

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 892

By Hazlewood

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Corporal Thomas Harley Cooper, United States Marine Corps.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the Volunteer State is especially proud to have been the home of so many valiant men and women who performed above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, some of these brave soldiers fought and returned home; some died in combat, while others endured imprisonment at the hands of the enemy or were classified as missing in action; and

WHEREAS, we wish to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of one such remarkable soldier, the late Corporal Thomas Harley Cooper of Chattanooga; and

WHEREAS, Corporal Cooper served with courage and gallantry in World War II and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of his nation, and he deserves proper recognition for his heroism; and

WHEREAS, born on November 2, 1921, in Omaha, Nebraska, Harley Cooper was the son of Thomas Grady and Allien Patterson Cooper; and

WHEREAS, on September 18, 1940, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, Corporal Cooper was assigned to the 2nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, which was activated on March 18, 1942, at Marine Barracks San Diego; a unit of the 2nd Marine Division, the battalion was equipped with LVT-1s, which were commonly referred to as "AMTRACs"; and

WHEREAS, his unit was shipped out with the First Marine Division to meet the Japanese tide sweeping across the South Pacific; Harley Cooper's first experience in combat would come in the Solomon Islands; and

WHEREAS, following the Battle of Guadalcanal, Corporal Cooper and his fellow Marines took in the sights, scenes, and hospitality of Wellington, New Zealand, while receiving medical treatment for such tropical ailments as malaria and recuperating from injuries sustained in battle; and

WHEREAS, Harley Cooper was with his brothers in Alpha Company of the 2nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion when they landed on Betio as part of Operation Galvanic. The mission of the 2nd Marine Division was to secure the island in order to control the Japanese airstrip in the Tarawa Atoll; the Battle of Tarawa would become one of the bloodiest battles in Marine Corps history; and

WHEREAS, on November 20, 1943, Corporal Thomas Harley Cooper, a proud member of the United States Marines, was killed in action; he was reportedly buried on Betio Island, a temporary location chosen by his fellow Marines until the fallen could be recovered and returned to their families; and

WHEREAS, for the service and sacrifice of Harley Cooper, his loving wife and infant daughter were presented with his awards and decorations, including the Purple Heart, Combat Action Ribbon, World War II Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation, Asiatic-Pacific Theater Campaign Medal, Marine Corp Expeditionary Medal, and Gold Star Lapel Button; and

WHEREAS, in the immediate aftermath of the fighting on Tarawa, U.S. service members who died in the battle were buried in a number of battlefield cemeteries on the island; the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company conducted remains recovery operations on Betio between 1946 and 1947, but Corporal Cooper's remains were not identified and were classified as non-recoverable; and

WHEREAS, in March 1980, the Central Identification Laboratory, a predecessor to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), sent officials to Betio Island to receive skeletal remains that had been recovered during a construction project; and

WHEREAS, of the three sets recovered, two were identified; the third was declared unidentifiable and was subsequently buried in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) in Honolulu, Hawaii; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, the Department of Veterans Affairs disinterred the remains of ninety-four Tarawa Unknowns from the NMCP for identification; the remains were consolidated and sent to a laboratory for analysis; and

WHEREAS, the DPAA identified the remains of Corporal Cooper using dental, anthropological, and DNA analysis on August 9, 2019, and his daughter received "The Call" from the Marine Corps POW/MIA Section with the long-awaited news; and

WHEREAS, Harley Cooper's remains will soon be returned to his family, and he will be laid to rest with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, on March 10, 2022; and

WHEREAS, memorialized among the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific's Honolulu Memorial, Corporal Thomas Harley Cooper's name will remain permanently inscribed within Court Two of the Courts of the Missing, with a rosette placed next to his name to confirm that he has finally been found; and

WHEREAS, Corporal Cooper's dedication to excellence in the military and his love of family, fellow soldiers, and country, exemplified in his sacrifice of life itself in defense of all that he held dear, stand as enduring examples of the characteristics that have ensured the continued freedom of our nation and the preservation of its ideals over the course of our history; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Corporal Thomas Harley Cooper of Chattanooga, a young man who served his country with extraordinary bravery and valor as a member of the United States Marine Corps during World War II and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of democracy worldwide.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.