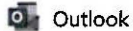


publiccomment # 31
25-0919
BOS Rcvd
7/14/25



Objections to Proposed Honoraria Criteria re: EDC Veterans Monument

From Joseph Connolly <retqmcs@gmail.com>

Date Sun 7/13/2025 7:26 PM

To BOS-District I <bosone@edcgov.us>; BOS-District II <bostwo@edcgov.us>; BOS-District III <bosthree@edcgov.us>; BOS-District IV <bosfour@edcgov.us>; Brooke Laine <Brooke.Laine@edcgov.us>

Cc Kathy Witherow <kathy.witherow@edcgov.us>; BOS-Clerk of the Board <edc.cob@edcgov.us>; David A Livingston <david.livingston@edcgov.us>; Olivia A. Byron-Cooper <olivia.byron-cooper@edcgov.us>; Timalynn Jaynes <timalynn.jaynes@edcgov.us>

2 attachments (6 MB)

BOS Letter_Reject HHSA Proposals_7.10.2025.pdf; Objection_Memorial Plaques Criteria_7.10.2025.pdf;

This Message Is From an External Sender

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Report Suspicious

Dear Supervisors: Attached are two documents detailing why the proposed revisions to the honoraria policy for the EDC Veterans Monument are not ready for Board action. I am asking you to unite in that recognition, and return the item to the County staff with direction to respond to these and other objections that may be made.

I have been diligent in putting these details together for your benefit, in order that the monument can be sustained as it was envisioned. If you have any questions I am available at your convenience to answer them and would be grateful for that opportunity.

Finally, I wholeheartedly agree with the following statement submitted to you by the Friends of the Monument 2.0 in this same matter. I hope you will agree that the outcomes they strive for are in the best interests of the monument and El Dorado County.

Dear Supervisors:

We believe that the continued desecration and commercialization of the El Dorado County Veterans Monument has national implications. The "Friends of the Veterans and ambiance consistent with military culture and protocol not subject to personal unilateral interpretation by any group or individual but compliant with the rule of police

Sincerely, Joseph Connolly, M.A.

Senior Chief Petty Officer, U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.)

July 10, 2025

From: Joseph Connolly, M.A., QMCS, USCG (Ret.)

To: El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

Copy: El Dorado County Chief Administrative Officer

El Dorado County Counsel

Ms. Olivia Byron-Cooper, Director, Health and Human Services

Mr. Richard Buchanan, Founder, El Dorado County Veterans Monument

Subj: Proposed Changes to El Dorado County Veterans Monument Honoraria

Dear Supervisors:

I respectfully urge that you not adopt any recommended changes to the current honoraria policy for the El Dorado County Veterans Monument, enacted by the Board of Supervisors in 2007.

First, the proposed changes are largely moot. The current state of the monument is different than in 2007, wherein the monument's design no longer supports two of the three existing forms of honoraria. Adding additional means to install more memorial plaques or benches would require altering the monument's design, an item which is not before the Board on the July 15th agenda.

Second, the proposed changes have no consensus among the relevant stakeholder groups. The recommendations are divisive and lack unified support among veterans, including the monument's founder and the Friends of the Monument group that was responsible for the existing policy. None of the recommendations address root causes of the monument's improper management, leading to the contentious proposals.

Third, you should not support unresolved conflicts in the guise of acceptable policy for such a respectable veterans monument, established by one of our County's most highly decorated combat veterans. Instead, I respectfully encourage you to reject all recommended honoraria changes, and return the item to the County staff with the following direction(s):

1. Direct relevant County staff to convene a working group of the following stakeholders within 30 days and ask each one if they will commit to collaboratively address all monument issues, including the desired forms of veteran honoraria and public management of that policy.

- Mr. Richard Buchanan, the Monument's founder.
- Mr. Peter Wolfe, the Monument's architect.
- Designated members of the Friends of the Monument 2.0.
- Designated members of the Veterans Alliance.
- County of El Dorado Veterans Service Officer.

2. Direct County staff to report back to the Board within 60 days the results of the working group's commitment to collaboratively resolve all monument issues. If the group had agreed to work together, include an overview of what the group intends to resolve and how they would like to do so.

3. Effective immediately, direct County staff to prohibit the approval or installation of any further monument honoraria until the Board of Supervisors has heard and responded to the outcomes of steps 1 and 2 above.

These immediate actions will preserve the monument as is, allow the stakeholders and County staff to collaboratively address all ongoing monument issues (which has yet to take place), and provide an opportunity for a consensus agreement to be returned to the Board.

An example of a possible non-divisive policy is attached for your consideration, to illustrate at least one potential outcome that a collaborative working group can achieve. It recognizes the monument's current state, does not alter the monument's design, eliminates a cumbersome and unnecessary appeals process, and allows for strict public management of the monument.

Sincerely,

s/Joseph Connolly

Senior Chief Petty Officer, U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.)

I. THE PROPOSED CHANGES ARE MOOT

On July 27, 2021 the Board's comments included "we never want to deal with this again." (emphasis added.)

Yet, on July 15, 2025 the Board will once again be asked to choose among divisive, non-consensual recommendations that do not address the root causes of unresolved management issues causing these divisions. Nor do those recommendations reflect the monument's present state that no longer supports two of the three forms of currently approved honoraria.

The current Board policy permits three forms of monument honoraria:

1. Bronze plaques, either for (a) eligible honorees who were awarded the Medal of Honor or a Service Cross Medal, our nation's two highest military medals, or (b) bronze plaques for military events or units;
2. Benches. (Engraved granite benches are the norm.);
3. Engraved bricks. (These red bricks are preinstalled on the monument grounds. Newly engraved bricks are typically placed following Memorial Day or Veterans Day ceremonies.)



Fig. 1
Forms of approved monument honoraria

A.
**THERE IS NO FURTHER DESIGNED SPACE TO PLACE BRONZE PLAQUES
OR ENGRAVED BENCHES**

Bronze plaques have been placed on four large granite slabs behind the monument's flagpoles. Some people describe those slabs as "the Honor Wall." Before 2007 those plaques included ones placed by the monument's benefactors for certain meaningful events and individuals.

The 2007 policy limited bronze plaques for individuals to two specific medals for valor: a Medal of Honor or a Service Cross medal. This criteria was approved in order to preserve the limited remaining space for El Dorado County veterans who had been awarded those medals.

In 2015, the monument's founder Richard Buchanan, a recipient of the Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism" during his Vietnam service, had to step down from the "Friends of the Monument" group in order to address health issues caused by his exposure to Agent Orange.

At that time, Navy Captain John Poimiroo offered to be a caretaker of the monument during Mr. Buchanan's absence. Over time, Mr. Poimiroo and other veterans formed a group known as the "Veterans Alliance" ("Alliance"), a private organization which is not formally recognized in the monument's governing ordinance or honoraria policy.

In writing and in person, the Alliance and Mr. Poimiroo have repeatedly asserted the Alliance has "sole" management authority over the monument, including for all honoraria matters. However, authority for the public monument rests exclusively with the Board.

Since 2015, the Alliance unilaterally placed bronze plaques of their own design and on claims of their sole authority. As a result, by 2024 the Alliance used up all the remaining space on the granite slabs that were meant for approved bronze plaques. (See Figs 2-5.)



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Currently, there is no remaining space or means to install other bronze plaques unless the monument's design is altered, making the recommendations for "Memorial Plaques" moot.

Likewise, the monument's design has been filled with benches along its installed sidewalks and upon its main plaza. The remaining area is green space (lawn, trees, and other groundcovers) and is typically used for crowd seating during ceremonial events on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

As is the case with bronze plaques, there is no other current space to install other benches unless the monument's design is altered. This also makes the recommendations for "Benches" a moot point.

C.

ENGRAVED BRICKS ARE THE SOLE REMAINING APPROVED HONORARIA

Engraved bricks are the sole remaining approved form of honoraria. There are only eight installed sections of bricks remaining at the monument's entrance, consisting

of approximately 650 bricks. (Each section has approximately 9 columns of 9 rows of bricks.)

Until the Alliance's presumed "sole authority" for the monument, each section of bricks were uniform. That is, each brick was engraved according to the same standards and each section retained a uniform appearance of red brick rows and columns.

After the Alliance began unilaterally approving its own honoraria criteria, it began installing larger sized granite blocks within the sections of approved red bricks. These granite blocks have varied by size but each has interrupted the uniform appearance of the monument's red brick honoraria up to that point. (See Fig. 6.)



Fig. 6
Unapproved granite block honoraria -
unilaterally approved by the Veterans Alliance after 2015

The proposed honoraria changes include adding "Memorial Stones", and seeks the Board's approval to continue these previously unapproved markers. The recommendation includes no justification for adding non-uniform markers that alter the monument's design, and eliminate other preinstalled bricks in their place.

II.
THE MONUMENT'S CURRENT STATE DOES NOT FIT EITHER
THE CURRENT OR PROPOSED HONORARIA POLICY

The honoraria proposals are not reflective of the monument's current state, and HHSA staff do not appear to be aware of or acknowledge those existing conditions.

Since the Board's 2021 direction to HHSA to address contested honoraria matters, the Veterans Alliance has repeatedly rejected any suggestions that do not fit their own views, including their assertion of having "sole authority" over the monument.

The recommended changes are the latest chapter in the Alliance's unilateral effort to implement their own honoraria criteria in support of claiming the monument as being their own.

In 2024, HHSA staff contributed to that divisiveness by secretly colluding with the Alliance and the Veteran Affairs commission to "approve" an Alliance proposal that would have granted sole control over the monument and any appeal process to the Alliance and the Veteran Affairs Commission, granting the Commission powers it does not have as an advisory body only.

That collusion was only stopped through three consecutive Brown Act violation notices by myself and others. Otherwise, HHSA staff had stated their intention to present that unlawfully "approved" policy recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, despite numerous objections by other veteran parties who were included in the Board's 2021 direction to resolve these issues.

To date, HHSA staff has not convened all relevant stakeholders together as a working group and taken a leadership role in producing collaborative solutions for the Board's benefit.

A.
A STRATEGIC, NON-COMPETITIVE POLICY IS POSSIBLE

A strategic view of the monument should consider its current state, recognize existing management issues that are contributing to unnecessary division over the monument's control (including honoraria), and eliminate an unnecessary appeals process that does not serve the Board or the monument.

The objectives of the following example policy include eliminating an ongoing debate over control of the monument's limited resources, and ending a contentious appeals process that would be unnecessary because honoraria would be limited to engraved bricks that have predesigned placements.

In the example, control of the monument rests with the County, subject to public policy and accountability processes, vs. private decisions undertaken apart from public accountability such as the Brown Act.

Furthermore, no unilateral changes could be made to the monument's design or honoraria policy. That authority would remain with the Board, guided by specific requirements for the proposal of any necessary changes.

B.
EXAMPLE HONORARIA POLICY

TITLE:

The title of this policy is "El Dorado County Veterans Monument Honoraria Criteria."

PURPOSE:

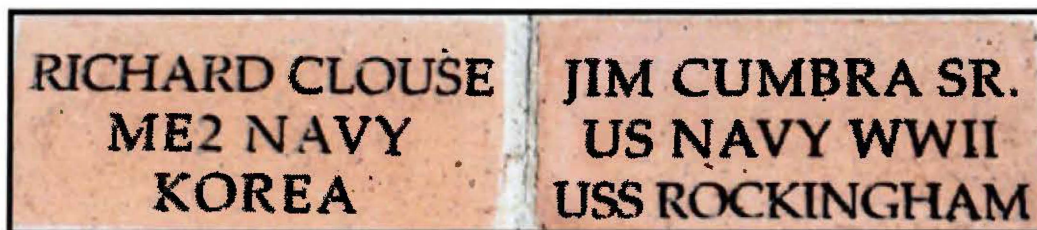
The El Dorado County Veterans Monument ("Monument") is intended to honor the service of eligible veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. This policy defines eligibility for potential honorees and the form of honoraria at the monument.

ELIGIBILITY:

Eligible honorees must be a current or past resident of El Dorado County who served in the Armed Forces of the United States and received an honorable discharge. The following discharges are disqualifying for eligibility: (1) Other than Honorable; (2) Bad Conduct; (3) Dishonorable; (4) Entry-Level Separation.

INDIVIDUAL HONORARIA:

The monument's honoraria is limited to engraved 4 x 8 inch sized bricks. The engraving may include up to three lines of text, with a maximum of 14 characters per line, as shown below.



APPLICATION AND APPROVAL:

All applications for honoraria shall be submitted to the El Dorado County Veterans Service office ("VSO Office") for review and approval. The office shall maintain forms online and in person for the submission of applications.

Each application shall include original or certified copies of eligibility for honoraria: (1) proof of current or past residency in El Dorado County; and (2) proof of an honorable discharge from the Armed Forces of the United States.

Any person may submit an application to request individual honoraria for eligible honorees. Approval is subject to verification of eligibility by the VSO office.

The VSO office may be administratively assisted by members of the Friends of the Monument.

COSTS AND ALLOCATION OF PROCEEDS:

The VSO office shall maintain current costs for honoraria online and in person.

The costs shall reflect the goal of the monument to support local scholarships for graduating high school students. The office shall timely forward all proceeds to the _____ Foundation for a designated scholarship fund.

MAINTENANCE OF THE MONUMENT:

The County of El Dorado shall be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the monument, including installation of approved honoraria.

BOARD REVIEW OF PROPOSED MONUMENT CHANGES:

As of the effective date of this policy, the Board of Supervisors does not expect to approve any further changes to the monument's design or its honoraria policy.

However, if and when the Board should consider any necessary changes to the monument, the Board shall be publicly briefed by the Chief Administrative Officer and Friends of the Monument why such changes are needed.

If the Board agrees with the need to make necessary changes, it shall direct appropriate County staff to solicit proposals for public consideration and comment, after which the staff shall submit appropriate recommendations to the Board.

The Board will consider all monument matters on its public comment agenda only. No monument or honoraria policy changes shall be made by consent.

July 10, 2025

From: Joseph Connolly, M.A., QMCS, USCG (Ret.)

To: El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

Copy: El Dorado County Chief Administrative Officer

El Dorado County Counsel

Ms. Olivia Byron-Cooper, Director, Health and Human Services

Mr. Richard Buchanan, Founder, El Dorado County Veterans Monument

Subj: Objection to Incorrectly Stated Honoraria Criteria for "Memorial Plaques"

Dear Supervisors:

I respectfully urge that you not adopt any recommended changes to the current honoraria policy for the El Dorado County Veterans Monument, enacted by the Board of Supervisors in 2007, as submitted by this objection and my additional letter regarding matters which make the proposals moot.

Among the proposed honoraria are "Memorial Plaques," which are described "to recognize veteran heroes that meet the following requirements in addition to the eligibility criteria identified above." (See Fig. 1.)

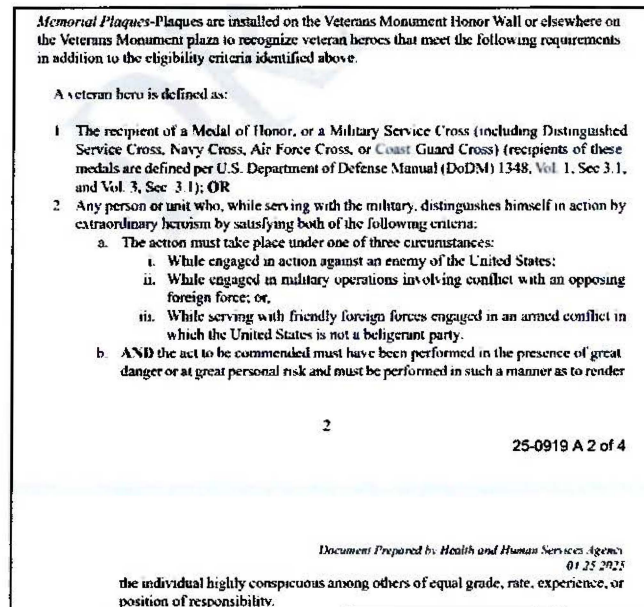


Fig. 1
Proposed honoraria criteria for "Memorial Plaques"

For the following reasons the proposed recommendations for “Memorial Plaques” should not be adopted.

First, they are incorrectly written and contain a statement that does not exist in the applicable Department of Defense manual governing the recommended military medals granting eligibility for monument honoraria.¹

Second, the proposed recommendations refer to eligible honorees as “heroes,” a subjective term that does exist in the same governing manuals.

1. The proposed “Memorial Plaques” criteria are incorrectly written:

The proposed monument criteria to be eligible for a memorial plaque are incorrectly written, suggesting there are additional “OR” and “AND” conditions that apply, beyond what the United States prescribes.

The proposal’s “OR” and “AND” conditions are merely *restatements* of the eligibility requirements to be awarded a Military Service Cross Medal by the United States.

There are four Military Service Cross Medals awarded by the United States to eligible recipients: the Distinguished Service Cross (U.S. Army); the Navy Cross (U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps); the Air Force Cross (U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force); and the Coast Guard Cross (U.S. Coast Guard).

The common standard for awarding all service cross medals is that **an individual** must have distinguished themselves by “**extraordinary heroism** not justifying the award of the Medal of Honor.” (emphasis added.) (See Figs. 2-3).

c. Award Criteria and Eligibility Requirements.

(1) In accordance with E.O. 13830, as amended by E.O. 14085, the Secretary of the Military Department concerned may award the applicable Service Cross, as authorized by Sections 7272, 8292, and 9272 of Title 10, U.S.C., in the name of the President, to those individuals who, while serving in any capacity with the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Space Force, distinguish themselves by **extraordinary** heroism not justifying the award of the Medal of Honor:

Fig. 2

DOD Criteria for Military Service Cross Medals

¹ See [Department of Defense Manual 1348.33, Volume 3, Section 3.1\(a\)-\(c\)](#), Change 5 dated July 9, 2024; [Coast Guard Military Medals and Awards Manual, COMDTINST M1650.25E, Chapter 2.A.2\(a\)](#).

2. Coast Guard Cross (CGC). Authorized by Title 14 USC §491a, by the Act of 15 October 2010, Public Law 111-281. See Table 1-1 for appropriate delegated awarding authority.
 - a. Eligibility Requirements. May be awarded by the President, to a person who, while serving in any capacity with the Coast Guard, when the Coast Guard is not operating under the Department of the Navy, distinguishes themselves by extraordinary heroism not justifying the award of the Medal of Honor:

Fig. 3

USCG Eligibility Requirements for Coast Guard Cross Medal (Section A.2.a)

- a. There are no “OR” conditions, as the proposal recommends.

There are three United States conditions under which “extraordinary heroism” must occur for an individual to be eligible for a Military Service Cross Medal. (See Figs. 2-4.)

- (a) While engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
- (b) While engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or
- (c) While serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

Fig. 4

DOD Service Cross Eligibility Conditions

The proposed honoraria policy defines a “veteran hero” as one of two cases. Case “1” is to be a recipient of either the Medal of Honor or a Service Cross medal. (See Fig. 1.)

Case “2” is to be “either a person *or unit*” who “distinguishes *himself* ... by extraordinary heroism ... by satisfying both of the following criteria.” (emphasis added.) (See Fig. 1). However, Service Cross medals are only awarded to individuals, not military units. (See Figs. 2-3.)

The proposal's first set of criteria to be satisfied under Case 2 are merely *restatements* of the United States criteria to be eligible for a Service Cross Medal. (See Fig. 4.) However, the proposal defines Case 2 as a *separate set of criteria* by which a person or a (military) unit would be deemed eligible for a “Memorial Plaque.”

The proposed honoraria criteria in this instance are incorrect statements of the United States laws applying to Service Cross medals.

- b. There are no “AND” conditions, as the proposal recommends.

Section A.2.a.(1) of the Coast Guard’s applicable manual includes nearly identical Department of Defense conditions under which “extraordinary heroism” must be distinguished in order to be eligible for a Coast Guard Cross medal. The only difference is the Coast Guard’s actions may also include conflict with an “international terrorist organization.” (See Figs. 4-5.)

- (1) While engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force or international terrorist organization; or while serving with friendly foreign forces in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.
- (2) To warrant this decoration, the act or the execution of duty must be performed in the presence of great danger or at great personal risk. It also must be performed in such a manner as to render the individual highly conspicuous above others of equal grade, rate, experience, or position of responsibility. An accumulation of

2-2

COMDTINST M1650.25E

minor acts of heroism does not justify the award. When recommending the award, bear in mind the high standards demanded.

Fig. 5

USCG Eligibility Requirements for Coast Guard Cross (Sections A.2.a.(1-2.)

Section A.2.a.(2) of the Coast Guard’s applicable manual adds a separate set of conditions that distinguishes an eligible recipient as “above others of equal grade, rate, experience, or position of responsibility.” (See Fig. 5.)

The additional Coast Guard conditions mirror standards that used to apply to the Navy Cross medal, but which are not listed in the current DOD awards manual. (See Fig. 6.)

(2) The required heroism, while of a lesser degree than that required for award of the Medal of Honor, must nevertheless have been performed with marked distinction. The Service Cross is awarded for singular acts of valor or for extraordinary heroism over a very brief period, such as 1 or 2 days of a battle. The Service Cross will not be awarded for an accumulation of lesser acts of heroism over time, none of which by itself would justify this level of decoration. Nor will the Service Cross be awarded in recognition for any period of meritorious service, regardless of the scope or impact of such service.

Fig. 6

In fact, Department of Defense policy prohibits using a service member's grade as a factor in determining the level of valor recognition (e.g., a Service Cross Medal), which is to be "based solely on the merits of his or her actions." (See Fig. 7.)

d. The Service member's grade will not be a factor in determining the type or level of valor recognition, nor will any quotas be established limiting the number of valor decorations that may be recommended or approved. A Service member who performs an act or acts of valor will be accorded appropriate recognition based solely on the merits of his or her actions.

Fig. 7

DOD policy regarding the determination of valor awards²

The proposed honoraria criteria in this instance are incorrect statements of the United States laws applying to Service Cross medals.

2. The United States award criteria does not include or define "hero."

The honoraria criteria includes defining a "veteran hero" as a recipient of either the Medal of Honor or a Service Cross Medal. Neither of those medals are awarded on the subjective basis of whether or not an individual is, or was, a "hero."

Department of Defense policy recognizes that individual service members will be recognized for "qualifying acts of valor" and that "[p]roviding distinctive recognition to Service members for acts of valor is the top priority of the DoD Military Decorations and Awards Program."³

² See [Department of Defense Manual 1348.33, Volume 1, Section 1.2\(d\)](#), Change 5, dated April 27, 2025.

³ *Id.*, Section 1.2(a).

The Medal of Honor is a valor award given to individuals who distinguish themselves “conspicuously by **gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of [their] life above and beyond the call of duty.**” (emphasis added.) (See Figs. 8–9.)

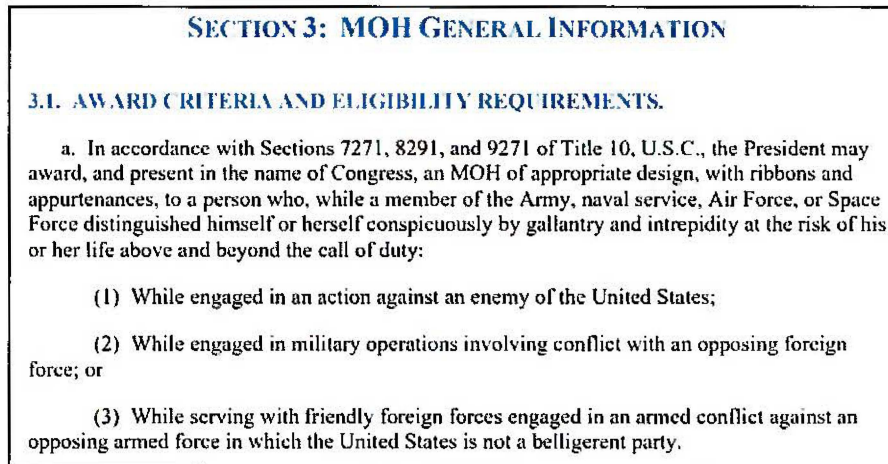


Fig. 8
DOD Eligibility Requirements for the Medal of Honor

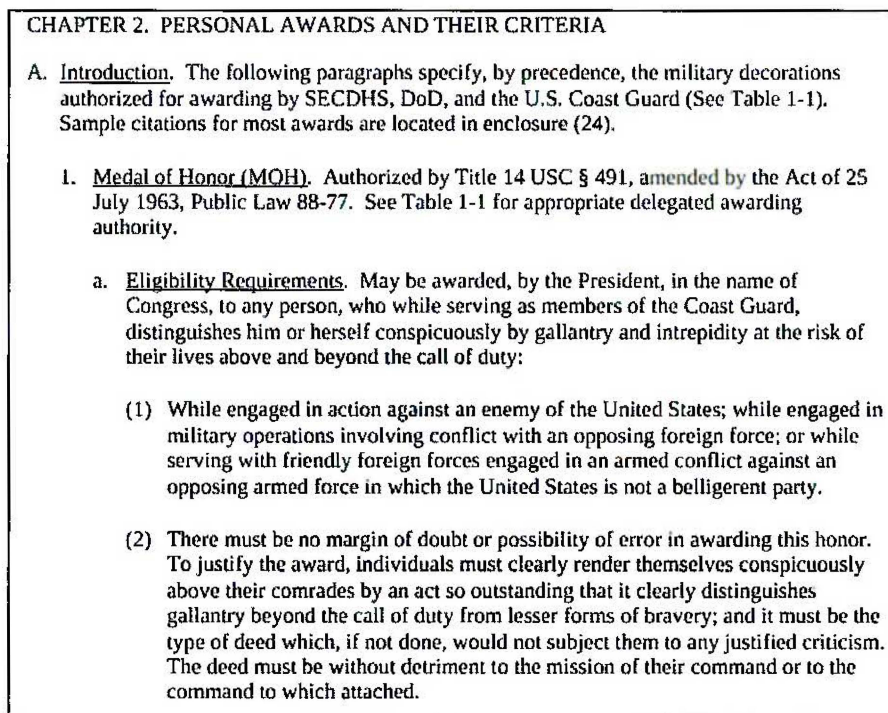


Fig. 9
USCG Eligibility Requirements for the Medal of Honor

As previously noted, a Service Cross Medal is a valor award given to individuals who distinguish themselves by “**extraordinary heroism** not justifying the award of the Medal of Honor.” (emphasis added.) (See Figs. 2-3.)

“Valor” is defined by the applicable DOD awards manual as “An act or acts of **heroism** by an individual above what is normally expected while engaged in direct combat with an enemy of the United States, or an opposing foreign or armed force, with exposure to enemy hostilities and personal risk.” (emphasis added.) (See Fig. 10.)

<p>valor. An act or acts of heroism by an individual above what is normally expected while engaged in direct combat with an enemy of the United States, or an opposing foreign or armed force, with exposure to enemy hostilities and personal risk.</p>

Fig. 10
DOD definition of “Valor”

Concluding Recommendation:

For the foregoing reasons, I strongly encourage the Board to reject all proposed recommendations to amend the honoraria criteria for the El Dorado County Veterans Monument, in favor of returning the item to the County staff.

The County of El Dorado should not adopt incorrect statements of applicable standards for the two highest military awards given by the United States, nor should the County of El Dorado conflate acts of “valor” as equivalent to the subjective label of “hero.”

Although the July 15th agenda item does appear to permit the adoption of revisions to portions of the proposed recommendations, the Board should not attempt to do ad hoc revisions of such an important issue during an otherwise busy agenda. Nor would the Board be able to ensure that any revisions are made by consensus of all stakeholders.

The best course to address objections to the proposed honoraria policy is to return the item to the County Staff, with direction to resolve all objections to consensus with the relevant stakeholders, then return those final recommendations to the Board at a later date.

Sincerely,

s/Joseph Connolly

Senior Chief Petty Officer, U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.)