

Defense Authorization Bill Urges Pentagon and Secretary Hagel to Put Names of "Lost 74" on Vietnam Wall

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Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) announced that a provision urging the Pentagon and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel to add the names of 74 sailors lost on the U.S.S. Frank E. Evans during the Vietnam War to the Vietnam Wall was included in the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act, which was passed in the House of Representatives today and is expected to be voted on in the Senate next week. A similar amendment was passed by the House in their version of the annual defense authorization bill.

On June 3, 1969, the USS Frank E. Evans was cut in half by an Australian aircraft carrier in the South China Sea – 74 American sailors lost their lives. The USS Frank E. Evans was participating in a joint Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) exercise called "Sea Spirit" in the South China Sea with more than 40 ships of SEATO nations, at the time of the collision with HMAS Melbourne. Despite operating in Vietnamese waters immediately before deployment to Exercise Sea Spirit, and being scheduled to return to activities supporting the war effort after the exercise, it was determined that since Exercise Sea Spirit took place outside the geographical limit for the combat zone the crew was ineligible for inclusion on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

While the U.S.S. Frank E. Evans was not in the combat zone as defined by Executive Order 11216, the ship was supporting the ongoing military conflict in Vietnam and the crew was instrumental in advancing American military objectives in Vietnam. The crew had also participated in the conflict just days before the collision. Vietnam veterans have long argued that inclusion on the monument should not be determined by geographic location, and exceptions to this rule have previously been made for service members killed as part of the conflict but not in Vietnam itself. For example, those involved in operations in Laos (Laos was later included in the combat zone) and those dying in transit to or from Vietnam have been made are eligible for the memorial.

Since first being approached several years ago by a family of a sailor lost on the ship, Rep. Schiff has been pushing the Administration and successive Defense Secretaries to rectify this situation. After meeting with Rep. Schiff in Nov. 2010, Secretary of the Navy Mabus expressed his support for adding the 74 sailors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

“Before he leaves office, Secretary Hagel has a chance to provide an important measure of solace to the families and fellow sailors of those lost on the U.S.S. Frank E. Evans and put the names of the Lost 74 on the Vietnam Memorial Wall,” said Rep. Adam Schiff. “The names not only deserve to be on the Wall, but we should act while some of their parents are still alive.”

The U.S.S. Frank E. Evans Association praised inclusion of the provision and urged the Secretary to act quickly before he left office.

“The tragic loss of the USS Frank E Evans on 3 June, 1969, continues to haunt the families and shipmates of the 74 lost sailors who gave their lives for their country,” said Tim Wendler, President of the Association. “I lost my father days before my second birthday, and my mom, became a much

too young 21 year-old widow. This haunting continues because we, as a nation, have failed to adequately address an issue which could, once and for all, provide closure to the families, shipmates and survivors of this tragedy.”

The Vice President of the Association, Steve Kraus, stated: “I can’t think how awful it must have felt in 1985 when the Box Family traveled to visit the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. to find their son, Thomas Belue Box was not on the Wall. Forty-five years later his name and the names of the other 73 lost are still not recognized for the greatest sacrifice one can give, their lives. In 1999, then Senator Hagel of Nebraska, made a commitment to Eunice Sage that he would do everything within his power so see that the ‘Lost 74’ sailors names of the USS Frank E. Evans be added to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. The Frank E. Evans Association is hopeful he makes good on his commitment.”

William “Randy” Slaughter, a constituent of Schiff’s in Glendale, stated: “I served on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Kearsarge at the time of the incident and the Evans was one of our escort ships and we were close by when the accident happened. The cause for the fallen 74 has been close to my heart since that morning when the sun came up and I looked down from the Kearsarge flight deck at what I used to know as a proud American Navy destroyer. It's time to right a major wrong and get the names of the 74 on The Wall before any more of their families and the survivors and their families aren't with us anymore to witness it. We owe it to them.”

Rep. Schiff has continued to keep close contact with the USS Frank E. Evans Association and has once again sought to right this injustice. This summer, Schiff met personally with Hagel (the third Secretary of Defense he has personally lobbied on the issue) to make the case that the names of the Lost 74 sailors of the USS Frank E. Evans deserve to be added to the memorial.

The amendment passed by the House can be found [here](#), and the pertinent report language included in the NDAA is below:

We recommend that the names of the 74 military personnel lost aboard the USS Frank E. Evans on June 3, 1969, be added to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial if adequate funds are available to pay for adding the names and there is sufficient space available on the Memorial to accommodate the additional names.