

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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House Bill 223 - Sponsor Statement (31-LS1443\A)

"An Act naming the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Memorial Bridge."

Helicopter pilots played a pivotal role in the Vietnam War, so much so that the engagement is often remembered as the "Helicopter War". This nickname was well deserved with the helicopter pilots spearheading the efforts of not only securing land in South Vietnam, but also in the casualty evacuation efforts, saving countless lives during the war. With over forty percent of helicopters in country being destroyed through the course of the War, these brave soldiers put their lives in danger every time they flew, which they did over two million times. The huey pilots proved early on that they and their helicopters would be central to conducting a campaign in the jungles of Vietnam, but no one knew just how crucial their efforts would be.

On February 9th, 1965, the 52nd Combat Aviation battalion successfully lifted 262 troops out of Phu My and brought them to safety while taking heavy enemy fire. On April 19th, 1965, the 119th Aviation Company attempted a similar lift with 420 troops in Phu Cat, however, they received intense enemy ground fire bringing down two armed UH-1Bs, killing all on board, along with a crew member of another UH-1B. On December 29th, 1965, just a few days before New Years', two helicopter pilots, once again, extracted fallen soldiers from a crashed aircraft. They did so while under extremely hazardous conditions as the enemy tried everything, they possible to bring down the rescue crew. These are just a few examples of the countless missions accomplished by the thousands of Vietnam helicopter pilots over the nineteen years of war. These examples occurred in 1965, that same year, Bridge 1124 was built to span the Matanuska river and connect the Mat-Su valley to Anchorage. It is only fitting then that we allow Bridge 1124, built along with its neighboring Bridge 1889 during the Vietnam War , to carry a name in honor of the thousands of helicopter pilots that laid down their lives for their country.

These courageous men ask for little in return for their immeasurable efforts put forth in Vietnam. The least we, as the State of Alaska, can do for them is to rename the 1124 & 1889 bridges at mile 30.4 on the Glenn Highway in their honor. Such a gesture would forever memorialize and honor the thousands of helicopter pilots that lost their lives and the thousands more who put their life on the line each day to save their fellow soldiers.