

SCR 30 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Carrier: Sen. Winters

Senate Committee On Rules

Action Date: 05/22/17
Action: Be adopted.
Vote: 5-0-0-0
Yeas: 5 - Beyer, Boquist, Burdick, Ferrioli, Roblan
Fiscal: No fiscal impact
Revenue: No revenue impact
Prepared By: Cherie Stone, LPRO Analyst

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Honors members of 555th "Triple Nickles" Parachute Infantry Battalion for their pioneering achievements and service to this country and state.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- History of Triple Nickles
- Duties and accomplishments of Triple Nickles
- Impact of Triple Nickles on military integration

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Officially activated on December 30, 1943, the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion was the first African-American paratrooper unit in the United States Army. Nicknamed "Triple Nickles," the unit's symbol was three buffalo nickels formed into a triangle, in recognition of the number five and the buffalo soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division.

Sergeant Walter Morris, recognizing the negative effect that the segregation of the United States Military was having on African-American soldiers, sought to boost morale amongst African-American soldiers by leading his unit in training similar to that of official paratroopers. Commanding General Ridgely Gaither took notice of the training activity and rewarded Sergeant Morris's initiative by making him First Sergeant of a newly formed platoon comprised solely of African-American paratroopers. The initial training program at Fort Benning included 20 men, 17 of whom earned the "silver wings" of the paratrooper badge, and later six more officers would join and complete the training. The success of the platoon made it possible for the army to call for enough African-American volunteers to form an official company. Response to the call was overwhelming and lead the army to increase the size of the Triple Nickles to a battalion of more than 400 men. Sergeant Morris was named as Battalion Adjutant.

The Triple Nickles demonstrated their abilities when they were ordered to participate in Operation Firefly, a firefighting mission to defend the west coast from Japanese incendiary balloons. When they arrived at Pendleton Field in Oregon, the men of the battalion learned they would be making the transition from combat paratroopers to smoke jumpers, and would be parachuting from planes to fight fires ignited by the balloons and to deactivate any that had not exploded. The men of the Triple Nickles committed themselves fully to their new training, used their ingenuity to overcome ill-suited and inadequate equipment, and became the first African-American smoke jumpers.

In 1947, the men of the Triple Nickles were the first African-American unit integrated into an American combat division when the Battalion was deactivated and transferred into the 3rd Battalion, 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. By the time President Harry Truman desegregated the military, members of the Triple Nickles had already been integrated for seven months and helped forge a path to integration. The men of the Triple Nickles and their incredible contributions will be honored with a historical marker at the Siskiyou Smokejumper

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Base Museum in Cave Junction, Oregon in June of 2017.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 30 honors the members of the 555th "Triple Nickles" Parachute Infantry Battalion for their pioneering achievements and their service to their country and this state.