

Reading Press Conference



Reading Eagle: Ryan McFadden

U.S. Rep. Tim Holden, holding umbrella, right, meets with veterans Friday at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in City Park to discuss his support of a new medal for the pilots and crew members of military medical helicopters. The lack of such a medal was brought to Holden's attention by Vietnam Veterans of America official John M. Travers, holding umbrella, left.

Holden works to honor group of slighted heroes

There is no military medal recognizing the courage of many helicopter pilots and crew members who risked all to rescue wounded. The lawmaker wants to correct that.

By Jason Brudereck
Reading Eagle

The pilots and crew members of military medical helicopters were heroic saviors who risked their lives, and often lost them, while rescuing injured troops under fire in Vietnam, several veterans said Friday.

That's why they support U.S. Rep. Tim Holden's effort to create a special medal to honor the pilots and crew members who are ineligible for the military's Combat Medic Badge, the veterans

White, 60, of Bethel Township. "They would come off their helicopters to help load the dead and wounded."

"They wouldn't leave the ground until you could get a guy stable," said Stephen B. Moyer, 56, of Robesonia.

"For those guys to come in when you were in a terrible firefight, they were heroes," White said.

"And they always came," said Robert C. Kelly, 60, of Exeter Township. "If you called and said you needed them, they would be there."

White, Moyer and Kelly each was awarded the Combat Medic Badge because they were medics attached to ground military units, but their colleagues who flew missions to evacuate their wounded comrades were ineligible to win that medal because they were not attached to specific units.

Creating a medal for those pilots and crews is now one

not allowing pilots and crews to receive medals was brought to his attention by John M. Travers, president of the Harrisburg chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Pitts, who was an electronic warfare officer on a B-52 in the Vietnam War, did not attend the press conference because he was traveling with his family, said Derek E. Karchner, a spokesman for Pitts.

Pitts also was approached by veterans about the issue and he believes the new medal is important to appropriately recognize the efforts of so-called dustoff pilots and crews, Karchner said.

During a 10-year period, 2,800 pilots and medics in Vietnam flew 475,000 missions and evacuated 920,000 dead and wounded soldiers, Travers said.

"My generation is starting to die," Travers said. "Let's not bury these guys unrecognized. They were 18-year-old

