

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

Steve Bullock  
GOVERNOR



Mike Cooney  
LT. GOVERNOR

June 18, 2016

Dear Casper Aviation Platoon, Montana Veterans, the Billings Chamber of Commerce, and Attendees:

I want to thank you all for coming to this wreath ceremony and commemoration of the Yellowstone Kelly Interpretative Gravesite. It is an honor to have the Casper Aviation Platoon and our Montana veterans join us here today as we commemorate the life of a Montana pioneer, soldier, and outdoor enthusiast.

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam War and it is important that we express our gratitude towards the heroic actions of these veterans. Montana has one of the highest per capita rates of veterans in the country—meaning we have lots of men and women who have made great sacrifices to protect our rights and our country. It is because of the courage of veterans across this country that we are able to enjoy the liberty and freedoms of living in Montana today. I welcome the American Legion, Montana's Vietnam veterans, and the Casper Platoon veterans as they join us here at the gravesite of one of Montana's first veterans, Luther Sage Kelly, or better known as "Yellowstone Kelly."

We gather here today at the gravesite of Yellowstone Kelly to honor his life and legacy. All Americans and Montanans are deeply indebted to Kelly for his service to the United States and to Montana as a veteran of both the American Civil War and the Philippine-American War. He was a fearless infantry soldier as well as a strong-willed and brave captain. In addition to his military service, Kelly played a critical role in the expansion and exploration of the American West. Westward expansion is an important part of our state's history, and Kelly's role helped shape Montana culture and values during the frontier days.

Each year until her death, Yellowstone Kelly's wife sent a three-foot wreath made of evergreen and Toyon berry to be laid on her husband's grave. Today, we are honoring a promise made to Mrs. Kelly by the Billings Chamber to place a wreath on her husband's gravesite every year. The Chamber has continued this tradition and today is extending their promise by developing this interpretive site near Kelly's grave.

Montana has a lot to be thankful for when it comes to our beautiful land and the opportunities we have to enjoy it. Right here near the Yellowstone Kelly Interpretive Gravesite, there are plans to expand the Billings trail system known as the Heritage Trails. We are continuing the tradition of upholding public access for Montanans by expanding the Heritage Trails—furthering a public lands legacy that Yellowstone Kelly can be proud of.

Thank you all for attending today. I am honored to be a part of this commemoration and honored to have the men and women who devoted their lives in service to our country recognized for their work as veterans of our great nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Bullock".

STEVE BULLOCK  
Governor