

By: Campbell

S.C.R. No. 50

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, The Texas Legislative Medal of Honor was established
2 to recognize gallant and intrepid service by a member of the state
3 or federal military forces, and U.S. Army Private Marcelino Serna
4 and U.S. Coast Guard Seaman Apprentice William Ray Flores proved
5 themselves deserving recipients of this prestigious honor with
6 their heroic actions in the service of their nation; and

7 WHEREAS, Born in Mexico, Mr. Serna came to the United States
8 as a young man; when the United States entered World War I in 1917,
9 he enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 20, and after only three
10 weeks of training, he was shipped overseas with the 355th Infantry,
11 89th Division; when his officers in France learned that he was not a
12 U.S. citizen, they gave him the opportunity to return home, but
13 Private Serna chose to stay and fight; and

14 WHEREAS, A remarkable soldier, Private Serna demonstrated
15 exceptional resourcefulness and courage during an engagement near
16 the French town of St. Mihiel; when 12 members of his unit were
17 gunned down by the enemy, he volunteered to scout the machine gun
18 emplacement on his own; moving through heavy fire and surviving two
19 rounds that were deflected by his helmet, he tossed four hand
20 grenades into the machine gun nest, killing six of the enemy
21 combatants; he then took the eight survivors captive; and

22 WHEREAS, Shortly thereafter, during the Meuse-Argonne
23 campaign, Private Serna volunteered again for a lone scouting
24 mission, wounding a German sniper with a shot from 200 yards and

1 then following the injured man into a trench; firing and hurling
2 grenades in all directions to make it seem as if he were part of a
3 larger force, he shot three German soldiers immediately, then
4 attacked an enemy dugout, felling 26 more and capturing 24; he
5 single-handedly held the prisoners at gunpoint until other members
6 of his unit arrived; and

7 WHEREAS, Private Serna served in combat until the end of the
8 war and was wounded in each leg, and while recovering in a French
9 hospital, he received the Distinguished Service Cross from General
10 John J. Pershing; he also earned the World War I Victory Medal with
11 five stars, the Victory Medal with three campaign bars, the
12 St. Mihiel Medal, the Verdun Medal, and two Purple Hearts, as well
13 as decorations from the governments of France, Italy, and the
14 United Kingdom; he became a U.S. citizen in 1924 and settled in El
15 Paso, where he resided until his death in 1992; the most decorated
16 Texas veteran of World War I, he won every major military award
17 short of the Congressional Medal of Honor, and petitions have been
18 put forth to grant him that commendation as well; and

19 WHEREAS, William Ray Flores was born in Carlsbad, New Mexico,
20 in 1961; he attended Western Hills High School in Benbrook, Texas,
21 and he left school early in order to enlist in the U.S. Coast Guard
22 at the age of 17; he served aboard the buoy tender *Blackthorn*, and
23 on the night of January 28, 1980, the ship was leaving Tampa,
24 Florida, on route to its home port of Galveston when it collided
25 with a 600-foot tanker, the SS *Capricorn*; the *Blackthorn*'s hull was
26 ripped open along the port side by the *Capricorn*'s anchor, and the
27 vessel began to take on water and roll onto its side; and

1 WHEREAS, In the chaos and darkness, Seaman Apprentice Flores
2 and a shipmate found the locker that held the ship's life jackets,
3 and they began throwing jackets to their crewmates already in the
4 water; Seaman Apprentice Flores used his trouser belt to strap the
5 locker open so that more jackets could float free as the *Blackthorn*
6 sank, and after nearly everyone else had abandoned ship, he stayed
7 aboard and attempted to save those who were still trapped below
8 deck; he lost his life in that effort, along with 22 of his
9 shipmates; and

10 WHEREAS, Through his selfless actions, Seaman Apprentice
11 Flores helped save 27 of his shipmates, and in September 2000, he
12 was posthumously awarded the Coast Guard Medal, the service's
13 highest commendation for noncombat heroism; in 2012, the Coast
14 Guard fast response cutter *William Flores* was named in his honor,
15 and on the 40th anniversary of the *Blackthorn's* accident in January
16 2020, a life-size statue of Seaman Apprentice Flores was unveiled
17 at a ceremony in St. Petersburg, Florida; and

18 WHEREAS, Marcelino Serna and William Flores each
19 demonstrated uncommon courage, initiative, and devotion to their
20 comrades during desperate situations, and it is indeed appropriate
21 that they be honored with the highest military award granted by the
22 state that is proud to call them Texans; now, therefore, be it

23 RESOLVED, That the 87th Legislature of the State of Texas
24 hereby direct the governor of the State of Texas to posthumously
25 award the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor to Marcelino Serna in
26 recognition of his valiant efforts during World War I and to William
27 Ray Flores in recognition of his heroism during the sinking of the

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1 USCGC *Blackthorn*.