

SCR 8 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Rules

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Meeting Dates: 2/19

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure honors the life and service of Private William Ezra Leon “Billy” Calkins, who lived from 1925 to 1942.

Fiscal impact: No impact

Revenue impact: No impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Private William Ezra Leon “Billy” Calkins was born in August 1925, and was raised in Washington County, Oregon. He had a strong desire to serve his country, so he lied about his age to join the United States Army at the age of 16.

While Private Calkins was serving in the Philippines in December 1941, the Japanese forces invaded the islands, and he was captured on the Bataan Peninsula. In April 1942, he, and an estimated 75,000 other prisoners of war, were gathered by Japanese forces and forced to march 65 miles to various prison camps, in what came to be known as the Bataan Death March. The troops on the march were subjected to severe physical and psychological abuse, starvation and summary executions, leading to thousands of deaths.

Private Calkins survived the march to reach Cabanatuan prisoner of war camp. The prisoners at the camp endured horrific conditions and abuse, and death rates soared due to lack of medicine and food. Private Calkins died on November 1, 1942, and he was buried in a common grave numbered 704.

After the war, the remains of Private Calkins, and others in mass graves, were exhumed. While some remains could be identified, his remains, and the remains of others, were reinterred as unknown soldiers at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial. In 2018, as part of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency’s Cabanatuan Project, the unidentified remains associated with common grave 704 were again exhumed for forensic analysis, and scientists at the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System were able to use DNA to identify the remains of Private Calkins. His remains were returned to Oregon and he was finally laid to rest next to his mother’s grave on September 13, 2024, at Fir Lawn Memorial Park in Hillsboro, with full military honors.

Private Calkins was 17 years old when he died. He was an outstanding soldier who served his country with honor and distinction, and his awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal with oak leaf cluster, the Purple Heart, the Prisoner of War Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, the American Defense Service Medal with Foreign Service Clasp, the World War II Victory Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation with two bronze oak leaf clusters, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Philippine Defense Medal with bronze star, and the Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation.