

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.C.R. 26
By: Fraser
Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
5/4/2015
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.C.R. 26 serves as a directive to the governor of the State of Texas to posthumously award Colonel Ed Dyess the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor in recognition of his extraordinary military service and valorous acts in World War II. Demonstrating leadership and courage in both infantry and aerial combat, Colonel Dyess led his squadron of airmen through combat in the jungles of the Bataan Peninsula and in the skies above the Pacific Theatre. On February 8, 1942, Captain Dyess led a 20-man force in an assault on two enemy battalions entrenched in Agloloma Bay. Dyess and his men eliminated approximately 75 heavily armed Japanese combatants ordered to wreak havoc behind the Filipino-American lines, giving American forces time to mobilize in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Not one month later, Dyess led nine pilots in five aircraft, braving heavy anti-aircraft fire in a raid that would destroy one 12,000-ton transport, one 6,000-ton vessel, at least two 100-ton motor launches, and a handful of barges and lighters. As the combat situation on the Bataan Peninsula deteriorated and many officers began to shirk their duties, Dyess continued to fly high risk missions, sometimes as far as 1,400 miles, to ensure his men had access to needed medicine. As situations continued to deteriorate, Dyess personally oversaw the evacuation of the Bataan Peninsula and gave up his seat on the final departing flight. Following the surrender of 75,000 American and Filipino troops, Dyess endured the Bataan Death March, one of the most horrific war crimes in the history of the United States. Dyess suffered savage beatings and witnessed horrific wartime practices of the Japanese Army, ultimately arriving at prison camps on Luzon Island. In November 1942, Dyess arrived at the Davao Penal Colony, a reportedly escape-proof prison planation. There, Captain Dyess co-organized an operation in which 10 American soldiers and two Filipino convicts, known as the "Davao Dozen," escaped through the thick jungle surrounding the camp to continue fighting with Filipino guerilla forces until he could evacuate to Australia in July 1943. Lieutenant Colonel Dyess would not live to see his remarkable story relayed to the American public. On December 22, 1943, Dyess encountered engine trouble while piloting a P-38 Lightning during a routine flight above Los Angeles. Rather than bailing out of his aircraft and allowing it to fall into a crowded residential area, Lieutenant Colonel Dyess attempted an emergency landing but was forced to pull up in order to avoid hitting a motorist who had strayed into his path; his aircraft struck a church and Dyess was killed instantly. To date, the only public recognition Lieutenant Colonel Dyess has received is the renaming of Abilene Air Force Base to Dyess Air Force Base in 1956. In recognition of Lieutenant Colonel Dyess' incredible accomplishments, S.C.R. 26 directs the Governor of Texas to posthumously award Lieutenant Colonel Dyess the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor.

The Texas Legislative Medal of Honor was established to recognize gallant and intrepid service by a member of the state or federal military forces, and Lieutenant Colonel Ed Dyess, a highly decorated aviator and warrior called "the One-Man Scourge of the Japanese" during World War II due to his remarkable adaptive ability to fight a relentless, ruthless enemy in the Pacific Theater as a combat pilot, infantry commander, prisoner of war, and guerrilla, would be a fitting recipient of this prestigious award.

Born in Albany, Shackelford County, on August 9, 1916, William Edwin Dyess exhibited natural leadership skills as the student body president at Albany High School and as the class president and commander of the R.O.T.C. detachment at John Tarleton Agricultural College (now Tarleton State University). A distinguished graduate of the flight schools at Randolph Field, known as "the West Point of the Air," and Kelly Field in San Antonio, Dyess was appointed commanding

officer of the 21st Pursuit Squadron and deployed to the Philippine Islands in 1941, where he would become one of the first Americans to engage the enemy in World War II.

During the early phase of the Pacific War, First Lieutenant Dyess shot down six enemy planes, actions that would have classified him as an "ace" if not for the lack of gun cameras and the destruction by American forces of military records to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. In late January 1942, during an emergency shortage of combat aircraft, Dyess demonstrated exceptional skill as a marksman and motivator as he led his ill-equipped and inexperienced squadron of airmen in infantry combat through the jungles of the Bataan Peninsula during the "Battle of the Points."

On February 8, 1942, Captain Dyess volunteered to lead America's first amphibious landing of World War II, at Agloloma Bay, to root out two enemy battalions that had entrenched themselves with orders from Japanese commanding General Masaharu Homma to wreak havoc behind the Filipino-American lines. Dyess was the first man ashore, selflessly exposing himself to enemy fire while engaging enemy positions with a Lewis machine gun and motivating his apprehensive 20-man force to join him. Amidst exploding bombs, Dyess and his party secured the beachhead using automatic weapons and hand grenades and eliminated approximately 75 heavily armed, elite Japanese troops who had fortified themselves in caves. The failure of General Homma's operation allowed American forces in the Philippines to hold out a few months longer, trapping enemy resources and giving America time to mobilize in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

On March 2, 1942, Dyess led nine pilots flying five battered warplanes in a daring raid on the enemy supply depot at Subic Bay, Luzon. Flying a Curtiss P-40 Warhawk rigged to carry 500-pound bombs, Dyess braved heavy antiaircraft fire, engaged an enemy cruiser, and ultimately destroyed one 12,000-ton transport, one 6,000-ton vessel, at least two 100-ton motor launches, and a handful of barges and lighters. In order to save face, Radio Tokyo reported that 54 bombers and swarms of fighter planes had been responsible for the attack. Dyess was presented with the Distinguished Service Cross, the second-highest military decoration that can be awarded, for the extraordinary heroism that he displayed on this occasion.

Although many officers began to shirk their duties and pull rank as the military situation deteriorated, Dyess worked hard to boost the morale of his men, cleaning cockpits and flying countless reconnaissance, resupply, and evacuation missions. He sometimes flew up to 1,400 miles through enemy skies to bring back desperately needed medicines and telegrams for his men.

Dyess refused multiple opportunities to leave the doomed Bataan Peninsula and endeavored to ensure others were evacuated before him. Dyess personally supervised the boarding of evacuees on the last flyable aircraft on Bataan. The final seat was reserved for Dyess himself, but at the last second he ordered a friend onto the plane in his stead.

After the surrender of 75,000 American and Filipino troops on Bataan on April 9, 1942, Dyess endured the most horrific war crime in the history of the United States, the Bataan Death March. Dyess watched as prisoners of war were denied water and medical care, beaten, beheaded, whipped, shot, buried alive, run over by tanks, and used for bayonet practice. Due to his height, fair complexion, and status as an officer, Dyess was singled out for mistreatment and suffered through savage beatings. Despite this, Dyess shepherded his men forward, helped the wounded, and noted the horrors taking place around him so that he could describe them in a firsthand account. For the next six months, Dyess endured starvation, disease, interrogation, and torture in two squalid prison camps on Luzon, where he continued to encourage and aid his fellow prisoners, smuggling food and medicine to those in need.

In November 1942, Captain Dyess arrived at the Davao Penal Colony, known as "Dapecol," a reportedly escape-proof prison plantation where 2,000 American prisoners of war were being forced to work as slave laborers. While at Dapecol, Dyess co-organized a team of United States military personnel to execute the only large-scale prison break of prisoners of war in the Pacific War. Dyess volunteered for the dangerous task of transporting the escape party's gear on a bull cart past multiple guard checkpoints. On April 4, 1943, the "Davao Dozen," 10 American

prisoners of war and two Filipino convicts, made their amazing escape through a deep, crocodile-infested swamp. After eluding search parties, Dyess fought alongside Filipino guerrilla forces behind enemy lines before evacuating to Australia in July 1943. He received a promotion to major and was personally presented with his second Distinguished Service Cross, in the form of a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, by General MacArthur on July 30, 1943.

Dyess would have enjoyed a hero's welcome had his superiors not consigned him to a military hospital in the mountains of West Virginia, where he was subjected to secret debriefings by government officials. He was sequestered there because the government feared that his story, if released to the public, would jeopardize the "Europe First" strategic policy and Pacific prisoner of war relief efforts of the Allies. Despite suffering from depression and severe posttraumatic stress disorder, Dyess was determined to make his account of the Bataan Death March and other atrocities known to the public, and he entered into a publishing agreement with the Chicago Tribune. His epic story, trumpeted by the War Department as "The Greatest Story of the War in the Pacific," was eventually released on January 28, 1944, skillfully timed to harness the full fury of America's anger. Stagnant war bond sales and service enlistment numbers soared as Dyess's revelations forced America out of a mid-war complacency.

Lieutenant Colonel Dyess never lived to see his remarkable story take hold of America. During a routine flight over Los Angeles on December 22, 1943, his P-38 Lightning began to have engine trouble. Rather than bailing out and letting his plane careen into a crowded residential area, Dyess attempted an emergency city street landing, but he pulled up at the last moment to avoid hitting a motorist who had strayed into his path. While attempting to guide his crippled aircraft onto a vacant lot, he struck a church and was killed instantly when his plane crashed. Dyess was awarded the Soldier's Medal posthumously in recognition of a heroic act not involving an armed enemy. Dyess's family resisted the public's clamor for his internment at Arlington National Cemetery and instead buried him in his beloved home state in the Albany Cemetery. To this day, the only public recognition of Dyess and his incredible life was the renaming of Abilene Air Force Base to Dyess Air Force Base in 1956.

Lieutenant Colonel Ed Dyess risked his life repeatedly in defense of his country, and he put the welfare of his fellow prisoners of war ahead of his own. He revealed to the American people a vital aspect of the war, and he ultimately sacrificed his own life to save the life of another. He is most assuredly deserving of this state's supreme military award.

RESOLVED

That the 84th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby direct the governor of the State of Texas to award the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor posthumously to Lieutenant Colonel Ed Dyess in recognition of his extraordinary military service and remarkable succession of valorous acts in World War II.