

Legislative Analysis



PETER C. LEMON HIGHWAY

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House Bill 4349 as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Sue Allor

1st Committee: Transportation

2nd Committee: Ways and Means

Complete to 10-2-19

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

(Enacted as Public Act 166 of 2019)

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4349 would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate the portion of highway US-23 in Iosco County, beginning at the intersection with M-55 in Tawas City and extending south to the Tawas River Bridge, as the "Peter C. Lemon Highway."

Proposed MCL 250.1042b

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to committee testimony and online sources,¹ Peter C. Lemon was born in Toronto, Canada, on June 5, 1950. At two years of age, his family moved to Alabaster, Michigan, where his father found a job. Peter became a United States citizen at 11 years of age. On his nineteenth birthday, he joined the Army and went to Fort Knox for basic combat training. Infantry training was exhausting, demanding, and challenging, but he loved it. Soon after his training, he was selected to be a squad leader, a responsibility he took very seriously. Through his leadership and skill, his squad performed better than other units in every area of training. As the top graduate of his class, Peter was sent to Fort Polk, Louisiana, for advanced infantry training. On July 24, 1969, he boarded a plane headed for South Vietnam.

As a Sergeant in E Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Peter was part of the unit that established the Illingworth Fire Base in the Tay Ninh Province in March 1970. Illingworth was a base near the Cambodian border that provided artillery support to units acting far from their own bases. Standing out in the middle of the jungle, it was vulnerable. In case of an attack, however, air support was available to intervene.

On March 31, 1970, Sergeant Lemon and his platoon patrolled the area around the base until night fell and they returned to base to rest. Around midnight, ground surveillance radar picked up movement of a large formation in the jungle. Base commander Lieutenant Colonel Michael John Conrad knew it was Vietnamese preparing to attack, and he ordered his men to open fire. Sergeant Lemon and his platoon woke up and went out to their positions. All seemed quiet after the gunfire. However, knowing that the enemy was nearby, Sergeant Lemon believed an attack was imminent.

¹ See, for example, www.warhistoryonline.com

At 2:17 a.m. on April 1, the first rockets hit the communications antenna, followed by artillery and mortar shells. As soon as the base was attacked, Sergeant Lemon ran out of his bunker and rushed toward his duty position. He grabbed the .50-caliber machine gun and fired on the enemy until the gun jammed. He then took his rifle and continued to fire until that also jammed. As Vietnamese shells were dropping and exploding, Sergeant Lemon was knocked to the ground, but managed to get up to grab a wounded comrade, taking him to the aid station. Ignoring his wounds, he took some grenades and headed back to his position. While running to the edge of the base, Sergeant Lemon was wounded again by enemy bullets. Disregarding his wounds, he continued to fight enemies using his fists. As some of the North Vietnamese Army soldiers were still attacking, Sergeant Lemon saw and used a nearby machine gun to open fire on them. While he stood in the open, Sergeant Lemon fired on the enemy until he passed out. When he regained consciousness in an aid station, Sergeant Lemon refused medical evacuation until his more seriously wounded comrades had first been evacuated.

Sergeant Lemon is the recipient of the following medals: Medal of Honor, Bronze Star, two Air Medals, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Purple Heart, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Gallantry Cross, Vietnam Civil Actions Medal, Meritorious Unit Citation, and Presidential Unit Citation.

Dedicating a portion of highway US-23 in Iosco County would be an appropriate way to honor and recognize the service of a highly decorated American hero who served his country, his community, and the citizens of this state with “gallantry and extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty.”

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.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Transportation indicated a neutral position on the bill. (9-10-19)

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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.