

By: White of Tyler

H.R. No. 1580

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, During World War II, the late Lieutenant Colonel
2 Philip W. Latimer distinguished himself through his combat service
3 with the historic Black Panther Battalion of the U.S. Army; and

4 WHEREAS, Colonel Latimer was teaching high school
5 mathematics in rural East Texas in 1941 when he was drafted into the
6 army; after serving as a private in the 3rd Armored Division and as
7 a sergeant in the 7th Armored Division, he attended Armor Officer
8 Candidate School; commissioned a second lieutenant in October 1942,
9 he assumed command of a mortar platoon in the 12th Armored Division;
10 the following January, he and the division's other white second
11 lieutenants were asked if they would be willing to serve with the
12 black soldiers in the newly formed 761st Tank Battalion, the first
13 armored combat unit to be made up of African American troops; and

14 WHEREAS, Lieutenant Latimer joined the battalion in July 1943
15 as one of six white officers and, promoted to captain, trained with
16 them at Camp Hood, where the men of the 761st excelled in combat
17 exercises, often outmaneuvering and defeating the units made up of
18 white soldiers; despite their success on duty, the soldiers of the
19 761st regularly experienced racial prejudice while off duty, and
20 one member of the battalion, future baseball great Jackie Robinson,
21 was nearly court-martialed for refusing to move to the back of a
22 bus; and

23 WHEREAS, On October 10, 1944, the 761st Tank Battalion landed
24 at Omaha Beach, and shortly afterward, it joined the Third Army in

1 northeastern France, where it was welcomed by General George S.
2 Patton himself; over the course of 183 days of continuous
3 operations, the men of the 761st fought their way bravely across
4 Europe, helping to liberate France, taking part in the Battle of the
5 Bulge, and punching a hole in the Siegfried Line that allowed
6 Patton's 4th Armored Division to enter Germany; and

7 WHEREAS, Through it all, Captain Latimer served as the
8 battalion supply officer, working with his crack staff to ensure
9 that the battalion's approximately 700 men and its 54 medium tanks
10 and 17 light tanks were well provided with ammunition, fuel, and
11 rations; as they moved across the Rhineland, Captain Latimer and
12 his driver took one village by themselves, accepting the surrender
13 of a wounded German soldier; at the end of the war, the 761st linked
14 up with the Soviet army at the River Steyr in Austria, becoming the
15 easternmost unit of the Western Allied forces in Europe; and

16 WHEREAS, In the years since, the 761st has become enshrined
17 in American military history as the "Black Panther Battalion,"
18 legendary for its members' skill, bravery, and determination in
19 combat, as well as for their gritty motto, "Come out fighting";
20 collectively, the men of the 761st were awarded a Medal of Honor,
21 296 Purple Hearts, 11 Silver Stars, 70 Bronze Stars, 8 battlefield
22 commissions, and 3 certificates of merit; in 1978, the battalion
23 received a long-overdue Presidential Unit Citation from President
24 Jimmy Carter, and in 2005, a monument to the battalion was dedicated
25 at Fort Hood; and

26 WHEREAS, After World War II, Philip Latimer became a
27 lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, and until the end of

1 his life, he remained proud of his service with the Black Panther
2 Battalion and of the mutual affection and respect he shared with his
3 comrades-in-arms; now, therefore, be it

4 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 84th Texas
5 Legislature hereby pay tribute to Lieutenant Colonel Philip W.
6 Latimer and the other members of the Black Panther Battalion for
7 their exemplary service in defense of this nation; and, be it
8 further

9 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
10 prepared for Lieutenant Colonel Latimer's family as an expression
11 of high regard by the Texas House of Representatives.