

Rep. Rush Testimony- Natural Resources Committee-  
HR 1130, the Fort Pillow National Battlefield Park Study Act (May 22, 2019)

Good morning Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and esteemed Members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of my bill, HR 1130, the Fort Pillow National Battlefield Park Study Act.

As a veteran myself, it is important for me to stand up on behalf of all of the valiant soldiers who fought and died at Fort Pillow in Henning, Tennessee, during the American Civil War.

Madame Chair, my bill would simply authorize a special resource study to determine the facts of what happened that fateful day back in 1864, evaluate the site's national significance, and determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the site as a unit of the National Historic Park System.

While there has been an ongoing dispute over what happened and whether a massacre occurred, here are the facts as I understand them.

On April 12, 1864, Fort Pillow, which was guarded by the 13<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Cavalry, made up of both white Union soldiers and parts of the Second and Sixth U.S. Colored Artillery regiments, came under attack by Confederate soldiers.

According to an 1864 report conducted by the U.S. Congress Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War entitled the 'Fort Pillow Massacre' "men, women and even children, wherever found, were deliberately shot down, beaten and hacked with sabers."

According to the report, the Union garrison consisted of 19 officers and 538 troops, including 262 United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.).

Of the three to four hundred soldiers known to have been killed at Fort Pillow, at least three hundred were murdered in cold blood after the fort had already been overtaken by the rebels and the men had thrown down their arms and ceased to offer resistance.

Following this massacre, other black soldiers serving in the Union Army realized that surrendering was not an option and Fort Pillow became a rallying cry and motivator for the additional 209,147 U.S. Colored Troops serving during the remainder of the War.

Madame Chair, history shows that those 209,000 soldiers fundamentally contributed to the Union's defeat of the Confederacy.

Unfortunately, this history has been revised and modified by the State of Tennessee, which claims that what happened at Fort Pillow was not a massacre, and hundreds of surrendering Union troops and innocent civilians did not lose their lives that day.

However, we owe it to those fallen soldiers to correct the record and give them the acknowledgement that they deserve.

As my bill states, this important and historical site deserves to be recognized and commemorated by becoming a National Battlefield Park due to its profound effect on United States Colored Troops, and on all Union forces in their fight to preserve the United States of America.

I want to thank you, Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and all of the Members of this Subcommittee for allowing me to testify here today and I look forward to working with you all to make this study into a reality.