

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 17  
By Overbey

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Kenneth E. Russell of Blount County.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Kenneth E. Russell, a native of Polk County who, at age 19, parachuted into Normandy with the 82nd Airborne's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment on June 6, 1944 as a part of the D-Day invasion; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Russell was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, Ken Russell served with acumen and alacrity as a Blount County Commissioner from 1986-90 and was serving as a Blount County Election Commissioner at the time of his death; in both positions he earned the respect of his peers and superiors alike for the exemplary quality of his work; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Russell died at 2:30 a.m. on June 6, 2004, sixty years to the minute after his D-Day jump into Sainte-Mere-Eglise, Normandy; on that morning sixty years ago, his parachute lines became entangled on a church gargoyle, leaving him stranded some 30 feet above the square and thirty feet below fellow paratrooper John Steele, whose parachute was caught on the steeple; and

WHEREAS, after cutting his lines and crashing onto the roof of the church, Ken Russell witnessed his Sergeant, John Ray, wounded by a German soldier. As the soldier turned his gun on Russell and Steele, the dying Sergeant Ray shot and killed him, saving the lives of Ken Russell and John Steele; and

WHEREAS, after reaching the ground, crawling to Sergeant Ray's side, and comforting him during his last moments, Ken Russell reached cover across the street and was later credited with blowing up a German anti-aircraft gun and its crew; and

WHEREAS, as the war progressed, Mr. Russell participated in jumps in Holland and Belgium, and fought in the desperate campaign in the Hurtgen Forest near Aachen, Germany; during his military career, he earned two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, and two Purple Hearts; and

WHEREAS, an account of Mr. Russell's D-Day experiences was included in several of the works of the late historian Stephen Ambrose, and in 1994 he received the Medaille du Jubile from the French government and an award from Sainte-Mere-Eglise; in 1999 he was given the keys to the City of Bastogne in Belgium; and

WHEREAS, Ken Russell was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; he enjoyed the loving companionship of his wife, Dorothy, and was the proud father of Gerald Russell and Elyse Rose and the doting grandfather of four grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Ken Russell leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant, courageous soldier, and exemplary human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Kenneth E. Russell, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BB IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that with our profound gratitude we acknowledge Kenneth Russell's outstanding courage and valorous service to his nation and to the cause of freedom during World War II, expressing our conviction that his life of service will stand as a model for future generations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our sincerest condolences to the family of Mr. Russell.

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