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May 24, 2022

The Honorable Christine Wormuth  
Secretary of the Army  
101 Defense Pentagon  
Room 3E700  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Wormuth,

**I previously contacted Army congressional affairs office, but now turn directly to you,** regarding the matter of Mr. George Bednarski, a Vietnam veteran and 100 percent service-connected disabled veteran whose superiors believed he is eligible for the Bronze Star Medal (BSM) for meritorious achievement.

By way of background, Mr. Bednarski served in-theater as an Army radar mechanic as part of the 79 Field Artillery Army Detachment Adv TM # 100 APO USARV 96243, as listed on his DD Form-214 (attached). His task, to pick up incoming mortar on radar and feed the data to U.S. artillery to take out enemy mortar, was critical to guarding Army personnel whose lives were well protected by his outstanding performance. This he did in action, under constant threat of enemy artillery fire, for 16 months (June 1966 to October 1967) in the region of Tan Son Nhut Air Base. During that time he achieved a remarkable 99 percent operational status for three units, compared to 75 percent for other units' operational status. *There is no doubt his leadership and proficiency aided and even saved lives of his fellow servicemembers.*

**The Army congressional affairs office reviewed Mr. Bednarski's case in 2021, and unfortunately considered him ineligible for the medal on the mere technical grounds** that the witness and recommender for the BSM are supposed to be two different people: a recommender and a living person in the chain of command. **I now reach out to you directly as Secretary of the Army to consider waiving this technicality and giving this deserving veteran the BMS on the merits.** I further note that I was told in writing on April 21, 2021 that Lt. Col. Johnson of the Human Resources Command, Awards and Decorations Branch determined that "If the only surviving member of the original chain of command is the recommender, they can also sign on the back of the DA 638 as an intermediate authority."

Consider the details: 1st Sergeant Richard Greene, a non-commissioned officer under whom Mr. Bednarski served during his tour in Vietnam, personally recommended Mr. Bednarski to receive the Army Commendation Medal (later upgraded to the BSM recommendation). He directly told Mr. Bednarski—both verbally and in writing—that he recommended a medal and submitted the paperwork. The BSM was awarded to their company commander, Vernon DeBord, and 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Greene believed Mr. Bednarski should be similarly honored. Sadly, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Greene is now deceased, but he believed

that as a direct result of Mr. Bednarski's involuntary extension and change of commands, the paperwork for his recommendation was lost by the Army.

Extremely noteworthy is a January 30, 2020 letter from that same company commander, Mr. Vernon DeBord, CW4 US Army (RET), who was Mr. Bednarski's commanding officer and who received the Bronze Star for the same exemplary radar operational performance, ***recommends the Bronze Star (in lieu of the Army Commendation Medal) be awarded to Mr. Bednarski.*** During several inquiries to the Army to obtain Mr. Bednarski assistance in submitting the DA Form 638, Recommendation for Award, the Army replied with specific details stating, "Without both a living recommender and one living intermediate authority, the retroactive recommendation cannot be entered into the channels and processed in accordance with the Army." Unfortunately, Mr. Bednarski has been able to locate only one living member (Mr. DeBord) left in the chain of command, who himself is ill.

As former chairman of the House Veterans' Committee, and a son and brother of military veterans, ***I believe the spirit and intent of the Army medal policy has been substantively met,*** and that you have the authority to waive the separate witness and recommender stipulation: "... the Secretary of a Military Department may award the BSM to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the Army... distinguishes or has distinguished himself or herself by valor, or meritorious achievement or service" [emphasis added] from DOD manual 1348.33, Volume 3 Manual of Military Decorations and Awards: DOD-wide Personal Performance and Valor Decorations (updated May 17, 2021), Section 3.6. Bronze Star Medal. Subsection c.1. Another section reads: "the Secretary of a Military Department may award the BSM to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force of the United States, after December 6, 1941, distinguishes or has distinguished himself or herself by valor, or meritorious achievement or service." [emphasis added].

In sum, please confirm if you have the authority to determine if the separate witness and recommender requirement can be waived, and consider awarding this Vietnam veteran the Bronze Star just like his fellow servicemember who received the BSM for performing the same work under the same conditions at the same location.

**1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Greene wrote to me before his death, giving an unequivocal testimonial that he “vividly” recalls recommending that Mr. Bednarski deserves to be honored with a medal appropriate to his outstanding actions in Vietnam:** *“I feel an injustice was done to this fine soldier! I can only speculate that the award was lost in Army channels and/or change of command. But I can assure you that this soldier deserves this award as well as any I received. Bar none! ...I pray this letter is strong enough for the Army to correct this injustice... .”* **Secretary Wormouth, let us correct this injustice.**

I would appreciate your checking into the matter for me and providing any information which will help me respond to my constituent further. I am confident that the matter will be carefully and objectively reviewed, and I am grateful for any assistance you may render Mr. Bednarski.

Please feel free to contact me, or my District Director at Jeff.Sagnip@mail.house.gov or 609-585-7878. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

  
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH  
Member of Congress