

SENATE RESOLUTION 178

By Tate

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of the African-American soldiers who died at Fort Pillow on April 12, 1864.

WHEREAS, from the founding of the United States of America, African Americans have bravely served their country in combat, despite often having to endure racism, discrimination, segregation, and inhumane conditions; and

WHEREAS, some 154 years ago during the Civil War, a shameful episode in our nation's history occurred when African-American Union soldiers were slaughtered while attempting to surrender during The Battle of Fort Pillow; and

WHEREAS, on April 12, 1864, Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate cavalymen attacked the isolated Union garrison at Fort Pillow in West Tennessee, which overlooked the Mississippi River; and

WHEREAS, of the 500-600-strong Union garrison defending Fort Pillow, more than one-half of the soldiers were African American; and

WHEREAS, after an initial bombardment, General Forrest asked for the badly outmanned garrison to surrender; the Union commander hesitated, hoping for support from Union ships approaching Fort Pillow via the Mississippi River; General Forrest, suspicious of the delay, then ordered the Confederate troops to attack; and

WHEREAS, the 1,500-2,500 Confederate cavalry troopers easily stormed and captured Fort Pillow; as the battle raged inside the fort walls, the situation degenerated into chaos, and command and control on both sides vanished; and

WHEREAS, the Confederate Army's conduct after the battle was quickly called into question; between 277 and 295 Union troops, most of whom were African American, were killed

in total, and another 100-plus seriously wounded, while Confederate losses numbered only fourteen soldiers; and

WHEREAS, statistics reported by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* indicate that twice as many Union soldiers were killed during the battle than were wounded, an inverse ratio for Civil War battles, and only twenty percent of the black soldiers present were taken prisoner, while sixty percent of the white soldiers were captured; and

WHEREAS, both Union and Confederate eyewitnesses reported that an unknown number of African-American soldiers were gunned down while attempting to surrender; many were shot as they fled, while others drowned in the Mississippi River; and

WHEREAS, Confederate sympathizers averred that the incident never occurred, and the report of the Congressional committee investigating this brutal episode had a decidedly pro-Union propagandist slant; still, the vast majority of historians are convinced that a massacre did indeed take place; and

WHEREAS, like the Alamo a generation earlier, the Fort Pillow massacre became a rallying cry for African Americans as they fought for their independence via the abolition of slavery; and

WHEREAS, the incident served to harden the resolve of African-American soldiers, and "Remember Fort Pillow!" became their battle cry; and

WHEREAS, the Fort Pillow massacre should be commemorated to remind us of man's inhumanity to man and the horrific aftermath of war and to encourage us to seek peace, understanding, and equality among all people, regardless of race, creed, or religion; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we solemnly honor the memory of the African-American soldiers who died at Fort Pillow on April 12, 1864, reflecting upon the courage and resolve they displayed while serving their country.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.