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Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress

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Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress

Senators and Representatives are frequently asked to support or sponsor proposals recognizing historic events and outstanding achievements by individuals or institutions. Among the various forms of recognition that Congress bestows, the Congressional Gold Medal is often considered the most distinguished. Through this venerable tradition—the occasional commissioning of individually struck gold medals in its name—Congress has expressed public gratitude on behalf of the nation for distinguished contributions for more than two centuries. Since 1776, this award, which initially was bestowed on military leaders, has also been given to such diverse individuals as Sir Winston Churchill and Bob Hope, George Washington and Robert Frost, Joe Louis and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Congressional gold medal legislation generally has a specific format. Once a gold medal is authorized, it follows a specified process for design, minting, and presentation. This process includes consultation and recommendations by the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC) and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), pursuant to any statutory instructions, before the Secretary of the Treasury makes the final decision on a gold medal's design. Once the medal has been struck, a ceremony will often be scheduled to formally award the medal to the recipient.

In recent years, the number of gold medals awarded has increased, and some have expressed interest in examining the gold medal authorization and awarding process. Should Congress want to make such changes, several individual and institutional options might be available. The individual options include decisions made by Members of Congress as to what individual or groups might be honored; potential specification of gold medal design elements; and where gold medals for groups might be housed once the award is made. The institutional options could include House, Senate, or committee rules for the consideration of gold medal legislation and whether statutory standards on the number of gold medals issued per year or per Congress might be established for gold medals.

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Introduction

Since the late 1700s, Congress has expressed public gratitude to individuals and groups by awarding medals and other similar decorations.¹ The Continental Congress awarded the first Congressional Gold Medals. Since that time, Congress has awarded gold medals to express public gratitude for distinguished contributions, dramatize the virtues of patriotism, and perpetuate the remembrance of great events. This tradition of authorizing individually struck gold medals bearing the portraits or actions of honorees is rich with history.

Although Congress has approved legislation stipulating specific requirements for numerous other awards and decorations, there are no permanent statutory provisions specifically relating to the creation of Congressional Gold Medals. When Congress has determined that such an award is appropriate, it has, by special action, provided for the creation of a personalized medal to be given in the name of Congress.²

Early Practices

The Continental Congress authorized the first Congressional Gold Medals. As initially conceived, Congressional Gold Medals were awards “imbued with the conviction that only the very highest achievements [were] entitled to such a distinction, and that the value of a reward is enhanced by its rarity!”³ At that time, the Continental Congress concluded there was no better way to honor “and preserve the memory of illustrious characters and splendid events than medals—whether we take into consideration the imperishable nature of the substance whence they are formed, the facility of multiplying copies, or the practice of depositing them in the cabinets of the curious.”⁴ The first gold medals were struck in Paris under the direction of Colonel David Humphrey.⁵

Following a long-standing historical practice, Congress commissioned gold medals as tributes for what it considered the most distinguished achievements. Silver and bronze medals, and ceremonial swords, were awarded for less eminent, but still notable, accomplishments.⁶ Only the gold medal has been continuously awarded to the present day.

The Continental Congress authorized the first Congressional Gold Medal on March 25, 1776, for George Washington, then commander of the Continental Army, for his “wise and spirited

¹ See “Decorations, Medals, and Badges,” in the general index of the *United States Code: 2018 Edition* (Washington: GPO, 2019).

² Other options for recognizing individuals and groups include naming post offices or federal office buildings, establishing a commemorative period, minting commemorative coins, and creating memorials. For more information on these recognitions, see CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, coordinated by Jacob R. Straus.

³ J.F. Loubat, *The Medallion History of the United States of America, 1776-1876*, 2 vols. (New York: Printed by Author, 1878), vol. 1, p. viii.

⁴ David Humphrey to Matthew Carey (Printer of the American Museum), November 1787, in Labatt, *The Medallion History of the United States*, vol. 1, p. xxiv.

⁵ Humphrey “succeeded in securing the cooperation of the *Academie d’Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* in Paris and this learned institution nominated a committee of four among its members who worked very expeditiously in devising designs and inscriptions” for the medals the Continental Congress had authorized. Vladimir Clain-Stefanelli and Elvira Clain-Stefanelli, *Medals Commemorating Battles of the American Revolution* (Washington: The National Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, 1973), p. 1.

⁶ T. Bailey Meyers, “Our National Medals,” *Magazine of American History*, vol. 2, September 1878, pp. 529-532. Altogether Congress authorized a total of 15 medals and 10 ceremonial swords during the Confederation period. Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 16, pp. 54-55.

conduct” in bringing about British evacuation of Boston.⁷ During the next 12 years, the Continental Congress authorized an additional six gold medals for Revolutionary military leaders. **Table 1** lists the Congressional Gold Medals issued by the Continental Congress, the year, the awardee, and the reason the medal was authorized.

Table 1. Congressional Gold Medals Issued by the Continental Congress, 1776-1787

Year	Awardee	Reason
1776	General George Washington	“Wise and spirited conduct” in bringing about British evacuation of Boston ^a
1777	Major General Horatio Gates	“Brave and successful efforts” in bringing about the surrender of the British Army at Saratoga ^b
1779	Major General Anthony Wayne	Courageous assault on the British at Stony Point, NY ^c
1779	Major Henry Lee	Skill and bravery exhibited against the British at Paulus Hook, NJ ^d
1781	Brigadier General Daniel Morgan	Gallant efforts in South Carolina during 1781 ^e
1781	Major General Nathaniel Greene	Gallant efforts in South Carolina during 1781 ^f
1787	John Paul Jones	“Valor and brilliant services” in capturing the <i>Serapis</i> ^g

Source: CRS analysis of Congressional Gold Medal legislation.

Notes: For discussions of these medals, see Theodore T. Belote, “War Medals of the American Revolution,” *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, vol. 55, September 1921, pp. 487-499; Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 16, pp. xxxv-xli, 53-66; Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint*, pp. 114-117, 120, 122, 149; Labatt, *The Medallion History of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 1-21, 29-36, 40-45, 50-56, 97-112; Martha L. Turner, “Commemorative Medals of the American Revolution and the War of 1812,” *Numismatist*, vol. 88, January 1975, pp. 6-15.

- a. U.S. Continental Congress, *Journals of the Continental Congress: 1774-1789*, vol. 4, March 25, 1776, p. 234. Brief histories of George Washington’s gold medal are found in Georgia Stamm Chamberlain, *American Medals and Medalists* (Annandale, VA: Designed and Lithographed by the Turnpike Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 16-17; R.W. Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint: The First Century 1792-1892* (El Cajon, CA: The Token and Medal Society, Inc., 1977), pp. 114-115.
- b. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 9, November 4, 1777, pp. 861-862.
- c. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 14, July 26, 1779, p. 890.
- d. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 15, September 24, 1779, p. 1099.
- e. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 19, January 17, 1781, pp. 246-247.
- f. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 21, October 19, 1781, pp. 1083-1085.
- g. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 33, October 16, 1787, p. 687.

The 1779 gold medal conferred upon Major Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee for his “remarkable prudence” and “bravery” during the surprise raid of Paulus Hook, NJ, was the first to be struck in the United States, as previous medals had been struck in France.⁸ **Figure 1** shows the 1779 Major Henry Lee Congressional Gold Medal.

⁷ U.S. Continental Congress, *Journals of the Continental Congress: 1774-1789*, vol. 4, March 25, 1776, p. 234. Brief histories of George Washington’s gold medal are found in Georgia Stamm Chamberlain, *American Medals and Medalists* (Annandale, VA: Designed and Lithographed by the Turnpike Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 16-17; R.W. Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint: The First Century 1792-1892* (El Cajon, CA: The Token and Medal Society, Inc., 1977), pp. 114-115.

⁸ Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint*, p. xviii.

Figure I. Major Henry Lee Congressional Gold Medal



Source: Museums Victoria (AUS) “Medal—Congressional Medal, Henry Lee, United States,” Item NU 36568, at <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1382927>.

19th Century Recipients

Following the ratification of the Constitution, Congress gave the first two Congressional Gold Medals in 1800 to Captain Thomas Truxton for his gallant effort during the action between the U.S. frigate *Constellation* and the French ship *La Vengeance* and in 1805 to Commodore Edward Preble for gallantry and good conduct during the War with Tripoli.⁹ After those medals, Congress issued gold medals primarily for military achievements in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. All told, Congress awarded 27 gold medals for the War of 1812,¹⁰ and another series of medals for expeditions led by Major General Zachary Taylor and Major General Winfield Scott in the Mexican War. General Taylor received three Congressional Gold Medals,¹¹ while General Scott received one.¹²

In 1854, Congress began to broaden the scope of activities that it recognized as meriting a Congressional Gold Medal. This change was prompted by Commander Duncan N. Ingraham of

⁹ 2 Stat. 87 (1800), 2 Stat. 346-347 (1805). See also Theodore T. Belote, “Naval War Medals of the United States 1800-1815, Part III,” *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, vol. 56, January 1922, pp. 77-93; Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint*, p. 150; Labatt, *The Medallist History of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 128-132.

¹⁰ For example, see 3 Stat. 341 (1816). On February 22, 1816, Congress awarded gold medals to Captain Charles Steward of the frigate *Constitution* and to Captain James Biddle of the sloop of war *Hornet*. Crews of the *Constitution* and *Hornet* were awarded silver medals. See also Theodore T. Belote, “Military and Naval Medals of the War of 1812-1815, Part II,” *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, vol. 55, November 1921, p. 639; Belote, “Naval War Medals of the United States 1800-1815, Part III,” pp. 92-93; Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint*, p. 153; Labatt, *The Medallist History of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 249-252.

¹¹ 9 Stat. 111 (1846), 9 Stat. 206 (1847), and 9 Stat. 334-335 (1848). See also Chamberlain, *American Medals and Medalists*, pp. 75-93.

¹² 9 Stat. 333 (1848). See also Theodore T. Belote, “Military Medals of the War with Mexico and the Civil War,” *Numismatist*, vol. 56, May 1922, pp. 280-281; Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint*, p. 138. In addition to medals for Generals Taylor and Scott, gold medals were given to 10 officers and seamen belonging or attached to the French, British, and Spanish ships-of-war, who on December 10, 1846, gallantly rescued 37 of the officers and crew from the wreck of the United States brig *Somers* in Vera Cruz harbor (9 Stat. 208 [1847]).

the USS *St. Louis*, whom Congress awarded a gold medal for his “gallant and judicious conduct ... in extending protection to Martin Koszta, by rescuing him from illegal seizure and imprisonment on board the Austrian war-brig Hussar.”¹³ Subsequently, Congress awarded gold medals to several individuals recognized for nonmilitary heroic activities or their work in specific fields. For example, in 1864, Cornelius Vanderbilt was honored for donating a steamship to the United States;¹⁴ in 1867, Cyrus W. Field was praised for his work in the laying of the transatlantic cable;¹⁵ and Private George F. Robinson was awarded for saving Secretary of State William H. Seward from an assassination attempt.¹⁶ In 1861, Congress also established the Medal of Honor as a military award and increasingly focused the Congressional Gold Medal as an award for nonmilitary individuals and events.¹⁷

20th and 21st Century Recipients

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Congress continued to broaden the scope of what it recognized as meriting a Congressional Gold Medal to include recognition of excellence in such varied fields as the arts, athletics, aviation, diplomacy, entertainment, exploration, medicine, politics, religion, and science. Several of the following individuals were the first in their specialties to be awarded Congressional Gold Medals:

- Composer George M. Cohan (1936) was the first entertainer to receive a gold medal, for his patriotic songs “Over There” and “A Grand Old Flag.”¹⁸
- Wilbur and Orville Wright (1909) were the first aeronautical or space pioneers to receive a gold medal, for their achievements in demonstrating to the world the potential of aerial navigation.¹⁹

¹³ 10 Stat. 594-595 (1854). For more information on Commander Ingraham and Martin Koszta, see U.S. Naval Institute, “A Personal Narrative of the Koszta Affair,” *Proceedings*, Vol. 53/3/289 (March 1927), at <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1927/march/personal-narrative-koszta-affair>.

¹⁴ 13 Stat. 401-402 (1864). See also U.S. President, 1861-1865 (Lincoln), Message of the President of the United States Recommending That Some Suitable Acknowledgment Be Made to Cornelius Vanderbilt for the Valuable Present to the United States of the Steamer “Vanderbilt,” S. Ex. Doc. 71, 37th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: GPO, 1862), p. 1.

¹⁵ 14 Stat. 574 (1867). See also U.S. President, 1865-1869 (A. Johnson), Gold Medal Presented to Cyrus W. Field, Message From the President in Relation to the Gold Medal Presented to Mr. Cyrus W. Field, H. Ex. Doc. 89, 40th Cong., 3rd sess. (Washington: GPO, 1869).

¹⁶ 16 Stat. 704 (1871). See also U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *George F. Robinson*, report to accompany H.Res. 501, 41st Cong., 3rd sess., H.Rept. 33 (Washington: GPO, 1874).

¹⁷ 12 Stat. 330 (1861), 12 Stat. 623-624 (1862). Also, see CRS Report 95-519, *Medal of Honor: History and Issues*, by Barbara Salazar Torreon; *Above and Beyond: A History of the Medal of Honor From the Civil War to Vietnam* (Boston: Boston Publishing Co., 1985); E. Kerrigan, *American War Medals and Decorations* (New York: The Viking Press), 1964, pp. 3-11; George Lang, *Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863-1994*, 2 vols. (New York: Facts on File, 1995); U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, *Medal of Honor Recipients 1863-1978*, committee print no. 3, 96th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1979); Mendel L. Peterson, “The Navy Medal of Honor,” *Numismatist*, vol. 63, June 1950, pp. 305-312; Mendel L. Peterson, “The Army Medal of Honor,” *Numismatist*, vol. 63, September 1950, pp. 557-565.

¹⁸ 49 Stat. 2371 (1936). See also U.S. Congress, House Committee on the Library, *To Authorize the President to Present a Gold Medal to George M. Cohan in Recognition of His Patriotic Service*, H.Rept. 2868, 74th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: GPO, 1936).

¹⁹ 35 Stat. 1627 (1909). See also “Gold Medal by Congress to Wright Brothers,” *Numismatist*, vol. 22, August 1919, pp. 231-232; Arthur L. Newman, “Some Medals Struck in Honor of the Wright Brothers,” *Numismatist*, vol. 81, December 1968, p. 1576.

- Lincoln Ellsworth (1926) was the first explorer honored, for his polar flight in 1925 and transpolar flight in 1926.²⁰
- Major Walter Reed and his associates (1928) were the first scientists honored, for discovering the cause and means of transmission of yellow fever in 1921.²¹
- Vice President Alben W. Barkley (1949) was the first political honoree.²²
- Roberto Clemente (1973) was the first athlete honoree.²³

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Congress has honored numerous other individuals for a variety of contributions including civil rights activism and humanitarian contributions.²⁴ For a complete list of Congressional Gold Medal recipients since 1776, see the **Appendix**.

Authorizing Congressional Gold Medals

Once a Congressional Gold Medal bill is introduced, it is typically referred to the House Committee on Financial Services or the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.²⁵ The process for considering legislation varies between the House and Senate.

House of Representatives

In the House, there are currently no chamber or committee rules regarding procedures for gold medal bills. In some past Congresses, the House Financial Services Committee had adopted a committee rule that prohibited its relevant subcommittee from holding a hearing on commemorative medal legislation—including Congressional Gold Medals—“unless the legislation is cosponsored by at least two-thirds of the members of the House.”²⁶ Informal practices regarding cosponsorship requirements, however, may still exist. For example, in the 118th Congress (2023-2024), the House majority leader’s protocols state that the “Majority Leader shall only consider five Gold Medal bills in a Congress that receive at least 290 cosponsors and are submitted to the Committee on Financial Services to be scheduled for the Floor.”²⁷ Rules or

²⁰ 45 Stat. 2026-2027 (1928). See also U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, *A Medal of Honor to Lincoln Ellsworth*, S.Rept. 831, 70th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1928).

²¹ 45 Stat. 1409-1410 (1929). See also U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *To Recognize the High Public Service Rendered by Major Walter Reed and Those Associated with Him in the Discovery of the Cause and Means of Transmission of Yellow Fever*, S.Rept. 1912, 70th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: GPO, 1929).

²² 63 Stat. 599 (1949). See also U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, *Medal for Vice President Alben W. Barkley*, S.Rept. 742, 81st Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1949).

²³ P.L. 93-33, 87 Stat. 71 (1973). See also, U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, *Roberto Walker Clemente Medals*, report to accompany H.R. 3841, S.Rept. 93-133, 93rd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1973).

²⁴ For examples of civil rights activists receiving gold medals, see 98 Stat. 173-174 (1984); 112 Stat. 2681-597 (1998); 113 Stat. 50-51 (1999); 117 Stat. 2017-2019 (2003); 117 Stat. 2645-2647 (2003); 118 Stat. 1746-1748 (2004). See also *Gold Medals to the Daughter of Harry S. Truman; Lady Bird Johnson; and the Widow of Roy Wilkins*, pp. 11-108. For examples of the recognition of humanitarian efforts, see 111 Stat. 35-36 (1997), 111 Stat. 1170-1171 (1997); 112 Stat. 895-896 (1998).

²⁵ U.S. Congress, House, Financial Services Committee, at <http://financialservices.house.gov>; and U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, at <https://www.banking.senate.gov>. Additionally, some bills have been referred to the Committee on House Administration.

²⁶ “Publication of Committee Rules,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 159 (February 15, 2013), p. H580.

²⁷ U.S. Congress, House Majority Leader, “118th Congress Floor Protocols,” at <https://www.majorityleader.gov/schedule/floor-protocols.htm>. Additionally, the protocols state that “(A) the recipient must be a natural person; (B) the (continued...)”

protocols regarding consideration of Congressional Gold Medals have existed in previous Congresses under both majority parties.²⁸

Senate

In the Senate, the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee in the 118th Congress requires that at least 67 Senators cosponsor any Congressional Gold Medal bill before being considered by the committee.²⁹ This committee rule presumably does not formally preclude committee consideration of a House bill referred to it.³⁰ The committee rule also does not prevent the Senate from considering or passing gold medal legislation. Referred bills may be brought to the floor without committee consideration; in other cases, a bill may avoid being referred to committee at all.³¹ In current practice, many enacted gold medal bills receive no formal committee consideration. Rather, the Senate often discharges the committee of the bill by unanimous consent; however, it appears that this discharge practice only occurs after the requisite number of cosponsors sign on to a Senate bill.

Other Statutory Limitations

Although Congress has approved legislation stipulating requirements for numerous other awards and decorations,³² there are no permanent statutory provisions specifically relating to the authorization of Congressional Gold Medals. When a Congressional Gold Medal has been deemed appropriate, Congress has, by legislative action, provided for the award of a medal on an

recipient must have performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient's field long after the achievement; (C) the recipient has not received a medal previously for the same or substantially the same achievement; (D) the recipient is living or, if deceased, has not been deceased for less than five years or more than twenty-five years; and (E) the achievements were performed in the recipient's field of endeavor, and represent either a lifetime of continuous superior achievements or a single achievement so significant that the recipient is recognized and acclaimed by others in the same field, as evidenced by the recipient having received the highest honors in the field."

²⁸ When the Democratic Party was in the majority in the 117th Congress, the majority leader's protocols provided guidance on scheduling legislation to direct the Secretary of the Treasury to strike a gold medal. The protocols stated that "the Majority Leader shall consider the first three Gold Medal bills in a Congress that receive 290 cosponsors and are submitted to the Committee on Financial Services to be scheduled for the floor." Additionally, the protocol noted that "(a) the recipient must be a natural person; (b) the recipient must have performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient's field long after the achievement; (c) the recipient must not have received a medal previously for the same or substantially the same achievement; (d) the recipient must be living or, if deceased, has not been deceased for less than five years or more than twenty-five years; and (e) the achievements were performed in the recipient's field of endeavor, and represent either a lifetime of continuous superior achievements or a single achievement so significant that the recipient is recognized and acclaimed by others in the same field, as evidenced by the recipient having received the highest honors in the field." U.S. Congress, House, Majority Leader, "117th Congress Legislative Protocols."

²⁹ "Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Rules of Procedure," *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 169 (February 9, 2023), pp. S296-S298. Rule 8 states, "At least 67 Senators must cosponsor any gold medal or commemorative coin bill or resolution before consideration by the Committee."

³⁰ A House bill would have no Senate cosponsors. For more information on sponsorship, see CRS Report 98-279, *Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of Senate Bills*, by Mark J. Oleszek; and CRS Report RS22477, *Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of House Bills*, by Mark J. Oleszek.

³¹ See CRS Report RS22309, *Senate Rule XIV Procedure for Placing Measures Directly on the Senate Calendar*, for explanation of the ways in which an introduced bill (or one received from the House) may receive floor consideration without a committee referral or committee action.

³² See "Decorations, Medals, and Badges," in the general index of the *United States Code: 2000 Edition* (Washington: GPO, 2001).

ad hoc basis. Additionally, there is no statutory limit on the number of Congressional Gold Medals that may be struck in a given year.

Sample Congressional Gold Medal Language

Congressional Gold Medal legislation generally has certain features, including

- a short title;
- findings that summarize the subject’s history and importance;
- specifications for awarding the medal;
- instructions, if any, for the medal’s design and striking;
- permission to mint and sell duplicates; and
- certification that medals are minted pursuant to existing requirements for national medals (5 U.S.C. §5111).

Short Title

Congressional Gold Medal legislation often includes a short title. For example, the legislation to authorize the Congressional Gold Medal to the 688th Central Postal Directory Battalion (“Six Triple Eight”) stated:

SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Six Triple Eight’ Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2021.”³³

Findings

Congressional Gold Medal legislation typically includes a section of findings. These often include historical facts about the people or groups being awarded the medal. For example, the legislation to authorize the Congressional Gold Medal to the World War II members of the “Doolittle Tokyo Raiders” stated:

FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1) on April 18, 1942, the brave men of the 17th Bombardment Group (Medium) became known as the “Doolittle Tokyo Raiders” for outstanding heroism, valor, skill, and service to the United States in conducting the bombings of Tokyo;

(2) 80 brave American aircraft crewmen, led by Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle, volunteered for an “extremely hazardous mission”, without knowing the target, location, or assignment, and willingly put their lives in harm’s way, risking death, capture, and torture;

(3) the conduct of medium bomber operations from a Navy aircraft carrier under combat conditions had never before been attempted;

(4) after the discovery of the USS Hornet by Japanese picket ships 170 miles further away from the prearranged launch point, the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders proceeded to take off 670 miles from the coast of Japan;

(5) by launching more than 100 miles beyond the distance considered to be minimally safe for the mission, the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders deliberately accepted the risk that the B-25s might not have enough fuel to reach the designated air-fields in China on return;

³³ P.L. 117-97, 136 Stat. 36 (2022).

- (6) the additional launch distance greatly increased the risk of crash landing in Japanese occupied China, exposing the crews to higher probability of death, injury, or capture;
- (7) because of that deliberate choice, after bombing their targets in Japan, low on fuel and in setting night and deteriorating weather, none of the 16 airplanes reached the prearranged Chinese airfields;
- (8) of the 80 Doolittle Tokyo Raiders who launched on the raid, 8 were captured, 2 died in the crash, and 70 returned to the United States;
- (9) of the 8 captured Doolittle Tokyo Raiders, 3 were executed and 1 died of disease; and
- (10) there were only 5 surviving members of the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders as of February 2013.³⁴

Medal Presentation, Design, and Striking

Congressional Gold Medal legislation typically includes a section that provides details on the presentation, design, and striking of the medal. For example, the legislation to authorize the Congressional Gold Medal to the Foot Soldiers who participated in Bloody Sunday, Turnaround Tuesday, or the final Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March in March of 1965 stated:

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.

(a) Presentation Authorized.—The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold medal of appropriate design to the Foot Soldiers who participated in Bloody Sunday, Turnaround Tuesday, or the final Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March during March of 1965, which served as a catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

(b) Design and Striking.—For purposes of the presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems, devices, and inscriptions to be determined by the Secretary.³⁵

When presenting a medal to a group, Congress often directs the Mint to strike a single Congressional Gold Medal and statutorily directs that the medal be given to an institution affiliated with the group or to the Smithsonian. This section can name the group and can contain specific instructions for the disposition and display of the medal. For example, the legislation authorizing the American Fighter Aces Congressional Gold Medal stated:

(c) Smithsonian Institution.—

(1) In general.—Following the award of the gold medal in honor of the American Fighter Aces, the gold medal shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where it will be available for display as appropriate and available for research.

(2) Sense of the Congress.—It is the sense of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should make the gold medal awarded pursuant to this Act available for display elsewhere, particularly at appropriate locations associated with the American Fighter Aces, and that preference should be given to locations affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution.³⁶

Duplicate Medals

Gold medal legislation also generally authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to strike and sell duplicate medals in bronze. The U.S. Mint generally sells the duplicates on its website in two

³⁴ P.L. 113-106, 128 Stat. 1160 (2014).

³⁵ P.L. 114-5, 129 Stat. 78 (2015).

³⁶ P.L. 113-105, 128 Stat. 1157 (2014).

sizes: 1.5 inches and 3 inches.³⁷ The U.S. Mint sets duplicate prices that allow it to cover the cost of striking the duplicate medals. For example, legislation authorizing the Congressional Gold Medal for the 369th Infantry Regiment, known as the “Harlem Hellfighters,” stated:

DUPLICATE MEDALS.

(a) In General.—The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price sufficient to cover the costs of the bronze medals, including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

(b) Proceeds of Sales.—The amounts received from the sale of duplicate medals under subsection (a) shall be deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund.

(c) Authority to Use Fund Amounts.—There is authorized to be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be necessary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under this Act.³⁸

Status of Medals

Gold medal legislation generally contains a statement that these awards are considered as national medals for the purpose of the U.S. Mint’s statutory requirements for producing medals. For example, legislation authorizing the Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley Congressional Gold Medal stated:

STATUS OF MEDALS.

(a) National Medals.—Medals struck under this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States Code.

(b) Numismatic Items.—For purposes of section 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.³⁹

Authorization of Appropriations; Proceeds

In some cases, Congressional Gold Medal bills include language authorizing appropriations. In these examples, Congress has authorized a specific sum from the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund to pay for the cost of the medal. In cases where the authorization of appropriations is provided, a provision requiring that proceeds from the sale of duplicates be deposited in the same Fund is generally included. For example, legislation authorizing the Women Airforce Service Pilots Congressional Gold Medal stated:

AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; PROCEEDS OF SALE.

(a) Authorization of Appropriations.—There is authorized to be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund, an amount not to exceed \$30,000 to pay for the cost of the medal authorized under section 2.

(b) Proceeds of Sale.—Amounts received from the sale of duplicate bronze medals under section 3 shall be deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund.⁴⁰

Some recent Congressional Gold Medal legislation has not authorized a specific dollar amount for the design and striking of the medal. Rather, the legislation has provided that “such amounts

³⁷ For more information about duplicate Congressional Gold Medals, see CRS In Focus IF10934, *Duplicate Congressional Gold Medals: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Jacob R. Straus.

³⁸ P.L. 117-38, 135 Stat. 333 (2021).

³⁹ P.L. 117-334, 136 Stat. 6140 (2022).

⁴⁰ P.L. 111-40, 123 Stat. 1961 (2009).

as may be necessary” can be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund for the medal. For example, the legislation authorizing the “Hidden Figures” Congressional Gold Medals for Katherine Johnson, Christine Darden, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson stated the following:

AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF SALE.

(a) Authority To Use Fund Amounts.—There is authorized to be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be necessary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under this Act.

(b) Proceeds of Sale.—Amounts received from the sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund.⁴¹

Design of Medals

Congressional Gold Medal designs vary for each issuance. In general, the authorizing legislation provides that the Secretary of the Treasury “shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary.”⁴² When designing a Congressional Gold Medal, the Secretary consults with the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC) and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) before determining the final design.

Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee

Established in 2003,⁴³ the CCAC advises the Secretary of the Treasury on theme and design of all U.S. coins and medals. For Congressional Gold Medals, the CCAC advises the Secretary “on any theme or design proposals relating to ... Congressional Gold Medals.”⁴⁴

The CCAC consists of 11 members appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury, with four persons appointed upon the recommendation of the congressional leadership (one each by the Speaker of the House, the House minority leader, the Senate majority leader, and the Senate minority leader).⁴⁵ The CCAC meets several times each year to consider design suggestions for coins and medals. For each coin considered, the CCAC provides advice to the Secretary “on thematic, technical, and design issues related to the production of coins.”⁴⁶ The committee publishes its recommendations to its website, at <http://www.ccac.gov>.

For example, in June 2020, the U.S. Mint presented several alternative designs for the Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal. In a letter to the U.S. Mint, the CCAC provided its recommendations on the design for the gold medal. CCAC’s letter stated the following:

Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal

The family’s preference is LD-O-01A and LD-R-03 and LD-R-03A. The CCAC’s recommended designs are LD-O-1A and LD-R-3 with the modification that “Act of Congress” be removed from the reverse as it also appears on the recommended obverse design. During the meeting Chairman Uram noted and read into the record a letter

⁴¹ P.L. 116-68, 133 Stat. 1132 (2019).

⁴² For example, see P.L. 111-253, 124 Stat. 2636 (2010).

⁴³ P.L. 108-15, 117 Stat. 615 (2003); 31 U.S.C. §5135.

⁴⁴ Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee, “About Us,” at <https://www.ccac.gov/aboutUs/index.html>.

⁴⁵ For a list of current members of the CCAC, see Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee, “Members,” at <https://www.ccac.gov/aboutUs/members.html>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, *Civic Art: A Centennial History of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), p. 480. [Hereinafter CFA, *Civic Art*.]

from Representative Bill Pascrell Jr, Senator Robert Menendez, and Senator Cory Booker supporting the family's preferences.

- *Obverse (LD-O-01A)*: The design depicts Larry Doby posing with a baseball bat in front of Hinchliffe Stadium. Hinchliffe Stadium, located in Paterson, New Jersey, was the home of the Newark Eagles, Doby's Negro National League team. The CCAC scored the design a perfect 30 out of a possible 30 votes.
- *Reverse (LD-R-03)*: Based on a famed photo, the design depicts Larry Doby and Steve Gromek hugging after their World Series win. It includes the inscription "We are Stronger Together as a Team, as [a] Nation, as a World" which is a quote offered by Larry Doby Jr as a way to encapsulate his father's sentiments and legacy. The CCAC scored this design 23 votes of a possible 30. A slightly different variation of the same design (LD-R-03A) received 14 votes.⁴⁷

Figure 2 shows the CCAC's preferred designs for the obverse and reverse of the Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal.

Figure 2. CCAC Preferred Design for Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal



Source: U.S. Mint, "CCAC Meeting Images for the Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal," June 23, 2020, at <https://www.usmint.gov/news/ccac-meetings/larry-doby-congressional-gold-medal>.

⁴⁷ Letter from the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee, to Steven T. Mnuchin, Secretary of the Treasury, June 23, 2020, at https://www.ccac.gov/media/calendar/lettersToSecretary/CCAC_June_23_2020_Recommendations.pdf. Images presented to the CCAC for the Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal can be found at U.S. Mint, "CCAC Meeting Images for the Larry Doby Congressional Gold Medal," at <https://www.usmint.gov/news/ccac-meetings/larry-doby-congressional-gold-medal>.

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