

Greetings to Mr. Vice Chairman and members of the House GVA Committee.

My name is Austen Schauer, representing District 13 in West Fargo.

I come before you today seeking your support of **Concurrent Resolution 3008**.

This is a sad and tragic story.

In late May of 1969, an Australian aircraft carrier, the **Melbourne**, led by Commanding officer **John Stevenson**, began a South China Sea exercise.

The **Melbourne** was assigned five escorts: three US destroyers and two US frigates.

One of the destroyers was the **USS Frank E. Evans** carrying a crew of 273 sailors.

Prior to the start of the training, Commander Stevenson had dinner with the five escort captains.

Stevenson emphasized **safety** because five years prior in 1964, the **Melbourne** was involved in a collision with another destroyer sinking the ship and killing 82 men aboard.

Stevenson talked about the incident at dinner.

His message was clear; **Be careful. Be Safe.**

Despite the warnings, a **near miss** happened in the early hours of May 31.

The escort ships were again warned about the dangers of operating near the **Melbourne** and were told to stay at least **two to three thousand** yards away.

Be careful. Be safe.

But the warnings did not lead to safety.

Just four days later, in the early morning of June 3, the **Frank E. Evans** made a fatal mistake and turned into the on-coming **Melbourne**.

Commanding Officer Stevenson ordered the carrier "**hard to port**," signaling the turn by both **radio** and **siren blasts** but it was too late.

The **Melbourne** hit the **Evans** at 3:15 am, cutting the destroyer in half.

The **Evans'** bow section **sank** within three minutes.

Boats, life-rafts, and lifebuoys were deployed.

Mooring lines were used to latch the two ships together to evacuate survivors.

Members of **Melbourne's** crew dived into the water to rescue overboard survivors **close** to the carrier while the carrier's boats and helicopters collected those farther out.

Other escort vessels arrived and did what they could.

In the end, **74 sailors** were killed...many of whom were trapped inside the **Evans'** bow when it plunged into the sea.

Only one body was recovered after 15 hours of searching.

It was later learned that the **Evans'** commanding officer was asleep in his quarters and the vessel was held by two Lieutenants; one who had failed the qualification exam to **stand watch**...and the other who was at sea *for the first time*.

In 2018, Sen. Cramer, was asked to sponsor a bill to place the names of the 74 **Evans'** sailors on the **Vietnam War Memorial** as the destroyer **had been** serving off the coast of Vietnam supporting our troops prior to the South China Sea exercise.

However, the bill sits in neglect.

Leaders of the Vietnam Wall say the deaths happened **outside** the combat zone even though US Code says (Lines 14-16 in the Resolution), "Veterans who died as a direct or **indirect result** of military operations in Southeast Asia are eligible for inclusion on the memorial wall."

Wouldn't it be wonderful for the families of those 74 sailors to receive the honor they deserve?

If passed, **Concurrent Resolution 3008** would be sent to the President, the Majority and Minority leaders in the U.S. Senate and House and each member of the North Dakota Congressional Delegation asking for **Wall recognition** for these sailors and their families.

Mr. Vice Chairman and committee members, I ask for your support in approving **Concurrent Resolution 3008**.

I stand open for questions.

