

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 110

Commending the 29th Infantry Division.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 14, 2019

WHEREAS, June 6, 2019, marks the 75th anniversary of the Allied assault at Normandy, France, by American, British, and Canadian troops, known as Operation Overlord, in which the 29th Infantry Division, based at Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, played a vital role; and

WHEREAS, the D-Day landing was the largest single amphibious assault in history, consisting of approximately 31,000 members of the United States Armed Forces; 153,000 members of the Allied Expeditionary Force; 5,000 naval vessels; and more than 11,000 sorties by Allied aircraft; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia National Guard, having been mobilized by the President of the United States starting in 1940, formed the 111th Field Artillery Battalion and the 116th Infantry Regiment; and

WHEREAS, these two units of the 29th Infantry Division would be among the very first units to land on Omaha Beach, thereby earning the unique battle streamer "Beaches of Normandy" for their unit flags; and

WHEREAS, among the soldiers on the beach that morning were Sergeant John Robert "Bob" Slaughter and Sergeant Arnold H. Lindblad; their heroic acts and devotion to duty gave cause to the Virginia National Guard to name their headquarters building the Sergeant Bob Slaughter Headquarters and to designate the Norfolk Virginia National Guard Readiness Center as the Chief Warrant Officer Arnold Lindblad Readiness Center; and

WHEREAS, in the early hours of the landing, the commander of the 111th Field Artillery, Lieutenant Colonel Thornton L. Mullins, on finding that the amphibious vehicles bringing his unit's howitzers ashore had sunk, told his men to forget their artillery training, saying, "We're infantrymen now"; and

WHEREAS, Lieutenant Colonel Mullins was killed in action shortly thereafter; and

WHEREAS, the subsequent fighting after the initial D-Day landing proved to be as dangerous and fraught with casualties; the individual heroic acts of Virginia National Guardsman Technical Sergeant Frank D. Peregory at Grandchamps, France, on June 8, 1944, in singlehandedly eliminating a German strongpoint and capturing more than thirty of the enemy earned him the Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, the 29th Infantry Division found itself fighting for weeks in the Bocage area of Normandy against a deadly foe that contested every field and hedgerow, and casualty rates soon exceeded those of the D-Day landing; and

WHEREAS, the breakout from the Bocage and subsequent capture of the town of Saint-Lô on July 19, 1944, was led by the Virginia Guardsmen of the 116th Infantry Regiment while supported by the 111th Field Artillery; after 45 days of continuous combat, more than 7,000 members of the 29th Infantry Division were killed or wounded; and

WHEREAS, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry, Major Thomas Dry Howie, was killed by enemy artillery fire, and his body carried by his troops into the heart of the shattered city, then laid in state on the rubble of a church in the Saint-Lô square; and

WHEREAS, this incredible show of respect for their fallen leader was reported in the world press and gave rise to the legend of the "Major of Saint-Lô"; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Guardsmen of the 29th Infantry Division would next be assigned to the assault on the German-fortified port city of Brest where they would be reunited with their former 116th Regimental Commander, Brigadier General Charles D. W. Canham, then Assistant Division Commander of the 8th Infantry Division, while fighting in the streets of Brest; and

WHEREAS, the final capture of Brest after weeks of street-to-street combat would lead to the movement of the 29th Infantry Division across France to take up positions in Holland, defending the northern flank of the U.S. Army forces in Europe; and

WHEREAS, units of the 29th Infantry Division participated in the assault across the Rur River in February 1945 and finished the war in a defensive position along the Elbe River in May of that year; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate of Virginia, That the 29th Infantry Division hereby be commended on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its meritorious actions during World War II, from the beaches of Normandy on D-Day to the Elbe River; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare copies of this resolution for presentation to the 29th Infantry Division and the National D-Day Memorial Foundation as an expression of the Senate of Virginia's admiration for the unit's meritorious service in combat during World War II and subsequent service to the Commonwealth and the United States.

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