

United States Senate

Honor Ceremony-Casper Aviation Platoon and Yellowstone Kelly

June 21, 2016

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the invitation to join you on this beautiful morning in Billings. Many of you have traveled from around the country to recognize American heroes from two different eras. We welcome the Casper Aviation Platoon and are grateful for the opportunity to personally thank its' members for their service to our nation alongside "Yellowstone" Kelly.

On May 5, 1965 the 173d Airborne Brigade was deployed to Vietnam, becoming the first U.S. Army unit committed to the Vietnam War. The Casper Platoon flew almost every type of heliborne mission that existed at the time and maintained the highest "extension" rate in the Brigade. They are an example of versatility and bravery and brought confidence and comfort to troops they assisted. We will never be able to honor our American servicemen and women to the degree they deserve. We are honored you have allowed us to thank you in Billings for your courage and service during this, the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War.

Yellowstone Kelly was an American soldier who served briefly in the American Civil War and then in an 1898 expedition to Alaska. Montana was lucky to have this adventurous scout, administrator, and veteran spend time in our great state and bless our people with his spirit. On June 26, 1929 Yellowstone Kelly was laid to rest with full military honors overlooking the Yellowstone Valley. His funeral procession and impact on our community is remembered to this day. In the words of Kelly's biographer, "If destiny ever decreed a fitting locale for one man's final resting place, surely this spot was meant for Yellowstone Kelly." Kelly himself stated "I feel my body will rest better in Montana, the scene of my earlier activities, than it would in the vastness of Arlington, where I purposed having it laid."

As his widow did until her passing, we are honored to lay a wreath at his grave overlooking this memorable site.

As Lieutenant Colonel Donald Charlton mentioned in a speech honoring Casper and the Sky Soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade, and I believe "Yellowstone" Kelly would agree.

"To be born free is an accident. To live free is a responsibility. But, to die free is an obligation."

God Bless,



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator