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ACR-62 Harlem Hellfighters Day. (2021-2022)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 62

CHAPTER 33

Relative to veterans.

[Filed with Secretary of State May 07, 2021.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 62, Voepel. Harlem Hellfighters Day.

This measure would proclaim April 6, 2021, as Harlem Hellfighters Day.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, "Harlem Hellfighters" was a nickname for the 369th United States Infantry Regiment, formerly the 15th New York National Guard Regiment, an African American unit that earned its nickname for its combat actions on the battlefields of France in 1918; and

WHEREAS, Despite the distinguished service of African Americans in the Armed Forces of the United States dating back to the American Revolutionary War, they faced considerable racial prejudice and strong resistance regarding their deployment as combat troops as the United States Army mobilized in 1917 to fight World War I; and

WHEREAS, Although the May 1917 Selective Service Act specified that able-bodied American men of 21 to 30 years of age, inclusive, were eligible for induction "regardless of race," the War Department initially planned to use African Americans only as manual labor troops, typically as cooks, stevedores, and drivers; and

WHEREAS, Increasingly strident demands from operational commanders for replacement fighting units to bolster Allied ranks led to the creation of two racially segregated United States infantry combat divisions, the 92nd and 93rd Divisions, consisting of African American soldiers led by White and some African American officers; and

WHEREAS, The Harlem Hellfighters' combat record leaves no legitimate doubt about the patriotism, combat effectiveness, and fearlessness of African American soldiers. The unit spent 191 days at the front, never lost ground, and was the first Allied unit to reach the Rhine River. The unit suffered 1,500 casualties while fighting in the Second Battle of the Marne from July 15 to 18, 1918, inclusive and in the first month of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive from September 26 to November 11, 1918, inclusive. The 369th's casualties constituted about one-half of the 93rd Division's losses of 3,167 total dead or wounded, despite being just one of four regiments in the division. The 369th was removed from its attachment to the French Army on December 18, 1918; and

WHEREAS, The regiment returned to the United States and demobilized on February 28, 1919, at Camp Upton, New York, and then was returned to the New York National Guard. Soldiers of the 93rd Division received more than 500 French and United States valor medals; and

WHEREAS, On February 18, 1919, 3,000 veterans of the 369th Infantry, formerly the 15th New York Regiment, paraded from Fifth Avenue at 23rd Street to 145th and Lenox in the City of New York. One of the few black combat regiments in World War I, they'd earned the prestigious Croix de Guerre from the French army, under which they'd served for six months of "brave and bitter fighting." Their nickname they'd received from their German foes: "Hellfighters," so they became the Harlem Hellfighters; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby proclaims April 6, 2021, as Harlem Hellfighters Day; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.