

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 45

Celebrating the life of Colonel Van T. Barfoot.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 7, 2012

WHEREAS, Colonel Van T. Barfoot, United States Army Retired, and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, died on March 2, 2012; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Van T. Barfoot, always very patriotic, joined the Army in 1940 before the beginning of the draft and by December 1941 was promoted to Technical Sergeant in L Company, 157th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division; and

WHEREAS, in July 1943, Colonel Barfoot took part in the invasion of Sicily and fought at Salerno; in January 1944, he landed at Anzio, pushing inland with his unit so that by May his unit held a defensive position near the town of Carano, Italy, where he lead numerous patrols during the day and night over the next four weeks in an effort to probe the German lines; and

WHEREAS, while out on patrol, Colonel Barfoot learned the layout of the German minefields, which would prove important for a future attack; on May 23, his company led an attack against the Germans, and as a squad leader, he requested to lead his squad to the German flank, going through some of the German minefields to get to the enemy positions with minimal casualties; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Barfoot led his men to the minefields and placed them in a position to defend a possible withdrawal, and he personally moved through ditches and depressions in the terrain toward the enemy; as he reached the first enemy machine gun on the far right flank, he destroyed it with a hand grenade, killing two and wounding three Germans; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Barfoot continued along their defensive line to the next gun emplacement and immediately killed two soldiers with his Thompson sub-machine gun, while wounding and capturing three others; as he approached the third gun emplacement, the Germans there surrendered to him; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Barfoot left the prisoners there for his support squad to pick up and proceeded to "mop up" the area and captured a few more prisoners—in total, Barfoot captured 17 men during his attack; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Barfoot and his men then occupied the German positions, where later that afternoon, the Germans launched a fierce counterattack on his position; with a bazooka, he knocked the tracks off of the tank closest to his position, causing the other two tanks to move away towards his flank; as the crew of the disabled tank attempted to dismount, he quickly eliminated them; and

WHEREAS, along with the attack that afternoon, Colonel Barfoot also discovered several abandoned German artillery pieces and disabled one of them; at the end of the day, Colonel Barfoot aided two of his severely wounded men and carried them to a safe position some 1,700 yards away; and

WHEREAS, not long after this action, Colonel Barfoot received a promotion to 2nd Lieutenant and soon afterwards learned that he was to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on May 23, 1944; given a choice to return to the United States for the award or to be awarded in the field, Barfoot felt it was important not to leave his men; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Barfoot continued to serve his country with a long and exemplary career in the United States Army, including duty in Korea and Vietnam before retiring in 1974; and

WHEREAS, after his retirement from the military, Colonel Barfoot generously gave of his time and talents to the Commonwealth as a member of the Board of Veterans Affairs, where he worked diligently on behalf of his fellow veterans; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Barfoot has received numerous awards and honors for his service, including a monument dedicated to him and a road named after him in his native Mississippi and the naming of the second Virginia Veterans Care Center at McGuire Veterans Administration Hospital after him and fellow Richmond-area Medal of Honor recipient Colonel Carl Sitter; and

WHEREAS, throughout a long life dedicated to his country, Colonel Barfoot demonstrated great courage and loyalty under fire that serves as a reminder of the perils faced daily by the thousands of Americans who serve in our armed forces overseas and whose devotion to duty places them in harm's way; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Delegates hereby note with great sadness the loss of a respected citizen of the Commonwealth, Colonel Van T. Barfoot; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Colonel Van T. Barfoot as an expression of the House of Delegates' respect for his memory.