

Recommendation vs Decision

Bottomline up front: The 29th Division patch was designed to promote unity. Soldiers coming together from disparate backgrounds to create a unified force to defend the United States and defeat tyranny. Any attempt to modify or change that historic insignia dishonors the service of those who have served and those currently deployed and proudly wearing the patch of the 29th Division.

It has recently come to the attention of the 29th Division Association that a study has been conducted that places the historic Division patch in jeopardy. As National Commander, I am reaching out with a “call to arms” starting with a bit of history, background, and thoughts for the future. It is important that we disseminate accurate information to our members and friends as quickly as possible. We are already behind the power curve on this!

Twenty-five years ago, I visited Normandy for the first time and was greeted in every town we visited with French citizens delighted to see members of the 29th Division again. I will never forget many of them coming to take my left sleeve and put their face on my patch to kiss, often shed tears on it! From that moment on I have been committed to honoring and preserving the legacy of America’s Blue and Gray Division.

Founded nearly 125 years ago, the Division has served in Europe during two world wars and more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, with multiple units currently deployed around the world. The heroism and sacrifice of “Twenty-Niners” are well documented. One of the first Divisions formed during the Army reorganization for World War I, it was created from historic militia units transitioned to become America’s National Guard. It originally included regiments from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia, plus volunteers and draftees from across the Nation. As a result of this diversity, the Division carefully selected an ancient Chinese symbol of unity, later adopted by Korea as their symbol of life, the Yin and Yang design, as their distinctive insignia. It was one of the first division insignias created and was approved by the Army in December 1917.

The National Defense Act of 2021, created what has become known as the “*Naming Commission.*” The mission statement was clear, a “*Congressional Commission providing naming, renaming, and removal recommendations to Congress for all Department of Defense items that commemorate the Confederate States of America or any person who served voluntarily with the Confederate States of America.*” While this mission seems pretty specific, the 29th Division patch was somehow brought up for review as a product honoring the Confederacy. It now appears that the Commission’s review agreed with that concern and will recommend a change as part of their final report. Unfortunately, as we finally learned the news of the decision, we found on their website: <https://www.thenamingcommission.gov> “*The naming Commission concluded its recommendation gathering period at 5 p.m. EST, December 1, 2021.*” Requests to make a presentation to the Commission at this point have been unsuccessful.

So, while it is fair to say as the Commission currently does, that “the final decision on changing the 29th Division patch has not been made”, it would be naïve to

believe that their recommendation would be anything other than the patch was one of the “symbols of the Confederacy” requiring change.

To my knowledge, at no time was any representative of the 29th Division or the 29th Division Association made aware the Commission was reviewing the patch, much less provided the opportunity to testify or show support for retaining it. If any friend of the 29th Division was aware of the Commission’s review of our patch, shame on them for being complicit in the threat we are now facing. Our supporters in uniform are limited in the assistance they can provide, so it is up to the 29th Division Association and the Division’s friends to lead this effort.

Our objective must be to reach the decision makers. The opportunity to stand up for the 29th Division’s historic patch is not over, it’s just beginning, but we must move forward now! It is therefore incumbent upon the 29th Division Association and friends of the 29th Division to take action to preserve the current and historic patch through a well-planned, unemotional response in opposition to the Commission’s ultimate recommendation. This will need to begin by reaching out to the Secretary of Defense and then to members of the Congressional Armed Services Committees where the final decision will be made.

The arguments for the patch are numerous and we will be developing them fully, but here are some initial thoughts. First, the patch is the opposite of a divisive symbol. It’s not about North or South, only Americans who have worn that patch in service to the United States, fighting under the banner of the Stars and Stripes. It is so well recognized throughout the Army that often smaller units serving as part of a 29th Division Task Force request, and are granted, the opportunity to wear the Division patch, thus allowing it to be their combat service identity. Second, citizens of every state and several territories and the District of Columbia have served and serve today in the 29th Division. Many soldiers, now in other units, wear the patch in recognition of their combat service. Third, the current organizations serving as part of the Division come from eleven different states. The 26th Massachusetts’s Brigade, for example, was recently the Second Brigade of the 29th Division manifesting the unity inherent in the patches’ design and its INTENT. Recent Division commanders have come from Massachusetts, Illinois, and the current commander is from Mississippi.

We cannot betray the legacy of those Twenty-Niners who have gone before, especially those resting in American Cemeteries in Europe and across America, our ‘Gray Beards,’ those still serving and especially the thousands currently deployed.

More to follow, “29 Let’s Go!”

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