

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 640

By Hawk

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Calvin Ward, Medal of Honor recipient, and to raise awareness about post-traumatic stress disorder.

WHEREAS, it is fitting for this General Assembly to commemorate the accomplishments of those brave Tennesseans who served our country during wartime, while also remembering the terrible toll that combat takes on its participants, many of whom never return to a normal life; and

WHEREAS, such is the sad story of the late Calvin John Ward, a native of Greene County who received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions while serving in the United States Army during World War I; and

WHEREAS, although he was more highly decorated than the legendary Sergeant Alvin C. York, Calvin Ward is perhaps the most forgotten war hero in American history; and

WHEREAS, after he committed suicide in a Morristown hotel room on December 15, 1967 at the age of 68, a victim of alcoholism and "shell shock," Mr. Ward's obituary did not mention that he had received the Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, born October 30, 1899, Private Calvin John Ward of Company D, 117th Infantry, 30th (Old Hickory) Division, U.S. Army was awarded the Medal of Honor for his courage and tenacity in combat near Estrees, France on October 18, 1918, a few days shy of his 19th birthday; and

WHEREAS, along with Knoxville soldier and fellow Medal of Honor recipient, Buck Karnes, Mr. Ward silenced two German machine gun positions on that fateful day; and

WHEREAS, Calvin Ward had encountered German gas just two days before fighting in this historic action; he was wounded twice in combat and served in the Ypres-Lys offensive; and

WHEREAS, overall, he received six American military honors, the Medal of Honor, Silver Star, Purple Heart, Distinguished Service Cross, World War I Victory Medal with Defensive Sector Clasp, and World War I Victory Button with Bronze Clasp, and six foreign medals for a total of twelve medals; and

WHEREAS, while Sergeant York returned from the Great War to be immortalized by Hollywood and become a respected presence in America's consciousness, Calvin Ward has been largely forgotten; and

WHEREAS, in fact, only two monuments exist for this reluctant hero: the Talley-Ward Memorial Recreation Center and his grave in Bristol's Glenwood Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Ward was so modest that his medals and decorations were not discovered until an officer found them in a shoe box; he always avoided the spotlight and refused to attend any events to honor veterans after his military service ended; and

WHEREAS, after World War I, Calvin Ward roamed from town to town and moved from job to job in search of an elusive happiness, never really returning to the normalcy of his pre-war life; and

WHEREAS, a victim of "shell shock" or "battle fatigue" during World War I, Mr. Ward changed drastically after the war, and his erratic behavior resulted in his family and others regarding him as a living, breathing casualty of combat; and

WHEREAS, in search of normalcy and purpose in his life, Calvin Ward reenlisted in the Army twice, but his alcoholism, odd conduct, and clashes with superior officers resulted in his receiving a dishonorable discharge in 1930; and

WHEREAS, he is believed to be the only Medal of Honor recipient to have been dishonorably discharged from the U.S. armed forces, and he would have been ineligible to have a military marker on his grave without the intervention of Congressman Jimmy Quillen; and

WHEREAS, recently efforts have been made to revive Calvin Ward's fascinating, if heartbreaking, story: the Center for the Study of War and Society at the University of Tennessee devoted a large portion of its newsletter to his story, and at least two Knoxville television stations have aired segments about him; and

WHEREAS, it is indeed tragic that Calvin Ward never knew the peace and happiness that he had earned on the battlefields of France, but equally distressing that he never received the proper treatment for his "shell shock," because such treatment did not exist at the time; and

WHEREAS, even today, when "shell shock" is better understood as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and treatment protocols are standardized, many of our soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are plagued by this disorder, and tragically some of them take their own lives, just as Calvin Ward did, because their minds can't relinquish the horrors of war; and

WHEREAS, if we wish to properly honor Mr. Ward's memory and thank him posthumously for his contributions to preserving democracy and the American way of life, we should do so by recommitting ourselves to better serving today's American soldiers suffering with PTSD; and

WHEREAS, these young men and women have sacrificed greatly in serving their country overseas in combat, and we owe them not only our praise and gratitude, but also the best medical and psychological treatment available, as well as our empathy and compassion in dealing with the many challenges resulting from PTSD; and

WHEREAS, as we pay tribute to Calvin Ward's memory, let us also remember the terrible price that he and thousands of other soldiers have paid on various battlefields across the globe, presenting us with a debt we can never repay; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor the memory of Medal of Honor recipient and Greene County native, Calvin Ward, reflecting upon his brave and meritorious service to his country during World War I.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that as we remember Calvin Ward's excellence in the military and his troubled later life, we vow to better serve our present day soldiers and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder by providing them with the best medical treatment available and extending to them our deepest gratitude and the full measure of our humanity.

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