lost Union ironclad gunboat sunk by Confederate
14 submarine torpedoes in 1862 that was buried in the
15 mud of the Yazoo River. Mr. Bearss later authored
16 a book on the "sinking and salvage" of the ironclad.

17 (8) It was during his tenure at Vicksburg that
18 he met his wife, Margie, a teacher who shared Mr.
19 Bearss' love of history. They had three children,
20 Sara, Cole, and Jenny.

21 (9) Mr. Bearss became the National Park Serv-
22 ice's chief historian in 1981. Following his retire-
23 ment in 1994, he was recognized with the title Chief
24 Historian Emeritus, a fitting title as his research

1 and recounting of our Nation's history continues to
2 this day.

3 (10) Whenever possible, he travels to our Na-
4 tion's Civil War battlefields, helping to preserve the
5 places where history happened and make those
6 places come alive as a public historian. He once said,
7 "You can't describe a battlefield unless you walk
8 it.". Anyone who has spent time with Mr. Bearss
9 touring a battlefield, sometimes braving the ele-
10 ments, enthralled by his prodigious tales regards
11 him as a National Treasure. His unique chronicling
12 of our Nation's history has been described as a
13 "transcendental experience" of "Homeric mono-
14 logues" punctuated by "colorful, vivid images". Mr.
15 Bearss himself has been described as a cross be-
16 tween "a good-natured platoon sergeant and Walter
17 Cronkite". He lectures with his eye closed, so he can
18 "see" the history better, he once said.

19 (11) Mr. Bearss has received multiple honors
20 for his contributions to the preservation of our Na-
21 tion's history: the Harry S. Truman Award in 1961
22 for Meritorious Service in the field of Civil War his-
23 tory, Man of the Year at Vicksburg in 1963, in-
24 ducted a member of the Company of Military Histo-
25 rians in 1964, the Nevins-Freeman Award from the

1 Chicago Civil War Roundtable in 1980, the Depart-
2 ment of the Interior’s Distinguished Service Award
3 in 1983, and a commendation from the Secretary of
4 the Army in 1985. The Secretary of the Interior at
5 the time, James Watt, called Mr. Bearss “unques-
6 tionably the most productive historian in the history
7 of the National Park Service”.

8 (12) Mr. Bearss continued to tour the country
9 well into his later years, visiting battlefields and
10 Civil War organizations, to keep America’s history
11 fresh in the minds of future generations.

12 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

13 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
14 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
15 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
16 for the presentation, on behalf of the Congress, of a gold
17 medal of appropriate design to Edwin Cole “Ed” Bearss,
18 in recognition of his contributions to preservation of
19 American Civil War history and continued efforts to bring
20 our Nation’s history alive for new generations through his
21 interpretive storytelling.

22 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
23 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
24 of the Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the
25 “Secretary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable em-

1 blem, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the
2 Secretary.

3 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

4 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
5 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 2
6 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at
7 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
8 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses,
9 and the cost of the gold medal.

10 **SEC. 4. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

11 The medals struck pursuant to this Act are national
12 medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United
13 States Code.

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