

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 142

BY SENATORS GATTI, ALARIO, ALLAIN, APPEL, BARROW, BISHOP, BOUDREAUX, CARTER, CHABERT, CLAITOR, COLOMB, CORTEZ, DONAHUE, ERDEY, FANNIN, HENSGENS, HEWITT, JOHNS, LAFLEUR, LAMBERT, LONG, LUNEAU, MARTINY, MILKOVICH, MILLS, MIZELL, MORRELL, MORRISH, PEACOCK, PETERSON, PRICE, RISER, GARY SMITH, JOHN SMITH, TARVER, THOMPSON, WALSWORTH, WARD AND WHITE AND REPRESENTATIVE MCMAHEN

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To commend and recognize First Lieutenant John Stillmon Willis Jr. upon the celebration of his one hundredth birthday and to record for posterity the extraordinary life he has lived.

WHEREAS, it is with great pride that the Legislature of Louisiana has learned of the joyous occasion of First Lieutenant John Stillmon Willis Jr.'s one hundredth birthday, and it is only appropriate to commend him for his outstanding contributions and accomplishments during his life; and

WHEREAS, John Stillmon Willis Jr. was born on June 2, 1919, to John Stillmon Willis Sr. and Ada Kennon Willis; and

WHEREAS, he was reared in Doyline, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Doyline High School, he attended Louisiana State University from 1937 to 1940 and graduated with a degree in agronomy; and

WHEREAS, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Mr. Willis, a member in the army infantry reserve as a lieutenant in the United States Army, volunteered for pilot training and was transferred from the 82nd Army Infantry Division to the Army Air Corps, in grade, as a second lieutenant; and

WHEREAS, he was assigned to the 452nd Bomb Group where he piloted a B-17 Flying Fortress from Deopham Green Airbase in Atleborough in Norfolk, England; and

WHEREAS, the 452nd Bomb Group hit strategic sites in Germany but also supported the movement of ground forces across Europe after D-Day; and

WHEREAS, on June 6, 1944, D-Day, the Group bombed coastal defenses before the landing; and

WHEREAS, upon reporting for duty, "We're losing this war." were the sobering words he heard from a superior officer; and

WHEREAS, in the six months before D-Day, his B-17 group was suffering eighty-three percent casualties; and

WHEREAS, when 2nd Lt. Willis first took to a cockpit in combat, B-17 crews that completed twenty-five missions could return home, but later that number increased to thirty and then thirty-five missions; and

WHEREAS, during his service, he had a humorous encounter with the famous Lieutenant Colonel James "Jimmy" Doolittle, then commander of the 8th Air Force, and previously of the famous "Doolittle's Raiders", that resulted in a surprise brand new B-17 Flying Fortress for 2nd Lt. Willis; and

WHEREAS, while serving he was promoted to first lieutenant, and he and his crew completed the magic number of thirty-five missions; and

WHEREAS, years later reflecting on the missions, he would say, "A return home with a hundred holes in the plane was not uncommon," and "It'd be a sea of fire that you had to fly through. Red flashes and black smoke. Germans were good gunners. They'd put it in your lap up there."; and

WHEREAS, 1st Lt. Willis credits the survival of his crew and himself to the fact that the good Lord had his arms around them; and

WHEREAS, upon returning from the war, he worked in his father's lumber business for twenty years; and

WHEREAS, he married the love of his life Lillian Mae Life, and their marriage would span over fifty-four years until her death in 2006; and

WHEREAS, Mr. and Mrs. Willis had one daughter, Martha Lou Willis, and three grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, after working for his father, he then worked for twenty years at his father-in-law's hardware business, Webb Hardware in Minden, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, many young children can remember the enjoyment of going to see him and his wife at the hardware store and getting a ride on the freight elevator with its wooden doors; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Willis was a longtime member of St. John's Episcopal Church in Minden; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Willis recently celebrated his one hundredth birthday with a party at St. John's Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, the success of the state of Louisiana, the strength of our communities, and the overall vitality of American society depend upon people and veterans like First Lieutenant John Stillmon Willis Jr.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend and recognize First Lieutenant John Stillmon Willis Jr. upon the wonderful occasion of his one hundredth birthday, record for posterity the extraordinary life he has lived, express enduring gratitude for his accomplishments and contributions he has made to his family, friends, community, state, and the country, and extend to him every good wish for health and happiness in the years to come.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to First Lieutenant John Stillmon Willis Jr.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES