

MEMORIAL HIGHWAYS

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House Bill 5089 as reported from committee
Sponsor: Rep. Sarah Lightner
Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure
Complete to 11-12-25

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 5089 would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate portions of highway M-60 in Jackson County as follows:

- From Emerson Road to North Cross Road would be known as the “WWII Veterans Lynford Graham, Melvin King, and Vernon Smalley Memorial Highway.”
- From North Cross Road to North Main Street would be known as the “Vietnam War Veterans Timothy Ballinger, Robert Jenks, and James Morgan Memorial Highway.”
- From North Main Street to Van Wert Road would be known as the “Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran Donald Wheeler Jr. Memorial Highway.”

The act now designates highway M-60 in Jackson County from Fairway Drive to Emerson Road as the “Sergeant Matthew R. Soper Memorial Highway.”

The proposed designations of the portions of M-60 described above would be in addition to, and would not replace, that current designation

MCL 250.1106

BACKGROUND:

According to committee testimony and several media and military sources:

Lynford A. Graham was born on April 1, 1919, in Spring Arbor Township, Michigan. After he came of age, he enlisted in the United States Army, completed basic training, and attained the rank of sergeant. He was assigned to Company I, 134th Infantry Regiment.

During World War II, Sergeant Graham was deployed to Germany. On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Sergeant Graham, along with four others, formed a patrol on a reconnaissance mission across the Rhine–Herne Canal in Germany. As they were crossing the canal in a paddle craft, they were fired on by the enemy and forced to leave the boat and jump into the canal. Two of the men got to shore safely. They reported they did not see Sergeant Graham after they left the boat.

On April 9, 1945, Major General Edward F Witsell wrote a letter to Sergeant Graham’s wife, Dorothy, confirming that he was missing in action. On April 17, 1946, she was sent another letter confirming his death. On February 27, 1952, Lynford’s father, George F Graham, received a telegram informing him that his son’s remains were en route by train and that the funeral home would be notified three days before their arrival. Sergeant

Lynford A. Graham was buried in March 1952. He was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

Melvin Lawrence King was born to Rollie Albert King and Bertha Mae Newland on June 29, 1923, in Ohio. He lived in Alger, Ohio, in 1935 and in Homer, Michigan, in 1940.

Melvin enlisted in the United States Navy from Michigan and attained the rank of Petty Officer Third Class. On the *USS Navajo* (AT-64), his military occupation or specialty was Machinist's Mate Third Class. The *USS Navajo* was stationed in the Pacific, operating from Pearl Harbor and supporting campaigns in the South Pacific, including the Solomon Islands. Some of Melvin King's duties on board included salvage, repair, and towing, often under battle conditions.

During his service on the *USS Navajo*, Navy Petty Officer Third Class Melvin Lawrence King was reported missing in action, and he was ultimately declared dead on September 12, 1943. He was 20 years of age. Navy Petty Officer King's name is among those listed on the Tablets of the Missing at Honolulu Memorial, Honolulu, Hawaii. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

Vernon Lynn Smalley was born on February 12, 1912, to Lynn and Rubie Brown Smalley in Concord, Michigan. He graduated from Concord High School in 1931 and built and operated a service station on M-60 in Concord. He enlisted in the United States Army on March 30, 1942, attaining the rank of sergeant. He was assigned to the 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division.

Sergeant Smalley was deployed to Germany in 1943, where he was killed in action in 1944. He was believed to be Concord's first fatality of World War II. He was 32 years old. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

Timothy J. Ballinger was born on June 8, 1948, in Springport, Michigan. He attended and Concord High School and graduated in 1966. He enlisted in the United States Army, attaining the rank of Infantryman Specialist. He was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. This unit was a component of the "Big Red One" and was heavily involved in operations during the Vietnam War.

On March 30, 1969, Specialist Timothy Ballinger deployed to Binh Duong Province, South Vietnam. On Saturday, May 24, 1969, he was involved in ground activity with enemy forces. He sustained multiple fragmentation wounds through hostile action and died from his wounds. He was 20 years old. Specialist Timothy Ballinger is honored on the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

Robert J. Jenks was born on August 3, 1947, to Halsey and Rose Briggs Jenks in Jackson County, Michigan. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1967. After completing his basic training, Robert attained the rank of Specialist 4, Infantry Operations and Intelligence Specialist. He was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division, 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry, E Company.

Specialist Robert Jenks was deployed to Vietnam and began his tour on October 5, 1967, as an M-79 grenadier. On Saturday, March 2, 1968, his battalion was engaged in an operation in the area southwest of Can Tho, Phong Dinh Province, South Vietnam. His company was inserted by boat. Specialist Robert Jenks volunteered to take the point position for his squad. The unit began moving down a trail and started taking small-arms fire from the enemy. Robert was wounded by friendly fire from an attack helicopter that had been called in to support. He was medevacked from the battle area, but later died of his wounds. He was 22 years old. Army Specialist Robert Jenks is honored on the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

James M. Morgan was born on September 3, 1945, in Concord, Michigan. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1966 and began basic training in May 1967. After completing basic training and other military advancement requirements, he began his journey toward becoming a staff sergeant. After serving 10 months of time in grade as a sergeant, Sergeant Morgan successfully completed the advance leader course and was recommended for promotion to the rank of staff sergeant by his promotion board.

In 1968 Staff Sergeant Morgan was deployed to Hiep Duc Valley, Quang Tin Province, South Vietnam, where he served with Company A, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 196th Infantry Brigade, American Division. On January 6, 1968, he engaged in ground activity with enemy forces. He sustained multiple fragmentation wounds through hostile action and died on January 10 from his wounds. He was 22 years old. Staff Sergeant James M. Morgan is honored on the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

Donald Wheeler, Jr. was born on July 15, 1981, to Donald Laverne Wheeler, Sr., and Mary Catherine Thorrez Wheeler. Donald, or “DJ” as he was affectionately known, was a 6-foot-5 offensive lineman on the Jackson Lumen Christi High School Titans football team that made the regional finals. He graduated from Lumen Christi in 1999.

In November 2001, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, DJ enlisted in the Army. He was assigned to A Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, and transferred to Fort Hood, Texas, in April 2002. He was deployed to Iraq in March 2003.

On Monday, October 13, 2003, Specialist Wheeler was searching for explosives in Tikrit, Iraq, when his unit was attacked with a rocket propelled grenade. He died of his injuries. He was 22 years old. Specialist Donald Lawrence Wheeler, Jr. was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Combat Infantryman Badge.

Designating the above-described portions of M-60 to Lynford Graham, Melvin King, Vernon Smalley, Timothy Ballinger, Robert Jenks, James Morgan, and Donald Wheeler, Jr., would be an appropriate way to honor their ultimate sacrifice and dedicated service to our state and our nation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Section 2 of the Michigan Memorial Highway Act indicates that the state transportation department shall provide for the erection of suitable markers indicating the name of the

highway only “when sufficient private contributions are received to completely cover the cost of erecting and maintaining those markers.” As a result, the bill has no state or local fiscal impact.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.