

1 Flying Fortress from Deopham Green Airbase in Atleborough in Norfolk, England; and

2 WHEREAS, the 452nd Bomb Group hit strategic sites in Germany but also supported
3 the movement of ground forces across Europe after D-Day; and

4 WHEREAS, on June 6, 1944, D-Day, the Group bombed coastal defenses before the
5 landing; and

6 WHEREAS, upon reporting for duty, "We're losing this war." were the sobering
7 words he heard from a superior officer; and

8 WHEREAS, in the six months before D-Day, his B-17 group was suffering eighty-
9 three percent casualties; and

10 WHEREAS, when 2nd Lt. Willis first took to a cockpit in combat, B-17 crews that
11 completed twenty-five missions could return home, but later that number increased to thirty
12 and then thirty-five missions; and

13 WHEREAS, during his service, he had a humorous encounter with the famous
14 Lieutenant Colonel James "Jimmy" Doolittle, then commander of the 8th Air Force, and
15 previously of the famous "Doolittle's Raiders", that resulted in a surprise brand new B-17
16 Flying Fortress for 2nd Lt. Willis; and

17 WHEREAS, while serving he was promoted to first lieutenant, and he and his crew
18 completed the magic number of thirty-five missions; and

19 WHEREAS, years later reflecting on the missions, he would say "A return home with
20 a hundred holes in the plane was not uncommon," and "It'd be a sea of fire that you had to
21 fly through. Red flashes and black smoke. Germans were good gunners. They'd put it in
22 your lap up there"; and

23 WHEREAS, 1st Lt. Willis credits the survival of his crew and himself to the fact that
24 the good Lord had his arms around them; and

25 WHEREAS, upon returning from the war, he worked in his father's lumber business
26 for twenty years; and

27 WHEREAS, he married the love of his life Lillian Mae Life, and their marriage
28 would span over fifty-four years until her death in 2006; and

29 WHEREAS, Mr. and Mrs. Willis had one daughter, Martha Lou Willis, and three
30 grandchildren; and

