

Representative Shannon Francis, Chair Transportation Committee

HB 2575 AN ACT concerning roads and highways: designating a portion of K-96 as the 96th "Deadeye" Infantry Division memorial Highway.

I thank you for the opportunity to request that you consider dedicating a portion of K96 Highway in Reno County from its junction of 56th Ave. to the junction of Nickerson Road in the name of the 96th "Deadeye" Infantry Division. I have included some information on the 96th for this consideration.

There were at least four Reno Countians with the 96th in Okinawa and Leyte that I knew served. There were many in Kansas that served in the 96th Deadeye Infantry Division during WW II and later. Because this is a state highway called K96, I believe it is only fitting that a section in Reno County be dedicated for all those Kansans who served in the 96th Deadeye Infantry Division. Those from Reno County that I have been able to identify are: Sgt. J. L. Mock, S/Sgt. Clyde C. Thrasher, Harold Garrison and Pfc. William N. Hirst. I have found 10 others from Reno County but unable to verify that they served in the 96th. They were in an infantry division in the Pacific area during that time period.

I am unaware of specific battle awards given to those except the Distinguished Unit Citation but Pfc. Hirst. Yes, Pfc William N. Hirst is my Dad. He was killed in action on May 27, 1945. He was in action for almost 30 days. He received the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star and the Distinguished Unit Citation. Sgt. Mock who, I understand went to grade school with my Mother at Valley Pride, rural Hutchinson.

96th "Deadeye" Infantry Division was activated in 1918 at the end of WWI, reconstituted in 1921 in the Army Reserve system with Maj. Gen. Bradley and assistant division commander Gen. Eastly. The commanders stressed rifle marksmanship hence the nickname "Deadeye". 96th was activated August 15, 1942. Left for training in Hawaii, July 23, 1944. On 9-11-1944 the 96th left training for combat destination, Leyte and then Okinawa. Awards: MH-5, DSC-12, DSM-1, SS-232, LM-4 SM-73, BSM-4588, AM-84

Division strength was 14,253. By end of June 1945, total counting replacements was approximately 30,000. 2136 would be killed in action or died of wounds. 14,484 would be wounded or have jungle fever. In this number would be 453 missing in action. By 2005 MIA is down to 50. In personal conversation with the historian at the Salt Lake City Deadeye reunion the average stay at the front during the Okinawa battle was 5 days before becoming a casualty and had one of the highest casualty rates of all divisions in WWII. Okinawa was the longest and largest of any Pacific campaigns. Eight million artillery shells were fired in the Okinawa battle.

The 96th has served in WW2 Leyte, Okinawa: Korean War, Viet Nam. Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan. Effective 17 September 2008, the unit became the 96th Sustainment Brigade. The 96th SB's headquarters is located at Fort Douglas, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Thank you for any consideration you may give to those who served in the 96th Deadeye Infantry Division from Kansas by dedicating a six-mile section of K96 in Reno County in their memory. I stand for any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Ron Hirst