

HCR 16 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Rules

Prepared By: Leslie Porter, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 3/19

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure recognizes and honors Specialist Four Paul Jeffrey “Jeff” Cochran, who lived from 1947 to 1968, for his service to his country.

Fiscal impact: No impact

Revenue impact: No impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

United States Army Specialist Four (SP4) Paul Jeffrey “Jeff” Cochran was born on October 6, 1947, to Beverly Cochran-Durham. SP4 Cochran’s friends and peers called him Paul, but to his family, he was “Jeff.” During a Christmastime visit to Santa Claus when he was a young boy, the only thing SP4 Cochran asked for was a new fridge for his mom’s apartment, demonstrating the thoughtfulness that would define him throughout his life.

In 1964, SP4 Cochran moved in with his grandparents, Paul and Marguerite Cochran, and lived with them until 1966 at their home at 1545 College Street in Philomath, Oregon. In 1965, he began attending Philomath High School and joined the school’s baseball team, the Philomath Warriors. During a legendary April 28, 1965, ball game against Salem Academy, he pitched a 3-hitter and struck out 13 batters, giving the Warriors a critical edge on their way to a 6-1 victory over Salem.

By the time of his graduation in 1966, SP4 Cochran had played high school baseball and football, participated in speech competitions, acted in the school play, and served as the Sergeant at Arms for his class’s student council. In the months following graduation, he spent his days deep in thought, driving around Philomath in his 1957 Ford Thunderbird, and contemplating what his future might hold.

Over the course of that summer, SP4 Cochran came to the realization that he wanted to be part of something bigger than himself. In the fall of 1966, he enlisted in the United States Army, attending basic training at Fort Lewis in Tacoma, Washington. In the spring of 1967, SP4 Cochran attended United States Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he earned his “Jump Wings” and became a paratrooper. He joined the 101st Airborne Division, known affectionately as the “Screaming Eagles,” at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and in December 1967, he was deployed to South Vietnam.

SP4 Cochran was well respected for his prowess as a soldier, but to his platoon mates, he was a stalwart friend and a brother. During his time in Vietnam, SP4 Cochran earned the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Expert Rifleman Badge.

In a letter to his grandmother Marguerite dated March 20, 1968, SP4 Cochran pondered whether the blossoms in Philomath were yet in bloom. On May 1, 1968, SP4 Cochran was killed during combat operations in Thua Thien Province, South Vietnam. He knew that serving his country was what he was meant to do, and he gave his life to uphold that destiny.

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SP4 Cochran's awards and decorations that were posthumously awarded to his grandmother Marguerite included the Bronze Star Medal with Oakleaf Cluster for meritorious service, the Purple Heart, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge. He was buried in 1968 at the Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Oregon. SP4 Cochran's name appears on panel 53E, line 29, of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The Paul J. Cochran Memorial Scholarship was established at Philomath High School in 1968 to honor his sacrifice, and it was awarded to its first recipient, graduating senior Ben Beddingfield, that June.

On August 5, 2018, 50 years after SP4 Cochran's death, his loving mother Beverly passed away. In February 2019, Shane Cochran-Fritz, his sister and executor of their mother's estate, came to Philomath City Hall and revealed that Beverly's final wish was that the property at 1545 College Street be donated to the City of Philomath in order to create a memorial park further honoring SP4 Cochran's sacrifice. Beverly wished for the park to become a communal space where people could gather together to reflect on the human cost of war.

In accordance with Beverly's wishes, the City of Philomath demolished the home at 1545 College Street on August 15, 2020, making way for the park to come. The City of Philomath was awarded a Veterans and War Memorial Grant from the State Parks and Recreation Department in 2022 for a granite memorial to be erected at the park. Construction of the Paul J. Cochran Veterans Memorial Park began in August 2023, and its dedication took place on November 9, 2024. Shane Cochran-Fritz had the honor of cutting the ribbon and officially opening the park to the public.

SP4 Cochran is survived by Shane Cochran-Fritz, his brother Nicholas Cochran, his half-brother Fritz Baier, his nieces and nephews, and countless others that considered him a dear friend. He will always be remembered for his thoughtfulness and generosity of spirit, and he was loved by his family, his friends, his fellow soldiers, his Philomath High School classmates, and his country.