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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 956

Offered February 19, 2007

Commemorating the loss of the American soldiers of the SS Léopoldville.

Patrons—Rapp and Gear; Senators: Norment and Williams

WHEREAS, on December 24, 1944, a German U-Boat (U486) patrolling off the coast of France during World War II sunk an Allied troop transport, the Belgian SS *Léopoldville*, in the English Channel with a single torpedo; 763 soldiers of the United States Army, 66th Infantry Division, who were on board the troopship died that day in service to their country; and

WHEREAS, hundreds of brave soldiers died immediately and many more died when darkness and rough seas hampered rescue efforts; 493 men were never found and are today entombed in a watery grave aboard the SS *Léopoldville*; and

WHEREAS, seven Virginia soldiers lost their lives that night—Sergeant Claude P. Bradley, Jr., from Stuarts Draft; Private First Class Charles L. Bush from Ewing; Private First Class Earl B. Fox from Hornsbyville; Private First Class Charles E. Goins from Duffield; Sergeant Melvin E. Nunn from Martinsville; and Private First Class William G. Roberson and Private First Class William E. Scott from Roanoke; and

WHEREAS, in all, 1,471 United States service members survived the attack—a British ship, the HMS *Brilliant*, saved an estimated 500 soldiers under adverse circumstances by pulling alongside the SS *Léopoldville*, allowing soldiers to jump to her deck to safety; the captains of small harbor craft and French fishing vessels picked up many soldiers who were saved from the treacherous 48 degree seas; and

WHEREAS, even though the sinking of the SS *Léopoldville* was a disaster of monumental proportions, the loss received little news coverage until the 60th anniversary of the tragic event in 2004; many families did not know the circumstances of their loved ones' deaths, because some soldiers were listed as missing in action and others were buried in France; and

WHEREAS, the Léopoldville Memorial Association is committed to researching and contacting loved ones, providing information about the sinking, and promoting awareness regarding this World War II tragedy; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly and the citizens of the Commonwealth recognize the ultimate sacrifice of these United States service members who died in the sinking of the SS *Léopoldville*, as well as the bravery and patriotism of those who survived the sinking to continue to serve their country; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commemorate the loss of 763 soldiers of the United States Army, 66th Infantry Division, including seven courageous Virginia service members, during the sinking of the SS *Léopoldville* on December 24, 1944, as well as herald the great heroism of the people who attempted to save them; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Léopoldville Memorial Association on behalf of the soldiers' families as an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude to the organization for its efforts to keep the memory of these brave service members alive and promote awareness of this World War II tragedy.

INTRODUCED

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