

BEYOND WOKE

The Diversity Of U.S. Military Heroes



Compiled and Edited By:

C. Douglas & Pamla M. Sterner

With

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BEYOND WOKE

THE DIVERSITY OF U.S. MILITARY HEROES

Compiled & Edited By
C. Douglas & Pamla M. Sterner

Respectfully Dedicated To The Memory Of:
ROY P. BENAVIDEZ, MOH (US ARMY)



A TRUE American Hero and Great Friend

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Introduction

When I got the idea for this book, my first reaction was to share the idea with friends and gauge their responses. It was overwhelmingly positive, however there were a few who voiced concerns regarding the subject, generally they all were the same, *“We shouldn’t classify our heroes by race or gender, they whould be simply identified as ‘American heroes.’”*



As I pondered their concerns, I realized that we already classify heroes on other criteria; we don’t say *“He/She was an American Hero,”* we say *“He/She was a U.S. Army, (or Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard) hero.”* Further, we usually don’t lump all the heroes from the American Revolution to present, we identify them by war; *“He/She was a U.S. Army, World War II hero.”* We make these distinctions for good reason, veterans of military service have pride in their branch of service, as well as the war(s) in which they were engaged. I once asked my friend, World War II Army hero Silvestre Herrera who is profiled herein, how he was able to continue to fight after both legs were blown off by enemy mines. Herrera simply said, *“I’m a Mexican-American and we have a tradition. We’re supposed to be men, not sissies.”* I would submit that it is no more improper for a veteran to take pride in their ethnicity or gender, any more than it is to take pride in the branch of service they served in, or the war(s) in which they served.

The U.S. Military services have been leaders in civil rights and human rights, although it has often been a long, step-by-step process to a more inclusive opportunity to serve in uniform. President Harry S Truman desegregated the military services in 1948, more than a decade before the Civil Rights movement began to bring changes to American society. And while women served in non-military support roles since the American Revolution, women were accepted into military service as nurses and switchboard communications in World War I, paving the way for the subsequent 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that granted women the right to vote. So, before sharing the stories of these diverse heroes, we’d like to look at the historical evolution of the U.S. military.

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INTEGRATING THE U.S. MILITARY

Black Americans have served in the U.S. military since long before there was a United States of America. During the early days of settlement, British colonists welcomed both slaves and free Blacks into provincial militias in order to defend small settlements from attack by native Indian tribes as well as other European powers. As the population of Black soldiers grew however, White Americans in the Colonies began to fear the potential for slave rebellions and began excluding all Blacks from military service. In 1639 Virginia passed a law prohibiting Black American from military service. The colony of Massachusetts followed with a similar law in 1656, and Connecticut in 1661.

Despite such laws, when enemies threatened the Colonies, Black Americans were quick to serve and were welcomed as needed soldiers. Black militiamen fought and died during King William's War (1689 – 1697), Queen Anne's War (1702 – 1713), and the French and Indian War (1754 – 1763). When the shot that was heard round the world was fired in Lexington, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775, one of the eight American casualties was Prince Estabrook, a Black militiaman.

During the American Revolution no fewer than 5,000 African Americans served in General George Washington's Continental Army. Thousands more served in local militias. Despite the fact that these volunteers were badly needed for the war effort, even as early as 1776, there was a prevailing attitude that the Black soldier was inferior to the White. Unlike later wars, during the American Revolution, free Blacks and slaves were integrated into White units, but most were relegated to support roles as substitute soldiers for White colonists. Most served as guides, general laborers, messengers, and teamsters. Black slaves who distinguished themselves in battle were promised freedom for their valor, but in the support roles where most of them served, it was difficult to demonstrate the battle prowess that could earn them freedom.

When the war ended and the demand for volunteers diminished, the United States quickly forgot the dedicated service of the Black soldier and returned to segregation in the South, and a basically all-White Army throughout America. When Congress passed the **Militia Act** in 1792, the implicit intent was to limit the American militia to *“able-bodied White male citizen(s) between the ages of 18 and 45.”* Such prejudice became even more blatant in the 1798 act to formally organize the United States

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Marine Corps. That legislation excluded “*Negroes, mulattos (of African and European descent), and Indians*” from service.

The fledgling new U.S. Navy became the one area where Black Americans could find some semblance of equal opportunity. When the War of 1812 began, fully ten percent of the United States Naval force was Black. With the beginning of war, the Army once again accepted Blacks into military service (though the Marine Corps remained totally White until World War II). These Black soldiers and sailors served honorably throughout that brief war. General Andrew Jackson, whose force at New Orleans during the famous battle of 1814 included two Black battalions, noted: “*I expected much from you...but you surpass my hopes...the American nation shall applaud your valor, as your General now praises your ardor.*”

When peace at last returned to the United States in 1814, the Black soldier found his services no longer needed or wanted. In 1820 the U.S. Army ordered that no Blacks be accepted as recruits. In 1839 the Navy limited its own ranks to a maximum of five percent of Black sailors. The moratorium on military service for Blacks continued virtually unabated until 1863 when, at the height of the Civil War, they were out of necessity, finally allowed once again to serve as a result of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.

Even while those in the North railed against the slavery of the South, however, the racial prejudice of the American Yankee was quite evident in the practice of segregation of Whites and Blacks. It took nearly two years of bitter warfare and the possibility of a Union loss of the war to convince the Northerners to reluctantly admit Black Americans into military service. Frederick Douglas pushed the Union Army to finally admit Black recruits, arguing sarcastically that: “*Colored men were good enough to fight under Washington, but they are not good enough to fight under McClellan.*”

When at last President Lincoln opened the military service to Black volunteers on New Years Day 1863, these soldiers were placed in segregated, all-Black units. Almost universally they were under the command of White officers. In the Union Army of the Civil War, Black soldiers were encouraged to fight for their own freedom, and then denied equal opportunity in service. Not only was there a prejudice against Black soldiers in positions of leadership and authority, but the inequality was also more vividly apparent in the soldier’s pay. White Union soldiers were

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paid thirteen dollars a month; their Black counterparts only seven dollars a month. Such was the subtle hypocrisy that continued in the American military until after the end of World War II.

During the Civil War Black soldiers served with a distinction in battle that, though not unique in comparison to prior conflicts, was at last recognized. Twenty-five Black Americans received Medals of Honor for their battlefield valor, and in 1865 Martin R. Delany became our Nation's first Black field officer when he was commissioned as a major in the Union Army.

Among the heroes who earned Medals of Honor in the Civil War was a free Negro who enlisted from Baltimore "*to save the country from ruin.*" After serving through engagements at Yorktown, Pennsylvania, and Fort Fisher, Sergeant Major Christian Fleetwood noted in his diary: "*This year has brought bout many changes that at the beginning were or would have been thought impossible. The close of the year finds me a soldier for the cause of my race.*"

Sergeant Major Fleetwood demonstrated that the Black soldier was an equal to his White counterpart, earning the Medal of Honor while carrying the flag of the United States through the horrible fight at Chapin's Farm, Virginia, in the fall of 1864. Despite this recognition, and the great strides towards acceptance the Black soldier earned during the Civil War, Fleetwood was realistic. Following the war he authored a pamphlet titled *The Negro as Soldier* in which he wrote: "*After each war, of 1776, of 1812, of 1861, history repeats itself in the absolute effacement of remembrance of the gallant deeds done for the country by its brave Black defenders and in their relegation to outer darkness. History further repeats itself in the fact that in every war so far known to this country, the first blood, and, in some cases, the last also, has been shed by the faithful Negro, and this in spite of all the years of bondage and oppression, and wrongs unspeakable.*"

The valor demonstrated by Black soldiers of both sides in the Civil War led to the formation of all-Black cavalry units to defend settlers in the American West. Known as *Buffalo Soldiers*, these courageous American soldiers established a tradition of valor and service. Of 426 Medals of Honor awarded to U.S. soldiers for action during the Indian Campaigns of the American West, eighteen were presented to Black soldiers.

Until 1948 in the United States Army, Black soldiers were segregated in all-Black units . . . certainly no indication of changing prejudices. The

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U.S. Navy, once the bastion of acceptance for Black volunteers, demonstrated similar prejudices even more vividly following the Civil War. While Blacks continued to be recruited for the Navy, most were relegated to menial tasks as cooks and stewards. There was no issue of segregation in the Marine Corps – it remained lily white.

An indirect result of military service was the opportunity for Black soldiers to demonstrate their equality to their White fellow soldiers. Though the Army remained segregated, all-Black units such as the 10th and 12th Cavalry fought alongside White regiments. In battles such as the famous Spanish-American War charge at San Juan Hill, these *Buffalo Soldiers* did their duty so well that the White soldiers fighting next to them could not deny their valor. Though only one Black soldier earned a Medal of Honor in that historic battle, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt later spoke of the *Buffalo Soldiers'* valor when he said: *"I don't think that any Rough Rider will ever forget the tie that binds us to the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry."*

When given opportunity on the battlefield, Black Americans were proving that all men regardless of race, are created equal. Those who witnessed their service and sacrifice could not help but change long-ingrained misperceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices against men of color. During the Spanish American War, six Black servicemen received Medals of Honor, four of them for risking their lives to save a trapped element of White soldiers at Tayacoba Bay in Cuba.

The opportunity for Black soldiers to demonstrate their valor and thereby change the prejudices around them continued to be rather limited, however. Prejudice within American society, as well as in the military, continued its age-old fashion. When World War I began more than two Million Negroes registered for the draft, presenting some serious questions to a still segregated American society:

- Where would such a large force of Black volunteers be trained? Certainly, they would need a separate (from the White draftees) facility, as the two races could not train together.
- In what units would these Black soldiers serve? (Segregation of Black soldiers from Whites was a time-honored tradition.)
- What if some of these men qualified for commissions as officers? (It was still widely believed that the Black man lacked the intelligence and leadership abilities of his White counterpart.)

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In all, nearly a half-million Black Americans were trained and readied for service with the American Expeditionary force. By mid-1917 a number of Black soldiers were training at **Camp Dodge** near Des Moines, Iowa, where 625 of them earned commissions as second lieutenants. The war department established the Ninety-second and Ninety-third Divisions, nearly all-Black in composition, and now at least commanded by a large contingent of Black officers as well. (During the war Fort Dodge trained and commissioned 639 Black American officers, a historic stride. Even so, though 13 percent of the American World War I active Army was Black, less than seven-tenths of one per cent was commissioned as officers.)

Despite these great strides, change can be agonizingly slow, and World War I American society continued to cling to its views of the Negro as inferior to the White. In the military, although 140,000 Black soldiers were deployed to Europe, where no less than 40,000 of them saw combat and served with honor and distinction, the accepted practice was to relegate Black soldiers to support tasks. They served the Army as janitors, stevedores, cooks, and in other menial tasks. Black combat units were unceremoniously turned over to the control of the French Army, causing Colonel William Hayward, commander of the 396th Infantry Regiment to comment: *“Our great American general (John J. Pershing) simply put the Black orphan in a basket, set it on the doorstep of the French, pulled the bell, and went away.”*

It was a stinging indictment of the man nicknamed as *Black Jack* Pershing as a White officer in the all-Black 10th Cavalry during the Indian Campaigns and Spanish-American War. To the general’s credit, early in the War when the British government requested that *Negro troops* NOT be sent overseas, Pershing returned his official reply to note that *“Colored combat divisions”* were being sent to France and: *“I cannot and will not discriminate against these men.”*

The General’s admirable statement aside, discrimination and segregation were a way of life for the soldiers who would one day father the Greatest Generation. Many White soldiers refused to serve with Black soldiers, and at home Jim Crow laws forced Black soldiers to sit in the back of troop trains, far behind the White troopers, when regiments were transported to awaiting ships from their training camps. The practice was common, even in what we today consider the *“less-prejudice”* Northern states.

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During the war, two soldiers of Colonel Hayward's 369th Infantry became the first American enlisted men, Black or White, to be awarded the French Croix de Guerre. Those few Black units that did see combat served with great distinction. Along the way Black soldiers earned hundreds of Croix de Guerres, dozens of Distinguished Service Crosses and Silver Stars—but NO Medals of Honor.* Thousands gave their lives on the battlefield, proving that death was the one force in the world of American military that did NOT discriminate against any man on the basis of race.

Beyond that however, World War I was NOT a defining moment in the push for American civil rights. Race riots in the military resulted in multiple deaths and court martials. Verbal and physical abuse by civilians directed towards Black soldiers who were training at Spartanburg, South Carolina, made headlines, and labor strikes by Negro stevedores tended to overshadow the valor of the Black soldier on the battlefield. Major General Robert Lee Bullard, who commanded the SECOND Army including the Ninety-second division, wrote in his memoirs that the Negro soldier was, *"Lazy, slothful, superstitious, imaginative...if you need combat soldiers, and especially if you need them in a hurry, don't put your time upon Negroes."*

Such was the attitude that proliferated throughout much of America in the post-World War I years. Between 1918 and 1937 the Negro soldier presence dropped to less than two percent of the Army and National Guard. It was becoming increasingly apparent that, despite the Black man's efforts to prove himself equal in time of war, military service alone could not achieve the dream of ethnic Americans not to be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF WOMEN IN SERVICE

Women served in civilian support roles from the American Revolution through the Spanish American War, but were actually prohibited by law from uniformed military service. The service and sacrifice of nurses in the Civil War, and more highly visible in the

* In the 1990s a review of these awards resulted in the upgrade of the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously awarded to Corporal Freddie Stowers to the Medal of Honor. It was presented to his surviving sisters by President George Bush on April 24, 1991. Two other such upgrades were made in following years.

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Spanish-American War (1898), paved the way for expanded roles. By necessity, during World War I uniformed women were welcomed in the military service in the Nurse Corps. Four uniformed women received Distinguished Service Crosses, four received Navy Crosses (three of them posthumously), and five uniformed or civilian women earned Silver Stars. Their service was a catalyst to adoption of the 19th Amendment of the Constitution that gave women the right to vote.

One vastly overlooked role played by women in World War I was the job of the so-called “*Hello Girls*” who were the first American women ever recruited for non-medical service in the Army. In 1917 General John J. Pershing, commander of the A.E.F., advertised in American newspaper for bi-lingual women to apply for service as Army switchboard operators. More than 7,000 women volunteered; 450 were selected and received military and Signal Corps training. They trained in basic military radio procedures at Camp Franklin, Maryland, (now Fort Meade). After training, the women purchased their Army regulation uniforms complete with “U.S.” crests, Signal Corps crests, and “*dog tags*.” Arm patches designating positions were issued. In the spring of 1918 when the first thirty-three operators deployed to Europe they were issued gas masks and steel helmets.

After the Armistice and upon their return to the United States, these women applied for their honorable discharges. Because all Army regulations were worded in the “*male*” gender, they were denied veterans status. The Army considered them civilians working on a contract basis for the Army. This perplexed the women because they had been required to wear regulation uniforms, they were sworn into service and had to follow all Army regulations. The Chief Telephone Operator, Grace Banker, even received the Distinguished Service Medal from Congress. Even so, in a move typical of the slight so often forced upon women who had served in time of war only to be subsequently overlooked, when those who served applied for their honorable discharges, the “*Hello Girls*” were denied veterans status.*

* For years afterwards, legislation was introduced into Congress to remedy this slight, but the bills were always buried in committee. It took one of the operators, Mearle Eagan Anderson, over fifty years of persistence to secure legislation to award the operators veteran's status. In 1978 President Jimmy Carter signed a bill giving the “Hello Girls” their deserved recognition as the first U.S. Army veterans in history.

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Early in 1941 Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts met with General George C. Marshall, the Army's Chief of Staff, and informed him that she intended to introduce a bill to establish an Army women's corps, separate and distinct from the existing Army Nurse Corps. Rogers believed the women's corps should be a part of the Army so women would receive equal pay, pension, and disability benefits, in contrast to those who served in the previous war but were denied veteran status or benefits. The opposition perhaps is best seen in the comments of one Congressman who noted, *"Who will then do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself; who will nurture the children?"*

A compromise version of Rogers' bill finally passed the House by a vote of 249 to 86, and on May 14, 1941, it passed the Senate 38 to 27. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was established the following day when the President signed the bill. The successful legislation, however, fell far short of what Congresswoman Rogers envisioned. The women's service was NOT a part of the Army, but an auxiliary thereto. Officers in the WAAC were noted by grade, First Grade Officer, Second Grade Officer, etc. Pay and benefits for those who volunteered fell far short of that offered to male counterparts in the Army.

Air power was destined to play a critical role during World War II and on September 14, 1942, General Henry Arnold approved a program to recruit, train, and use women as pilots to ferry aircraft in non-combat theaters in order to free up male pilots for combat missions. Under the direction of Jacqueline *Jackie* Cochran, who had pitched just such an idea to the First Lady three years earlier, the Army Air Force established the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) to teach women to fly. Simultaneously, the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) was born under the leadership of Nancy H. Love, to perform such duties. Despite the shortcomings in terms of advancing the role of women in military, the two programs were a quantum leap that demonstrated a new confidence in women to master the skills needed to pilot large bomber airplanes.

Not to be outdone by the Army, albeit with much the same opposition from those who resisted the move to bring women into the military, in the summer of 1942 the Navy established its own female force, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). The title alone left little illusion that the move was nothing more than a temporary measure to meet the demands of the current war, however, and

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in general it was assumed that the WAVES would be disbanded when the war ended. With that in mind and with tongue in cheek, some of them took to defining the acronym for their organization “*Women are Very Essential Sometimes.*”

Unlike the Army’s WAAC and WFTD/WAFS however, Navy WAVES were NOT an auxiliary to the Navy, but were accepted directly into service. They served and were treated for the most part, as their male counterparts in the U.S. Naval Reserve. So progressive an attitude aside, prejudice lingered in the Navy which still relegated Black men to menial tasks in the galley. Not until 1944 were Black women accepted into the WAVES. Conversely, however, although Black women were welcomed into the Army’s auxiliaries from its creation, they were assigned to segregated all-Black units. It was, perhaps, the only place in early World War II military where men and women served on a comparable basis, although not in a positive manner.*

Through these programs in World War II, women entered military service in record numbers. More than 500 women died in war-related incidents, including sixteen nurses killed by enemy fire. One woman civilian spy in the Office of Strategic Services received the Distinguished Service Cross, five American and three foreign women received Silver Stars, and Flight Nurses in the Army Air Forces earned four Distinguished Flying Crosses. Unfortunately, when the war ended, so did many of their opportunities.

Much like the “*Hello Girls*” of a generation that had served in the previous war, the WASPs were classified as members of the Civil Service, not the Army Air Force, and were denied veterans status. Not until 1977 did Congress finally recognize them as members of the military force that won World War II, granting them status as veterans and authorizing them the World War II Victory Medal. That legislative victory was achieved in no small part, thanks to the efforts of Bruce Arnold, son of the World War II Army Air Forces commander who bade them thanks for their service back in 1944.

While the future of the WACs, WAVES and MCWR looked uncertain amid cutbacks when World War II ended, their service had not

* Not to be forgotten are the women who, beginning in 1942, were accepted into service with the U.S. Coast Guard. They were called SPARs, an acronym for the Coast Guard Motto “Semper Paratus - Always Ready”.

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gone unnoticed. On July 26, 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 proclaiming that “*there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.*” Although the President’s action that ended racial segregation in the military forces did not mention “*sex*” or “*gender*,” one month earlier he signed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act opening the door for them to find careers not as auxiliaries, but as full-fledged, sworn in members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and newly created Air Force.

Though the door opened for women to serve in the Armed Forces in 1948, it opened only slightly. In 1949 legislation prohibited women with dependent children from service, promotion was capped, women were barred from combat roles, and forbidden to command their male counterparts.

During the Korean War (1950-1953) nearly 125,000 women served in the military including members of the Nurse Corps, WAC and WAVEs. Seventeen died while on active duty, most in accidents or air crashes. During the Vietnam War 7,000 women in uniform served in-country. Eight died in service including one by hostile fire. Along the way they earned Distinguished Service Medals, Legion of Merits, Air Medals, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts. As non-combatants, however, none received the Medal of Honor, none received the Navy Cross in World War II,* and the four Nurses who earned Silver Stars in World War II would be the last female recipients of the millennium.** Furthermore, in the words of one male commander, “*women are not awarded the Soldier’s Medal.*”

So, the fact is, despite that during the Vietnam War the U.S. Military became “*color blind*” and was perhaps the leader in equal opportunity regardless of race, it remained one of the most resistant sub-sets of American culture in terms of equality for women. That gender bias was not only a traditional one based upon flawed stereotyping of women who

* During World War II Virginia Hall, a member of the Office of Strategic Services, became and remains the only American woman since World War I to receive the Distinguished Service Cross, awarded for her courageous and dangerous services in espionage. The DSC was also awarded to a woman who was a French Lieutenant working with the Office of Strategic Services.

** One Filipino woman was also awarded a Silver Star in World War II.

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wanted to serve their nation, it was based in statute. When Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law granting equal opportunity in employment and prohibiting discriminatory actions against “. . . *any individual on the basis of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin,*” under United States Law:

- No more than 2% of the military force could be comprised of women.
- Women afforded officers commissions could comprise no more than 10% of the total number of women in the Armed Forces.
- A cap was placed on the promotion of women above paygrade O-3 (captain in the Army, lieutenant in the Navy).
- No woman serving as director of the WACs, WAVEs, or WAFs was allowed promotion above paygrade O-5 (lieutenant colonel in the Army and Commander in the Navy). Women Marines were allowed nothing higher than the temporary paygrade O-6 (Colonel). Women of ALL services were barred from promotion to General Officer.
- Women were barred from having command authority over men.
- Women were barred from serving aboard Navy vessels except for certain hospital ships and specified transports, and were further prohibited from duty in combat aircraft engaged in combat missions.
- Women were precluded from participation in campus ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) programs, as well as from appointments to the Army, Navy, or Air Force Academies.
- Women were denied spousal benefits for their husbands unless he depended on his wife for more than 50 percent of his support.
- The military services were authorized to automatically discharge any woman, married or single, who became pregnant. This provision extended to military women who became a parent by adoption or by marriage to a man who had a minor child/stepchild that resided in the family home at least 30 days a year.

Slowly, in the midst of the Vietnam War, things began to change. In 1967 the Women's Armed Services Integration Act was modified by Public Law 90-130, eliminating the 2% ceiling on the number of women who could serve in the military. At the same time, the cap on promotions above paygrade O-6 were removed and women were granted eligibility to hold Flag (admiral/general officer) rank. In 1967 the U.S. Air Force opened its ROTC program to women, to be followed by Army ROTC opportunities in 1971. Also, in 1971 the Air Force initiated a policy that

INTRODUCTION

allowed pregnant women to request a waiver of the automatic discharge rule and opened the door for women with dependent children to enlist.

In 1972 Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Chief of Naval Operations, opened Navy ROTC to women and suspended restrictions on a woman's right to succeed to command in the United States. He authorized Women Naval Officers to be selected for the War College, and expanded the occupational fields available for service, including the opportunity for women to serve at sea aboard the U.S.S. *Sanctuary*. In 1973 the Navy allowed women to serve on aviation duty in non-combat aircraft, a policy shift that was adopted by the Army the following year; and by the U.S. Air Force in 1977.

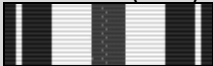
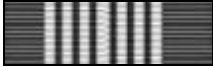
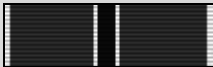
In 1973 the U.S. Coast Guard began enlisting women for regular active duty and two years later invited them to enroll in the Coast Guard Academy. Under Public Law 94-106, in 1976, the remaining service academies (Army, Navy and Air Force) were opened to women. By 1980 enlisted women became eligible for many at-sea, shipboard assignments. In a span of only thirteen years from 1967 to 1980, the available roles for women in military service at last moved forward at last in a major way.

Among the heady events for military women during that period was a historic action on June 11, 1970. On that date a star was pinned to the uniform of Colonel Anna Mae Hays, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, and she became the first woman general in any branch of American military service in history. Moments later Elizabeth P. Hoisington, Director of the Women's Army Corps, was also promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. Within a year the Director of Air Force Women, Jeanne M. Holm, became the Air Force's first woman general officer. In 1972 Alene B. Duerk, Chief of the Navy Nurse Corps, received a spot promotion to Rear Admiral (Lower Half). In 1978 Margaret Brewer became the Marine Corps' first woman general.

Some of these women who ascended to leadership were members of *The Greatest Generation*, having served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. But among the ranks of women in uniform was a new generation of leaders. They were women of a new generation, and they too would make history, commanding combat troops, flying combat missions, two U.S. Army Women earning Silver Stars in the Global War on Terrorism; in 2024 Captain Lacie E. Hester became the first Air Force woman to earn a Silver Star while flying combat over Syria.

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PYRAMID OF HONOR

Medal of Honor (Valor)  For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty.					
Service Crosses (Valor) DSC  Navy Cross  Air Force Cross  For extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy.					
Distinguished Service Medals (Service) Army  Navy  Air Force  Coast Guard  For meritorious and distinguished service in a position of great responsibility					
Silver Star (Valor)  For gallantry and intrepidity in action against an armed enemy. Legion of Merit  For meritorious conduct but also may be awarded with Combat "V" for Valor Distinguished Flying Cross  For heroism or extraordinary achievement in aerial flight.					
Non-Combat Heroism Awards (Valor) Soldier's Medal  Navy/USMC Medal  Airman's Medal  Coast Guard Medal  Army Navy/USMC Air Force Coast Guard For heroism at the risk of life not involving conflict with an armed enemy.					
Bronze Star  For heroism (with "V"), meritorious achievement, or outstandingly meritorious service.		Purple Heart  For wounds or death as a result of combat actions against an enemy of the United States.			
Meritorious/Achievement Medals • Defense Meritorious Service Medal • Meritorious Service Medal • Air Medal • Gold & Silver Lifesaving Medals • Joint Service Commendation Medal • Commendation Medal (Army, Navy, & Air Force) • Joint Service Achievement Medal • Achievement Medal (Army, Navy, & Air Force)					
Prisoner of War Medal  For service while held or confined as a Prisoner of War.					

Milton Olive*
“SOME OF US ARE STILL LITTLE BOYS”
C. DOUGLAS STERNER

By early 1965 American military advisors to Vietnam, including Green Berets, numbered some 23,000 men, although the United States was not yet officially at war with the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong. The mission of the American soldiers, airmen, sailors, and Marines was to advise and assist the South Vietnamese forces in their efforts against the growing insurgency.

On February 7, 1965, the Viet Cong attacked the garrison at Pleiku, killing eight American soldiers. In response President Lyndon Johnson ordered retaliatory bombing attacks against North Vietnam by American Air Force bombers flying out of bases in Thailand. The operation was labeled *Rolling Thunder*.

On March 8 the first U.S. Marine combat troops arrived in South Vietnam. Their mission, too, remained defensive at first. They were charged with protecting the American air base at DaNang against the kind of attack that had killed eight of their American comrades the previous month. By the end of March two more Marine battalions were authorized for deployment and were subsequently secretly authorized to begin the first American offensive combat actions.

Within the month the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered deployment of the Army's 173d Airborne Brigade, based in Okinawa, to South Vietnam. When the 3,500 “*sky soldiers*” arrived at Bien Hoa Air Base on May 3, 1965, they became the first major U.S. Army ground combat unit committed to the growing war. Paratroopers all, they were NOT the elite like the men who wore the Green Beret. They were, however, among the finest of the Army's traditional combat units. Perhaps the only noticeable difference between that combat brigade and the airborne combat units of previous wars was the color of the Brigade's soldiers. For the first time in American history Black, White, Yellow, Red, and Brown soldiers fought together as one integrated unit.

* Edited and Reprinted from: The Defining Generation

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There was nothing in the orders that sent the young *Sky Soldiers* of Company B, 2d Battalion, 503d Regiment of the 173d Airborne Brigade into the enemy-infested jungles near Phu Cong, Vietnam, on October 22, 1965, that alluded to either advisory or defensive roles. The mission of Lieutenant Jimmy Stanford's platoon, as well as the other platoons in the company, was "*Search and Destroy*" --find and kill.

Since the arrival of the *Sky Soldiers* in Vietnam six months earlier, more than 325 U.S. Army soldiers had been killed in action, many of them men of the 173d Airborne Brigade. Forty-one of those were Black American soldiers, comprising 12% of an ethnic minority that at home comprised an almost identical proportion of the American population.

Early on this day, Lieutenant Stanford's platoon suffered one casualty when Specialist Fourth Class George Luis of Pahoa, Hawaii, was instantly killed by a bullet to the head. Luis was the third Asian-American soldier to sacrifice his life in the same period. (Casualty statistics from May to October 1965 also included two Native American Indians.)* Vietnam had indeed become the *proving ground* for the concept of equal rights in service, as well as equal opportunity to sacrifice one's life in that same service.

Lieutenant Stanford was thankful for every man in his platoon, regardless of color. Each man provided additional fire power to accomplish the mission. Even so, Stanford was NOT without his own personal prejudices. "*I was a real redneck,*" he admitted unabashedly to Don Terry during an interview for a 2002 story in the *Chicago Tribune*. The 29-year-old officer grew up in the segregated town of Lake Jackson, Texas, and told Terry he couldn't remember seeing Blacks (outside) after dark when he was growing up in the 1930s and 40s. "*They stayed in their place, we stayed in ours,*" he continued.

The ingrained prejudice that Stanford struggled to overcome was the product, as is all prejudice, of experiences thrust upon him during the formative years of his youth by an older generation unwilling to face the winds of change. Stanford recalled in that interview, the story of the child of a Black woman who worked for his family when he had been only six

* Because Hispanic soldiers were identified as Caucasian in the casualty records, it is difficult to break out the number of casualties suffered in the same period by that ethnic minority that contributed in equal measure in Vietnam.

MILTON OLIVE

or seven years old. The two youths, too young yet to develop irrational racial prejudices, often played together and became friends. Friends that is, until one fateful day when Stanford's father saw the two of them together and chased the Black boy away while admonishing his son to "*go play with his own kind.*"

After that "*I'd give them hell,*" he recalled. "*It was just normal racial harassment, nothing serious, practical jokes, name-calling, kid stuff.*"

Lieutenant Stanford's own subtle, but real, prejudice had not yet negatively impacted his relationship with his men. He had been transferred only a few days earlier to command Company C's 3d Platoon, so he was not well-known yet to the men who would follow him into battle. Furthermore, as a career soldier with more than a decade of Army service, and as a man who worked his way through the enlisted ranks to a commission as a second lieutenant, Stanford had learned NOT to allow his personal prejudices to negatively influence his job performance.

For Stanford, this ability to ignore personal prejudice for the sake of the mission was fortunate. Two of his subordinate squad leaders in 3d platoon were Black, as were several of the men who served in all of the squads. His senior NCO, Platoon Sergeant Vince Yrineo, was Mexican-American; so too, was one of his squad leaders.

Thirty-six year old Platoon Sergeant Yrineo understood racial prejudice first-hand, though not against himself. His first insight into the injustice of judging fellow Americans based upon the color of their skin occurred early in 1942 when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. That action ultimately resulted in uprooting more than 110,000 Americans from their homes and placing them behind the guarded barbed wire of "*relocation camps,*" all because of the color of their skin and the shape of their eyes. Japanese-American men, women, and children were subjected to this unwarranted exclusion from American society which was, despite more innocuous terms, nothing short of *imprisonment* for having as little as one-sixth Japanese ancestry.

Twelve-year-old Yrineo's family moved from Tucson, Arizona, shortly after war broke out in order to be near a brother who was in military service and stationed in California. In his home in Los Angeles Vince's best friend was a Japanese-American boy, his own age. Murio, as he vaguely recalls his friend's name 55 years later, was a regular visitor to the Yrineo household.

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There was no racial prejudice in the Yrineo household, no admonitions to *“play with his own kind”* as Stanford heard in his youth. For young Vince Yrineo, Murio was more like a brother than a neighbor. When his best friend and his family were uprooted and sent away to a *“relocation camp”* because of the color of their skin, Vince was both crushed and angry. *“That was completely out of line,”* he said in a 2005 interview for this story.

Though four of his older brothers served in World War II, by the time Vince was old enough to join the military the war was over. Vince joined the Navy and said he never experienced any racial prejudice against himself for his own Hispanic-American heritage. *“I served on a small ship,”* he recalled, *“and besides me there was only one other Mexican in the crew. We never had any problems.”*

“Did you witness any prejudice against Black Americans?” I asked him.

“No,” he replied. *“We never saw any Blacks. If there were any in the crew, they were down in the galley as cooks.”*

Vince returned to civilian life after a brief stint in the Navy and then joined the Army to become a career soldier. He went to jump school and was serving with the 11th Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, when President Harry Truman desegregated the U.S. Army. *“There was a line of barracks nearby that housed 400 Black Airborne soldiers in one company,”* he recalled. *“The day they were to join our ranks, they moved across the street and into our barracks, and there was not a single problem.”*

Over the next decade Yrineo continued to serve during the period in which the military changed rapidly from one of America’s most segregated sub-cultures into what may have been our country’s first truly integrated institution. He believes that the Korean War, during which he served in non-combat assignments, set the stage for the expanding opportunities for Black soldiers. He doesn’t recall witnessing any overt prejudicial acts against his comrades in military service during the period.

As a Platoon Sergeant, Yrineo finally saw combat duty when the 173d Airborne Brigade was deployed to Vietnam in 1965. In mid-October he witnessed one of his first major evidences of lingering racial prejudices when Lieutenant Jimmy Stanford transferred in as his Platoon Leader.

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“He was a real REDNECK,” Yrineo recalled of the first meeting with his new commander. While preparing to brief his squad leaders for a mission planned for October 22, Lieutenant Stanford told Sergeant Yrineo to *“go get those niggers.”*

“My platoon had two Black squad leaders, one White, and one Mexican. I told Stanford, ‘I don’t have any niggers in my platoon!’,” Vince said. *“I simply wasn’t going to take that shit from some redneck shavetail, and I wanted him to know right away where I stood.”*

On October 22, 1965, helicopters inserted Stanford’s 3d platoon, along with other platoons of the *“Bravo Bulls”* (Company B) into a clearing in the jungle near Phu Cong at the southern edge of the **Iron Triangle**. The platoon moved out quickly, advancing into the jungle to hack their way through dense foliage to seek out the enemy. More often than not, the enemy found the *Bravo Bulls* first and their arduous incursion into the Viet Cong lair was peppered with sporadic sniper fire and occasional small engagements. Early in the day an enemy round struck one of Stanford’s soldiers in the head, Private First Class George Luis of Hawaii, killing him instantly. Despite the loss of a comrade and the challenge before them, Stanford’s men continued to seek out the enemy.

Late in the afternoon an enemy force hidden behind the heavy undergrowth temporarily pinned down lead elements of the company with heavy fire. Following initial contact, however, as they had throughout a day of multiple skirmishes, the enemy retreated. Stanford, Yrineo, and their young soldiers immediately and aggressively pursued.

Three soldiers, two Black and one White, were grouped around Lieutenant Stanford and Platoon Sergeant Yrineo as the *“Sky Soldiers”* hacked their way through *“wait-a-minute”* vines and thick vegetation to reach a small, burned out clearing. There, as enemy bullets impacted the ground around them, the five men hit the dirt in a tight perimeter, seeking shelter behind some burned out tree stumps.

Amid a hail of incoming bullets, in a heartbreaking moment the ever-present potential for sudden death became ominously more real. With a dull thud that might go unnoticed in any other environment, but which was quickly recognizable and unmistakable to a soldier in a combat zone, an enemy grenade landed amid the five men of third platoon.

“We didn’t even see where it was coming from,” recalled Private John *“Hop”* Foster, a 19-year old Black kid from Pittsburgh, in a 2002

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interview for the *Chicago Tribune* said, *“Either they (the Viet Cong) opened up the ground and threw it up or they were in the trees and tossed it down.”*

So closely bunched together were the five men, all of them faced probable death from the explosion that would occur within seconds. *“It was about a foot from my face,”* recalled Lieutenant Stanford, who also remembered a shouted warning from one of his men, a Black kid the men of the platoon often called Skipper. *“Then out comes this black hand and grabs it!”* he continued.

Then came the explosion. It was not the sharp thunder of detonating explosives that would throw thousands of deadly white-hot shards of steel into the bodies of five under-fire soldiers. Rather, it was a muffled sound as a single body absorbed the blast and shrapnel after the man behind the hand Lieutenant Stanford had just seen, hugged the deadly orb to his chest and fell on top of it.

Some shards of hot metal struck Private Lionel Hubbard, a Black soldier from Brownfield, Texas who recalled for Don Terry nearly 40 years later, *“If it wasn’t for Milton, I know I wouldn’t be here talking to you right now.”* Hop Foster was wounded moments before the grenade exploded when a bullet glanced off his steel helmet, and additional fragments from the grenade struck both Lieutenant Stanford and Platoon Sergeant Yrineo. But all four men, despite their wounds, survived and were subsequently evacuated, thanks to the quick actions and personal sacrifice of a young Black man from Chicago.

“It was the most incredible display of selfless bravery I ever witnessed,” Jimmy Standford said later.

Vince Yrineo, as a Platoon Sergeant, lost far more young soldiers during his service in Vietnam than he cared to remember, and said he still remembers them all. The young man who died that day to save Yrineo’s life held a special place among those memories. For decades he kept the battered and sheared dog tag of the man who saved his life, only recently sending it to Skipper’s step-mother.



“Jimmy and I went on to become very good friends,” Yrineo told me. *“He changed drastically after that day.”* In fact, after serving a second tour in Vietnam as a *Green Beret*, Stanford finished his career

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with a 4-year assignment in the Army's Office of Race Relations and Equal Opportunity.

Of that day, and the 18-year-old Paratrooper from Chicago who saved the lives of four comrades, Stanford said, *"A day doesn't go by that I don't think about him. Milton Olive changed me. I made a vow never to forget him."*

MILTON LEE OLIVE

When his son was born in Chicago on November 7, 1946, it was a day of mixed emotions for Milton Olive, Jr. The newborn child was Milton and Clara Lee Olive's first child. He was also destined to be their last; Clara Lee died four hours after giving birth to her infant son.

The third generation in a line of Milton Olives, the baby was given his mother's middle name, becoming Milton Lee Olive, III. Throughout his life however, he would become affectionately known to his family, and years later to his comrades in the Army, as *"Skipper"* or *"Skip."*



For Milton Olive, Jr., the news on that day went from bad to worse. Not only had he lost his young wife, the prognosis for the survival of his infant son did not bode well. Doctors gave *Skipper* little chance of surviving more than one or two days. But the under-weight, fragile little boy fought for life with a resolve that belied his scrawny frame. He survived those first critical days and was soon released from the hospital to the South Side Chicago home where he would grow up, with periodic visits to live with his grandparents in Mississippi.

Skipper was never a South Side Chicago hard-case like many of the young boys who had to grow up in what was often a rough side of the city. Rather he was more of a quiet kid, never hanging out with neighborhood hoodlums or seeking trouble. That rather placid personality, however, was never misunderstood as a character weakness by those who knew him. Skipper was a scrapper when circumstances demanded it; his very survival against a gloomy medical prognosis had demonstrated this vividly.

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Even in the early, formative years after his birth, Skipper's health was always a matter of concern. *"It wasn't until he was in the first or second grade that we began to quit worrying, and realized he would survive,"* recalled, his aunt Barbara Penelton during an interview.

After *Skipper's* birth, his father relied heavily upon his extended family to help him raise the young boy. Many of *Skipper's* early years were spent living with relatives in Chicago or with his grandparents on their farm in Lexington, Mississippi. Then, when *Skipper* was ten years old, his father married Antoinette Mainor, a teacher in the Chicago public schools, and young Milton moved home to live with his father and step-mother.

In contrast to his infancy where he had battled simply for life, in adolescence *Skipper* enjoyed a rather comfortable home life. His father doted on his only son and, unlike so many poor Black families living in the South, in Chicago he could afford to cater to his son's whims and desires. *"He got new bicycles for his birthday and cameras for Christmas,"* wrote Don Terry in a 2002 *Chicago Tribune* story about the man who became a local hero. *"At family gatherings, when his cousins were dressed in jeans and t-shirts, he was often decked out in a suit that matched his dad's."*

"Olive loved taking photographs with his father, who made a few extra bucks snapping newlyweds and church picnics. Stuck inside the pages of his (Skipper's) Bible was a business card his father had made for him years earlier: Milton Olive III, Chicago's Only 12-year-old Professional Photographer."

Miles away from Chicago, Skipper had a "second-family" in Mississippi, and during his summer school vacations he frequently returned to his grandparent's farm. When he was ready to begin high school, Skipper opted to remain on the farm. For the next two years he attended an all-Black school that was an extension of a local Pentecostal church.

While living in Mississippi, *Skipper* could not help but become intimately aware of the glaring disparity between the rights and opportunities afforded to White men and women as opposed to their Black American counterparts. He was quickly caught up in the Civil Rights movement. In the summer between his freshman and sophomore years some 200,000 civil rights advocates marched on Washington, D.C., to hear Dr. Martin Luther King deliver his famous "Dream Speech." As

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he began his sophomore year, trouble continued to broil in the South. On September 13, 1963, a bomb exploded at the **Sixteenth Street Baptist Church** in Birmingham, Alabama, a key site of many civil rights organizational meetings. The explosion killed four young girls: Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins, who were attending Sunday School that morning. The tragedy prompted immediate riots in Birmingham that resulted in the death of two more young Black people.

On January 23, 1964, while *Skipper* was mid-way through his second high school year, the requisite three-fourths of the 50 United States ratified the **24th Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution that had passed Congress a year and a half earlier. While that amendment said nothing about the rights of Black Americans, it was in fact a sweeping reform. The Amendment reads simply:

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay poll tax or other tax.”

Poll Taxes had been enacted in eleven Southern states after **Reconstruction** as a measure to prevent poor people, who included the vast majority of Southern Blacks as well as poverty-stricken and uneducated White people, from voting. While the Poll Tax violated a provision of the **14th Amendment** that supposedly granted “*equal protection under the law*,” and despite Poll Taxes having been found unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, at the time the 24th Amendment was ratified, five southern states (Virginia, Alabama, Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi) still used the illegal tax as a means of silencing the voice of its Black population.

Ratification of the **24th Amendment** could not have occurred at a more opportune time. For two years the **Congress on Racial Equality (CORE)**, the **Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**, and the **Nacional Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** had struggled to strengthen the political voice of Black Americans in the South by organizing voter registration drives. The three diverse organizations found strength in uniting under the umbrella of the

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Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and in September 1963 they sponsored a highly successful *election experiment* in Mississippi.

The *Freedom Vote* was intended to demonstrate the desire of Mississippi's poor Black population to be involved in the political process. More than 90,000 of them voted in a mock election pitting the candidate of an unofficial **Freedom Party** against the official **State Party** candidates. It set the stage for a turbulent, but historic change in the tide of the Southern political process over the next year in a stirring, and often dangerous, clamor for civil rights that caught up young Skipper Olive in its fervor.

Skipper became one of 3,000 students who attended one of the 50 "*Mississippi Freedom Schools*" as part of the **Mississippi Project** led by COFO in an effort to educate the state's Black population about their rights and their potential to change their society by making their voices heard at the polls. Though the students were too young to vote, (in the election of 1964 the National age for voting rights was 21), COFO concentrated largely on 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students.

When the traditional school year ended in the spring of 1964, the **Mississippi Project** evolved into a massive voter registration campaign called the *Freedom Summer Project*. It was an effort in which *Skipper* was an ardent supporter and active participant. As project volunteers spread out across Mississippi to visit Black homes and register new voters, they needed "*guides*" to help them get around the largely rural, poor Southern communities. *Skipper* became one of those guides, despite the danger of escalating violence.

The violence was in fact both real and extreme. On June 21, 1964, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, two White student civil rights activists who came to Mississippi from Northern colleges for the summer project, disappeared. Along with them was a local **CORE** volunteer, a young Black man much like *Skipper* and only four years his senior, James Chaney. Though the three men's bodies went undiscovered until August 4, there was an immediate certainty after their disappearance that the three men had been both abducted and murdered.

In retaliation against the **Freedom Summer Project**, during June, July, and August, Mississippi's most ardent segregationists and White supremacists burned 37 Black churches and the homes or businesses of 30 Black families. More than 1,000 **CORE** volunteers, many of them

MILTON OLIVE

White students from Northern universities, were arrested; 80 volunteers were viciously beaten.

While the violence could not deter *Skipper* from his new-found mission in life, it certainly became a concern for his grandmother. When the young man refused to leave behind his volunteer duties with the Mississippi Project, Grandma Olive sent him back to his father in Chicago with the comment, “*He’s going to get killed, and get us killed.*” Her fears were not unfounded; the violence of that hot summer in Mississippi often spilled over to destroy the family of those who sought to change America at the voting booth.

When *Skipper* returned to his father’s home he was much like many seventeen-year-old boys, both Black and White, of any generation; shiftless, uncertain about his future, and still seeking to find himself. His father sought to provide guidance by offering *Skipper* three alternatives. The young man could either go back to school (in Chicago), get a job and go to work, or join the military.

Initially *Skipper* opted to return to school. When he attempted to enroll for his junior year at Chicago’s Highland High School, however, he learned that some of the credits he had earned during his first two years in a Mississippi Pentecostal high school would not transfer. At Highland High he would not be an upper classman scheduled to graduate in 1966. Rather, he would have to repeat much of his sophomore year.

Discouraged, *Skipper* turned to his father’s second option. Quickly he learned that there were few jobs available to a 17-year-old Black boy who did not have a high school diploma. Before considering the third alternative, *Skipper* borrowed money from a cousin and took a train back to Mississippi to rejoin the Mississippi Project. Shortly after his arrival word reach his grandmother that *Skipper* was back, living temporarily with a school employee, and continuing his dangerous activities in the civil rights movement.

The chain of events that wound up sending *Skipper* back once again to Chicago left him feeling both disappointed in himself and embarrassed in front of his family. He had dropped out of school, joined a growing but not always popular civil rights revolution, failed to find a job, and bounced back and forth from one family member to another. At last, shortly before his 18th birthday, Milton Lee Olive, III, decided to prove he could do something positive. With a cousin he joined the United States Army.

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Further determined to prove his worth, Skipper applied for jump school in order to become a paratrooper. He was proud of his uniform, wearing it regularly when he came home on leave, and was doubly proud of his jump wings. In a letter home to the family he wrote, *"You said I was crazy for joining up. Well, I've gone you one better. I'm now an official U.S. Army Paratrooper. How does that grab you? I've made six jumps already."*



On June 5, 1965, one month after the *Sky Soldiers* arrived at Bien Hoa Airfield, South Vietnam, Private First Class Milton Olive joined the 173d Airborne in the combat theater. Within a month he earned his first Purple Heart when he was wounded in action, an incident he hid from his family in order to spare them undue concern for his safety. Already back home there were subtle but divisive whispers about the wisdom of *Skipper's* father having sent his only son off to war. Milton Olive, Jr., indeed had to question his own wisdom in that action. In his defense, it was of little comfort to him to point out that when he had offered his son that option, there had been no real war in Vietnam and few Americans even knew that the Southeast Asian country existed.

Private First Class Olive was a good *Sky Soldier* and well liked. His somewhat cherubic countenance, his quiet demeanor, and his tendency to avoid brash and vulgar language made him stand apart. Combined with *Skipper's* propensity to constantly quote scripture, in Vietnam he earned a second nickname. The men of Bravo Company's third platoon often called him *"Preacher."*

Though *Skipper* made it a point not to communicate things that would worry his family in letters home, such as the wound that had earned him a Purple Heart, he wrote regularly and not only to his father and step-mother, but to his cousins as well. Early in October he sent a letter to the farm in Mississippi in which he wrote, *"Grandma, please send me some cookies."* In a letter penned later that same month he wrote a poignant line revealing much of what he felt about life in the war zone. *"We all do a man's job and wear a man's clothes and call ourselves men,"* he noted, *"but some of us are still little boys."*

Even as *Skipper* wrote those words, a package with the previously requested cookies was on its way to Vietnam. They would not arrive in time. Weeks later when the unopened package was returned by the Postal

MILTON OLIVE

Service to the farm in Mississippi, it was a traumatic moment for an aging grandmother whose heart had already been broken.

Early on the morning of October 22, 1965, Army helicopters inserted Bravo Company at the edge of the dense jungle outside Phu Cong. Quickly the heavily-loaded troopers fanned out in a sweep towards the hidden enemy. The enemy did not remain hidden for very long. Amid a hail of gunfire that for a time pinned down the platoon, Private First Class George Luis was shot in the head and instantly killed. The *“little boys”* of 3d platoon had little time to grieve the loss of their comrade. There was still a man’s job to be done. Attacking the jungle, they drove the enemy backward and into retreat.

As the enemy raced backward into the jungle, Lieutenant Jimmy Stanford rallied his men to give chase. Following their leader, Platoon Sergeant Vince Yrineo and three men of the 3d platoon gave chase. The three were John *“Hop”* Foster, a 19-year old Black private from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 20-year old Private Lionel Hubbard, a Black kid from Brownfield, Texas, and Private First Class Milton Lee Olive, III.

As the five soldiers pursued the fleeing enemy, they suddenly found themselves racing into an ambush. An enemy bullet crashed into Foster’s steel pot and ricocheted downward to draw blood above his eye. *“How bad is it?”* he shouted above the din of battle to his nearby comrade.

“You’ll live,” Milton Olive shouted back with a grin as he continued to rake the hidden enemy with his rifle. The smile quickly vanished, and *Skipper* shouted again, *“Look out, Lieutenant, grenade!”*

All five members of 3d platoon were in a tight perimeter and the enemy explosive might well have cost all five men their lives, but for the subsequent actions of an 18-year old boy from Chicago. Quickly, selflessly, Milton Olive reached out to grasp the deadly orb, hugging it to his body and then falling on top of it. It exploded almost immediately, tossing the slender paratrooper’s body into the air and flipping him over on his back. Red blood flowed from the multiple wounds of a shattered Black body, but four men survived and continued to battle the hidden enemy. Before the contact was broken Stanford, Yrineo, Hubbard, and Foster were all wounded. But all four men survived to return home, raise families, and to never forget they had been spared by the sacrifice of a comrade.

On April 21, 1966, the elder Milton Olive and his wife Antoinette were honored guests at the White House. On that day President Lyndon

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Johnson read a citation detailing the heroic acts of their young son just six months earlier, while Lieutenant Jimmy Stanford and Private John Foster looked on. Then, with Chicago Mayor Richard Daly, members of *Skipper's* extended family, and other dignitaries gathered for the somber but impressive ceremony, President Johnson presented Milton Olive the Medal of Honor. In that moment, Milton Lee *Skipper* Olive, III, became the first Black soldier of the Vietnam War, and the third Black American since the Spanish-American War, to receive his nation's highest honor. He was also the first Black American in history to be awarded the Medal for actions performed while serving in a non-segregated Army combat unit.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Private First Class Milton Lee Olive, III (ASN: 16810165), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade, in action against enemy aggressor forces at Phu Cuong, Republic of Vietnam, on 22 October 1965. Private First Class Olive was a member of the 3d Platoon of Company B, as it moved through the jungle to find the Viet Cong operating in the area. Although the platoon was subjected to a heavy volume of enemy gunfire and pinned down temporarily, it retaliated by assaulting the Viet Cong positions, causing the enemy to flee. As the platoon pursued the insurgents, Private First Class Olive and four other soldiers were moving through the jungle together when a grenade was thrown into their midst. Private First Class Olive saw the grenade, and then saved the lives of his fellow soldiers at the sacrifice of his by grabbing the grenade in his hand and falling on it to absorb the blast with his body. Through his bravery, unhesitating actions, and complete disregard for his safety, he prevented additional loss of life or injury to the members of his platoon. Private First Class Olive's extraordinary heroism, at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Before the ceremony concluded the President read a letter. It revealed publicly for the first time the text of a letter *Skipper's*

MILTON OLIVE

father sent the President upon receiving word that his son would receive the Medal of Honor. Milton Olive, Jr., wrote:

“Our only child and only grandchild gave his last full measure of devotion on an international battlefield 10,000 miles from home. It is our dream and prayer that someday the Asiatics, the Europeans, the Israelites, the Africans, the Australians, the Latins, and the Americans can all live in One-World. It is our hope that in our own country the Klansmen, the Negroes, the Hebrews, and the Catholics will sit down together in the common purpose of good will and dedication; that the moral and creative intelligence of our united people will pick up the chalice of wisdom and place it upon the mountain top of human integrity; that all mankind, from all the earth, shall resolve ‘to study war no more’.”



The President then told those gathered for the ceremony: *“(Milton Olive) is the eighth Negro American to receive this Nation’s highest award. Fortunately, it will be more difficult for future presidents to say how many Negroes have received the Medal of Honor. For unlike the other seven, Private Olive’s military records have never carried the color of his skin or his racial origin, only the testimony that he was a good and loyal citizen of the United States of America.”*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Special thanks to Don Terry and *The Chicago Tribune*, for permission to re-print these and other selected quotes from the May 12, 2002, article: The Men of Olive Company; Four Soldiers Survived Vietnam Because Milton Olive Didn’t

Author’s Note: We were privileged to interview Jimmy Stanford and Vince Yrileo in 2005 for this story, and they were pleased when it was published online in our HomeOfHeroes website. We were saddened to learn that Vince passed away in 2013.

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Deborah Sampson Gannett*

She Fought as Robert Shurtleff

BY: DEBBIE MAULDING

Deborah H. Samson, spelled Sampson in later years, was born in Plympton, Massachusetts, on December 17, 1760, to Jonathan Samson and Deborah *Bradford* Samson, great granddaughter of William Bradford of the *Mayflower* and second Governor of Plymouth Colony. There were seven children in the family, four older and two younger than Deborah. The family was very poor, causing them to move frequently in search of adequate housing and profitable employment.



In 1759, when Jonathan Samson's father passed away, Jonathan was supposedly deprived of his inheritance by a spiteful brother, deepening the family's state of poverty. Although there are tales of Jonathan "*sailing the high seas*," and "*searching for gold and treasures*," dying in a shipwreck, the actual tale is not nearly as exciting. He



Deborah's Birth Home

sold his portion of the family farm and inheritance to his brother shortly after the birth of his last child, then moved to Maine where he took a common-law wife and had a second smaller family with her. Having abandoned his first wife and his seven children, Jonathan Samson never returned and died in Maine in 1811.

Mrs. Deborah Sampson, theoretically adding the letter "p" to the spelling of the name to distinguish herself from her estranged husband, was unable to support her seven children, therefore, as was common at the time, she sent them to live with other relatives and friends. They became

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Women Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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“bound children,” basically indentured servants, working for their room and board.

By age twelve, young Deborah was living with her fourth foster family. She had been taught to read, and was able to cook, weave, care for the younger children, perform the usual household chores, and help in the fields. According to Reverend Stillman Pratt of Middleborough, Massachusetts, in a later article about her life: *“She (Deborah) became acquainted with almost all kinds of manual labor. If occasion required, she could harness the horse and ride him to plough, or to town on errands. She could rake hay or stow it away in the barn, was familiar with the milkmaid’s task.”*

Although haying and plowing was usually a man’s task, Deborah was quite proficient in these duties. According to Pratt, she acquired another *“solely masculine”* skill: *“A tolerable mechanic . . . If she wanted a basket, a milking stool or sled, she could make them. With the use of a jack-knife, she was familiar and could work out a weather cock with that instrument as well as a man.”*

Living in the home of Deacon Thomas, Deborah and the other girls in the household were not allowed to pursue an education. Although she was a *“tom-boy,”* Deborah was curious and desired to learn. She would borrow the textbooks from the boys and follow them to school to eavesdrop thus continuing her education on her own.

With a great deal of energy and an independent personality, Deborah was determined to break through the barriers placed in her path. She would not allow being female, poor, or self-educated, to prevent her from learning about the world around her. As early as age fifteen she was intensely aware of the struggle for liberty and was determined to participate in the Revolution.

In 1778, eighteen-year-old Deborah left Deacon Thomas’ residence and began working independently for families in the area to earn her room and board. She served for a time as a teacher in Middleborough, Massachusetts, spinning yarn, weaving fabrics, and learning how to make clothing.

Throughout this time, Deborah’s desire for adventure and travel intensified, and she resolved to find a way to explore the country. Her plan: disguise herself as a man and travel at will. Turning to her skills, Deborah fashioned a *“genteel coat, waistcoat and breeches . . . the*

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other articles, hat, shoes, and so on, were purchased under other pretexts."

According to an article found in the June 30, 1897, *Kennebec Journal*, the number of women in the ranks of the Continental Army during the *Rebellion* was estimated to be around four hundred, but there was only one "well authenticated" case during the Revolutionary War, that of Deborah Sampson Gannett.



Many sayings regarding beauty being only skin deep, and in the eye of the beholder, come to mind when one considers the physical description of Miss Sampson. Those who knew her, including a neighbor boy who knew her in her later years, described her as a "person of plain features" but never commented that she was "ugly" or "difficult to look upon." She had a reputation of being courageous and highly skilled, resolute and affectionate, all qualities that helped soften her "plain features."

The *Kennebec Journal* article gave this detailed description: "She was not an Amazon, thirsting for blood but fully possessing the natural inclinations, tastes and desires of the average woman of her day, later events in her life will show . . . (She was) possessing a clear understanding, a general knowledge of passing events; fluent in speech, and delivers her sentiments in correct language, with deliberate and measured accent; easy in her deportment, affable in her manners, robust and masculine in her appearance."

Herman Mann, her biographer and friend of many years, included a physical description in his book *The Female Review: Memoirs of an American young lady*, published in 1797. He wrote that her "life and character were peculiarly distinguished by being a Continental Soldier for nearly three years in the late American War."

Mann described her as approximately five feet seven inches to five feet eight inches tall. At the time, the average man was five feet five inches tall, and the average woman was five feet tall. He implied that she was not thin by his description of her waist, saying it might "be displeasing to a coquette," a word used at that time to refer to a woman or seductress who was flirtatious and wore frilly or fashionable clothing.

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During her years as a soldier, Deborah bound her breasts with a linen cloth to hide them under her uniform. Mann described them as being very small and possibly not requiring *“such attention.”* He wrote that: *“The features of her face are regular; but not what a physiognomist would term the most beautiful.”*

Of note, a physiognomist is defined as a person able to judge character, temperament, or predict one’s future from facial characteristics and other outward appearance. Deborah Sampson was taller than most people of her time, broad, strong, and not delicately feminine. It was these features that enabled her to achieve her goal.

As her interest in patriotic causes intensified, Deborah’s plot became not only to disguise as a man, but also to enlist as a soldier. She set out to join the Continental Army. According to the Kennebec Journal article cited above: *“At age twenty-two, with her body well-developed and judgement matured, and all her plans carefully and deliberately made, she privately left her home, and dressed in male attire, succeeded in getting mustered into the service, either personally or by proxy for it could hardly be possible to pass the surgeon’s examination without detection.”*

The Massachusetts Line of Continental Soldiers was offering a bounty in search of 1,500 new recruits in the spring of 1782. In April, she presented herself in men’s clothing, enlisting as Thomas Timothy Thayer, but did not show up a few days later to muster in.

Confident in her ability and her disguise, Deborah presented herself again, this time as Robert Shurtleff, a name derived from the name of her mother’s son who died as a young child. As a seventeen-year-old *“smock faced boy,”* a term used to taunt beardless young men in those days, Deborah Sampson, AKA Robert Shurtleff enlisted on May 20, 1782. Muster Master Noah Taft paid the new recruit a sixty-pound bounty, and three days later Shurtleff mustered in. Success could have been her middle name; Deborah was now a Private in the Continental Army.



Private Robert Shurtleff joined the Light Infantry Company, Fourth Massachusetts Regiment at West Point, New York, on May 20, 1782,

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under the command of Captain George Webb. Shurtleff was given the adventurous, yet dangerous, task of scouting the neutral territory to assess the British supplies and troops remaining in the area. The last major battle of the Revolutionary War was fought at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, but as General George Washington had contemplated, there were still British holdouts and guerilla warfare taking place across the northeast.

While on an expedition with two sergeants in June of 1782, Shurtleff led about thirty infantry soldiers into a confrontation with the Tories, at times fighting hand to hand. Shurtleff led a raid on a home that resulted in the capture of fifteen men. Then, at Tarrytown, Shurtleff dug trenches, participated in the storming of a British redoubt, and endured canon fire.



Private Shurtleff's final combat mission was cut short when *he* received a musket ball in the thigh and a large gash across the forehead, requiring treatment. *He* presented himself to the hospital tent, received treatment for the head wound then, before having his gender discovered, limped outside where he removed the musket ball himself.

During and after *his* recuperation, Private Shurtleff served as a waiter to General John Patterson. Once fully recovered, Shurtleff was sent to defend Congress in Philadelphia in 1783. An epidemic of yellow fever swept through, and Shurtleff was acutely ill.

Taken to the home of Dr. Binney for treatment, Private Shurtleff, unconscious from fever, was unable to continue the ruse. Dr. Binney discovered that Shurtleff was actually a female and reported his findings to the commanding officer, Colonel Henry Jackson. Jackson recommended Robert Shurtleff to be honorably discharged from military service. Colonel Jackson later wrote of Shurtleff on August 1, 1786, that "*Robert Shurtleff did his duty as a faithful soldier and was honorably discharged on October 23, 1783.*" She was one of the first American military heroes to be the subject of a book.

Deborah Sampson returned to her hometown around November 1, 1783, and also to her church, First Baptist Church of Middleborough, Massachusetts, where she had been a member since 1780. Records dated September 3, 1782, included discussion of her sudden departure from the community: "*The Church considered the case of Deborah Sampson, a member of this church, who last spring was accused of dressing in*

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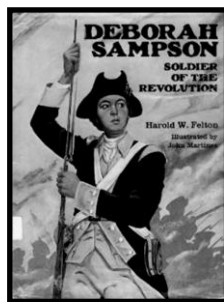
men's clothes, and enlisting as a soldier in the army . . .and for some time before behaved very loose and unchristian like, and at least left our parts in a sudden manner . . .”

The First Baptist Church withdrew fellowship from Deborah, instructing their members not to associate with her until she repented of her sinful ways and asked for forgiveness publicly. There is no documentation found to support whether the church ever welcomed her back. She spent the winter with her uncle, Mr. Waters, and met her future husband during this time.

In Stoughton, Massachusetts, on April 7, 1785, Deborah married Benjamin Gannett, who had also served in the Revolutionary War as a Minuteman. They made their home in Sharon, Norfolk County, Massachusetts, and had three children, a son named Earl, and two daughters named Mary and Patience.

As a farmer's wife, Deborah Gannett had many opportunities to utilize the skills she learned during her indentured years. Managing a one-hundred-acre farm was demanding work and left the couple constantly in need of more money. Her military service was honorable, and she served with distinction; she received only thirty-four pounds as a lump sum payment upon discharge from the Army. Reaching out to her friends and influential family members in search of assistance in obtaining both back pay and pension for her time in the service, Deborah received mostly advice.

Paul Revere suggested she capitalize on her experiences. In 1802, Mrs. Gannett embarked on a two-year-long tour, lecturing about her experiences throughout New England and New York. Her lectures included tales of her wartime experiences, a demonstration of the manual of arms, and a display of her full military regalia. Sometimes she appeared in uniform.



Deborah continued to advocate for women veterans' equality, including disability pension benefits, motivating women to take an active role in the military both as personnel and as volunteers. She also spoke about gender differences, gender equality; the woman's right to safety, and equal treatment in any role she might desire to occupy.

Although they were both diligent, conscientious people, Deborah and Benjamin Gannett continued to be short on funds. The tours did not

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generate enough income to support the family. Deborah Sampson Gannett petitioned the Massachusetts State Legislature for the pay the Army withheld because she was a woman and for a pension in recognition of her service in the Army. Her friend and fellow soldier, Paul Revere, made a statement to the Legislature on her behalf stating: *"I have been induced to enquire her situation, and character, since she quit the male habit and soldier's uniform, for the most decent apparel of her own sex; and obliges me to say, that every person with whom I have conversed about her, and it is not a few, speak of her as a woman with handsome talents, good morals, a dutiful wife and an affectionate parent."*

The pension was finally granted in 1805 after the General Court of Massachusetts verified her service. In recognition of Deborah Sampson's military career, they wrote: *"She exhibited extraordinary instance of female heroism by discharging the duties of a faithful gallant soldier, and at the same time preserving the virtue and chastity of her gender unsuspected and unblemished and was discharged from the service with a fair and honorable character."*

Their statement acknowledged her as a female, a soldier, and a hero. The *"Invalid's Pension"* of \$76.80 per year was finally awarded in 1816 and continued until the time of her death.

Before the settlement, life had finally started to look up for Deborah. Her son, Earl, married Mary Clark, and they lived in a spacious mansion at 300 East Street in Sharon, Massachusetts. Earl and Mary provided their upper left bedroom to Deborah for her comfort during her final years. She died on April 29, 1827, as a result of long-term complications from her battle wounds.



Several years later, when she was unable to recover from the burden of her healthcare costs, Benjamin Gannett petitioned for continuation of his wife's pension benefits. Mr. Gannett was eventually awarded the widower's pension, the first to be approved, yet died before he began collecting the benefit. The funds were distributed to the couple's children.

Deborah is buried in Rock Ridge Cemetery in Sharon, Massachusetts. The grave marker is inscribed on both sides. The front: *"Deborah, wife of Benjamin Gannett, died April 29, 1827, aged 68*

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years” and the back: “*The Female Soldier Service 1781-1783.*” Facing her headstone is a large rock with a plaque placed by The Deborah Sampson Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



It seems that Deborah Sampson Gannett will not soon be forgotten. There are many memorials honoring her decisions and actions during the Revolutionary War, and more are added each year.

The Female Review: Memoirs of an American young lady; whose life and character are peculiarly distinguished- being a Continental Soldier, for nearly three years in the late American War, published in 1797 by Herman Mann, gave a “lengthy notice and bore testimony to the conduct and unblemished character of Deborah Sampson Gannett,” AKA Robert Shurtleff. Information provided in the *Review* was used to establish the eligibility of her direct descendants for admission to the Daughters and Sons of the American Revolution.

In 1889, George Washington Gay, grandson of Deborah Sampson Gannett, of Stoughton, Massachusetts willed: “*a sufficient sum to erect a monument in the Sharon cemetery to the memory of Deborah Sampson Gannett, for her services during the Revolutionary War, she having fought against the enemy in male attire.*”



In 1890, *The Woman's Tribune*, a newspaper dedicated to “*equality before the law,*” ran several articles chronicling the life of Deborah

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Sampson Gannett. She was recognized as an advocate and spokesperson for women's rights.

In 1891, *The Boston Evening Transcript* carried a question about a whip owned and carried by Deborah Sampson Gannett. It was described as a common riding whip, strong and heavily loaded at the butt. The writer said of Deborah: "*She served with credit for more than two years as a private in the War of the Revolution, under the name of Robert Shurtleff, and received a pension. She was at the capture of Cornwallis and was wounded at Tarrytown.*" The whip was later donated to a museum that was described as "*dedicated to the 'Daughters of the American Revolution.'*"

In World War II, a ten-ton liberty ship was named the *S.S. Deborah Sampson Gannett* and commissioned by her collateral descendent, Frank M. Gannett. Frank Gannett was Deborah's second great-grandnephew, and a newspaper mogul from New York, founder of the Gannett Company and *USA Today* newspaper.



In 1947, Deborah was honored with a flower. A beautiful pale pink, creamy throated gladiolus, grown by Wendall Wyman of Sharon, Massachusetts, was named for her by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.



Since 1971, Women's Equality Day has been celebrated on August 26 each year, recognizing the anniversary of the certification of the 19th Amendment of the United States Constitution that gave American women the right to vote. The **Deborah Sampson Act** was signed into law for years ago on January 5, 2021, ensuring that progress towards fair and equal treatment of women in the military will continue to be made in her name. The **Veteran's Administration** is required to act against sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, and sexual assault across their reach, assuring safety in their facilities for the fastest growing group in the Veteran population – women.

The town of Sharon, Massachusetts, honored Deborah with a street named for her, the **Deborah Sampson Statue** in front of the public

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library, the Deborah Sampson Field, and the Deborah Sampson House. On May 23, 1983, then-Governor Michael Dukakis signed a proclamation deeming Deborah Sampson Gannett the “*Official Heroine of the State of Massachusetts.*”

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) chapter is known as the Deborah Sampson Chapter. A plaque honoring Deborah’s military service was placed near her grave by the Chapter. The Chapter has also kept a record of the many memorials and honors bestowed on Deborah Sampson Gannett.



In the 2023 legislative session, over four hundred and seventy anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced, and at least forty of them targeted people who identified as *transgender*, most simply defined as “*identifying as a gender other than the one assigned at birth.*” Many of the bills impacted the types of care that young people could legally receive when dealing with their gender identity. Much misinformation and myth appeared to be the basis for these bills with little regard to the scientific evidence or the personal experiences of those living transgender or nonbinary lives.

As early as August 15, 1897, in an article included in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* titled “*A Brave Woman and A Good Soldier*” the matter of sexuality, although not a common newspaper topic at the time, was rather gently approached when the story of Deborah Sampson Gannett was revealed. The article stated Ms. Sampson displayed “*robust and masculine*” qualities, yet she was able to conceal her true identity for over two years. By definition, Deborah Sampson Gannett experienced a “*transient transgender episode*” in order to achieve her goal of fulfilling her patriotic duty. Deborah Sampson Gannett is still being honored to this day for the personal sacrifice she made in service to her country.

Molly Pitcher*

Heroic Women in the American Revolution

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Molly Pitcher is a name synonymous with heroic women volunteers in the American Revolution. In fact, there is no identified woman by that name; it is a name that brings to mind Mrs. Mary Ludwig Hays or Mrs. Margaret Cochran Corbin. There were many “*Molly Pitchers*” during the war, including the three whose stories follow. Most lithographs, drawings, and paintings were not specific to any particular one of these women; they are used interchangeably for several of them.

MARY LUDWIG HAYS

Maria Rachel Ludwig was born in Trenton, New Jersey, on October 13, 1754, to German immigrants Johaan George Ludwig and Anna Margretha *Wildt* Ludwig. The family was quite poor and at a young age *Mary*, as she came to be known, was sent to the home of Colonel William Irvine in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, as a servant. In 1869 she married William Hays, a local barber who in 1775 enlisted in the 4th Pennsylvania Artillery.



His unit was absorbed into the 4th Continental Artillery and spent the winter of 1777/78 at Valley Forge, after two major defeats in which the British occupied Philadelphia. General George Washington pulled back to Valley Forge for the winter to rebuild his battered army. During those harsh winter months, several of the Continental Army's soldiers' wives spent the cold months in the camp washing and mending uniforms and cooking meals for their husbands and his fellow soldiers.

On June 28, 1777, General Washington's 10,000-man Army attacked the 10,000-man rear guard of British General Sir's Henry Clinton's forces in central New Jersey in what became known as *The Battle of Monmouth Court House*. It was the largest battle of the American Revolution, costing the Continental Army 600 men killed, wounded, or missing in

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Women Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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action. The British suffered 300 men killed and 700 wounded; neither side could claim victory; it was at best a draw.

The fighting was close in and furious as the Continental Artillery rained shell after shell upon the British. It was an unusually hot early summer day; Hays and other wives began making repeated trips to a small spring to return with pitchers of water to quench the thirst of the busy artillerymen. As cannon barrels heat from the rapid fire, they carried more water to cool them. It was this action that gave the women, often unidentifiable to the men at the cannons, the name “*Molly Pitchers*.” While it was a general nickname that could be applied to several heroic women in that battle, one of them stood out – Mary Hays, making her the one woman most identifiable as *Molly Pitcher*.

At some point in the battle, William Hays, who was a loader on one of the cannons, suffered heat stroke and was rendered unconscious. Rather than see that critical gun silenced, Mary raced to the gun and having watched her husband do it before in training and several times that day, assumed his position. At the end of the day



General George Washington, who became aware of her actions, issued a warrant to award Mary a noncommissioned officer rank. Thereafter, throughout her whole life she identified herself as “*Sergeant Molly*.” Although there was no clear victory, General Washington expected the battle to resume the following morning; during the night the British retreated to Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

After independence was achieved in 1783, Mary and William returned to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where Mary became a “*Folk Hero*.” When William died in 1789, she married George McCauley, a friend of her husband who was a Revolutionary War veteran. Theirs’ was not a happy marriage, and George’s actions led to financial woes forcing Mary to sell 200 acres of land she assumed at the death of her first husband.

George disappeared sometime between 1807 and 1810. Mary continued to live in Carlisle as a general service, cleaning and painting houses, washing windows, and nursing the sick children of others. She was well liked in Carlisle, although most who knew her said she “*cursed like a soldier*.” In 1822 the Pennsylvania legislature awarded Mary a \$40 yearly pension in recognition of her Revolutionary War.

MOLLY PITCHER

In 1830 author Joseph Plumb Martin included the story of Mary Hays at Monmouth Courthouse. He was a veteran of the Connecticut Militia and Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War and published his memoir *Adventures and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*. The subtitle noted that it was *“Interspersed with Anecdotes and Incidents That Occurred Within His Own Observation.”* It contained important first-person accounts of the battles he was in and also shared the story of who was most likely Molly Hays. He wrote, *“A woman whose husband belonged to the artillery and who was then attached to a piece in the engagement, attended with her husband at the piece the whole time. While in the act of reaching a cartridge and having one of her feet as far before the other as she could step, a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying all the lower part of her petticoat. Looking at it with apparent unconcern, she observed that it was lucky it did not pass a little higher, for in that case it might have carried away something else and continued her occupation.”* Some historians believe that Martin may have been a little loose with his facts, but it remains an interesting insight into the battle and the courage of Mary and the other Colonial veterans’ wives.

Mary McCauley died in Carlisle on January 22, 1832, and was buried at Old Graveyard there. Although her headstone is simple and nondescript, the memorial there to *“Molly Pitcher”* is prominent in keeping her memory alive for future generations.



MARGARET CORBIN COCHRAN

Margaret Cochran was born in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on November 12, 1851, to Robert and Sara Jane Corbin. She grew up in poverty; her father died when their settlement was attacked in 1756. Her mother was kidnapped by the same Indians that killed her husband and was never seen again. Margaret’s uncle adopted and raised her.

In 1772 she married Virginia farmer John Corbin; daughter Abigail was born in 1776.



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When John enlisted in the 1st Pennsylvania Artillery of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, like the wives and families of many enlistees of the time, about her only option was to follow her husband during his military service. She and other such women and their children became known as “*Camp Followers*.” Life could be difficult, even dangerous, as they endured the same hardships as their soldier husbands. The wives and older daughters among these *Camp Followers* were paid a small wage to cook, mend, and launder for the soldiers. They were viewed by others in society as uncouth, often dirty, and prone to vulgarity – but camp life was the only option left to them.

In 1776 Corbin’s regiment was stationed at Fort Washington in Northern Manhattan, New York. In September the British captured New York City, and Fort Washington was isolated, the only Patriot-controlled position on the island. On November 16, 1776, British war ships sailed up the Hudson River to shell Fort Washington and unload Hessian mercenaries. While manning his gun, on he served as loader, John Corbin and most of his gun crew were killed in action.

Instead of retreating to safety, Margaret Cochran raced to the officer in charge and requested permission to man the gun herself and put it back in action. When the officer grudgingly gave permission she ran back to the gun and began loading it to defend the fort. It was said her aim was so good that it temporarily halted the advance of the Hessians.

She was hit three times by musket balls, one of which nearly severed her left arm. The grapeshot inflicted serious wounds to her jaw and chest. Her gun was said to have been the last firing artillery piece before the Hessians overran and captured Fort Washington. Some reports claim she was found by the British, still at her gun but in critical condition. While the doctors were able to save her life, she was left with a paralyzed left arm and multiple facial scars and was paroled along with other wounded prisoners.

Margaret Cochran’s injuries precluded her from finding any work to support herself, and she fell into poverty. The soldiers with whom she served at Fort Washington admired her for her courage and interceded on her behalf. After receiving a token \$30 by the Executive Council of Pennsylvania, on July 6, 1779, Congress awarded Cochran a lifelong pension “*in recognition of her service*.” Although it was half the monthly pay of a Continental Army soldier, she was the first woman in our country’s history to receive a military pension from Congress.

MOLLY PITCHER

Cochran's physical struggles because of her wounds were nearly debilitating. She found even simple tasks like dressing herself difficult. She remained on the military rolls until the end of the war. In 1781 she joined the Invalid Regiment at West Point, New York, where she helped care for other wounded soldiers. It was said that other women at West Point did not welcome her because she was difficult to get along with and tended to drink to excess. One commanding officer who respected her for what she did in battle noted that she was "*such an offensive person that people are unwilling to take her in charge.*"

Corbin died on January 16, 1800, at Highland Falls, New York. Initially she was buried in a pauper's grave without any military recognition. In 1926 the New York State Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) arranged for remains thought to be hers to be exhumed and reburied at West Point, where a memorial marker was placed to her memory in the U.S. Military Academy Post Cemetery. In 2017 an archaeological study identified those remains as an unknown male, not Corbin; she remains buried somewhere in an unmarked grave.

In 2021 the Manhattan Campus of the New York Harbor Health Care System was renamed the Margaret Cochran Corbin Campus. It was the first such facility in the United States to be named for a woman veteran.



ANNA MARIA LANE

It is believed that Anna Maria (even her surname or parentage is unknown), was born in New Hampshire in 1755. History first finds her in 1776, married to John Lane of Virginia, at the beginning of the American Revolution. She must have spent some time in Virginia, possibly even before her marriage, as she would later be identified as "*the only documented female Revolutionary War veteran in Virginia.*"



When John Lane joined the Continental Army, Anna followed him. However, unlike the other *Camp Followers*, she chose to take an active role in the war. Dressed in the uniform of a man, she fought beside her husband during campaigns in New York, New

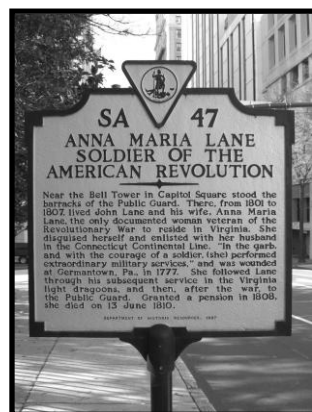
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Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. She particularly distinguished herself on October 3, 1777, during the *Battle of Germantown* near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she received combat wounds that left her lame for life. It is speculated that she may not have even sought medical treatment for her wounds. General Washington had recently issued orders restricting *Camp Followers* from accompanying men into the battlefield.

Despite her disability, Anna joined her husband when he enlisted in the Virginia Light Dragoons and was beside him during the Siege of Savannah in 1779, when he was wounded. They both continued to serve until 1781. After the war ended two years later, they settled in Virginia where John worked at the state arsenal at Point of Fork. When he joined the Public Guard the family, which now included three children, moved to Richmond to live in the barracks. Anna may have worked at the hospital and received a small stipend as a nurse.

In 1808 John was discharged for disability, at which time Virginia Governor William H. Cabell asked the General Assembly to provide pensions to disabled male soldiers, and also a few women. He specifically referenced Anna Maria Lane noting that she was *“very infirm, having been disabled by a severe wound which she received while fighting as a common soldier, in one of our Revolutionary battles, from which she never has recovered, and perhaps never will recover.”* Her subsequent \$100 a year pension noted that she had, *“performed extraordinary military services at the Battle of Germantown, in the garb, and with the courage of a soldier.”*

Anna Maria Lane died on June 13, 1810; there is no record of where she was buried. Her husband John died thirteen years later on July 14, 1823, and was buried at Shockoe Hill Cemetery in Richmond. The war service of Anna Maria Lane would probably have been lost to history, but for the editor of the Richmond Magazine, who discovered her pension records in the 1920s and published stories about her. Nearly 200 years after her death, in 1997 the Virginia Sons of the American Revolution sponsored a marker at the corner of 9th and Back Street in Richmond, near the Bell Tower in Capitol Square.



William Harvey Carney

“OUR FLAG NEVER TOUCHED THE GROUND”

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

The 1989 Oscar-winning movie “*Glory*” is an epic production based on the true exploits of Black American soldiers during the Civil War. One of the most gripping portions of the movie is the assault on Fort Wagner, in South Carolina. Just two weeks after General Grant’s victory at Vicksburg, a large Union force gathered outside the walled Confederate fort on the beach at Fort Wagner, an obstacle considered essential to Grant’s plan to capture Charleston. Off the beach in the bay, six ironclad Union ships began the preparatory bombardment. Lying on the sandy beach within 1,000 yards of the fort were members of the Union infantry, including the 600 men of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. Behind them was the 6th Connecticut, but on this day it would be the Black soldiers of the 54th who would lead the assault.

While the movie is based on fact, depicting real battles, other than Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, played by Matthew Broderic, most of the Black soldiers portrayed are fictional, some loosely based on actual soldiers. The main Black character played by Denzel Washington, is a fictional character identified simply as Private Trip. Notably missing, however, is the one real person who became a legendary hero in the *Battle of Fort Wagner*.



The Civil War was almost two years old when President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. With that historic step, for the first time, Black American’s were encouraged to enlist in the Union Army. Among the enlistees was a young man named William Harvey Carney. He was born on February 29, 1840, in Norfolk, Virginia, the son of slaves William Carney, Sr. and Frances Ann Dean Carney.

How young William achieved his freedom is unknown, it is generally believed his father escaped to Massachusetts, and then made arrangements for his wife, son, and daughters Sare and Mary Ann to join

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him there. It is commonly believed young William made his way north through the *Underground Railroad*. By 1850 when William was ten years old the family was reunited in Bedford, Massachusetts, where they made their home.

At a time when educational opportunities were limited, even banned by some restrictive laws, young William was able to attend secret schools where he was eager to learn. In an 1863 letter Carney wrote, *"I had a strong inclination to prepare myself for the ministry; but when the country called for all persons, I could best serve my God by serving my country and my oppressed brothers. The sequel is short – I enlisted for the war."*

When volunteers were requested to man the Union Army in 1862, following President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, 23-year-old Carney temporarily set aside his plans to enter the ministry and enlisted. He became a member of, and trained with, the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry's Company C. Most of the soldiers in the unit were conscientious and focused on the task at hand. It is to the credit of Colonel Shaw that he eagerly accepted command of the first Black Union Army regiment; among the White Union soldiers there remained concerns about the combat prowess of their Black comrades. Despite Lincoln's Proclamation and widening acceptance of these *"soldiers of color,"* some prejudices and preconceived notions still prevailed, even in the North. Their service would erase all doubts. Union Brigadier General Ullmann who was sent to recruit Black volunteers later said of the men in the all-Black units, *"They are far more earnest than we. They know the deep stake they have in the issue."*

The assault on Fort Wagner was the first real test of these young Black, Union soldiers--every one of whom was a volunteer. Though the 54th Massachusetts was Federalized, it was an entirely separate regiment. So it was that the brave but un-battle-tested young men of the 54th found themselves lying in the sand, waiting for the order to lead the advance on Fort Wagner. Among those brave soldiers was 23-year old Sergeant William Carney.

In the late afternoon of July 18, 1863, under the cover of naval bombardment off the shoreline, the 54th Massachusetts led the movement to the fort, halting out of range for the bombardment to end and darkness to begin falling. When the order came, Colonel Shaw led his men forward shouting *"Forward, Fifty-Fourth, Forward."* The

William Harvey Carney

naval bombardment failed to inflict much damage on the fort, and the Confederates were ready, pouring a devastating barrage of cannon and rifle fire on the attacking Union Army.

Under the galling fire, the 54th pressed on, climbing a muddy hill and now in full view of the fort, charging forward. Ahead of the men of the 54th Massachusetts, Sergeant John Wall advanced next to his commander, carrying the Regimental Colors -- the red, white, and blue of the flag of the United States of America.

Sergeant Wall's was a critical job, perhaps second only to that of the regimental commander. During the Civil War, of 1,525 Medals of Honor awarded, more than a third were for either saving the Regimental Colors, or capturing the flag of a Confederate Regiment. By today's tactical standards it may seem rather petty, but during the Civil War there were no radios for commanders to direct their regiment's movement. Instead, it was the Regimental Colors that became the means of communications, advancing at the front encouraging those that followed to "*rally 'round the flag.*" If the Regimental Colors fell, confusion ensued and attacks faltered. The man who bravely remained ahead of the troops holding the flag aloft, was the catalyst to victory. Conversely, to capture the flag of a Confederate Regiment was tantamount to single-handedly dispersing the enemy and blunting their advance.



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When the Regiment was halted, Colonel Shaw mounted a parapet urging his men forward, when he was hit at least three times and instantly killed. Next to him Sergeant Wall was also hit and stumbled to the ground. Sergeant Carney raced to Wall's side, grasping the staff of the flag, even as a bullet struck him in the leg. Despite the pain and hail of gunfire that was dropping his comrades all around him, pressing one hand against the wound in his leg to stem the flow of blood, he hoisted the colors high in the air and continued to lead the advance.

Somehow Sergeant Carney gained the entrance to the fort and proudly planted his flag . . . but he was alone. The battle raged until about 10 p.m. by which time most Union Soldiers of all advancing regiments who were not killed, fell back to the protection of the sand dunes in the distance. Meanwhile one solitary figure and his flag pressed against the wall of the fort for half an hour. When stragglers making an attack to the right of the fort's entrance drew the enemy's attention away from him, Carney noticed a group of soldiers advancing towards him and, mistaking them for friendly troops, hoisted his flag high. Again, gunfire split the air as Carney realized all too late that they were Confederate soldiers.

In that moment of danger Carney remembered the flag that represented all he held dear and was fighting to protect that day. Rather than dropping the flag and fleeing for his life, he wrapped the flag around the staff to protect it and ran down an embankment. Stumbling through a ditch, chest-deep in water, he held his flag high. Another bullet struck him in the chest, another in the right arm, then another in his right leg. Still, Carney struggled forward, alone, determined not to let his flag fall to the enemy.

From the safety of the distant sand dunes to which they had retreated, in the dim light of continuing cannon fire, what remained of the valiant warriors of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry watched the brave Sergeant struggle towards safety. A retreating member of the 100th New York infantry passed Carney in his own desperate flight to the rear and, seeing the severity of his wounds said, *"Let me carry that flag for you."* With indomitable courage Sergeant Carney replied, *"No one but a member of the 54th should carry the colors."* Despite the sounds of rifle and cannon fire that followed him, striking the sand all around him, Carney struggled on. Another enemy bullet found its mark, grazing his head, but Carney wouldn't quit.

William Harvey Carney

Amid the cheers of his battered comrades Sergeant Carney finally reached safety. Before collapsing among them from his many wounds, his only words as he handed the flag off to a comrade were, *"Boys, I only did my duty. The flag never touched the ground."*

The next day Confederate General Johnson Hagood sent his victorious soldiers out to collect the bodies of the dead Union officers, which was according to custom. The enlisted dead were buried in mass graves. In a show of contempt for the Union officer who led an all-Black regiment, Hagood ordered Shaw buried in a mass grave with his enlisted men.

What General Hagood attempted to do, failed. In a letter to the regimental surgeon, Lincoln Stone, Frank Stone, the dead officer's father wrote: *"We would not have his body removed from where it lies surrounded by his brave and devoted soldiers. We can imagine no holier place than that in which he lies, among his brave and devoted followers, nor wish for him better company – what a body-guard he has!"* After the war those bodies were disinterred and reburied at Beaufort National Cemetery in Beaufort South Carolina, their headstones marked *"Unknown."*

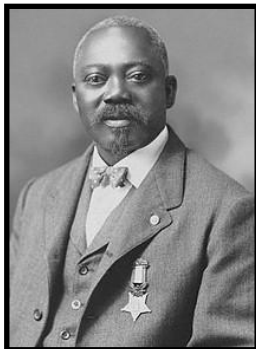
Several months after the battle for Fort Wagner, Sergeant William Carney, propped up on a cane from the injuries to his right leg, posed for a picture holding the flag he had risked so much for that day. The following year he was discharged from the army for the disabilities of his wounds.

Although William Carney was the first Black American of twenty-five to earn the Medal of Honor in the Civil War, he was not the first to receive it. He returned home, just one more wounded combat veteran. He married Miss Susanna Williams, and they had one daughter, Clara Heronia.



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Carney never realized his dream of becoming a minister. Moving back to New Bedford, he worked for several years as a mail carrier. After that he worked as a messenger in the Massachusetts State House. For forty-three years he was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic, Post #1, and was active in Black veterans' organizations. At one memorial event in 1889, he was the featured singer of the *Star Spangled Banner*. On May 23, 1900, William Carney was finally awarded the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant William Harvey Carney, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 18 July 1863, while serving with Company C, 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry, in action at Fort Wagner, South Carolina. When the color sergeant was shot down, Sergeant Carney grasped the flag, led the way to the parapet, and planted the colors thereon. When the troops fell back he brought off the flag, under a fierce fire in which he was twice severely wounded.

William Harvey Carney died at his home in New Bedford on December 9, 1908, and is buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery there. His final resting place bears a distinctive stone, one claimed by less than 3,538 Americans. Engraved on the white marble is a gold image of the Medal of Honor, a tribute to a courageous soldier and the flag he loved so dearly.



Dr. Mary Edwards Walker*

A WOMAN AHEAD OF HER TIME

BY DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker has a distinction unique in American military history. She is the only woman to be awarded the Medal of Honor; a high point in a life that ran the gamut from great achievement to great injustice.

While many extraordinary women made their mark in nineteenth century America, none garnered more attention or inspired more controversy during their lifetime than the maverick Dr. Mary Edwards Walker. Her rise to the pedestal of international fame and fall into the wilderness of historical footnote was epic. She was the second woman to earn a physician's degree in America and a social activist for women's rights and issues that went far beyond suffrage. She was also a temperance advocate, an abolitionist, bestselling author, lecturer, spy, prisoner of war, and, as if that weren't enough, a veterans' advocate as well.

Though all of that contributed to her worldwide fame, it was not so much *what* she did that set her apart from other similarly driven women, it was her status as a fashion pariah that literally made her stand out from her sister suffragettes. Dr. Walker openly defied the feminine fashion custom of the day of wearing corsets and hoop skirts. Her reason was one of health. Dr. Walker wore pants. While such a fashion statement now is considered acceptable, back then a woman could—and



* Reprinted from: True Stories of Civilian Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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did—go to jail for wearing “*mannish attire*” as it was then called. She stated that corsets and tight skirts were unhealthy (which they were) and that they restricted movement (which they did). Dr. Walker wasn’t the only woman to advocate such, but she was the most famous, even more famous than Amelia Bloomer who designed the less restrictive style known as reform dress, also called “*Bloomers*.” Throughout her life Dr. Walker would be mocked, arrested, and jailed for wearing pants.

Mary Walker was born on November 26, 1832, in Oswego, New York, the youngest of seven children. Her farmer parents were progressive to the point of revolutionary when it came to the raising of their six daughters and one son. Ignoring the gender norms of the day, they encouraged their daughters to fend for themselves, instilled in them a sense of justice that charged them to be forthright in speaking out, and exercise other traits and behaviors then attributed to men.

When Mary enrolled in Syracuse Medical School in 1853, she found herself confronting a gender-centric prejudice that would dog her medical career: an attitude held by the majority of both men and women of the time who believed that while it was acceptable for a woman to be a nurse, being a doctor was, well, weird, unbecoming, and, most importantly, beyond the intellectual capability of women. Upon graduation in 1855, she divided her time between her medical practice and her women’s rights activism, lecturing and writing for dress reform, suffrage, and other social issues.

By the time the Civil War erupted in 1861, Walker was already a rising star on the national scene regarding women’s issues, but it was in the Civil War that her fame would skyrocket. In journalism parlance, she was “*good copy*.” Early on she learned how to cultivate reporters and maintained a lifelong relationship with the press.

In addition to making powerful and influential friends, she accumulated a number of equally powerful enemies. In the suffragette movement the two most important were Susan B. Anthony and Elisabeth Cady Stanton. The two were rivals and didn’t like each other. Though today thought of as united, the suffragette movement actually was rife with rivalries, factions, and differing—even conflicting—agendas.

Even so, these two buried their hatchet in common cause against Dr. Walker. So great became their jealousy and hatred of her (after all, she was something they weren’t: an independent career woman, a Civil

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

War hero, and most galling of all, she violated their sense of fashion propriety) that they went so far as to call for her arrest while she was on stage speaking during a women's rights convention. More successfully, they literally wrote Dr. Walker out of the multi-volume post-war official history of the suffragette movement even though she was one of its most influential advocates. Dr. Walker's other important adversary was the War Department.

Her battle against the War Department began at the Civil War's outbreak. Dr. Walker was among the many physicians who offered their services to the War Department. But even though the need was acute, she was turned down flat. The reason: she was female and told it was illegal for a woman to be an army officer (doctors were given officer's commissions). But if she wanted to serve, the War Department was willing to accept her as a volunteer nurse.

Dr. Walker dug in her heels. She was a doctor, and she would serve as a doctor, dammit. Thus began a years-long battle between her and the War Department bureaucracy over various issues, the most contentious being her desire to serve as a doctor and concomitant request for an officer's commission. Resolution of the officer's commission sticking point would make history.

In between waging her bureaucratic battle, from 1861 to 1863, she successfully worked as a volunteer physician for the Army, going back and forth from Washington Hospital to Virginia battlefields treating the wounded and overseeing their transport to Washington, D.C. She also acted as concierge, scribe, lawyer, and War Department red tape cutter for soldiers and their families convalescing and living in Washington, all the while keeping up the pressure to formally serve.

In September 1863, she went west to assist in caring for the wounded from the *Battle of Chickamauga* and the *Battle of Chattanooga*. Her medical and organizational skills so impressed Army of the Cumberland commander General George Thomas that he signed orders authorizing her appointment as a "*contract civilian physician*" with the equivalent rank of lieutenant. In addition to her medical work for Thomas's Army, she also served as a spy, going behind enemy lines in North Georgia to gather intelligence.

On April 10, 1864, she was captured and made a prisoner of war at Castle Thunder Prison in Richmond, Virginia, where she became the bane of her jailers. She was released as part of a prisoner exchange on

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August 12, 1864, and it became a point of pride for her that she was exchanged for a Confederate surgeon with the rank of major. The official notation on the Confederate POW list described her as “*The notorious Miss Dr. Mary E. Walker, Surgeoness of the 52nd Ohio Regulars.*”

It was not the first, nor would it be the last time she was called “*notorious.*” News of her freedom was reported nationwide, and she met President Abraham Lincoln who asked about her treatment while a prisoner.



Castle Thunder prison in Richmond, Virginia, was a converted tobacco warehouse used to hold political prisoners. Though not as notorious as Andersonville, the Confederate prisoner of war camp in Georgia, it, too, had an unsavory reputation, with its guards noted for their brutality. Library of Congress

After a brief period in recovery, she returned to treat soldiers wounded in the *Battle of Atlanta*, was later a supervisor of a prison in Louisville, Kentucky, and after that director of a refugee house in Clarksville, Tennessee. She was mustered out of the service on June 15, 1865.

She resumed her medical practice in Washington, D.C., once again became active in the women’s rights movement (she was always more than just a suffragette), and petitioned President Andrew Johnson to recognize her wartime service retroactively with an officer’s commission.

The issue of granting the officer’s commission request quickly became an embarrassing political football for the administration. By now Dr. Walker was too famous and had too many powerful allies and

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

advocates to be further stonewalled. Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt was assigned Dr. Walker's case and in October 1865 he sent a twelve-page epic of legalistic hemming and hawing to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton which concluded by saying that granting her an army commission would set "*an inconvenient precedent.*"

But, well aware of the political stakes involved, he gave Stanton an out, adding "*her sacrifices, her fearless energy under circumstances of peril, her endurance of hardship and imprisonment at the hands of the enemy and especially her active patriotism and eminent loyalty . . . may well be regarded as an almost isolated one in the history of the rebellion; and to signalize and perpetrate it as such would seem to be desirable.*"

So, it was decided. Instead of an army commission, President Andrew Johnson would award her the Medal of Honor. The unintended consequence of this "*consolation prize*" was that it made history.

On November 11, 1865, President Johnson signed the citation and on January 24, 1866, Dr. Mary Walker received the decoration, becoming the first woman to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Immensely proud of the decoration, she would wear it every day for the rest of her life. Unfortunately, the story didn't end there.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Assistant Surgeon-Civilian Mary Edwards Walker, United States Civilian, for extraordinary heroism as a Contract Surgeon to the Union Forces. Whereas it appears from official reports that Dr. Mary E. Walker, a graduate of medicine, "has rendered valuable service to the Government, and her efforts have been earnest and untiring in a variety of ways," and that she was assigned to duty and served as an assistant surgeon in charge of female prisoners at Louisville, Kentucky, upon the recommendation of Major Generals Sherman and Thomas, and faithfully served as contract surgeon in the service of the United States, and has devoted herself with much patriotic zeal to the sick

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and wounded soldiers, both in the field and hospitals, to the detriment of her own health, and has also endured hardships as a prisoner of war four months in a Southern prison while acting as contract surgeon; and Whereas by reason of her not being a commissioned officer in the military service, a brevet or honorary rank cannot, under existing laws, be conferred upon her; and Whereas in the opinion of the President an honorable recognition of her services and sufferings should be made: It is ordered, That a testimonial thereof shall be hereby made and given to the said Dr. Mary E. Walker, and that the usual medal of honor for meritorious services be given her.

Given under my hand in the city of Washington, D.C., this 11th day of November, A.D. 1865.

/s/ Andrew Johnson, President.

In the Purge of 1917, the U.S. Army's review of Medal of Honor recipients, Dr. Walker's Medal of Honor was one of 911 Army Medals of Honor deemed inappropriately awarded. In her case it was because she was a "*civilian contract surgeon*" and not a soldier (as per the terms of the new criteria). Along with the names of 910 other individuals her name was revoked from the Medal of Honor Roll.

Ordered to return her medal, she refused and defiantly continued to wear it, daring those in power to take it from her. None tried.

But that was not the only late in life indignity she suffered. When she died on February 21, 1919, at age eighty-six, she had also become marginalized as an embarrassing anachronism to the movement she dedicated most of her life to; a sad conclusion for one who fought the good fight for women's rights. One year later, on August 26, 1920,



Dr. Mary Walker circa 1912. At the turn of the twentieth century, Dr. Walker found herself sidelined by the movement she spent most of her life advocating.

Library of Congress

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote was certified.

Sixty years later, upon the urging of one of Dr. Walker's descendants and after a review and recommendation by the Army Board of Correction of Military Records, on June 19, 1977, Army Secretary Clifford Alexander righted six decades of wrong and restored her decoration.

To date Dr. Mary Edwards Walker remains the only woman to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

Milton M. Holland



Air Force veteran and portrait artist from McKinney, Texas, and founder of the North Texas Fallen Warrior project, Colin Kimball specializes in portraying our nation's fallen warriors. This portrait is part of a compilation of portraits he is working on to tell the stories of our nation's posthumous and belatedly recognized Medal of Honor recipients who never got to wear the medal, as well as other military heroes.

Milton M. Holland

THE FIRST TEXAN TO EARN THE MEDAL OF HONOR

BY: COLIN E. KIMBALL

Born on August 1, 1844, in Panola County, Texas, Milton Murray Holland was the child of a slave named Matilda and a White father, Bird Holland, a prominent Texan at the time. Matilda was owned by Bird Holland's brother, Samuel Holland, who came to Texas from Mississippi as part of the "*Planter Class*" of early settlers to Texas, bringing with him a group of slaves and settling in east Texas near the present-day town of Carthage. The *Planter Class* of the Texas society owned large plantations and relied on slave labor to produce crops for the agrarian economy of the era. They dominated Texas politics and advocated for Texas to secede from the Union in 1861.

Bird Holland fathered seven children with Matilda. He held some prominence within the state by serving in the Legislature and becoming the Secretary of State of the Confederate State of Texas in 1861. During the late 1850s, while Milton entered his teenage years, Bird emancipated Milton and two brothers, William and James, by purchasing them from his brother Samuel. Emancipated slaves were forbidden to reside in the state. Holland sent Milton and his two brothers to the **Albany Manual Labor Academy** in Athens, Ohio, where young Milton was given a first-class education while training to become a shoemaker. The self-proclaimed educational philosophy of the Academy was: "*By combining manual labor with study, we intend to rebuke the withering spirit of caste, and as far as our influence extends, make all forms of useful industry respectable, and furnish the community with practical men and women instead of mere theorists.*"

The students received a solid education in the standard academic subjects and contributed labor to the 600 acre campus. Tuition ranged upwards of \$4.50 per term, and room and board cost \$4.00 per week. It's hard to imagine that for what we now budget for a cup of gourmet coffee, Milton and his brothers received a first-rate education.

In February 1861 the State of Texas, through both legislative action and statewide election, voted to secede from the Union. Bird Holland assumed the role of Secretary of State for Texas and certified the results of the Secession Vote after his predecessor, E. W. Cave, who opposed

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Secession, stepped down in protest. Holland served as Secretary of State until November, when he stepped down to serve as Adjutant for the 22d Infantry Regiment of the State Militia.

In April 1861, secessionist forces from South Carolina, a state that seceded the prior year in December, attacked Union troops at Fort Sumter, forcing the Union Troops to surrender. This opening engagement led to a war between the states of the United States of America, a Civil War, stemming from the core issue of slavery.

In April 1861, Milton Holland, a 16-year-old freed slave, wanted to answer his nation's call to duty. He was denied enlistment due to his age. Denied his first attempt at enlistment, he helped organize a local militia in Athens in May called the *Attucks Guards*, named after Crispus Attucks, a sailor of African descent who was reported to be the first person killed in the *Boston Massacre* at the start of the American Revolution. He also left his academic pursuits behind and became a shoemaker in the Quartermaster Corps of the U.S. Army and worked as aide-de-camp for Colonel Nelson H. Van Vorhes, who served with several Ohio Infantry Regiments.

Throughout 1862 the Governor of Ohio, David Tod, denied Americans of African descent the opportunity to enlist in the Army. His rationale was, *"This is a White man's government: that White men are able to defend and protect, and to enlist a negro soldier would drive every White man out of service."* On one hand, men from Ohio were called to serve their nation to liberate enslaved people of African heritage, and on the other hand, they were unwilling to serve alongside those fortunate enough, like Holland, who had gained their freedom. The Governor's attitude changed, however, and by 1863 he authorized the formation of the 127th Ohio Regiment that would later become the 5th U. S. Colored Troop Regiment. Milton's brother, William, also served the Union as part of the 16th U. S. Colored Troop Regiment.

Enlistment records indicate that Milton M. Holland enlisted in Company C of the 5th U. S. Colored Troop Regiment on June 22, 1863, at the fairgrounds in Athens, Ohio. It was also noted that Holland was very influential in recruiting other men to join this unit.

A local attorney, educator, abolitionist, and future congressman from Virginia, John Mercer Langston, met Milton Holland while he was still in school and said of him: *"He was a young colored Texan sent North and located as a student, at that time in Albany . . . He was by nature a*

Milton M. Holland

soldier. He smelt battle from afar, and was ready at the shortest warning to engage in deadly conflict. At the time, he was really a lad of about nineteen years of age, with all the fire of such youthful, daring nature as he possessed in blood and by inheritance. He was a young person of remarkable native intelligence, good name, bearing himself constantly, even among his men, so as to win the largest respect and confidence. The promise of manly life and endeavor were apparent in his case on the most casual observation and contact."

It did not take long for Holland to take the fight to the Confederate troops. By September, he earned the rank of first sergeant, a rare feat and testament to his leadership ability at the age of 19. By the winter of 1863, his regiment was in the *Dismal Swamp* in North Carolina, fighting rebel soldiers whom he referred to as "Guerrillas." He took the time to write the local newspaper in Athens, Ohio, *The Messenger*, stating: "*I must say of the 5th, that after twenty days of hard scouting, without overcoats or blankets, they returned home to camp, which the soldiers term their home, making twenty-five and thirty miles per day. Several of the White cavalry told me that no soldiers have ever done as hard marching through swamps and marched as cheerfully as we did, and that if they had to follow us for any length of time, it would kill their horses. During that raid, thousands of slaves belonging to rebel masters were liberated.*"

Interestingly, *The Messenger* was edited by Nelson Van Vorhes, for whom Holland had served as an aide-de-camp before he enlisted in the Army. Further, in his letter, Holland's superior education at Albany Academy was on display with his writing acumen. He continued, "*The boys are generally well, and satisfied that though they are deprived of all the comforts of home, and laboring under great disadvantages as regards pay and having families to support upon less wages than White soldiers, still trust that when they do return they will be crowned with honors, and a happier home prepared for them, when they will be free from the abuses of northern and southern fire-eaters. Though we should fall struggling in our blood for right and justice, for the freedom of our brothers in bondage, or fall in defense of our national color, the Stars and Stripes, our home and fireside will ever be protected by our old friend Gov. Tod, by the loyalty of Abraham Lincoln, our Moses, and the all-wise God that created us. Friends at home be cheerful, cast aside all mercenary compensation. Spring forth to the call and show to*

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the world that you are men. You have thus far shown, and still continue to show yourselves, worthy of freedom, and you will win the respect of the whole nation."

Holland penned this letter on January 19, 1864. His elegant, scholarly language spoke not only to the challenge of fighting an armed foe and dealing with harsh, primitive conditions, but also to fighting societal prejudices that prevailed in both the North and the South. Despite the harsh attitude that Governor Tod initially proclaimed, Holland was forgiving and politically astute. One thing is certain, his words clearly defined the nature of this terrible war and what animated him and many others in the north to take arms against their fellow countrymen.

Meanwhile, Milton's father, Bird Holland, was serving in the 22nd Texas Infantry, and in the spring of 1864 was called to serve in the *Red River Campaign*. The *Red River Campaign* was carried out by Union forces commanded by Major General Nathaniel Banks, intended to disrupt Confederate supply lines in North Louisiana and South Arkansas, and seize Louisiana's Confederate capital of Shreveport. A series of Battles took place between Alexandria, Louisiana, and Mansfield, Louisiana, less than 40 miles south of Shreveport. Union scouts travelled up the Red River and saw massive earthworks and fortifications on the bluffs of the Red River at what was then called Fort Turnbill in Shreveport. The fortifications contained an abundance of what appeared to be cannon emplacements.

They did not realize that the Confederate forces were depleted in armaments, and what were thought to be cannons were a ruse, and the Union scouts retreated. What they saw were, in fact, pine trees that were charred black and mounted on wheels to resemble cannons. It was an elaborate deception that worked.

The Union forces did not have sufficient armament to assault these fortifications, phony as they were, and instead focused on fighting Confederate troops far to the south in Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, a small community further to the south of Mansfield. Bird Holland, serving as a captain, was killed in action in the *Battle of Pleasant Hill* on April 9, 1864. Ironically, this area of Louisiana is relatively close to Carthage, Texas, by about 50 miles, where his son Milton was born and raised as a slave on the Holland Plantation. This was a major, short-lived victory for the Confederates. Fort Turnbill remains, and its name was changed to Fort Humbug to commemorate its stealthy deception. Fort Humbug, on

Milton M. Holland

the bluffs that overlook the Red River in Shreveport, currently serves as the home to the Veterans Administration Hospital, and as a post for the Louisiana National Guard.

By June 1864, as courageous as they were, the Colored Troop Regiments, as they were known, were not favored by the Union Army leadership. Many commanders, at best, overlooked their value; at worst, they refused to utilize them. One commander, General William F. Smith, initially refused to use the Colored Troops in the initial assault on Petersburg, Virginia. Under orders of the corps commander, Major General Benjamin Butler, he was ordered to charge the breastworks of the Confederate defenses on June 15. After this successful engagement Smith remarked that he “*would lead men like those into any battle.*”

As the siege of Petersburg commenced, Holland was witness to one of the worst debacles that the Union Army perpetrated in what is known as the *Battle of the Crater*. For several months, Union Troops, using experienced mine engineers from the Pennsylvania coal mines, began tunnelling under the Confederate lines and created a 500-foot-long “T” shaped tunnel under a Confederate fortress known as “*Elliott’s Salient.*” After its construction, they filled the tunnel under the fort with 8,000 pounds of gunpowder.

Holland’s Regiment was tasked with charging the gap created by the explosion, to break through the Confederate lines. In the early morning hours of July 30, the gunpowder charges were detonated, creating a massive 30-foot deep crater that was 170 feet long and 120 feet wide. Over 200 Confederates were killed outright.

Colored Troop Regiments were tasked with charging through the Confederate lines in a spearhead attack. Instead of circumventing the crater, as they were trained, these troops, thinking the crater would serve as a massive rifle pit, entered the crater not realizing its great depth. They became trapped, and when the Confederates rallied, they were slaughtered in what was called a “*Turkey Shoot.*” Over 500 of the Colored Union Troops were killed, and 1,400 were missing or captured. It was a devastating defeat for the Union. Many of those who survived were summarily executed by the savage Confederate soldiers. The normal ratio of wounded to killed in action for Union troops during the war was 4.8:1, that is, 4.8 soldiers wounded to every soldier killed. In the *Battle of the Crater*, the ratio was 1.8 to 1.

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Fortunately for Holland, his Regiment, while in reserve for this engagement, did not receive the call to charge after the massive explosion. In a letter written by Holland to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph P. Mitchel regarding being denied the opportunity to charge the Confederate lines after the huge explosion, he wrote that the Union forces *“lost a key that otherwise would have been gained.”* Holland further articulated he had *“planned and decided to cover himself in glory,”* further stating he was *“sorely disappointed, but never relinquished the desire and intention to avail himself at the first opportunity.”* Clearly, Milton Holland’s own words convey the depth of his dedication in that he was willing to sacrifice his own life, should it be necessary, to achieve victory in this terrible war, which in this case was between him and his own father.

By September, Holland was serving as a regimental sergeant major, the highest rank he could attain due to his heritage. He was 20 years old. His regiment, under the command of Major General Benjamin Butler, was part of what was known as the **Army of the James**, and continued to press their attack on the Confederate forces around Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia. On September 29, Holland’s regiment engaged the Confederate forces in the area of Chaffin’s Farm in what became known as the *Battle of New Market Heights*. The battle was fierce, and all the White officers who led the troops of the 5th U. S Colored Troop Regiment were killed or wounded and taken out of action.

To compound matters, there was an all-White Union regiment that became trapped behind enemy lines. During this engagement, Holland took command of his troops, rallied them, then charged and defeated the Confederate defenders. Further, the Regiment successfully liberated the Union soldiers of the White regiment who had been temporarily trapped. Milton Holland remained true to his desire to *“avail himself,”* and was personally recognized along with First Sergeants James Bronson, Robert Pinn, and Powhatan Beaty by General Butler, who, in a letter dated October 11, 1864, wrote: *“Milton M. Holland, sergeant-major, Fifth U.S. Colored Troops, commanding Company C; James H. Bronson, first sergeant, commanding Company D; Robert Pinn, first sergeant, commanding Company I, wounded; Powhatan Beatty, first sergeant, commanding Company G, Fifth U.S. Colored Troops--all these gallant colored soldiers were left in command, all their company officers being killed or wounded, and led them gallantly and meritoriously through the day. For these services they have most honorable mention, and the*

Milton M. Holland

commanding general will cause a special medal to be struck in honor of these gallant-colored soldiers."

General Butler commissioned creation of a medal of Tiffany silver known as the "*Butler Medal*," and personally issued it to Holland and those mentioned in his letter, along with James Daniel Gardener and Edward Ratcliff. It was a rare and unprecedented occurrence, never again repeated in the United States Army.



At the same time, General Butler also ordered that Holland be awarded a battlefield promotion to the rank of captain. This order was rescinded by the War Department due to Holland's African ancestry. Governor Tod of Ohio then intervened. Tod proposed that Holland could go in front of a board and claim to be a White man, receive the promotion to captain, and then be reassigned to another unit. Holland's "*yellow complexion*" identified on his Draft Registration, could have enabled this stunt to succeed; however, Holland's honorable and noble nature would not allow him to participate in such a ruse. He refused to deny his racial identity for the sake of a commission in the Union Army.



Holland continued to serve with his regiment and participated in a daring three-week raid in the cold of December to liberate slaves in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. He and two other regiments of Colored Troops were led by Brigadier General Edward A. Wild, a homeopathic doctor and staunch abolitionist, in what was known as "*The Wilds Raid*." Despite losing his left arm in a previous battle early in the war, Wild led the Colored Troops in *The Dismal Swamp*, which contained pockets of freed slaves along with a high population of those who were enslaved. This was an especially hazardous task for Holland, as well as all the soldiers of African heritage, as they risked death by execution from the Confederate guerrillas that resented the Colored Troops in the worst way. One soldier, Samuel Jordan, who served in Company D of Holland's Regiment, was captured by Confederate guerrillas and executed. By Christmas Eve, Wild's raiding forces liberated 2,500 formerly enslaved people, and it took 73 horse teams to transport them to Roanoke Island,

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where they were liberated. While on the island, some were recruited to join the Union cause. Holland was relentless in his pursuit of liberating his fellow brothers and sisters who suffered in the bondage of slavery.

Major General Butler recommended Holland for the Medal of Honor in October 1864, and on the 6th of April 1865, Sergeant Major Milton Holland was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Battle at Chaffins farm during the *Battle of New Market Heights*.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Major Milton Murray Holland, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 29 September 1864, while serving with 5th U.S. Colored Infantry, in action at Chapin's Farm, Virginia. Sergeant Major Holland took command of Company C, after all the officers had been killed or wounded, and gallantly led it.

Three days later, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia. It was a war that ended the abhorrent practice of slavery in the United States. It was also a war in which Milton Holland lost his father, who, on one hand, loved his sons and liberated them from slavery, but then fought for the ideals that promoted it.

Milton Holland mustered out of the Union Army in September 1865 at the rank of sergeant major, the highest rank that could be attained by a person of African descent. He returned home to his adopted state of Ohio and, within a month, married Miss Virginia Dickey and resumed his job as a shoemaker in Albany.

Holland's service to his nation did not end with his enlistment in the Union Army. In 1870 Holland took a position within the Treasury Department after receiving recommendations from John Mercer Langston, Major General Benjamin Butler, and future President of the United States Rutherford Hayes. As he began his career with the Treasury

Milton M. Holland

Department, he attended Howard University and earned a law degree in 1872. He was one of 17 graduates and the only Texan. He continued to work for the Treasury Department and became one of the first Americans of African descent to be admitted to the Bar of the United States Supreme Court. Remaining with the Treasury Department, he ascended to Chief of the Division of the Auditors Department and oversaw the accounts of the War Department and West Point Military Academy.

After 17 years of his association with the Treasury Department, Holland left in 1887 and became involved in banking, real estate, and insurance. He served two institutions owned by Americans of African descent, becoming president of the Capital Savings Bank and general manager of Industrial Building and Savings Company. In the 1890's he stepped down from Capital Savings Bank, and founded Alpha Insurance Company, one of the first insurance companies that catered to the community of Freedmen.



Holland also became active in the Republican Party. His brother William, also a veteran of the Civil War, returned home to Texas after the War and was elected to the State Legislature representing Waller County in south Texas. William helped sponsor legislation that led to the creation of Prairie View College, a historically Black university and the Texas Blind, Deaf and Orphan School in Austin. Milton, himself, never ran for political office, but he remained an influential figure in Republican circles in Washington DC. He was a contemporary of Frederick Douglass, with whom he often shared the stage at conventions and parades.

Something changed for Holland in 1891 as he stepped out of public life and filed a request for a pension as an invalid based on his military service. He was briefly recommended to President William McKinley to be appointed as a brigadier general in the U.S. Army by the Virginia Republican League. That appointment was never made, perhaps due to his declining health. Alpha Insurance Company, although successful, went out of business due to demands for higher wages. To avoid bankrupting the company, Holland closed it down and paid off all debts and met all financial obligations of the company.

In 1910, Holland suffered a heart attack while at his Silver Spring, Virginia home. He passed away on May 16, 1910, at the age of 65. He was in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

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Milton Holland was a man called to heroic duty, possessing great and noble virtues of courage, leadership, and academic and business acumen. He rose from the meager and inhumane beginnings as an enslaved person to a man who used his God-given virtues and overcame the shortcomings that society afforded people of his race. His story is unique and spans well beyond his heroic duty to our nation. He speaks to the resilience of the American Spirit in the pursuit of Liberty for all and the promise of great rewards to those who dare to achieve. He was the first Texan to earn the Medal of Honor. He was one of thirteen Black soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor at the *Battle of Chapin’s Farm* on September 29, 1864.



Alfred Hilton  H/4th Col. Inf. Baltimore, MD	Charles Veal  D/4th Col. Inf. Baltimore, MD	Christian Fleetwood  4th Colored Inf. Baltimore, MD	James Bronson  D/5th Col. Inf. Trumbell Cty. OH
Powhatan Beaty  G/ 5th Col. Inf. Cincinnati, OH	Robert Pinn  I/5th Col. Inf. Massillon, OH	Thomas Hawkins  6th Colored Inf. Philadelphia, PA	Alexander Kelly  F/6th Col. Inf. Allegheny, PA
Edward Ratcliff  C/38th Col. Inf. Yorktown, VA	James Gardner  I/38th Col. Inf. Yorktown, VA	James Harris  B/38th Col. Inf. Great Mills, MD	William Barnes  38th Colored Inf. Norfolk, VA

William Alchesay*
HEROIC APACHE SCOUT
BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

THE INDIAN CAMPAIGNS

When one speaks of the “*Indian Wars*” it usually conjures images of cowboys and Indians in the Wild West, as represented in popular western movies. In fact, conflict between the indigenous Native American population and arriving European settlers began shortly after that migration began in the 1700s and spanned more than two centuries. By the early 1800s, most areas west of the Mississippi River were pacified, however, the increased migration of White settlers to the West exacerbated the conflict with the native Indian tribes.

With the acquisition of lands west of the Mississippi in the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the migration of White settlers westward grew. Deadly clashes led to the **Indian Removal Act of 1830**, which gave the U.S. Government the authority to relocate indigenous people to specially designated and federally protected and subsidized Indian Reservations.

Texas was annexed by the United States in 1845, prompting the Mexican-American War (1845 – 1848). With the surrender of Mexico, under the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**, the U.S. acquired large sections of the Southwest Indian lands in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, further expanding the area of Federal responsibility for protection of American settlers. The **Indian Removal Act** encompassed nearly all lands south of the Canadian Border and north of the Mexican Border, from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast.

After the Civil War (1862 – 1865) there was a large migration to settle White citizens to these new territories amid resistance from the Indian tribes that called these lands home. The U.S. Army was hard pressed to keep peace, roundup, and relocate the Native Americans, and provide security for the White settlers. It was this period the Army designated “*Indian Campaigns*,” and from 1861 to 1898, 451 U.S. Army soldiers and cavalymen earned Medals of Honor.

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Arizona Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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In the territories of New Mexico and Arizona, the Apache Nation refused to willingly submit their freedom for internment on a Government-run reservation, and raids on settlers and clashes with the U.S. Army escalated. In 1871 Indian Chief Cochise of the Chokonon-Chiricahua Tribe was forced, with his warriors and their families, to leave their ancestral home in northern New Mexico for Arizona's Dragoon Mountains, from which they continued attacks against White settlements. Cochise was finally persuaded to negotiate a peace treaty on October 12, 1872, ending the **Chiricahua War**, but another war was brewing.

In 1871 President Ulysses S. Grant placed Civil War veteran Colonel George Crook in command of the Arizona Territory. On April 28, 1871, a band of O'odham warriors, Mexican, and American settlers, attacked Pinal and Aravaipa Apaches at their reservation near **Camp Grant**, Arizona. One hundred and fifty Indians were massacred, most of them women and children. Survivors left the reservation and fled north to the Tonto Basin to seek refuge among friendly Yavapai and Tonto tribes. It fell to Colonel Crook to find and return these Indians to the reservation, marking the beginning of the four-year **Yavapai War**.

In December 1872, Colonel Crook began a winter campaign that would last until the following spring in his first steps to pacify the region and return the Apache to their reservations. To render advice, assistance, and even act as negotiators, he undertook to hire and enlist a number of Apache Indians to work with his 23d Infantry and 5th Cavalry in accomplishing their mission. While Indian Scouts had served with the Army since early in the Indian Campaigns, Crook set a precedent by recruiting for the first time, a full company of Indian Scouts.

WILLIAM ALCHESAY

Nineteen year old Sierra Blanca Apache (Western Apache) warrior Al-che-say (Alchesay) reported for duty in the U.S. Army at **Camp Verde**, Arizona, on December 2, 1872. That he was almost immediately promoted to sergeant is notable. Colonel Crook's aide, Second Lieutenant John Gregory Bourke, who earned a Medal of Honor as a private in the Civil War and then attended and graduated from West Point, described Alchesay as *"a perfect Adonis in figure, a mass of muscle and*



William Alchesay

sinew of wonderful courage, great sagacity, and as faithful as an Irish hound."

Alchesay was born in Arizona Territory's Limestone Canyon on May 17, 1853. His father Pedro was respected and prominent, becoming chief of his White Mountain Tribe. In the Army, Alchesay became, perhaps, the most famous of the Indian Scouts, and had a close and trusting relationship with Colonel Crook. He was the colonel's lead scout, as well as a trusted friend. Alchesay was indeed very loyal, often shadowing his commander as seen in this period photo.



After the conclusion of Crook's 1872/1873 Winter Campaign, Alchesay explained his service with the Army against other Apache Indians noting that he and his companions would *"march against the enemy because the Great Father wanted them to do so and because the Great Father had been good in sending Crook to watch over them."* Another scout noted, *"The White men does not tell the truth. Crook does. We know that while he stays we will have good times and three meals a day."*

Many Apache were reluctant to join the U.S. Army and take up arms against their fellow Indians, But Crook was able to raise a formidable corps of two Indian Scout Companies to work with his infantry and cavalry. Among them of course, was Alchesay, the third scout from the left in the middle row of this photo of some of Crook's scouts.



The wisdom of Colonel Crook in enlisting the scouts began to pay off almost immediately. In late December his scouts found a cave overlooking the Salt River in the Tonto Basin, where 100 Indian warriors, their wives, and children were holed up. From their hideout, Chief Nanni-chaddi and his warriors had mounted attacks on nearby White settlers. Nanni-chaddi had boasted that no soldier would ever find his cave-stronghold which was known only by the Yavapai and Tonto Apache. He had not counted on the Army using Indian Scouts to locate him.

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Thirty scouts accompanied 130 cavalrymen of the 5th Cavalry under the command of Captain William Brown into the engagement in the *Battle of Salt River Canyon*. They reached the mouth of Skeleton Cave while a band of Yavapai were dancing in celebration of a recent raid on settlers. The soldiers fired into the roof of the cave, calling on the Indians to surrender, and a deadly battle followed, as some of the soldiers in positions above rolled large rocks down into the cave. One warrior managed to escape by crawling on his belly, and when he reached an open space jumped on a large rock and let out a war cry, firing on the soldiers below before he was shot.

In what the Army called a victory and the Indians called a massacre, 76 Indians, including some women and children, were killed. The incident was not, however, without mercy. Nantaje, one of the Indian Scouts, led a team of Army sharpshooters to the mouth of the cave to ambush the Indians hiding there. In the exchange of gunfire that followed, Nantaje took note of a young Yavapai boy who was caught in the crossfire. Running from cover and exposed to gunfire from both sides, he grab the boy and carried him to safety. The boy was one of the 34 survivors who were captured and taken to **Camp Grant**. Chief Nanni-chaddi was not among the survivors. The Army's only casualty was one Pima scout killed in action.



Soldiers firing down at the cave. "Ross's Attack" by Frederic Remington, for Century Magazine, March 1891.

In terms of casualties, the *Battle of Salt River Canyon* was the most lopsided engagement of the Apache Campaigns. It had an immediate and profound impact on the Yavapai and Tonto, who began flocking to **Camp Verde** to surrender. Nonetheless some bands continued to resist relocation and continued their raids on Arizona settlements into the spring. In 1870 Captain George M. Randall, a Civil War veteran, was given command of Crook's 23d Infantry, with which he would serve in the West for 20 years. Among the Indian Scouts of his command was Alchesay, who guided the soldiers in numerous expeditions to locate Apache raiding parties and capture them for return to **Camp Verde**. These patrols in early 1873 saw improved success after the *Battle of Salt*

William Alchesay

River Canyon, but there remained renegade bands that held out and continued to conduct deadly raids on White settlements.

At midnight on March 27, 1873, a small group of soldiers and scouts under Captain Randall crept up Turret Peak to attack a small band of renegade Indians. At first light they launched a charge on a rancheria near the crest of the mountain, creating such panic that many of the panic-stricken Indians deliberately jumped to their deaths from the mountain, rather than subject themselves to relocation. Others fought back in another lopsided engagement. Fifty-seven Indians were killed either in the fighting or in leaping from the mountain, and many more were wounded and captured. The demoralizing impact of the *Battle of Turret Peak* convinced many more Indians to turn themselves in, and on April 6 many more surrendered to Colonel Crook at **Camp Verde**.

The *Battle of Turret Peak* was the last major battle of the Yavapai War. On April 25 Captain Randall led a force to surround the camp of Tonto Apache Chief Delshay on the upper Canyon Creek. Certainly, aware of what happened at Salt River and Turret Peak, Delshay surrendered as soon as Randall's troops opened fire. He was the last of the Apache War chiefs to surrender and move with his people to a reservation.

For their actions in the successful Winter Campaign of 1872 – 1873, Colonel Crook submitted 23 of his men for award of the Medal of Honor, including William Alchesay and nine others of his Indian Scouts. When the Medals were presented two years later, each of the Scouts was cited under nearly identical citations as the one for William Alchesay.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant William Alchesay, United States Army, for gallant conduct during campaigns and engagements with Apaches, in the Arizona Territory during the winter of 1872 to 1873, while serving as an Indian Scout.

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Though their actions ranged over a period from December 1872 until the following spring, little is known of each man other than Alchesay. After serving from 1872 to 1875, most returned to their tribes to live in obscurity and disappeared from public record. Such personal information as date of birth, date of death, and where they are buried, as well as any post-military-service record of achievements or family have never been found. These nine are all memorialized by a single historical marker at the Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Marana, Arizona.



William Alchesay, on the other hand, left a distinguished series of achievements that made him one of Arizona's most celebrated heroes. He continued to serve General Crook, who was promoted to Flag Rank in 1873. In 1876 Crook left Arizona for Dakota Territory, and Colonel Augustus P. Kautz took command of the scouts, forming a third company in 1877 and a fourth in 1878. Kautz would note, *"These scouts supported by a small force of cavalry, are exceedingly efficient, and have succeeded, with one or two exceptions, in finding every party of Indians they have gone in pursuit of. They are a great terror to the runaways [renegades] from the Reservations, and for such work are more efficient than double the number of soldiers."*

Crooks subsequently returned to Arizona during a series of uprisings in 1880. The Bureau of Indian Affairs had replaced military control of the reservations with civilian authorities, sparking considerable unrest. An effort was initiated by the government to identify possible ring leaders; William Alchesay, along with other scouts, were arrested – three were executed. After several months a federal grand jury condemned the conditions at San Carlos and the treatment of Alchesay and his comrades, who had been held in confinement by the Indian agent *"for a period of fourteen months without even presenting a charge against them."*

General Crook subsequently returned to Arizona to once again bring peace to the area, and despite what he endured, Alchesay loyally returned to service with Crook. Riding with the punitive expedition in the wilds of Sierra Madre, John Bourke noted that Alchesay was among those Indians who were *"all tried and true men, experienced in warfare, and devoted to the General whose standard they followed."*

William Alchesay

In 1885 Indian Chief Geronimo and about 150 Chiricahua Apaches left the White Mountain Reservation to conduct raids along the border, prompting a swift response from General Crook. In March 1885, Crook dispatched Alchesay and Ka-en-en-na to seek out Geronimo and facilitate a meeting. Alchesay and Geronimo were long time, and Geronimo stated that he would surrender himself only to General Crook. At the subsequent meeting Geronimo asked Alchesay to speak in his behalf. Alchesay told Crook that Geronimo wanted the general *“to be in charge of us and no one else. You know me well,”* he continued. *“I have never told a lie, nor have you ever told me a lie, and now I tell you that these Chiricahua really want to do what is right and live in peace.”*

After agreeing to the surrender terms, Geronimo camped that night on the Mexican side and was prepared to cross over and surrender to Crook the following morning. However, that night a soldier who had peddled whisky to the Indians told them that they would all be killed as soon as they crossed the border on the following day. Geronimo and two dozen warriors slipped away in the dark, sparking an incident that cost Crook his command, which was assumed by Nelson A. Miles. Miles subsequently captured the Indian chief and his warriors, and transported them to a prison in Florida. Numbered among those captured and held for 26 years in captivity, were a number of Chiricahua Scouts who had served the Army faithfully. This act infuriated Crook who sent numerous telegrams protesting their arrest to Washington D.C.

After 14 years of service to the U.S. Army William Alchesay left the Scouts and returned to White Mountain to ranch near the north fork of the White River. He also became a prominent chief in his tribe and was an outspoken advocate for his own and other tribes.

He was so highly regarded he met with three United States Presidents, President Grover Cleveland in 1887, President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909, and Warren G. Harding in 1923, to advise them on Indian concerns and conditions: He was also a strong

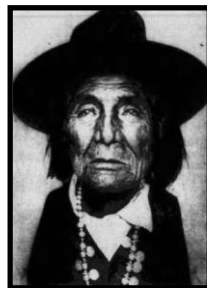


White Mountain Apaches, from the Apache reservation in Arizona, come to Washington to see Indian Commissioner Cato Sells. This trip is the first time the Indians ever left their reservation. Bala, at extreme left, purchased \$25,000 worth of liberty bonds. Commissioner Sells, second from left in foreground. Inset: "A Study in Wrinkles." He is William Alchesay, chief of the tribe of Apaches visiting the capital.

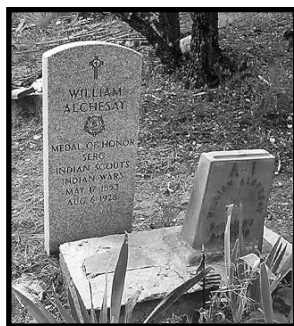
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advocate for educating his people. In 1923 the Theodore Roosevelt Indian Boarding School was built for Navajo children at what had previously been Fort Apache.

In 1922 as the Army abandoned Fort Apache, a new Lutheran Mission Church was dedicated there, and William Alchesay was one of nearly 100 Apaches that converted to Christianity and were baptized. While reporting on his speech later that year to the Ladies Missionary Society of Cooly, the Holbrook News said of him: *"He is a man of remarkable character and it is seldom you find one who can speak with equal sententiousness, be he White or Red. Asked once year ago what he thought of the round country around Fort Apache, he said, 'Well, God made the country, so it's all right – but if the White man had made it we would never have forgiven him.'"*



William Alchesay died on August 6, 1928, and was buried at the Fort Apache Indian Reservation Cemetery in Whiteriver, Arizona. His legacy, however, lives on in his home state. Alchesay Canyon in Maricopa County is named for him, as is Alchesay Barracks at Fort Huachuca. He would, perhaps, be most proud of the tribute to his dedication to educating not only Apache but Navajo children, remembering



him at Alchesay High School in Whiteriver.

In 2012 William Alchesay was inducted into the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame.



The *Buffalo Soldiers*

ESTABLISHING A TRADITION OF HEROIC SERVICE

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

During the Civil War, after the Emancipation Proclamation the Union Army forms segregated Black regiments known as the U. S. Colored Troops (USCT). After the war the Army underwent a downsizing and reduction in its war time Army; in tribute to the gallantry and service of Black Soldiers during the war, they organized what became two Infantry regiments, the 24th and 25th Colored Infantry Regiments, and the 9th and 10th Colored Cavalry Regiments. They served with distinction in the Indian Campaigns of the West, and every subsequent war until President Truman desegregated the U.S. military with Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948. Even then the 24th Infantry Regiment remained segregated in the first year of the Korean War, before it was disbanded.



It was during the Indian Wars that the soldiers of the Black regiments became known as “*Buffalo Soldiers*.” It was a name given by the very Indians they fought against, although accounts differ as to what tribe initiated it, and whether it was for their Black Soldiers tight black curly hair like a buffalo, or for the buffalo hides that they wore in the winter. Even today, those now desegregated units that are from the lineage of those early segregated units retain the title *Buffalo Soldiers*.

A total of 18 *Buffalo Soldiers* earned the Medal of Honor in the Indian Campaigns: three were scouts, three were from the 24th Infantry, eleven from the 9th Cavalry, and one from the 10th Cavalry. It is notable that all were enlisted Soldiers; up until World War II and even to some degree in that war, *Buffalo Soldiers* were generally commanded by White officers. In fact, First Lieutenant Rupert Sergeant who was killed in action in Vietnam on March 16, 1967, became the first Black officer to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Following upgrades to Black heroes of World War II in 1997, of the seven upgraded awards, three were officers. First Lieutenant Charles L. Thomas became the first Black officer to earn his nation’s highest military honor for actions on December 14, 1944.

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Today, Paris Davis, whose Medal of Honor was belatedly presented in 2023 is one of only two living Black recipients of the Medal of Honor, and the only former officer.

Not all of the battles fought during the period were against Native Americans; the U.S. Army and its *Buffalo Soldiers* also protected settlements from bandits and others that populated the *Wild West*.

THE WHAM PAYMASTER ROBBERY

On May 11, 1889, Army paymaster Major Joseph W. Wham was tasked with transporting a payroll consisting of more than \$28,000 in gold and silver coins (nearly a million dollars by today's standards) from Fort Grant to Fort Thomas in Arizona Territory. The train of two mule-drawn carriages to transport the 250 pounds of coins, and a covered ambulance, included unarmed civilians to make the 46-mile trek. Eleven *Buffalo Soldiers* of the 24th Infantry including a sergeant and corporal with pistols and nine enlisted men with single-shot rifles, were assigned as escort.



The members of the train were relaxed, it was a routine assignment. Most of the roving bands of renegade Indians had either been killed or sent to reservations, and there had never been an attempt to rob a payroll train in Arizona Territory.

Moving southwest through the desolate area, the train passed the small town of Bonita. It was a community established by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon), operated by polygamist Wiley Holladay and his families of polygamists who were seeking to escape persecution. They had considerable angst against the U.S. Government, exacerbated by the increased enforcement of the 1882 Edmunds Act, which made polygamy a felony. They also had a deep-seated racial prejudice against Black people, and in the aftermath of the events of that day, it was speculated that they believed the government owed them something, and the gold and silver coins would better serve their community, as opposed to going into the pockets of Black Soldiers who they thought would probably spend it on gambling and liquor.

The Buffalo Soldiers

After passing the town, the train turned north and entered a narrow creek bed bordered on the east by a steep, rocky slope about 50 feet above the road. Unknown to the members of the train, the Mormon bandits established breastworks along the high ridge.

At about 1 p.m. the train encountered a boulder blocking the road, forcing the convoy to halt. Sergeant Benjamin Brown led his men forward to try to move the boulder while Corporal Isiah Mays took his men to a position to protect the back of the train. When Sergeant Brown reached the rock, it was obvious that it was placed there intentionally, and looking up, he was confronted by two armed men, one of whom yelled, "*Get out, you black sons of bitches.*" Then the *Buffalo Soldiers* came under a hail of gunfire from the breastworks above them.

Suddenly gunfire erupted from the breastworks, killing three mules and wounding the ambulance driver, and Sergeant Brown crawled 170 feet to a dry creek bed. Additional fire rained down, most of it above the *Buffalo Soldier's* heads; it is postulated that since the attackers had a negative view of the Black Soldier's competence as fighting men, it was an attempt to frighten them into retreating. They did not.

Sergeant Brown's soldiers had laid their weapons down when they reached the rock in order to try to move it; now they picked them up and began returning fire. Brown was wounded as were two of his men, but fired his pistol until he exhausted his ammunition. He picked up the rifle of one of his two wounded Soldiers and continued to fire until he was wounded a second time, and he and his two wounded men crawled to safety in the creek bed.

Major Wham pulled back to the protection of a rocky ledge where his clerk began administering aid to the wounded while Wham directed the fire of his men. Sergeant Mays, at the rear of the train, returned fire with his pistol from the protection of the escort wagon. The panicked mules dragged the two wagons off the west side of the road, damaging their harnesses and fleeing the area.

Mays directed the return fire of the other Buffalo Soldiers after the wounded Sergeant Brown reached the creek bed. They exchanged fire with the bandits for half-an-hour, many of the Soldiers being wounded. Mays determined the position was indefensible and ordered his men to withdraw. They joined Major Wham at the ledge, from which they withdrew to the dry creek bed.

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Wham was inclined to dispatch the Buffalo Soldiers to the wrecked wagons to recover the strongbox containing the lock box. The bandits continued to rain fire on the area, the wagons were 300 yards distant, and with eight of his eleven Soldiers wounded he decided it would be a suicide mission. While their fellow bandits continued to blanket the area with heavy fire, several of the robbers ran down the hill and broke into the strongbox with an axe. An hour and a half after the ambush began, they led a mule with what appeared to be the body of a man slumped over it and escaped under their comrades' fire. Then the firing stopped and the remainder of the bandits left the area.

Around 3 p.m. Wham and his party returned to their vehicles. Nine of the surviving mules had run off and their harnesses had been cut to pieces. While the eight wounded men were being treated, others found four of the mules in the nearby creek bed and were able to splice together enough harnesses to hitch them to the ambulance. Six of the wounded were loaded aboard it; Sergeant Brown and one other Soldier were too severely wounded to be transported and were left behind with Barney Norton. Sergeant Mays had walked and crawled two miles to the Norton ranch for help, and Norton raced to the scene with his ranch hands. Then Wham took his wagon load of wounded men to Fort Thomas to get them treatment and have an Army surgeon sent to the battle site to treat Brown and the other wounded man. Wham reached the fort about 5:30 p.m.

In September 1889 a federal grand jury in Tucson investigated the robbery and with 64 witnesses, indicted eight suspects. Several pre-trial shady actions by Judge Willia H. Barnes, a personal friend of some of the defendants enabled their release on bail. U.S. Attorney Harry R. Jeffords transmitted a telegram to the Department of Justice advising that Barnes had intimidated some of the witnesses. Upon learning this, Barnes dismissed the grand jury calling them "*a band of character assassins, unworthy to sit in any court of justice,*" and arranged for Judge John J. Hawkins to preside over the trial.

Ultimately, President Benjamin Harrison appointed Judge Richard E. Sloan to preside over the trial which included 165 witnesses, more than half of them for the defense. Former Graham County sheriff Ben M. Crawford was forced to resign, and later was indicted for securing defense witnesses who gave false testimony. In his testimony, Wham identified three of the defendants as being part of the robbery, and identified one of them who had deposited gold coins in a hotel safe. Under cross examination, Mark Smith, one of two defense attorneys, mixed several of

The Buffalo Soldiers

the coins with others from the bank and asked Wham to identify which coins were taken in the robbery. The Army major was embarrassed, testifying that he could not tell one group of coins from the other. Under Smith's combative cross-examination, several of the Buffalo Soldiers who were witnesses had to admit that they did not have clear views of their attackers. The defense then bolstered their case by providing a series of witnesses described as "*brothers, sisters, cousins, and aunts of each other and the defendants,*" to provide alibis for the defendants.

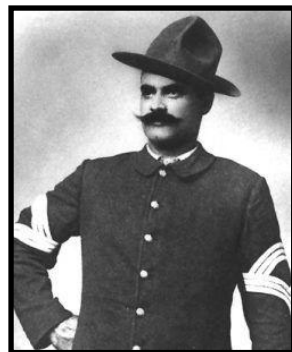
In the end, it took the all-White jury only two hours to return a verdict of "*not guilty*" for all the defendants. Deputy William Breakenridge noted, "*the Government had a good case against them [the robbers], but they had too many friends willing to swear to an alibi, and there were too many on the jury who thought it no harm to rob the Government.*" The verdict also reflected the reluctance of the jury to take the word of a Black former slave over those of a White witness. In 2000, author Larry D. Ball published a book about the robbery titled: *Ambush at Bloody Run: A Story of Politics, Religion, Race, and Banditry in Arizona Territory*.

As for the Buffalo Soldiers themselves, eight received Certificates of Merit for gallantry in their attempts to protect the payroll train; one of them, Private George Arrington, later saw his upgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross. The two gallant sergeants were each awarded the Medal of Honor.

BENJAMIN BROWN

Benjamin Brown was born in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, in 1859, to Joseph M. Brown and Ellen E. *Kindig* Brown; he had two older brothers, John and Thomas. Very little is known of his early life beyond that fact that he enlisted in the U.S. Army from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and was assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment, where he served in for a time in the band, as well as Companies C and H.

Sergeant Brown was wounded in the abdomen and both arms during the ambush on the Wham payroll, and carried bullets in his body for the rest of his life. For his actions he received the Medal of Honor

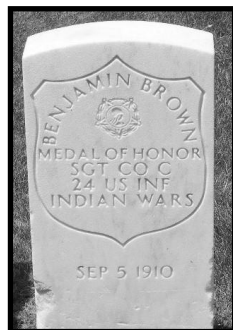


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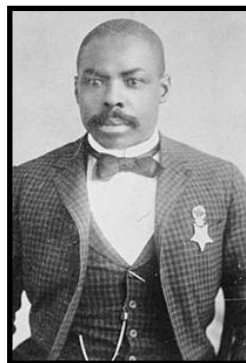
The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Benjamin Brown, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 11 May 1889, while serving with Company C, 24th U.S. Infantry, in action in Arizona Territory. Although shot in the abdomen, in a fight between a paymaster's escort and robbers, Sergeant Brown did not leave the field until again wounded through both arms.

Although Sergeant Brown never fully recovered from his wounds, he remained in the Army and served in the Spanish-American War, and in the Philippine Insurrection that followed that war. He was an expert rifleman, and in 1904 was ranked fifty-fourth among U.S. Army sharpshooters, the same year he was forced to retire due to suffering a stroke. He then was sent to the United States Soldiers' Home in Washington, D.C., where he died on September 5, 1910, at the age of fifty. He was buried at the United States Soldier's and Airmen's Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.



ISAIAH MAYS

Isaiah Mays was born into slavery in Carter's Bridge, Virginia, on February 16, 1858, to John and Sallie Wilson Mays. He grew up with older sister Sarah who died when Isaiah was nine years old, younger brother Walke, and younger sisters Sarah and Mildred. At age 28 he enlisted in the U.S. Army at Columbus, Barracks, Ohio, and was assigned to Company C, 24th U.S. Infantry. By the time of the Wham payroll robbery, Mays was a corporal and the second ranking noncommissioned officer in that fight. For his actions he was awarded the Medal of Honor.



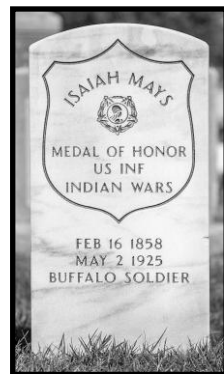


The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Corporal Isaiah Mays, United States Army, for gallantry in the fight between Paymaster Wham's escort and robbers on 11 May 1889, while serving with Company B, 24th U.S. Infantry, in action at Cedar Springs, Arizona Territory. Corporal Mays walked and crawled two miles to a ranch for help.

Mays was discharged from the Army in 1893 but chose to remain in Arizona. He married Miss Dotey Erown-On; she died in 1897. He worked as a laborer in Arizona and New Mexico, and in 1922 applied for a federal pension, which was denied. He was subsequently committed to the Territorial Insane Asylum (Arizona State Hospital), whose population included not only the mentally challenged but people who had tuberculosis, as well as those living in poverty. He died there on May 2, 1925, at the age of 67 and was buried at the hospital's cemetery.

In those days, those who died in the hospital and whose bodies were not claimed by a relative, were buried with a simple number to identify them. In a 1935 a fire destroyed all of the records connecting names to numbered grave sites buried prior to 1929.

Decades later, hospital therapist Mary Towne began trying to identify grave sites and link names to numbers; she found what she believed to be Isaiah Mays' final resting place. A stone marker was placed there in 2001. Towne said that her patients were fascinated with Mays. *"They see Isaiah Mays as one of their own. And many of them have said to me that this honor is long overdue."* In March 2009 the remains believed Mays' were disinterred, cremated, and buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.



In December 1890, Corporal William O. Wilson became the last *Buffalo Soldier* to earn the Medal of Honor for actions in the Indian

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Campaigns serving with the 9th Cavalry at White Clay Creek, South Dakota. But the service of the Army's Buffalo soldiers continued in all subsequent wars up to and including the Korean War.

On October 20, 1892, a new White first lieutenant was assigned to the *Buffalo Soldiers* of the 10th Cavalry. John Joseph Pershing was an 1886 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and upon receiving his commission as a second lieutenant, was sent west to serve with the 6th Cavalry Regiment. In September 1891, he was assigned as the professor of military science and tactics at the University of Nebraska. Promoted to first lieutenant, he then joined the 10th Cavalry, leading them in the final campaigns of the Indian Wars.



In 1897 Pershing returned to West Point as an instructor to Cadet Company A. He was a strict and rigid officer that was unpopular with the cadets, who began calling him "*Nigger Jack*" because of his prior service with the *Buffalo Soldiers*. Later it was softened to "*Black Jack*;" it was a moniker he would wear with pride for the rest of his life.

Pershing returned to the 10th Cavalry Regiment as its Quartermaster. When the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, after the initial destruction of Spain's Pacific Fleet in the harbor of Manila, Philippine Islands, United States. Soldiers and Marines sailed from Florida to Cuba to end Spanish rule of the Island.

THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

On June 21, 1898, most of the 10th Cavalry departed Tampa, Florida, along with other troops including Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt's 1st Volunteer Cavalry, better known as "*The Rough Riders*." They were transported to the southeast coast of Cuba to fight their way inland towards Santiago, where the last remnants of the vaunted Spanish Fleet were holed up, unable to escape due to the blockade of U.S. Navy warships at the entrance to the harbor. As Regimental Quartermaster, charged with organizing and loading horses, equipment, and supplies, *Black Jack* Pershing remained in Florida with elements of M Troop and a few *Buffalo Soldiers* of A and H Troops.

The *Buffalo Soldiers*

These 50 Buffalo Soldiers finally sailed out of Tampa on June 21, the day before the rest of the 10th Cavalry landed at Daiquiri to begin their fighting advance to Santiago. This small element, however, was a different and dangerous mission. Together with their horses, 65 mules laden with ammunitions and supplies, and 375 Cuban soldiers, they were assigned the task of landing at Cienfuegos further north on the underside of the island. From there they were to move through the enemy infested jungle to deliver needed supplies and rations to the Cuban rebels fighting for their independence.



On June 29 the fleet carrying the force attempted to land them at Cienfuegos. Enemy shore batteries were too much for the single gunboat accompanying the two transports, and the convoy moved southeast to Tayacoba. On the following day, several Cubans and 28 Americans went ashore at Tayacoba to make a reconnaissance of the enemy fortifications.

The advance party rowed to the shoreline in small boats launched from the transports *Florida* and *Funita*. When they reached the shoreline they hid their boats in the heavy jungle around the horse-shoe shaped bay and began creeping inland. Suddenly, enemy fire raked their midst from a Spanish blockhouse. The enemy fire was overpowering and the party began moving back to the water, several Americans falling wounded and five or six Cubans killed in the action. When they reached the waters of the bay, they found their boats had been destroyed by enemy artillery.

Stranded and hopelessly outnumbered, the advance party seemed doomed to annihilation. Aboard the *Florida*, Lieutenant C. P. Johnson heard the sounds of battle, while anxiously awaiting the return of his reconnaissance patrol. When they did not materialize, he began to fear the worst. Quickly he organized four detachments of Cuban soldiers to go ashore and rescue the stranded soldiers. Each attempt was met with heavy enemy fire and all four rescue attempts failed miserably. The Cubans were turned back to their transports and it appeared that the American and Cuban soldiers who had landed at Tayacoba were hopelessly lost.

Back at Tayacoba, darkness was falling as the surrounded Americans on shore hid along the lagoon to hope and pray for a miracle. Aboard the *Florida*, Johnson met with Lieutenant George Ahern of the 10th Cavalry

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to discuss the situation and the failure of the previous rescue attempts. “*My only hope,*” he told the officer, “*is to try your colored boys.*”

Lieutenant Ahern went below to the hold where his young cavalry soldiers had spent most of their long trip from Florida to Cuba. He appraised them of the fate of the landing party, explained the danger of any rescue effort while citing the previous four failures, and then asked for volunteers to make a fifth effort under the cover of darkness. Quickly, four of them: Privates Dennis Bell, Fitz Lee, William Thompkins and George Wanton volunteered.

The four men along with Lieutenant Ahern lowered their small boat from the *Florida*, quickly rowing towards the shore under cover of darkness. As quickly as they reached the beach and began securing their boat, the Spaniards opened fire. Streaks of deadly fireballs flew over their heads and smacked dully into the surrounding sand. Ignoring the enemy fire, the four volunteers slowly worked their way through the jungle growth along the beach, searching for the stranded shore party. Eventually the enemy fire ended and an eerie silence fell over the lagoon.

Lieutenant Ahern’s men continued their quiet search until the silence was interrupted by a whispered, “*Hey, over here.*” Peering into the near total darkness, Private Thompkins started moving towards the sound of the voice while his comrades kept their weapons poised to open fire if it turned out to be a Spanish trick. “*Who’s there?*” Thompkins whispered back into the darkness when he neared the area from which he had heard the initial sounds. “*Chandler,*” the voice replied. “*I’m over here.*”

Thompkins knew that Winthrop Chandler was one of the missing men from the shore party, but still continued slowly and alertly forward in case it was an enemy ruse to draw him in. In the darkness he stumbled over a body on the ground, but ignored it to continue forward. His heart pounding, the sudden appearance of two white faces in the dark shadows may have startled him. Then he heard one of the apparitions say, “*I’m Chandler. Thank God, you found us.*”

As Thompkins moved to greet the Americans, the Spaniards opened fire from the nearby jungle, a torrent of leaden death reaching out across the beach. While two of the *Buffalo Soldiers* remained behind to provide cover fire, the rescued Americans were helped to the boats. Lieutenant Ahern’s valiant men worked swiftly to locate and rescue all surviving members of the shore party. Then they joined the group in launching their boat into the lagoon, rowing anxiously towards their transport ship.

The Buffalo Soldiers

Enemy fire continued to rain about the Americans, the rescued and the rescuers, bullets smacking like stones into the calm waters of the lagoon. Heedless of the danger, the small boat continued to move forward. Finally, by three o'clock in the morning, the rescued shore party was safely aboard the transport ship.

Despite the danger the men endured, Private Wanton volunteered to return to retrieve the bodies of their dead comrades. Lieutenant Johnson deemed the effort too risky, however, and denied permission. For their heroism, Privates Bell, Lee, Thompkins and Wanton were awarded Medals of Honor under identical citations.



Private Dennis Bell (Troop H)

Private Fitz Lee (Troop M)

Private William H. Thompkins (Troop G)

Private George Henry Wanton (Troop M)

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism on 30 June 1898, while serving with the 10th U.S. Cavalry, in action at Tayacoba, Cuba. He voluntarily went ashore in the face of the enemy and aided in the rescue of his wounded comrades; this after several previous attempts had been frustrated.

Dennis Bell was born in Washington, D.C., on December 28, 1866, to Judson Bell and Adeline Beans Bell, and grew up in the nation's capital with older brother Rouzeberry and younger brothers Samuel and Arthur. After enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1892, he was assigned to the 10th Cavalry and went with them to Cuba. After earning the Medal of Honor, he was promoted to corporal, and was honorably discharged in 1903 after 11 years of service.



Bell returned to Washington, D.C., He worked as a government employee until his retirement. He had one step-daughter from his wife Rosa's first marriage. When he died in Washington, D.C. on September

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25, 1953, at age 87, he was the oldest living Medal of Honor recipient. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

Fitz Lee was born in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, in June 1866, to William Lee and Agnes *Roberson* Lee. His father died in 1869; after his mother remarried he had four half-brothers and two half-sisters. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on December 27, 1897, and went to Cuba with the 10th Cavalry. On September 14, 1899, three months after he was awarded the Medal of Honor, Lee died at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and was buried at the Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery.



Fort Lee (formerly Camp Lee) in Virginia, was named for Civil War Confederate General Robert E. Lee. In the 2020s a commission was tasked with recommendations for renaming U.S. Army bases that were named for Confederate generals. On 8 August 2022, the commission proposed the Fort Lee be changed to Fort Gregg-Adams, after Lieutenant General Arthur J. Gregg and Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams Earley, becoming the first base named for Black soldiers. When Donald Trump became president in 2025, he directed that those posts which were renamed, be restored to their original names, but this time highlighting Army heroes other than Confederate generals. In June of 2025, the name was again changed back to Fort Lee, but this time to honor *Buffalo Soldier* Private Fitz Lee, Medal of Honor recipient.

William H. Thompkins was born in Paterson, New Jersey, on October 3, 1872, to John S. Thompkins and Angeline *Free* Thompkins. He grew up in Paterson and enlisted in the Army on August 2, 1894. After the Spanish-American War, it appears he continued to serve until at least 1910, records show he was a corporal, married, and living in Seattle, Washington. He later moved to San Francisco, California, where he died on September 24, 1916, at the young age of forty-three. He was buried at **San Francisco National Cemetery**.



The *Buffalo Soldiers*

George Henry Wanton was born in Paterson, New Jersey, on May 15, 1868, to William H. Wanton and Margaret *Miller* Wanton. After growing up in Paterson, on August 15, 1884, at age sixteen he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, serving a four-year enlistment. After his discharge in 1888, the following year Wanton enlisted in the U.S. Army. In 1893 he married Miss Elizabeth Jackson with whom he had son George Henry Wanton, Jr., and daughters Eliza and Vivian; the family maintained their home in Essex, Vermont.



Following the actions in the Spanish-American War that earned him the Medal of Honor, Wanton continued his Army career. After serving in **Fort Huachuca**, Arizona, in 1915, he moved to Washington, D.C., and his first marriage having failed, remarried. He and Helen B. Wanton continued to live in the nation's capital. In 1921 he was selected as part of the President's Honor Guard and an honorary pallbearer for the burial of the Unknown Soldier of World War I at Arlington National Cemetery.

In 1924 Wanton graduated from the Army's Motor Transport School at Camp Holabird, Maryland. At the time he was the only Black Medal of Honor recipient still serving in uniform. He retired in 1925 as an Army master sergeant and continued to live in Washington, D.C., until his death at **Walter Reed Hospital** on November 27, 1940. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

SAN JUAN HILL

On that dark night of June 30 while the four **Buffalo Soldiers** were rescuing their comrades, miles to the east near Santiago de Cuba, the remainder of the 10th Cavalry knew nothing of the heroic act. They, along with the other soldiers of General Shafter's FIFTH Corps, were preoccupied with preparations and thoughts for tomorrow. The long awaited assault on Santiago was about to begin, and with daylight the 10th Cavalry would join Theodore Roosevelt's *Rough Riders* in an assault on the heights over the city near the village of San Juan.

Spanish General Vara Del Rey had turned the town of El Caney into a virtual fort with houses along each street to serve as well defended barricades to any opposing force. His 520 soldiers were barricaded inside six heavy timber blockhouses and held a fortified stone church at the

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highest point of the town, called El Viso. The enemy was well prepared when General Lawton's 3,500 soldiers began their assault on July 1.

Sergeant Major Frank Pullen of the *Buffalo Soldiers'* 25th Infantry Regiment later recalled the scene of battle from the American perspective. "*It (the charge on El Caney) was not the glorious run from the edge of some nearby thicket to the top of a small hill, as many may imagine. This particular charge was a tough, hard climb, over sharp, rising ground, which, were a man in perfect physical strength, he would climb slowly. Part of the charge was made over soft, plowed ground, a part through a lot of prickly pineapple plants and barbed-wire entanglements. It was slow, hard work, under a blazing sun and a perfect hailstorm of bullets.*"

As the early morning assault at El Caney turned into continued battles throughout the afternoon, the main force under Generals Sumner and King could wait no longer. Without the flanking support of General Lawton's Division, the order was given to advance towards San Juan Hill. There, this force would find a similarly stiff resistance.

Astride his pony *Texas*, Colonel Roosevelt hurried his regiment across the knee-deep ford of the San Juan River and into position below San Juan Hill. Slightly forward of the *Rough Riders* were the soldiers of Colonel Henry K. Carroll's 1st Brigade, lined up for assault with the 6th U.S. Cavalry in the center, flanked on the right by the *Buffalo Soldiers* of the 9th Cavalry, and on the left by the 3rd Cavalry. Coming up from behind to take a position to the left of the *Rough Riders* was the 1st U.S. (Regular) Cavalry Regiment, followed by the 10th Cavalry.

The *Buffalo Soldiers* of the 10th were moving at double-time through the jungle, racing for the river crossing that would position them below San Juan Hill. The regimental commander was Colonel T. A. Baldwin who, like most officers in the U.S. Army's four all-Black regiments was White. As the 10th Cavalry reached the river they found the crossing littered with the bodies of dead and wounded. It became known as "*Bloody Ford.*" Even as Colonel Baldwin rode up and down the banks encouraging his men ever forward, enemy fire continued to fall on the soldiers in the open valley.

Amid the whine of sniper fire and the explosion of Spanish artillery, Colonel Baldwin's horse reared back, throwing the commander to the ground. Sergeant Major Edward Lee Baker, Jr. saw his leader fall to the ground and braved the enemy fire to race to Colonel Baldwin's side.

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Shrapnel from the enemy artillery wounded Baldwin in the arm and side. “*I’m alright, Ed,*” the colonel told his non-com. “*Get back and rally the men.*” Reluctantly, Sergeant Major Baker left Baldwin behind to continue directing his soldiers across the river.

The soldiers of the 10th needed little urging from Baker; the rain of enemy fire around the crossing motivated them to move swiftly across the river and take up firing positions in the jungle below San Juan Hill. Sergeant Major Baker dove for cover behind the heavy foliage to join his men in returning the enemy fire. Amid the sounds of battle, he heard a desperate cry for help coming from somewhere in the river.

Looking through the heavy pall of gun smoke that hung in the valley, he noticed Private Marshall, one of his soldiers, struggling to keep his head above water. Wounded, the hapless young man had fallen and was struggling as his heavy pack threatened to pull him down. Ignoring the rain of enemy small arms and artillery fire throughout *Bloody Ford*, Sergeant Major Baker ran to the aid of the wounded private. An enemy shell passed by “*so close I could feel the heat,*” he later recalled. Diving for cover, deadly missiles reached out for him. Though wounded twice in the arm, Baker continued to make his way back to the river, rescuing Private Marshall and dragging him to safety. Then, finding the regimental surgeon, Baker instructed him to treat the wounded private while rejecting treatment for his own wounds.

The high ridge known as San Juan Hill was actually two hilltops, separated by a slight ravine. The southernmost point was most recognizable for the blockhouse that dominated the crest. Across the ravine to the north was another large blockhouse; this hill was known as Kettle Hill.

By 11 o’clock most of the 15 regiments tasked with wresting control of the two hills had crossed the San Juan River and were prepared for the assault. Below San Juan Hill the soldiers of General Kent’s Division continued to return fire on the enemy as they awaited orders. To the Division’s right the dismounted cavalry was poised to attack Kettle Hill. Despite his illness, the venerable General *Fighting Joe* Wheeler, a former Civil War general, rode his horse to the front to watch his men, now



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under the leadership of General Sumner, fight their way through the blockhouses and enemy trenches to reach the top of Kettle Hill.

For two hours the Americans struggled to survive while awaiting the arrival of General Lawton's brigade from El Caney. The devastating fire that rained on the men below San Juan and Kettle Hills continued unabated, and the only way to silence those guns was to charge and take the hill. The steady drum roll of Lieutenant Parker's Gatling's gave the hard pressed cavalry and infantry soldiers an infusion of new hope. It was a moment ripe for something extraordinary to occur, a moment for individual valor to claim the day . . . it was a moment for history. *"It was a moment pregnant with heroism,"* historian Henry Watterson wrote shortly after the battle. *"It was delivered of thousands of heroes."*

Among the *Buffalo Soldiers* that mingled with the *Rough Riders* was Black Jack Pershing who had finally arrived from Florida to join his men. As First Lieutenant Pershing charged up the hill among his *Buffalo Soldiers*, he was more than impressed by what he saw. He later wrote:



"Each officer or soldier next in rank took charge of the line or group immediately in his front or rear and halting to fire at each good opportunity, taking reasonable advantage of cover, the entire command moved forward as coolly as though the buzzing of bullets was the humming of bees. White regiments, Black regiments, regulars and Rough Riders., representing the young manhood of the North and the South, fought shoulder to shoulder, unmindful of race or color, unmindful of whether commanded by ex-Confederate or not, and mindful of only their common duty as Americans."

Precisely because it was a spontaneous moment, the charge to drive the Spanish from San Juan Hill lacked any semblance of military order. What it lacked in order, was more than made up for in valor. The inter-mixing of the thirteen regular and two volunteer regiments that assaulted the two hillsides would lead to centuries of debate among historians about *"who did what,"* and how much credit Colonel Roosevelt and his *Rough Riders* really deserved for their role in events. While historians continue the debate even today, the record of valor and co-operation that would result in victory is unchallenged.

The *Buffalo Soldiers*

Colonel Roosevelt planned to dismount at the foot of the hill and lead his *Rough Riders* to victory on foot. As the sea of young soldiers rose and attacked, however, he quickly found he could cover more ground more quickly on horseback. As he spurred *Texas* among the ranks of his charging *Rough Riders*, he found himself well into the lead, ahead of the attacking forces. Armed only with a pistol, his leadership, bordering on carelessness in the face of enemy fire inspired those who followed and generated a snap-shot view that would become a historic image of the war in Cuba.



Color Sergeant J. E. Andrews of the 3d Cavalry surged forward with the colors of his regiment when enemy fire struck him in the stomach. He called out to his lieutenant to take the colors, but tumbled down the hill still clutching the flag, before a replacement could reach him. Sergeant George Berry of the 10th Cavalry was moving forward with the standard of his own regiment when he saw Andrews fall. Quickly he grasped the colors of the 3d Cavalry and together with the colors of his own 10th Cavalry, raised them bravely and shouted, “*Dress on the colors, boys, dress on the colors!*” as he valiantly carried both standards up the hill.

Forty yards from the top of the hill, Colonel Roosevelt, still far to the front of his regiment, reached the last line of enemy barbed wire. He dismounted to continue his advance on foot, turning *Texas* over to his orderly who had managed to keep up with his colonel’s reckless charge. Behind him swarmed hundreds of American soldiers, the mixed assortment of volunteer cowboys, lawmen, and outlaws that comprised the *Rough Riders*, the regular Army professionals of the 1st, 3d, and 6th U.S. Cavalry, and the *Buffalo Soldiers* of the 9th and 10th Cavalry.

As the Americans neared the blockhouse at the top of the hill, the Spanish defenders escaped down the opposite slope, retreating for the safety of Santiago. Quickly the *Rough Riders* planted their standards, while Sergeant George Berry planted the colors of both the 3d and 10th Cavalry. He became the only soldier in U.S. military history to carry two standards through battle and plant them victoriously on the enemy’s works. Quickly fanning out across the hilltop, several soldiers took shelter behind a large kettle, presumed to have been used for processing sugar. Thus, it was that the hill just to the north of San Juan Hill gained the name “Kettle Hill.”

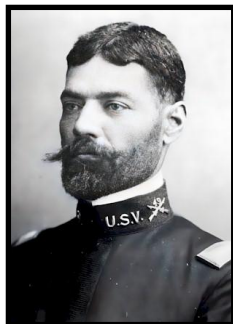
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In all, the battle at San Juan and Kettle Hills cost the American forces 124 killed and 817 wounded; 24 Medals of Honor were awarded, including one of them to *Buffalo Soldier* Edward Baker.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Major Edward Lee Baker, Jr., United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 1 July 1898, while serving with 10th U.S. Cavalry, in action at Santiago, Cuba. Sergeant Major Baker left cover and, under fire, rescued a wounded comrade from drowning.

Edward Lee Baker, Jr. was the son of Edward Lee Baker, Sr.; the name of his mother is not recorded. He was born in Platte River, Wyoming, on December 28, 1865. He enlisted in the U.S. Army on July 27, 1882, and served in the 9th Cavalry, reaching the rank of trumpeter before his enlistment ended in 1887. He reenlisted on August 25 and was assigned to the 10th Cavalry Regiment where, by the time he was sent to Cuba in 1898 he was a sergeant major and the highest ranking noncommissioned officer in the regiment. He was married and when he deployed his wife Mary Elizabeth *Prince* Baker maintained the home for their five children.



His heroics in that battle prompted President William McKinley to commission Baker as a first lieutenant, and in 1899 was promoted to captain in the 49th U.S. Volunteer Infantry. He mustered out of the regiment on March 8, 1899. He was recommissioned a second lieutenant to serve with the Philippine Scouts in 1902 and again reached the rank of captain on September 12, 1908. He retired on October 3rd, 1909, after 27 years of service, and at the time of his retirement he was the highest ranking Black officer in the U.S. Army. He died in Los Angeles, California, on August 26, 1913, and was buried at Angelus Rosedale Cemetery there.

Robert A. Penn

A Daring Sailor's Heroic Actions to Save His Ship

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Robert Penn was born in City Point, Virginia, on October 10, 1872, to George Penn and Julia *Evans* Penn. George was Black and Julia was mulatto, likely the child of a Black slave and her White owner. Robert was the youngest of their five children that included Samuel, Mary, Charly, and Josephine. Robert's father, who is believed to have been a sailor, was working as a messenger for the railroad when he died in 1876, four years after Robert was born. Robert's mother remarried Charles Washington, and Robert had four half-siblings.



In 1895, twenty-three year old Robert Penn enlisted in the U.S. Navy. When the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, he was serving aboard the *U.S.S. Iowa*, the only Black Sailor on the ship. After the Spanish forces in Cuba capitulated, the U.S. Army prepared to land troops on nearby Spanish-occupied Puerto Rico. Due to confusion at command levels, the Soldiers spent ten days at sea in their transports before the order to land was finally given; D-Day was July 21.

The *U.S.S. Iowa* was part of the U.S. Navy fleet patrolling at sea off the coast of Puerto Rico on July 20, 1898. Shortly before 7 a.m., a manhole gasket blew out in one of the boilers of fireroom No. 2. The fireroom immediately filled with live steam and the floor was covered with boiling water, flying from the boiler under a pressure of 120 pounds. Coppersmith P. B. Keefer and Fireman Second Class Robert Penn were stationed in adjoining compartments and rushed instantly to the rescue.



The 1903 book *Deeds of Valor* by W. F. Beyer and O. F. Keydel described what happened next. "*Penn entered Fire-Room No. 2, just in time to save an injured coal-passer from falling into the boiling water which covered the floor. He carried the man, who had both feet scalded*

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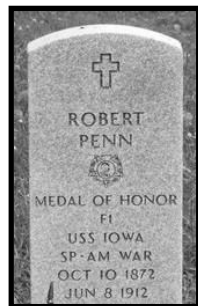
and a wound on his forehead, to a safe place and then ran back. Penn's quick thinking and selfless actions helped to avert a boiler-room explosion and preserved the lives of the sailors aboard the U.S.S. Iowa.

"After building a makeshift bridge over the foiling water at his feet by throwing a plank across some coal buckets, Penn then hauled the two remaining fires, and thus the imminent danger of an explosion was averted. However, shutting down a malfunctioning boiler, a process called "hauling the fire," was no easy task. In a claustrophobic room filled with scalding steam and boiling water, Penn had to lift the boiler's safety valves, close its valves, reduce the steam pressure to 50 pounds from 120 pounds, and use an extinguisher to quell the fire." For his actions he was awarded the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Fireman First Class Robert Penn, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism in action on board the U.S.S. Iowa off Santiago de Cuba, 20 July 1898. Performing his duty at the risk of serious scalding at the time of the blowing out of the manhole gasket on board the vessel, Fireman First Class Penn hauled the fire while standing on a board thrown across a coal bucket one foot above the boiling water which was still blowing from the boiler.

Penn returned home to work in Philadelphia as a machinist, and on September 3, 1901, he married Miss Harriet R. Epps; there is no record of any children. Penn later went to Colorado where he died on December 14, 1912, at the Las Animas Hospital. He was buried in an unknown cemetery in Philadelphia. A cenotaph was later placed at Eden Cemetery in Collingdale, Pennsylvania.



Although Black Soldiers, Sailors, and eventually Marines served in every combat action for the next half-century, including two World Wars, Robert Penn was the last Black man to receive the Medal of Honor until the Korean War in 1950.

Beatrice MacDonald & Helen McClelland*

The “Ministers of Mercy”

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

World War I began in Europe in 1914 and for the next three years the United States did its best to remain neutral. When the aggressor Central Powers made it impossible for the U.S. to remain neutral any longer, on April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson sent a request to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Germany, citing that nation’s unrestricted submarine warfare and other factors. On April 6 Congress voted to declare war with only one member voting against it.

While it would take three months to raise and train ground forces for combat in France, the British Army continued to take heavy casualties during the fighting in France and Belgium. As quickly as the United States entered the war, they requested medical assistance including equipment, supplies, and personnel. Under the U.S. National Defense Act of July 1916, the American Red Cross worked with the Army to organize fifty base hospitals from U.S. civilian university hospitals. Six of these units sailed for England and then to France including Base Hospital #2 organized from New York Presbyterian Hospital, Base Hospital #5 from Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Base Hospital #10 from Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia.

Volunteers were selected from only the best physicians, nurses, and orderlies. From the base hospitals, they became medical teams at forward clearing stations. These front-line stations were close to the fighting, and service there was subject to the possibility of enemy bombardment. The first American ground combat troops began arriving in Paris, in the summer of 1917. There, on July 4, U.S. Army Colonel Charles E. Stanton proclaimed “*Lafayette, we are here,*” while standing at the tomb of the Marquis de Lafayette whose service had been critical to the Continental Army’s success during the American Revolution.

The newly arrived Army soldiers were assigned far from the front lines in order to welcome continuing forces from the United States and to equip and train for combat. Scores of U.S. Army nurses were at work with

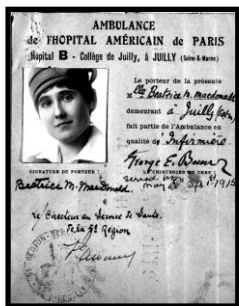
* Reprinted from: True Stories of Women Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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the surgical teams' forward hospitals, including two nurses stationed at British Casualty Clearing Station No. 61. It was a battlefield hospital only four miles from the front-line trenches in Belgium. On August 17, 1917, only weeks after the first Americans began arriving in France, those two nurses would become the first Americans to earn the new Distinguished Service Cross, and the first members of the U.S. Army to earn combat decorations in World War I.

BEATRICE M. MACDONALD

Beatrice Mary MacDonald was born in North Bedeque, Prince County, Prince Edward Island, Canada, on September 29, 1881, to Daniel H. MacDonald and Mary C. *Thornton* MacDonald. She was the middle of seven children with an older brother, two older sisters, a younger brother, and two younger sisters. She grew up in Canada until emigrating to the United States in 1902 at age nineteen, and settled in New York City to continue her education in pursuit of a nursing career.



Beatrice attended the New York City Hospital Nursing School, where she graduated in 1905, and began working as a nurse. In 1915 while the United States was remaining neutral, MacDonald volunteered for the American Ambulance Service and went to France to work in the American Hospital in Paris from May to September.

She returned to New York City to work as an office manager for surgeon George Emerson Brewer of the Presbyterian Hospital at Columbia University. When the United States finally declared war on Germany in 1917, Beatrice enlisted in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps and was one of twenty-three nurses selected to accompany Dr. Brewer's hastily organized medical mission to France. The Columbia University team was deployed to France on the staff of Base Hospital



BEATRICE MACDONALD & HELEN MCCLELLAND

#2. As a nurse and a humanitarian Beatrice was saddened by the death and destruction she saw on her return to France. The impact is quite evident in the sad expression on her face from the 1917 photo of her sitting in front of a bombed-out French town. On July 22, 1917, Nurse MacDonald, who had prior service in France, was selected to be sent to British Casualty Clearing Station #61 near the front lines at Ypres, Belgium.

HELEN G. MCCLELLAND

Helen Grace McClelland was born in Austinburg, Ohio, on July 25, 1887, to Reverend Raymond Green McClelland and Harriet Lee Cooper McClelland. She was the middle child with two older brothers and two younger sisters. The children grew up in a family environment that promoted selfless service; Raymond was a Baptist minister, oldest daughter Mary Jane went on to become a missionary, and youngest son Stewart Winning followed his father's footsteps into a life of ministry.



Helen's inclination was towards a nursing career, and she graduated from Pennsylvania Hospital's School of Nursing in 1912. She then went to work at Emergency Hospital in Easton, Maryland, until she, like MacDonald, went to France in 1915 where she served at the American Hospital at Neuilly. After volunteering for field service, she spent eleven weeks at Casualty Clearing Station #61 at Ypres, Belgium. For her actions there, she was awarded the British Royal Red Cross First Class Medals by Sir Douglas Haig.

Before the end of the year Helen returned home and returned to Pennsylvania to work at the hospital where she had received her training. When the United States entered the war in April 1917, as an Army Reserve Nurse she was called up for service and went to France with the Pennsylvania Hospital team to work at Base Hospital #10. With her prior combat zone experience she was a good fit for front line duty and was sent to the same Casualty Clearing Station #61 where she had served and been decorated by the British two years earlier. There, Helen McClelland and Beatrice MacDonald became co-workers, and friends.

Clearing Stations were the "*emergency rooms*" of combat medicine. They were located near the front-line to quickly admit and triage the

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wounded. Patients with minor wounds were promptly treated and sent back to the fighting; surgical teams focused primarily on those with serious, life-threatening wounds. It was a frantic and often bustling near-endless process of straining the limits of combat medicine to save the lives of these serious cases so they could be stabilized for evacuation to more traditional hospitals further from the front lines.

Because they were located near the battlefield, the clearly marked hospitals frequently were subjected to enemy artillery and/or aerial bombardment. Helen McClelland later recalled how, when she heard the sounds of bombs dropping nearby she lay down on her cot and pressed herself as low as she could. Since the deadly orbs threw deadly shrapnel upward and out in a conical pattern, the closer to the ground she was, the better the chance that the red-hot metal fragments from a nearby explosion would pass above her.

On August 17, 1917, the Germans made a major drive to capture the Passendale Ridge near the Belgian border, and the heavy fighting filled the Casualty Clearing Station with wounded soldiers. After a long, hard day of work, when night fell, the nurses returned to their tents amid the continuing sounds of combat in the distance, to get some much needed sleep. McClelland recalled, *"We were asleep in our tents and awakened by the humming of German motors. Then then bombs began to drop. We reached for our 'tin hats' that we always kept having on our cots along with our gas masks. Even with my eyes closed, I saw the flashes from the explosion. The concussion was terrific."*

The single explosion she wrote about was a particular bomb that exploded only 30 feet from the tent where she and MacDonald were sleeping. Several British soldiers outside were seriously wounded and shrapnel pierced the nurses' tent. The deadly shards pierced McClelland's tin hat and the pocket of her smock containing a small handkerchief where they were hung on a tent pole near her cot. Another white-hot shard struck Beatrice MacDonald's face, tearing the skin and piercing one of her eyes. McClelland began life-saving first aid for her friend and, when she had been bandaged, raced to the operating room to begin receiving other casualties despite ongoing bombardment. Some of the soldiers helped Nurse MacDonald to her feet and she insisted, despite her blood loss and serious wounds, on being helped to the operating room where she continued her own care for other wounded soldiers. The two exhausted women worked well into the early morning hours, saving lives

BEATRICE MACDONALD & HELEN MCCLELLAND

despite the imminent danger to themselves. For their actions they were subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.



Beatrice Mary MacDonald

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Reserve Nurse Beatrice Mary MacDonald, United States Army Nurse Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving with Nurse Corps, American Expeditionary Forces (Attached), while on duty with the surgical team at the British Casualty Clearing Station No. 61, British Area, 17 August 1917. During a German night air raid Nurse MacDonald continued at her post of duty, caring for the sick and wounded until seriously wounded by a German bomb, thereby losing one eye.



Helen Grace McClelland

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Reserve Nurse Helen Grace McClelland, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in action while serving with Nurse Corps, American Expeditionary Forces (Attached), while on duty with the surgical team at British Casualty Clearing Station No. 61, British area, France, 17 August 1917. Nurse McClelland occupied the same tent with Miss Beatrice MacDonald, another reserve nurse, cared for her when wounded, stopped the hemorrhage from her wounds under fire caused by bombs from German aeroplanes.



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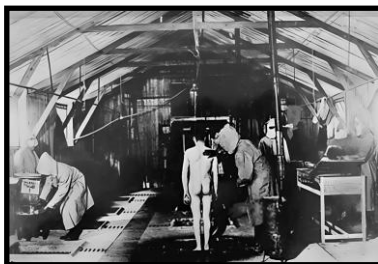
Nurse MacDonald (pictured) and Nurse McClelland were the first, other than the cited soldiers of earlier wars who were *grandfathered in*, to earn the Army's newest and highest combat decoration, and were the Army's first decorated heroes of World War I. Nurse MacDonald was also one of the first U.S. Army casualties of the war and authorized to wear a *wound stripe* on her uniform. Blinded in her right eye for life, which later had to be removed by surgeons, in 1936, four years after General Washington's Badge for Military Merit was reborn as the Purple Heart Medal, Beatrice MacDonald became the first woman to receive that award.



The Distinguished Service Cross was presented in 1919 by Secretary of War Newton D. Baker who noted that it gave him *“great pleasure to say the Army of the United States is under deep obligation to the nursers who served so gallantly and so faithfully. That our losses in this war were so slight, relatively, is undoubtedly due to the fidelity, self-sacrifice, and heroism of the women of the Nurse Corps who ministered to our wounded at the very front.”*

The commendation for the award noted: *“It is interesting that this cross is to be conferred upon a woman and a nurse. This war has, of course, taken the nurses, who are the ministers of mercy, up to the very front lines of battle, and because of the carrying of the war into the third dimension the airplane has, of course, made their task more perilous.* MacDonald was also awarded the Military Medal and the Royal Red Cross from the British government, and the Croix de Guerre from the French government.

Nurse MacDonald underwent six weeks of treatment and recovery before requesting a return to duty in the military hospitals in France and England. She



BEATRICE MACDONALD & HELEN MCCLELLAND

kept a scrap book of her war service in which she noted in particular, the sad cases of those soldiers debilitated by poison gas recalling *“entering chambers containing a certain amount of Phosgene and other gasses, in order that we should be able to recognize them in case of an attack, and to become adept in adjusting our gas masks in less than ten seconds.”* Her scrapbook included a photo of the gas treatment building which also had a back room for those sad situations of the hopeless victims who could not be saved.

When the war ended she remained briefly in Europe with the Army of Occupation before returning home to continue nursing, serving as director of the Pennsylvania Hospital School of Nursing for 23 years until her retirement in 1956. Beatrice MacDonald died in White Plains, New York, on September 4, 1969, and was buried at Long Island National Cemetery in East Farmingdale, New York. A cenotaph was placed in her memory at Saint Paul’s Roman Catholic Cemetery in her native Canadian home at Summerside, Prince Edward Island.



Nurse Helen McClelland returned home from the war and was discharged from the Army Nurse Corps on May 25, 1919. She took a position as assistant superintendent at Protestant Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia, where she served until 1926. She then assumed a similar position at Pennsylvania Hospital until 1930, when she took charge of the Lying-In Hospital and the hospital’s maternity division. She continued to work there until her retirement in 1956, except for her return to service briefly during World War II.



During that second world war, Nurse McClelland returned to the Army Nurse Corps and organized the nursing component of the 52d Evacuation Hospital for duty in the South Pacific. She personally recruited 43 nurses, many from Pennsylvania Hospital, to serve in that hospital in New Caledonia. During her 44-year nursing career, Nurse McClelland was very much involved in the evolution of nursing. She developed accelerated nurse training courses of study for four-year college

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curricula, and helped establish scholarship and educational leaves for her nurses, as well as helping them to win professional recognition. Stacy Peoples, lead historian and curator at Pennsylvania Hospital said, *“Helen Grace McClelland, perhaps more than any other single person, shaped the nursing school and nursing services at Pennsylvania Hospital.”*

Throughout her life Helen remained proud of her war service and was one of a handful of women admitted to the Army and Navy Legion of Valor where she was an active member. On a shelf in her home was the pierced tin hat that hung on the tent pole by her cot on the night a German bomb struck near the tent, and the torn handkerchief that had been in the pocket of her hung smock. On other shelves were displayed ornate “vases” McClelland fashioned from spent Germany shell casings she brought home with her when she returned from her World War I service.



Recalling her friendship with Beatrice MacDonald who arrived at Casualty Clearing Station #61 the day after McClelland returned there, she recalled, *“From the way we greeted each other, the British sisters (nurses) thought we were old friends, but we had not known of each other’s existence until we met at the front.”* When asked about her heroic actions to save her friend life’s after she was grievously wounded, McClelland demurred saying simply, *“It was nothing really. Anybody would have done what I did.”*



When she retired at age 69, Miss McClelland moved to an 83-acre wooded farm near Reading, Pennsylvania, where she enjoyed gardening, hunting, and fishing, all of which she excelled in. It was said that she could *“hit a woodchuck in the eye with a .22-caliber rifle from 75 yards.”* In 1978 she was inducted into the Ohio Women’s Hall of Fame. At age 80 she moved back to her birth town of Fredericktown, where she died on December 20, 1984, at age 97. She was buried at Wayne Baptist Cemetery in Wayne Township, Pennsylvania.



The Harlem Hell Fighters

VICTORS ON THE BATTLEFIELD – VANQUISHED ON THE HOMEFRONT

BY: DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN



On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson, in response to an escalating series of provocations by Imperial Germany, called on Congress to declare war against Germany. Four days later, on April 6, Congress overwhelmingly approved it. After more than two and a half years of uneasy neutrality, the United States was now an active combatant on the side of the Allies led by Great Britain, France, and Italy in the Great War (later to be called World War I.)

Despite witnessing for almost three years the battles ravaging the European continent and Atlantic Ocean shipping, the United States was singularly unprepared for war. Overnight its army had to go from being a constabulary force of just over 100,000 men (but for a handful of nurses they were all men) who were used to fighting renegade Native Americans and Mexican bandits, to one numbering in the millions. They were capable of battling an enemy whose warmaking had been honed by years of bitter conflict. Aware that it was tantalizingly close to victory, the German army was racing to deliver the deathblow on the Allies in France before the impact of fresh troops from America turned the tide.

As part of the nation's mobilization campaign, in May 1917 Congress passed the Selective Service Act. But even before then young men

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throughout the country were enlisting with patriotic fervor. Among them were men from New York City and, for the most part, from a northern Manhattan neighborhood. Just one problem:

These young men were, to use the term of the day, Negroes.

Thanks to the Supreme Court's seven to one decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (ironically, the sole dissenting vote came from John Marshall Harlan, a Kentuckian whose family had owned slaves prior to the Civil War), "*separate but equal*"—segregation—was codified as the law of the land. And in the former Confederate states of the South where the Civil War was a living memory, it was enforced with a vengeance. These Southern states passed variety of statutes that collectively came to be called "*Jim Crow*" laws that disenfranchised and restricted the civil liberties of African Americans. While discrimination and segregation were most prominent in the South, it was the warp and weft of society elsewhere in the country as well. And it was that social fabric that created a vexing dilemma for the U.S. Army.

The Army didn't want the African American men volunteers, and later draftees, historically doing all it could to keep as many as possible out of uniform. But thanks to the mushrooming wartime manpower demands, it needed them. The question now was: where to put them? Like the southern states, the Army was segregated, and would remain so until 1948 when President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 integrating the military. To accommodate the influx the Army revived the precedent established in the Civil War of creating "*colored units*" led by White officers. Ultimately about 400,000 African Americans joined the Army, with roughly half seeing service overseas, primarily in France. Of that half, only 42,000 saw combat. One of the African American units that did was the 369th Infantry Regiment which, in earning the nickname *Harlem Hellfighters*, would achieve honor and glory under the flag for which it fought and shed blood—one that was not a flag of the United States of America.

The 369th began existence as the 15th New York National Guard regiment whose origin dated back to the Civil War when it assisted in suppressing the New York City draft riots in July 1863, and a year later in federal service guarding the port of New York City. When the country entered the war, the men of the 15th New York, and the African American community as a whole, saw it as an opportunity to improve their conditions. In demonstration of its patriotic commitment to the war effort, the 15th New York became the first National Guard unit in the

THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS

country to reach full war strength. Part of the motivation in doing so was the desire to be included in the roster of the 42nd Division, nicknamed the “*Rainbow Division*” because as part of a publicity campaign it would include units from every state. But when Colonel William Hayward, the 15th New York’s commanding officer, put in his request, he was turned down. According to legend, he was told that the reason was “*Black is not a color of the rainbow.*”

The 15th New York was mustered into Federal service on July 25, 1917, and for the first few months spent time guarding rail lines, construction sites, and other camps throughout New York State. On October 8, 1917, it received orders to travel to Camp Wadsworth for final training before being shipped overseas. A more maladroit order by the U.S. Army could not have been made.

Camp Wadsworth was located near Spartanburg, South Carolina. When the camp was opened in July 1917, the community looked forward to the economic boom provided by the arrival of thousands of troops, having received assurance by the Army that no Black troops would be stationed there. So, it came as an unpleasant surprise to the town’s White citizens when the men of the 15th New York arrived. In their eyes the problem of suddenly having thousands of Black soldiers in their midst was compounded by the fact that, unlike the local Blacks who lived and labored under the strict protocols of *Jim Crow*, these Blacks were instead “uppity.”

The bad relationship between the racist White community and the Black soldiers of the 15th New York deteriorated so rapidly that by the third week it was no longer a question of “*if*,” but rather “*when*” the Army would have a full-blown race riot on its hands like what had happened earlier in East St. Louis, Missouri, and Houston, Texas. Orders were cut and, before the end of the month was out; the unit was on a train heading back north for deployment to France. Two days after Christmas, on December 27, 1917, the 15th New York arrived at Brest, the French port city on the western tip of the Brittany peninsula. From there they traveled to the port of St. Nazaire on the southeast border of the peninsula where it was put to work—as stevedore. On March 1, 1918, they lost their identity, being reorganized and re-designated the 369th Infantry Regiment. For the men of the unit, what was most galling, aside from the name change itself, was the fact that numbers above 200 were assigned to draftee units, and, while the 15th New York did contain

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draftees, it entered the Army as a volunteer regiment and was proud of that fact.

For three months the 369th labored as . . . laborers. As they were doing so, their commanding officer repeatedly petitioned American Expeditionary Forces commander, General John J. Pershing, for a combat assignment. After all, it was an infantry unit trained to fight, not offload ship cargo. Finally, on April 8, 1918, it received orders to report to the front. But, not as part of the American First Army. Instead, it was assigned to the French Fourth Army.

As the headquarters of the AEF saw it, this decision killed two birds with one stone. It was a sop (standard operating procedure) to what overall Allied commander Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch wanted, which was American units integrated into the British and French armies. It was



also what the AEF wanted, keeping a Black unit segregated from the White units composing the American First Army. But, as Colonel William Heyward angrily wrote in a letter back home, *“Our great American general [Pershing] simply put the black orphan in a basket, set it on the doorstep of the French, pulled the bell, and went away.”*

Upon arrival at the 16th Division of the French Fourth Army, the men were issued new uniforms, weapons, and gear—all French. While this made sense from a logistics standpoint, since they would henceforth be supplied by the French, it served as a further reminder of their unwanted status within the American army chain of command.

A little over a month after reporting to the division, on the night of May 11, a member of the 369th dramatically proved the faith the French Army had in the unit. Almost single-handedly, while stationed in an outpost in *No Man’s Land* on the front, Private Henry Johnson routed a German patrol, first with rifle and grenades, then, after being wounded and after fighting went hand-to-hand, with his machete-like bolo knife. For his heroic action the French Army awarded him the Croix de Guerre with gold palm. Not only was he the unit’s, as well as the Black

THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS

community's first hero, but he was also the first American soldier to be decorated for valor. The response from the AEF? Nothing.

Not until well after his death in 1929 would his nation officially recognize his valor. First, he was recognized with award of the Purple Heart (1996), then with the Distinguished Service Cross (2003), and finally with the Medal of Honor (2015).

Dubbed the “*Black Rattlers*” by their commanding officer after the black rattlesnake on their shoulder patch and with the French bestowing on the unit the sobriquet Hommes des Bronze (“*Men of Bronze*”) for their combat gallantry, the 369th came to be known to history under the nickname *Harlem Hellfighters*. It ended the war as the most decorated American unit in the conflict. The French government awarded individual Croix de Guerre medals to 170 of its members as well as a unit Croix de Guerre citation.

As for the country of their birth, formal recognition happened well after the death of all of its members. In addition to Johnson's award, Sergeant Willim Shemin received a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross. In August 2021 Congress awarded the unit its highest award, the Congressional Gold Medal.

But notably and arguably the most memorable contribution the unit made to both the war and culture was that of its band. Composed of professional musicians in civilian life, their performances of American jazz, a music form created in the States and by African Americans. The French audience was enthralled and it swept the nation.



William Henry Johnson



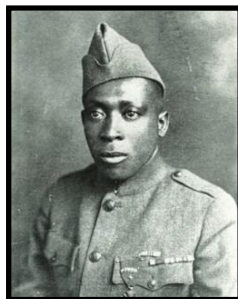
Air Force veteran and portrait artist from McKinney, Texas, and founder of the North Texas Fallen Warrior project, Colin Kimball specializes in portraying our nation's fallen warriors. This portrait is part of a compilation of portraits he is working on to tell the stories of our nation's posthumous and belatedly recognized Medal of Honor recipients who never got to wear the medal, as well as other military heroes.

William Henry Johnson

A HARLEM HELLFIGHTER'S BELATED RECOGNITION

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

The man that Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (son of President Theodore Roosevelt and himself a Medal of Honor recipient) called one of the “*five bravest Americans*” to serve in World War I was Private Henry Johnson. When he registered for the draft, Johnson said he was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on July 15, 1882. Little is known of his early life other than that he moved to Albany, New York, in his early teens, working various jobs before working as a redcap porter at the Albany Union Station on Broadway. He was a little guy, standing only 5-feet-4-inches tall, when he enlisted in the Army on June 5, 1917.



Returning home after the war, his heroism was legendary among his fellow *Harlem Hellfighters*, and even known by others including Roosevelt. The August 24, 1918, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* included an article by Irvin S. Cobb titled “*Young Black Joe*” which shared his exploits in World War I. Nonetheless, he died in obscurity on July 1, 1929. His heroism resurfaced six decades later when a review of World War I Black soldiers was conducted, resulting in Freddie Stowers’ Distinguished Service Cross being upgraded to the Medal of Honor, and Private Johnson being belatedly awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Johnson’s award was upgraded more than a decade later, and the hero of the *Harlem Hellfighters* was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Private Henry Johnson (ASN: 1316046), United States Army. Private Henry Johnson

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distinguished himself by extraordinary acts of heroism at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a member of Company C, 369th Infantry Regiment, 93d Infantry Division, American Expeditionary Forces, on May 15, 1918, during combat operations against the enemy on the front lines of the Western Front in France. In the early morning hours, Private Johnson and another soldier were on sentry duty at a forward outpost when they received a surprise attack from the German raiding party consisting of at least 12 soldiers. While under intense enemy fire and despite receiving significant wounds, Private Johnson mounted a brave retaliation, resulting in several enemy casualties. When his fellow soldier was badly wounded and being carried away by the enemy, Private Johnson exposed himself to great danger by advancing from his position to engage the two enemy captors in hand-to-hand combat. Wielding only a knife and gravely wounded himself, Private Johnson continued fighting, defeating the two captors and rescuing the wounded soldier. Displaying great courage, he continued to hold back the larger enemy force until the defeated enemy retreated, leaving behind a large cache of weapons and equipment and providing valuable intelligence. Without Private Johnson's quick actions and continued fighting, even in the face of almost certain death, the enemy might have succeeded in capturing prisoners in the outpost and abandoning valuable intelligence. Private Johnson's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, Company C, 369th Infantry Regiment, 93d Infantry Division, and the United States Army.

In ceremonies at the White House in Washington, D.C., on June 2, 2015, President Barack Obama presented Private William Henry Johnson's Medal of Honor to Command Sergeant Major Louis Wilson of the New York National Guard, who accepted the

award on behalf of the hero who died, virtually unrecognized and little known, more than eighty years earlier.

William Henry Johnson is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.



Marcelino Serna

A MEXICAN HERO IN WORLD WAR I

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Military awards are credited to the hometown of the recipient at the time they entered military service. That gives Fort Morgan, Colorado, claim to one of World War I's highly decorated heroes, and a most unusual man.

Marcelino Serna was born into poverty in Chihuahua, Mexico, on April 26, 1896. In 1916, at the age of 20, he crossed the Rio Grande and settled in El Paso, Texas, to find work. In addition to what he found in Texas, he also travelled to Colorado to find seasonal work in the beet fields at Fort Morgan. It was there he was detained by federal officials who wished to verify his draft status. Fearful that he might be deported, he opted to join the U.S. Army for service in World War I, enlisting in Fort Morgan and inducted in Denver.



After training he was sent to France as a member of Company B, 355th Infantry Regiment, 89th Division. How he got through training is unknown, but in Europe, unable to speak English, when his commanders learned he was not an American citizen he was offered to be discharged. He declined, preferring to remain with his comrades.

During the *Battle of St. Mihiel*, France, his unit was confronted by a German machine gunner who had killed 12 soldiers. Crawling through enemy fire that twice hit his helmet, he got close enough to throw four grenades, killing many in the machine gun nest and forcing eight to surrender. On September 12, 1918, his unit was fighting in the Meuse-Argonne region when he saw an enemy sniper and wounded him with his rifle. He followed the wounded enemy to a trench and threw in three grenades. His actions resulted in the death of 26 enemy and he captured the 24 who survived. For that latter action he was personally decorated by General John J. Pershing with the Distinguished Service Cross. He was

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wounded twice, in both legs, the last time only four days before the Armistice. For these wounds he received two Purple Hearts.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Private Marcelino Serna (ASN: 2195593), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in action while serving with Company B, 355th Infantry Regiment, 89th Division, American Expeditionary Forces, near Flirey, France, 12 September 1918. Private Serna displayed exceptional coolness and courage in single handed charging and capturing 24 Germans.



He was discharged in 1919 and returned without fanfare after the war to El Paso. In 1922 he married Mexican-born Simona Jimenez, and in 1924 he became a United States Citizen. The couple remained in El Paso where Serna worked as a city truck driver and a civil service employee at Fort Bliss. The couple was graced from 1925 to 1937 with five daughters and one son, only two of them surviving their childhood.

He retired as a plumber from William Beaumont Hospital, and passed away on February 29, 1992. He was buried with full military honors at Fort Bliss National Cemetery in El Paso, Texas.



Freddie Stowers

RECOGNITION: BETTER LATE – THAN NEVER

C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Freddie Stowers was born in Sandy Springs, Anderson Country, South Carolina, to Wiley Stowers and Ann *Rackett* Stowers, the oldest of their four children with younger brother John, and younger sisters Georgina and Mary Jane. His grandfather grew up in slavery. Freddie grew up in Anderson County where he worked on his father's farm. On March 24, 1917, he married Miss Pearl Crumey. A short time later he was drafted for service in the U.S. Army, and was serving in uniform when the couple's daughter was born.



After training, Freddie was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 371st Infantry Regiment, 93d Division. The 93d Division was a segregated unit composed almost entirely of Black soldiers who were generally commanded by White officers. The Division was composed of four regiments; the 369th Infantry Regiment (*The Harlem Hellfighters*), the 379th Infantry Regiment (*The Black Devils*), and the 372d Infantry Regiment were stood up from existing Army units. The 371st Infantry Regiment was composed mostly of draftees like Stowers.

The Division sailed for France on April 7, 1918. Upon arrival, the Division came under French command; during the war the four regiments served under three different French Army corps, and three different French Divisions. The American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) rejected the Black units from serving with it in combat; the French had many of their own Black soldiers serving, and welcomed the segregated unit. For this reason, most of the awards earned by the 93d Division soldiers were French awards, although the Division earned 28 U.S. Army Distinguished Service Crosses, and 41 Silver Stars.



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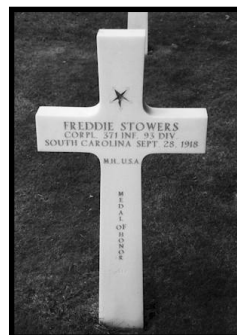
In the spring of 1918, the Germans launched an offensive, driving nearly to Rome. American soldiers and Marines of the American Expeditionary Forces saw their first major engagements of the war, fighting with British and French forces, and pushing back the German advance. In September the A.E.F. launched an offensive at St. Mihiel, a critical salient that had obstructed critical rail lines since the first year of the war. It was the first American offensive of the war.

The entrenched Germans at St. Mihiel were quickly crushed by overwhelming American air power and the advance of more than 200,000 A.E.F. soldiers with 275 tanks, and 100,000 French troops including the Black soldiers of the 93d Division. After four days the Germans retreated to the formidable forest Argonne Forest, fighting with their backs to the wall along the border of their homeland. During fighting there over the next two months, it quickly resulted in an Armistice bringing an end of the war.

On the early morning of September 28, 1918, the 371st Infantry Regiment was advancing into the Argonne Forest, and Stowers' Company C was assigned to assault Cote 188, a heavily defended hill near Ardeuil-et-Montfauxelles. Despite the heavy fire of the dug in Germans, and despite several casualties, they advance continued. Soon the Germans communicated that they wanted to surrender. As Company C advanced on the German trenches to gain control of their prisoners, suddenly the enemy machine guns mowed them down with withering fire; the "*surrender*" had been a ruse to draw the Americans into the open where they could be massacred by the intense fire. In the opening salvo, Company C sustained the loss of half of its men, including Stower's platoon leader and several of the more senior officers.

Although only a Corporal, Stowers rallied the remainder of his platoon and began crawling towards an enemy machine gun nest, shouting for his men to follow him. They reached the first trench line and knocked out the enemy machine gun. Hit by enemy fire, Stowers shrugged it off and continued his advance until he was hit a second time. Even as he collapsed to the ground, he shouted for his men to continue their advance, contributing to the capture of Hill 188.

Stowers was buried at A.B.M.C. Meuse-Argonne Cemetery at Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, with 133 of his comrades. He was recommended for



Freddie Stowers

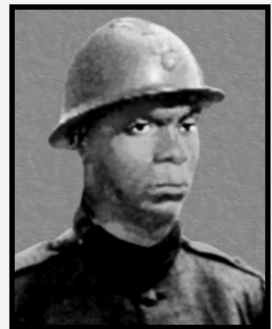
the Medal of Honor for his actions that day, but the recommendation was never processed. Instead, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

World War I and World War II were conspicuous due the fact that during two world wars, not a single Black American received the Medal of Honor. Black Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines earned Medals of Honor in the Civil War, 18 *Buffalo Soldiers* earned Medals of Honor in the Indian Wars, and five *Buffalo Soldiers* and one Sailor earned Medals of Honor in the Spanish-American War. But from 1898 until the Korean War, although nearly a million-and-a-half Blacks served in the military, not one Medal of Honor was awarded.

As a result, in 1990 Congress called upon the Army to conduct a review of World War I decorated Black soldiers to see if some may have merited the Medal of Honor, but been denied due to racial attitudes. Freddie Stowers' actions and "lost" Medal of Honor recommendation stood out, and the Black hero from South Carolina saw his Distinguished Service Cross upgraded to the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Corporal Freddie Stowers, United States Army, for exceptional heroism on 28 September 1918, while serving as a squad leader in Company C, 371st Infantry Regiment, 93d Infantry Division. Corporal Stowers' company was the lead company during the attack on Hill 188, Champagne Marne Sector, France, during World War I. A few minutes after the attack began, the enemy ceased firing and began climbing up onto the parapets of the trenches, holding up their arms as if wishing to surrender. The enemy's actions caused the American forces to cease fire and to come out into the open. As the company started forward and when within about 100 meters of the trench line, the enemy jumped back into their trenches and greeted



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Corporal Stowers' company with interlocking bands of machine gun fire and mortar fire causing well over fifty percent casualties. Faced with incredible enemy resistance, Corporal Stowers took charge, setting such a courageous example of personal bravery and leadership that he inspired his men to follow him in the attack. With extraordinary heroism and complete disregard of personal danger under devastating fire, he crawled forward leading his squad toward an enemy machine gun nest, which was causing heavy casualties to his company. After fierce fighting, the machine gun position was destroyed and the enemy soldiers were killed. Displaying great courage and intrepidity, Corporal Stowers continued to press the attack against a determined enemy. While crawling forward and urging his men to continue the attack on a second trench line, he was gravely wounded by machine gun fire. Although, Corporal Stowers was mortally wounded, he pressed forward, urging on the members of his squad, until he died. Inspired by the heroism and display of bravery of Corporal Stowers, his company continued the attack against incredible odds, contributing to the capture of Hill 188 and causing heavy enemy casualties. Corporal Stowers' conspicuous gallantry, extraordinary heroism and supreme devotion to his men were well above and beyond the call of duty, follow the finest traditions of military service and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army.

On April 24, 1991, President George H. W. Bush presented Corporal Freddie Stowers' posthumous Medal of Honor to his two surviving sisters, Georgina and Mary. In that moment not only was a wrong made right, but it had a significant impact. The Army subsequently reviewed high



awards to Black Soldiers in World War II, On January 13, 1994, seven Black World War II heroes received their overdue Medals of Honor, and additional reviews resulted in awards on June 21, 2000, to 22 Japanese-American World War II heroes. Additional reviews uncovered many other heroes, including one Black hero in the Civil War. As recently as this year (2025), such reviews resulted in two more Black Soldiers who received Distinguished Service Crosses saw their awards upgraded to the Medal of Honor, both awards posthumously presented.

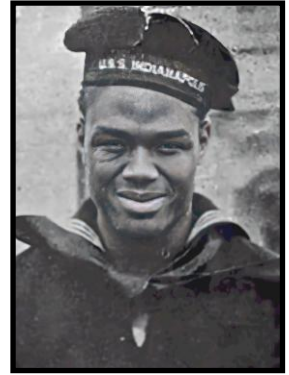
Doris “Dorie” Miller

AN UNEXPECTED HERO ON AN UNPRECEDENTED DAY

XAVIER LUNDIN

EARLY LIFE

Doris Miller was born on October 12, 1919, in Waco, Texas, to Conery Miller and Henrietta Murell Miller. He was named “Doris” because after giving birth to two sons, Selvia and Conery, the midwife was convinced her third child was going to be a girl. Two years later Henrietta Miller gave birth to fourth son, Arthur James.



“Dorie,” as he was called, grew up on the family farm, doing chores and other farming labor. He also enjoyed hunting squirrels with his .22 rifle. He attended Alexander James Moore High School, which from 1923 to 1952 taught kindergarten through 12th grade, and played fullback on the football team. After failing the eighth grade twice, in 1937 he dropped out of school and applied to join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a New Deal program established in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to address unemployment during the Great Depression, but was rejected. Disappointed, he continued to work on his father’s farm and also completed a correspondence course in taxidermy.

On September 16, 1939, nineteen-year-old Miller enlisted for a six-year commitment in the Navy. At the time, the Navy had a historically welcome for enlisting Black sailors. They were, however, limited in the roles in which they could serve. Black Sailors were usually assigned as stevedores doing manual labor loading and unloading their ship, serving as cooks in the kitchen, or as mess stewards serving meals to the ship’s officers. Dorie Miller received a rating of third class mess attendant. He, like other Black sailors, received no combat training; Black sailors were never expected to serve in a combat role.

Dorie served aboard the U.S.S. *Pyro* (AE-1), until January 2, 1940, when he transferred to the battleship U.S.S. *West Virginia* (BB-48).

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There he joined the ship's boxing competition, becoming the vessel's heavyweight champion. After a brief tour of duty aboard the U.S.S. *Nevada* (BB-36) in the summer of 1940, he returned in August to the *West Virginia*, home ported out of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In February 1941 he was promoted to mess attendant second class.

ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

December 7, 1941, had all the marks of a beautiful Sunday in a tropical paradise. Anchored in neat rows around Ford Island at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, were the finest of the American Navy's Pacific Fleet. Many of the officers and crew had been allowed to spend the weekend ashore, and those still on duty were relaxed when the sun came up, unaware of what was occurring a few miles away at Kaneohe Bay.

On the south-west side of Ford Island sat seven huge battleships:

U.S.S. *Arizona* (BB-39)

U.S.S. *California* (BB-44)

U.S.S. *Maryland* BB-46

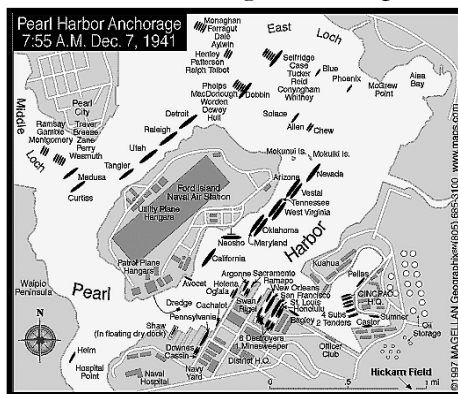
U.S.S. *Nevada* (BB-36)

U.S.S. *Oklahoma* (BB-37)

U.S.S. *Tennessee* BB-43

U.S.S. *West Virginia* BB-48

In dry dock nearby was the battleship U.S.S. *Pennsylvania* (BB-38), along with the destroyers *Shaw* (DD-373), *Cassin* (DD-372), and *Downes* (DD-375).



Throughout the harbor sat additional ships of the Pacific Fleet, more than 100 of them in all. They represented almost half the entire fleet. The only thing missing was the presence of the three big aircraft carriers U.S.S. *Lexington*, U.S.S. *Enterprise*, and U.S.S. *Saratoga*, all of which were out to sea. It was to be a fortunate turn of events for the U.S. Navy on a day when there was little else to be thankful for.

When the first wave of Japanese planes descended on Pearl Harbor the 8 a.m. muster and flag raising ceremonies were well underway on most of the big battleships neatly lined up on the southeast side of Ford Island. With *Zeroes* sweeping in from three directions, chaos erupted all around. As the first torpedo struck the U.S.S. *Utah* on the northeast side of Ford

Doris “Dorie” Miller

Island, torpedo bombers began releasing their lethal charges against the Navy’s big battleships on “*Battleship Row*.”

Doris Miller woke up that morning as typical at 6 a.m., and got to work serving breakfast. It was nearly two hours later when the Japanese aircraft carrier *Akagi* fired the first of several torpedoes that hit the *U.S.S. West Virginia*, forcing Miller to quickly deviate from his previously assigned mundane task of working on his fellow sailor’s laundry. An alarm went off at the first attack and Miller headed to his battle station only to find it destroyed. With no assigned destination in the chaos, he then went to the ship’s deck and reported himself available for further instruction; he was told to relocate the wounded to safety.

The ship’s communications officer, Lieutenant Commander Doir C. Johnson, saw Miller’s display of strength in his rescue attempt, and ordered him to aid in moving the ship’s captain, Mervyn Bennion, who had a gaping abdomen wound from shrapnel. Miller and another sailor lifted the captain but remained unable to move him from the bridge. The two did manage to carry him from his exposed position on a cot, successfully getting Captain Bennion from the damaged bridge and relocating him to a more secure location behind the conning tower. The Benion refused to back down; he demanded more information on the current situation and gave orders to continue to fight. Bennion was carried up to the navigation bridge for further security where he died from blood loss. He was later posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, one of fifteen awarded for heroism on the *Day of Infamy*.

Lieutenant Frederic H. White, an officer in charge of the ship’s guns, then ordered Miller to help him load the unmanned Number 1 and Number 2 Browning .50 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns to the rear of the conning tower. Although he had never been trained in gunner, Miller learned the weapon quickly with direction from Lieutenant White and Ensign Victor Delano. He was put on the starboard gun where he fired at the incoming Japanese aircraft until he ran out of ammunition. He was



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officially credited with the downing of at least one enemy plane; he and comrades who witnessed his actions claimed he shot down between four to six. When the assault slowed, Miller proceeded to relocate injured soldiers through many obstacles to the quarterdeck.

The ship sustained heavy damage, but the crew worked hard to prevent it from capsizing. The Japanese dropped two armor-piercing bombs on the Deck of the West Virginia, which crashed through and exploded below. She was also hit by five 18-inch torpedoes to her port side. The *West Virginia* finally sank as the surviving



crew abandoned the ship. In the aftermath, Messman Doris Miller turned his attention to moving his wounded through oil that burned on the water, to the quarter deck for subsequent evacuation. He was credited with *“unquestionably saving the lives of a number of people who might otherwise have been lost.”*

Captain Benyon was one of 132 officers and enlisted sailors that were killed on the battleship; 52 were wounded. Miller was one of the fortunate Sailors who made it off the ship when the attack was over. The *West Virginia* was later raised, restored, and returned to duty during the remainder of World War II.

On that horrible day, within two hours four U.S. Navy battleships were sunk, and four were badly damaged. Three light cruisers, three destroyers, and three other ships were also badly damaged. Of 390 military aircraft based in Hawaii, the Army and Navy suffered the loss of 188 aircraft, with 159 others damaged. A total of 2,350 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen, as well as 49 Hawaii civilians were killed in the attack.

Doris Miller was eventually recognized for his bravery. The Navy initially released a list of commendations for actions of those who fought at Pearl Harbor. One was a commendation for an unnamed black man. On March 12, 1942, Miller identified and named as the previously unknown Black Sailor. He became recognized as one of the *“first U.S. heroes of World War II.”* On May 11, President Roosevelt approved award of the Navy’s highest award, the Navy Cross, for Miller.

LATER, SHORT LIFE

On May 27, 1942, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz presented the Navy Cross to Miller in ceremonies aboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Enterprise (CV-6). On June 1, 1942, Miller was promoted to mess attendant first class. Later in the month he returned home. He was to literally become the U.S. Navy’s “*Black poster boy*,” and he became quite famous in the United States. It was uncomfortable for the shy young sailor, quite in contrast with his simple beginnings, but it did serve a noble purpose.



As a good sailor, Miller endured the “dog and pony show” back home, it was necessary to gain and continue public support for the war effort. He also served as an inspiration to other Black Sailors, and did at least enjoy visiting with them. It was also a boon to recruitment efforts to enlist other young Black men for service in the wartime U.S. military forces. In February 1943, Miller was promoted to steward’s mate, and returned to the Pacific, assigned to the



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U.S.S. *Liscome Bay* (CVE-) still serving as a member of the kitchen crew.

In November 1943 the *Liscome Bay* was at sea supporting Operation *Galvanic*, the American attack on the Gilbert Islands in the Pacific. On November 24, 1943, the day after ground forces secured Main Island, the Japanese submarine *I-175* launched a torpedo at the *Liscome Bay*. The torpedo struck near the ship's bomb magazine, and there was a chain reaction followed by a massive explosion that knocked Sailors on ships half a mile away off their feet. The ship listed and sank by the stern in only 23 minutes. Only about one-third of the ship's officers and sailors survived. Many who survived her sinking later died of their wounds; in all 702 Sailors were killed, most, including Doris Miller, missing in action. Miller is memorialized in the *Courts of the Missing* at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.

On May 28, 1944, a granite marker was placed to Miller's memory at Moore High School in Waco. On June 30, 1963, the Brooke-class frigate was commissioned the U.S.S. *Miller* (FF-1091) in honor of the Navy messman who became a hero on the *Day of Infamy*. On January 31, 2019, a contract was issued for the building of the Navy's fourth Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier. Launch is anticipated for October 29, 2029, and it will be commissioned the U.S.S. *Doris Miller* (CVN-81). It will be the first aircraft carrier named for a Sailor who was both Black and an enlisted Sailor. On February 4, 2010, in Washington, DC, the Postal Service issued a 44-cent Distinguished Sailors commemorative stamp in four designs, one of which commemorated the life and heroism of Doris Miller.



Both of Doris' brothers also served in World War II. Younger brother Army Corporal Arthur James Miller spent 18 months in the European Theater of Operations as a driver hauling food, equipment, and supplies under heavy fire in the Rhine River Offensive. Older brother Army Private Connery Miller served in the segregated 92d Infantry Division, the only Black division to serve in combat in World War II



Charles Ball*

THE FIRST NATIVE AMERICAN HERO OF WWII

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Ten hours after the Japanese launched their December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Japanese aircraft began attacks on the airfields on Luzon in the Philippine Islands. After continued bombardment, less than two weeks later on December 20 the Japanese landed ground troops on Luzon, and the American and Filipino forces marshalled a defense there.

Initially, General Douglas MacArthur attempted to have his American soldiers and Philippine Scouts meet and defeat the invading Japanese as they landed on the island's northern beaches. The Japanese threat to the Philippines had been recognized twenty years earlier, and a war plan for its defense was written in 1928. Known as "*Orange No. 3*" (WPO-3), the defense of the islands called for a tactical delay of the invading enemy. Rather than battling the Japanese throughout the island, if they could not defeat the invaders at their point of landing, they were to pull back to the peninsula of Bataan at the opening of Manila Bay. There they were to delay the enemy for up to six months until reinforcements could be brought in.

American forces and Philippine Scouts fought courageously, but on December 22, hope began to vanish. Japanese Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma waded ashore at Lingayen Gulf, just north of the Bataan Peninsula. Supported by 80 ships of the Japanese navy and 43,000 more fresh troops, the Philippine defenders were doomed.

Two days later the Japanese took control of Manila. Meanwhile, more than 80,000 American and Filipino soldiers withdrew to the 500 square mile Bataan peninsula to maintain the delaying defense.



* Reprinted from: True Stories of Montana Heroes That Defy Comprehension

TRUE DIVERSITY OF U.S. MILITARY HEROES

Across the island the Philippine Scouts and Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen, now all performing as Infantry, continued to battle the enemy. It was a brave effort; many of the Filipinos were fighting with outdated World War I British Enfield rifles. Ammunition began to run out, food was in short supply, and disease depleted their ranks. But they stubbornly held out, anxiously awaiting the resources of the United States that was promised by the President. Amazingly the soldiers stopped the Japanese advance at the Abucay Line and held it for twelve days. Among those heroic defenders was a soldier from Harlem, Montana.

CHARLES BALL

Charles “Charley” Ball was born on April 9, 1919, in Harlem, Montana, to William and Cecella *Azure* Ball. Charles was of Native American ancestry, his father was Assiniboiné and his mother was Cree, both of them born on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Northern Montana. His father worked as a blacksmith in Harlem, while Cecelia was busy raising the family’s eight children on the family ranch. They included brothers Robert, Bartholomew, Thomas, and John, and sisters Mary Elizabeth, Josephine, and Katherine.



As a young Charles he worked for Miller Brothers Land & Livestock on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and in 1936, he joined the effort to fight two fires in the Little Rockies Mountains that burned 7,000 acres. On October 16, 1940, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, only a month after his older brother enlisted. After training, Charley was sent to the Philippine Islands in April 1941. He was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry Division.

As a young man growing up in Montana, Charley developed exceptional skills in scouting and marksmanship that would serve him well. He was well liked, and his friends described him as being a little rowdy, but a loyal friend.

By the time the Japanese brought war to the Philippine Islands, Ball had been promoted to corporal. He was among the heroic defenders of the important Abucay Line where the outnumbered and outgunned

Charles Ball

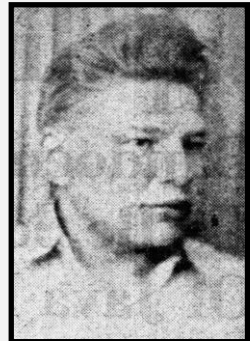
Americans and Philippine Scouts did their best to delay the enemy advance.

In the tropical jungles, where Japanese snipers often lay hidden, his scouting skills and keen perception served him and his company well. He often observed abnormalities in the jungle vegetation and killed the enemy snipers before they could fire on his comrades.

On January 24, 1942, his company was holding an exposed ridgeline in the front line when Corporal Ball was wounded. Nevertheless, he refused to be evacuated for treatment, dressed his own wound, and continued to fire on the enemy, repulsing several attacks on his position. Single-handedly, the accurate fire of his **Browning Automatic Rifle** held the enemy at bay until his comrades could withdraw. For his action he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, becoming the first Montana soldier to earn the Army's highest award during World War II, and the first Native American hero of World War II.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Private Charles Ball (ASN: 19019171), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, Philippine Division, in action against enemy forces on 24 January 1942, in the vicinity of Abucay Hacienda, Bataan, Philippine Islands. Wounded while his company was occupying an exposed front line position under heavy rifle and machine gun fire, Private Ball refused to be evacuated to the rear, but dressed his own wound and maintained the fire of his automatic rifle, thereby assisting materially in repulsing several strong enemy attacks on his position. When his company was ordered to withdraw, this gallant soldier remained in position, effectively covering the withdrawal of his platoon by fire from his



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weapon. Private Ball's extraordinary heroism, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the Philippine Scouts, and the United States Army.

Even after his company withdrew, despite his wound, Private Ball continued to fearlessly attack the enemy on a series of ridges until the enemy attack faltered.

Ball continued in the fighting across Bataan, but the enemy force was overpowering and the 31st Infantry Division continued to fall back. On April 6, after completing a reconnaissance of possible routes of withdrawal from Mount Samat, Ball reported to his Battalion Commander, Major Addison W. Durham. While making his report an enemy artillery shell burst in a nearby tree, mortally wounding him as well as his commander and several others nearby. His body was never recovered, and he was officially listed as "*missing in action*" on October 6, 1942. He was memorialized in the *Wall of the Missing* at the American Battle Monuments Commission Cemetery in Manila, Philippine Islands, and a cenotaph was erected to his memory at Fort Belknap, Montana.



On February 8, General Homma received an infusion of fresh troops from Tokyo. For the Americans and Filipinos there were no fresh troops and no resupply. When Singapore fell on February 15, 1942, it became apparent to the Philippine defenders that the United States would not be sending reinforcements – the Philippine defenders were expendable. On April 9, 1942, the valiant defenders of Bataan, nearly out of ammunition, facing starvation and without rations after months of bitter fighting, surrendered.

Joseph Red Door & Arthur Belgarde

MONTANA'S FIGHTING INDIANS

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN

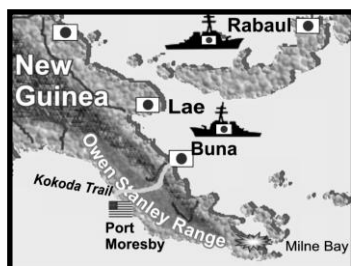
New Guinea in the Southwest Pacific, is the world's second largest island after Greenland. During World War II it was the site of some of the war's deadliest and most difficult combat actions. Combat and disease caused more than 42,000 Allied casualties.

New Guinea itself was divided into three territories until 1918. The western half of the island was the Dutch Colony of Netherlands New Guinea, and the eastern side of the island was divided horizontally; Germany claimed the north portion in 1884, and the British assumed the southern area as their protectorate. After World War I the German area was ceded to the British and became the Australian Colony of New Guinea, known as Papua, including the Bismarck Archipelago with its deep port of Rabaul on New Britain Island. Only 81 nautical miles north of the tip of Australia, New Guinea became a strategic battle ground during World War II.



On February 19, 1942, Japanese aircraft bombed Darwin, Australia, in the largest single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on that continent. Australia was one of America's strongest allies in the Pacific, and the only area not already under Japanese control. Those American bombers and fighters that survived the battles in the Philippine Islands, as well as others flown there from the United States, began missions over New Guinea and Rabaul to defend Australia.

The Papuan Peninsula juts out into the Coral Sea from the east side of New Guinea, with Port Moresby on its southern coast. Only 600 miles from Australia, in 1942 Port Moresby was the only Allied stronghold in the region. It was the last line



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of defense between Tokyo and Australia. Invading and taking Port Moresby (*Operation MO*) had been the primary objective of the Japanese incursion that led to the *Battle of the Coral Sea* on May 7 & 8, 1942. Despite the failure of that invasion, the Japanese refused to concede the important port to the Allies. In July the Japanese landed thousands of seasoned jungle fighters along the northern coast of the peninsula, fortifying positions at Lae, Salamaua, Gona, Buna, and points in between.

The Japanese repeatedly bombed Port Moresby while their ground troops tried to make their way south over the mountains of the **Owen Stanley Range** that separates north Papua from the south. The Australians valiantly held out, supported by Allied aircraft. The *Battle of the Coral Sea* was a last-ditch effort by the Japanese to lay the foundation for ground troops to invade and capture Port Moresby. While the battle was not a victory for either side, Japanese troops landing on the Papua Peninsula were routed and forced to be evacuated.

In August 1942, U.S. Army Air Forces bombers began basing out of Port Moresby to fly missions over New Guinea and New Britain, while also supporting the landing of U.S. Marines at Guadalcanal on August 7. The Japanese had established major air bases on the north side of Papua, with a large presence at Buna, Gona, and Sanananda. These enemy fighters and bombers were wreaking havoc on Australian ground forces, as well as American bombers conducting missions against Rabaul, the Japanese “*Pearl Harbor*” of the Southwest Pacific. Massive convoys were arriving daily at Rabaul to send reinforcements and supplies to reinforce Japanese ground troops trying to re-take Guadalcanal. Further, the Japanese began mounting another ground force to march south over the Owen Stanley Range to attack and capture Port Moresby.

General MacArthur had two U.S. Army divisions, newly arrived in Australia, the 32d and 41st Infantry Divisions. On September 15 the 32d Division, minus one regiment, was flown to Port Moresby to begin offensive operations in Papua.

The 32d Infantry Division, composed largely of soldiers of the Wisconsin and Michigan National Guard, were insufficiently trained for what they faced in New Guinea. Not only were they going head-to-head against seasoned Japanese combat veterans, but they also had the terrain to deal with. New Guinea is covered with heavy jungle and large swamps filled with crocodiles. Mosquitoes were everywhere, bringing malaria to soldiers of both sides. Typhus was rampant for those who waded through

JOSEPH RED DOOR & ARTHUR BELGARDE

the swamps. In fact, disease killed perhaps more Japanese than did the Australian and American soldiers who came to kill them.

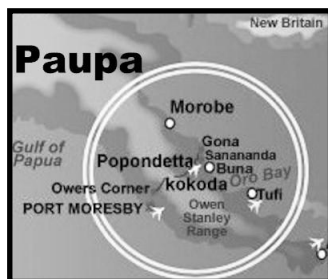
American General Enis Whitehead was tasked with turning Port Moresby into a forward staging area for vital air missions against Rabaul, and in support of U.S. Marines at Guadalcanal. On August 13 more than 11,000 Japanese troops began the arduous march south over the Owen Stanley Range via the rudimentary Kokoda Trail, quickly routing the valiant but grossly outnumbered Australian defenders. American bombing missions were mounted repeatedly against Buna, Lae, Rabaul, and other targets, but they seemed futile to stemming the steady influx of enemy soldiers and supplies. The fate of all of New Guinea was in jeopardy.

The American ground campaign in New Guinea in 1942 faltered for a number of reasons: poor training, inept leadership, the combat conditions, and of course, the fiercely resisting Japanese. On November 30 General MacArthur replaced the commander there with General Robert Eichelberger, telling him, *“Take Buna or don’t come back alive.”*

163D INFANTRY REGIMENT

The 163d Infantry Regiment was a unit of the Montana National Guard that was federalized for service in 1940. World War II began during the regiment’s 18 months of training, mostly in Washington State. In the spring of 1942, the regiment began arriving in Australia for additional training, and was then assigned to the 41st Infantry *“Sunset”* Division under Brigadier Jens A. Doe

On December 27, 1942, the 163d Infantry Regiment moved to Port Moresby, New Guinea. The city of Buna, the major Japanese stronghold in the area, fell to American and Australian forces on January 1, 1943. Immediately the 163d was airlifted to Popondette and Dobodura on the north coast of Papua, to advance west to Soputa at the head of the Kokoda Trail, and Sanananda on the north coast. Both sat about midway between Buna and the strong Japanese base and airfield at Gona. The Regiment was about to begin its first combat operations of World War II.



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JOSEPH B. RED DOOR (POPLAR)

Joseph B. Red Door was a full-blooded Sioux Indian, born on January 8, 1915, to the Reverend Basil M. Red Door and Blanche *Melbourne* Red Door. He was the oldest of three children with sister Charity born in 1902, and Timothy, who was born in 1905 and died at the age of 24. Reverend Red Door was a native of Wibaux, Montana, and married Blanche in Poplar in 1896. In 1900 he became a missionary on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, where he served for 44 years, working his entire life with the Indian tribes. His son and daughter received their education there.



In the late 1930s Harold Lindstrom came to Fort Peck, Montana, to organize a company for the 163d Infantry Regiment. Joseph Red Door was among the first to join Company B, and in 1940 was promoted to sergeant when the regiment was activated. After training he was promoted to staff sergeant, and in 1942 was sent to combat in the Pacific, where he would become the 163d Infantry Regiment's first combat hero.

Back in Montana during the early days of World War II, in the Christian community there was some consternation at the prospect of sending Montana's boys off to war to kill Japanese. In April 1942, the Mnisda Presbyterian Church of Chelsea on the Fort Peck Reservation held a week of services for the families of Indian servicemen in military service. Among the speakers was Reverend Red Door, whose sole-surviving son was preparing to ship out to the Pacific war. His remarks were published in the *Glasgow Courier*, and are well worth reprinting.

"One fact stands out clearly, that the Christian is a member of two worlds. First of all, upon apostolic authority, our citizenship is in heaven. The fact is that so long as the Christian is upon this earth he is a member of the church and also of the state. To each of these he has obligations. The conscious objector may say, 'No, I will not go to war,' but one's conscience is not always a safe guide . . . As a citizen, both he and his property have been under the protection of the state and hence he is under personal obligation to support the state and even defend it with his life against all attacks, whether from without or within. They who regard all war as murder should remember that it was God who ordered Moses to raise a conscript army, determined solely by age and ability, to go forth to war . . . God indeed is the God of love but also the God of battle.

"We cannot lay any claim to being an authority in theological fields, but it

JOSEPH RED DOOR & ARTHUR BELGARDE

strikes us that this is the sort of commonsense conclusion that any good citizen, regardless of his beliefs, may well follow. It is in line with the pioneer preacher's admonition, 'Trust the Lord, but keep your powder dry.' Or in modern times, we can be gratified by the example of the army chaplain on that fateful December day at Pearl Harbor. Shucking off his coat, the man of cloth jumped in to help an anti-aircraft gun crew. During a lull in the firing he was heard to shout, 'Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.' He evidently believed that he was under obligation to support the state. His was the view of the practical Christian."

Eight months later Reverend Red Door's son was in New Guinea preparing to attack Japanese forces near Sanananda. The tropical climate was hot and humid, draining the men and soaking uniforms, causing painful rot from wet socks inside combat boots. Mosquitoes bearing Malaria were the only threat larger than the number of Japanese. who infested the jungles to snipe at the soldiers from the trees. All along the coastline were crude but deadly, hidden enemy bunkers. They were dug into the ground and reinforced with mud-covered bamboo logs. Most had high-caliber machine guns mounted inside to rain death on advancing American or Australian troops.



At 2 p.m. on January 4, 1943, near Soputa, Red Door went on patrol with four men: Sergeant Arthur Belgarde, an Indian from Brockton; Montana; Private Bill Realae of Seattle, Washington, Private Bill Dolan of Port Huron, Michigan; and Private Charles Godfrey of Springfield, Missouri. Belgarde recalled that it was the unit's second day in the area when they located a Japanese bunker that had been harassing their company. Staff Sergeant Red Door, known to his men as *Chief*," moved his men to within ten yards of the position. He stationed his men behind the bunker, then kicked in the door and lobbed in two grenades.

The action was later cited in a story in *Yank* magazine, the Army weekly, by noted combat correspondent Sergeant Dave Richardson. Writing about the Indian soldiers of the 163d Infantry Regiment he said: *"They (Native Americans) are the best scouts and patrol leaders in the outfit. Ace scout is S/Sgt. Joe Red Door, formerly a tailor on the Indian reservation at Poplar, Montana. Time after time he stole through the Jap lines and discovered the location of every enemy pillbox in a given*

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area and the number of Japs in that area, the type and number of their weapons, and the weak spots where an attack could best be made.

“When he had reported all this information Red Door would go out with a patrol and strike the enemy, disrupting and weakening certain points for direct attack by a larger force. One time, when he was leading a six-man patrol in a thrust at a pill box that had been giving the Americans plenty of trouble, Red Door crept up to the coconut-log stronghold and tossed grenades through the slits. As the Japs rushed out the back way, they found Red Door’s patrol waiting to knock them off.

“The patrol got six Japs in the skirmish, but Red Door was hit. Sergeant Arthur Belgard, another Indian from Brockton, Montana, saw him fall. He rushed over to Red Door, hoisted him to his back and braved machine-gun fire from a second pill box to carry the wounded scout to a medical aid station. Belgard then collected a patrol of his own and went back to wipe out the machine gun nest that had fired on him.”

Red Door’s comrades later recalled that battle noting, *“although he was badly wounded, (Staff Sergeant Reddock) continued to ‘pop off’ Japs while he was being carried back by a medical corpsman.”* For his actions that day he became the regiment’s first decorated hero. His award of the Silver Star was published only ten days later.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Staff Sergeant Joseph Red Door, United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 163d Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division, in action against the enemy in New Guinea, on 4 January 1943. Under heavy enemy fire, Staff Sergeant Red Door led a patrol of six men within grenade range of an enemy machine gun nest. He threw two grenades into the enemy position, destroying the crew, but under intense fire from snipers he could no longer advance. Staff Sergeant Red Door then ran forward, firing his Thompson submachine gun until it was his by enemy fire and rendering it

JOSEPH RED DOOR & ARTHUR BELGARDE

unserviceable. As enemy fire made the position of the patrol untenable, he ordered its withdrawal. Though twice wounded, he continued to lead his patrol to safety. The gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty demonstrated by Red Door, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.

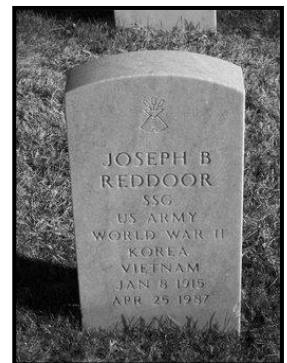
Returning to combat after his recovery, he continued to fight in New Guinea for 20 months until he was wounded again. This time the wounds were serious enough that he was hospitalized and then sent home for further treatment. He returned to Montana to visit his father – his mother had died in 1941 while he was training for combat. He then went to visit his brother in South Dakota before returning to service at Fort Houston, Texas.

He was assigned to travel extensively on War Bond drives. As part of a program “*Here’s Your Infantry*,” he posed a photograph of an Army medic in a simulated combat action that was widely published. The “*medic*” is Technical Sergeant Virgil C. Thompson of Decatur, Illinois, himself



a recipient of a Bronze Star and Purple Heart. The “*wounded*” man was posed by Staff Sergeant George H. Harrison of Toledo, Ohio, who had received two Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart. The soldier crawling through the wire in the background is Staff Sergeant Joseph Red Door.

Red Door was honorably discharged as a Staff Sergeant. In 1945 he married Edith Track in Glasgow, where he was living. Together they had one daughter, Jolene Belle. The couple divorced in 1953. He subsequently got remarried, and he and his second wife Frieda moved to Colorado. He died in Colorado Springs on April 25, 1987, and was buried at Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver. When Frieda died in 1994 she was buried next to him.



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ARTHUR BELGARDE (BROCKTON)

For his actions in rescuing his wounded comrade and mounting a second patrol to go out and destroy the enemy position that had wounded his comrade, Sergeant Belgarde was also awarded the Silver Star.

Very little is known of Arthur Belgarde who carried Red Door off the battlefield, but for his actions he too was awarded the Silver Star. His citation distinguished him for *“gallantry in action while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 163d Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division, in action against the enemy at Soputa, New Guinea, on 4 January 1943.”*

Belgarde was born to Norbert and Octavia (Auctaegia) Azure Belgarde in Culbertson, Montana, on September 13, 1911. He and his older brother Robert and sister Mary, as well as younger brothers Ernest and Herman, grew up on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. He entered the Montana National Guard while living in Brockton, Montana. He and his first wife Mercale had one son Larry, born in 1941, before Arthur deployed to the Pacific.

He was wounded two months after his Silver Star action, and after treatment and recovery served most of the remainder of the war with his unit. When he returned home, troubled by much of what he saw and lived through, he had a difficult time adjusting to civilian life. In 1948 he and three of his combat buddies were arrested and charged with bringing wine onto the Fort Peck Reservation. They noted they did so to *“entertain a friend who was leaving to return to military duty.”*

He and Mercale divorced not long afterwards, and he lived briefly with his parents and siblings. In January 1963 he married Jessie Bandy of Great Falls. He died in Great Falls years later on November 13, 1965, at the age of 54, and was buried at Riverview Cemetery in Williston, North Dakota.



Indian *Code Talkers*

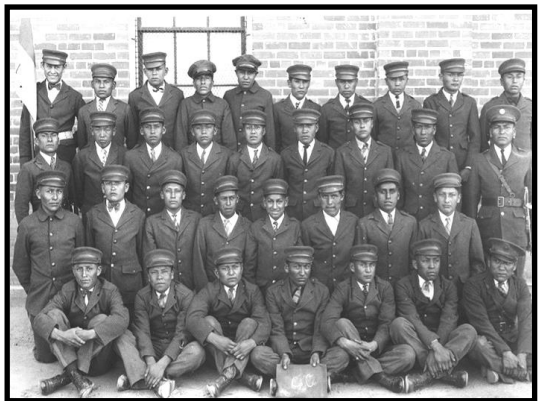
THE UNBREAKABLE CODE

BY: SCOTT BARON

For most of the 20th Century, and into the early 21st Century, America's knowledge about and understanding of Native Americans, more commonly referred to as "*Indians*," was shaped by stereotypes depicted in motion pictures, and later television westerns which portrayed them as a semi-literate, childlike, and primitive peoples. They were considered by many to be savages that attacked peaceful wagon trains or frontier outposts without cause. An equally common and horrid perception by many is that the "*Redskins*" were crazed people who after consuming the *paleface's* "*fire water*," ruthlessly murdered peaceful settlers.

The reality of American military history teaches us otherwise. Their history of service is laudable, from the U.S. Army's Indian Scouts of the 19 Century to their more recent service in two World Wars as "*Code Talkers*." A *Code Talker* was a person employed by the U.S. military services during wartime to use their unique and native language as a means of secret communication. The term is most often used to refer to Native American members of the military during the World Wars who used their knowledge of their native languages as a basis to transmit coded messages to another *Code Talker* on the other end of the line.

There was a certain irony in asking Native Americans to use their Native languages to fight on behalf of America, when most if not all had been forced to attend government or religious-run boarding schools that worked diligently to "*assimilate*" Native peoples and punished students for speaking in their traditional language.



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The term *Code Talker* was coined by the United States Marine Corps, used to denote individuals who had completed the special training required to qualify as *Code Talkers*. Their service records indicated “642 – *Code Talker*” as a duty assignment. There were approximately 400 to 500 Native Americans in the United States



Marine Corps whose primary job was to transmit secret tactical messages. Today, the term *Code Talker* is most often associated with the bi-lingual Navajo speakers trained in the Navajo Code during World War II by the U.S. Marine Corps to serve in all six divisions of the Corps and the Marine Raiders of the Pacific theater. One common misconception is that *Code Talkers* were utilized only in World War II. Another is that they were only used in the Pacific and were all Marines. Yet another is that they were all Navajo.

The 2002 motion picture *Windtalkers*, directed and co-produced by John Woo, starring Nicolas Cage, Christian Slater, and Adam Beach, fostered that perception. The movie was based on the real story of *Code Talkers* from the Navajo nation during World War II. The film was released in the United States by MGM Distribution Co. on June 14, 2002, receiving mixed-to-negative reviews. Panned for too many clichés and only superficially telling the story of the *Code Talkers*, it lost money at the box office, but undeniably raised awareness of Native Americans’ participation in and contribution to the war effort in World War II.

In fact, the idea of using Native Americans fluent in both their traditional tribal language and in English to send secret messages in battle originated in World War I with the Choctaw Telephone Squad and other Native communications experts



and messengers. While the Choctaw Soldiers are the most documented of the World War I *Code Talkers*, the U.S. Army used nine tribal languages during the war. including Cheyenne, Cherokee, Comanche, Ho-Chunk, Osage, and Yankton Sioux, who also provided *Code Talkers* in the Great War. This list was added to during World War II to include Assiniboiné,

INDIAN CODE TALKERS

Cree, Meskwaki, Mohawk, Muscogee (Seminole and Creek), Tlingit (Alaska), and most famously, Navajo.

During World War I the American Army first used Cherokee soldiers of the U.S. 30th Division, American Expeditionary Forces as *Code Talkers*. Soldiers fluent in the Cherokee language were assigned to transmit messages while under fire during the *Second Battle of the Somme*. According to one division signal officer, this occurred in September 1918 while the unit was under British command.

During the *Meuse-Argonne Offensive*, Captain Lawrence, a company commander in the Army's 36th Division, overheard Private Solomon Louis and Private Mitchell Bobb, two men in his company, conversing in Choctaw. He discovered that there were eight Choctaw men serving in the battalion. Aware that the Germans had broken every American code and tapped into their telephone lines, he came up with a plan. It was really quite simple, even rudimentary. The eight men, all Choctaw, were distributed between the division headquarters to translate English orders and intelligence reports into Choctaw, send this translation by field telephones or written messages to each other, and then translate the messages back into English for their respective commanders.

Captain Lawrence's superiors approved the plan. On October 26, 1918, the *Code Talkers* began transmitting messages in Choctaw and the "*tide of battle turned within 72 hours*". The war ended the following month. The Choctaw soldiers returned home to their families, never receiving any recognition, official or otherwise. But another war was only twenty years away.

German authorities learned about the use of *Code Talkers* during World War I, and sent a team of thirty anthropologists to the United States to learn Native American languages prior to the outbreak of World War II. However, this task proved too difficult because of the large numbers of Indigenous languages and dialects. Upon learning of the German efforts, the Army opted not to implement a large-scale *Code Talker* program in the European Theater.

Initially, only 17 Comanche *Code Talkers* were enlisted, but three did not make the trip across the Atlantic until the unit was finally deployed. Two Comanche *Code Talkers* were assigned to each regiment, and the remainder were assigned to Headquarters, 4th Infantry Division. Fourteen Comanche *Code Talkers* took part in the Invasion of Normandy and served in the 4th Infantry Division in Europe. Comanche

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soldiers of the 4th Signal Company assembled a vocabulary of 250 code terms using words and phrases in Commanche, using a substitution method not unlike that of the Navajo, with *Code Talkers* using descriptive words from the Comanche language for things that did not have translations. For example, the Comanche language code term for tank was “*turtle*,” bomber was “*pregnant bird*,” machine gun was “*sewing machine*,” and Adolf Hitler was “*crazy white man*.”

Although the Army was the first branch of the military to begin actively recruiting *Code Talkers* in 1940, other branches, such as the U.S. Marines and Navy, followed a few years later. Early in 1942, following the United States’ entry into World War II the previous December, Philip Johnston, a Christian missionary, civil engineer for the city of Los Angeles, California, and one of the few non-Navajo who spoke the language fluently, read about the Army’s use of Native Americans to transmit codes during World War I.



Johnston, a World War I veteran, was raised on the Navajo reservation as the son of missionaries to the Navajo. He was able to converse in “*Trader’s Navajo*,” a pidgin language, and was among the few non-Navajo who had enough exposure to it to understand some of its nuances. Its complex syntax, phonology, and numerous dialects made it unintelligible to anyone without extensive exposure and training, with one estimate indicating that fewer than 30 non-Navajo could understand the language during World War II; it was still an unwritten language at the time.

Johnston believed that the Navajo language would meet the military’s requirement for an undecipherable code, and he proposed the use of the Navajo language to the United States Marine Corps. His problem was to persuade officers who hadn’t seen or heard of the Choctaw *Code Talkers* to take the idea seriously. In early 1942, Johnston met with the commander of the Amphibious Corps, Major General Clayton B. Vogel, and convinced him to give him a chance to put on a demonstration at Camp Elliot, near San Diego, on February 27, 1942.

Johnson used Navajo volunteers for the demonstration, and they were given typical types of military messages to translate from English into Navajo. These translated messages were sent into another room

INDIAN CODE TALKERS

where the receiving Navajo man would translate the message back into English. This entire process was found to take only a few seconds.

Johnston had the same message sent by the military code machine in which the translation took more than thirty minutes. Seeing the possibilities but still skeptical, the Marines agreed to enlist Johnston and 30 Navajos to try their “*code*” in actual combat.

On May 4, 1942, twenty-nine Navajo men were sworn into service at Fort Wingate, an old U.S. Army fort converted into a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school. They were organized as Platoon 382, the Marine Corps’ first “*all-Indian, all-Navajo*” platoon. The



first 29 Navajo recruits attended boot camp in May 1942, then created the Navajo code at **Camp Pendleton**. Its members would become known as “*The First Twenty-Nine.*”

The First Twenty-Nine were Samuel Begay (Toadlena, AZ), John Brown, Jr. (Chinle, AZ), Lowell Damon (Fort Defiance, AZ), James Dixon (Shiprock, NM), Carl Gorman (Chinle, AZ), Alfred Leonard (Lukachukai, AZ), Johnny Manuelito (Sheep Springs, NM), William McCabe (Ganado, AZ), Balmer Slowtalker (aka Joe Palmer) (Leupp, AZ), Nelson Thompson (Leupp, AZ), Benjamin Cleveland (Fort Defiance, AZ), Jack Nez (Canyon del Muerto, AZ), Oscar Ilthma (Lupton, AZ), George Dennison (Fort Defiance, AZ), Chester Nez (Two Wells, AZ), Roy Begay (Black Mountain, AZ), Cozy Brown (Chinle, AZ), Eugene Crawford (Tohatchi, NM), John Benally (Fort Defiance, AZ), Lloyd Oliver (Fruitland, NM), John Willie (Shonto, AZ), Charlie Begay (Tocito, NM), Wilsie Bitsie (Rehoboth, NM), Frank Denny Pete (Fruitland, NM), John Chee (Tocito, NM), Allen Dale June (Kaibito, AZ), Harry Tsosie (Rough Rock, AZ), David Curley, (Phoenix, AZ) and Bill Yazzie (aka Dean Wilson) (Teeconospos, AZ).

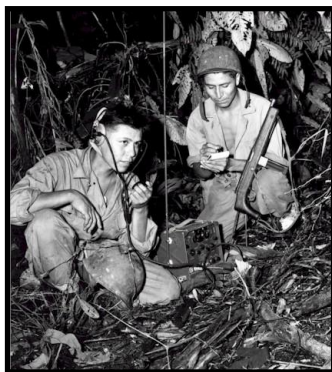
Apart from basic training, these men had to develop and memorize a unique military code using their mostly unwritten language, and were placed in a guarded room until this task was completed. The code they

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developed was surprisingly simple. They first code developed an alphabet code by choosing an English word that began with each letter of the alphabet, such as “*ant*” for “*a*” and “*bear*” for “*b*,” then used the Navajo word for ant or bear. They used other names of animals for other items, such as “*hummingbird*” for fighter planes and “*whale*” for battleships. Eventually, they added more terms to represent letters, in order to frustrate Japanese code breakers.

A codebook was developed to teach new initiates the numerous relevant words and concepts. The text was for classroom purposes only and was classified as top-secret, never permitted to be taken into the field. The *Code Talkers* memorized all these variations and practiced their rapid use under stressful conditions during training. Even Navajo speakers who had not been trained in the code work had no idea what the *Code Talkers*’ messages meant. They developed what was to become history’s only unbreakable code.

They were eventually deployed overseas to the Pacific. Most *Code Talkers* were assigned in pairs. In battle, one person would operate the portable radio while the second person would relay and receive messages in the Native language and translate them into English. Their work was highly dangerous especially in the Pacific, where Japanese soldiers deliberately targeted officers, medics, and radiomen; *Code Talkers* kept moving as they transmitted their messages. Among them was Corporal Henry Blake, Jr. and Private First Class George H. Kirk, seen transmitting and receiving messages while serving on the front lines with Marine riflemen at Bougainville in December 1943.



Their work proved essential to Allied victory in World War II, and they were present at many important battles, including at *Utah Beach* during the D-Day invasion in France, and at Iwo Jima in the Pacific. The FIFTH Marine Division signal officer at Iwo Jima, Major Howard Connor, had six Navajo *Code Talkers* working around the clock during the first two days of the battle. These six sent and received over 800 messages, all without error. Connor later stated, “*Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima.*”

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After incidents where Navajo *Code Talkers* were mistaken for ethnic Japanese and were captured by other American soldiers, several were assigned an Anglo bodyguard whose principal duty was to protect them from their American comrades. According to Bill Toledo, a member of the second group after the original 29, they also had a secret secondary duty which was that if their *Code Talker* was at risk of being captured, they were to shoot him to prevent him from revealing the code under torture, protecting the code. Fortunately, there were no occasions when it became necessary to do so.

More than 400 Navajo *Code Talkers* served with the Marines during World War II, as well as numerous other Native Americans in the Pacific, Europe, and North Africa. It would be impractical to honor them all here, but a few examples might be appropriate to illustrate their service. The youngest *Code Talker* was William Dean Yazzie (aka Dean Wilson), who was only fifteen-years-old when he was recruited, and his experiences were common to many of the *Code Talkers*.

WILLIAM DEAN YAZZIE – YOUNGEST CODE TALKER

As a boy, “*Bill*” Yazzie was discouraged from, and punished for, speaking in his native Navajo language. Years later, he was recruited by the U.S. Marines precisely for his ability to communicate in Navajo. One of the original *Code Talkers* during World War II, Bill Yazzie and the other *Code Talkers* would, as the Marine Corps acknowledges, “*significantly impact the outcome of the war*”.

Those records that exist state that William Diné Yazzie was born on November 19, 1923, on a reservation of the Navajo Nation at Nazlini, Apache County, Arizona, yet other facts and accounts call this into question. As official birth certificates were not prepared for Navajo births, and births commonly occurred at home, birth dates were passed by word of mouth, and any exact date is impossible to determine, and thus vary; that it occurred in 1923 is questionable.

One account has him recruited by the Marines as a 15-year-old schoolboy when recruiters came to the Navajo Indian reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico, where he lived. Since Marine Corps records document his enlistment in 1942, that would have his birth in 1927.



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However, lying to recruiters wasn't exactly uncommon, nor was facilitating lies rare for recruiters trying to meet their quota. Too young to be drafted but eager to sign up, many *Code Talkers* lied about their age. *"I said I was 18,"* Yazzie later said in a newspaper interview.

He was the son of Paul Wilson Sr (Tachine) and Dine Yazhe Bitsi. Later his stepmother, Jeanie R. Wilson, suggested that he was raised at some point by his father. As a boy, he recalled herding sheep, but was then, as required by law at the time, shipped off to the federal Indian boarding school at the Navajo reservation at Shiprock, New Mexico.

Founded to facilitate the assimilation of Native American children, students at Indian schools they were separated from family and forbidden from speaking Native languages. They were required to wear uniforms with Native dress or hairstyles prohibited; they were not allowed to practice traditional customs. Education was frequently limited to training as domestic or industrial workers. With the United States entry into World War II in December 1941, Yazzie saw an opportunity to escape from the rigors of the school.

In April 1942, Marine Corps recruiter, First Sergeant Frank Shinn, arrived at the reservation seeking to recruit Navajo youth for what they called only *"special duty."* Concerning his recruitment, Yazzie has said, *"I was, according to my parents, only 16 and I remember the day that we were physically examined at Fort Defiance Public Health Service. At noon, the recruiters had gone to lunch, and we were left in the hall. We were mingling around when I saw the stack of folders on the recruiter's desk. Mine was sitting way off to the side, tagged with the information that my parents wouldn't consent to my induction. I gently pulled the folder out and put it underneath the big stack. That's how I got in at age 16."*

On May 4, 1942, Yazzie and twenty-eight other Navajos were sworn-into service at an old U.S. Army fort that had been converted into a Bureau of Indian Affairs Boarding School at Fort Wingate. The group was then taken by bus to San Diego for six weeks of recruit training, which was completed on June 27, 1942. Following graduation, the group was taken to nearby Camp Elliott on the outskirts of San Diego where they finally learned what their *"special duty"* was. They were to be



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trained as *Code Talkers*. Private Yazzie # 875347 was among the first 29 Navajos *Code Talkers*., (21 were from Arizona, 8 from New Mexico).

The First Twenty Nine were instructed that their mission was top secret and were ordered to tell no one, including their family, about their assignment. The 29 new Marines were taken to nearby Camp Pendleton, and when their code had been developed, the group was disbursed for service with combat Marines throughout the Pacific area.

Yazzie saw combat serving with the FIRST, SECOND, and FIFTH Marine Divisions at Guadalcanal, New Hebrides, and Tarawa. On Guadalcanal, the *Code Talkers*' primary job was to transmit information on tactics and troop movements, orders, and other vital battlefield communications over telephones and radios. The *Code Talkers* also acted as messengers and performed general Marine duties.

With Japanese forces sweeping over Guadalcanal and listening to every Marine radio frequency, Yazzie and his friends Carl Gorman, Jack Nez, and Oscar Ilthma called in artillery fire and provided status reports in what again sounded like gibberish to the enemy. It was much of the same at New Hebrides, November 11, 1943, and Tarawa, November 20, 1943, one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

After World War II ended, Yazzie remained on active duty. On March 2, 1947, he was awarded a third-place medal for excellence at 1947 Marine Corps Pacific Division Rifle and Pistol Competition, held at Puuloa Point near Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. When he returned from the war, he learned that some missionaries had renamed his father Paul Wilson, so he took that last name. His middle name morphed from Diné to Dean over the years.



After being released from active duty Yazzie returned to the reservation but remained in the Marine Corps Reserve until he retired in 1967 as a staff sergeant, after 24-years of service during which he served during the Korean War. During this time, he also continued to represent the Marines in military shooting competitions across the country.

After World War II, Wilson attended Haskell Institute and Albuquerque Indian School where he received his high school diploma in

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1951. He was known by various names including Bill Dene Yazzie, Bill Denet Yazzie, Billy D. Yazzie, William Dene Yazzie, William Dean Yazzie, Dean Yazzie, William Dean Wilson, and Dean Wilson. He held a variety of jobs including as a security guard at the Wingate Ordnance Depot from 1952 to 1954. He worked as an instructional aide in the Five-Year Navajo Program at the Albuquerque Indian School from 1954 to 1958, and as a clerk/interpreter for the Railroad Retirement Board from 1958-to 1959. He was also one of the first Navajo Tribal Judges, serving from 1960 to 1975.

In 2001, President George W. Bush presented each of the original 29 Navajo *Code Talkers* with a Congressional Gold Medal in a ceremony in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. Wilson, who died at Farmington, New Mexico, on December 19, 1999, received his medal posthumously. He is buried at Family Cemeteries, Apache County, Arizona. Along with his wife, Mary Louise Defender Wilson, a Sioux woman he married in 1969, Wilson was a strong advocate for honoring and preserving Native American traditions until his death.



JOE LEE KIEYOOMIA – NAVAHO PRISONER OF WAR

Perhaps one of the most interesting accounts to come out of the *Code Talker* chronicles is the story of Joe Kieyoomia, a Navajo who wasn't a *Code Talker*, but was the only Navajo taken prisoner by the Japanese. He survived the Bataan Death March, "Hell Ships," an atomic bomb, and three years of torture while a prisoner of the Japanese to live to the age of 77.

Joe Lee Kieyoomia was born on November 21, 1919, at the Black Mountain Trading Post, Ganada, Arizona, part of the Naabeehó Bináhásdzo or Navajo Nation, which encompasses an area spread across New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado. He attended three years of high school and was working as a jeweler and silversmith for Southwest Arts and Crafts when he registered



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for the draft in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on October 17, 1940. His registration papers described him as 5'4, 143 pounds, with brown eyes, black hair, and a dark brown complexion.

On March 28, 1941, he enlisted in the Army's 200th Coast Artillery, part of the New Mexico National Guard, the longest continuously serving state militia in the United States. They were first organized in 1598 as Spanish colonialists formally united to fight off the native people, into whose territory they had settled. Initially designated the 111th Cavalry, on April 20, 1940, the 111th Cavalry was redesignated the 207th Coast Artillery, but because New York State already had a 207th Regiment with a distinguished history, they protested this duplication and the 200th was born. The unit was comprised of a diverse group of college professors, students, miners, lumberjacks, cowboys, rodeo performers, sheepherders, farmers, as well as Navajo, Pueblo, Apache, and Zuni Indians.

Federalized shortly before Christmas 1940, the 200th was sent to Fort Bliss, Texas, in mid-January 1941, for training. They soon numbered approximately 1,800 soldiers. Among the units selected to reinforce the Philippines at the request of General Douglas MacArthur, they were moved west to Angel Island in San Francisco Bay.

On August 30, the 1st Battalion loaded onto the U.S.S. *President Pierce*, and on September 9, 2d Battalion loaded onto the U.S.S. *President Coolidge*, bound for the Philippine Islands. Upon their arrival, they were sent to Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg, about 80 miles north of Manila. Its 77 officers and 1,732 enlisted men, equipped with small arms, searchlights, and a battery of 50 caliber anti-aircraft guns, twenty-two 37-mm. guns and twelve 3-inch guns, would spend the next several months training and guarding the airfield.

In the early morning hours of December 8, 1941, (December 7 in Hawaii), Japanese land-based naval bombers and *Zero* fighters from Formosa were detected heading over the Lingayen Gulf in the direction of Manila. It wasn't until just after noon that Japanese aircraft actually began bombing and strafing runs at Clark Field. First to fire upon the Japanese that day were the men of the 200th, but by nightfall, the field was a wreck with burning aircraft and debris everywhere. Manila had no anti-aircraft units protecting the Philippine capital, so that evening, Colonel Harry Peck took one-third of the 200th and headed south for the defense of the capital city.

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On December 10, Japanese assault troops began landing at Vigna and Aparri in preparation for the main assault. On December 22, Japanese Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma's 14th Army landed at Lingayen Gulf. Immediately, the decision was made to pull all forces, 80,000 U.S. and Filipino troops, south to the Bataan peninsula.

On Christmas Day, the 200th departed Clark Field to make the same journey down to Bataan. General Jonathan Wainwright, the senior field commander of American and Filipino forces, had been ordered to hold Bataan until reinforcements of men and material could be sent to the Philippines from the United States. Because President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill had agreed on a *"Europe First"* strategy for the war, reinforcements would never arrive.

For the next four months, the men on Bataan ran out of ammunition, food, and medicine but -- never hope. Soon, however, the lack of food and supplies became critical. Captain Jack Boyer of the 200th recalled that, *"January, February, and March saw our position deteriorate from bad to worse to serious. We were trapped on Bataan still waiting for reinforcements but soon realized that none would come. The war in Europe was more important. Still, our morale was high. We were determined to make the Japs pay a high price to defeat us."*

On April 3, the main Japanese attack came, resulting in chaos and confusion throughout the north part of Bataan, as those who managed to hold the line began to retreat back toward Mariveles. The 200th destroyed their big guns, broke *"everything we could break with big hammers,"* and burned the unit colors. They fought as infantrymen and began to make their way north to engage the Japanese, marching against the retreating tide.

Eventually they too, were forced south. The 200th was credited with 86 confirmed hits on Japanese aircraft, they guarded bridges which allowed U.S. and Filipino forces the ability to move south, and kept open



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strategic points during the fighting, slowing Japanese progress and forcing them to use men and material needed elsewhere.

On April 1, General Homma now having the reinforcements he had requested, launched a new attack on Bataan. By April 9 Major General Edward King decided it was not worth the additional loss of lives for the U.S. and Filipino soldiers to keep fighting. Unknown to General Wainwright, who now commanded the isolated fortress island of Corregidor, General King surrendered the men on Bataan.

The surrender of Bataan hastened the fall of Corregidor a month later, but this final stand delayed the Japanese, forcing them to slow down, giving the Allies valuable time to prepare for future conflicts such as the *Battle of the Coral Sea* and the *Battle of Midway*. With the surrender of Bataan, Kieyoomia, along with more than 60,000 Filipinos and 15,000 Americans became prisoners of war.

The Japanese found themselves completely unprepared for the surrender, with no idea of what to do with the more than seventy-five thousand captured prisoners, which greatly exceeded the 25,000 they had expected; the subsequent logistics to care for them had not been planned. At first they were gathered in the open on the Bataan peninsula. The decision was made to send them to a concentration camp at Camp O'Donnell, located a hundred kilometers away, in the province of Tarlac.

Beginning on April 9, 1942, the journey was carried out under horrific conditions, with the prisoners exhausted and hungry. For the first three days they had not received any food, could only drink from puddles, and were only given a cup of rice with weevils. In addition, they were physically mistreated and abused by



the soldiers, who did not hesitate to hit or even pierce them with their bayonets those who could not keep up. The Japanese, who lived by the code of "*Bushido*" (death before dishonor) had extreme contempt for those who surrendered instead of fighting to the end. Fifty Filipino officers who had been left behind were summarily executed.

A first stop in San Fernando allowed a brief respite, although many died due to not being able to recover, or died from the epidemics that spread. The next section to Capas was done by train but it was not an

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improvement since the cars were full and overflowing. Upon arrival the prisoners still had to march nine more kilometers to the camp. The total fatalities amounted to almost ten thousand; the brutal march became notorious as the “*Bataan Death March*.”

The total distance marched from Mariveles to San Fernando and from the Capas Train Station to various camps was 65 miles. Sources report differing numbers of prisoner of war casualties before reaching Camp O'Donnell, ranging from 5,000 to 18,000 Filipino deaths, and 500 to 650 American deaths during the march.

The march was characterized by extreme physical abuse and wanton killings, including the Pantingan River massacre during which up to 400 prisoners were executed. POWs who fell or were caught on the ground were shot. After the war the Japanese commander, General Masaharu Homma and two of his officers, Major General Yoshitaka Kawane and Colonel Kurataro Hirano, were tried for war crimes. They were convicted and sentenced to death on charges of failing to prevent their subordinates from committing atrocities. Homma was executed in 1946, and Kawane and Hirano in 1949.

Kieyoomia survived the death march, but other horrors awaited him. The march was only the start of his 43 months of captivity. His physical appearance was neither Filipino nor White, and although he explained that he was an American, his captors believed him to be a “*Nikkei Amerikajin*” or American of Japanese origin, and he was subjected to additional abuse as a traitor.

Kieyoomia was eventually sent to the Japanese mainland, because of his looks and his name, and he was placed aboard a “*Hell Ship*” for transport to Japan. *Hell Ships* were transport ships (freighters, ocean liners, etc.) that the Imperial Japanese Navy used to transport prisoners of war and forced Asian workers. The captives were crammed into overcrowded holds below deck, with hardly any ventilation, food, water, or air for a journey that lasted weeks. Many prisoners died due to asphyxia, starvation, or dysentery. Some POWs became delirious and unresponsive in their environment of heat, humidity, and lack of oxygen, food, and water. Since these transports carried a mixture of POWs and regular Japanese troops, and cargo, they were not considered to be “*non-combatant*.”

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Fifteen of these *Hell Ships* became infamous, such as the *Arisan Maru* or the *Oryoku Maru*, because they sank with their human cargo trapped aboard after being torpedoed or hit by Allied warships or aircraft, unaware that there were POWs aboard. More than 20,000 Allied POWs died at sea when the transport ships were attacked by Allied submarines and aircraft.



Yet again, Kieyoomia cheated death and survived the hellish sea crossing. He arrived on the Japanese mainland, where he was finally sent to the Matishima Prisoner of War camp, located about nine kilometers south of Nagasaki, at the southwestern tip of the island of Kyūshū.

Matishima, also known as Matsushima, Tokyo No. 2 Detached Camp, and Tokyo 20, provided forced labor to build the Hiraoka Dam on the Tenryū River in the Central Highlands of the island. A guard there, Tatsuo Tsuchiya, was the first Japanese to be convicted of war crimes at the Yokohama War Crimes Trials after the end of the war. Six guards, including their commander, were found guilty of war crimes and executed. Another four guards, including Tsuchiya, were given life sentences. They were judged responsible for the deaths of 48 prisoners.

Life in the camp proved no easier. Despite his claims that he was a Navajo Indian, the Japanese believed that Kieyoomia was Japanese and being in the U.S. Army, he was a traitor to his people. “*They didn’t believe me,*” he later told *The Deseret News* when he was 72 years old. “*The only thing they understood about Americans was Black and White. I guess they didn’t know about Indians.*” For several months he suffered especially harsh treatment and beatings, until they were finally convinced of his claim that he was not a Nikkei but a Navajo.

The Japanese were aware of the Navajo *Code Talkers*, but were unable to decipher the code. Now, they had a Navajo POW and were determined to force him to reveal the code. But Kieyoomia wasn’t a *Code Talker*, and he didn’t know the code. He didn’t even know about the existence of the code.

Kieyoomia was visited by two Japanese women who wrote two Navajo words in English to check if he could read them. He proved he could. He was then provided with radio intercepts, and they had him

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listen to radio broadcasts. Kieyoomia was required to transcribe the encrypted codes from his language into English.

Not knowing the code, Kieyoomia could only decipher bits and pieces of what the Navajo *Code Talkers* were saying. This led him to tell the Japanese that it sounded like gibberish to him. Although the code was based on the Navajo language, it was decipherable only by individuals specifically trained in its usage.

As punishment for his inability to crack the code, and perhaps because the Japanese believed he was unwilling to crack the code, he was beaten and tortured. On one occasion he was stripped naked and forced to stand for hours in waist-deep snow at three degrees below zero until he talked. When he was finally allowed to return to his cell, a guard shoved him, causing the frozen soles of his feet to remain stuck to the ground. At one point, they pounded a nail into his skull as punishment.

Kieyoomia was a prisoner of war for more than three years when, on August 9, 1945, air raid alarms sounded over Nagasaki. Three days earlier, the U.S. Army Air Force dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima. The second atomic bomb was scheduled to be dropped on Kokura, but the cloudy sky above the target resulted in the crew of the B-29 *Bockscar* choosing the secondary target, Nagasaki, an important port with shipyards and the Mitsubishi factory located there.

Kieyoomia was imprisoned in Nagasaki when that city was bombed, but amazingly survived the attack, protected by the thick concrete walls of his cell. Having survived the *Bataan Death March*, *Hell Ships*, and torture, he was also a survivor of an atomic bomb, although thirty to forty thousand people died instantly, most of them workers but the death toll also included thousands of Korean forced laborers.

He was abandoned and forgotten in the midst of the chaos for three days before a Japanese officer found and released him. Following a speech by Emperor Hirohito, broadcast on radio to the entire country, Japan surrendered on August 14, marking the end of World War II.

After the war, Kieyoomia was repatriated to the United States, where he spent several months in hospitals recovering from his wounds, malnutrition, and dysentery. Doctors rebroke and reset fractures and grafted skin on his feet. He was awarded the Purple Heart, and later the Prisoner of War Medal, and was honorably discharged as a sergeant on July 11, 1946.

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In 1949 he returned to Farmington, New Mexico, and rebuilt his post-war life, working professionally as an award winning jeweler. He married Sarah Begay with whom he had eight children (Rita, Ernest, Joe Jr., Albert, Christopher, Virginia, Genevieve and Betty). Joe Jr. would grow up and serve three years in the Marines, rising to corporal and seeing combat in Vietnam.

In February 1985, forty years after the war, Kieyoomia was awarded a long overdue Bronze Star Medal. He died on February 17, 1997, in Farmington, and was buried in the Memory Gardens Cemetery there. In an interview, Kieyoomia stated *"I salute the Code Talkers. And even if I knew about their code, I wouldn't tell the Japanese."*

THOMAS H. BEGAY

Originally, only 29 men were selected to evaluate the merits of the proposal to establish the *Code Talkers*. The total number of Navajo *Code Talkers* that served in the U.S. Marines is not known, but it is estimated to number more than 400. The last living *Code Talkers* are Thomas Begay, John Kinsel Sr. and Peter MacDonald.

Thomas H. Begay never knew his own birthday or birthplace growing up, only that he was born in a Hogan when the moon was in a certain position and there was approximately two feet of snow on the ground. The exact date of his birth was not recorded, although it was almost certainly in 1926, just as it is certain he was born somewhere on the Navajo reservation.



The Navajo Nation covers a huge territory of more than 27,000 square miles in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Sources cite his birthplace as both Toadlena, Arizona and Two Wells, New Mexico, both close to the Arizona/New Mexico border. Birth records were not kept on the reservation, especially for those born at home.

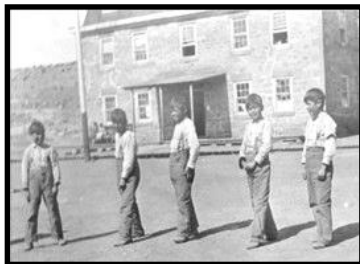
Thomas remembers growing up, one of eight children, in the small community of Chichiltah, New Mexico, and helping with his family's 2,000 sheep. Isolated from the outside, he spoke only Navajo until he was 13. When much of the southwest was gripped in the *Dust Bowl*, the U. S. government,



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concerned with overgrazing, taxed livestock and regulated the number of animals allowed on the land decreasing the Begay family's flock. Thomas' father became concerned about his children following him into the livestock industry. When Thomas was 13, his father, admonishing him to "*learn the ways of the White man*" sent him off to a government boarding school at Fort Defiance, Arizona.

When Thomas entered the school the only English he knew was his first name. He answered every question with "*Thomas.*" None of the children at the school had last names, so the school assigned names to them. Thomas was assigned the last name "*Begay,*" as were many other children. It came from the



Navajo word *biye*, meaning "*his son.*" Records show that three of the original 29 *Code Talkers* were named Begay: Roy Begay, Sam Begay and Charlie Begay.

Students at the school had their hair cut, traded traditional dress for uniforms, and were denied contact with their families for months at a time. Rules were strict, discipline harsh, and punishments severe. They included beatings, standing in the corner for hours, or having their mouths washed out with a foul smelling soap. The children learned that nothing good would come from speaking the Navajo language. Ironically, that would change.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Thomas Begay was 16. He watched many of his fellow Navajo join up, and he was starting his final year at Fort Defiance School when the first group of *Code Talkers* left for the Pacific. Though he was 16 years of age, he was only in fifth grade, having not started school until the age of 13. By the summer of 1943, unable to find a job and being told that he was too young for most jobs, Thomas decided to join the Marines.

He persuaded a Marine Corps recruiter to allow him to enlist when he was just sixteen years old, in September 1943, helped by the fact that, in his own words, "*my age was flexible.*" Any dates in his Marine records were at best, guesses. Begay hoped to be placed in gunnery school and was disappointed when he was told he would become a *Code Talker*. Despite protests, he was sent to Camp Pendleton, California, where,

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surrounded by fellow Navajos, he learned how to use a radio, Morse Code, and the difficult *Code Talker* code.

At the time the program was highly classified. Begay later recalled they were told, *"If you talk about what this school is about to anyone, the Marine Corps will put you before a firing squad! They might have said that just to scare us, and they might not have meant it, but we definitely believed them!"*

Begay completed the *Code Talker* training course in November 1943, and was assigned to the Signal Company for the FIFTH Marine Division. He fought on the Marshall Islands, Saipan, Guam, Tinian, and finally at Iwo Jima.

On February 19, 1945, Begay was on a ship off the coast of Iwo Jima as the Marine invasion began. He remembers *"I couldn't believe how ugly and forbidding that place looked. It made me very uncomfortable and then something happened that confirmed that feeling. Another Code Talker and I had our radio net operating when a shell, fired from the island, bounced off just below where we were standing. It bounced off the next deck below and exploded on the third bounce. We would have been the first casualties of Iwo Jima if that shell had exploded on impact."*



He was sent to the 27th Marines as a replacement for another *Code Talker* who had been killed in action. He remembers that two *Code Talkers* were killed and three more were wounded on the first day of the battle. During the nearly month-long battle for Iwo Jima, he and five other Navajo *Code Talkers* Marines successfully transmitted more than 800 messages without error. Marine leaders stated after the battle that the *Code Talkers* were *"critical to the victory at Iwo Jima."*

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Begay remained on Iwo Jima after the battle and recalled that he and a fellow *Code Talker* were near the airfield when they smelled cooking. *“Fresh food, you could smell it anywhere! You could smell the death, too. We made up an excuse that our radio battery had run down, and we needed to go back to headquarters for a new one. We took off and just about 100 yards away a signal company had hot chow cooking. I grabbed my mess kit and joined the line. For days all we had were C rations, so we jumped at the chance for hot, fresh food.”*

Concerning his service on Iwo Jima he said, *“We were disciplined. I learned to survive combat. The first hour, I was with my radio, communication with other floats. I was scared. Mortars and artillery were landing everywhere but I wasn’t hit. The Iwo Jima sand was ashy and hard to walk on, but I had to carry my radio and other equipment across it.”* At the end of the war, the Navajo Code remained unbroken.

Begay was discharged from the Marines in July 1946, but he joined the Army the following year and worked as a radio operator and also qualified as a paratrooper. He again experienced intense combat with the 7th Infantry Division in Korea, including at the Chosin Reservoir in late 1950. He was one of the last soldiers to be evacuated as the Allies withdrew from the region. His experiences in Korea influenced his decision to finally leave the military in 1953.

Throughout his military career, Begay said, his one mission was always to *“Stay alive and keep your buddies alive. I was never wounded or shot but was missed by inches and missed being captured by thirty minutes or less. I was very lucky to have gotten through that time. Maybe because I believe in the traditional Navajo ways and felt the Great Spirit was protecting me. My parents, both very traditional Navajos, had ceremonies for me using clothes that I had worn before I left home to go in the service. These ceremonies protected my well-being, so I could survive.”*

Begay was awarded six battle stars during his military career for being in major battles from Iwo Jima to Korea. After his discharge, Begay went to work for the federal government, becoming a senior administrator for the **Bureau of Indian Affairs** on the Navajo reservation. With the BIA, he worked as an employment assistance officer for many years, helping Navajos find employment and education opportunities both on the reservation and off. He retired from the BIA in 1984.

INDIAN CODE TALKERS

The Navajo code remained classified until 1968, but their story became known to the public as they were publicly recognized by Presidents Nixon, Carter, and Reagan. A *Code Talkers* GI Joe Figurine was produced in 2001 and was voiced by Sam Billison, one of the original developers of the code. In 2000 the U. S. Congress passed legislation to honor the *Code Talkers* with Congressional Medals. The original 29 received gold medals and the others received silver medals.

At this writing, Begay, at age 98, continues to be active in the *Code Talker* Association.



As for the *Code Talkers*, although eleven were killed in combat, none were ever captured, and the code was never broken. The existence of the Navajo *Code Talkers* was kept secret; they all took oaths of secrecy. They received no recognition until 1968 when their operation was declassified. In 1982, the *Code Talkers* were given a Certificate of Recognition by President Ronald Reagan, who also proclaimed August 14, 1982, as *Navajo Code Talkers Day*.

On December 21, 2000, President Bill Clinton signed Public Law 106-554, 114 Statute 2763, which awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to the original 29 World War II Navajo *Code Talkers* and Silver Medals to each person who qualified as a Navajo *Code Talker*, which numbered approximately 300.

In July 2001, President George W. Bush honored the *Code Talkers* by presenting Gold medals to the four surviving original *Code Talkers* (the fifth living original *Code Talker* was unable to attend) at a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C. Gold medals were presented to the families of the deceased 24 original *Code Talkers*.



In 2011, the state of Arizona established April 23 as an annual recognition day for the Hopi *Code Talkers*. On September 17, 2007, the Texas Medal of Valor was awarded posthumously to 18 Choctaw *Code Talkers* for their service in World War II.

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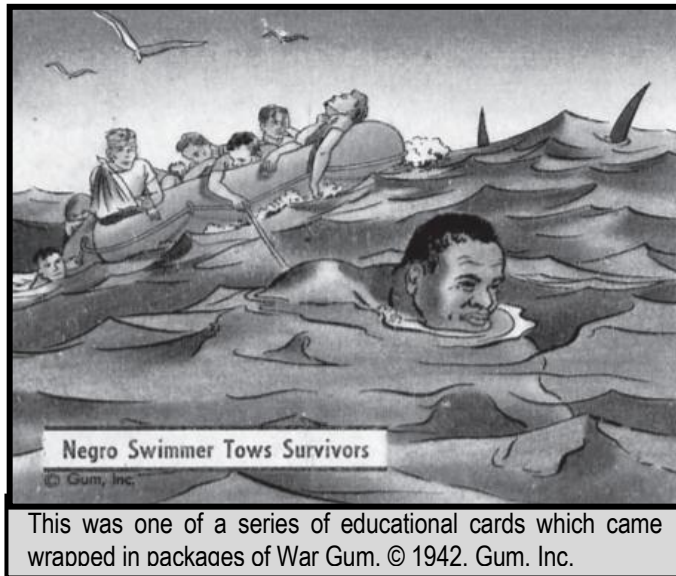
On November 27, 2017, three Navajo *Code Talkers*, joined by the President of the Navajo Nation, Russell Begaye, were honored by President Donald Trump in an official White House ceremony held in the Oval Office to “*pay tribute to the contributions of the young Native Americans recruited by the United States military to create top-secret coded messages used to communicate during World War II battles*”.

On March 17, 2025, Axios reported that at least 10 articles pertaining to Native American *Code Talkers* had been removed from U.S. Army and Department of Defense websites. Pentagon Press Secretary John Ulyot was quoted in response: “*As Secretary [Pete] Hegseth has said, DEI is dead at the Defense Department . . . We are pleased by the rapid compliance across the Department with the directive removing DEI content from all platforms.*”



Code Talker Memorial – Window Rock, Arizona

Charles J. French*
SWIMMING WITH THE SHARKS
BY: JIM FURLONG



EARLY LIFE

Charles Jackson French was born in Foreman, Little River County, Arkansas, on September 25, 1919. Foreman, earlier known as New Comfort, reached its peak population of 16,200 in the 1920 census. In the aftermath of the Great Depression the town's population continued to slip until it was under 10,000 by the 1940 census.

French was orphaned at eight years of age for reasons that are unknown. Due to Jim Crow-era laws on the books during those times,



it is extremely doubtful that French learned to swim in any public

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Navy Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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facilities. However, both the Little River (from which the county takes its name) and the larger Red River flow nearby on either side of town. During wetter months, these swollen rivers have fast-moving currents from which young French might have learned to be the strong swimmer we know him to have become.

Jobs during the Depression years of the 1930s were hard to come by—let alone for an African American orphan. So, in 1937 Charles Jackson French joined the U.S. Navy when he was eighteen years old. When his enlistment was up, he took an honorable discharge and appeared ready to become a civilian again when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Five days later, on December 12, 1941, French appeared in a Recruitment Office and re-enlisted in the Navy.

THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC

After December 7, 1941, with the weakened U.S. Navy, Japan continued its land grab and expanded its area of influence deep into the South Pacific, Southwest Pacific, and even the Indian Ocean. Japan controlled Manchuria and virtually the entire Chinese mainland coastal area. They captured the Philippine Islands, forcing General Douglas MacArthur, commander of American and Philippine troops in the Philippines, to move his headquarters from Manila to Australia. Malaysia, the British colonies of Hong Kong and Singapore, Burma and Thailand fell to Japan. Japan forced the pro-Axis French Vichy government to grant it concessions in French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). After Japanese forces captured the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) the Japanese invaded the island of New Guinea and advanced down the Solomon Islands archipelago. The United States was forced to alter critical supply routes to Australia. In fact, Australia felt very threatened, as indeed it should have, since New Guinea was just a few hundred miles from the north coast of Australia.

With Australia threatened from attack and possible invasion from New Guinea, should that island be conquered, and the vital supply line between the United States and Australia and New Zealand threatened because of Japanese conquest of the Solomons, something had to be done to stop the Japanese onslaught. And, it had to be done fast. On August 7, 1942, U.S. Marines landed at Guadalcanal and nearby islands in Solomon Islands chain in Operation *Watchtower*.

The Japanese had occupied the islands of Tulagi, Florida, and Guadalcanal in the southern Solomon Islands archipelago since May 1942.

Originally, Guadalcanal, the largest of these islands, was not included in the original *Watchtower* plans. But when the Allies discovered the Japanese were building a large airfield for bombers capable of threatening sea lanes between the Western United States and Australia and New Zealand, *Watchtower* was expanded to include Guadalcanal.

By August 1942, there were 2,800 personnel on Japanese-held Guadalcanal (including 2,200 Korean slave laborers), and another 900 Japanese naval troops were entrenched on Tulagi, Florida, and smaller neighboring islands. The Japanese strategy in 1942 was to deploy sixty bomber aircraft and forty-five fighters to provide air cover for Japanese forces advancing farther into the South Pacific.

Storms and low clouds effectively hid the Allies' approach on the evening of August 6 and the early morning hours of August 7, 1942. Despite numerous Japanese patrol aircraft searching the area where the invasion force was preparing to land, low clouds and thunderstorms kept the enemy patrols from detecting the invasion force. The waters off that portion of the coast would soon come to be known as *Iron Bottom Sound* for the many ships lost by both sides during the coming months.

The Marine Corps invasion force split into two groups with 3,000 Marines attacking Tulagi and its seaplane base, and another 11,000 Marines coming ashore on Guadalcanal, with 2,000 Marines held in reserve. Over the next two days IJN warplanes based on the island of Rabaul about 660 miles northwest, attacked the amphibious forces. They disabled the transport ship *George F Elliott*, which sank two days later, and heavily damaged the destroyer *Jarvis*. During the air attacks the Japanese lost thirty-six aircraft to the United States' nineteen—which included fourteen carrier aircraft.

Concerned about low fuel levels, Japanese attacks from nearby Rabaul, and the loss of fourteen of his carrier fighters, on the evening of August 8 Admiral Fletcher decided to withdraw his carriers and support ships in order to replenish fuel and aircraft. This was barely thirty-six hours after arriving on station and was controversial to say the least. Without carrier support, it forced Admiral Turner to reevaluate his plans for offloading supplies. Turner's Task Force 61.1 had barely unloaded half the ammunition and provisions needed for the Marines on Guadalcanal.

As a result, General Vandegrift was forced to immediately cut back on rations from three-a-day to two-a-day. The consequences of Admiral Fletcher's action would soon have an even greater effect on the Marines.

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Though they held the airfield, the perimeter around Henderson Field was dangerously shallow, roughly 1,500 yards deep and 2,500 yards wide, with the Japanese holding the rest of the island.

During the night of August 8–9, two Allied screening groups consisting of cruisers and destroyers were surprised by a Japanese force of seven cruisers and one destroyer under the command of IJN Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa. In what is now known as the *Battle of Savo Island*, one Australian cruiser and three American cruisers were sunk and one American cruiser and two destroyers were damaged. The Japanese suffered moderate damage to three cruisers.

Despite the victory, Admiral Mikawa withdrew from the area under cover of darkness. He returned to Rabaul, fearing that if he stayed until first light his own ships might be subject to attack from carrier- and land-based aircraft. Had Mikawa known that Fletcher had removed the carriers from the Solomon Sea, he might have opted to continue on and could have wreaked havoc with the American ships in Turner's Task Force 61.2. But the battle forced Turner's hand and he ordered his Task Group to leave the area, despite having unloaded only about half of the provisions and supplies onto the island.

To recapture Guadalcanal the Japanese were willing to commit the troops and supplies necessary to pull it off. Conversely the United States intended do whatever was necessary to hold the island and use it as a springboard for further operations in the theater. It was shortly after the *Battle of Savo Island* that the Japanese, to avoid daylight air attacks on their ships, initiated nightly runs to reinforce and resupply the Japanese garrison and bombard Marine positions on Guadalcanal via convoy. The convoy schedule was so regular that the Marines came to call the trips the "*Tokyo Express*."

On August 18, *Henderson Field* became operational. On August 20, a squadron of nineteen Grumman F4F *Wildcat* fighters and a squadron of twelve Douglas SBD *Dauntless* dive bombers were flown from the deck of the escort carrier U.S.S. *Long Island* to be stationed at Henderson Field. On August 22, five U.S. Army Bell P-400 *Airacobras* landed at Henderson Field which was now open for business. The fighters were immediately put into action, engaging the almost daily attacks from Japanese bombers.

THE U.S.S. *GREGORY*

The U.S.S. *Gregory* (DD-82) was a World War I-era *Wickes*-class four-stack destroyer, named after Francis Hoyt Gregory, who was appointed a midshipman



in 1809 by President Thomas Jefferson. He proudly served his country until the end of the Civil War—about fifty-six years. *Gregory* was laid down August 25, 1917, at the Fore River Shipbuilding Company of Quincy, Massachusetts, and launched January 27, 1918. She was commissioned on June 1, 1918, and commanded by Commander Arthur P. Fairchild who skippered her in World War I.

Joining a troop convoy at New York City, *Gregory* sailed for Brest, France, on June 25, 1918. She spent the final summer of the war escorting convoys from Brest to various Allied ports in Britain and France. As the war neared its close *Gregory* was assigned to the patrol squadron at Gibraltar on November 2, 1918. From that point *Gregory* patrolled the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Post Armistice, the *Gregory* carried passengers and relief supplies throughout the Adriatic Sea. After approximately six months of this duty, *Gregory* set sail for New York reaching the States on June 13, 1919. After a year of local training operations ended on April 12, 1922, *Gregory* entered the Philadelphia Navy Yard, was decommissioned July 7, 1922, and went into reserve.

When war again broke out in Europe in 1939 and it became likely to threaten to involve the United States, *Gregory* and three other four-stackers were taken out of mothballs for conversion to high-speed transports. The destroyers were stripped of their armament to make room for boats and other modifications were made to accommodate troops and cargo. *Gregory* was recommissioned November 4, 1940, as APD-3 (“AP” for transport and “D” for destroyer) and joined *Little*, *Colhoun*, and *McKean* to form Transport Division 12. None of these ships were destined to survive the Pacific war; all but *McKean* were lost during the *Guadalcanal Campaign*.

Gregory and her sister APDs trained along the East Coast for the following year, perfecting landing techniques with various Marine divisions. On January 27, 1942, with war raging in the Pacific, she

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departed Charleston for Pearl Harbor. Exercises in Hawaiian waters kept TransDiv 12 in the Pacific through the spring, after which they returned to San Diego for repairs. They sailed for the Pacific again June 7, reaching Pearl Harbor a week later to train for the upcoming invasion of Guadalcanal, America's first offensive effort in the long Pacific campaign.

Departing Noumea July 31, 1942, *Gregory* joined Task Force 61 and steamed for Guadalcanal. After sending her Marines ashore on August 7, *Gregory* and her sister APDs remained in the area performing a variety of tasks in one of history's most desperately fought over areas. The versatile ships patrolled the waters of *Iron Bottom Sound* and brought up ammunition and supplies from Espiritu Santo.

SEPTEMBER 4–5, 1942

The following information comes from declassified after-action reports obtained from the National Archives. These are the recollections of the ship's crew as best they remember the incident. These recollections were taken mere days after the sinking.

On September 4, *Gregory* and *Little* were returning to their anchorage at Tulagi after transferring a Marine Raider Battalion to Savo Island. The night was black with a low haze obscuring all landmarks, and the ships decided to remain on patrol rather than risk threading their way through the dangerous channel.

As they steamed between Guadalcanal and Savo Island at ten knots, the Japanese ships *Yūdachi*, *Hatsuyuki*, and *Murakumo* entered *The Slot* undetected to deliver a *Tokyo Express* package of troops and supplies to Guadalcanal. After completing the delivery, the destroyers prepared to bombard Henderson Field at Lunga Point. At 12:56 a.m. on September 5, *Gregory* and *Little* saw flashes of gunfire which they assumed came from a Japanese submarine until radar showed four targets, apparently a cruiser had joined the three destroyers. While the two outgunned ships were debating whether to close for action or depart quietly and undetected, the decision was taken out of their hands.

The after-action reports detail not only the chaos on board the *Gregory*, but individual acts of bravery and heroism as the officers and crew tried valiantly to save their ship in an almost hopeless situation. From the first sounds of firing, and the sounding of general quarters at approximately 12:55 a.m. on September 5, until the *Gregory* slipped

below the water and sank at 1:23 a.m., a mere twenty-eight minutes had elapsed.

A Navy pilot who had also seen the gunfire and, assuming it came from a Japanese submarine, thinking to aid the U.S. Navy ships, dropped a string of five flares almost on top of the two APDs. *Gregory* and *Little*, silhouetted against the blackness, were spotted immediately by the Japanese destroyers, who opened fire at 1:00 a.m.

Lieutenant, Junior Grade, William Dyer was awakened in his quarters by the General Quarters alarm at 12:55 a.m. He quickly dressed in combat gear and proceeded to his battle station on the Fire Control Platform and observed all guns were manned or in the process of being manned. Arriving at 1:00 a.m. he noted the flares being dropped by the Navy aircraft off the *Gregory's* port side. The Japanese ships on the port side of the ship immediately began firing at the silhouetted targets of *Gregory* and *Little*.

On the bridge, Quartermaster David Burton was on the mid-watch. Immediately, when firing began, he woke *Gregory's* skipper, Lieutenant Commander Harry Bauer, who issued a command for General Quarters. The ship was on a course of 130 degrees off the stern of the *Little* when the flares illuminated both ships off the port sides, estimated about 2000 yards distant. When the *Little* changed course to 280 degrees the *Gregory* did likewise, and one of the Japanese ships lit up the *Little* with a searchlight and commenced firing on her, immediately striking her and setting *Little* on fire. A second Japanese ship spotted *Gregory*, turning, and fired on her.

In the Fireroom, Water Tender Charles Young was on the watch when he heard several shells bursting, and the blower to Boiler No. 2 slowly shut down. He noted that the steam line to the boiler had ruptured. Almost at the same time a shell penetrated just above the waterline and hit Boiler No. 1. Young pulled the emergency fuel oil trips a second before both boiler fronts fell in.

At 1:03 a.m. the *Gregory* was dead in the water a proverbial sitting duck. Boatswain's Mate Clarence Justice had been asleep in the Well Deck when he awoke to the sounds of the battle. He reported to his battle station and commenced firing. He witnessed the *Little* burst into flames and his own ship took several hits, including one to the bridge which knocked out communications.

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Gregory brought all her guns to bear but was desperately overmatched and, less than three minutes after the final flares had been dropped she was dead in the water and beginning to sink. Two boilers had burst and her decks were a mass of flames. Lieutenant Commander Bauer was himself seriously wounded from the shell that hit the bridge when he gave word to abandon ship, and *Gregory*'s crew reluctantly took to the water. Ensign A. L. Gallin, in charge of the after battery, ordered his guns to continue firing although "*Abandon Ship*" had been sounded. He then calmly went from depth charge to depth charge, setting all charges on safe and removing the firing charges.

IN THE WATER

At 1:23 a.m., with all of *Gregory*'s and most of *Little*'s crew in the water, the Japanese ships began shelling again—aiming not at the crippled ships but at their crews, helpless in the water. *Gregory* sank first, followed two hours later by *Little*. Admiral Chester Nimitz, in praising the courageous ships after their loss, wrote that "*Both of these small vessels fought as well as possible against the overwhelming odds. . . . With little means, they performed duties vital to the success of the campaign.*"

With both the enemy ships and enemy shore batteries firing on the survivors, many in the boats died from the enemy fire. Motor Machinist Mate John Metzger was one sailor who succeeded in getting into a lifeboat and rowing it clear of the *Gregory*. He loaded it with survivors, but his lifeboat came under continuous enemy fire. In the end, Metzger was the sole survivor of his boat.

Boatswain's Mate Stephen Kristof was one of the many sailors in the water. He spotted lifeboat No. 3, which was his abandon ship station lifeboat and swam to it. Seeing it full he then headed to nearby boat No. 1. It was nearly full, with about thirty men. The boat was drifting powerless, its motor having been hit by enemy fire prior to *Gregory*'s sinking. With the enemy gunners continuing to target the large lifeboats, some sailors in lifeboat No. 1 decided that the smaller, lower profile life rafts floating nearby would be safer, and jumped into the water and swam to them. Kristof felt it would be better to stay in the powerless boat. What he did not know was that the tide was taking the boat towards enemy shore emplacements. As Kristof checked the condition of the boat, he encountered his battery mate, Seaman Kyle. Hearing Machinist's Mate

Snipes calling out for help, Kristof and Kyle pulled him aboard and saw he was badly wounded in both legs. As the boat continued to drift they rescued Seaman Britt. In an effort to keep the lifeboat afloat, they took off their shirts and used them to plug the many holes and used their helmets to bail the water out of the boat.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Dyer, unable to get to a lifeboat, jumped into the water. The first person he came across was Sonar Operator Norman Berry. Berry was without a life jacket and Dyer supported him while he searched for a lifeboat or raft. Dyer thought he heard the sound of a lifeboat's motor and he and Berry began swimming toward the sound while calling out for other *Gregory* survivors. They gathered a "*shocked and badly frightened*" Operations Specialist Adell Walker, Quartermaster Burton, who had shrapnel wounds "*all over his body,*" Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Fair who had a very serious leg wound, Gunner's Mate Paul Smith, Gunner's Mate William Kirkman, and Fire Control Specialist Claude Darnell who was wounded in both legs. Smith supported Berry while Dyer tried to help Fair and Darnell. Seaman James Holdford swam up and did what he could to help the swimmers stay afloat.

Suddenly the swimmers heard Chief Commissary Steward Thomas Myers calling out from a raft. The sailors began swimming to it, pulling Fair along with them. Myers was alone on the raft which was upside down. The sailors righted the boat, put the wounded Fair in, and then climbed in. Ensign Robert Adrian then swam up. Despite a leg wound, Adrian opted to "*hitch a ride*" by holding on to the raft.

Soon the men in the raft spotted a drifting lifeboat. Vanderboss, who had joined the group, swam over to see if he could get the engine working. Unable to do so, the sailors on the raft eventually brought the raft alongside the lifeboat. They got in and met Seaman Kyle, Bosun's Mate Kristof and Seaman Britt, along with wounded: Machinist's Mate Snipes, Officer's Cook Francis, and Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Decker. Additionally, the boat had rations, medical gear and small arms weapons. Soon another raft pulled up containing Bosun's Mate Adamski, Seaman Longshore, and Signalman Howell.

Messman Charles Jackson French was one of those sailors who jumped directly from the sinking ship into the water. As French started swimming away from the sinking *Gregory* he spotted Lieutenant Dyer's

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lifeboat. Swimming to it, he was pulled inside by his comrades. The boat now contained the following officers and sailors:

Adamski	Dyer (Senior Officer)	Kristof
Adrian (WIA)	Fair (WIA)	Kyle
Berry	Fisher	Longshore
Britt	Francis (WIA)*	Myers
Bump (WIA)	French	Smith
Burton (WIA)	Holdford	Snipes (WIA)
Darnell (WIA)*	Howell	Vanderboss
Decker (WIA)*	Kirkman	Walker

* Darnell, Francis and Decker would succumb to their wounds before rescue.

The tide which had carried the powerless boat to safety away from the sinking *Gregory*, was now bringing them closer to another danger. As the lifeboat neared the beach they were spotted by Japanese troops, who opened fire. It was then that Messman French's ability as a strong swimmer was put to use in a do-or-die attempt to save his comrades.

SWIMMING WITH THE SHARKS

Shortly after the Korean War, French was invited to the San Diego home of a mutual friend of Chester Wright. Wright had been the Chief Steward on the U.S.S. *Princeton* (CV-37) and was writing a book titled: *Black Men and Blue Water*. Wright asked French to recall that night and French described it thus: *"When Gregory was hit by them planes a lot of us got off before she sunk and many friends wuz [sic] hurt. I was on a boat with some of them and we started drifting towards land. I knowed [sic] that if we got close enough them Japs would kill us. They, we had been told, would soon as kill a man already wounded as anybody else. So, I being lucky enough to not get hurt jes (sic) put a line around my middle and started paddling away from the beach. Then I got the hell scared outta [sic] me. I noticed they was sharks circling around that raft awaitin [sic] for their dinner. So, I thought what's wurze [sic] them sharks or them Japs? At least them sharks will be quick. I don't know about them Japs. They be some mean 'mothers. So, I jest keep paddling. I nearly peed on myself when one of those sharks teched [sic] my feet. I jes [sic] froze and tried to surface*



and float, git my feet outta [sic] the water, some of um hurt purty [sic] bad." Then French laughed uproariously and pithily observed that the sharks decided against eating a scared Black sailor.*

And paddle on French did. At approximately 7:00 a.m. Dyer spotted a PBY *Catalina* and managed to signal an SOS to the plane. At 7:56 a.m. a "tank lighter" (essentially an amphibious landing craft) pulled up to the boat. French had been swimming in the water for more than six hours. Dyer transferred all but the wounded aboard the tank lighter, rationalizing that he didn't want to move the wounded unnecessarily. So, they attached the rope that French had been using and the injured were towed first to the U.S.S. *William Ward Burrows* (APD-6). Then they were then transported to a secure beach on Guadalcanal.

Not only was French NOT welcomed as a hero, but he was also subject to racial taunting by the sailors on the beach who were not aware of his heroism. Again, from Wight's book in French's own words: "*Then he (French) changed from laughter to what the author had trouble discerning. It was anger, frustration, then tears. On questioning him, after waiting two minutes or so, he said, in a more subdued, angry voice: 'When we wuz [sic] picked up and the hurt ones wuz [sic] taken to be worked on we wuz [sic] taken to the rest camp with the others. I heard they come up wid [sic] some of some of that 'race-shit' that 'you a culud [sic] boy' mess. 'I was told 'you can go over there where the culud [sic] boys stay'. 'Then some of them White boys what wuz [sic] on the raft, and other sailors from the Gregory's crew said 'He ain't going nowhere! He is a member of the Gregory's crew and he damned well will stay right here with rest of us. Anybody who tries to take him anywhere had betta [sic] be ready to go to 'General quarters' (ready to fight) with all of us.'*"

"*The boy who did all the talking was from either Alabama or Georgia according to French. 'So, for near on to five minutes there it was a standoff, us covered with oil and grime in our hair and all over our clothes, in our eyes, and them clean master at arms folks. We musta looked like wildmen. Anyway, one of the master at arms said: 'Them folks mean it. Just leave them alone. We got other folk who need help. Them 'crackers' retreated, tuck they tails and left!'*"

*Black Men and Blue Water, Chester Wright, Author House, May 15, 2009

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“This conversation with Charles Jackson French occurred shortly after the Korean War. The author (Wright) attempted to probe the cause of such intense emotion concerning an incident that happened years before. French’s shoulder shook, tears coursed down his cheeks. And all the author could get from him was, ‘Them White boys stood up for me.’” (ibid)

The Navy seemed to be rather ambivalent about French’s heroism. He and the other able bodied survivors were shuttled back to Pearl Harbor aboard the U.S.S. *William Ward Burrows* (APD-6) for reassignment. While there, Ensign Robert Adrian told an Associated Press reporter about French’s heroism. A news story was written and went out on the national newswire.

The tale of French’s extraordinary exploits was picked up by most major media outlets. *The Chicago Defender* called French the “*Hero of the Year.*” Adrian was asked to go on a national radio program where he repeated the tale. Gum, Inc. a baseball trading card manufacturer printed a war tales trading card series. Card No. 129 depicts French’s heroism. The front of that card is reprinted at the beginning of this chapter and is entitled “*Negro Swimmer Tows Survivors.*” Capitalizing on French’s fame, the Navy relieved French of his ship duties and sent him on U.S. Savings Bond tours. His feat was published in comic book form in *Swimming World* magazine, and he would later be recognized in the International Swimming Hall of Fame.



One would think that after all this recognition of his feat, he would be awarded a Silver Star, a Navy Cross, or at least a Navy and Marine Corps Medal; it was not to be. His consolation was the feeling of his shipmates, especially those twenty-four men in the boat whose lives he had undoubtedly saved. Once again the Navy continued its practice of downplaying acts of valor by Black Americans. In May 1943, eight months after French’s heroics, Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr. issued French a “*Letter of Commendation.*”

For meritorious conduct in action while serving on a destroyer transport which was badly damaged during the engagement with Japanese forces in the British Solomon Islands on September 5, 1942.

After the engagement, a group of about fifteen men were adrift on a raft, which was being deliberately shelled by Japanese naval forces. French tied a line to himself and swam for more than two hours without rest, thus attempting to tow the raft. His conduct was in keeping with highest traditions of the Naval Service.

The narrative of his commendation itself reflects further understatement of his actions. His ship was not *“badly damaged,”* it was SUNK. There were TWENTY-FOUR men, not fifteen in the life raft that he towed to safety swimming for SIX hours with the sharks, which of course is *“more than two hours”* but woefully understated.

French spent twelve months in three different Naval hospitals over the three years that followed. While we don't know for sure what his illness was, it was likely detox and/or psychological problems. which today we would associate with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD. He spent only six weeks on the U.S.S. *Sibley*. The *Sibley* was an APD troop transport like *Gregory*. It left for duty in the Pacific three days after French was admitted to San Diego Naval Hospital. *Sibley* was eventually involved in the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Scuttlebutt being what it is on naval vessels, I am sure French realized he was on another lightly armed APD heading into invasions in the Pacific. Seized with fear he probably drank himself into such a state that he required hospitalization.

After being admitted to the San Diego Naval Hospital in November 1944, he was discharged from the Navy on March 9, 1945. It is impossible to tell what, if any, treatment French got from the Veterans Administration. Chester Wright noted: *“From close questioning of friends, it would appear he returned from the Pacific Wars ‘stressed out’ from seeing too much death and destruction.”*



French was enthusiastically applauded by grateful citizens on his War Bonds tours. Here, he appeared in his sister Viola at her hometown of Omaha, NE.



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Certainly, when he was interviewed for Chester Wright's book the range of opposing emotions indicated PTSD. One minute he was laughing, then crying, and another minute later he's angry at the racism shown to him on the beach after rescue. Still, he seemed proud that his shipmates stood up to the racist sailors on the beach.

Except for the interview for Wright's book, not much was ever mentioned of French in the intervening time between his discharge and November 7, 1956, when Charles Jackson French succumbed to alcoholism at age 37. He was buried in Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego along with his wife Jettie Mae.

Certainly, it's a tragedy that French died so young. But he left a legacy that's not hard to understand. Twenty-four sailors owed their lives to him. Robert Adrian, who first told French's story, retired from the Navy and had a successful career as a banker in Baltimore. Undoubtedly the other survivors went on to lead successful lives and, perhaps, tell their children and grandchildren of Charles Jackson French, who saved their lives by bravely swimming with the sharks. They remembered him fondly as "*The Human Tugboat.*"



Go For Broke

NISEI HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

By 1941 more than 5,000 Japanese Americans were serving in the U.S. military. Pearl Harbor changed that. In the hysteria and paranoia that followed the attack, young Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) were discharged from the service. Even as young men of other races swamped military recruiting offices to volunteer their services in defense of their country, young Japanese were quickly classified as 4-F (unfit for military service) or 4-C (enemy aliens). Despite the fact that these young Nisei were born in America, held U.S. Citizenship, and pledged their allegiance to the *Stars and Stripes*, their desire to serve was ignored.

Japanese Americans were hardest hit on the Mainland. The three Pacific coast states of Washington, Oregon, and California were home to 112,353 Japanese Americans. As the United States struggled in the early months after Pearl Harbor to rebuild the Pacific fleet and mount a response to the “*Day of Infamy*,” a stunned American population often made these citizens the subjects of their desire for revenge. Japanese Americans lived under a persistent cloud of suspicion. Ultimately, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 led to the imprisonment of most of them in “*relocation camps*.” From March through May 1942, more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were “*relocated*” to heavily guarded camps, similar in every way to Prisoner of War camps. More than two thirds of these “*relocated*” citizens were native-born Americans, singled out only because of their ancestry.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066

Innocently sounding enough, Executive Order No. 9066 granted military authorities the power to declare entire regions to be “*military areas*” and to take whatever steps were necessary to “*remove*” from the area any persons thought to be a sabotage or espionage threat. It was a “*relocation*” provision designed to move Japanese American citizens from their homes, mostly in Hawaii or the west coast, to



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controlled areas . . . specifically, hastily constructed camps surrounded by barbed wire, gun towers, and guards who had orders to shoot anyone trying to escape. Fortunately, in Hawaii, an experiment began in 1942 that would pave the way for them, and thousands of other patriotic Nisei Americans to prove their loyalty.

THE 100TH INFANTRY BATTALION

In the weeks following Pearl Harbor, Hawaiian Military Governor Lieutenant General Delos C. Emmons demonstrated a reluctance to deport Hawaii's Japanese citizens. Not only did they comprise 37% of the territory's population, but they were also essential to its economy. Nonetheless, within weeks of the first attack by Imperial Japan, General Emmons discharged all Japanese American soldiers from the Hawaiian Territorial Guard and the 298th and 299th Regiments of the National Guard of Hawaii. These young men who had the most to prove and the greatest reason to fight for their homeland, were stripped of the chance to serve.



The discharged Japanese appealed to Emmons to allow them to support the war effort of their Nation in any capacity. Their persistence paid off, and the Military Governor consented to allow some of them the opportunity to function in support roles. Though these *“support roles”* usually consisted of the most menial tasks, the young Nisei performed them with dedication and determination. General Emmons took note of their patriotism and determination, and saw beyond the hysteria and paranoia around him. He recommended to the War Department that these veterans of pre-Pearl Harbor service be formed into a special unit, shipped to the mainland, and trained for combat.

On May 26, 1942, General George C. Marshall responded, establishing the **Hawaiian Provisional Battalion** and returning to military service many young Nisei who had been summarily discharged after the December 7, 1941, attack. From these, 1,400 were selected and shipped out on June 5 for training on the Mainland under the guidance of 29 White officers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Farrant Turner. By mid-June the unit was attached to the SECOND Army at **Camp McCoy**, Wisconsin, for six months of basic training. The Hawaiian

Provisional Battalion was redesignated the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). The battalion's motto was: "***Remember Pearl Harbor.***"

When the 100th Infantry Battalion began training at Camp McCoy in June 1942, its soldiers faced prejudice, suspicion and distrust, not only from other soldiers but from highly placed military and political leaders as well. Even as the battalion's training began, the War Department announced it wouldn't "*accept for service with the armed forces, Japanese or persons of Japanese extraction, regardless of citizenship status or other factors.*" The progress of the 100th led to new dialog about the formation of a Japanese American regiment, but on September 14, 1942, it was announced that the call for such a unit had been rejected "*because of the universal distrust in which they (the Japanese Americans) are held.*"

The recruits at Camp McCoy were aware of this prejudice and mistrust, but most of them were not aware just how deeply felt it was in the higher echelons of the military command. Some of the all-White officers and NCOs assigned to train them were schooled in psychology and were planted among them to test not only their physical and military abilities, but their loyalty. After the war, news surfaced of their reports not only on the progress of the unit, but on the loyalty and suitability for service of individual soldiers. Such reports were surreptitiously sent to higher echelons from clandestine mail drops on a daily basis.

No one could have predicted the wide ranging impact of these ill-conceived reports, although not in terms of their intent. Designed to "*weed out*" the untrustworthy Nisei soldiers and validate continued resistance to an all Japanese military unit, the attitude of the men in the 100th Infantry Battalion had the opposite effect. Reports of their patriotism and dedication to the nation that tried to scorn them was humbling.

By the time the men of the 100th finished their basic military training in December and prepared to ship out to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for advanced training, the young Nisei had given military and political leaders more than ample reason to see the error of their earlier doubts, suspicion and prejudice. On February 1, 1943, President Roosevelt announced the formation of an all Japanese American military unit, this time composed not only of volunteers from Hawaii, but also the mainland. The President noted, "*Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of face or ancestry.*"

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THE 442D INFANTRY REGIMENT

Many of these new volunteers were recruited from within the internment camps where they now lived, under guard, with their families. The President hoped at least 3,000 volunteers could be raised on the mainland, and 1,500 more from Hawaii. More than 1,000 volunteered on the first day of the announcement. It soon reached nearly 10,000 from which 2,600 Hawaiian Nisei were selected, to join 800 of the more than 1,200 volunteers from the internment camps in Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, California, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. This new all-volunteer, nearly all-Japanese unit was designated the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. It would go down in history based upon the unit's motto: ***“Go For Broke.”***



While the volunteers for the 442d Infantry Regiment were beginning training, the 100th Infantry Battalion landed at Salerno, Italy. Over the following eight months the men of the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) went on to engage the enemy in some of the fiercest engagements in Italy along the Volturno River and at Monte Cassino. Their aggressiveness resulted in heavy casualties, earning them the nickname *The Purple Heart Battalion* and leaving them badly depleted until the arrival of their first replacements in January 1944. Reinforced, the Battalion landed at Anzio in March and, after a protracted stalemate, participated in the breakout to Rome, attacking and capturing Lanuvio.

The first elements of the 442d Regimental Combat Team began arriving in Italy in May. They consisted of the 2d and 3d Battalions (Infantry), the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion and the 232d Engineer Company. The regiment's 1st Battalion, depleted from sending replacements to the 100th Battalion, remained at Camp McCoy.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, 14,400 Japanese and Japanese Americans lived in Washington State, 9,600 of them in King County. A group of them from Bainbridge Island were the first in the United States to be sent to internment camps. In all, a total of 12,892 were placed in confinement, first at the Puyallup *“assembly center,”* and then on to Camp Minidoka near Hunt, Idaho.



Only one Medal of Honor was presented to a Japanese American soldier during World War II, despite the fact that these soldiers who rose above intense prejudice at home in the United States, were among the most decorated soldiers of the war. One Nisei from Washington State was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) and nine received Silver Stars. Following a review in the late 1990s of Distinguished Service Cross awards to Japanese Americans, 22 such awards were upgraded to Medals of Honor and presented by President Bill Clinton on June 21, 2000; all but seven were posthumously awarded.

BAPTISM OF FIRE

While the 442d Infantry Regiment was beginning their training, the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) shipped out to North Africa under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Farrant Turner and 29 White officers. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, commander of the North Africa Theater of Operations, refused to accept them, but Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, commander of the FIFTH Army, gladly welcomed them; they were attached to the 133d Infantry Regiment, 34th Infantry Division. On September 10, 1943, they sailed from North Africa with the 34th Infantry Division, landing southeast of Naples, Italy, to begin combat operations.

Despite Italy's surrender to the Allies the day before Lieutenant General Mark Clark's FIFTH Army landed at Salerno, the battle for Italy would be a long and bitter campaign. German Field Marshal Kesselring sent six divisions of Axis troops to fend off the invading force. When the 100th landed at Salerno ten days behind the initial invading force, the untested Nisei would find themselves going up against battle hardened, crack German troops.

Initially the 1,432-man unit was detailed the relatively safe task of guarding supply trains in North Africa, but Colonel Turner knew his Nisei had come to Europe to fight. In training they proved to be among the best, despite their slight stature (the average Japanese-American soldier was only 5'4" tall and weighed a diminutive 125 pounds.) Colonel Turner was determined to allow them the chance to prove their mettle in combat as well. The 100th arrived in Salerno, Italy on September 19.

On September 27, Sergeant Conrad Tsukayama was wounded by an enemy mine, becoming the company's first casualty and first Purple Heart recipient. Two days later the 3d Platoon of Company B was moving slowly through the Italian countryside, leading the FIFTH Army advance into Monte Milieto. They knew the enemy was nearby.

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Sergeant Shigeo “Joe” Takata’s platoon was the point element, leading the rest of the battalion along a portion of road bordered by a gully on one side and an olive grove on the other. The advance element had just rounded an “S” curve at 9:15 a.m. when the ground began to rumble with the sudden force of explosions. Enemy mortars and artillery began to rain from the heavens, driving the untested soldiers of the 100th to the ground. From a clearing in front of them came the sound of enemy machineguns. Sergeant Takata, the 24-year-old Nisei from Oahu, Hawaii, rose and began to advance towards the enemy gun, deliberately exposing himself to draw fire and locate the enemy position. The other young soldiers watched in horror as an enemy round struck him in the head, driving him to the ground. Then, slowly, the sergeant began to rise back up, blood masking his face.

He was waving, pointing, directing them to the position of the enemy gun. The Nisei from 3d platoon went on the offensive, moving and shooting as the wounded Sergeant directed them, until the enemy position was destroyed. Glancing back for new orders, the soldiers no longer saw their Sergeant. Slumping back to the ground, the last drops of his Nisei blood stained the soil of Italy. The 100th Infantry Battalion had its first Distinguished Service Cross recipient, and its soldiers lost their first brother.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Sergeant Shigeo Joseph Takata (ASN: 30102426), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company B, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on the morning of 29 September 1943, west of Monte Milieto, Italy. Sergeant Takata personally led his squad in a flanking movement, forcing the withdrawal of enemy machine gunners and materially assisting in the attainment of the Battalion objective. Taking position in front of his men, he led



them through intense artillery, mortar and machine gun fire to carry out his mission. He continuously and deliberately disregarded his own welfare in making personal reconnaissance to determine enemy gun positions. While so exposing himself, he was struck by an artillery shell and mortally wounded. In spite of his wounds, he attempted to communicate with his platoon leader to inform him what he had learned of the enemy positions. Sergeant Takata's extraordinary heroism, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty at the cost of his life, exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 34th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.

In that battle, Corporal Masaichi Goto of Honolulu, Hawaii, a Medical Aidman, became the first member of the company to earn the Silver Star. Goto survived to wear his Silver Star, continuing in action with the battalion and returning home after the war. He lived a full life and died on August 12, 1988. He was buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu.

In the drive to Monte Milieto the 100th Infantry Battalion tasted first blood. In two days, they covered seven miles and captured two towns. They proved their courage and set the stage for a legacy unmatched in military history. Along the way, during their first week of battle, they buried three of their brothers and sent 23 wounded comrades back for medical attention. General Mark Clark later stated, "*General (George C.) Marshall gave me very strict personal instructions to report to him immediately the outcome in your first baptism of fire. After your first engagement, I said, 'They performed magnificently on the field of battle. I've never had such fine soldiers. Send me all you got.'*" The ultimate goal of the Allied Fifth Army was to push northwest from Salerno to Naples, then on to liberate Rome, a distance of some 200 miles. The task would take nine months. Along the way the Nisei battalion had to cross the Rapido River, fight past the monastery at Monte Cassino, make the landing at Anzio, survive a live volcano, and endure the harsh Italian winter. All of this had to be accomplished in the rugged terrain of the Apennine Mountain Range.

That first week of battle was the prelude for things to come. The 100th continued north throughout the month of October, crossing the Volturno River no less than six times and driving slowly towards Naples. The Germans mounted counter-attacks in force, as well as ambushing the advancing Nisei from hidden positions in stone farmhouses, high ridges,

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and thick timber. German Messerschmidts rained death on the infantrymen from the skies. In one three day October action, 21 members of the 100th were killed and 67 wounded.

The 100th continued its move north through Benevento, crossing the winding Volturno river the first time in early-October, then doubling back to cross it a second time on October 18. Waiting for them at a road junction near San Angelo d'Alife was Field Marshal Kesselring's crack 29th Grenadier Regiment. From October 20 to 22 the men of the 100th, along with the 3rd Battalion of the 133d Infantry Regiment fought a bitter contest with these troops. Despite the German's well-hidden and carefully reinforced machinegun positions, the constant rain of "*screaming meemies*" and deadly minefields, the Americans prevailed. During the battle Private Masao Awakuni of Kaneohe, Hawaii, became the second member of the 100th in less than 30 days to earn the Distinguished Service Cross. He was also the battalion's first living recipient of the award and survived the war, returning home to live a full life until his death in Hawaii on January 18, 1991. He was buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Private Masao Awakuni (ASN: 30102030), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with C, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 8 February 1944, near Cassino, Italy. While advancing in an attack, Private Awakuni's company encountered an enemy tank upon which was mounted a 75-mm. gun. The enemy tank immediately went into action, supported by intense machine gun and sniper fire, forcing the company to take cover. Rifle grenadiers failed to stop the firing from the tank. Private Awakuni was called from the support platoon to attempt to fire at the tank with his rocket launcher. He worked his way across fifty yards of open ground and arrived at a point only thirty yards from the hostile



armor. Although he had poor protective cover, Private Awakuni coolly took aim, and with his first shell hit the tread of the tank. His second shell was a dud. Having disclosed his position from the first two shots, Private Awakuni was subjected to heavy enemy fire. Despite the deadly peril facing him, he calmly took aim for a third time and made a direct hit on the tank, causing it to burst into flames. Private Awakuni then sought the sparse protection of a nearby rock and was forced to remain in this position until darkness permitted his return to friendly lines. For ten hours he was pinned down by deadly sniper fire, and in his attempt to return to his lines in darkness, he was wounded in the arm by machine gun fire. Private Awakuni's extraordinary heroism, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 34th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.

The battles continued, from one hill to the next, an almost daily struggle to stay alive amid enemy fire. On the last day of October, twelve more members of the battalion were wounded when Company A and Company C were attacked by German fighter planes near Ciorlano.

From that first taste of combat on September 29 through the first week of November, the men of the 100th Infantry Battalion saw almost daily combat as they slugged their way through the Italian mountain range. On November 6, three forward observers from Company D earned Silver Star Medals. None of them would ever wear the award, they died in their moment of valor. On November 11, units of the 45th Division relieved a badly decimated but valiant 100th Infantry Battalion. In their first six weeks of combat, they suffered nearly 25% casualties: Their fearlessness in combat resulted in so many soldiers killed or wounded in action, the 100th Infantry Battalion gained the nickname "*The Purple Heart Battalion*."

The day before Thanksgiving, after a much needed two week rest, the *Purple Heart Battalion* was called back into action. Among the many battles in their quest to push the Germans out of the hills was the November 28 - 29 battle near Cerasuolo. Staff Sergeant Allan Ohata of Aiea, Hawaii, along with his squad leader and three men, was ordered to protect the platoon's flanks. Ohata positioned his small force carefully. Suddenly, 40 enemy soldiers attacked his position with rifle and machinegun fire. Sergeant Ohata fought back furiously until he heard the rifleman to his left call for help. Private Mikio Hasemoto of Honolulu, Hawaii, faced down two German machine gunners, firing four clips

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before his gun was shot and damaged. More Germans were advancing, and Sergeant Ohata rushed 15 yards, exposed to the enemy's fusillade, to shore up the position while Hasemoto dashed back to the rear to get another automatic rifle.

Together, Ohata and Hasemoto repulsed the attack, killing 20 enemy. When Hasemoto's second rifle jammed, he dashed again through the hail of enemy fire to find a working M-1 rifle. Together the two Americans killed 37 of the enemy. As the surviving Germans attempted to flee, the intrepid soldiers attacked, killing one, wounding another, and capturing the third. Later, when a second force of 14 Germans attacked, Ohata and his fearless rifleman again stood their ground, killing four, wounding three, and causing the remaining enemy to retreat. The following day both men continued to battle the advancing enemy. They held their ground, repulsed every assault, but in the end Private Hasemoto was killed in action. For their actions both men were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

On that same day Company A was making a flanking assault on a high hill held by the enemy when they were pinned down by grenades, rifle, and machinegun fire. Private Shizuya Hayashi of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, rose to his feet firing his machinegun from the hip while suspended from a shoulder sling, to make a lone assault on the enemy. His courage and marksmanship enabled him to kill all the enemy soldiers and capture the enemy position. The unit moved forward 200 yards and was pinned down a second time, this time by an enemy anti-aircraft position. Again, Private Hayashi went on the offensive, knocking out the new enemy threat. Through both actions of single-handedly destroying two enemy positions, he killed 20 enemy soldiers and captured four more. Like Ohata and Hasemoto, Private Hayashi was awarded the DSC.

There was to be yet a fourth DSC in a single day to the battalion. When Company A was pinned down by heavy enemy fire, Corporal Masaru Suehiro of Honolulu, Hawaii, *“leader of a 60-mm. mortar squad, moved forward in the face of intense enemy fire to an exposed position in order to direct his mortar fire. His position, although almost untenable because of heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire, afforded excellent observation. From this hazardous observation post he directed accurate fire on an enemy machine gun, destroying the weapon and depriving the enemy of essential supporting fire.*



Observing an enemy group forming for an assault, he started to adjust his fire but was seriously wounded by shell fragments. Although suffering intense pain, he remained in his hazardous position and continued to direct such effective fire that the enemy counterattack was successfully repulsed. Corporal Suehiro's determined courage and steadfast devotion to duty contributed materially to the defense by his company."

In addition to the four DSCs, six Nisei earned Silver Stars, two of them posthumously awarded. Fifty-seven years later on June 21, 2000, after an Army review of the DSCs awarded to Asian Americans in World War II, Hasemoto, Ohata, and Hayashi saw their awards upgraded to the Medal of Honor. The award to Hasemoto who was killed in the battle, was presented to surviving family members. So too was the Medal of Honor awarded to Sergeant Ohata; although he survived the war he died October 17, 1977, and was buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. Only Shizuya "Cesar" Hayashi was still alive to personally receive his award from President William Clinton. Hayashi died eight years later on October 17, 1977; he was buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.



Allan Masaharu Ohata

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Staff Sergeant Allan Masaharu Ohata (ASN: 30101888), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company B, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 29 and 30 November 1943, near Cerasuolo, Italy. Sergeant Ohata, his squad leader, and three men were ordered to protect his platoon's



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left flank against an attacking enemy force of 40 men, armed with machine guns, machine pistols, and rifles. He posted one of his men, an automatic rifleman, on the extreme left, 15 yards from his own position. Taking his position, Sergeant Ohata delivered effective fire against the advancing enemy. The man to his left called for assistance when his automatic rifle was shot and damaged. With utter disregard for his personal safety, Sergeant Ohata left his position and advanced 15 yards through heavy machine gun fire. Reaching his comrade's position, he immediately fired upon the enemy, killing ten enemy soldiers and successfully covering his comrade's withdrawal to replace his damaged weapon. Sergeant Ohata and the automatic rifleman held their position and killed 37 enemy soldiers. Both men then charged the three remaining soldiers and captured them. Later, Sergeant Ohata and the automatic rifleman stopped another attacking force of 14, killing four and wounding three while the others fled. The following day he and the automatic rifleman held their flank with grim determination and staved off all attacks. Staff Sergeant Ohata's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States

Mikio Hasemoto

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Private Mikio Hasemoto (ASN: 30101561), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company B, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 29 November 1943, in the vicinity of Cerasuolo, Italy. On that date a force of approximately 40



enemy soldiers, armed with machine guns, machine pistols, rifles, and grenades, attacked the left flank of his platoon. Two enemy soldiers with machine guns advanced forward, firing their weapons. Private Hasemoto, an automatic rifleman, challenged these two machine gunners. After firing four magazines at the approaching enemy, his weapon was shot and damaged. Unhesitatingly, he ran ten yards to the rear, secured another automatic rifle and continued to fire until his weapon jammed. At this point, Private Hasemoto and his squad leader had killed approximately 20 enemy soldiers. Again, Private Hasemoto ran through a barrage of enemy machine gun fire to pick up an M-1 rifle. Continuing their fire, Private Hasemoto and his squad leader killed ten more enemy soldiers. With only three enemy soldiers left, he and his squad leader charged courageously forward, killing one, wounding one, and capturing another. The following day, Private Hasemoto continued to repel enemy attacks

until he was killed by enemy fire. Private Hasemoto's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.

Shizuya Hayashi

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private Shizuya Hayashi (ASN: 30100871), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company A, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 29 November 1943, near Cerasuolo, Italy. During a flank assault on high ground held by the enemy, Private Hayashi rose alone in the face of grenade, rifle, and machine gun fire. Firing his automatic rifle from the hip, he charged and overtook an enemy machine gun position, killing seven men in the nest and two more as they fled. After his platoon advanced 200 yards from this point, an enemy anti-aircraft gun opened fire on the men. Private Hayashi returned fire at the hostile position, killing nine of the enemy, taking four prisoners, and forcing the remainder of the force to withdraw from the hill. Private Hayashi's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.



The blizzards of December in the high Apennine Mountain Range made fighting difficult and life unbearable. Still, the 100th took hill after hill in the push towards Naples. Along the way they continued to suffer tremendous casualties. By January 1944 the 1,400 man battalion that arrived four months earlier was down to only 800 men. They were, indeed, the *Purple Heart Battalion*, winding up its first campaign and preparing for a second, the long awaited assault on Monte Cassino and the march into Rome. Slowly replacements filtered in, but not fast enough to bring the battalion to strength. Back home, more Nisei were training in the 442d Regimental Combat Team; many of them young Nisei who had volunteered for military service from the barbed-wire enclosed internment camps to which they and their families were relocated after being forcibly removed from their homes.

They entered military service with some angst, but little malice for their treatment; rather they had something to prove – that they were loyal and patriotic American citizens. The volunteers in the Regiment from Hawaii brought with them the game of “*Craps*” that was a popular

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diversion at home. Those who played the game knew that in every game of dice there came a point when the game ended and it became time to get serious. In that moment the participant would “*Go For Broke*,” risking everything he had on the roll of the dice.

The men of the 442nd bore on their shoulders the hopes of tens of thousands of Japanese Americans who knew their sons, husbands, and brothers were every bit as loyal, tough, and brave as any other young American. The respect rightly due America’s Japanese citizens hung in the balance, and the recruits of the 442nd held the dice. What they determined to do with those dice became their motto. This was no game, it was serious business that would affect all of them for a lifetime. They determined to *Go For Broke*.

MONTE CASINO

Although most of the *Go For Broke Regiment* was still in training at Camp Shelby, slowly replacements began arriving in early 1944, but the infusion of fresh soldiers could not keep up with the high casualty rate the *Purple Heart Battalion* was suffering. It was the aggressive manner in which the Nisei took the war to the enemy, and not a lack of training or leadership that accounted for the high number of men killed or wounded. The FIFTH Army had to slug its way to Rome, one heavily defended mountain at a time, and it seemed that the small soldiers of the 100th, dwarfed by backpacks almost as large as they were, were sometimes bent on taking “*a mountain a day*.” On January 11 they took Hill 1109. Two days later they attacked and wrested Hill 1207 from the crack German grenadiers. The next day they moved on to capture Hill 692. The next day they captured the town of San Michele. All this during an intense blizzard that dumped two feet of snow around soldiers with no winter clothing, men who went without sleep for three nights. Wrote one of the survivors, “*You have to have the will, you have to have the desire, and you have to have the spirit. It’s a mind over matter situation. You can go without*

One member of the 100th wrote home to say, “*When you read that a town was taken, or a certain hill was taken, remember that in the process of that accomplishment lives of fine fellows were lost., and also, that during this accomplishment for the participants, life was a horrifying massacre. You lose your buddies--fellows with whom you laughed, ate, slept, sweated. They grow to be more than mere buddies. They become blood relations to you and they die before your eyes--not a pleasant, natural death, but an unimaginable kind of mutilation*

mixed with groans and prayers ending with a gurgling last breath. Only five minutes ago you might have been laughing with that buddy of yours."

Each mountain the 100th took brought them one step closer to Rome, and the goal of liberating the capitol city. One major obstacle to the FIFTH Army's advance was a high mountaintop crowned with a spectacular monastery. Founded in 529 by St. Benedict of Nursia, it was home to the Benedictine Order.



For centuries it had been the leading monastery in western Europe. Now the American commanders believed it was being used by the Germans as a fortress to turn back the 5th Army's advance. Orders came down through the chain of command: "*Destroy Monte Cassino.*"

Reluctant to destroy such a vital part of world history, British General Bernard Freyberg never-the-less requested permission to bomb the mountain top's structure. On February 15 Pope Pius XII granted permission, and American B-17s began dropping the first of 2,500 tons of bombs to demolish the stone monastery. They performed their task well, but it was an ill-fated success, for the rubble of the once elegant monastery provided excellent locations for the Germans to dig in. It would take four assaults and cost 100,000 lives to finish the task the bombers begun. The blood that stained the ruins of a once proud icon of world history included the blood of hundreds of Nisei from the 100th Infantry Battalion.

On the evening of January 20, the 141st and 143d Regiments of the 36th Infantry Division (formerly of the Texas National Guard) began crossing the Rapido River which ran along the side of the town of Cassino. The ice-choked river was flooding, up to 200 yards of ground was awash after the Germans had destroyed the dam upriver. The crossing was made using 12-man wooden assault boats. Before the boats were halfway across, German artillery began to rain from the heavens. Entire boats disintegrated in flashes of fire, wounded survivors quickly drowning in the frozen waters. By dawn only about 1,000 men of the 143d made it across. In the daylight they came under intense machinegun fire from the German soldiers in the high ground above them. The regimental commander ordered them to withdraw, and the haggard remnants of the proud Texas unit made their way back across the river.

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Engineers hastily constructed portable bridges for a renewed crossing, and as night fell on the 21st the soldiers of the 36th moved across them and into enemy territory, only to find themselves hopelessly out-gunned with no hope of retreat. Two days of intense fighting followed, and by noon on January 23 every American on the German side of the Rapido River had been killed or captured.

Despite the powerful enemy force that repelled two regiments and nearly wiped them out in two and a half days, orders came for the 100th to cross the Rapido and attack Cassino. Despite suffering 50% casualties in previous fighting and with only a few replacements, the battalion had only 832 men including officers, and was still well below fighting strength. But orders for the Purple Heart Battalion were to *"Take Cassino,"* and the 100th had gained a reputation for following orders, regardless of how impossible the task appeared. On the night of January 24, the 100th moved into position to cross the Rapido River.

Moving out from San Micheli a few miles from the east bank of the Rapido River, the Nisei moved into the darkness. As they approached the river they found themselves in a morass of knee-deep mud caused by the flooding. Embedded in the mud were thousands of deadly German mines. Slowly they moved through the mud, groping in the darkness to detect the enemy mines, as they advanced towards the 8-foot high stone dike that channeled the raging waters of the Rapido. At midnight American artillery commenced a heavy volume of supportive fire that, rather than covering the advance of the 100th, simply alerted the enemy to their presence. From the high western bank of the river the Germans began to pour deadly machinegun fire on the approaching Nisei from well-hidden and fortified emplacements. Alpha Company's Captain Richard Mizuta was badly wounded probing in the mud for mines, when one of the explosive devices almost severed his right arm and leg. Despite the mud, mines and enemy fire, companies A and C managed to reach the wall, where the men struggled for survival throughout the day.

As night fell on the 25th Major George Dewey, was wounded and his executive officer killed as they attempted a reconnaissance of A and C companies. Major Caspar Clough, who had been relieved of command the previous evening when he had ignored orders from the regimental commander to send his soldiers into what he considered a *"suicide mission,"* resumed command of the 100th. The following morning Bravo Company made a daring daylight advance under cover of a smoke screen in an attempt to reach its sister companies. Suddenly the wind arose,

blowing away their cover and revealing them to the enemy in bunkers on the far bank of the river. Artillery and machinegun fire rained in torrents as the men of Company B struggled through the exploding mines and muddy shore to reach Company A and C. Of the 187 brave soldiers who began the assault, only 14 reached the wall. These survived only because they had fallen into the mud, laying there as though dead, until darkness fell. As the few survivors of the three Nisei companies hugged the wall in the darkness, regimental headquarters ordered their withdrawal.

The *Purple Heart Battalion* withdrew to San Micheli to bury their dead, treat their wounded, resupply the survivors, and welcome not nearly enough replacements. Major Clough had been wounded and the battalion's new commander was Major Jim Lovell who had just returned from a hospital in North Africa where he recuperated from wounds received in a previous action. On February 8 Major Lovell led his men back into action.

Castle Hill (Hill 165) sat over the only paved road leading to the monastery at the top of Monte Cassino. The *Purple Heart Battalion* took control of the hill against only light resistance, but resistance was strong enough to send Major Lovell home with a war ending wound to his leg. The recovering Major Clough again took command as the 100th, with virtually no support on its flanks, clung tenuously to their position. For four days the enemy poured heavy fire on the Nisei. Major Clough was wounded again and two more soldiers were killed in action. Finally, unable to send the beleaguered soldiers support, the regimental commander ordered the 100th to fall back into the hills near Cassino to join the regimental reserves. On February 15 the bombing that destroyed the abbey at Monte Casino began.

After three days of some of the most intense bombing of the war, the second assault on Monte Cassino commenced. It was the last assault on the mountain fortress by the 34th Division, as well as its 100th Infantry Battalion. Badly decimated by three weeks of fierce fighting, the Division didn't have the manpower to get the job done. One platoon of the *Purple Heart Battalion* attacked the mountain with 40 soldiers, only to return with five. In four days of fighting the 100th managed to fight almost halfway to the top of Monte Cassino, but again there was no manpower left in the Division to render them support. When finally



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ordered to withdraw, the 100th Infantry Battalion was down to 512 men. Monte Cassino remained in German hands, a sad defeat not only for the brave Nisei but for all the men of the 34th Infantry. Their advance had been strong, aggressive, and nearly successful. Nine Nisei earned Silver Stars and one earned a Distinguished Service Cross, but they ran out of men and material, or they just might have succeeded. It would take five divisions until of May 17 to finally bring Monte Cassino to its knees. There was no shame in the defeat at Monte Cassino, these brave Nisei soldiers ALMOST did it by themselves.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

The goal of the entire push northward across the Apennine Mountains was the liberation of Rome. Field Marshall Kesselring was determined to prevent the fall of the Italian capitol, and committed his finest troops to battle the Allies. Monte Cassino was the dominant point in his Gustav Line, and it had held.

On January 22, 1944, two days before the 100th made its first assault on Monte Cassino, the U.S. FIFTH Army landed at Anzio, a beachhead south of Rome. The goal was to relieve pressure at Monte Cassino by placing 50,000 Allied soldiers north of the Gustav Line. After the 100th Infantry's last assault on Monte Cassino, they were pulled back to recuperate. A month later on March 15 a second wave of bombers, greater than the first, rained tons of bombs on the mountain. The Germans held stubbornly through attacks by five Allied Divisions. Not until May 17 did Monte Cassino fall. Meanwhile, the 100th Infantry found itself stalemated with the other Allied soldiers near the beaches of Anzio.

After their last attack on the monastery on February 18, the 512 men of the *Purple Heart Battalion* had pulled back to "heal," and some 200 replacements were brought in, bringing the battalion to about half-strength. On March 26 the 100th, moving out of Naples, made an amphibious landing to join the forces of the SIXTH Army at Anzio. Kesselring sent eight German divisions south from Rome to contain the new invasion.

The Allies secured a 15-mile beach head that bulged inward only a few miles. Between the Americans and the German forces was a flat, open "no-man's-land" across which the opposing forces could watch each other through binoculars during daylight hours. Skirmishes were fought under cover of darkness as each side probed the other. When the sun came up the two sides pulled back to their secure areas. Though

devastating artillery barrages were launched by both sides during the day, there was almost a “*gentleman’s agreement*” between the two sides that no infantry war would be conducted while the sun shined. The men fought in what the Nisei of the 100th Infantry Battalion called their “*Dracula Days*,” sleeping during the day, drawing blood at night.

In the early days of June 1944, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team landed at Naples and moved north to link up with its Nisei brothers. Relief for the 1,300-man *Purple Heart Battalion* that had suffered more than 900 casualties during nine months of combat, was on the way. Before the reunion, however, there would be more casualties.

Even as they were arriving, the 100th Infantry Battalion was going into battle again. Joined by two artillery battalions, two antitank companies, and a chemical mortar company, the 100th was part of “*Task Force Singles*.” Their job was to spearhead the drive through Lanuvio and La Torreto, taking the cities and opening Highway 7 all the way into Rome. On June 2, Yeiki Kobashigawa, a 26-year old technical sergeant from Wailua, Hawaii, was in the fight of his life. Drafted to military service a month before Pearl Harbor, he was assigned to the 298th Regiment of Hawaii’s National Guard. After the hysteria and summary discharge of Japanese-American soldiers that followed the attack, when the 100th Infantry Battalion was organized, Yeiki Kobashigawa was among the first to join. From the battalion’s first landing a year before, he had fought his way through the rugged Apennines. Now, as Company B moved against the Germans near Lanuvio, a series of heavily fortified machinegun nests raked the Nisei of his company with devastating fire.

The young sergeant finally spotted one of the enemy positions 50 yards away. With one of his men, he crawled forward. With split-second timing he threw a grenade at the enemy position while the other soldier opened fire. Amid the hail of both friendly and enemy fire he charged forward through the smoke and debris of the grenade to kill one enemy and capture two more. When a second enemy position opened fire on him, Kobashigawa moved forward again, throwing grenades and giving cover fire to the soldier with him who rushed forward to capture the 4-man enemy gun crew. Continuing to lead and direct his men, Sergeant Kobashigawa managed to destroy two more enemy gun emplacements. Fifty-six years later the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day was upgraded, and President Clinton hung the blue ribbon of the Medal of Honor around the neck of the 82 year old war hero.

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The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Technical Sergeant Yeiki Kobashigawa (ASN: 30101851), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company B, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 2 June 1944, in the vicinity of Lanuvio, Italy. During an attack, Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa's platoon encountered strong enemy resistance from a series of machine guns providing supporting fire. Observing a machine gun nest 50 yards from his position, Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa crawled forward with one of his men, threw a grenade and then charged the enemy with his submachine gun while a fellow soldier provided covering fire. He killed one enemy soldier and captured two prisoners. Meanwhile, Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa and his comrade were fired upon by another machine gun 50 yards ahead. Directing a squad to advance to his first position, Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa again moved forward with a fellow soldier to subdue the second machine gun nest. After throwing grenades into the position, Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa provided close supporting fire while a fellow soldier charged, capturing four prisoners. On the alert for other machine gun nests, Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa discovered four more, and skillfully led a squad in neutralizing two of them. Technical Sergeant Kobashigawa's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.



A short distance away at La Torreto, Private Shinyei Nakamine of Waianae, Oahu, Hawaii, crawled 175 yards towards an enemy machine gun nest that had caught his platoon in a cross-fire. Suddenly he charged, hurtling grenades and firing his submachine gun. Three enemy soldiers fell dead and two others surrendered. The young Army private's first charge of the day was a success.



A second enemy position fell to the intrepid private later in the day. As other soldiers from his squad provided covering fire, he again rushed forward with grenades to wound one enemy, capture four more, and destroy his second enemy position. A third position would not fall so easily. This time as the brave warrior from Hawaii rushed forward, the men of his squad watched in horror as his valiant charge was abruptly halted by a hail of enemy bullets. When his DSC was upgraded 56 years later, relatives would accept the award on behalf of the private who gave his life destroying the enemy positions that threatened his fellow soldiers.

The battle for Highway 7 lasted two days. In the end Lanuvio and La Torreto fell. From there *Task Force Singles* moved swiftly through Aricia, Albano, and Fattochie. Fifteen brave soldiers of the *Purple Heart Battalion* gave their lives in the march to Rome, 63 were wounded. By the afternoon of June 5, the Task Force was within 7 miles of the Italian capitol and the long awaited triumphant entry was in sight. Excitement spread among the Nisei, exuberance at victory and the thrill of being first to enter and liberate the first European capitol from the Axis.

Then the march was halted, not by the Germans, but by General Harmon of the American 1st Armored Division. The men of the *Purple Heart Battalion* were ordered to halt their advance. They sat along the road watching other units march triumphantly down the Highway and into the hero's welcome lavished upon them by the liberated citizens of Rome. It was one of the saddest indignities the men who had fought so hard and given so much could have suffered. Finally, as night fell, a convoy of trucks arrived to transport the weary soldiers of the 100th Infantry Battalion to the outskirts of the city. Years later even the award of the Presidential Unit Citation to the 100th Infantry for its Rome-Arno Campaign (January 22 - September 9, 1945) could not soften the disappointment many of the men felt at the tragedy that befell them on the road to Rome, not by the enemy, but by their fellow Americans.

The Nisei were praised in the July 1944 issue of *Time* magazine for what they accomplished noting, "*From a cautious experiment the Army has received an unexpectedly rich reward. A group of sinewy oriental soldiers only one generation removed from a nation that was fighting fanatically against the U.S. was fighting just as fanatically for it.*" And there was still much fighting ahead. By the time the first campaign in Italy ended for the Nisei, 19 men of the *Purple Heart Battalion* and ten of the other units in the *Go For Broke Regiment* earned Distinguished Service

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Crosses.; thirteen of which would be upgraded to Medals of Honor nearly six decades later. They also earned 107 Silver Stars.

In all, the Rome-Arno campaign cost the 100th/442d RCT nearly 1,300 casualties, one fourth of their total strength. The Nisei buried 239 of their brothers, patched the wounds of 972, and remembered in their prayers the 17 men who were missing in action. Major General Charles Wolcott Ryder, commanding general of the 34th Infantry Division under which the 100/442 served in Italy, watched the Nisei march proudly in a parade during the month of August when Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal visited the Italian front. As the men of the 442d marched past, General Ryder turned to the Secretary and said proudly, "*My best outfit.*"

COMBAT IN SOUTHERN FRANCE

On June 6, 1944, the day after the liberation of Rome, Allied Forces stunned the Germans when 170,000 soldiers landed at Normandy on the northwest coast of France in **Operation Overlord**. While the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was slugging their way north in Italy from Rome to the Arno River in July and August, Allied forces were pushing eastward in France in the drive to liberate Paris.

The United States Army high command initially wanted to launch a two-prong assault on France, one from the north (**Operation Overlord**) and one from the south (**Operation Anvil**). Prime Minister Winston Churchill was opposed to the idea, advising vehemently that all available manpower and material be marshaled for the landing at Normandy. In the end, the British prevailed and the June 6 landing took place only at Normandy.

The concept for a landing on the coast of Southern France would not be forgotten, for weeks Allied commanders wrestled with the issue. Proponents wanted a massive invasion from the south that could move up the Rhone Valley and become the right flank of the massive Allied movement inland after the breakout from Normandy. On July 15 the 442d RCT's Anti-Tank Company was pulled back to join the First Airborne Task Force that was training south of Rome for the invasion of Southern France. On August 15 the Nisei Anti-Tank unit landed with other American forces near Le Muy, France, to begin the push eastward to open the Franco-Italian border. Ten days later, farther to the north, Paris was liberated.

The Southern France Campaign extended from August 15 to September 14, 1944. During the period the 442d Anti-Tank Company was awarded the Regiment's second Presidential Unit Citation. Having made the invasion in gliders and fought with infantrymen of the 6th Army, these soldiers were authorized to wear both the Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB) and the distinctive Glider Patch on their uniforms.

Operation *Anvil* was still steeped in controversy and disagreement, so much so that the invasion was re-named *Operation Dragoon*. General Mark Clark was slated to lead the invasion of South France, but aligned his thinking with that of the British and asked General Eisenhower to allow him to remain with the FIFTH Army in Rome. Eisenhower granted the request, but asked the FIFTH Army to provide three divisions for the September invasion. Mark Clark quickly provided the necessary forces. He balked only when a second request arrived, asking him to also send the "*Japanese-American units*".

The 442d left Naples by transport ship on September 27th, landing near Marseille three days later. From Marseille the 100th and 2nd Battalions moved northward up the Rhone Valley more than 1,000 miles by truck. The 3d Battalion was loaded on a series of old World War I railroad box cars and sent to join them. Along the way the 442d Anti-Tank Company rejoined the regiment. By October 13th the reunited regiment was only miles from the French-German border, where they were attached to the 36th Infantry, the old Texas National Guard.

The "*T-patchers*" of the 36th Infantry were a proud lot. They boasted a Texas heritage, though there were certainly many soldiers among them from other states. They were also no strangers to the Nisei of the 100th Infantry Battalion, next to whom they had fought throughout Italy, most notably in the assault on Monte Cassino.

On October 15 the 442d began the two-and-a-half mile offensive through the densely wooded Vosges Mountains under orders to liberate Bruyeres. With the 3d Battalion in reserve, the 100th began its assault on Hill A, directly west of the town while the 2d Battalion moved in the direction of Hill B to the north. In the first day the Nisei advanced only 500 yards, losing one man killed and 20 wounded. The following morning the two battalions moved into the valley between their respective hills, fighting off a vicious early morning counter-attack by the enemy. On the morning of the October 17th Companies E and F managed to beat back the Germans before a second counter-attack was launched. Quickly the

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100th moved in to shore up the defenses of its comrades in the 2d Battalion. On the morning of the October 18, five artillery battalions laid a 30 minute barrage on the enemy. Four hours of bitter fighting followed, finally allowing the 100th to take control of Hill A. After a similar 7-hour battle, the 2d Battalion took Hill B.

With Hills A and B under American control, the 3d Battalion joined the 36th Infantry's 142d Regiment in the sweep into the city. The battle to take Bruyeres had taken three days, and it wasn't over yet. Despite three days of continuous combat, Hills C and D provided the enemy high ground from which to rain death down on the city. On October 19, the 2d Battalion took Hill C, then moved forward with the 3d Battalion towards La Broquaine. Soon after, word reached the soldiers that the enemy had counter-attacked, retaking Hill C. Companies F and H were sent back to retake the hill. The fighting was close and heated. Technical Sergeant Abraham Ohama watched as one of his soldiers fell wounded in the open. The sergeant ran forward to render aid, when he too was hit.

During a lull in the firing, the medics moved forward to treat the two wounded. They placed Sergeant Ohama on the stretcher to carry him to safety. As they did, a burst of enemy fire streaked through the mist, shattering the helpless body of the wounded sergeant being carried to safety. As the sergeant died, the full impact of what the other soldiers just witnessed hit them with a fury. Up to the moments the enemy bullets had struck Sergeant Ohama, the effort to retake Hill D had been a stalemate, a see-saw struggle between the Nisei and the Germans to take and hold each yard. The senseless slaughter of the wounded sergeant sent a ripple of unchecked fury through his men. No order was given for the assault, it was a spontaneous response to what had just happened. To a man the men of Company F rose to their feet with a cry of anger and rushed boldly into the foray, heedless of the danger. The adrenaline charged onslaught quickly turned the stalemate into a rout. Fifty Germans were killed, seven captured, and Hill D once again secured. But for the Nisei it was no longer "*Hill D*," it became "*Ohama's Hill*".

Bitter fighting continued through the month of October, as the Nisei fought fiercely to liberate Bruyeres and then Biffontaine. It rained on October 15 when the offensive towards Bruyeres began, and continued to rain almost constantly for the next ten days as the 442d battled from one hamlet to the next. In the early morning the moist ground yielded a dense fog causing even more difficulty in travel.

GO FOR BROKE

In the nine day period from September 17 to 25, members of the 100/442 earned six Distinguished Service Crosses and fifty-four Silver Stars. Decades later the DSC awarded to Private Barney F. Hajiro of Waipahu, Hawaii, a member of Company I, 3d Battalion, 442d Regimental Combat Team, was upgraded to the Medal of Honor, which was presented to him at the White House by President William J. Clinton on June 21, 2000.



Staff Sergeant Robert Toshio Kuroda of Aiea, Oahu, Hawaii, received the DSC for his actions on October 20, 1944, near Bruyeres, while serving with Company H, 2d Battalion, 442d Regimental Combat Team. Killed in that action, his DSC was upgraded, his Medal of Honor was posthumously presented to his surviving family by President Clinton on June 21, 2000.



By October 31, having taken many casualties and with virtually no officers to command them and no resupply in two days, the men of the *Purple Heart Battalion* were outnumbered and surrounded after two assaults on their position in Biffontaine. When Germans launched a third brutal assault the Nisei were reduced to fighting back with weapons taken from the dead bodies of their enemies. Miraculously they held, forcing the enemy to withdraw. By afternoon the 3d Battalion took control of the ridge overlooking Biffontaine. Task Force Felber broke through with water and ammunition and, more importantly, reinforcements for the battered city. The Germans lost Biffontaine, along with 40 men killed or wounded and another 40 captured. It cost the *Purple Heart Battalion* 21 soldiers killed, 122 wounded, and 18 captured. Badly battered, their ranks severely depleted, the 100/442 had survived the enemy, the elements, and a series of bad decisions by division headquarters. Now, at last, they could rest for a few days, maybe even a week.

Unknown to the Nisei in that moment was the predicament faced by the 3d Battalion, 141st regiment of 36th Infantry more hopelessly surrounded than the *Go For Broke Regiment* had been at Biffontaine. Nine miles into enemy territory, every effort had been expended to save them, all to no avail. To call the battered 442d back into action so soon would be to sign the death warrant of a legendary battalion. But when all else failed; the stranded T-Patchers were left with only one hope of

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rescue. The *Go For Broke* regiment was sent back into the cauldron with new orders: "*Rescue The Lost Battalion.*"

THE LOST BATTALION

Sergeant Edward Guy knew how it felt to be a prisoner; he had lived a life of confinement for the last seven days. There was no barbed wire to confine him, no gun tower to prevent his escape --only 700 German soldiers that had built a wall of death around his unit, the 1st Battalion, 141st Regiment, 36th Infantry Division.

A week earlier the 275 man battalion dug in on the heavily wooded hillside in the rugged Vosges Mountains. Suddenly surrounded, they were cut off from all support, alone, and without food and water. That first night a message was sent to regimental headquarters to report their situation. The coded message read: "*No rations, no water, no communications with headquarters --four litter cases.*" The battalion had been whittled down to 211 men who would become known as the soldiers of "*The Lost Battalion.*"

Peering through the early morning mist from his outpost, Sergeant Guy noticed movement. He gripped his rifle firmly and strained his eyes against the fog, prepared to go down fighting. Slowly the image of a soldier approaching his position began to take shape. In the distance the man seemed quite small. Even as he continued up the hill, closer to Sergeant Guy's position, his stature grew only slightly.

The approaching soldier was close enough now for Sergeant Guy to recognize the uniform. Then he noticed the eyes, the oval eyes of oriental heritage. It was a Japanese soldier in an American uniform. A feeling of euphoria swept over the exhausted sergeant. He'd seen these soldiers before, Nisei warriors of the Japanese-American unit that lived by the motto "*Go For Broke.*" The Lost Battalion had got its miracle -- all the way from Hawaii.

The 1st Battalion had moved out at dawn on October 24, moving down a thickly wooded valley between Gerardmer and St. Die to rout the enemy from their hidden positions. By mid-afternoon they traveled six miles, flanked by 3d Battalion on a ridge to the north. Rising from the valley, the 1st Battalion attacked the heavily wooded hillsides, beating back the Germans. Suddenly the enemy counter-attacked, splitting the two Battalions and cutting the 1st Battalion off from its flank support.

As night fell, 1st Battalion took a position on the barren crest of the densely wooded hilltop. First Sergeant Bill Hull sent a 36-man patrol to work its way back to friendly lines and obtain needed supplies for the men on the hilltop. Almost immediately after leaving the perimeter the patrol ran into the Germans. The first hint of just how badly surrounded the 1st Battalion was, came when only five of the thirty-six escaped to return to the hilltop. In the darkness of that first night, the soldiers took turns standing guard duty. But no one really slept. They knew the enemy was near, that they were surrounded. They suspected that they were also heavily outnumbered.

Throughout the day the soldiers reinforced their position, digging foxholes into the ground and using knives to cut down trees for cover. Every effort was made to maintain silence, for the Germans seemed to be everywhere. Some of the soldiers resorted to wrapping blankets around small trees as they cut through the trunks, in order to quiet them as they fell. Back at headquarters, Major General Dahlquist, Commander of the 36th Infantry Division, was concerned. The situation faced by the 275 men he had sent from Belmont posed potential for a major military disaster. Throughout the previous night, the 3d Battalion of the 141st tried to fight their way in past the forces that had stopped 2nd Battalion from reaching the trapped unit. It was all to no avail.

“Hang on, a heavy force is coming to relieve you,” headquarters radioed back to Erwin Blonder, an artillery observer attached to the battalion. With his staff, General Dahlquist had committed all the resources of the 2d and 3d Battalions to the situation, while trying hard to determine what kind of manpower would be required to push through to the lonely hill where the majority of his 1st Battalion were huddled against the powerful German force. On the hillside, the enemy was moving in more tanks, heavy guns, and dropping artillery fire on their cornered prey. In the forests they were blocking the advance of the American relief efforts. The 1st Battalion wasn’t really *“lost,”* the Germans knew where they were, and so did General Dahlquist. But knowing where the trapped unit was, and effecting their rescue, were two different things. Huddled in the mud protecting the radio that provided the Lost Battalions’ only link to the rear, Lieutenant Blonder prayed for a miracle.

At Belmont, weary Nisei who had been pushed beyond the limit of human endurance rose up to do the impossible. Sometimes when you go for broke, you win big. At other times the roll of the dice can be cruel,

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and rob you of everything. This time the roll of the dice would be insanely cruel, for men who *“Refused to Quit, Refused to Lose!”*

On the afternoon of October 25, Colonel Charles Pence knew something major was up the minute General Dahlquist walked into the 442d RCT’s command post at Belmont. Visits from the general and his crisp aide Lieutenant Lewis, were common. Today, however, Colonel Pence’s attention was quickly drawn to the other officer with General Dahlquist. It was hard to miss the three stars on the uniform of Lieutenant General Alexander Patch, commander of the SEVENTH Army Corps. Something was definitely in the wind.

“I don’t really want to send your soldiers to battle again, so soon,” General Dahlquist told Colonel Pence, *“But I have little choice.”* With that, he ordered 442 RCT’s 2d Battalion to move out before darkness to assume a defensive position on the flank of the 141st Regiment. The general then visited Lieutenant Colonel Singles at the 100th Battalion’s command post and laid out the scenario playing out on the hilltop near La Houssiere, explaining the predicament of the *Lost 1st Battalion* and informed the *Purple Heart Battalion’s* commander to have his soldiers ready to move out on a moment’s notice.

The 100th and the 3d Battalion remained for one more day at Belmont as the exhausted men of the 2d Battalion moved out in support of the 141st Regiment. As dawn broke the skies on Thursday, October 26, the *Lost Battalion* had survived its second night on the hill. The beleaguered soldiers were under almost constant enemy artillery fire and most had not eaten in 24 hours.

On October 27, 1944, at 2:00 a.m., the two remaining battalions of the 442d RCT were alerted. Two hours later the 3d Battalion moved out and into the darkness of the forest. An hour later the 100th Battalion followed. Every effort to relieve the *Lost Battalion* had failed. Now it would be up to a group of soldiers who had left more than a week of combat two days earlier, to accomplish what no one else seemed able to do. Still the Nisei were not aware of the nature of their mission, the lives that depended upon their success. But as they moved out of Belmont it was hard to miss the line of ambulances and built up aid stations that had been assembled for the eventual rescue. It was an eerie symbol of what lay ahead.

Moving into the forest, it was almost impossible to see. The soldiers created a human chain, each man holding the straps of the pack ahead of

him. Sliding down muddy trails, forcing their way through dense brush, and stumbling over sharp rocks, the Nisei walked obediently into the jaws of certain death. All three battalions moved slowly northward in the direction of St. Die. On that first day, a heavy concentration of German 88-mm. fire tore into the men of the 3d Battalion, causing numerous casualties. Still, the brave men fought on. In the forests, the Germans seemed to be fighting with increased intensity. The German high command became aware that their soldiers in the Vosges had trapped nearly an entire American battalion and Adolf Hitler had personally issued orders to stop any rescue effort.

The three battalions of the 442d spent their first full night back in the forest trying to hold their positions and stay alive. Their orders were to attack at daylight, in what General Dahlquist expected to be an aggressive and swift push to snatch the *Lost Battalion* out of harm's way. During the night the enemy moved reinforcements, including heavy armor into the valley to turn back the Americans. When the attack commenced at 6:30 a.m., it was still dark in the forest. Suddenly the darkness came alive with the brilliant flashes of enemy artillery. Company K took two hours to push forward some 350 yards when an enemy mortar left several brave soldiers lying in the mud, dead and dying. By mid-morning platoon sergeant George Nishi was the only NCO left in the unit. As he attempted to pull his men back a grenade landed in his foxhole. Quickly he tossed it back at the enemy. A second grenade came in his direction, killing the young soldier behind him. Nishi was wounded in the back.

Shortly before noon Colonel Pence ordered Company L out of reserve. The division commander was desperate, the destruction of his *Lost Battalion* would be a major catastrophe. Not only did the General order an unrelenting frontal assault by the 442d regardless of cost, he went to the front himself, issuing orders and pushing men forward. To many of the Nisei, none of whom still were aware that their mission was one to rescue a lost battalion of friendlies, it was senseless. It was difficult to see themselves as anything other than cannon-fodder, expendable in the push through the Vosges.

The battle raged through the morning. Everywhere, casualties were falling, to enemy fire, to artillery fire, to mines and booby traps. Technician Fifth Grade James Okubo of Bellingham Washington was a medic. One hundred fifty yards ahead of him lay wounded soldiers, within 40 yards of the enemy lines. Under heavy fire he crawled forward time

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and again. Two grenades landed near him but he ignored the danger they represented. In all he rescued and treated 17 men.

After two days of horrible fighting, two lieutenants were all that remained to command the entire battalion. During the night a patrol of twelve men was sent through the darkness to the rear to obtain badly needed ammunition and supplies. The patrol was unable to finish their important task; two were killed and the remaining ten all wounded.

Lieutenant Blonder huddled next to the radio on the battalion's fifth night alone on the barren hilltop. He had made it a practice to send out only two radio messages each day in an effort to spare the battery of the one precious link the men had with the rear. His messages were always the same: "*Send us medical supplies.*" "*We need rations.*" "*Please, we need fresh Water.*" "*I need radio batteries.*" "*My wounded need plasma.*" Every morning an enemy tank appeared. Throughout the day and night, enemy artillery fell on their small 350 yard defensive position.

During the day a flight of P-47 fighter-bombers of the XII Tactical Air Combat Wing flew over to drop supplies. The stranded soldiers on the ground waved white underwear and popped smoke grenades to guide them in. None-the-less, few of the supplies landed in the small perimeter, and much of the supplies that were on target quickly rolled down the hillside and into the hands of the enemy.

That evening an American 105 artillery round whistled through the air, homing in on top of the men of the *Lost Battalion*. Buried in the nose of the warhead in place of explosives, was chocolate. It was a bizarre, desperate effort to get some nourishment to embattled soldiers who had not eaten in a week. The velocity of the shell caused the chocolate to burrow deep into the mud upon impact. It was a novel idea, a good effort, but like all other efforts to provide relief to the *Lost Battalion*, it failed.

The survivors on the hillside had no way of knowing that the men of the *Go For Broke Regiment* were slugging their way to reach them. They could only hope and pray that tomorrow they would see friendly faces breaking through the forest below them. With dawn they faced their sixth day alone in enemy territory. Though they prayed that day six would bring rescue, instead it would only bring the worst yet, both for the men on the hill and the brave Nisei coming to their rescue.

On October 29, for the first time the men of the 442d Regimental Combat Team were made aware of the fate of the *Lost Battalion* and their mission to rescue them. With that knowledge came some

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understanding of the events of the previous days. For the men of the 100th who had been cut off and surrounded at Biffontaine, there was a special sense of identity with the 36th Infantry's *Lost Battalion*. It steeled the resolve of the surviving Nisei to push forward.

At dawn the 100th and 3d Battalion launched their attack, running directly into heavy resistance supported by enemy armor. It was the small Nisei infantrymen going head to head with multi-ton, steel fortresses of death. The brave soldiers never wavered. At eight in the morning General Dahlquist urged Colonel Singles to push his men onward, emphasizing. *"There's a battalion about to die up there (in the mountains) and we've got to reach them."* Before noon the General arrived at the scene of the fighting with his young aide, Lieutenant Lewis. As Colonel Singles and the division commander viewed the terrain, an enemy machinegun some 40 yards away opened fire. Twenty-seven year old Wells Lewis, the eldest son of the first American to receive the Nobel prize for literature Sinclair Lewis, fell dead, his blood splattering the uniform of his commanding general. It was a blow to the General from which he never fully recovered.

In the valleys the *Go For Broke Regiment's* 232d Combat Engineers fought through the mud to shore up roadways with logs. Along the hillsides they cleared minefields and booby traps. Wounded were everywhere. James Okubo, the medic who braved enemy fire the day before to rescue 17 men continued his courageous efforts in the face of enemy fire to rescue eight more. He would survive to wear his Silver Star medal, which in 2001 was upgraded to the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Technician Fifth Grade James K. Okubo, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Medical Aidman with the Medical Detachment, 442d Regimental Combat Team, attached to the 36th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 28 and 29 October 1944 and 4 November 1944, in the



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Foret Domaniale de Champ, near Biffontaine, eastern France. On 28 October, under strong enemy fire coming from behind mine fields and roadblocks, Technician Fifth Grade Okubo, a medic, crawled 150 yards to within 40 yards of the enemy lines. Two grenades were thrown at him while he left his last covered position to carry back wounded comrades. Under constant barrages of enemy small arms and machine gun fire, he treated 17 men on 28 October and eight more men on 29 October. On 4 November, Technician Fifth Grade Okubo ran 75 yards under grazing machine gun fire and, while exposed to hostile fire directed at him, evacuated and treated a seriously wounded crewman from a burning tank, who otherwise would have died. Technician Fifth Grade James K. Okubo's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.

Lieutenant Colonel Pursall ordered Companies I and K to assault the high ground. His men were hesitant to move from the safety of their foxholes, knowing the assault would be deadly and useless. Standing in the open, bareheaded without a helmet, the Battalion commander raised his .45 Army Colt pistol and said, "*Okay, boys, let's go.*" as he led the way forward in classic *John Wayne* style.

Second Lieutenant Edward Davis was the only officer left in company K, and slowly rose to his feet as the Nisei around him watched in amazement. All knew the order to assault the enemy above would be suicidal and were reluctant to move. The lieutenant turned to Sergeant Kohashi and asked the NCO to follow him. Then something amazing happened. Sergeant Kohashi rose to his feet with a loud yell of desperation that reverberated across the hillside. It shook the Japanese-American soldiers to the soul, eliciting similar cries. As a unit the Nisei leaped screaming to their feet in a "*banzai*" charge against the Germans.

In his own sector, Private Barney Hajiro of Waipahu, Hawaii, (pictured) rose to his feet to lead his own assault. Next to him was a friend he had known since basic training, Takeyasu "*Thomas*" Onaga. As they moved forward young Hajiro watched in horror as the friend who moments earlier had loaded his browning automatic rifle, fell dead to a hail of enemy bullets. The young private who had already twice demonstrated the highest degree of valor could contain the torment of his soul no longer. With abandon he assaulted "*suicide hill*," yards ahead of



the other men of his platoon, raining the rounds his dead comrade had loaded in the BAR on the enemy. Camouflage netting could not hide the enemy gunners from the fury of his assault, nor could the continuous stream of enemy machinegun fire turn back his determination. Private Barney Hajiro quickly knocked out two enemy gun emplacements and shot two snipers, allowing the rest of his unit to advance. Then enemy rounds slammed into Private Hajiro's left arm, rendering it useless. Fifty-six years later that arm still hung at his side, helplessly paralyzed, as the President presented Barney Hajiro the Medal of Honor for his actions on October 19, 20, and 29. Every Memorial Day for those 56 years Mr. Hajiro visited Thomas Onaga's grave site at the *Punchbowl* in Hawaii.

The banzai charge on "*suicide hill*" consumed an hour. The Nisei suffered many casualties, but by 3:30 they had taken the hill. Those enemy soldiers who had been wounded or otherwise unable to escape the hill cowered in fear before the survivors of the onslaught. Never had they seen such courage, such fierce determination, such sheer force of will-power in the face of unbelievable odds.

These kinds of banzai charges, when looked upon in retrospect, further reveal the desperation to which the men of the 442d had been pushed. Fifty-six years later looking back on October 29, 1944, George Sakato (pictured), a retired postal worker from Denver, Colorado, and summed up the events saying, "*Nowadays, they call it road rage.*" He should know; he was there. His eyes still fill with tears whenever he is asked to recall the events of that day, reflecting the emotion of an event not reflected in his Medal of Honor citation.



The men of Sakato's platoon from Company E knew their objective only as Hill 617. Sakato's citation tells how the men moved forward to take the hill, destroying two enemy positions. Private Sakato personally killed five enemy soldiers and captured four more. Then the enemy counter attacked. Private Sakato and his buddy Saburo Tanamachi had been together since basic training. As the enemy launched their renewed assault, George turned to Saburo and told him to watch out for a machine gun. It was too late. The enemy rounds slammed into his friend, ripping flesh and spilling blood. As Saburo Tanamachi died in Sakato's arms, tears welled up within the young private's eyes. A rage began to boil deep within as he gently lowered his friend's lifeless body to the ground. Tears continuing to blur his vision he leaped to his feet, heedless of the enemy

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fire that tore into the brush around him, to launch his one-man assault on the Germans. Using an enemy rifle and P-38 pistol he charged headlong into the counter-attack, killing 12 enemy, wounding two more and capturing four. Inspired by Private Sakato's brazen assault, his platoon followed, retaking the hill and capturing 34 prisoners. In all, Companies E and F killed 100 enemy and captured 41 in the taking of Hill 617.

If there was any doubt how close the enemy was, the question was answered on the morning of October 29. During the darkness of the previous night one of the Americans was huddling in his foxhole when he felt another soldier climb in next to him. Exhausted, both men fell asleep, content to share the wet hole in the ground and to share their body heat. When the American awakened at daylight he saw his bedmate for the first time. It was a German soldier who had wandered into the small perimeter and taken shelter with the Americans, believing they were his German comrades. Not only did the *Lost Battalion* survive their fifth night, but they also captured a prisoner.

Lieutenant Blonder was worried. Despite nearly a week without food and sustained by only the brackish water drawn from shell holes, the men were holding up reasonably well. Most sincerely believed that help was on the way. What worried Lieutenant Blonder was that the Germans probably knew by now, how few and how desperate were the men of the *Lost Battalion*. The attempt at an air drop the previous day certainly had sent a message to the enemy as to the dire straits of the men they surrounded. To his chagrin, he was correct.

The attack began with an artillery barrage, something they had endured for six days, but this was the worst yet. Then the enemy came, attacking in force. Fortunately, the Germans did not know where the *Lost Battalion* had placed their heavy machineguns. By chance they made their assault on the most heavily defended area of the perimeter. The gunners restrained themselves, firing single-shot bursts as the enemy came closer. When the Germans were almost upon them, the *Lost Battalion* cut loose with everything they had. The hillside was littered with the bodies of enemy soldiers as Americans settled in for their sixth night in hell.

October 30, 1944, was the fifth day in the forest for the 442d RCT as 3d Battalion led the way. The rain that had fallen virtually every day since October 15 began to turn to snow, altering conditions from bad to worse. Time was running out for the *Lost Battalion* and equally important, the "cavalry" was running out of men to send to their rescue.

What remained of the 3d Battalion's I and K Companies joined with B and C Companies of the 100th Battalion to sweep down the ridge that led to the position of the *Lost Battalion*. To the left, the 2d Battalion was moving on the flank to dig out enemy soldiers and protect the efforts on the ridge. Men of the 232d Engineers and the 522d Artillery were fighting as infantrymen, many replacing lost soldiers in the battered line companies. It would have been a beautiful display of complete teamwork by the Regiment, a tribute to their personal maturity were it not for the sad loss of so many team members.

Leading the way was the decimated remains of Company I, which ran into a roadblock manned by 50 Germans. Company K moved over to assist their badly outnumbered comrades, killing and routing the enemy and destroying the roadblock. Then, despite their fatigue, the Nisei moved on. Only two platoons remained in Company I which had been fully staffed at the beginning of the rescue mission, a company of 205 men: First Platoon consisted of six men, and Second Platoon contained two. The highest ranking officer of the eight-man company was an NCO, Sergeant Tak Senzaki. Shortly after 2 p.m. it was these men who finally broke through to the *Lost Battalion*.

Private First Class Matt Sakumoto was the point man, the first friendly face the 211 survivors of the surrounded battalion had seen in a week. As the Nisei enlisted man walked past the first T-patcher he noticed the man's lips begin to quiver and his eyes fill with tears. He stared with relief and numbed shock at the miracle that had appeared out of the forest in the Vosges mountains. It was an emotionally charged moment of silence . . . what can one say at a time like that. Turning to the mud blacked face, tears streaming down the cheeks from sunken eyes, Private First Class Sakumoto could only say, "*Want a smoke?*"

Minutes later the rest of Company I broke through, and was joined shortly thereafter by Company K, or what remained of it . . . 17 men. In all the Nisei lost 800 men in five days of battle to rescue 211. Sergeant Senzaki didn't allow his men time to reflect in their accomplishment, for the enemy was still nearby. He ordered his eight-man company to move on to take up defensive positions on the far side of the hill to protect the men so many of his brothers had sacrificed to reach. Within an hour the *Lost Battalion* was on its way down the other side, into the shelter of the waiting aid stations and the spotlight of a battery of newsmen. For those who survived it was one of those experiences that stamps itself indelibly on the subconscious, never to be forgotten. For the 442d Regiment

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Combat Team, in a series of war time accomplishments unprecedented in military history, it was *A Defining Moment*.

After the rescue the rank and file among the *Lost Battalion* survivors launched a campaign to have all members of the 442d declared “*honorary Texans.*” But for the sacrifice of the brave Nisei, Texas might have claimed a second Alamo. A few years after the war the men who owed their lives to the Nisei, now most of



them civilians, would not let a forgotten promise fall by the wayside. Texas Governor John Connolly took the unprecedented step of issuing a proclamation declaring each and every member of the 442d Regimental Combat Team to be “*Honorary Texans.*” Also, after the war, a painting was commissioned to depict the members of the 442d in action, battling through the Vosges to rescue the Lost Battalion. That painting was hung at the Pentagon, a constant reminder of the incredible feat.

After the devastating losses the 100/442 was pulled back to patrolling an 18-mile stretch of the beach of Southern France. During the entire month of December only 20 members were killed in this relatively plus assignment, quite in contrast to the 140 Nisei killed in 21 days of fighting in the Vosges. The Nisei called this duty on the French Riviera the “*Champagne Campaign.*”

The 442d had not had any winter clothing since arriving in France, and a requisition was sent in for winter wear and other clothing for the Nisei. Finally, some of the supplies caught up to the quickly moving regiment: raincoats and clean underwear. When the men opened the boxes containing raincoats they found labels inside reading “*WAC*” (Women’s Army Corps). Due the small stature of the Nisei as compared to other GIs, the Army Quartermasters had resorted to the women’s wear to find small enough raincoats for the men battling in the Vosges. When it is cold outside, you take what you can get, and the Nisei bundled against the elements in the WAC raincoats without any sense of embarrassment. The clean underwear would have to wait . . . none of them would wear the panties that arrived in boxes marked “*shorts.*”

One day a sentry on watch over the beach noticed a sudden flash of light on the waters. He shifted position, peering closely through binoculars at what appeared to be a whale. On closer inspection it turned out to be a small two-man German submarine. After radioing a message to headquarters, a patrol showed up with .50 caliber machineguns and trench mortars. The submarine seemed to be floundering and after a fifteen minute attack by the Nisei, the submarine was guided to the shore where the two German crewmen surrendered. A year later *San Francisco Chronicle* Reporter Robert O'Brien wrote, "*The 442d Regimental Combat Team is probably the only infantry unit in history to capture an enemy submarine.*"



Lieutenant Colonel James M. Hanley was commander of the 2d Battalion, 442d Regimental Combat Team and a veteran of the fierce battles of the Vosges.

As he relaxed with his men in southern France he had occasional opportunities to connect to his home via the receipt of his hometown newspaper. One day as he perused a copy of the *Mandan Daily Pioneer* from his hometown of Mandan, North Dakota, he was both hurt and stunned by a comment in Editor Charles F. Pierce's column that read, "*A squib in a paper makes the statement that there are some good Jap-Americans in this country but it didn't say where they are buried.*" On March 10 Hanley scribbled off a reply that was printed 21 days later.

Dear Charlie:

Just received the Pioneer of Jan. 20 and noted the paragraph enclosed. Yes, Charlie, I know where there are some GOOD Japanese Americans--there are some 5000 of them in this unit. They are American soldiers--and I know where some of them are buried. I wish I could show you some of them, Charlie. I remember one Japanese American. He was walking ahead of me in a forest in France. A German shell took the right side of his face off. I recall another boy, an 88 had been trying to get us for some time--finally got him. When they carried him out on a stretcher the bloody meat from the middle of the thighs hung down over the end of the stretcher and dragged in the dirt--the bone parts were gone.

I recall a sergeant--a Japanese American if you will--who had

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his back blown in two--what was he doing? Why, he was only lying on top of an officer who had been wounded, to protect him from shell fragments during a barrage.

I recall one of my boys who stopped a German counterattack single handed. He fired all his BAR ammunition, picked a German rifle, emptied that--used a German Luger pistol he had taken from a prisoner.

I wish I could tell you the number of Japanese Americans who have died in this unit alone. I wish the boys in the "Lost Battalion" could tell you what they think of Japanese Americans. I wish that all the troops we have fought beside could tell you what they know.

The marvel is, Charlie, that these boys fight at all--they are good soldiers in spite of the type of racial prejudice shown by your paragraph. I know it makes a good joke--but it is the kind of joke that prejudice thrives upon. It shows a lack of faith in the American ideal. Our system is supposed to make good Americans out of anyone--it certainly has done it in the case of these boys.

You, the Hood River Legion post, Hearst (newspapers) and a few others make one wonder just what we are fighting for. I hope it isn't racial prejudice. Come over here, Charlie, I'll show you where "some good Japanese Americans" are buried.

J. M. Hanley,
HQ. 442d INF. APO 758

THE DEADLY PO VALLEY

Although the *Champaign Campaign* was almost like R&R with the opportunity for much needed and well deserved rest, heavy fighting was still going on in Italy and General Mark Clark wanted his Nisei back. On March 28, 1945, the 100th/442d Regimental Combat Team departed France to return to Italy. After devastating losses in Franch, the Regiment was brought back to regimental strength through the arrival of replacements.

Prior to the Regiment's departure for the campaign in the Vosges, the Nisei crossed the Arno River to battle German soldiers all along the area south of the Gothic Line. Upon their return, the *Go For Broke Regiment* found the Allied advance on the western coast of northern Italy still stalled before the formidable Gothic Line. Throughout the winter the enemy had built up their forces, reinforced their positions, and strengthened their hold in the high mountains of northern Italy.

While the advance stalled, General Clark began developing a plan to crush enemy resistance by ordering the FIFTH Army in a bold frontal assault on the **Gothic Line**, while simultaneously moving the EIGHTH Army westward from Bologna to trap the fleeing enemy and crush them near the Po River. Meanwhile, German Field Marshall Kesselring swiftly moved four divisions westward to buoy up his heavy fortifications. Using more than 15,000 slave-laborers, the Germans created more than 2,000 well-fortified machinegun nests, observation posts, and fighting positions to repel any attempt by the Allies to breach the **Gothic Line**.

To spearhead General Clark's drive along the western coast, he turned to the soldiers that had successfully taken every barrier they had been assigned in Italy. After returning to Italy on March 28, 1945, the 442d Regimental Combat Team took up six positions near Pisa, an area they left six months earlier. Their redeployment below the **Gothic Line** was a closely guarded military secret. When the last hope of a negotiated German surrender fell through on April 1, General Clark launched his offensive. The final month of warfare in Italy would see some of the war's most deadly operations in the *Po Valley Campaign*.

Rising from the Ligurian Sea, a series of high mountains provided a natural barrier to the advance northward towards Massa. They also provided rugged concealment for the well-entrenched enemy. Each mountain top led to the next, each higher than the one before. First was Georgia, then Florida, Ohio 1, Ohio 2, Ohio 3, Mount Cerreta and Mount Folgorita. Just inland from Massa were three more major mountain-tops critical to control of the area, Mount Belvedere, Mount Carchio, and the dominant inland peak of the 3,000 foot high Mount Altissimo. Breaking through the **Gothic Line** would require taking each mountain in turn, all the while under fire from the large coastal guns at La Spezia.

As darkness fell on April 3rd the 100th Battalion was moving quietly into the small town of Vallecchio below the high tops of Georgia and Florida. The 3d Battalion moved by truck to the flank, using the cover of night to silently climb up the valley facing Azzano to the east of Mount Cerreta. Men slipped and fell beneath backpacks laden with supplies and ammunition as the Nisei forged through the darkness, never breaking silence. The next day the battalions, still maintaining strict silence, positioned themselves for the first day of the renewed offensive. The *Purple Heart Battalion* relieved the 371st Infantry at Florida; the 3d Battalion took positions near Mount Folgorita and Mount Carchio. On

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the morning of April 5, the Germans still had no idea that the Nisei soldiers they had come to fear a year before, now lay hidden below their mountaintop fortifications. Before daylight dawned, they would be awakened to the sudden realization that the *Go For Broke Regiment* was back in Italy, ready to break through their venerable Gothic Line and put an end to the stalemate that had gone on for months. At 5 a.m. the order was given to the Nisei of the *Purple Heart Battalion* to attack.

Private First Class Sadao Munemori of Los Angeles, California, watched from his place of concealment as the first American artillery rounds began to rain down on Georgia Hill. He was the son of Japanese immigrants. His father died in 1940, the year Sadao graduated of Abraham Lincoln Senior High School. He enlisted in the Army in November 1941; but after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, he was demoted, removed from combat training, and assigned to menial labor. After a series of Army transfers, he was sent to Camp Savage, Minnesota. His mother and two brothers and sisters were forcibly removed from their California home and incarcerated at the Manzanar Relocation Camp in California.



When the 442d RCT was organized in 1943, he volunteered to join the *Go For Broke Regiment* and was sent to Camp Shelby. After training, he was sent to Anzio, Italy, where he joined the 100th Infantry Battalion as a replacement. He fought through the breakout from Anzio and subsequent fighting to liberate Rome, and served with the Battalion in France including the rescue of The Lost Battalion. The 22-year-old Nisei had aged beyond his years, and life had given him a hefty burden to bear.

On this day, Munemori watched for ten minutes as American artillery pounded Georgia Hill, forcing the Germans to take cover. When the shaken enemy tried to regroup after the bombardment, they were stunned to see hundreds of Japanese-American soldiers making a daring frontal assault on the hilltop the Germans had held for months.

As Company A attacked, Pone Munemori saw his squad leader fall, wounded by a German grenade. He took control of the squad, leading them through the enemy's protective minefield to within 30 yards of the first machinegun nest. When the Germans turned their machineguns on the advancing squad, the men, many of them replacements tasting combat for the first time, dived for the protection of craters from earlier artillery

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barrage the hilltop. Pressing their bodies firmly into the dirt, the continuous fire from two enemy gun emplacements had them pinned down and at the mercy of the enemy.

Checking his own supply of ordinance, Munemori grabbed grenades from a couple of his men, arming himself for a one-man assault. Moving within 15 yards of the enemy as lethal missiles of death rained around him, the 22-year old combat veteran threw his first grenade, then another, and another. In all, the brave Nisei managed to lob six grenades, destroying both enemy machinegun nests.

The immediate threat destroyed, the Pfc began to work his way back to his squad of men huddled in their shell holes. Other machinegun nests opened fire as he moved back, and enemy soldiers began throwing grenades. As Private First Class Sadao Munemori reached his men he felt something hard slam into his helmet, then fall to the ground inside the shell hole where two of his soldiers waited. Quickly the young Nisei dove on top of the grenade, covering it with his body as it detonated. Beside him, two soldiers survived because of the young hero's sacrifice.

Munemori was the only Asian-American to receive the Medal of Honor during or in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and then, only after considerable Congressional intervention on behalf of the Nisei hero. Sadao Munemori's Medal of Honor was presented posthumously to his mother, Nawa Munemori, in ceremonies at Fort MacArthur, California, by Colonel Evans R. Cromwell.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Private First Class Sadao S. Munemori (ASN: 39019023), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company A, 100th Infantry Battalion, 442d Regimental Combat Team, attached to the 92d Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 5

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April 1945. Private First Class Munemori fought with great gallantry and intrepidity near Seravezza, Italy. When his unit was pinned down by grazing fire from the enemy's strong mountain defense and command of the squad devolved on him with the wounding of its regular leader, he made frontal, one-man attacks through direct fire and knocked out two machineguns with grenades. Withdrawing under murderous fire and showers of grenades from other enemy emplacements, he had nearly reached a shell crater occupied by two of his men when an unexploded grenade bounced on his helmet and rolled toward his helpless comrades. He arose into the withering fire, dived for the missile and smothered its blast with his body. By his swift, supremely heroic action Private First Class Munemori saved two of his men at the cost of his own life and did much to clear the path for his company's victorious advance.

In three weeks of fighting from April 5 to April 25, 1945, in addition to Munemori's Medal of Honor, six Nisei of the 100/442 earned Distinguished Service Crosses and 84 Silver Stars. Three of those DSCs from the Po Valley Campaign were upgraded to the Medal of Honor in 2001, including the last DSC earned by the regiment in World War II.

Second Lieutenant Daniel Ken Inouye was a Nisei warrior, born September 7, 1924, in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Japanese immigrants. On December 7, 1941, during the Japanese first wave of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the 17-year-old boy rode his bike to a first aid station where he worked all night and into the next day. In the days that followed he alternated between studies at school and working a twelve-hour graveyard shift at an aid station. After graduation he enrolled at the University of Hawaii.



In 1943, when a call for volunteers for Nisei to serve in an all Japanese-American Regiment, Daniel Inouye was among the first to volunteer. After being rejected by the draft board, he returned regularly to find the reason for his rejection. Finally, exasperated with his determination to join the Army, the recruiters informed him that because of his continuing work at an aid station, and because he was enrolled in premed studies, he was needed more at home. *"Give me about an hour,"* he told them, *"then call the aid station and the university. They'll tell you that I've just given my notice to quit by the end of the week."* Two days later Inouye said goodbye to his family and departed for training in Camp Shelby as a recruit in the *"Go For Broke"* regiment.

Inouye joined the 442d RCT in Naples, Italy, in 1944. He was promoted to sergeant and assigned to the 100th Infantry Battalion as a replacement. He fought with his battalion through the first drive north to the Arno River, survived the war in the Vosges, but missed the *Lost Battalion* rescue having been pulled back to Headquarters for a field promotion to first lieutenant. By the time he got back to take command of his platoon, it had been cut in half by casualties.

Second Lieutenant Inouye had seen nine months of combat and served with pride and honor, remembering the words of his father the day he left to begin training with the 442d: “*Son, you know what ‘on’ means?*” (“*On*” is a Japanese colloquialism, very deep in the Japanese culture. It requires that when one man is aided by another, he incurs a debt that is never canceled, one that must be repaid at every opportunity.

“*Yes, father,*” young Daniel Inouye responded.

“*The Inouyes have a great ‘on’ for America,*” his father continued. “*It has been good to us. And now it is you who must try to return the goodness. You are my first son, and you are very precious to your mother and to me, but you must do what must be done. If it is necessary, you must be ready to . . . to . . .*”

“*I know, Papa. I understand.*”

“*Son, Do no bring dishonor on our name.*”

As the first rays of sunlight began breaking through the morning skies on October 20, 1945, Second, Lieutenant Inouye still couldn’t shake his uneasy feeling. He put his hand to the breast pocket of his uniform again, feeling nothing. And that was the problem. Throughout nine months of combat, he had always felt the hard shape of two silver dollars in that pocket. One was cracked, the other bent, but the enemy round that damaged the two coins was halted and left only a dark bruise on the flesh over his heart. Had it not been for the two coins, Lieutenant Inouye would have been killed in the battlefields of France. From the moment the two silver dollars saved his life, the Nisei officer had carried them in the same pocket through every campaign, through every battle. The previous day, somehow, they had fallen out. Well into the night he searched in vain to find them. Now, with the order to attack, their absence sent a foreboding sense of disaster to his young mind.

Realizing how irrational his regard for the two “*lucky charms*” was, Lieutenant Inouye prepared his men for the assault. Two other rifle platoons would attack Colle Musatello from the front, Lieutenant

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Inouye's 3d platoon moving in on the left flank. At the first sounds of gunfire from the other two platoons, Inouye led his own men forward.

At first it seemed the feelings of impending disaster had been foolish. Lieutenant Inouye skillfully led his men forward and, despite heavy opposition, quickly overcame every enemy position. The 3d platoon met and quickly defeated an enemy patrol, captured a mortar position, and moved within 40 yards of the main defensive force emplaced on Colle Musatello. So well had the attack been coordinated by third platoon, it was in position to attack the main fortifications while first and second platoons were still struggling to make their way through enemy defenses further down the ridge. Almost within grenade range of the enemy, Lieutenant Inouye had to make a decision; either his men could take shelter and wait for the other platoons to catch up or they could attack.

Inouye didn't order his men forward, he led them. Rising, the platoon began its assault on the last German stronghold, Inouye well out in front of them. Three enemy machineguns began spitting lethal death at the advancing Nisei, pressing them to take cover. Alone in advance of his men, Inouye took a grenade from his belt and raised up to throw it. As he did he felt a powerful blow to his side. Ignoring the pain, he counted down three seconds and lobbed the lethal orb. As the enemy pulled back from their destroyed position, Inouye stood his ground to cut them down while motioning his men forward. When they reached Inouye's position, one of them said, *"My God, Dan, you're bleeding! Get down and I'll get an aid man."* It was only then that the young officer realized he had been shot in the side as he raised up to throw his grenade.

The other two enemy gun positions continued to rain fire on the Nisei platoon and had to be destroyed. Ignoring his pain, Inouye forced his body forward, rushing towards the second enemy position. Moments before his legs collapsed under him, he managed to close in on the second position and throw two more grenades. The second enemy gun fell silent, even as the broken body of Dan Inouye collapsed to the ground.

"Go For Broke," yelled one soldier of Inouye's platoon as the brave Nisei charged headlong into the third enemy machinegun. Met by a curtain of death, heedless of the danger, they pressed forward. Struggling to maintain consciousness, their wounded lieutenant watched their display of raw courage with great pride and admiration. But raw courage could not shield flesh and blood from the ravages of the hot lead the enemy guns rained on the platoon. The attack faltered and the survivors of Inouye's third platoon were forced to pull back and seek cover.

The valiant charge had given the wounded officer more than just an opportunity to observe his men in action. Their assault monopolized the attention of the enemy in the last machinegun nest. Lieutenant Inouye used the diversion to great advantage, dragging himself unseen along the enemy flank. Even as the attack faltered, Lieutenant Inouye was close enough. He forced his body, weakened by loss of blood, to respond beyond its limits. He pulled the pin on his last grenade, then stood to release the spoon and throw it. As he rose, one of the Germans spotted him and quickly fired a rifle grenade at the lone Nisei. There was a horrible explosion and a searing pain in the young lieutenant's arm. When Inouye looked down, his arm was destroyed, hanging in place by only a few stringy tendons. Clutched in the nearly detached hand that could no longer respond to impulses from the brain, was the grenade.

The men of third platoon were horror-struck, rising up to rush to the aid of their commander. "*Get back!*" Inouye screamed at them. With his one good hand he pried the grenade from the frozen fingers of his useless right and threw it at the enemy. Then, stumbling to his feet and firing his tommy-gun left handed, he continued to advance through the smoke and dust of its explosion to kill all but one of the enemy. The last survivor sent a burst of fire in the direction of the brave lieutenant, advancing fearlessly while the destroyed tissue that had one been an arm, flopped uselessly at his right side. One round hit Lieutenant Inouye in the right leg, halting his advance and sending him rolling down the hillside.

Quickly the men of third platoon rushed to the side of their leader's body. He had been shot in the stomach, the right leg, and his right arm was destroyed beyond repair. As they reached his side, the young officer gritted his teeth through the pain and ordered, "*Get back up that hill! Nobody called off the war.*" They did, and inspired by their brave lieutenant, they took their position.

On May 2, 1945, the war ended in Italy. On May 6 the *Go For Broke Regiment* held a memorial service at Novi Liguria near Genoa for its fallen comrades. In all, the regiment suffered nearly 700 killed in action, 67 missing in action, and nearly 10,000 wounded in action. Three days after the memorial service, Germany surrendered.

After being treated in hospitals overseas, in August 1945 Inouye returned home and was placed in a rehabilitation center for wounded soldiers in Atlantic City, New Jersey. In mid-1946, he was transferred to the Percy Jones Army Hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan, to continue his

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rehabilitation for nine more months. The amputation of his right arm killed his lifelong dream of becoming a medical doctor and the young hero went through a period of great despair and angst.

At Percy-Jones, Inouye met another wounded second lieutenant who, serving with the 10th Mountain Division in the Po Valley, was grievously wounded one week before Inouye, other than their race, the two men had much in common and became friends. For Second Lieutenant Robert Dole the loss of the use of his right arm did not alter his post-war dream; he would go home, attend law school, run for local political officer, then run for Congress, and finally for the U.S. Senate.

During their long months of rehabilitation, Inouye and Dole mastered playing cards once handed; Inouye is on the left in the photo and Dole is next to him, his useless right arm hanging at his side while he held the cards in his left. As they visited over cards, and in their private conversations at other times, Bob's dream for the future became



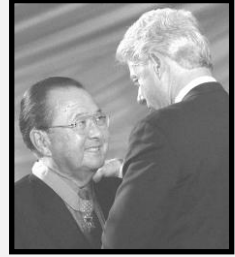
Daniel's dream. He returned home to Hawaii, and in 1959 became the first Congressman from the new State of Hawaii, arriving in Washington, D.C., one year before his mentor.

Both Bob Dole and Daniel Inouye moved to the U.S. Senate on January 3, 1964, Dole as a Republican and Inouye as a Democrat. Their political differences never became a barrier in their lifetime friendship.

Following a review of awards to Asian American soldiers in World War II, twenty Nisei of the 100/443 saw their World War II awards (19 Distinguished Service Crosses and Medic Okubo's Silver Star) upgraded to the Medal of Honor. Also presented at the White House on June 1, 2000, were upgraded Medals of Honor to one Nisei who served with the 7th Infantry in Italy, and a twenty-second award to a Korean American hero of the War in the Pacific. Ten of the awards were posthumously presented to brave young men who were killed during their moment of heroism. Among the remaining dozen heroes, five survived the war but died before their awards were upgraded. Only seven of the Nisei were alive to personally receive the Medal of Honor from President William J. Clinton. Perhaps no one was prouder that day to see Senator Daniel Inouye among them, receiving the Medal of Honor, than fellow Senator and lifetime friend, Bob Dole.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Second Lieutenant Daniel K. Inouye (ASN: 0-1998638), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 442d Regimental Combat Team, attached to the 92d Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 21 April 1945, in the vicinity of San Terenzo, Italy. While attacking a defended ridge guarding an important road junction, Second Lieutenant Inouye skillfully directed his platoon through a hail of automatic weapon and small arms fire, in a swift enveloping movement that resulted in the capture of an artillery and mortar post and brought his men to within 40 yards of the hostile force. Emplaced in bunkers and rock formations, the enemy halted the advance with crossfire from three machine guns. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Second Lieutenant Inouye crawled up the treacherous slope to within five yards of the nearest machine gun and hurled two grenades, destroying the emplacement. Before the enemy could retaliate, he stood up and neutralized a second machine gun nest. Although wounded by a sniper's bullet, he continued to engage other hostile positions at close range until an exploding grenade shattered his right arm. Despite the intense pain, he refused evacuation and continued to direct his platoon until enemy resistance was broken and his men were again deployed in defensive positions. In the attack, 25 enemy soldiers were killed and eight others captured. By his gallant, aggressive tactics and by his indomitable leadership, Second Lieutenant Inouye enabled his platoon to advance through formidable resistance, and was instrumental in the capture of the ridge. Second Lieutenant Inouye's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.



In addition to the Nisei that served in the 100/442, as well as a very few who saw service in integrated combat units, 6,000 Nisei were trained as highly secret translators, interpreters, interrogators, and intelligence gatherers in the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). They served in every theater of war, participating in major battles like Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima,

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and Okinawa. After the war, they were instrumental in the occupation of Japan, serving as a vital cultural and linguistic bridge. Three earned Distinguished Service Crosses and many more earned Silver Stars.

When Daniel Inouye died on December 17, 2012, while still at work in the U.S. Senate, he was the second to last Medal of Honor recipient of the 100/442 alive. Before burial at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii, his body lay in state at the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

Danny's friend Bob Dole, now 89 years old and retired from the Senate, was wheeled up to Inouye's flag-draped coffin to pay his respects, his wife Elizabeth Dole at his side. There, despite his own weakened condition, Bob Dole determinedly struggled shakily to his feet noting, *"I wouldn't want Danny to see me in a wheelchair."*

And then, in one of those unforgettable iconic moments in history, he raised his left hand in a final salute to his friend with whom he had so much in common.



After their victorious and costly battles in World War II, on July 16, 1946, the proud Nisei of the 100th Infantry Battalion/442d Regimental combat team marched proudly down Constitution Avenue in Washington, DC. Dignitaries and military officials abounded; the War Department and



other Federal agencies gave employees time off to witness the return of the Nisei. The proud *Go For Broke Regiment* marched to the White House lawn where they met their President Harry S. Truman, who summed up their service in his words. *"You fought for the free nations of the world. You fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice--and you won. Keep up that fight . . . continue to win--make this great Republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for: 'the welfare of all the people, all the time.'"*

They Did!

Young-Oak Kim

“A FEARLESS LEADER WHO INSPIRED HIS MEN”

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Young-Oak Kim was born in Los Angeles, California, on January 26, 1919, to Korean immigrants Shoon Kwon Kim and Nora Ko Kim. He grew up in the Bunker Hill neighborhood of Los Angeles with older sister Willa and younger siblings Mary, Jack, Philaph, and Henry, and adopted brother Andy Kil. His older sister Willa worked in Hollywood where she was a Tony Award winning costume designer. His parents operated a grocery store, however the family often struggled financially as his father had a gambling addiction.



Kim graduated from Belmont High School in 1937, and then enrolled at Los Angeles City College, leaving after one year to work at New Wells Meat Market to help support his family. He tried to enlist in the Army but was denied due to his ethnicity. However, after Congress passed legislation that made Americans of Asian descent eligible to be drafted, he was conscripted for service in the U.S. Army. While beginning his training, his father died in Los Angeles on May 1, 1941.

Kim was initially trained as a combat engineer, but his service as an enlisted man showed leadership potential, and he was sent to the Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Fort Benning, Georgia. Upon completion, on January 31, 1943, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. At the time his commission was unusual, there was at the time a reluctance to give such leadership roles to ethnic minorities, and especially to Asian Americans.

The newly minted officer was assigned to the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) during its advanced combat readiness phase at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. His assignment to the all-Japanese American unit was tantamount to mixing oil and water. There was great animus for the Japanese in the Korean community; in 1910 Japan invaded and formally annexed Korea, and thereafter occupied the country. Kim's father had been an active member of a Hawaii-based advocacy group established by Syngman Rhee to help liberate Korea from Japanese occupation.

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Upon arrival, the commanding officer, cognizant of this issue to avoid problems between him and the Nisei (first generation Japanese-Americans). Kim would, in fact, be the only non-White officer in the regiment. Kim declined noting, *"There are no Japanese nor Korean here. We're all Americans and we're fighting for the same cause."*

The 24 year old Lieutenant Kim was the kind of officer every enlisted man has seen far too many of, and wished to avoid. Fresh out of OCS, he was immaculate in uniform and very *"gung-ho,"* and so his introduction wasn't smooth. To make matters worse, he was not Japanese but Korean. Kim pushed the men of the 100th, enduring initial disdain from the enlisted men and the dislike of his fellow White officers (initially most of the officers of the 100th were Caucasian), but gradually earned their respect. Upon landing with the unit in Italy in September 1943, his cool leadership in combat and concern for the welfare of his troops quickly earned praise. His tenacity and courage on the battlefields won their admiration as well.

On November 3, 1943, the 100th was ordered to make an early morning third crossing of the Volturno River near Ciorlano. After the area was pounded by a heavy midnight artillery barrage, the 100th and the 2d Battalion of the 133d Infantry set out. At about 4 a.m. Company B of the 100th began crossing the cold, swift waters of the Volturno. The Nisei scrambled up the far bank cold, wet, and breathing with exertion, only to find themselves in a minefield. A sudden barrage of misplaced friendly artillery, followed by an immediate response by German artillery, caught the soldiers in mid crossing. More than 30 Nisei fell to the death that rained down from the skies. Stumbling up from the riverbanks, the surviving soldiers quickly assembled to move towards their destination on Route 85, four miles away. In the darkness, confusion arose as to which direction the company should travel in. The lead platoon walked into a minefield, adding seven more men to the casualty list.

Lieutenant Kim's platoon moved to the point, backtracking and then setting out in the direction Kim led until a road came into view. The fearless lieutenant moved ahead, alone in the darkness, to scout it. Even in the darkness it was not hard to identify the brave lieutenant who always wore a knit cap in lieu of a steel helmet. (Lieutenant Kim always said he couldn't think straight with something heavy on his head.)

Reaching the top of a stone wall, Kim stood and waved the men forward. Suddenly German bullets tore through the air and Kim fell to the ground. In the midst of the furious exchange, Staff Sergeant Robert Ozaki

YOUNG-OAK KIM

was enraged at the sudden death or capture of the brave lieutenant the Nisei had come to love and respect. Almost reflexively he shouted over the din of battle, "*Fix Bayonets!*" With yells of "*Banzai*," the entire front line of Nisei rose and advanced on the German guns. The first bayonet charge in Italy of World War II, coupled with the tenacious "*Banzai*" attack, stunned the Germans. When the line broke over the wall, they found their lieutenant, alive and throwing grenades at the enemy machinegun nests. Before the Volturno River action ended, Lieutenant Kim was wounded again. He also earned the Silver Star.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star Medal to First Lieutenant [then Second Lieutenant] Young-Oak Kim (ASN: 0-1309572), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy while serving with Company B, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, from ** to ** 1943, in Italy. Lieutenant Kim was one of three men acting as scouts for his combat patrol having the mission of clearing an area known to contain enemy machine-gun positions. When the scouts, advancing ahead of the patrol, discovered a German ammunition carrying party, Lieutenant Kim intentionally drew the enemy fire so that the other two men could locate and dispose of the enemy with hand grenades. Using the same tactics Lieutenant Kim and his comrades accounted for four enemy machine-gun nests and captured seven prisoners. On ** November 1943, Lieutenant Kim observed an entire German company entering the area and though his patrol was outnumbered, he held his ground, ordering his men to hold their fire until an enemy platoon had entered the area. They then opened fire and the trapped Germans fled in disorder, but Lieutenant Kim and his men flanked them and drove them into adjacent friendly troops and as a result, the entire platoon was either killed or captured. Lieutenant Kim's outstanding leadership, courage and conduct in the face of grave danger was highly meritorious and a credit to the Armed Forces of the United States.

On January 22, 1944, two days before the 100th made its first assault on Monte Cassino, the U.S. FIFTH Army landed at Anzio, a beachhead

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south of Rome. After the 100th Infantry Battalion's last attack on the monastery on February 18, the 512 men of the *Purple Heart Battalion* pulled back to "*heal*," and some 200 replacements were brought in, bringing the battalion to about half-strength. On March 26 the 100th left Naples to make an amphibious landing at Anzio. There they joined the 50,000 Allied troops that were bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and were surround on the other three sides by eight German Divisions Kesseling sent to contain the invasion.

When the 100th arrived at Anzio they joined five American divisions that had been pinned down in a 15-mile beachhead since January. The stalemate continued for another seven weeks. FIFTH Army planners selected May 23, as "*break out day*." The only concern was the lack of intelligence information on the strength and positions of the German units. Rumor indicated the enemy beyond was supported by a crack German Tank Division, carefully camouflaged beyond the *no-man's-land*. Patrols were sent out at night to scout the area, including one recon mission by a company-strength probe supported by American tanks. Not a single enemy soldier was captured to allow the interrogators opportunity to learn what kind of resistance the May 23 breakout would face.

It seemed to be a problem without a solution, one that could mean disaster to the impending offensive. Once again, the answer came from the 100th Infantry Battalion. This time, it would only take two soldiers to do the impossible. One of them was the unstoppable Second Lieutenant Kim who looked the 100th's battalion commander in the eye and said, "*Send me out and I'll bring back a prisoner*." Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Singles replied: "*That's Crazy*." Then, out of sheer necessity, gave Kim the *green light*.

A blanket covered the window in the second story of the old farmhouse in the battalion area. "*Crazy*," Lieutenant Colonel Singles thought to himself again, as he the blanket aside to peer through his binoculars across the wheat field and barbed wire that marked the *no-man's land* between Company B and the Germans. The men of the company usually slept during the day, but not on this day . . . May 17, 1944. In the distance, Second Lieutenant Kim and Private First Class Irving M. Akahoshi of Honolulu, Hawaii, (pictured), were slowly crawling towards the enemy. They were two men alone, in broad daylight. "*Definitely crazy*."



Sometimes it was the crazy ideas that were most successful. In his pitch to headquarters to gain permission for the mission, Lieutenant Kim argued that the reason previous patrols were unsuccessful in snatching a P.O.W. were three-fold:

- Previous patrols had gone out only at night, when the enemy was most alert. He had watched them through the same second story farmhouse window for days and noted they came in from night patrols to eat breakfast, then sleep to prepare for the next night's patrols.
- Previous patrols had been too large, one even company size. So large a patrol was easy for the enemy to spot and avoid.
- Most patrols did what the enemy expected, taking the routes that afforded the most cover under the blanket of darkness.
- Finally, Kim believed that enemy would never expect a patrol of two men to crawl through an open wheat field under the bright sunshine into their territory. So that was what he and Akahoshi would do.

At 10 p.m. on the night before the mission, Company B sent its best automatic riflemen from their position of safety in the rear, to crawl through the wheatfield under darkness to a mid-point in *no man's land*. Kim positioned them carefully in foxholes at about 2 a.m. and then cut a hole in the barbed wire so that he and Akahoshi could slip through into enemy territory. Carrying only a submachine gun, a pistol, and a few grenades, the two soon slipped upon an enemy patrol returning to their own staging area. Slowly and quietly, the two Americans crawled more than a quarter of a mile as they followed the enemy. Dawn broke to reveal the Germans preparing for breakfast. Kim and Akahoshi crawled to a ditch Kim saw earlier in aerial photographs of the area, and the two men pressed their bodies to the ground and prayed for luck. By 9 a.m. they heard the sounds of snoring as the enemy soldiers bedded down.

Though the soldiers of both sides usually slept during the day, the observers in the nearby enemy outposts would be awake and alert. Kim knew they had to move, skirt the patrol until they could find the right place and moment. Back in the American camp the Nisei soldiers were also still away, anxiously watching the progress of their two comrades through binoculars. Kim pressed on, praying that he was correct in believing the German observers wouldn't bother to watch their own area. They would be busy training their field glasses on the Americans on the other side of the barbed wire. "*Crazy . . . Yeah, like a fox.*"

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After a nervous two hour crawl around the enemy, Kim and Akahoshi found their prey, two German soldiers soundly sleeping in a dugout. When the enemy awoke it was to the taste of gun metal; Kim and Akahoshi carefully placed their submachine guns in the sleeping soldiers' mouths, then awakened them. Removing all weapons, they quietly forced the two to crawl back to the ditch where the two Americans had hidden earlier. When dusk began to fall, the four crawled the rest of the way to the barbed wire where the B.A.R. men of Company B waited. Then, with the full darkness of night, the entire patrol returned to the company area.

The prisoners turned out to be an enemy sergeant and private first class from a German division's headquarters. The breakout from Anzio began as scheduled on May 23. Thanks to intelligence reports generated by the interrogation of the prisoners, the FIFTH Army chose to make the main thrust through the same area the two soldiers had crawled through their daring feat. Knowing where the enemy was positioned, what his strength was, and how best to deploy the Allied troops didn't negate the danger, however. Every mile to Rome would be a battleground. Once the FIFTH Army and its gallant 100th Infantry Battalion broke out of the beachhead and crossed no-man's land, they would be faced with digging out a well-entrenched German force, barricaded in the rugged mountains open valleys.

A month later a special ceremony was held to honor Lieutenant Kim and other heroes of the *Purple Heart Battalion*. General Mark Clark personally pinned the Distinguished Service Cross on Kim's uniform. Then, as the general stepped back and looked at the lieutenant again, recognition dawned. Just a few months earlier Clark presented this same brave officer with a Silver Star. The FIFTH Army commander called one of his aides, a captain, to his side. He removed one of the aide's parallel silver bars and pinned them on Kim.



Most people, including General Clark, always thought of Kim as being Japanese because of his role with the 100th Infantry Battalion. Captain Kim was the only Korean-American to receive the Distinguished Service Cross in World War II. A Distinguished Service Cross was also awarded to Private First Class Akahoshi.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Young-Oak Kim (ASN: 0-1309572), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving Headquarters Company, 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate), attached to the 34th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces near Cisterna, Italy, on 16 May 1944. First Lieutenant Kim, accompanied by one enlisted man, voluntarily went on a patrol to secure information of enemy units and dispositions in a vital sector of the front. All previous patrols of combat strength had attempted without success to take prisoners in this well defended sector. First Lieutenant Kim and his assistant infiltrated approximately 800 yards through the enemy line of outposts. While observing enemy dispositions, he discovered a strong enemy outpost situated in a small ditch. To reach this outpost, First Lieutenant Kim and his assistant, in broad daylight, crawled 250 yards across an open field, exposed to enemy observation from the German main line of resistance on the commanding slope of their rear. Arriving at a point near the outpost, they surprised two Germans armed with machine pistols who were acting as security. By use of signs, First Lieutenant Kim warned the enemy to remain quiet. He retraced his perilous route with the two prisoners and successfully by-passed two enemy listening posts to arrive at his own lines. First Lieutenant Kim's courageous and daring performance provided vital information and identification of enemy units in a critical sector of the front.

Captain Kim continued in action with his battalion, which was absorbed by the 442d Regimental Combat Team when they began arriving in June 1944. In September the 442 deployed to Southern France to fight its way inland to the foreboding Vosges Forest.

After securing the French village of Bruyeres in October, the 100th Infantry Battalion received orders to move against the German entrenchments at nearby Biffontaine. *"This puts us beyond radio range and artillery support, and we are low on ammunition,"* Captain Kim radioed Headquarters, adding, *"Promise that you'll put another unit in our position (on the ridge overlooking Biffontaine) if we go down into*

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Biffontaine.” The regimental commander promised, and with that, one battered Nisei fighting force prepared for the advance.

The small French hamlet in peace time boasted a population of some 300 people, living in homes nestled among the hills of the Vosges. Now, much of it was deserted, save for the Germans who had fortified a position near the village church. Without so much as a full night’s sleep, the Nisei of the *Purple Heart Battalion* were roused for a quick, forward movement. In the hours before dawn they began slipping and sliding down the steep slopes of the ridge and into the city; they nearly ran as they forced their way to a ridge overlooking Biffontaine. In the process they passed through the enemy defenses, only to find themselves isolated by early morning, cut off from the rest of the 442d. As night fell on the 21st the brave but weary warriors were low on ammunition and supplies. For many there had been no rations in more than 24 hours. The soldiers clasped hands over their empty stomachs, counted their rounds, and dug in for the night.

Early the following morning the 100th began digging the enemy out of the area. The Nisei were taking fire from three sides, and their meager supplies were almost gone. The battalion S-3 sent a report that, *“The 100th will have to be throwing stones if they don’t get ammo.”* One supply train from Company A was ambushed by 50 Germans. Captain Kim and his other officers had to be content to sit on the ridge and hold the line until they could obtain resupply and reinforcements. Any other action would have been foolish. Foolishness prevailed!

Fortunately, most of the Germans that had been holed up in the city had already escaped the back way. Only about 50 Germans remained behind, unable to make the withdrawal. Biffontaine fell easily to the *Purple Heart Battalion*. It would not be held so easily. Rather than leaving the town to the Allies, the Germans attacked from four directions, moving in on the Nisei. One emerging German fired several rounds at Captain Bill Pye, Commander of Company C. He missed the CO, the bullets flying under the officer’s arm as he pointed to the enemy. Three of the whispering shards of death slammed into Captain Kim’s right hand. While the soldiers tried desperately to hold in the face of the German counterattack, help was on the way.

The Felber Task Force, consisting of an armored group set out from Belmont to bring fresh water and ammunition to the surrounded Nisei at Biffontaine. From the high ridge that separated the two towns, the same ridge held by the Nisei at the time they were ordered into the village,

German fire halted the supply train. The 2d Battalion was pulled from reserve and sent to the rescue. As they struggled towards their surrounded, outnumbered comrades, their flank was hit by a special detachment of German bicycle troops. The advance to Biffontaine slowed, but the infantrymen of the 442d beat back the superior mobility and firepower of their motorized opponents. Company K of the Third Battalion moved along the floor of the valleys to dig out the enemy and fight their way into Biffontaine. Troops from Company G of the 2d Battalion were moving on foot under the leadership of the battalion S-4 Captain George Grandstaff, in an effort to carry supplies to the beleaguered force at Biffontaine.

Late in the day the Germans launched a second counterattack at Biffontaine, supported by tanks. None of the resupply/reinforcement efforts had yet succeeded. The men of the *Purple Heart Battalion* had to hang on by sheer force of will. When darkness fell, the enemy had moved infantry and armor into the city, proclaiming, “*You are surrounded.*” Their calls for surrender were met by the rifle fire and grenades of Nisei who refused to quit.

Before the sun arose on the morning of October 23, an attempt was made to send out a party of wounded under Lieutenant Jimmie Kanaya. Six guards were assigned to protect the eleven wounded men that included Captain Kim. Morphine dulled some of the brave Korean’s pain, but it also dulled his senses and created some disorientation. The wounded who could not walk were carried on stretchers by a group of 20 German prisoners of war. As the small contingent moved through the dark forest, they paused momentarily to rest. Suddenly they were confronted by a squad of enemy. The Nisei called for the enemy squad to surrender. At first it seemed the ruse would work, then the world caved in. Captain Kim and Private Richard Chinen, a medic, managed to make it into the woods in an effort to evade the enemy. The badly wounded Kim and the medic were the only men of the litter detachment to escape capture. He was sent back to California for recovery, and the war ended before he could return to his unit.

Kim returned to civilian life, becoming a successful businessman and running a self-service laundry. When the Korean War began in June 1950, he reenlisted in the Army. Because he was fluent in the Korean language, the Army wanted to assign him to a desk job in the Army Security Agency, but Kim was determined to serve in a front line unit.

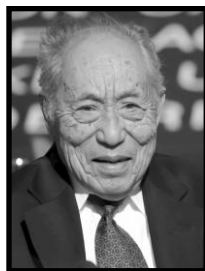
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Thanks to the influence of friends he knew from World War II, now in higher positions, in 1951 as a major he was assigned to the 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was the first Korean American to command a battalion in combat. As intelligence and operations officer, he directed the rescue of several U.S. and South Korean army troops in combat, and led a force of South Korean guerillas. While serving in Korea he solicited contributions for an orphanage in Seoul that housed hundreds of orphans. Some sources state that Kim was awarded a second Silver Star.



In 1952, he went to Fort Benning, Georgia, as an instructor in the Infantry school. He then served staff assignments in Germany. In 1959 he became an instructor at the Army Command and General Staff College. He then returned to Korea as a military advisor and was promoted to colonel. He retired in 1972 at the rank of colonel.

There is no record that Kim ever married or had children. He continued to be a successful businessman, and established and supported several non-profit organizations to serve needy Asian communities in Southern California. He was influential and active in the Go For Broke National Education Center in California.



In 2005 Korean President Roh Moon-hyam announced award of South Korea's highest military award, the Taeguk Order of Military Merit, to Kim. Unfortunately, the 86-year-old hero was hospitalized for treatment at Cedar-Sinai Medical Center in California, and could not attend to receive it personally. He died on December 29, 2005, and was inurned at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. Upon Kim's death Senator Daniel Inouye, one of the 100/442's twenty Medal of Honor recipients said: *"There was one name that always commanded attention and respect: Captain Kim's. He was a Bonafide hero of the 100th Infantry Battalion. He was a fearless leader who, through his deeds, inspired men."*



Ernest Childers & Jack Montgomery

TWO INDIAN HEROES FROM ONE SMALL SCHOOL

C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Only three high schools in America produced more than one Medal of Honor recipient. Moses Lake High School in Washington State graduated Air Force Vietnam War recipient James Fleming and Army Vietnam recipient Joe Ronnie



Hooper; Pueblo, Colorado's Central High School graduated World War II Army hero William J. Craford and Korean War Marine hero Carl L. Sitter. The only other high school to graduate two is the small Chilocco Indian Agricultural School in Oklahoma.

Established in 1882 in a Congressional act to establish five non-reservation boarding schools, Chilocco Indian Agricultural School provided academic and vocational education to American Indians, with the goal of integrating and assimilating American Indians into mainstream America. Students lived on the sprawling campus that grew to 100 buildings spread across 5,000 acres, and were required to wear uniforms, subsist on meager and bland meals, and attended weekly Christian church services. Female students were trained *"not to labor in their homes but as employees of White women."* It was said that the school was *"home and haven to some, reformatory and prison to others."*

ERNEST CHILDERS

Ernest *"Chief"* Childers was born in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, on February 1, 1918, the fifth of the five sons of Ellis Buffentan Childers and Tennie Windom Starks Childers.; four of the five sons served during World War II. Ernest also had an older half-brother and three older half-sisters from his father's first wife Fannie Lee Davis Childers who died in 1898. His father



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owned the cattle company, Childers-Wilson Pasture Co., and later studied and was admitted to the bar in 1887. He practiced law with his firm Childers & Mingo. He became a member of and was Speaker of the House of Warriors (Creek Nation) in 1887 and served two terms.

The Creek Indians were the first Native Americans to be considered “civilized” under George Washington’s civilization plan, and were known as the “*Five Civilized Tribes*,” they had quickly adopted many of the cultural and technological practices of the White society. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was a U.S. law that authorized the President to negotiate with Native American tribes for their removal from ancestral lands in exchange for lands west of the Mississippi River. Under President Andrew Jackson, the act led to the forced displacement of thousands of Native Americans from the Southeastern United States to a newly designated Indian Territory, primarily to Oklahoma.

Ellis Childers died in 1930 when Ernest was twelve-years-old. With the Great Depression impacting all of U.S. society, and the Dust Bowl, a period of severe dust storms that greatly damaged the ecology and agriculture of the American and Canadian prairies during the 1930, Ernest and his siblings grew up in abject poverty. Ernest recalled that things were so bleak his mother couldn’t afford to buy meat; he was given a single .22 cartridge each day to hunt for a rabbit for dinner. It prompted him to become a skilled marksman; Ernest recalled, “*I got to be a very good aim because if I missed, we didn’t eat.*”

Later, the *Daily Oklahoman* described Childers as “*the kind of Indian boy the Whites consider typical of Indians. He loved his family well enough, but he was a lone wolf. He got his first gun when he was 8, and from then on he spent considerable time fishing and hunting, always alone. His favorite spot in the early years was the pond on the old home place. Later, as he grew older, he was permitted to go to the Verdigris River farther to the east. Proud of his Indian heritage, he never went in for feathers and regalia. His Indian name is Red Eagle, but he is known throughout his home community as Ernest . . . before he was 12 he was an expert rifle shot, and brought in many squirrels from the Verdigris bottoms.*”

Ernest attended school in Wagoner, Oklahoma, until 1934, when he was sent to the Chilocco Indian School where there was a military-like regimen and an emphasis on teaching Indian children to assimilate into White culture. His mother died in 1937, the same year he graduated. As

Ernest Childers & Jack Montgomery

did many of his fellow students, after graduation Childers joined the Oklahoma National Guard and was assigned to the 180th Infantry Regiment, which went into action in World War II with the 45th Infantry Division.

Although unlike African-Americans and Japanese-Americans, Native Americans served in integrated units, and the Oklahoma National Guard had a large population of Native American soldiers. The shoulder patch of the 45th Infantry Division was a red diamond with a gold swastika, a common Native American symbol, in tribute to the service of its large Indian population. When World War II began, due to the Third Reich's use of the swastika to represent their evil aggression, the 45th Infantry Division replaced that shoulder patch with a thunderbird, again in tribute to the large number of Native American Soldiers in the Division.



“Chief” Childers, as he was affectionately known his entire life, left his 40-acre tract of land in Wagoner County, Oklahoma, when his regiment was called up for active duty in 1940. From his earliest days of training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and then service at Camp Barkley, Texas in 1941, his natural leadership abilities marked him for promotion, and he worked his way up from private to master sergeant by the time he was sent to Italy in 1943. A training photo of him crawling forward with a knife as a staff sergeant graced the pages of many national newspapers.



The 45th Infantry Division deployed from the United States on June 8, 1943, aboard thirteen attack transports and five cargo vessels, landing in North Africa on June 22. North Africa had been secured in seven months of fighting after other Allied forces landed there in November 1942. The first taste of combat for Chief Childers and his division came on July 10, 1943, when the Division crossed the Mediterranean Sea to make an amphibious assault on Sicily in Operation *Husky*. After weeks of fighting, by the time the



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Division crossed the 362 mile span of the Tyrrhenian Sea to make the amphibious landing at Salerno, Italy, in Operation *Avalanche*, Childers was a second lieutenant.

Three days of heavy fighting followed the September 9, 1943, as the Allies tried to break out from the beachhead and begin fighting their way north towards Rome. On September 13 the Germans launched a massive counterattack, and the *Naples-Foggia Campaign* would be the scene of some of the bitterest mountain warfare of the war. Even after Naples was liberated on October 1, fighting would drag on into early 1944.

On the early morning of September 22, 1943, Second Lieutenant Childers' company was attacking German positions at Oliveto, Italy, when he stumbled and fell into a shell crater, fracturing his instep. Struggling to his feet, he hobbled his way to a nearby, hastily-setup aid station for treatment. As quickly as he arrived, it was hit by an enemy mortar round that killed the Army doctor there, and destroyed the aid station. With few other options, Second Lieutenant Childers hobbled his way back to his company, where he found his platoon pinned down by heavy machine gun fire from fortified houses on a nearby hill.

Childers grabbed eight of his men and began crawling over the fire-swept terrain towards the enemy machine gun nests. When they reached a stone wall overlooking an open cornfield. He recalled, *"I crawled back and told my men to lay down a base of fire over me . . . you see, I had to crawl because of my broken ankle . . . I couldn't tell that as I was crawling. I was crawling up a slope of a hill. I came up behind one of the German machine gun nests that had us pinned down."*

Continuing to crawl, winding his way through ditches and depression in the terrain, despite fire from two German snipers he reached the nearest house. Staggering inside, he shot and killed two German soldiers, and then found and killed the enemy manning the first machine gun nest.

Then, crawling towards a second house, he began throwing rocks; the Germans thinking the rocks were grenades rushed out of the house and into Childers' direct line of fire. Childers killed one, and one of his men killed the other with his covering fire. Childers then struggled on up the hill, capturing a German observer who was directing the enemy fire on the Americans. *"The German must have been watching the action,"* Childers recalled, *"because when he came out toward me, I was on my knees training my .30 caliber carbine on him. I was yelling to one of my men, 'Take him prisoner!' My sergeant yelled back, 'Shoot the*

Ernest Childers & Jack Montgomery

bastard!’ I yelled, ‘I can’t, I’m out of ammunition . . . My body was wet with sweat since the German was fully armed, and I was holding an empty rifle on him. That German was the only surviving German in the entire action of that day.’

After the action that day, Childers was evacuated to North Africa for treatment of his broken ankle. He then returned to his platoon and joined them for the January 22, 1944, Allied landing at Anzio, in **Operation Shingle**. Only the 45th Infantry Division’s 179th Infantry Regiment made the landing on D-Day, but the other units continued to land, all of the Division in place within the first week. The landings were generally unopposed; the Germans chose to allow the landing of 50,000 American troops on a beachhead that was covered on three sides by some of Germany’s best and most experienced divisions. It would take 136 days for the Allies to break out of the beachhead and it was a bloodbath; the Allies suffering 43,000 casualties including Childers. Wounded again, he was sent to Naples for recovery.

On April 8, 1944, still in a hospital bed, Childers received word that a general wanted to see him. *“What general sends for a second lieutenant,”* Childers said he thought upon hearing that news. Reporting as ordered, he found nine companies standing at attention in formation for review by the Mediterranean Theater of Operations commander, Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers. Childers was called forward and General Devers presented him with the Medal of Honor for his actions the previous September at Oliveto. In that moment Ernest Childers became the first Native American since the Indian Wars of the 1800s to be awarded his country’s highest honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Second Lieutenant (Infantry) Ernest “Chief” Childers, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at

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risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in action on 22 September 1943, at Oliveto, Italy, while serving with Company C, 1st Battalion, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division. Although Second Lieutenant Childers previously had just suffered a fractured instep he, with eight enlisted men, advanced up a hill toward enemy machinegun nests. The group advanced to a rock wall overlooking a cornfield and Second Lieutenant Childers ordered a base of fire laid across the field so that he could advance. When he was fired upon by two enemy snipers from a nearby house he killed both of them. He moved behind the machinegun nests and killed all occupants of the nearer one. He continued toward the second one and threw rocks into it. When the two occupants of the nest raised up, he shot one. The other was killed by one of the eight enlisted men. Second Lieutenant Childers continued his advance toward a house farther up the hill, and single-handed, captured an enemy mortar observer. The exceptional leadership, initiative, calmness under fire, and conspicuous gallantry displayed by Second Lieutenant Childers were an inspiration to his men.

Back home in Oklahoma, reporting on Childers' feat the *Tulsa World* reported, *"The marksmanship of Lieutenant Ernest Childers of Broken Arrow is an example of the contrast between the German hit-or-miss theory of spraying an area with rapid-fire weapons and the American soldier's stress on marksmanship and selecting his target before firing."* Oklahoma was justifiably proud of its second native son to earn the Medal of Honor in World War II.

After the award ceremony Childers received a 30 day leave and returned home to Broken Arrow with one detour, to Washington, D.C. to meet President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House. Upon arrival in Broken Arrow, he was honored with the biggest parade in the town's history. *"Schools and businesses were closed; the entire population of the town and surrounding county turned out; the parade was impressive; and the key of the proud little city was presented to the hometown boy who had indubitably 'made good,'"* local newspapers reported.

On September 16, 1945, Childers married Miss Yolanda LaDema Chadwell, a registered nurse. The couple had one son Ernest, and daughters Donna and Elaine. Childers remained in the Army, serving during the period of the Korean



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War and in the early years of the Vietnam War. He retired in 1965 as a lieutenant colonel. In addition to the Medal of Honor he earned the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. The Oklahoma State Legislature also honored him with the first award of the State's Distinguished Service Medal.

Chief and Yolanda were active in his retirement, travelling extensively and also attended all Medal of Honor related activities. Yolanda always arrived with her camera, taking hundreds of photos even before digital cameras made it economical. She often called herself the unofficial Medal of Honor Society photographer.

On September 24, 1994, a nine-foot bronze statue of Chief Childers was dedicated in at Veterans Park in Broken Arrow,



Oklahoma. The local middle school was named Ernest Childers Middle School, and features a gallery honoring the hometown hero. The Department of Veterans Affairs named their out-patient Clinic in Tulsa after Chief Childers. Childers died on March 17, 2005, and is buried at Floral Haven Memorial Gardens in Broken Arrow.



JACK C. MONTGOMERY

Jack Cleveland Montgomery was born in Long, Oklahoma on July 23, 1927, to John Cleveland Montgomery and Emma *Youngblood* Montgomery. A Cherokee Indian, he grew up with two older brothers, two older sisters, and one younger sister, in one of the most impoverished counties in Oklahoma. When Jack was four years old, the family moved to Cushing, Oklahoma. After attending grade school in Cushing, at age thirteen Jack was sent to the Chilocco Indian



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School. After graduating high school in 1936, he went to the Native-American **Bacone Junior College** in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and then transferred to **Carnegie High School** in Carnegie, Oklahoma.

While finishing high school, Jack attended the **Citizen's Military Training Camp (CMTC)** at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, a program began under the **National Defense Act of 1920** as an alternative to mandatory universal military training. Despite spreading his time between studies and playing football on the school football team, Jack also served in the Oklahoma National Guard's Company I, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division.

After graduation in 1936, Montgomery left the National Guard and Oklahoma, to attend **Redlands College** in California on a football scholarship; it was quite an accomplishment for a young man who stood only 5'6" tall and weighed 150 pounds. After graduation he returned to Oklahoma with a physical education degree but was unable to find work. He rejoined his old Army unit for a one year hitch, after which he was honorably discharged in September 1941. Three months later the Japanese forced the United States into World War II when it attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. Jack immediately reenlisted in the Army and was assigned to his old unit, the 180th Infantry Regiment, now assigned to the 45th Infantry Division.

Jack trained with the Division and sailed with it to North Africa, from where the 45th Infantry Division made the amphibious assault across the Mediterranean Sea in July 1943 during the invasion of Sicily in **Operation Husky**. He was a noncommissioned officer when his Company I, 3d Battalion, was assigned to assault and secure the town of Biscari. The fighting was bitter and close-in, often hand-to-hand. For his heroic actions Montgomery was awarded a Bronze Star and received a battlefield commission to second lieutenant. Wounded in that action, he also received the Purple Heart.



In the subsequent landing at Salerno, Italy, on September 9, '1943, Second Lieutenant Montgomery's unit was held in reserve, landing north of Benevento, Italy, in mid-September. They immediately went into action and during the fighting in and around the town, for his leadership and heroism, Second Lieutenant Montgomery received the Silver Star.

Ernest Childers & Jack Montgomery



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Jack Cleveland Montgomery, United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving with Company I, 3d Battalion, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy near Benevento, Italy, on 9 October 1943. First Lieutenant Montgomery was a platoon leader of a rifle platoon with light machine gun sections attached, which was ordered to set up a roadblock at a road junction. When personal reconnaissance disclosed a large enemy roadblock, he led an attack against the enemy position, displaying great coolness as he moved about directing the action of his platoon. The enemy was completely surprised by the attack and withdrew in disorder after suffering heavy casualties. First Lieutenant Montgomery's gallantry and leadership reflect high credit on the Armed Forces of the United States.

Fierce fighting ensued over the following months as Allied forces tried to move north towards Rome in the *Naples-Foggia Campaign*. By December 1943 the advance was halted.

On February 22, 1944, First Lieutenant Montgomery's platoon encountered a German fortress in a house occupied by about 40 Germans and two machine guns manned by twelve Germans outside the fortress. First Lieutenant Montgomery personally fired six rockets and 10 anti-tank grenades to soften the target, before calling in artillery and tank fire on the house. Then he instructed the men of his platoon and launched a one-man assault on the machine guns protecting the house from the outside.

Montgomery alternately crawled and ran up a ditch leading to the machinegun emplacement, firing his M-1 rifle as he advanced. Reaching the machinegun position, he found eight dead Germans; four others surrendered. Again, ordering his men to cover him, he entered the house, found eight dead Germans, and forced the 32 living enemy soldiers to surrender. For his actions, Montgomery was recommended for the Medal of Honor. That night, after his platoon established a defensive position, they came under a heavy enemy mortar attack. First Lieutenant Montgomery was severely wounded with shrapnel to his legs, back, and

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chest. He was evacuated to a first aid station, then to a field hospital, and eventually shipped back to the United States to endure several surgeries.

After his recovery, Montgomery was sent to Camp Wolters, Texas, as an Infantry instructor. It was while serving in this capacity that he was called to Washington, D.C. On January 10, 1945, in ceremonies at the White House, President Franklin D. Roosevelt hung the Medal of Honor around the neck of a diminutive Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma, First Lieutenant Jack C. Montgomery.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Jack Cleveland Montgomery, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty on 22 February 1944, while serving with Company I, 3d Battalion, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division, in action near Padiglione, Italy. Two hours before daybreak a strong force of enemy infantry established themselves in three echelons at 50 yards, 100 yards, and 300 yards, respectively, in front of the rifle platoons commanded by First Lieutenant Montgomery. The closest position, consisting of four machineguns and one mortar, threatened the immediate security of the platoon position. Seizing an M-1 rifle and several hand grenades, First Lieutenant Montgomery crawled up a ditch to within hand grenade range of the enemy. Then climbing boldly onto a little mound, he fired his rifle and threw his grenades so accurately that he killed eight of the enemy and captured the remaining four. Returning to his platoon, he called for artillery fire on a house, in and around which he suspected that the majority of the enemy had entrenched themselves. Arming himself with a carbine, he proceeded along the shallow ditch, as withering fire from the riflemen and machine gunners in the second position was concentrated on him. He attacked this position with such fury that seven of the enemy surrendered to him, and both machineguns were silenced. Three German dead were found in the vicinity later that morning. First Lieutenant

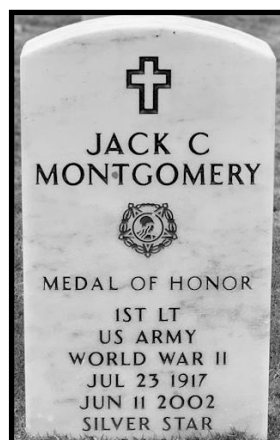
Ernest Childers & Jack Montgomery

Montgomery continued boldly toward the house, 300 yards from his platoon position. It was now daylight, and the enemy observation was excellent across the flat open terrain which led to First Lieutenant Montgomery's objective. When the artillery barrage had lifted, First Lieutenant Montgomery ran fearlessly toward the strongly defended position. As the enemy started streaming out of the house, First Lieutenant Montgomery, unafraid of treacherous snipers, exposed himself daringly to assemble the surrendering enemy and send them to the rear. His fearless, aggressive, and intrepid actions that morning accounted for a total of 11 enemy dead, 32 prisoners, and an unknown number of wounded. That night, while aiding an adjacent unit to repulse a counterattack, he was struck by mortar fragments and seriously wounded. The selflessness and courage exhibited by First Lieutenant Montgomery in alone attacking three strong enemy positions inspired his men to a degree beyond estimation.



Montgomery was honorably discharged in September 1945, and began working for the Veterans Administration. He was a humble and unpretentious man who never talked about or flaunted his award. When he was dating Miss Joyce M. Magness, whom he married in 1961, she had no idea her boyfriend was a hero until one day when she saw it in his office. *"Oh,"* Jack explained, *"that's just something I did back in the war."*

Jack Montgomery died on June 11, 2002, and was buried at Fort Gibson National Cemetery at Fort Gibson, Oklahoma.



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Virginia Hall*

EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN AND AN EXCEPTIONAL SPY

BY: JAMES G. FAUSONE, ESQ.

The State Department stuck Virginia Hall in a series of dead-end jobs as a clerk and secretary, and then was denied employment, let alone a promotion, because of a disability, even though she was college educated, was fluent in six languages, and had years of multicultural experience. The State Department's short-sighted loss was first the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and later the American Operation for Strategic Services' (OSS) long-term gain. As *la Dame Qui Boite*, "*the Limping Lady*," Virginia Hall became a formidable agent for both special operations services. She was so effective in Occupied France during World War II that she became the Gestapo's Enemy No. 1. No matter what the Nazis did, she was never caught. Gestapo leader Klaus Barbie, the notorious "*Butcher of Lyon*," mistaking her nationality, cursed, "*I would give anything to get my hands on that limping Canadian bitch.*" After the war, she became the only civilian woman to be awarded the U.S. Army Distinguished Service Cross.



AMERICAN UPBRINGING

Virginia Hall was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 6, 1906, to Barbara Virginia Hammel and Edwin Lee Hall. She had a privileged upper-class upbringing. She attended Roland Park Country School, Radcliffe College, one of the historic "*Seven Sisters*" that offered college degrees to women, and then Barnard College (Columbia University), where she studied French, Italian, and German. She also attended George Washington University where she studied French and Economics.

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Civilian Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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PRE-WORLD WAR II AND TRAGEDY

Hall's goal was to be a member of the diplomatic corps. This was not a goal that was easy to achieve in the 1920s — there were very few women in the diplomatic corps at that time. In 1931 Virginia did find work in the State Department, albeit as a lowly clerk in the Warsaw Embassy. Though overqualified for the job, she took it, believing that the most important thing was to get in and find a way to get promoted.

She transferred to Smyrna, Turkey. At the time she arrived, the economy was driven by cotton dying, mills spinning thread, iron works, and soap works owned by British and French companies. Much of the area was still undeveloped and outdoor shooting sports were regular activities of the educated class. Virginia was a regular participant in the hunts for Gallinago—a marsh snipe found on the shore of the Gediz Peninsula in Turkey.



Virginia was competitive even in hunting outings. In 1933, she was out early and hoping to bag the first snipe of the day. While going over a fence she tripped, and her shotgun went off, accidentally shooting herself in the left foot. Though doctors were able to save her life, they could not save her limb. Virginia lost a portion of her left leg just below the knee.

She was given a leave from the State Department and returned to the United States for care and recovery. Back at the family farm in Parkton, Maryland, Virginia learned to walk with a prosthetic limb that she called “*Cuthbert*.” Cuthbert was an Anglo-Saxon monk, mystic, miracle worker and saint in England in the seventh century AD. It is unclear if Virginia knew of the saint from her studies or travels.

After her leg injury, she worked again as a consular clerk in Venice, Italy, and in Tallinn, Estonia. Despite several attempts to become a U.S. diplomat, she was turned down because of an obscure rule against hiring people with disabilities as diplomats. Secretary of State Cordell Hull dismissed her request writing, “*Hall could become a fine career girl in the Consular Service.*”

She was not going to be “*a fine career girl.*” However, even her appeal to disabled President Franklin D. Roosevelt was unsuccessful. Six

Virginia Hall

years after her accident, Hall resigned from the Department of State in March 1939, still working as a consular clerk.

When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, Virginia Hall was not one to cautiously wait or sit out the next great adventure. Looking to help in France, Hall became an ambulance driver for the French army's Services Sanitaires de L'Armee. As a private, she received training in first aid and ambulance driving. When the German army



invaded France in May 1940, the work was around the clock. After France's defeat in June 1940, it became obvious it was time to leave France and contemplate her options.

When she arrived in London, the U.S. Embassy wanted her firsthand information on the status of France. She was again hired by the U.S. Defense Attaché Office but knew this was a dead end with no career opportunities. She endured the Luftwaffe's bombings of London in the *Battle of Britain*. After a chance meeting with a British undercover agent on a train who, at one point during their conversation, gave her a business card with a phone number and Virginia called it. She left her position as a clerk in February 1941, having been recruited by the SOE.

AN AMERICAN IN BRITISH SERVICE

The SOE was a secret World War II organization created to conduct espionage, sabotage, and intelligence gathering, and other clandestine activities in Axis occupied territories for the British. It began in July 1940 and was known as "*Baker Street Irregulars*" or "*Churchill's Secret Army*," or "*Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*."

The importance of this clandestine work could not be underestimated. Neither could the danger of such work. Virginia Hall was uniquely qualified to participate in behind-enemy-lines spy activity. Importantly, the British saw a role for women to play in this work. The SOE directly employed or controlled more than 13,000 people, about 25 percent of whom were women.

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Hall received training in such things as armed and unarmed combat, parachute jumping, radio operations, demolition techniques, trade craft, etc.

Because Hall was an American citizen at a time when the United States was neutral, she was a particularly valuable asset for SOE. She was sent to Vichy France in August 1941. Her cover was that of a *New York Post* reporter, which gave her an ability to interview people and populate stories with facts of importance to British military planners.

From August 1941 until November 1942, her headquarters were in the Haute Loire Department between the cities of Toulouse and Lyon. Her code-name was *Geologist-5*, with a mission to provide SOE with information on Vichy, France, including reports on political developments, economic conditions, and the pulse of the resistance. Lyon, in southern France, is closer to Geneva, Switzerland, than it is to Paris.

She created the Heckler Network in Lyon. Over the next fifteen months she focused on support operations—organizing resistance movements' supplying agents with money, weapons, and supplies; as well as helping downed airmen to escape; and offering safe houses and medical assistance to wounded agents and pilots.

A network would be made up of numerous spies that in turn had a chain of agents that helped the network by providing information, safe houses, food, and logistical support. But Virginia went beyond her charter and proved adept at recruiting spies. The Heckler Network she established had a reported 90 agents in southern France. The group provided intelligence on ammunition and fuel depots, German troop movements, and industrial production. Virginia's encoded communications were sent via Western Union telegram to her cutout at the *New York Post*, who forwarded the information to SOE London.

When the United States entered the war in December 1941, Hall's neutral status vanished and, even though she was operating in nominally free Vichy France, her situation became increasingly dangerous.

In September 1942, she sent a message to SOE in London that *said*, "*my time is about up.*" Virginia stayed another two months after her message, changing names and safe houses frequently to avoid capture. Hall knew the border with Spain would be sealed and more men would be hunting her.

Virginia Hall

When the Allies landed in French Northwest Africa in *Operation Torch*, the German response in France was to seize control of the rest of the country. As a result, Hall's already fraught situation became untenable. She knew if she stayed, she'd be caught. After a car ride south with two companions, Hall was deposited at the start of a trail that led through the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. The trail took days to navigate. This was not a walk in the park for anyone, especially a woman with a prosthetic leg. The mountainous trail rose 7,500 feet before coming down in Spain. It was a forty-four-mile trail that normally took three to four days to traverse. The exact time for travel, and the pain she endured, was never discussed by Hall.

Unfortunately, getting to Spain was not the end of Hall's problems. She arrived at the train station at San Juan de las Abadesas hours before the Barcelona-bound train. She was spotted and jailed by Spanish authorities for illegally crossing the border. Eventually, the U.S. Embassy secured her release, and she returned to the United States.

Britain's King George secretly awarded her the honor of Member of the British Empire in 1943, the third highest ranking Order of the British Empire award, behind Commander of the Order of the British Empire (COB), and Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

IN SERVICE TO AMERICAN

Hall wanted to return to France, but SOE knew it was too dangerous. The Nazis were looking for her and her network had been rolled up. Undeterred, she sought another way to serve. She found it with the Office of Strategic Services. She was commissioned as a second lieutenant and, after

completing training, she was given the false identity of Marcelle Montagne, codename Diane. She had another codename as well, Artemis. She was then sent to France to help organize, supply, and lead Resistance networks in support of *Operation Overlord*, the Allied landings in Normandy scheduled for the spring. Standard operating



A painting of Hall as a wireless operator during her second mission to France by Jeffrey W. Bass.

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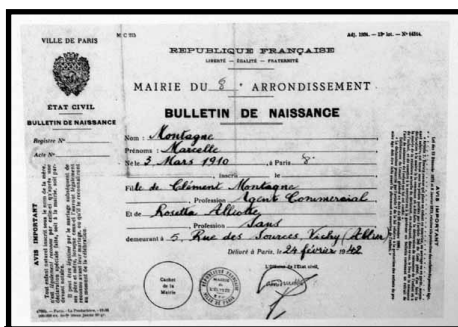
procedure was for operators to be parachuted into occupied territory. But, because of her prosthesis, on March 21, 1944, she was taken to France by motor gunboat, landing at Beg-an-Fry near the Breton port of Brest.

Landing with her was sixty-two-year-old Henri Lassot, who was to be the organizer and leader of the new Saint network, it being too radical a thought that a woman could lead an OSS network of agents. She was assigned as Lassot's wireless operator. Lassot carried with him one million francs, equivalent to 5,000 British pounds, and Hall had 500,000 francs with her. Hall quickly separated herself from Lassot, whom she characterized as too talkative and a security risk, instructing her contacts not to tell him where she was. Aware that her accent would reveal that she was not French, she engaged a French woman, Madame Rabut, to accompany and speak for her.

Hall was disguised as an older woman, with gray hair, her teeth filed down to resemble that of a peasant woman. She disguised her limp with the long skirt and shuffle of an old woman.

Hall roamed around France south of Paris, from March to July 1944, posing sometimes as an elderly milkmaid. She found and organized drop zones, established several safe houses, and organized and supplied with arms several resistance groups of a hundred men each in the Cher and Cosne departments along the Loir Valley.

Following the D-day landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, from July to September 1944 Hall operated in the Haute-Loire Department. Next she was given the job of assisting the Maquis in southern France to harass the Germans in support of the Allied invasion on France's Mediterranean coast in, *Operation Dragoon*, scheduled for August 15, 1944. As a civilian woman but with the rank of second lieutenant, she had problems asserting her authority over the Maquis groups and the self-proclaimed colonels heading them. She complained to OSS headquarters, "*you send people out ostensibly*



The OSS of World War II forged a French identification certificate for "Marcelle Montagne," an alias of spy Virginia Hall - (Photo by Rudi Williams, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

Virginia Hall

to work with me and for me, but you do not give me the necessary authority.'

She told the Maquis leaders that she would finance them and give them arms on condition that they would be advised by her, but the prickly Maquis leaders, reluctant to take orders from a woman junior officer, at first balked and continued to be a problem. However, the three planeloads of supplies she received in late July, and the money she distributed for expenses, gained their grudging acquiescence.

The three battalions of Maquis (about 1,500 men) in her area undertook several successful sabotage operations. As part of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI), they forced the German occupiers to withdraw from Le Puy-en-Velay in the Auvergne region of south-central France, and head north with the rest of the retreating German forces.

In August 1944, Paris was liberated amid celebration in the streets, and American troops rumbled through the avenues on August 26th. The following year, in April 1945, she returned to Paris where she wrote reports and identified people who helped her and were deserving of commendations. Her work completed, she then resigned from OSS; but her efforts were not forgotten.

In May 1945, General William Donovan, the legendary head of the OSS, presented her with the Distinguished Service Cross. President Truman wanted to give Hall the award himself in a public ceremony, but she declined such a public event worried the fanfare would make her non-operational in the future and reveal too much to the enemy. It was the only DSC awarded to a civilian woman in World War II.



The Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) is the United States Army's highest military decoration for soldiers who display extraordinary heroism in combat with an armed enemy force. Ranking below the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest decoration for military valor, it is the highest award that can be given to civilians and foreign allies. The French government awarded Hall the Croix de Guerre avec Palme in

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1988 as part of the inaugural class of the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame.

In 2006, the French and British ambassadors honored Hall, who died in 1982, in a ceremony at the home of the French ambassador in Washington. The British ambassador to the United States presented a certificate signed by King George VI to Ms. Hall's niece. Hall should have received the document in 1943, when she was made a member of the Order of the British Empire. However, it had remained in a British government vault for over fifty years.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Miss Virginia Hall, a United States Civilian, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as an American Civilian Intelligence Officer in the employ of the Special Operations Branch, Office of Strategic Services, who entered voluntarily and served in enemy-occupied France from March to September 1944. Despite the fact that she was well known to the Gestapo because of previous activities, Miss Hall established and maintained radio communications with London headquarters, supplying valuable operational and intelligence information. With the help of a Jedburgh team, she organized, armed, and trained three battalions of French resistance forces in the Department of the Haute Loire. Working in a region infested with enemy troops and continually at the risk of capture, torture, and death, she directed the resistance forces with extraordinary success in acts of sabotage and guerrilla warfare against enemy troops, installations, and communications. Miss Hall displayed rare courage, perseverance, and ingenuity. Her efforts contributed materially to the successful operations of the resistance forces in support of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in the liberation of France.

LIFE AFTER WWII

Life back in the United States had to be slow paced and dull for Hall. She did not have a *“normal life”* to return to having left and explored the world. But adjust she must. She returned to Lyon to see

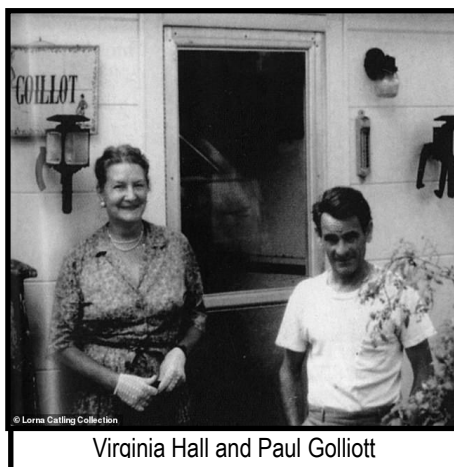
Virginia Hall

how her friends and comrades had fared after the war. Heartbreak and happiness would be in store for her.

Her closest associates, brothel-owner Germaine Guérin and Dr. Jean Rousset, had both been captured by the Germans and sent to concentration camps, but they survived. She arranged 80,000 francs (400 British pounds) compensation from the United Kingdom for Guérin, but most of her network received nothing other than freedom. Unfortunately, all too many of her network did not survive – some were executed at Buchenwald concentration camp. The German agent, Robert Alesch, who had betrayed her network in Lyon, was captured after the war and executed in Paris.

Hall joined the Central Intelligence Agency, the successor to the OSS, in 1947, one of the first women hired by the new agency. Her desk-bound job as an intelligence analyst was to gather information about Soviet penetration of European countries. She resigned in 1948 and then was rehired in 1950 for another desk job.

In 1951, she worked alongside fellow former spy Paul Golliott, supporting undercover activities to prevent the spread of communism in Europe. She simply was not cut out to sit at a desk and be subservient to men that had less knowledge and experience. In 1966, she retired, at the mandatory retirement age of 60. Those who did not know her background would have viewed her as just another federal bureaucrat buying time to retire.



© Lorna Catling Collection
Virginia Hall and Paul Golliott

Her personal life took a positive turn in 1957 when she married Golliott after living together off-and-on for years. They retired to a farm in Barnesville, Maryland, where she lived until her death on July 8, 1982. She packed a lot of living into her seventy-six years. Her husband survived her by five years. She is buried in the Druid Ridge Cemetery, Pikesville, Maryland.

Virginia Hall left no memoir, granted no interviews, and spoke little about her overseas life—even with relatives. She left behind no

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daughters, but she changed perceptions about what everyone’s daughters could accomplish. Her life is a road map of how to raise a strong and independent woman.

Virginia Hall was the last of five American Women in history to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Subsequently one French Woman serving with the OSS also received the Army’s highest award. Below are the seven Women have received it.

War	Name	Branch	MOS	Date of Action
WWI	McClelland, Helen Grace	USA	Nurse	Aug. 17, 1917
WWI	Stambaugh, Isabelle	USA	Nurse	Mar. 21, 1918
WWI	Jeffrey, Jane	USA	Nurse	Jul. 15, 1918
WWI	MacDonald, Beatrice Mary	USA	Nurse	Aug. 17, 1917
WWII	Hall, Virginia	USA	OSS	Mar. 1, 1944
WWII	Guyot, Jeannette	French	OSS	Feb. 8, 1944

The Men in Gun Tub 10

HONORS DELAYED

BY: SCOTT BARON



When the keel for the U.S.S. *Intrepid* (CV-11) was laid down on December 1, 1941, in Shipway 10 of the Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co., Newport News, Virginia, it was six days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States' entrance into World War II. Earlier that year, on October 17, German submarines attacked an American convoy, SC-48, 400 miles south of Iceland, sinking several ships. On October 31, the destroyer U.S.S. *Reuben James* (DD-245), a World War I-era Clemson-class destroyer was torpedoed 600 miles west of Ireland, killing all but forty-five of the 160-man crew.

The *Intrepid* (CV-11) was the fifth of the new Essex-class heavy aircraft carriers. She was launched on April 26, 1943, and commissioned on August 16, 1943, with Captain Thomas L. Sprague in command. After her shakedown and training in the Caribbean, she returned to Norfolk, then departed on December 3 for San Francisco. She proceeded on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, arriving there on January 10, 1944, to begin preparations to join the rest of the Pacific Fleet for offensive operations against the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Nicknamed "*The Fighting I*," *Intrepid* saw almost two years of fighting against the Japanese, and was hit by enemy fire on five occasions. She took part in the battle for Truk, and participated in the largest naval battle in history, the *Battle of Leyte Gulf* in October 1944. The *Intrepid* helped capture Okinawa, and participated in the sinking of both of Japan's super-battleships, *Yamato* and *Musashi*. She was awarded five battle stars for her World War II service.

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On the chilly autumn evening of November 3, 1993, forty-eight years after the end of World War II, Alonzo Alexander Swann, Jr., a greying sixty-eight year old African American former sailor stood once again at attention on the deck of his old ship. His ship the *Intrepid* is now a museum located at Pier 86 at West 46th Street along the Hudson River in the *Hell's Kitchen* neighborhood of the West Side of Manhattan.



Swann was there to be awarded the Navy Cross, the Navy's highest decoration for valor, second only to the Medal of Honor, for his actions forty-nine years earlier on October 29, 1944, during the *Battle of Okinawa*. Present were Admiral Stan Author, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, as well as a number of flag officers, including three African American admirals, a Marine Corps lieutenant general, and the commandant of the Coast Guard.

Vice Admiral Paul Reason, an African American, was among the speakers. He praised Swann, stating that it was "*Men like him who paved the way and made it possible for African Americans to achieve high ranking positions in the armed forces.*" Admiral Arthur then pinned the Navy Cross onto Swann's lapel.

Swann returned to the *Intrepid* several months later to attend the museum's annual *Salute to Freedom Gala* in 1993. The museum's *Intrepid Freedom Award* recipient that year was former President Ronald Reagan, and Swann had the honor of sitting at Reagan's table. Former president Reagan honored Swann, asking him to stand "*and receive fifty years of admiration.*"

Born on September 21, 1925, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Alonzo was one of the five children of Alonzo, Sr. and Mary Swann. His father, a steelworker, moved to nearby Steelton where Alonzo graduated from high school in 1943. On November 23, 1943, at age eighteen, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and took boot camp at the Great Lakes Naval Base.

In the racially segregated Navy of World War II, most African Americans had severely limited opportunities, and most were confined to lower ranks and restricted to the Steward's Branch, where they served White officers, cleaning and taking care of their quarters, helping to prepare and serve their meals, and other similar menial duties. However, during combat, Black sailors could volunteer for duty, serving the ship's

The Men in Gun Tub 10

guns in defense of their ship. Stewards, galley cooks, and waiters became fighting men, working in the gun tubs.

Assigned to the aircraft carrier *Intrepid*, Swann, whose rank was steward's mate first class, worked with a crew of twenty other Black and Hispanic sailors (even gun emplacements were segregated) who, during battle, would abandon their usual posts and rush to their battle station, Gun Tub 10.

While in port at San Francisco before sailing west, Swann and a group of Black steward mates were sent to Fort Ord, California, to train as gunners. These men would become the gunners in Gun Tub 10, although they would never be given the official rating of gunner's mate.



Swann and the other gunners continued their training while *Intrepid* traveled between San Francisco and Pearl Harbor. Some of the pilots (all of whom at the time were White) refused to fly targets for Gun Tub 10's gunnery practice. The commanding officer said that any pilot who refused would be transferred off the ship, and training continued.

Early in 1944, *Intrepid* joined the Fast Carrier Task Force, then Task Force 58 (TF 58), for the island-hopping campaign across the Gilbert and Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific. On January 16, 1944, *Intrepid*, her sister ship U.S.S. *Essex* (CV-9), and the light carrier U.S.S. *Cabot* (CVL-28), departed Pearl Harbor to conduct a raid on islands in the Kwajalein Atoll from January 29 to February 2. The three carriers' air group destroyed all 83 Japanese aircraft stationed on Roi-Namur in the first two days of the strikes, before Marines went ashore on neighboring islands on January 31 in the *Battle of Kwajalein*.

Swann and most the other crewmen were "*plank owners*," members of the ship's first crew, and were aboard during the Kwajalein campaign. When the fighting finished by February 3, *Intrepid* and the rest of TF 58 launched *Operation Hailstone*, a raid on the main Japanese naval base in the Central Pacific, Truk Lagoon. From February 17–19 the

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carriers pounded Japanese forces in the lagoon, sinking two destroyers and some 200,000 gross registered tonnage of merchant ships.

On the night of February 17–18, a Japanese torpedo bomber scored a hit on the carrier near her stern. The torpedo struck fifteen feet below the waterline, jamming the ship's rudder to port, and flooding several compartments. The damaged ship returned to Pearl Harbor, where she arrived on February 24 for temporary repairs, after which *Intrepid* steamed to Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco for permanent repairs on March 16, arriving six days later.

The work was completed by June 9, and *Intrepid* returned to Pearl Harbor to begin two months of training. By early September, *Intrepid* joined operations in the western Caroline Islands. Her Fast Carrier Task Force was now part of the Third Fleet under Admiral William Halsey Jr., and renamed Task Force 38.

On September 6 and 7, *Intrepid* conducted air strikes on Japanese artillery batteries and airfields on the island of Peleliu, in preparation for the invasion of that island. On September 9 and 10, the fleet moved on to attack airfields on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, followed by further strikes on bases in the Visayan Sea between September 12 and 14. On September 17, *Intrepid* returned to Peleliu to provide air support to the Marines that landed on the island two days before on the 15th.

Intrepid and the other carriers then returned to the Philippine Islands to prepare for the *Philippines Campaign*. *Intrepid* was assigned to Task Group 38.2. In addition to targets in the Philippines themselves, the carriers also struck Japanese airfields on the islands of Formosa and Okinawa to degrade Japanese air power in the region.

On October 20, at the start of the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*, *Intrepid* launched strikes to support Allied forces as they went ashore on the island of Leyte. By this time, Halsey reduced the carriers of Task Group 38.2 to just *Intrepid*, *Cabot*, and the light carrier U.S.S. *Independence* (CVL-22), commanded by Rear Admiral Gerald F. Bogan aboard his flagship the *Intrepid*.

Between October 23 and 26, the Japanese Navy launched a major operation to disrupt the Allied landings in the Philippines, resulting in the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*. Early on October 25, aircraft from *Intrepid* and the other carriers launched a strike on the Japanese carriers and scored hits on the carrier *Zuihō* and possibly the carrier *Zuikaku*. Further strikes

The Men in Gun Tub 10

throughout the morning resulted in the sinking of four Japanese aircraft carriers and a destroyer in the *Battle off Cape Engaño*.

On October 27, Task Group 38.2 returned to operations over Luzon, which included a raid on Manila on October 29, and the *Intrepid* came under heavy fire from Japanese planes. On that day, *Intrepid* would have its first experience with a kamikaze.

Kamikazes were a part of the Japanese Special Attack Units that included pilots who flew suicide attacks against Allied naval vessels in the closing stages of the Pacific campaign, beginning in October 1944. They were essentially pilot-guided explosive missiles, purpose-built or converted from conventional aircraft. Pilots attempted to intentionally crash their aircraft into enemy ships in their planes which were loaded with bombs, torpedoes, or other explosives.

Only about nineteen percent of kamikaze attacks were successful, but they were more accurate than conventional attacks, and often caused more damage. About 3,800 kamikaze pilots died during the war, and more than 7,000 U.S. naval personnel were killed by kamikaze attacks. The sailors aboard the *Intrepid* had heard about these suicide dive bombers, but none had yet targeted the *Intrepid*.

On October 29 at 12:04 p.m., Swann was just coming from the ship's church service when he heard the sirens warning of approaching enemy aircraft. As a kamikaze pilot steered his plane toward the *Intrepid*, Swann, who was barely nineteen years old, and more than a dozen other young Black and Hispanic men in his crew, hurried to their battle station, Gun Tub No. 10 on the port side of the ship to man an Oerlikon 20-mm. anti-aircraft gun. As others rushed for cover the men of Gun Tub 10, only one of whom had any actual combat experience, made no such effort to abandon their post. They kept shooting, scoring hit after hit.

The plane veered off but the men stayed at their position, shooting away the attacking plane's left wing and most of the tail, diverting it from the flight deck and toward them. The badly damaged aircraft crashed into their position and flaming gasoline streamed everywhere, soon causing ammunition to cook off.

Swann was dazed but conscious. The impact hurled him against the steel



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bulkhead of the gun tub. He shook his head, trying to focus his eyes. All he could see was orange flame and bodies. Meanwhile, he could hear his shipmates; they were still there—still at their guns, firing away.

Then he heard screams. His best friend, another steward's mate named Samuel Gant, was entangled in the straps that secured him to his gun mount. Gant was burning to death. Though he was badly burned himself, Swann rushed back into the inferno to try to rescue his shipmate.

As fire seared his legs and chest, Swann fought the intense heat and flames as he made several attempts in vain to free Gant who begged Swann to kill him and end the pain. As Swann worked to free him and considered a mercy killing, another explosion sent him reeling.

The damage control party responded quickly. Gently they removed the dead and injured gunners from the gun tub and laid them on the hanger deck, where corpsmen treated them. Swann was badly injured, and Sam Gant was killed by the blast. In all, nine gunners died at their battle stations and another ten were severely wounded. The men were later buried at sea, covered only by flags draped over their bodies.

While recovering in the hospital, six of the survivors, including Swann, were promised the Navy Cross, the Navy's highest honor for bravery. They were given temporary certificates for the honor. Months later, a Naval officer asked Swann to return the paperwork.

Articles were written in hometown newspapers about the heroes of the *Intrepid*. Mayors of their home cities celebrated them with honors and accolades. But, when the time came for the ceremony to present the awards, their awards had been downgraded to the Bronze Star. The Navy gave no explanation for the medal change, but Swann and the others believed they knew why. The year was 1944 and America was still deep into *Jim Crow* laws and racial segregation.

Captain Joseph Francis Bolger presented the six, Jonell Copeland, Que Gant, Harold Clark Jr., James Dockery, Eli Benjamin and Alonzo Swann, their Bronze Star medals. Swann, however, vowed to fight for the Navy Cross he felt was due to him and his comrades.

Swann, although badly burned, he was back in the gun station within a month. The war was not yet over and on November 25, shortly after noon, two



The Men in Gun Tub 10

kamikazes crashed into *Intrepid*, killing sixty-six men and causing a serious fire. The ship remained on station, however, and within two hours, the fires were extinguished. The following day *Intrepid* departed for San Francisco for repairs, reaching San Francisco on December 20.

Back in the fight by the following February, *Intrepid* sailed westward for strikes on Japan on March 14, launching airstrikes against airfields on Kyūshū four days later. That morning a twin-engine Japanese G4M *Betty Bomber* broke through a curtain of defensive fire, turned toward *Intrepid*, and exploded only fifty feet off her forward boat crane. A shower of flaming gasoline and aircraft parts started fires on the hangar deck, but damage control teams quickly put them out.

At Okinawa, on April 16, during an air raid, a Japanese aircraft dove into *Intrepid's* flight deck, driving the engine and part of her fuselage through it, killing eight men and wounding twenty-one. In less than an hour the flaming gasoline was extinguished, and only three hours after the crash, American aircraft were again landing on the carrier.

On April 17, *Intrepid* again returned homeward, making a stop at Pearl Harbor before arriving at San Francisco for repairs on May 19. On June 29 the carrier left San Francisco and by August 6, launched strikes against Japanese-held Wake Island. On August 15, when the Japanese surrendered, she received word to “*cease offensive operations*,” and *Intrepid* got under way on August 21 to support the occupation of Japan. On December 2, 1945, she left Yokosuka and arrived at San Pedro, California, on December 15.

Discharged from the Navy after the war, Swann earned a degree in political science at Pennsylvania State University and worked as General Director of the Gary (Indiana) Sanitary District and also co-owned a nightclub, but Swann never forgot his promise to himself. Over the next half-century, Swann wrote and phoned politicians to recount his war story and sought the help of anyone he thought might assist in righting the wrong against him and his fellow heroic gunners.

In 1991, Swann filed a lawsuit in federal court. U.S. District Judge Rudy Lozano ruled in 1993 that Swann had been denied the Navy Cross due to an “*Error of intentional racial injustice*.” During World War II, 3,951 Navy Crosses were awarded, but only three went to African Americans; the judge ordered the Secretary of the Navy to grant the honor that had eluded Swann for decades. Swann’s Navy Cross was approved by the Secretary of the Navy on January 15, 1993.

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In a ceremony aboard the Intrepid later that year, with his wife and ten children proudly looking on, Swann finally received the Navy Cross, forty-nine years after earning it.



Alonso Swann died in Gary, Indiana, on January 30, 2007, at the age of eighty-one, and was survived by his wife, Gussie Swann, and nine of his ten children. He was buried at Fern Oaks Cemetery in Griffith, Indiana. As a result of his efforts, four of his crew members were awarded the Navy Cross the following year. Navy Crosses were presented to James Eddie Dockery, Que Gant, Robert Jones, Jr., William S. Swan, and a posthumous award was made to Alfonso Chavarrias who was killed in action in Gun Tub 10. The citations were identical except for the names of those so honored:





***Steward's Mate Third Class Alfonso Chavarrias (Posthumous)**

Steward's Mate First Class James Eddie Dockery

Cook Second Class Que Gant

Steward's Mate Third Class Robert Jones

Steward's Mate First Class Eugene Smith, Jr.,

Cook Second Class William S. Swan

Steward's Mate First Class Alonzo Alexander Swann

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism in connection with operations against the enemy while serving as a Gun Captain of a 20-mm. anti-aircraft gun aboard the Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. INTREPID (CV-11), in action against enemy Japanese forces when his ship was attacked by a Japanese dive bomber from the starboard side of the ship in Philippine waters during the Battle of Leyte Gulf on 29 October 1944. Undaunted by the extremely heavy volume of enemy fire which caused extensive damage to the ship, he remained in a dangerously exposed position and inadvertently continued to operate his portside gun in its fire over the flight deck. Although it became apparent that the enemy plane was headed directly for his gun tub and despite the imminent danger, he steadfastly continued to deliver effective gun fire upon the enemy until the Japanese plane crashed into the tub and exploded, causing him to be severely burned. Through his daring and resolute determination, he was instrumental in thwarting the enemy attack. By his personal valor, significant contribution, and unwavering devotion to duty, he reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States

THE CREW OF GUN TUB 10

Stewards Mate 1st Class Eli Benjamin, Bronze Star

Stewards Mate 1st Class Leander Brewer (KIA)

Gunners Mate 1st Class Alfonso Chavarrias, Navy Cross (KIA)

Stewards Mate 1st Class Harold Clark, Bronze Star

Stewards Mate 1st Class Joseph Cody (KIA)

Boiler Maker 2nd Class Johnell Copeland, Bronze Star

Stewards Mate 1st Class James Dockery, Navy Cross

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Stewards Mate 1st Class Edward Davison (KIA)
Seaman 1st Class Raymond Doulette (KIA)
Stewards Mate 1st Class Granville Fleming (KIA)
Petty Officer 3rd Class Que Gant, Navy Cross
Stewards Mate 1st Class Samuel W. Gant (KIA)
Stewards Mate 1st Class John Giddens (KIA)
Stewards Mate 1st Class Robert Jones, Navy Cross
Stewards Mate 1st Class Calvin Saunders
Stewards Mate 1st Class Eugene Smith, Jr., Navy Cross
Stewards Mate 1st Class Fred Smith (KIA)
Aviation Machinists Mate 2nd Class James Spoon
Cook 2nd Class W. Samuel Swan
Stewards Mate 1st Class James Taylor (KIA)
Aviation Machinists Mate 2nd Class G. C. Vilven

Francis B. Wai

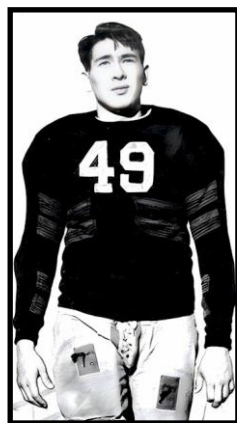
THE ONLY CHINESE AMERICAN MEDAL OF HONOR HERO

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Francis Brown Keliimaikai Wai was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on April 14, 1917, to Chinese immigrant Kim Wai Lum and his Native Hawaiian wife Rosina *Lambert* Wai. He was the oldest of their five children with younger brothers Robert, Conkling, Lambert and sister Rosina. Growing up he loved to surf, and was also athletically inclined. As a student at **Punahou School**, a prestigious college preparatory school in Honolulu, he lettered in track, football, and baseball.



After graduating in 1935 he attended **Sacramento Junior College** in California for two years where he played football and was the state light heavyweight boxing champion. In 1937 he transferred to the **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)**. There he and brothers Robert and Conkling played on the **Bruins** football team; Francis played the fullback position and was the starting quarterback for two games. He was a four-sport letterman, playing rugby, basketball, and track. He graduated from **UCLA** in 1940 with a bachelor's degree in economics.



Wai returned to Hawaii, intent on working with his father, and also joined the **Hawaii National Guard**. Both his intelligence and his athleticism drew attention from his officers, and Wai was sent to **Fort Benning, Georgia**, for **Officer Candidate School (OCS)**. Upon graduation on September 27, 1941, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Returning to Hawaii, when the **Hawaii National Guard** was federalized in preparation for war, they became the **34th Infantry Regiment**. Wai was assigned as an intelligence officer in Headquarters, **34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division**, stationed at **Scholfield Barracks, Oahu, Hawaii**. During the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on

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December 7, 1941, the 34th Infantry Regiment was among the first Americans to engage the enemy, turning their machine guns on the incoming Japanese fighters and bombers.

On July 3, 1942, Wai married Miss Louise Leilani Lambert in Hawaii. Son Francis Brown Wai, Jr. was born prematurely on January 19, 1943, and died two days later. In May 1943 the 24th Infantry Division deployed to Australia, to train and prepare for General Douglas MacArthur's island-hopping campaign to return to the Philippine Islands. On January 31, 1944, the Division moved to Goodenough Island to prepare for *Operation Reckless*, the amphibious landing at Hollandia in Netherlands New Guinea. While preparing for their first major combat action, Wai received exciting news from home; Louise was pregnant.

D-Day was April 4, 1944, and heavy fighting followed until Hollandia was secured on June 6, 1944. Wai and the 34th Infantry Regiment missed that action; however, the 34th Infantry Regiment was sent to Biak to reinforce the 41st Infantry Division there. After those actions the 24th Infantry Division pulled back to prepare for their next campaign, the long anticipated return to the Philippine Islands. In August Wai received more news from home; on August 2, 1944, Louise gave birth to a healthy baby boy. They named him Daniel Kanuha Wai.

On October 20, 1944, the 24th Infantry Division was paired with the 1st Cavalry Division when they made the landing at Leyte. The invasion met with only light resistance, and within an hour of landing, units in most sectors secured beachheads deep enough to land heavy vehicles and large amounts of supplies. At Red Beach however, where General Douglas MacArthur planned to make his triumphant return, the enemy was dug in and ready for a fight. From gun positions hidden in the palm trees, and surrounded by open rice paddies, the Japanese leveled a devastating fire on wave after wave of landing American soldiers of the 24th Infantry Division. Captain Wai landed with the fifth wave to find the beach littered with wounded and dead American soldiers. Among the dead was the commanding officer of a rifle company of the 3d Battalion. Chaos and death was everywhere among the leaderless and pinned down soldiers. Wai himself was hit and wounded soon after landing. His assignment as a staff officer was to move to the command post in the rear of the fighting, but seeing the young soldiers struggling under fire, dazed and confused, he assumed command and began to reorganize the men.

Captain Wai exposed himself to fire from five Japanese bunkers, forcing them to direct their fire his direction, thus exposing themselves.

Francis B. Wai

Fearlessly leading from the front, he personally destroyed three of them with hand grenades. He moved towards a fourth gun position, drawing their fire so another soldier could knock it out. Then Wai began attacking the fifth, this time taking a full blast of machine gun bullets to the body that killed him.

Thanks to Captain Wai's leadership and heroic actions, his men were able to destroy the fifth gun position and secure the beach. By 1:30 p.m. Red Beach was secure enough for General MacArthur and his staff, along with Philippine president in exile Sergio Osmeña to make their dramatic landing. General MacArthur made his famous statement, *"People of the Philippines, I have returned! By the grace of Almighty God, our forces stand again on Philippine soil."*



Colonel Aubrey Newman, Commanding Officer of the 34th Infantry Regiment recommended Captain Wai for award of the Medal of Honor. Instead, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Francis Wai's body was returned to Hawaii, and he was buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu.



The Army's review in the 1990s of high awards to Black soldiers in World War I and World War II resulted in one World War I Soldier and seven World War II Soldiers seeing their previously awarded Distinguished Crosses upgraded to the Medal of Honor. Only one of the eight men was still living to personally receive it. The Army then conducted a review of high awards to Asian Americans in World War II, that resulted in upgrades of 21 Distinguished Service Crosses and one Silver Star to the Medal of Honor. Of these 22 heroes, 20 awards were to Nisei (first generation Japanese Americans) that served in the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442d Regimental Combat Team, a segregated

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unit. Another was awarded to Rudolph Davila, a Nisei serving with the 3d Infantry Division in Italy. The other was the upgrade of the Distinguished Service Cross to the Medal of Honor for Captain Francis Wai. Wai's widow remarried and died in 1987, and his son Daniel died in 1995. On June 21, 2000, President William J. Clinton presented Francis Wai's posthumous Medal of Honor to his brother Robert Wai, Sr. The family then donated his Medal of Honor to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where it is on display.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Captain (Infantry) Francis B. Wai (ASN: 0-450330), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Headquarters, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, in action against the enemy on 20 October 1944, at Leyte, Philippine Islands. Captain Wai landed at Red Beach, Leyte, in the face of accurate, concentrated enemy fire from gun positions advantageously located in a palm grove bounded by submerged rice paddies. Finding the first four waves of American soldiers leaderless, disorganized, and pinned down on the open beach, he immediately assumed command. Issuing clear and concise orders, and disregarding heavy enemy machine gun and rifle fire, he began to move inland through the rice paddies without cover. The men, inspired by his cool demeanor and heroic example, rose from their positions and followed him. During the advance, Captain Wai repeatedly determined the locations of enemy strong points by deliberately exposing himself to draw their fire. In leading an assault upon the last remaining Japanese pillbox in the area, he was killed by its occupants. Captain Wai's courageous, aggressive leadership inspired the men, even after his death, to advance and destroy the enemy. His intrepid and determined efforts were largely responsible for the rapidity with which the initial beachhead was secured. Captain Wai's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.

Macario Garcia

“AN EPITAPH FOR AN AVERAGE GI”

BY: CARLOS R. GARCIA

My father was a hero. He died in a car accident when I was only 17 years old. As I learned more about his life and met some of his fellow Medal of Honor recipients and witnessed their respect for him, I can only wish we had more time together.

Macario Garcia was born in Castaños Municipality, Coahuila de Zaragoza, Mexico, on January 2, 1920, to Luciana Garcia and Josefa *Martinez* Garcia. Macario was the couple's second son, after older brother Charles; they also had a daughter Junie. Seeking a better life for his growing family, Luciana Garcia and his family of five moved to the United States. While crossing the Mexico border into Texas, daughter Junie died.



The family settled in Waelder, Texas where six more children were born; son Luciano died in infancy. In October 1935 when Macario was fifteen, the family moved to Sugar Land, Texas. Sugar Land is a large agricultural region not far from Houston, dominated by large farms producing sugar, cotton, rice, and pecans. Crops were harvested by convict labor and a large Mexican population that came north to make homes in the *Land of Opportunity*. The immigrant laborers received low pay for hard work in the hot Texas sun, and the Texas Department of Corrections arranged several facilities to house convict harvesters. Neither group held any social standing in the large metropolitan areas around Houston; both groups were considered nearly sub-human but were necessary to the local economy.

Macario as well as his older siblings worked hard in the fields for little remuneration to help support the large but dirt poor family. Macario only attended school through four grades, and then left to work with his family in the fields, as eventually did all of the Garcia children. In Sugarland, Macario worked at the Shuman Ranch.

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Most written accounts note that my father was drafted into the U.S. Army in November 1942. In fact, it was a little more complicated than that. In a confrontation with immigration officials, due his illegal status in the United States, he was given the option to be deported back to Mexico or to enlist in the U.S. Army. Without hesitation he chose the latter; the United States was the only home he knew and he felt he owed his adopted country for giving him and his family the opportunity to find a better life. On November 11, 1942, Veterans Day in the United States, twenty-two year old Mexican national Macario Garcia enlisted in the U.S. Army.

After training, Private Garcia was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. On January 26, 1944, the Division was sent to England to train and prepare for the invasion of German Occupied France. Private Garcia's company landed at *Utah Beach* at Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944. During fighting to break out of the Normandy beachhead, Garcia was wounded when he was hit in the arm by a German bullet. After treatment and recuperation, he returned to his unit, now a recipient of the Purple Heart. In the continued fighting across Northern France, Garcia distinguished himself in combat and earned a Bronze Star.

By November 1944 the 22d Infantry Regiment was fighting near Grosshau, Germany. Although he was still only a private, Garcia was made an acting squad leader in his platoon. Described by the Houston Post in subsequent reports as a "*quiet, slightly-built,*" standing only 5'5" and weighing 147 pounds, on November 27, 1944, he became a giant of U.S. military history.

It was around noon on that day that, as his platoon was advancing they became pinned down by a German machine gun nest. Private Garcia volunteered to try to knock it out, but after crawling for about ten yards he was shot in the shoulder. Ignoring his wound, he continued crawling until he was close enough to throw a grenade into the enemy position, destroying the gun. Then, while painfully making his way back to his comrades, he saw two German ammunition carriers and killed them with his rifle.

When he reached his own lines his platoon leader saw he was severely wounded, and ordered him to the rear to receive treatment from the medics. As he began making his way, another German machine gun opened fire on the platoon. Without waiting for his platoon leader to call for a volunteer to destroy it, Garcia once again began crawling towards the enemy. Pressing his stomach as low to the ground as possible, he

Macario Garcia

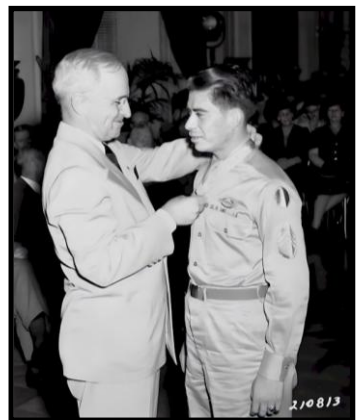
crawled within 20 yards of this emplacement, and upon seeing one of the gunners quickly killed him with his rifle, and then threw a grenade to take out the other gunner.

Suddenly, Garcia was taken under fire from a Terman sniper in a nearby tree. Garcia, who had grown up shooting rabbits to feed his family was a better shot, and the sniper was killed. Upon witnessing all this, four Germans in a nearby position, realizing they were no match for Garcia, dropped their weapons and came out with their hands raised yelling "*kamerad*," the German expression indicating they wanted to surrender. Holding them at gunpoint he returned with his four prisoners to his own lines.

After treatment Garcia again returned to his unit, continuing in action until the war ended on May 8, 1945. Returning home to Sugar Land in August. Staff Sergeant Garcia was summoned to the White House; his company commander, Captain Tony Bizzarro, had nominated Garcia for the Medal of Honor. What made it unique was, that although Garcia was hoping to become an American citizen, at that time he was still a Mexican national. He was the first of two Mexican Nationals to earn the Medal of Honor during World War II. Unlike the other Mexican national, Silvestre Herrera was assigned tutors to gain citizenship before joining Garcia at the White House on the date of presentation. Garcia was still an alien in the only country he had ever known.

Twenty-eight men were scheduled to receive their Country's highest honor from President Harry S Truman at the White House on September 10, 1945. They included three Texans, Garcia, Herrera, and Eli Whitney. Even the nation's capital, things were different for Garcia. Though most of the invited heroes received good housing while waiting for President Truman to return from a trip abroad, Garcia slept with the cooks at the War College.

When President Truman hung the Medal of Honor around Staff Sergeant Macario's neck, the young Infantryman from Sugar Land, Texas, became the first foreign national (with the exception of five Unknown Soldiers of World War I), to receive the Medal of Honor.



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The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant [then Private] Macario Garcia, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty. While an acting squad leader of Company B, 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, on 27 November 1944, near Grosshau, Germany, Staff Sergeant Garcia's single-handedly assaulted two enemy machinegun emplacements. Attacking prepared positions on a wooded hill, which could be approached only through meager cover, his company was pinned down by intense machinegun fire and subjected to a concentrated artillery and mortar barrage. Although painfully wounded, he refused to be evacuated and on his own initiative crawled forward alone until he reached a position near an enemy emplacement. Hurling grenades, he boldly assaulted the position, destroyed the gun, and with his rifle killed three of the enemy who attempted to escape. When he rejoined his company, a second machinegun opened fire and again the intrepid soldier went forward, utterly disregarding his own safety. He stormed the position and destroyed the gun, killed three more Germans, and captured four prisoners. He fought on with his unit until the objective was taken and only then did he permit himself to be removed for medical care. Staff Sergeant Garcia's conspicuous heroism, his inspiring, courageous conduct, and his complete disregard for his personal safety wiped out two enemy emplacements and enabled his company to advance and secure its objective.



When Garcia returned to Sugar Land, it was to a warm hero's welcome; he was praised and honored by city leaders and local citizens. News reports would frequently refer to his *"quiet, shy, and mild-mannered"* manner. At one event in Houston in December, one admirer offered Garcia a cigarette. Looking nervously around the room, he declined saying, *"Pop's watching, and he'd whip me when we got home."*



Macario Garcia

That humble, self-deprecating nature was in contrast to how he would be portrayed two weeks after returning to Texas from the White House. Assigned duty at a nearby former German POW camp at Rosenberg Texas, on September 10, 1945, Garcia and Pedro Ramirez, a fellow soldier, were in Richmond, Texas, when they saw the Oasis Café. Macario told Pedro he was going to go inside and get something to eat, and Pedro advised him that because of his Mexican heritage, the café would not serve him. Garcia entered anyway and ordered a cup of coffee. *"Although I was wearing the uniform of the United States Army,"* he recalled, *"they told me Mexicans were not served there."*

Although accounts of what happened next were disputed by both sides, the end result was a broken front window and a tussle in which the mild-mannered Garcia was hit in the back of the head with a baseball bat. Pedro later affirmed that both of them were in uniform, were not drunk, and there were no ladies with them. Despite this the owner, Mrs. Donna Lower Andrews, called authorities and the two soldiers were detained until their commanding officer arrived to take them into custody. Mrs. Anderson pressed charges and the incident made national headlines after prominent newsman Walter Winchell reported it. It became known as the *"Macario Garcia Incident,"* and was the catalyst to the civil rights issue for Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas.

My father didn't like the publicity the incident garnered. Once while visiting with another Mexican lady, she told him, *"Don't run from it. You are our 'Rosa' Parks."* Indeed, there was a problem with racial prejudice in many Texas towns, and Garcia remained involved in subsequent civil rights advocacy. Although court hearings were scheduled and rescheduled for two years, no charges were ever filed against Garcia and eventually it was dropped. On February 17, 1946, Bruno Garcia, another Mexican American veteran, was refused service at the Oasis Café. In the incident that followed he was charged with disturbing the peace and fined \$132.

In 1949 the *"Longoria Incident"* in Three Rivers, Texas, called to mind the *"Macario Garcia Incident."* Felix Zepeda Longoria was a Mexican American, born, raised, and entered military service in Three Rivers. He was shot and killed by a sniper during fighting at Luzon, Philippine Islands, and was initially buried overseas. In 1949 his



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body was returned to Three Rivers for burial. Longoria's widow, Beatrice, approached the only mortuary to arrange a wake for her husband. Funeral home director Tom Kennedy declined to schedule such because Longoria *"was a Mexican"* and *"the Whites would not like it."* This too, became a national news story. When he heard the news, Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, who little more than a decade later as president signed the Civil Rights Act, immediately intervened and arrange for Longoria to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

In addition to the U.S. Medal of Honor, the President of Mexico awarded Garcia the Mérito Militar, it's high military award. It is believed that Garcia and Silvestre Herrera are the only Medal of Honor recipients to receive both. Garcia became an American citizen on June 25, 1947, and earned a high school diploma in 1951. On May 18, 1952, he married Miss Alicia Reyes, my mother, and I was blessed with two siblings, brother Rene Gustavo and sister Maria Theresa. For the next twenty-five years my father worked as a counselor for the Veterans Administration while serving in the Army Reserves achieving command master sergeant rank.

On November 21, 1963, President John F. Kennedy came to Texas, and that evening my father greeted him at the Rice Ballroom in Houston. Speaking in fluent Spanish, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy shared words of encouragement and inspiration to the audience there, which included a number of Hispanic military veterans, Civil Rights leaders, and future political activists. During a parade through Dallas, Texas, the following day, President Kennedy was assassinated.

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1972, my father died of injuries he sustained in an automobile accident while driving home on U.S. 59 in Sugar Land. He was buried with military honors at Houston National Cemetery in Houston, Texas.



After his death, in an article titled *"An Epitaph for 'An Average GI'"* the *Houston Chronicle* wrote: *"Little did Macario Garcia reckon on being a hero when he quit his job in a cottonfield near Lubbock in 1942 and became a U.S. soldier, even though he was not a citizen. He was scared, he said, and remained so even while winning the nation's highest award for valor – the Congressional Medal of Honor. He always said he was just an average GI, but his military history belies that."*

Kathleen Dial & Mary L. Hawkins

WORLD WAR II NURSE CORPS HEROES

BY C. DOUGLAS STERNER

The Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) is the sixth highest military award, ranking in precedence below the Legion of Merit. Established in 1926, it is awarded for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight during war or in peacetime. Nearly 200,000 DFCs have been awarded in history. Among these was civilian aviator Amelia Earhart Putnam, the first of twenty-eight women to date to receive the award. Numbered among those others are several heroic flight nurses.



FLIGHT NURSES IN WORLD WAR II

While women have served as nurses during every war in our nation's history, prior to 1901 they served in civilian capacities. In 1901 the Army Nurse Corps was established as a part of the Army Medical Department, and, in fact, the first two decorated heroes to earn the Army's Distinguished Service Cross when it was established in 1917, were both nurses serving in France. Their awards were for actions at a front-line hospital on August 17, 1917, six months before American troops began combat operations.

The Nurse Corps' role expanded during World War II when, in November 1942, the War Department directed the training of flight surgeons, flight nurses, and enlisted personnel for evacuation duty aboard troop and cargo carriers. Flight Nurses were assigned to evacuation aircraft used to transport seriously wounded combat soldiers to



hospitals. This required special training beyond their prior medical training in triage and care, such as monitoring the effects of high altitude on their patients. They were also trained in crash procedures and survival.

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Every Flight Nurse was a volunteer for what was essentially combat duty. Since the evacuation aircraft served dual duty, often transporting supplies and ammunition back to the battlefield after delivering the wounded, they could not be marked with a red cross denoting them as medical flights. This made them subject to attack by enemy aircraft and ground fire, increasing the danger of Flight Nurse duty.



The first class of Army Flight Nurses graduated at Bowman Field in Louisville, Kentucky, and received their distinctive wings with a large “N” in the center. They were commissioned officers, and were unusual in the military at the time as they outranked the male surgical technician that accompanied them on these *mercy flights*. Each U.S. Army Air Force squadron was assigned an evacuation aircraft which, in addition to the pilot and flight staff, cared for the wounded en route to a military hospital.

Evacuation aircraft could be loaded and airborne from the battlefield in fewer than ten minutes. While the wounded were being carried aboard, a flight surgeon briefed the nurse on the condition of each patient.

KATHLEEN DIAL

Kathleen Dial was born on March 31, 1914, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to Julian Sidney Dial and Mamie Estelle *Hall* Dial. She was the eldest of the couple’s four children. Her father was a government employee at the Wilson Dam and she grew up in Florence. She attended the old Normal School, (later State Teacher’s College), when she was in the ninth and tenth grades, and then transferred to Coffee High School where she graduated with honors in 1931. While working in the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C., she joined the U.S. Army Nurse Corps and was subsequently trained as a Flight Nurse.



Kathleen Dial was in the first squadron of Flight Nurses sent to the Southwest Pacific. She later said that at first flight nurses “*weren’t allowed in the combat zone. But now, we go out with the second assault wave. We have been everywhere our troops have landed. We take out*

Kathleen Dial & Mary Hawkins

everything that has to be evacuated. We take Army, Navy, Marines, and even wounded Japanese prisoners if they are too seriously injured to wait for slower transportation."

On her first combat flight, her pilot was First Lieutenant Henry G. Coile of Mississippi, who had connections to Florence, Alabama. The two flew together occasionally, and became friends; then they became more than friends. Kathleen and Henry were married in Australia on April 16, 1944. Both continued to fly missions, not always together. Flight Nurses were moved around among evacuation aircraft crews as needed.



By June 10, 1944, Lieutenant Dial had been in the Southwest Pacific for 17 months and flown 150 air evacuations. During the mission on that day, her pilot took off from Australia and flew to pick up 18 wounded men in New Guinea. While flying back to base, the pilot lost his bearings.

The aircraft floundered and the pilot warned that a crash landing was imminent; he found a small area where he thought he could make a controlled crash landing at Fisherman's Island near Port Moresby. He encouraged Lieutenant Dial to move to a safer area of the aircraft but she declined, preferring to remain in the hold with her 18 litter patients.

When the aircraft crashed hard to the ground, Dial was thrown out the door. She could have been spared, however, she had assumed a vulnerable position near the door before the crash in order to hold down a litter containing a wounded man. Dial was the only person injured in the crash, *"although in partial coma she directed the loading of the crash boats and then collapsed."* For her actions Lieutenant Dial was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



Synopsis: The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Lieutenant (Nurse Corps) Kathleen R. Dial, United States Army Air

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Forces, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight while serving as a Flight Nurse with the FIFTH Air Force, in the Southwest Pacific on 10 June 1944. Lieutenant Dial broke her hip, dislocated her shoulder, and suffered a concussion, when her aircraft crashed onto a New Guinea beach. Despite the injuries she directed the off-loading of patients until she collapsed. Her outstanding courage and dedication to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Army Air Forces.

As a result of the crash, Lieutenant Dial's right shoulder was fractured and in a cast, her hip was dislocated, she was badly scarred from a head wound, and suffered a concussion. Doctors ordered her evacuation back to the United States, estimating she would have six to eight months for recovery, with the prospect that she might have to struggle with a stiff arm and damaged eyesight for the rest of her life.

After arriving in California, she was sent to Hamilton Field Hospital for treatment, and then was transferred to Foster General Hospital in Mississippi, where her sister First Lieutenant Evelyn Dial was on duty as an Army Nurse.

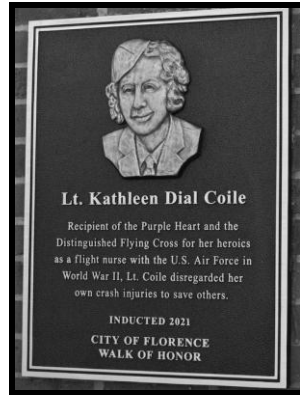
By February 1945, Dial's husband Henry Coile, returned home, and in a ceremony at Foster General Hospital, Colonel Edmund Horgan presented Lieutenant Coile with a Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal. Then he also presented the Air Medal to Kathleen Dial Coile who was standing next to her husband. It was awarded for "*operational flight missions from December 7, 1943, to June 1, 1944.*" It may have been the only time in history that a husband and wife were decorated together for service in combat.

Facing a medical discharge, Dial began preparing for extensive work with the USO. In 1947 she gave birth to the couple's son, who died at birth. Two years later a daughter was born, and died the day after her birth. Henry stayed in the Air Force and retired after



Kathleen Dial & Mary Hawkins

22 years of service. In 1975 she and Henry separated while living in Mississippi, and Kathleen returned to Alabama. She died in Florence on January 6, 2002, and was buried at Greenview Memorial Gardens in Florence. She is memorialized by a bronze plaque in the City of Florence Walk of Honor.



MARY L. HAWKINS

Thomas M. Hawkins was a U.S. Army technical sergeant who was stationed in Denver, Colorado, when Mary Louise Hawkins was born. She was the third daughter of Thomas and Mary France Hawkins since their marriage in 1917. Although their youngest daughter spent most of her early life in California, her first breaths were filled with Colorado's high mountain air when she was born at Fitzsimons Army Hospital on May 24, 1921.



By age three Mary Louise was a world traveler, the family having lived for a time in the Philippine Islands when her father's military duties took him there. After a brief tenure in the Philippines, the family returned to Colorado in 1924. Two years later when Mary Louise was five years old her mother died and was buried at Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. Thomas married Hallie Virginia McNeill, and the family moved to California where he went to work in the Veterans Facilities Hospital.

Mary Hawkins graduated from Sequoia Union High School in Redwood City in 1939, and in 1942 graduated from Highland School of Nursing in Oakland, California. During this period, she was a member of the Visiting Nurses Association in San Francisco. After entering military

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service in the Army Nurse Corps, she was commissioned a second lieutenant in January 1943, and posted to duty in Walla Walla, Washington. While serving there her stepmother died.

After serving briefly in Walla Walla, in 1943 Second Lieutenant Mary Hawkins was deployed to the combat zones of the Pacific Theater of Operations with the U.S. Army Air Forces' Air Transport Command. Over the next thirteen months she flew multiple missions and was responsible for saving the lives of countless wounded men, earning the Air Medal for her professional and valiant service.

On September 26, 1944, her C-47 evacuation aircraft landed at a makeshift airfield at Los Negros in the Admiralty Group to recover the men badly wounded from the fierce fighting in the Palau Islands. As the flight surgeon quickly briefed her on the condition of her patients and the nature of their wounds, twenty-four seriously wounded Marines were loaded aboard. The C-47 lifted off to transport the badly wounded Marines to the hospital at Guadalcanal.

En route on the long-distance flight, the C-47 became lost – the compass had been erratic since they had left Los Negros -- and then went out completely. A turbulent weather front began to buffet the plane, forcing it to burn more fuel, and the auxiliary tanks were close to empty. The pilot, realizing he could not reach Guadalcanal, saw a small clearing in the mostly mountainous and small (only 6.6 square miles) island of Bellonia. The engines were sputtering as the last fuel was consumed. Lieutenant Hawkins told the patients to brace themselves. Gliding low over the jungle, treetops cut the airplane's speed and the pilot maneuvered to fit it into the small clearing.

The C-47 landed hard, sustaining severe damage. One of the propellers was wrenched loose and tore through the fuselage of the aircraft, lacerating several patients and severing the trachea of one of the wounded Marines Lieutenant Hawkins was caring for.

With the help of her surgical technician, Technical Sergeant Ernest W. Miller of Newport, Oregon, and one of the patients who was mobile, she quickly worked to restore order inside the now-bloody cargo hold. The wounded were evacuated and the Marine whose windpipe was nearly severed was carried to the edge of the foreboding jungle and laid beneath a tree. Using blankets, Lieutenant Hawkins positioned him to minimize shock and to protect him from the elements. She administered drugs for pain.



Kathleen Dial & Mary Hawkins

The Marine's airway was severely damaged and the immediate need was to find a way to keep it open and find a way to insert a suction tube to keep the man's throat clear until more sophisticated help became available. Lacking any kind of surgical tools, Lieutenant Hawkins took one of the *Mae West* life preservers the aircraft carried, and cut the inflation tube on the collar. With the help of Technical Sergeant Miller, she used that tube to perform an emergency tracheotomy, shoving it down the dying Marine's throat. Amazingly, it bought her needed time. Then, while Miller held the man's tongue, Lieutenant Hawkins inserted a rectal tube attached to an asepto syringe to begin sucking the blood from his lungs.



As friendly natives began to converge on the clearing, their curiosity made them more of a nuisance than a help. Miller transferred the Marine back to the interior of the aircraft to get him out of the elements and give him some privacy. She then turned her attention to patching up the multiple cuts, scrapes, and lacerations of the other wounded. Eventually the air crew and the patients were moved to the nearby native village, and learning that one of the wounded had a rudimentary understanding of their language, Miller put him in the chief's hut to be her liaison.

The C-47's radio operator was able to reach Guadalcanal before his radio died, and a flight of badly needed blood plasma was promised within a few hours. Sadly, it never arrived – the supply aircraft was forced by the weather and impending darkness to turn back. Meanwhile, one of the wounded men, who was a Navy Corpsman, radioed his Naval comrades at Guadalcanal, and although they were not able to immediately send the needed plasma, a rescue effort was mounted.

That night the survivors ate dinner with the natives – broiled green bananas which were not kind to the palate. One of the wounded began to succumb to shock and another was struck with malaria fever; Hawkins and Miller maintained their vigil through the night. During those dark and tenuous hours, a radio message was received that a Navy destroyer would arrive early the next day, thirteen hours after the crash landing. In the darkness the pilot, co-pilot, and three of the stronger patients made their way through the wild Solomons Island's jungle to the beach where in the early dawn, they could see a U.S. Navy destroyer five miles off shore.

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A short time later, small boats from the destroyer came ashore bringing plasma, drugs, and skilled medical professionals. Led back to the village, they continued their treatment of the wounded until they could be evacuated to Guadalcanal.

There were twenty-four wounded but living Marines when the C-47 was loaded the previous day. When they came out of the jungle and arrived at the hospital there were still twenty-four living Marines, thanks not only to the skill and courage of Lieutenant Hawkins and Technical Sergeant Miller, but also due to the incredible ingenuity of the woman who found a way to do what needed to be done. Her makeshift surgery kept one gravely injured Marine alive for nineteen hours.

The *Honolulu Advertiser* later reported, “(Lieutenant Hawkins) took care of all the wounded and saved one man’s life, and swam her way out to a Navy vessel when the little boat in which she was transferring the last batch of casualties collapsed – ‘Its all in a day’s work,’ Lieutenant Hawkins says.”

Hawkins was promoted to First Lieutenant shortly after her heroic mission in September 1944, and logged more than 600 hours of flight time in the Pacific during the war. On July 7, 1945, at Headquarters Pacific Division Army Transport Command at Oahu, Hawaii, both Hawkins and Technical Sergeant Miller were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to First Lieutenant (Nurse Corps), [then Second Lieutenant] Mary Louise Hawkins (ASN: N-737974), United States Army, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight while serving with the Air Transportation Command as Flight Nurse in charge of patients of a crashed evacuation airplane on Bellona Island, Solomons Group, on 26 September 1944. First Lieutenant Hawkins displayed unusual courage in rendering prompt and efficient first-aid treatment to an injured passenger immediately after the accident. Examination of the patients extricated with her from the wreckage disclosed that a wounded Marine Corps

enlisted man had suffered throat injuries in the crash and was threatened with death by asphyxiation. Although badly shaken by the crash, First Lieutenant Hawkins performed an emergency operation, enabling the patient to breathe and thereby saving his life. First Lieutenant Hawkins' immediate performance of technically difficult acts despite the stress incident to the crash landing of the airplane is an example of steadfast courage which reflects great credit on herself and the Army Nurse Corps.

After the war and her honorable discharge, Mary Hawkins returned to California where she continued her education, earning her master's degree from the University of California Berkeley in 1953. While working as a nurse in Saudi Arabia in 1959, she met William Michael Lambert, and the following year the two were married in Zurich, Switzerland. They returned to the United States briefly, living in New York and Texas while Mary served on the faculty of Texas Women's University. In 1966 they left again, living in various parts of Africa and the Middle East before returning home in 1976. Mary resumed her nursing career until 1988 when the couple moved to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where they resided until her death on July 9, 2007, at the age of 86.



FOOTNOTE:

In all, about 500 Army nurses served as members of thirty-one medical air evacuation transport squadrons operating worldwide. It is a tribute to their skill that of the 1,176,048 patients air evacuated throughout the war, only 46 died en route. Seventeen flight nurses lost their lives during the war. The World War II Flight Nurses are memorialized at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Among numerous displays is a large marker for the WWII Flight Nurses.



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Below are the names of all women who have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in history.

War	Name	Branch	MOS		Date of Action
1918-1942	Earhart Putnam, Amelia	Civ	Pilot		May 20, 1932'
WWII	Dial, Kathleen R.	USAAF	Nurse		Jun. 10, 1944
WWII	Hawkins, Mary Louise	USA	Nurse		Sep. 24, 1944
WW II	Lutz, Aleda E.	USA	Nurse		World War II
WWII	Schilbach, Roberta	USA	Nurse		World War II
1945-1950	Cochran, Jacqueline	USAF	Pilot	1st	1947 - 1951
Korea	Bonham, Jonita Ruth	USAF	Nurse		Jul-Sep, 1950
RVN	Cochran, Jacqueline	USAF	Pilot	2d	Apr. 1962
RVN	Cochran, Jacqueline	USAF	Pilot	3d	May-Jun. 1964
Gulf	Cornum, Rhonda S.	USA	Doctor		Feb. 27, 1991
1975-2001	McFetridge, Patricia A.	USCG	Pilot		Sep. 22, 1990
1975-2001	Collins, Eileen Marie	USAF	Pilot		Jul. 23-27, 1999
GWOT	Stires, Sara A.	USN	Pilot		Nov. 9, 2001
GWOT	Kniep, Andra V. P.	USAF	Pilot	1st	Mar. 5, 2002
GWOT	Kniep, Andra V. P.	USAF	Pilot	2d	Mar. 6, 2002
GWOT	May, Melissa J.	USAF	Pilot		Mar. 24, 2003
GWOT	Hill, Lori	USA	Pilot		Mar. 21, 2006
GWOT	Hegar, Mary J.	USAF	Pilot		Jul. 29, 2009
GWOT	Bringloe, Julia A.	USA	Medic		Jun. 25-27, 2011
GWOT	Heisler, Lindsay G.	USA	Pilot		Dec. 5, 2015
GWOT	Heiser, Kimberly	USAF	Crew		Aug. 22, 2021
GWOT	Green, Leslie	USAF	Pilot		Aug. 23, 2021
GWOT	McFarland, Rhea	USAF	Pilot		Aug. 23, 2021
GWOT	Orellana, Katherine R	USAF	Crew		Aug 23, 2021
GWOT	Schmidt, Leah	USAF	Crew		Aug. 23, 2021
GWOT	Katelyn E. Dunahoe	USAF	Pilot		Aug. 25, 2021
GWOT	Deniece A. Lobban	USAF	Crew		Aug. 25, 2021
GWOT	Courtney Smith	USAF	Crew		Aug. 25, 2021
GWOT	Lunning, Katie	USAF	Nurse		Aug. 26, 2021
GWOT	Eddins, Claire	USAF	Pilot		Apr. 13/14, 2025
GWOT	Nava, Carla	USAF	Pilot		Apr. 13/14, 2025

Phillip Y. H. Joe*
“LITTLE JOE” – BIG HERO
BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Phillip (Philip) Young Ho Joe was born in Wenatchee, Washington on May 8, 1923. His parents, Y. H. Joe and Sung K. Joe were both immigrants from Korea. They had a son Janes and daughter Sung K. who were older than Phillip. Younger sisters Ruby and Ruth, and younger brother Henry, later joined the family.

When he was six years old Joe was sent to Korea to live with his grandparents. It was a time of Japanese aggression towards Korea, and young Joe developed an intense hatred of the Japanese. While he was gone his father, a truck farmer, moved with the family to Butte, Montana. Joe returned to his parents' home when he was twelve years old. The family lived in the Korean community at Nine Mile, where Joe attended Hawthorne and Whittier schools. His parents separated; his mother moved to New York and remarried. His father moved to nearby Ramsey, Montana.

Behind in his education, Joe was in his late teens when he began studies at Butte High School, attending only one year. In March 1942 he enlisted in the Army in Butte, listing Ramsey as his home address. It was his hope to go to the Pacific to fight Japanese, but the Army had other plans. He was trained as an infantryman, and then assigned to the 5th Armored Division's 15th Armored Infantry Battalion.

In September 1943 he made news when his picture was printed in *The Missoulian* and other national newspapers with the caption: “*Sampling*”



* Reprinted from: True Stories of Montana Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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tomato in Webster, New York, cannery where U.S. soldiers are relieving labor shortage is Sergeant Philip Joe, who had good reason for wanting to beat the Japs— He's of Korean Ancestry." Joe, who stood only 5'2" and weighted only about 120 pounds, was the smallest man in his company but, despite his shyness, he had a big heart and a lot of motivation. In less than two years he had advanced from private to sergeant. The men of his unit called him "*Little Joe*."

Joe landed with his division at *Utah Beach* in Normandy, France, on July 24, 1944. The Division went into combat on August 2, driving through several French cities to capture the city of LeMans on August 8. Then the Division turned north, and despite being surrounded by the Germans in Normandy, liberated LeMele-Sur-Sarthe on August 11 and then Argentan only eight days before the Argentan-Falaise Gap was closed. They advanced more than 80 miles to the Eure River Line, clearing the corridor. They passed through Paris on August 30 to spearhead the V Corps drive through the Compeigne Forest, and across the Oise Aisne and Somme Rivers, reaching Belgium in September.

They then turned north, advancing 100 miles in only eight hours to cross the Meuse River, liberating Luxembourg City on September 10 after bitter fighting. Four days later the Division penetrated the Siegfried line at Wallendorf, defending it until September 20. The Division entered the Hurtgen Forest in late November, pushing the Germans back to the banks of the Roer River.

Joe considered himself a lucky soldier. During the advance in the Hurtgen Forest in December, the intrepid technical sergeant, now a platoon leader, was lying prone next to two companions. A mortar shell hit and killed the man furthest away from Joe, as well as the soldier lying next to him, but Sergeant Joe found himself surprisingly without a scratch.

A few days later while advancing amid the hail of 20-mm. German AA shells, shrapnel struck Joe in the arm and lodged in the wooden butt of his rifle strapped across his chest as he advanced. There was enough shrapnel in the wooden butt to cause serious wounds, and Joe was awarded the Purple Heart.

A few days later his unit was advancing with tanks and halftracks on the city of Munchen-Gladbach against a withering barrage of 88 and 20-mm. artillery, when they were forced to a halt. Technical Sergeant Joe determined that the enemy fire was being directed from a house 100 yards away, and with one of his squad leaders moved up to the building. While

Phillip Y. H. Joe

his squad leader provided covering fire, Joe knocked the door open, threw in a few grenades, and then entered the house. He caught the Germans holed up in the basement and they quickly surrendered— all FORTY of them. He also captured three enemy radio transmitters and several phones. He later recalled his amusement at the German's reaction. *"They were not only surprised to be captured by a small fellow, but they were skeptical when he told them he was a little Korean – an American Korean from Butte, Montana, U.S.A."*

With the German observation post captured, the artillery fire stopped, and the Division was able to continue its advance and attack on an important German city. For his heroic actions, Technical Sergeant Joe was awarded the Silver Star.



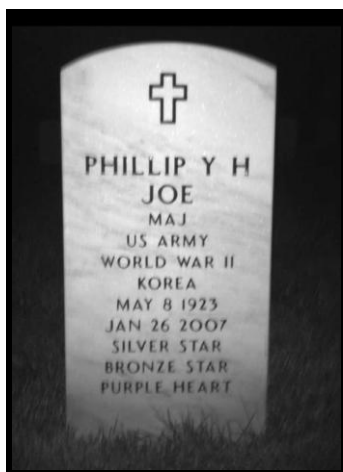
The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Technical Sergeant Philip Y. H. Joe, United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving as a Platoon Sergeant with a company of the 15th Armored Infantry Battalion, 5th Armored Division, in action against the enemy during the attack on Munchen-Gladbach, in the Hurtgen Forest, in December 1944. Concentrated fire from German 88 and 20 millimeter guns halted the tanks and halftracks as they moved in toward the city. Deciding that the artillery fire was being directed from a house 100 yards away, Technical Sergeant Joe and one of his squad leaders moved up to the building. While his companion provided covering fire, Technical Sergeant Joe entered the house, capturing 40 Germans, and three radio transmitters and several telephones. With the enemy observation post captured, the artillery fire ceased and the Division's forces were able to continue the attack on the strategic city without difficulty. The gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty demonstrated by Technical Sergeant Joe, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.

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Joe served with his division in 1945 when it spearheaded the XIII Corps drive to the Rhine, crossing the river on March 30. After additional battles the Division began to mop up the NINTH Army sector until Germany surrendered.

Fifth Armored Division Major General Holmes E. Dager named Technical Sergeant Joe as one of the 22 most outstanding soldiers of the Fifth Armored Division. He returned home in October 1945 with the select few of the Division named to the “*General’s party*,” those who accompanied the general home when he arrived in New York.

Joe remained in military service, receiving a commission, and retiring as a U.S. Army major. In his post-war years he married a young woman named Joyce; the couple had sons Dean, Daniel, and Michael, and daughter Dale. After retirement he made his home in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he died on January 26, 2007. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

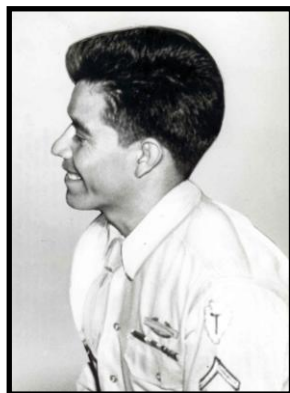


Silvestre Herrera*

A MEXICAN WHO BECAME AN ARIZONA HERO

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Silvestre Herrera was 27 years old, living in a two-room frame shack at 1139 West Sherman Street in Phoenix, Arizona, with his wife and three small children when he received his draft notice in January 1944. His first action upon receiving a summons to service was to walk the short distance to his father's home, to inform him of the development. Upon arrival his father invited Silvestre to the back yard for a private discussion.



As Silvestre looked on in puzzlement, the man who had raised him for most of his life had a stunning pronouncement. *"Silvestre,"* he said, *"although I have raised you as a son for much of your life, I am really your uncle, not your father."* Then, before Silvestre could express his surprise he continued, *"And, Silvestre, you are actually not an American citizen, you are a Mexican national. So, they really can't draft you into military service."*

Silvestre Santana Almanza was born on December 31, 1916, in Carmago, Mexico. His parents died in the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 - 1919, and an uncle who lived in El Paso, Texas, brought Silvestre to the United States where he raised him as his own son until Silvestre was age 10. Then, Silvestre went for a time to live with his maternal aunt in Phoenix. It was there that he assumed his aunt's surname, becoming Silvestre Herrera.

Silvestre moved back to El Paso where he worked as a farm hand as he became an adult. In 1939 he married Ramona Cota Hidalgo, a native of Phoenix. By the time Silvestre received his draft notice in 1944, he and his family, along with the uncle he thought was his father, moved back to Phoenix. Ramona was pregnant with the couple's fourth child.

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Upon learning the truth of his nationality, Herrera took two life-changing steps before the end of the month of January 1944. First, he enlisted in the Texas National Guard's 36th Infantry Division that had been fighting in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations since landing in North Africa on April 13, 1943. He explained his decision, despite the deferment his status as a Mexican National allowed by noting, *"I thought, I'm going anyway. I didn't want anybody to die in my place . . . I*



Silvestre's children in 1945
photo: Elva (age 3), Maria
(age 6), and Silvestre (age 5)

felt that I had my adopted country that had been so nice to me. I thought, I have an America wife and the kids and one on the way. So, I'm going to war to help my country."

Silvestre's second step was to immediately begin studying to take the test to receive his American citizenship. Throughout his training, and even when subsequently deployed to combat, when he had spare time, he studied the material necessary to obtain his citizenship.

After training, Private First Class Herrera was assigned to Company E, 2d Battalion, 142d Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, and joined his company in Italy in the summer of 1944. Soon after his arrival, on August 15, 1944, the 36th Infantry Division landed in southern France during Operation *Dragoon* following the *Normandy Invasion* the previous June in Northern France. Thereafter the Division that had written history in Italy, began fighting a whole new war in France. By March 1945 they had advanced to far northeastern France and were engaged at Merzwiller, near the German border.

On March 15, 1945, Herrera's platoon was moving down the road when they came under heavy fire from a wooded area, halting the advance as the American soldiers dove for cover in the ditches. While others raced for cover, Private First Class Herrera single-handedly began running towards the enemy positions, firing from the hip and throwing grenades. So fierce was his assault that the eight Germans manning the position surrendered to him. He marched his prisoners back to his platoon, and they were then sent back to Company E headquarters for processing and delivering to an American prisoner of war camp.

Silvestre Herrera

The threat neutralized, Herrera's platoon resumed their advance down the road, but before they progressed much further, they again came under fire. This time it was coming from an enemy machinegun well protected by a frontal mine field. While his comrades began throwing rocks into the minefield to try and explode the mines, Private First Class Herrera once again advanced on the enemy position. After crawling through much of the minefield, he stood and once again charged the enemy, firing his rifle and throwing grenades. Before he reached the enemy position, he stepped on a shoe mine (antipersonnel mine) which blew him up into the air, severing his leg below the knee. He recalled, *"I was protecting my squad with a machine gun. I was trying to draw their fire. I stepped on one (land mine) . . . it blew me up. Then I stepped on another one with the other foot. I was fighting them on my knees."*

Despite the fact that both legs had been cut out from under him, and with the bleeding unchecked, Private First Class Herrera did not quit. As he lay on the ground unable to move further, he raised his rifle and continued to fire on the enemy, occupying their attention while other members of the platoon flanked it and knocked it out. Decades later when asked about his incredible act of valor despite his grievous wounds, Herrera simply said, *"I'm a Mexican-American and we have a tradition. We're supposed to be men, not sissies."*

Once the area was secured, Herrera was rushed to a field aid station, still conscious and in great pain. He told the medical doctor, *"Please try to save my knees."* The doctor was successful in fulfilling that request. While Herrera was being treated in France, on March 23 daughter Josephine, who was born on August 22, 1944, died at age 7 months.

After field surgery in Europe, Silvestre Herrera was sent back to the United States for further treatment and fitting for prosthesis at the Army Amputation Center in Utah. Upon his arrival there, someone suggested that he call his family back in Phoenix to let them know he had survived his wounds and would be coming home soon. Sheepishly, Silvestre admitted that the family was so poor they did not even have a telephone in their two-room shack. Finally, a call was placed to a third party to get a message to Ramona and to his uncle and aunt.

Before his prosthesis were fully prepared, Silvestre was sent home on a 90 day convalescent leave. It was while he was back home that he received a call from Washington, D.C., that he was going to be awarded

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the Medal of Honor. Army tutors were assigned to help Silvestre complete his studies and gain his American citizenship before the President hung his adopted country's highest honor around his neck.

In August Silvestre's uncle and wife Ramona travelled with Silvestre to Washington, D.C., where on August 23, 1945, United States citizen and Arizona hero Silvestre Herrera was wheeled into the White House in a wheelchair. There, President Harry S. Truman placed the Medal of Honor around his neck. At the time, his award was the first and only Medal of Honor awarded to an Arizona serviceman in World War II.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private First Class Silvestre Santana Herrera, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty on 15 March 1945, while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 142d Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, in action at Merzwiller, France. Private First Class Herrera advanced with a platoon along a wooded road until stopped by heavy enemy machinegun fire. As the rest of the unit took cover, he made a one man frontal assault on a strongpoint and captured eight enemy soldiers. When the platoon resumed its advance and was subjected to fire from a second emplacement beyond an extensive minefield, Private Herrera again moved forward, disregarding the danger of exploding mines, to attack the position. He stepped on a mine and had both feet severed but, despite intense pain and unchecked loss of blood, he pinned down the enemy with accurate rifle fire while a friendly squad captured the enemy gun by skirting the minefield and rushing in from the flank. The magnificent courage,



extraordinary heroism, and willing self-sacrifice displayed by Private Herrera resulted in the capture of two enemy strongpoints and the taking of eight prisoners.

The Arizona Republic noted: *“The roar of applause came from 27 other heroes gathered in the East Room of the White House, also to receive the nation’s highest honor, and their 100 relatives, sweethearts, and friends, including Private Herrera’s wife. If the applause was longer or louder than for the rest, none of the other 27 men felt a twinge of envy for the smiling private from Phoenix who earned it at Mertzwiller, France, last March 15.”*

Silvestre returned to Phoenix where he was hailed as a favorite son and hero. *“There was a parade and a series of parties,”* he recalled. *“I stayed home about a month, and then went back to the hospital where I was being treated for my legs.”* By the time Silvestre returned home, the citizens of Phoenix had raised \$14,000 to give Silvester, Ramona, and their growing family of two sons and three daughters. A year after his Medal of Honor presentation, Mexico awarded him the Premier Merito Militar, that country’s equivalent. Silvestre wore both awards with pride, and is one of only two men known to receive both awards.



Herrera was honorably discharged from the Army in 1946, and used the GI Bill to attend trade school, working thereafter for several businesses making saddles, boots, and belts. After retiring in 1978, he continued to work as a retired leatherworker and silversmith out of the garage at his home in Glendale. He was loved by everyone, and invited neighborhood children to make special gifts for their loved ones under his tutelage in his shop.

He was active in community, veterans’ groups, and schools throughout his life. He seldom spoke of his hardships saying, *“I coped with my disability very well. I wasn’t sorry for it. I felt that I didn’t want anybody to be sorry for me. I’ve lived a very happy life.”*

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Silvestre Herrera died on November 26, 2007, at age 90. He was buried at West Resthaven Park Cemetery in Glendale, Arizona, next to Ramona, who died in 1991.



Author's Note:

It was our family's privilege to meet Silvestre Herrera when we brought him to Pueblo, Colorado, as part of a group of recipients who provided school assemblies for each of our city's public and private schools on National Medal of Honor Day, March 25, 1996. Because of his heritage, Silvestre was chosen to do an assembly at one of Pueblo's schools for troubled teens, many of whom were Hispanic. When the military escort introduced Silvestre as Hispanic, one girl in the classroom rudely shouted, "We're not Hispanic, we're Chicanas." Silvestre shrugged off the disrespect, but when the escort mentioned in his introduction that Silvestre had lost both legs in World War II, another student shouted, "Yeah, right. We just watched him walk up the stairs."

Silvestre calmly stepped forward and lifted his pants leg to show his prosthesis, and as a hush fell over the room, he proudly said, "They work pretty good. My wife and I used to go dancing every night until her death." For the next half hour, as he spoke, the students listened with rapt attention and admiration. Silvestre was a hero who broke down many barriers, and that day he became a hero to a room full of troubled teens.

When he returned home, Silvestre asked if he could take our youngest son Douglas back to Arizona with him for a week. Douglas loved the week, and said they spent much of their time watching John Wayne Westerns, Silvestre's favorite pastime. Silvestre also helped Douglas make a beautiful wood clock with turquoise insets, that we still proudly display in our home decades later.

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THE FIRST FIVE - BREAKING BARRIERS IN THE COCKPIT

BY: PETER STONEFIELD



The First Five – Back: Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., George S. Roberts, Mac Ross. Front: Lemuel R. Custis, Charles DeBow

The three Messerschmitt ME-262 *Schwalbe* jet-powered fighters seemed to appear out of nowhere moving faster than many of the American pilots had ever seen an aircraft move before. Faster and more heavily armed than any of the Allied fighters of her day, the ME-262 was a formidable force when first becoming operational with the Luftwaffe in mid-1944. Now, over the skies of Germany on March 24, 1945, they were creating havoc among the formation of American B-17 *Flying Fortress* bombers being escorted by the 332d Fighter Group. Stiff in their cockpits after enduring long hours in the flight out of their Italian base to where they rendezvoused with the bombers for the mission into Germany, the fighter pilots were alert and anxious as they neared the target area near Berlin. Now, fully alert, they prepared to engage the enemy, many having already seen the damage the *Schwalbe*, German for “Swallow” could inflict on a bomber formation. It was the world’s first operational jet fighter.

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Leading the formation of P-51 *Mustang* fighters with their distinctive red tails, Captain Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., instructed his men to drop their auxiliary fuel tanks and engage. Using tactics honed from his previous three years of fighting in the European Theatre, Brown quickly climbed to meet the incoming jets. Closing on each other at a combined speed of over eight-hundred miles per hour, the two aircraft were head-to-head when Brown opened fire at five-hundred meters in short bursts, correcting for the proper deflection. He watched as his bullets hit the ME-262, shredding along its left wing and pouring into the engine. The aircraft burst into flames, forcing the pilot to eject just as it disintegrated.



A few short aerial miles away, Second Lieutenant Charles V. Brantley closed on another German jet fighter. Coming in fast, he began firing and in seconds he blew the German jet fighter into pieces. Almost simultaneously, First Lieutenant Earl R. Lane shot down a third ME-262, catching it at the bottom of its dive. These aerial victories marked the first time that the squadron shot down three ME-262s in a single mission. History had been made, but for these pilots it was just another day of making history. After all, the pilots of the 332nd were members of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, also known as the All-Negro *Tuskegee Airman*.

ROOSEVELT’S “NEW DEAL” FOR BLACK U.S. SERVICEMEN

Formed by the War Department in January 1941, when they announced plans to create a “*Negro pursuit squadron*,” the 99th Pursuit Squadron of the U.S. Army Air Forces traces its roots to a combination of factors including the efforts of advocates of the Black American community, and three major events played out in the Nation’s capital around the beginning of World War II in Europe. The first of these events was the decision by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in December 1938 to create an experimental pilot training program which resulted in Congress passing legislation to authorize the permanent Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) via the Civilian Pilot Training Act of 1939. One of the key provisions of this Act was that the program could not exclude anyone based on race, thus opening the door for Black Americans to become aviators. Many colleges, including six major Black colleges took part in the program.

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The second major event was the 1940 Selective Service and Training Service Act, signed into law by President Roosevelt in September 1940. This legislation became the basis for the first peace-time draft in American history. The law required all American males between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five to register for the draft. More importantly the law contained provisions allowing that *“Any person regardless of race or color...shall be afforded an opportunity to volunteer for induction.”* The law further specified that *“In the selection and training of men under this Act, and in the interpretation and execution of the provision of this Act, there shall be no discrimination against any person on account of race or color.”* This allowed for Black Americans to participate in the defense of their country for the first time.

The third major event was the announcement by the War Department that they would begin development of *“colored personnel”* for service as aviators. This was key since, prior to 1940, any Black American choosing to join the military was typically relegated to a role as an infantryman, cook, officer’s valet, or some type of laborer.

The *“role gap”* between Black and White service members had spurred a nearly two-decade push by the African American community to advocate for greater responsibilities for Black Americans wishing to serve in the military, including those who wished to become pilots. Many prominent civil rights leaders of the era, such as Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), labor union boss Philip Randolph, and Judge William H. Hastie, the first African American to serve as Governor of the United States Virgin Islands and as a Federal Judge, worked tirelessly in this fight. When the President signed the CPT Act in 1939, they moved to obtain the additional funding required to support the training of Black pilots. On April 3, 1939, Congress passed Appropriations Bill Public Law 18 which contained an amendment by Wyoming Democratic Senator Harry H. Schwartz, an advocate of the Black American community, to designate funds to train African American pilots. Although the policy of segregation was still in play in the military and would be throughout World War II, finally the doors were opened and Blacks could become aviators.

The events of 1938 through 1940 became a herald for Black Americans, and they came from all over the country to serve in the military. Although many Blacks had served in the military as either

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conscripts or volunteers leading up to this point, no Black American became an American military pilot, although several had tried and failed to become observers during World War I. At the time, Blacks were thought to be intellectually and physically inferior to Whites, and it was a commonly held belief that they had slower reflexes, which would make them unsuitable for combat roles. Even with these misconceptions, the military relented and in 1940, qualified Black pilot cadets flocked to the aviation schools to get flight training.

Civilian pilot training in the Tuskegee, Alabama, area began in January 1941, and the 99th Pursuit Squadron of the U.S. Army Air Forces was activated on March 22, 1941. As a strange quirk of timing, the 99th was designed as a flying unit even though it initially did not have any pilots. Another item of note was that when it was formed, a unique characteristic of the 99th was that in addition to the pilots being Black Americans, all support personnel; including every mechanic, truck driver, parachute rigger, cook, and dishwasher was also of African descent. As word spread, members of the 99th came from all over America to participate in defending the nation and to become military pilots.

On March 19, 1941, the 99th Pursuit Squadron was officially created at Tuskegee. A few days later, on March 22, the squadron was activated at Chanute Field, Illinois, under the command of Captain Harold R. Maddux, a White officer charged with developing and populating the squadron with Black pilots and enlisted men. Known by many as the *"Tuskegee Military Experiment,"* it was still a fledgling program and under heavy scrutiny by the War Department when First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt toured the 99th's Kennedy Airfield in late March while on a publicity tour in Tuskegee.

The First Lady had been a staunch advocate of eliminating segregation and *"Jim Crow"* laws, and her visit was meant to show her support of Black Americans. During her visit, and to everyone's surprise, the First Lady asked Tuskegee Institute's Black American Chief Flight Instructor C. Alfred *"Chief"* Anderson if she could take a ride. Mrs. Roosevelt got into the back seat of Anderson's plane and he took her for a thirty-minute ride in one of the small trainers at the airfield. Upon their return the First Lady was quite complimentary, and publicly voiced



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her support of the program, giving it a much-needed and highly publicized boost.

The military, still operating under “*Jim Crow*” standards which instituted both formal and informal segregation policies, decided that for the creation of the 99th they would accept only the most skilled and highest educated candidates. The War Department relied heavily on the use of psychological testing as well as other methods to determine the value of each candidate, and although the process was meant to weed out most applicants with its high acceptance standards, the process ended up in having the unanticipated effect of creating a squadron that was an elite group of individuals; perhaps better qualified than many of their all-White squadron counterparts. In essence, the “*Jim Crow*” aspect of the selection process created the best of the best.



The first aviation class to serve in the 99th began their training July 19, 1941, with a mere thirteen cadets. This training covered many of the subjects expected for all pilots including basic meteorology, navigation, and instrument familiarization. Flight training consisted of both ground school and training in military aircraft provided by the Army Air Forces. The Tuskegee Institute in Eastern Alabama furnished the facilities, including housing for the cadets. Upon successfully completing their initial training, the cadets were transferred to Tuskegee Army Air Field to begin Army Air Forces training. Due to their proximity to Tuskegee, Alabama, the men of the 99th became known as the *Tuskegee Airman*. In March 1942, Second Lieutenants Lemuel R. Custis, Charles DeBow, Mac Ross, George Spencer Roberts, and Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., five of the initial thirteen cadets, completed the Army Air Forces training program and earned their silver wings, to become the Nation’s first Black military pilots.

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THE FIRST FIVE “TUSKEGEE AIRMEN”

GEORGE ROBERTS

On June 1, 1942, Lieutenant George S. “Spanky” Roberts became the first commander of the 99th Fighter Squadron. Born September 24, 1918, in Loudon, West Virginia, he was the son of Spencer and Estella Roberts and was raised in nearby Fairmount. After graduating from Dunbar School in 1934, Roberts entered West Virginia State College where he earned a bachelor’s degree in mechanical arts in 1938. A benefactor of the Civilian Pilot Training Program, Roberts earned his pilot’s license in 1940, and was one of thirteen of the original class accepted into the U.S. Army Air Forces’ Tuskegee Aviation Cadet training program after being recommended by officials from the West Virginia State College.



Roberts worked hard while in the program and became one of only five men to graduate and earn their silver wings on March 7, 1942. On the same day he married his sweetheart, Edith Norle McMillan. After a very brief honeymoon, Roberts continued training and on June 1, 1942, he became the first commander of the 99th Fighter Squadron. Roberts was a fair commander and treated his men with respect. He turned over the reins of the squadron on August 22, 1942, to his colleague Benjamin O. Davis, with whom he had earned his wings.



In letters home, Roberts relayed to Edith the harsh conditions in which they lived and worked. Often the Black squadron wasn’t provided with the best equipment or supplies, and they often were forced to make-do with what they had, and improvise. Roberts told her that they were always under scrutiny, and he felt that the Army hierarchy was always looking for ways to take them out of action, simply due to their being Black. Flying bomber escort duty on the daily daylight raids, the men were given strict orders to stay with the bombers at all costs and not go off

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chasing the German aggressors. Too many bomber crews had been lost to the “*glory hunting*” of fighter pilots looking to become ACEs, and the men of the 99th had to have more discipline than their White counterparts.

Major George Roberts racked up an impressive one hundred combat missions before being rotated home. After the war ended he became the senior Army Air Corps Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) instructor at the Tuskegee Institute. The U.S. Armed Forces were integrated in 1948, and subsequently, in 1950 Roberts became the first African American officer to command a racially integrated unit at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. Shortly afterwards, at the onset of the Korean War, Roberts served in the Korean Theatre. He also served a post in Okinawa after that conflict ended. In 1963, Roberts was assigned to Griffiss Air Force Base in New York where he was responsible for all ground radar in the Air Force, and during the Vietnam War he served as deputy for logistics for all fighter aircraft in Vietnam.

Roberts retired with the rank of colonel in 1968 while serving at McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, California. For a time afterwards, he worked in the private sector at Wells Fargo in multiple capacities until finally retiring at the age of sixty-three. Colonel George S. Roberts, Tuskegee Airman and aviation pioneer died March 8, 1984, in Sacramento, California surrounded by his wife Edith and their four children. Roberts was buried with full military honors at Mount Vernon Memorial Park in Fair Oaks, California.



BENJAMIN DAVIS, JR.

On August 22, 1942, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., became commander of the 99th Fighter Squadron, replacing Roberts. Davis was born December 18, 1912, in Washington, D.C., to U.S. Army officer Benjamin Davis, Sr., and Elnora *Dickerson* Davis. Appreciative of his father's military service, young Benjamin was exposed to many military related things, including airplanes. He developed an interest in aviation after attending an exhibition at



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Bolling Field in Washington, D.C. when one of the pilots offered him a ride. Knowing he faced obstacles, Davis was determined to become a pilot. After graduating high school he attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, receiving his appointment from Illinois Representative Oscar De Priest, the only Black congressman at the time. Davis's time at West Point was one of hardship and strain as he was ostracized by his fellow cadets due to his skin color. He was forced to bunk alone and eat his meals isolated from his peers. He was subjected to the silent treatment not only by other cadets but by faculty and staff as well, choosing only to speak to the young cadet on an official basis. The outward racism made him resolute, and he worked hard to be the best at his studies. In 1936 he became only the fourth Black American to graduate from West Point ranking 35th out of his class of 276.

Upon being commissioned as a second lieutenant, Davis became one of only two Black officers in the United States Army; his father was the other one. For the next several years Davis applied and was denied entry to flight training, although later he was assigned to the Tuskegee Institute in 1939 as a Reserve Officers' Training Corps program (ROTC) instructor. In 1941 when the War Department activated the Air Corps Advanced Flying School at Tuskegee, Davis was allowed to join the first class of cadets. One of only five to complete the training, Davis excelled and was the first Black American to solo in an Army Air Forces aircraft. As commander of the 99th and subsequently the 332d, Davis took his men to Africa and then Sicily, leading them in fighting against the Axis powers. Davis flew many successful missions in the P-40 *Warhawk*, P-47 *Thunderbolt*, and the P-51 *Mustang*, and was awarded the Silver Star for his actions and leadership on April 15, 1945, and the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions and leadership on June 9, 1944.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Colonel (Air Corps) Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr. (AFSN: 0-1206/ASN: 0-20146), United States Army Air Forces, for gallantry in action against the enemy while serving as Pilot of a

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Fighter Airplane and as Commanding Officer of the 332d Fighter Group, FIFTEENTH Air Force, in aerial operations over Austria, on 15 April 1945. Colonel Davis led his fighter group in a strafing attack on rail targets which resulted in damage or destruction of 35 locomotives, 52 railroad cars, four barges, and one enemy airplane. The gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty demonstrated by Colonel Davis, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army Air Forces.

On June 21, 1945, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., assumed command of the 477th Bombardment Group, which became the 477th Composite Group when the 99th Fighter Squadron was assigned to it that summer. Initially scheduled to rotate into the Pacific Theatre, this became a non-issue when Japan surrendered in August. In March 1946, the unit relocated to Lockbourne Army Air Base in Ohio and Davis took over the command of the base, and subsequently the entire 332nd Fighter Wing. Davis oversaw the transition of the wing to the new U.S. Air Force while at this post.

After his assignment in Ohio, Davis attended the War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama in 1949 and after graduating was assigned to the Deputy Chief of Staff of Operations for the Air Force. In 1953 he attended advanced jet fighter gunnery school in Nevada before assuming command of the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing in Korea. In 1954 Davis became the first Black American to earn the rank of General in the U.S. Air Force. General Davis served in several other locations with the Air Force before retiring from the military in 1970. After retirement, he served as assistant secretary at the Department of Transportation. In December 1988, the once-ostracized West Point cadet was awarded his fourth star by President Bill Clinton. He was the first African American to receive this honor after their retirement.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., one of the first *Tuskegee Airmen* and their leader throughout World War II, died at the age of 89 of Alzheimer's disease at his home in Washington, D.C., on July 4, 2002. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.



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MAC ROSS

Selma, Alabama, native-son Mac Ross was born June 12, 1912, to Eddie Samuel “Sam” Ross and Willie B. Collins Ross. One of nine children, Mac and his family moved to Dayton, Ohio, when he was around eight years old to escape the dangerous environment around Selma, where a Black American wasn’t safe from racial violence or even random lynchings. Ross completed his high school studies at Roosevelt High School before attending West Virginia State College, where he became interested in and attended the school’s Civilian Pilot Training Program and earned his civilian pilot credentials. Ross obtained a bachelor’s degree in mechanical arts in 1940, two years after previously profiled pilot George Roberts, and shortly afterwards both men were recommended by the college for the U.S. Army Air Corps’ Tuskegee Aviation Cadet training program’s inaugural class at the nearby Tuskegee Army Air Field.



During training at Tuskegee Field, Ross learned to fly several aircraft including the Curtiss P-40 *Warhawk*. While on a training flight in late 1941, Ross’ aircraft caught fire and he was forced to bail out. Fearing he would be kicked out of the program, Ross worked tirelessly with flight instructor Colonel C. I. Williams and the investigation board that ultimately found the fault was mechanical in nature. Ross is the first known Black American aviator to bail out of an aircraft joining the “*Caterpillar Club*,” an organization informally created in 1922 by movie stuntman and parachute inventor Leslie Irvin to recognize people who have successfully bailed out of an airplane using a parachute.

On March 7, 1942, Second Lieutenant Ross joined four colleagues as the first graduates of the Tuskegee program and received his silver wings. A couple of months later, in May 1942, he was promoted to Squadron Commander of the 332nd Fighter Group’s 100th Fighter Squadron. In July 1942, before departing for combat in North Africa, Ross was promoted again and became the 332nd Fight Group Operations Officer. Ross served with the 332nd and flew over fifty combat missions from their bases in Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy. As Operations Officer his combat time was limited, and he spent most of his time as the pilot of the

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Group's Cessna C-78 *Bobcat* light transport aircraft, ferrying materials and personnel throughout the group's operating arc.

In early July 1944, Ross was relieved of his duties as Operations Officer by commanding officer, Benjamin O. Davis, for undisclosed reasons. He was replaced by Lieutenant Alfonso W. Davis, a pilot with more extensive combat but less operations experience. A few days later, on July 10, Ross was flying a check ride in a P-51 near Provincia di Foggia, Puglia, Italy, when the aircraft was observed going into a slow, shallow descent before finally impacting a hillside near the base. Sadly, the official accident report called the crash a suicide, although his commanding officer and colleagues strenuously disagreed. They even went as far as to threaten the investigator unless he changed the report, but the report was finalized without changing the result. Colonel Davis and others argued that a known issue with the P-51, a faulty oxygen system may have resulted in hypoxia, a condition where the pilot's brain is slowly starved of oxygen causing them to black out. Sadly, there wasn't enough of the aircraft left to make a finding either way.

Ross left behind his wife, Abbie Voorhies, a U.S. Army Nurse from Alexandria, Louisiana, whom he met while training at Tuskegee Airfield. The couple had been married for just over one year. Mac Ross, one of the first of the Tuskegee Airmen, was buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial, near Nettuno, Italy. After his death his widow worked tirelessly to keep his memory alive working with different Tuskegee Airmen historical groups and others to honor his memory and his struggle to become an American aviator.

CHARLES DEBOW, JR.

Charles Henry DeBow, Jr. was a native of Indianapolis, Indiana. Born February 13, 1918, the son of Charels, Sr., and Anna Sue *Home* DeBow, he grew up in Indianapolis and attended Crispus Attucks High School, named after a Black American patriot, killed during the 1770 *Boston Massacre*. It seemed only fitting that a high school named after a Black American patriot would school yet another in young Charles.

A born leader, Charles was active in high school excelling as an honor student, Student Council President, and cadet major commanding



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the ROTC program. At his father's urging, DeBow briefly attended Indiana University (IU) after graduating high school with a plan to study medicine. His father, a porter at local establishment, wanted his son to have a life that would ensure security and financial independence during hard times, regardless of his race. However, DeBow wanted more, having caught what he termed "*the flying bug*." After a very brief time at IU he transferred to the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Virginia, a traditional Black college, to study business and, more importantly, to enroll in their new pilot training program.

Short on money and seeing the growing tensions between the United States and the Axis Powers, DeBow was itching to become a military pilot and serve his country. In early 1941, he dropped out of Hampton Institute to pursue a military career in the U.S. Army. On July 19, 1941, DeBow was one of thirteen selected for admission into the U.S. Army Air Corps Tuskegee Aviation Cadet training program's inaugural class. Less than a year later DeBow was one of only five to graduate from the course and earn their silver wings.

Already considered heroes by the Black American community, in March 1942 *Life* magazine published an article highlighting the five new U.S. Air Corps pilots from Tuskegee and for a dime, readers across America could see photos of America's first Black pilots. In the era of segregation and rampant discrimination, it was also surprising that the article included a positive statement from their White instructors that read in part that "*...their Negro charges, by virtue of exceptional eyesight, courage and coordination, will prove crack combat pilots. Upon their performance and promise hang the hope of additional thousands of aspiring Negro fliers throughout the land.*" This was just a taste of the publicity received by the first five after they earned their wings.

If DeBow and the others felt any additional pressure based on the publicity they received they didn't let it show in public. DeBow continued to train with the 99th, and his first military assignment was as an advanced flight instructor at the Tuskegee Institute, training the next classes of airmen. Along with the other four members of that first graduating class, he also took advanced aerial combat classes for both dogfighting tactics as well as ground attack techniques, while they worked to get into the rotation for combat deployment. Together, the new military pilots learned to fly tight formations, and to both lead and follow in a fighter pair as well as larger groups of aircraft. In 1943, when the Tuskegee Airmen were

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finally deployed to North Africa, DeBow flew several combat missions. When they transferred to their base in Italy, he became the first commander of the 301st Fighter Squadron, attached to the 332nd Fighter Group. DeBow flew his North American P-51 *Mustang* on fifty-two combat missions in the European Theatre from, bases in Italy and later in support of Operation *Overlord* on June 6, 1944, over Normandy, France. Shortly after the invasion of Normandy, DeBow was injured during a mission and lost his combat flight status. He was rotated out of the European Theatre and returned to Tuskegee Army Air Field as an instructor, to help train the next generation of Black airmen for combat.

After World War II ended, DeBow stayed in what became the Air Force Reserve, stationed at Atterbury Air Force Base in Columbus, Indiana. He married his sweetheart Aurelia Jane Priscilla Stuart, and the couple had several children including sons Charles. III, William, and Jonathon, and daughters Kay, Emily, LeCheryl, and Myra. While an Air Force reservist, DeBow re-entered civilian life continuing to give back to his community. He mentored and taught Black students as a teacher at the segregated John Hope School in Indianapolis. He went back to school himself during those post-war years, earning master's degrees from both Butler University and Indiana University. In 1955, DeBow was selected to pioneer the new racial integration plan as the only Black educator on the faculty at Thomas Carr Howe High School. At the time he was also teaching night school English classes at his alma mater, Crispus Attucks High School, providing much-needed education to those who couldn't afford to not work during the day.

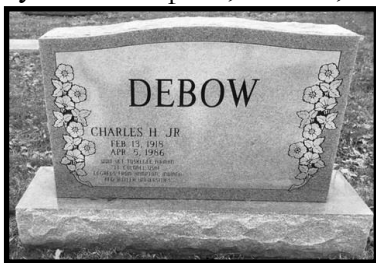
Debow continued his military service as well. When the new U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado, opened its doors to Black applicants in 1959, he became an Admissions Liaison Officer to help recruit and mentor potential candidates. In the 1970's DeBow became an equal opportunity employment specialist for the U.S. Department of Labor, managing a fledgling program for minority youth employment called the "*Neighborhood Youth Corps.*" With this program, youth from poor and under-privileged walks of life were given the opportunity to find suitable jobs that would help them in both the service and trade industries.

Charles DeBow, Jr., retired from the U.S. Air Force as a lieutenant colonel in late 1970's, and spent the rest of his life as an adjunct professor in English at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

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(IUPUI) until his death in 1986. On October 1, 2021, he was inducted into the **Indiana Aviation Hall of Fame**, and his legacy of service and sacrifice was once again celebrated. A further testament to his legacy was that his son, William DeBow, joined the U.S. Navy, became a captain, and served as the Commander of the Port Hueneme Division, **Naval Surface Warfare Center**. It was a position that he could have never held if it wasn't for the efforts of men like his father to break the military color barrier. In addition to that, his daughter Kayanne "*Kay*" DeBow became one of the co-founders of the **National Black Chamber of Commerce**, an organization incorporated in 1993 that is dedicated to the economic empowerment of African American communities.

After his death on April 4, 1986, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Henry DeBow, Jr. was buried at **Calvary Cemetery** in Indianapolis, Indiana, with full military honors. His wife, herself having earned two Masters of Education Degrees from **Indiana University**, spent over thirty years in the **Indianapolis Public School System** as a devoted schoolteacher, was laid by his side upon her death in 2017.



LEMUEL CUSTIS

Before joining the **Tuskegee Airmen** in 1941, Lemuel Custis had already broken racial barriers in another unlikely place, the **Hartford, Connecticut**, police force. There, in 1940 he became the first Black American officer on the city's payroll. He was born on June 4, 1915, the son of former Virginia slave Charles Custis and his wife Mary *Goodwin* Custis. Lemuel Rodney Custis was a product of the **Hartford public school education system** and a 1939 **Howard University** graduate. He returned to Hartford with the hope of securing a job at either the **Aetna Insurance Company** where his father was employed, or one of the other companies in town. Not finding success in the insurance industry, he applied for and became the first Black policeman, serving as a beat officer in some of the poorer, Black sections of town. Feeling he had more to give, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor Custis left Hartford for



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Tuskegee, Alabama, to enlist in the U.S. Army and become a military aviator. In Tuskegee he applied for and was admitted to the Tuskegee Institute Aviation Cadet Training program.

In March of 1942, Custis joined four other Black pilots to be inducted into the U.S. Army Air Forces. Their induction took place in a ceremony on the airstrip at Tuskegee Airfield. Shortly afterwards Custis became the first Operations Officer of the 99th Pursuit Squadron.

Later that month, the U.S. Army formed the 100th Fighter Squadron as part of the 332nd Fighter Group, and the pilots began the process of training for combat operations. In early April 1943, elements of the 99th Fighter Squadron including Custis were sent overseas and were assigned escort and patrol missions out of Tunisia in North Africa. Initially assigned to the Bell P-39 *Airacobra*, with its center-fuselage engine and tricycle landing gear, the squadron switched to the Curtiss P-40 *Warhawk* soon after their arrival. From April 1943 through July 1944, Custis flew missions out of bases in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.



On January 27, 1944, while covering the beach landings at Anzio, Italy, Custis and other members of the 99th came up against fifteen German Focke-Wulf 190 fighters that were dive-bombing Allied ships. Immediately, the sixteen *Warhawks* dove after the superior enemy aircraft and, in the ensuing air battle, the Black aviators reportedly shot down ten aircraft without losing any of their own. Custis received credit for one of the Focke-Wulf fighters downed that day, and nine other members of the 99th Fighter Squadron who also downed enemy aircraft that day were:

Second Lieutenant Clarence W. Allen (0.5 FW-190)

First Lieutenant Willie Ashley Jr. (1 FW-190)

Second Lieutenant Charles P. Bailey (1 FW-190)

First Lieutenant Howard Baugh (1.5 FW-190)

First Lieutenant Robert W. Deiz (1 FW-190)

Second Lieutenant Wilson V. Eagleson (1 FW-190)

First Lieutenant Leon C. Roberts (1 FW-190)

Second Lieutenant Lewis C. Smith (1 FW-190)

First Lieutenant Edward L. Toppins (1 FW-190)

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That day marked a turning point in history, not just for the men with aerial victories on that day, but for all the Tuskegee Airmen. In an interview he gave in April 2000, Custis was quoted as saying that *“After our success at Anzio and Salerno . . . we had an inkling that perhaps we had made a real contribution, and then, of course, as the years went by, and you got older and you had a better perspective of history and so forth, we could realize that we had really done something from a historical standpoint.”*

In total, Custis flew more than ninety combat missions with the Tuskegee Airmen, receiving an Air Medal with oak leaf clusters for his bravery. He was also credited with one confirmed and two probable kills. During his watch, an extremely low number of the bombers he and his fellow Black pilots were charged with escorting were lost to enemy aircraft. In late 1944, Custis returned to Tuskegee where he became one of the first Black flight instructors. There he was instrumental in shaping the lives and careers of the Black American aviators who followed in his, and the other original four Tuskegee Airmen’s, footsteps.

In 1946 Custis was released from active military service with the rank of major, and took a job in state government. In 1980, after nearly thirty years of civil service, he retired as the Chief Examiner, Tax Department, for the State of Connecticut. During his post-war career, Custis also served on the Board of Directors at the New England Air Museum in Washington, D.C., and was active with Tuskegee Airmen Inc., serving as a member of the East Coast Chapter, Washington D.C. In 1995, Custis was one of the consultants for the HBO movie, *“The Tuskegee Airmen,”* and in 2001 his life achievements were recognized by Central Connecticut State University with an Honorary Doctorate of Humanities Degree.

Major Lemuel Rodney Custis passed away February 24, 2005, at the age of eighty-nine, at the Brookview Health Care Center in West Hartford, Connecticut. The last of the *First Five Tuskegee Airmen*, he was buried with full military honors at the Cedar Hill Cemetery in nearby Hartford.





Tuskegee's first five cadets to receive their wings and become official U.S. Army Air Force pilots were in Class 42C-SE. This group of Black pilots completed their pilot training on March 6, 1942, at Tuskegee Army Air Field, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Of the 13 original cadets, five graduated: Charles DeBow Jr., Benjamin O. Davis Jr., George "Spanky" Roberts, Mac Ross, and Lemuel Custis. Picture Courtesy of Palm Springs Air Museum.

GETTING INTO THE FIGHT

While the first class at Tuskegee was finishing its training, the Army Air Forces created the 100th Pursuit Squadron in February 1942, to operate as the second all Black military aviation unit. Along with the 99th, the 100th was redesignated as a Fighter Squadron in May 1942. Both squadrons would later be attached to what became the 332nd Fighter Group, which was officially activated in Tuskegee on October 13, 1942, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Sam W. Westbrook, Jr., a White officer. At the time of its activation, the 332nd was comprised of the 99th, 100th, 301st, and the 302nd Fighter Squadrons. The 332nd unit emblem was a blue shield with a gold band across the middle with a black panther breathing fire.



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As the Tuskegee Airmen continued to develop into a fighting force, elements of the all-White military leadership, still unconvinced of their aptitude, were fighting their deployment. They were denigrated as “*incompetent*” and “*irresponsible*,” and said to be unable to follow simple orders by many of these segregationists, as a way to justify the Army’s continued discriminatory policies. Luckily, Black airmen were still considered essential to the war effort, and in early April 1943, after agonizing months of training and practicing, the 99th Fighter Squadron was finally assigned to deploy overseas.

On April 16 they sailed aboard the steamship *Mariposa* from New York Harbor to Africa. Arriving at Casablanca, French Morocco, on April 24, the squadron was officially attached to the 33rd Fighter Group of the TWELFTH Air Force and began integration into daily operations. Even though they were fully integrated as an operational military unit, the 99th was physically segregated from the White squadrons, and tucked away in a corner of the airfield. It wasn’t until June 2, after being given advanced combat training by the British Royal Air Force and assigned their own Curtiss P-40 *Warhawks*, that the 99th was given its first duty orders to patrol the Mediterranean Sea off Tunisia

The Curtiss P-40 *Warhawk* was a rugged single seat, single-engined fighter, used extensively in all combat theatres in World War II. First flown in 1938, the aircraft featured a single-stage, single-speed supercharged liquid cooled Allison V-1710 engine capable of just over one-thousand horsepower and a cruise speed of just over three hundred mph. Later versions were powered with fourteen-hundred horsepower Packard engines. Although it was not great at climbing, the aircraft was excellent in a dive and had a reputation as an “*ambush*” fighter capable of superior performance when attacking from above. Armed with six M2 Browning machine guns in the wings, and capable of carrying up to one-thousand pounds of bombs on wing and fuselage hardpoints, the P-40C was an effective fighter against early German fighters.



On June 9 the 99th had its first engagement with German fighters. Escorting a flight of Douglas A-20 *Havoc* light bombers over Pantelleria Island, a small land mass situated halfway between Allied-controlled Tunisia and Axis-controlled Sicily, the squadron encountered four

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Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters. Peeling out of the formation, four of the P-40's moved to defend the bombers. The German fighters broke off and fled for home without a shot being fired by either side. Just over a week later another engagement occurred, but this one left Lieutenant Lee Rayford's P-40 with several bullet holes courtesy of the German fighters.

On July 2, while escorting North American B-25 *Mitchell* medium bombers on a raid against Castelvetro Airfield in southwestern Sicily, the 99th scored their first aerial victory. As they cleared the area, the Allied aircraft were challenged by a flight of German Focke-Wulf FW-190 fighters. First Lieutenant Charles B. Hall engaged one of the fighters in a dogfight and, after a short time, he got on the tail of the enemy aircraft and shot it down. During the same engagement, First Lieutenant W. I. Lawson claimed a probable victory over another FW-190 and damaged an Me-109. Sadly, the day of their first aerial victories also saw the 99th losing their first pilots when First Lieutenant Sherman H. White and Second Lieutenant James L. McCullin were lost in combat. Over the next several weeks the 99th continued to support Allied landings against Sicily and their performance earned them their first Distinguished Unit Citation.

After the successful capture of Sicily, the 99th under the command of Colonel Davis relocated from Tunisia to Licata, Sicily, in late July 1943. Subsequently, the group was taken away from Davis and attached to the 33rd Fighter Group under the command of Colonel William W. Momyer, whom they served under while in North Africa. Momyer was not a fan of the Tuskegee group and openly opposed their attachment to his group.

The 99th was subjected to even more overt discrimination by Momyer in September 1943, when he told his superior Major General Edwin J. House commanding XII Air Support Command that, *"It is my opinion that they are not of the fighting caliber of any squadron in this Group. They have failed to display the aggressiveness and desire for combat that are necessary to a first-class fighting organization."*

Factually, Momyer's primary concern about the lack of effectiveness of the 99th in air-to-air roles was directly due to his assigning the all-Black squadron air-to-ground duties, depriving them of the opportunity to develop and hone their air-to-air combat skills. General House added insult to Momyer's report by simply rubber-stamping it and sending it up the chain of command with his own statement reading *"The consensus of*

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opinion seems to be that the Negro type has not proper reflexes to make a first-class fighter pilot."

In days the memo was the talk of Washington, D.C., with proponents of the Tuskegee group adamant that they had not been given proper authorization to perform air-to-air combat roles. A subsequent investigation comparing the 99th's performance against other P-40 squadrons operating in the Mediterranean showed that they had performed as well as every other unit, thus proving Momyer wrong. When confronted with the allegations in late 1943, Colonel Davis refuted them, defending his former command. After a brief time to consider this, the 99th Fighter Squadron was allowed to continue in a combat role, but assigned to different groups whose leadership didn't see them as a liability.

After the successful Allied landings in Italy and subsequent capture of enemy territory, elements of the 99th, now comprised of three fighter squadrons, the 100th, 301st and 302nd, moved to Italy, arriving early in February 1944. They began operations with the TWELFTH Air Force on February 5, continuing to escort convoys, protect harbors, and fly armed reconnaissance missions. The rest of the 99th Fighter Squadron was assigned to the group on May 1, 1944, and arrived on June 6 at the unit's new base at Ramitelli Airfield, a few miles south-southeast of Campomarino, on the Italian coast of the Adriatic Sea.

From their base at Ramitelli, the 332d Fighter Group's primary responsibility was to escort the heavy bombers of the FIFTEENTH Air Force during their strategic bombing raids into Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Germany. Initially the Black airmen were shunned and openly discriminated against by the White pilots, who saw them as inferior. Before too long, however, the 99th developed a reputation for staying with the bombers as opposed to chasing enemy fighters to run up personal scores. During their time at Ramitelli the squadron exchanged their outdated P-40s for the newer and sturdier Republic P-47 *Thunderbolts*, before ultimately switching to the North American P-51 *Mustang* in the late Summer of 1944.

Powered by a 12-cylinder liquid-cooled Packard V-1650-7 *Merlin* engine, the North American P-51 *Mustang* could reach 440 mph, driven by its Hamilton Standard constant-speed, variable-pitch, four-bladed propeller. Its climb rate of 3,200 feet per minute ranked among the highest of the World War II fighters. She easily outclassed the Japanese *Zero* and the German Messerschmidt with its incredible maneuverability.

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The “D” model had a bubble canopy affording pilots with a nearly 360-degree view, and with her power she was ideal for combat and escort missions. The *Mustang* carried six .50 caliber Browning machine guns (three in each wing), and could carry bombs on hardpoints under each wing. Her range was 1,650 miles with external tanks, making her ideal for escort missions deep into enemy territory. The P-51 was formidable as both an aerial combat fighter and a ground support capable fighter-bomber, and in the hands of a skilled pilots like the Tuskegee Airmen, she was indomitable.



Restored North American P-51C "Mustang", Photo Credit Commemorative Air Force

From May 1944 to April 1945, the Tuskegee Airmen operated with the FIFTEENTH Air Force, engaged primarily in protecting bombers during their daily raids to strike military objectives including oil refineries, factories, airfields, and marshalling yards throughout Axis-occupied Europe. When not assigned to bomber protection, the fighters conducted widespread sweeps of enemy airdromes, railroads, highways, bridges, river traffic, troop concentrations, radar facilities, power stations, and other valuable targets. These missions resulted in the destruction of one-hundred twelve enemy aircraft destroyed in the air, and another one-hundred fifty on the ground, nine-hundred fifty railcars, trucks, and other motor vehicles destroyed, and a single enemy destroyer reportedly sunk by P-47 machine gun fire from a flight led by Lieutenant Gwynne Pierson. It was while operating with the FIFTEENTH Air Force that the pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group painted the tails of their aircraft red as an identifier, thus resulting in the nickname “*Red Tails*.” Bomber crews, appreciative of the dedication of the squadron to protect them and not go “*trophy-hunting*” after German aircraft applied a more effusive “*Red-Tail Angels*.”

On March 24, 1945, a flight of forty-three P-51 *Mustangs*, led by Colonel Davis, were escorting a flight of Boeing B-17 *Flying Fortresses* deep into Germany to raid the huge Daimler-Benz tank factory complex

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near Berlin when they were attacked by dozens of enemy aircraft including propeller-driven Focke-Wulf Fw-190s and Messerschmitt Me-109s, rocket-powered Me-163 *Komets*, and the newest threat to the Allied initiative, the jet-powered Messerschmitt Me-262 *Schwalbe* fighters. The *Red Tails* fought off each of the German waves of attackers to protect the bombers. During the fight, pilots from the 332nd shot down several of the enemy aircraft including three of the German jets, marking it one of the very few times that Allied pilots had bested them in propeller vs. jet combat. After seeing the bombers safely out of harm's way, the squadron headed back to their home base in Italy, taking a brief detour on the way to strafe Axis transportation facilities, destroying and damaging a multitude of valuable targets. For their actions on March 24, 1945, the 332nd Fighter Group received a Distinguished Unit Citation, the third one received by the Tuskegee Airmen.

The Distinguished Unit Citations Received by the Tuskegee Airmen



- **99th Pursuit Squadron:** Awarded for actions over Sicily from May 30 to June 11, 1943, during the lead up to the invasion of Sicily by the Allied forces.
- **99th Fighter Squadron:** Awarded for successful airstrikes against Monte Cassino, Italy, in support of the Eighth Army during the Allied assault from May 12–14, 1944.
- **332nd Fighter Group:** Awarded for the mission on March 24, 1945, when they escorted a flight of Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortresses" to Berlin and subsequently shot down three German Me-262 jets.

The 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group returned to the United States in October of 1945. During their time in combat, they had an impressive service record, but it came at a cost. Sixty-six Tuskegee Airmen were killed in action or because of accidents during this time, and another thirty-two were shot down, becoming Prisoners of War (POWs). The Squadron earned ninety-six Distinguished Flying Crosses, seven-hundred forty-four Air Medals, fourteen Bronze Stars, and eight Purple Hearts.

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From 1941 to 1946, nine-hundred ninety-two Black fighter pilots, including five Haitians, graduated from training at Tuskegee receiving their commissions and silver pilot wings. Of the pilots who trained, three-hundred fifty-five served in combat with the 332nd Fighter Group which consisted of the 99th, 100th, 301st and 302nd Fighter Squadrons. In addition to the fighter pilots, many twin-engine pilots also trained at Tuskegee. These men were assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group and flew the **B-25 Mitchell** bomber, a twin-engine, medium bomber. The Group was activated with four bombardment squadrons; the 616th, 617th, 618th, and 619th, but the war against Japan ended before the 477th Group could be deployed overseas.

During the same time frame, a multitude of Black navigators, bombardiers, gunnery crews, and mechanics received training at other military bases. Throughout their training at Tuskegee, none of the traditional training standards were lowered for either the pilots or any of the other Tuskegee Airmen, or other support positions. In fact, the opposite could be stated due to the requirements placed on the airmen to have college degrees or other advanced or skill-based education. Finally, while there were more Black American men in the Tuskegee program, there were also male and female mechanics of different races, plus many women who operated as test pilots and parachute technicians; ALL are considered to be Tuskegee Airmen.

FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AND LEGACY OF THE FIRST FIVE

The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 1,200 missions for the Fighter Squadrons of the 332nd Fighter Group while attached to the TWELFTH and FIFTEENTH Air Force commands. Yet despite their tremendous record, the men and women who passed through Tuskegee to serve their nation, most, if not all, still endured rampant racism. Lemuel Custis said in a 2002 interview, *“I like to think that most of us, as a result of all of our experiences, tried to really overcome some of those scars we had picked up over the years – some of the mental and social scars. We tried to be good citizens in whatever city or town we thought we’d live our lives in.”*

As it was before and during the war, Black servicemembers continued to be subjected to the same “*Jim Crow*” conditions in the United States, and while serving abroad. Forced segregation was part of

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the life of Black American soldiers and airmen, and American military leadership even tried to impose these rules on our allies. In Britain, the U.S. military went as far as to try to force pub owners near American bases to provide segregated facilities. In other parts of the European Theatre, Black service members were not welcome in certain Officers Clubs or other venues, although there was the rare occasion when White bomber pilots, reportedly, bought drinks for the Black pilots of the 332nd as a thank you for safely escorting them over enemy territory.

One publication trying to change things was the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a Black American weekly newspaper that, in 1942, initiated what they termed the “*Double V Campaign*” against racism. The *Double V* stood for victory both over the Axis powers and at home against racism and discrimination. Essential partners in this effort included the NAACP, as well as many prominent Black American leaders. The campaign lobbied for the U.S. government to end “*Jim Crow*” laws and create legislation to protect Black Americans from oppression, discrimination, harassment, and even lynch mobs.

The *Double V Campaign* also worked to end discrimination in the military by recommending an end to segregation and full integration of Black servicemembers into White units. Many movements across the nation heralded the campaign as a call to action, and demonstrations were held in many cities during the war to protest the lack of government involvement in solving the problem of discrimination. Among other things, these served to awaken some action including the signing of Executive Order 8802 by President Roosevelt that banned employment discrimination in American defense industries, as well as civilian agencies of the federal government, based on race, color or creed.

Another catalyst for change was an event that occurred at **Freeman Field** in Seymour, Indiana. A segregated base, **Freeman Field** had facilities for both White and Black servicemembers, including an element of the Tuskegee Airmen of the 477th Bombardment Group. At the time there were also two officers’ clubs, one for Whites and one for Blacks. The commander of **Freeman Field**, Colonel Robert Selway, found a way around the Army’s 1940 regulation requiring clubs to extend membership to all officers on duty at any U.S. Army post. Selway created the two clubs, specifying membership for one was to be only for “*instructor supervisors*” and the other for “*trainees*,” knowing that most of the Tuskegee Airmen were not supervisors and therefore could not enter the

Tuskegee Airmen

club. The small town of Seymour was home to a small number of Blacks, and most of the town's restaurants, bars, etc. were openly hostile, refusing to serve the Black servicemen.

On April 5, 1945, Tuskegee bombardier James C. Warren decided that he was through with being kept out of the Whites only officers club. Born in the racially segregated deep South town of Gurley, Alabama, he worked his way out of poverty and became an aviation cadet in Tuskegee. Washed out as a pilot, 21-year-old Warren was subsequently trained as a bombardier and assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group in Indiana as a flight officer; a position he felt should be regarded with respect. That afternoon Warren and a group of other officers of the 477th decided that they were going into the White officers' club and demand to be served. *"I knew that our mission was unusual and fraught with danger, but this was the path we had chosen, and we were acting as a force of light against the forces of darkness,"* Warren, recalled 40 years later. *"It never crossed my mind that we could be making history."* Putting their careers on the line and risking court-martial, possible incarceration, or even death, these men disobeyed direct orders and entered the Whites only club.

With an agreement amongst themselves that no matter what happened they would not be violent, Warren and his group approached the club noting that the door was *"protected"* by the White Officer of the Day, Lieutenant. J. D. Rogers, ordered this to post by Selway. Ignoring the lieutenant's orders to halt, Warren and nineteen other Black officers entered the club and asked the astonished Black bartender for a beer. Major Andrew M. White, the club officer immediately arrested Warren and the other nineteen officers. A short time later, another seventeen airmen followed suit, walking into the club and were arrested. The next day twenty-five more Black officers were arrested for entering the club. For days the men were incarcerated, awaiting a ruling by the Judge Advocate who decided that the best resolution was to order Selway to release the Black airmen. Subsequently, all except three, who were accused of physically accosting one of the White officers, were released. Selway, thinking ahead created a new rule specifically barring the Tuskegee Airmen from all White facilities. All one-hundred and one of the Black officers were brought before Selway, one by one, and forced to read the orders and then told to sign them. Each refused to sign, infuriating the colonel who immediately re-arrested all of them.

Selway decided he had enough, and decided to ship the Tuskegee Airmen away from his base. He had them lined up on the tarmac to

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prepare to leave when a White officer noticed a Black enlisted man taking photographs with an official camera. The White officer took the camera from the man and destroyed the film before stepping on and breaking the camera. Meanwhile, another Black enlisted man, Harold J. Beaulieu, had hidden a camera in a shoebox due to his prior experience with regulations and unauthorized photography. He snapped several pictures which he later sent to the *Pittsburgh Courier*; the very same newspaper that initiated the *Double V Campaign*. Once published, the story of the arrest of the Tuskegee Airmen spread like wildfire across the nation and the War Department; members of Congress and the President himself all received a multitude of letters and telegrams from readers who were outraged at the situation. On April 23, 1945, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall ordered the men released, and although each received a letter of reprimand in their files, the fuse had been lit for the eventual desegregation of the military.

With the cessation of hostilities in Europe and then Japan, the military, although still segregated, was slowly figuring itself out. Black servicemen were still, unfortunately, subjected to widespread discrimination and racism although some strides had been made to ease this situation. Post World War II America was changing in other ways as well. Many questioned the need for a strong military, now that the threat of Fascism had been eliminated. The United States emerged from the war as the strongest nation on Earth, and her economy was strong. In Washington, D.C., America's military leaders were pondering the need for two militaries, a Black one and a White one. It was argued by many that although the Black soldiers had performed at a level commensurate with their White counterparts, the cost to continue to have both groups to be trained and supplied was prohibitive in the post-war atmosphere.

For the Tuskegee Airmen, those who didn't favor a career in the military were removed from flight status, taken off the military payroll, and many never saw a cockpit again. Others, who chose to remain in the employment of *Uncle Sam*, found themselves relegated to performing tasks well below their training, and forced to the back corners of the military mindset. Some senior officers who chose to pursue their military career like Colonel Davis, Major Roberts, and others, demanded a *seat at the table* and control over their own destiny. These former combat leaders were instrumental in the desegregation efforts of the military, and their efforts succeeded when, in July 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 abolishing discrimination "*on the basis of*

Tuskegee Airmen

race, color, religion or national origin,” in the United States Armed Forces. Although there was much to do to change perspectives of those in leadership, the American military was now a place where pilots of any race could fight alongside each other as a unified force.

As for the legacy of the first five, *simply put, theirs’ was the path that others followed to change the world.* “*We stood on the shoulders of that class,*” said Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., a Tuskegee Airman who later became an administrator at City University of New York. “*If he (Custis) and the four others from that class had not been successful 63 years ago, the rest of us would never have been airmen.*” He added. Without knowing they were setting the groundwork for the eventual desegregation of the United States military, the *First Five* Tuskegee Airmen paved the way for their fellow Airmen and broke through the barriers that would have held them all back had they failed. Clayton F. Lawrence, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, Tuskegee alumnus, and president of the Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Claude B. Govan Tri-State Chapter. stated it best when interviewed years later. “*They wanted the experiment with Lem (Custis) and the others to fail,*” he said, referring to the racially charged trial program that ended up producing the acclaimed air squadrons. “*But Lem and the others proved to those who said we couldn’t do the job that we could.*”

Since the days of World War II and subsequent review of the history of the Tuskegee Airmen, many publications, articles, and even movies have been produced. However, the history of this amazing group of men and women was buoyed by the success of the *First Five*. As America slowly matured, and as we continue our fight against racism of all forms, recognition of the Tuskegee Airmen continues. As recently as March 28, 2007, Congress awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to the Tuskegee Airmen, more than 60 years after the end of World War II. Three-hundred pilots and family members from the famed group received the award, which is given to “*an individual who performs an outstanding deed or act of service to the security, prosperity, and national interest of the United States*”. The award is a long-overdue acknowledgment by the American



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people of the important and historic contributions of the Tuskegee Airmen. Thank you for your service.

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Guy “Gabby” Gabaldon*

The “Pied Piper of Saipan”

By Scott Baron

By early 1944, American forces in the Pacific theater of war had vastly improved their ability in making amphibious landings, however the Japanese had simultaneously improved their ability to defend their islands, resulting in greater and greater number of casualties. Saipan, in the Marianna Islands, would put the Marines’ ability to the test. Its capture was considered essential to victory in the Pacific.

The envisioned full-scale invasion of the Japanese mainland, with its estimated one million American casualties, would require airfields within range of the mainland from which to launch B-29 Superfortress bombers. With an operational range of 1,500 miles to support the invasion, Saipan fit the bill. The invasion of Saipan would involve 535 ships and 127,570 personnel, primarily troops of the SECOND and FOURTH Marine Divisions. Two days prior to the invasion, on June 13, 1944, the guns aboard seven battleships and eleven destroyers shelled Saipan and a sister island, Tinian, expending 15,000 16-inch and 5-inch shells, and 165,000 other shells. The following day, eight older battleships and eleven cruisers replaced the more modern fast battleships and continued bombarding the island.

At 7 a.m. on June 15, 1944, 300 LVTs (Landing Vehicle Tracked) began landing the SECOND and FOURTH Marine Divisions on the west coast of Saipan, taking the Japanese high command by surprise. They had expected the landings further south. By 9 a.m., 800 Marines were ashore. A naval force of eleven ships, comprised of two battleships (U.S.S. *Tennessee* and U.S.S. *California*), two cruisers (U.S.S. *Indianapolis* and U.S.S. *Birmingham*) and seven destroyers, provided fire support for the invasion and by nightfall, the Marines had established a beachhead, six miles long by a half-mile deep. That night, a Japanese counterattack failed, with heavy casualties.



*Reprinted from: True Stories of Marine Corps Heroes

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The next day the Army's 27th Infantry Division landed and advanced to the airfield at As Lito. A nighttime counterattack again failed, with the Japanese abandoning the field on June 18. On June 19 - 20, the *Battle of the Philippine Sea*, nicknamed the *Great Marianas Turkey Shoot*, took place – the largest and last carrier-to-carrier battle of the war. The disastrous loss by the Japanese of three fleet aircraft carriers and between 550 - 645 aircraft eliminated any possibility of resupply or reinforcement of the Japanese garrison on Saipan, sealing their fate.

Thus began a twenty-four-day battle (June 15 - July 9) that pitted the approximate 71,000 American troops on the island against approximately 31,000 troops of the Japanese 31st Army. Surrounded and cut off, the Japanese refused to surrender, choosing to fight to the last man from caves, and in mountainous terrain. In desperation, at dawn on July 7 the Japanese launched a “*Banzai charge*,” hoping to drive the Americans back into the sea. They suffered a loss of over 4,000 soldiers and civilians that had joined the charge.

In the close quarters combat that made up most of the fighting for the island, Americans suffered 2,949 killed or missing, and another 10,364 wounded, compared to Japanese losses of 29,000 killed (of which 5,000 were suicides) and only 2,100 prisoners taken.

The battle for Saipan included many legendary stories of courage and valor, among them, the Navajo **Code Talkers**, who used their native language to direct naval gunfire onto targets and frustrated Japanese attempts at eavesdropping on sensitive communications. It also included 800 African-American Marines who unloaded food and ammunition on the beach under fire, the first Black Marines to see combat in World War II. Four White Marines were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions on the island, all of them posthumously.

As American forces advanced and made gains for control of Saipan, an estimated 22,000 Japanese civilians died on the island. The majority committed suicide by jumping from cliffs. later named *Suicide Cliff* and *Banzai Cliff*. Many jumped while holding babies and small children. Often it was a family suicide; youngest children were pushed by the eldest, then mothers pushed the eldest, and finally, distraught fathers pushed the mothers and then jumped after them.



Guy “Gabby” Gabaldon

Civilians were encouraged by Japanese propaganda to commit suicide rather than be captured by the Americans, who they were told were committing atrocities including rape and torture. It was believable because, in fact, Japanese soldiers had long been doing just that among the civilian populations of territory they controlled by invasion and force, going back to the infamous *Rape of Nanking*, China, over six weeks from December 1937 to January 1938. Estimates vary with rapes committed, numbering perhaps more than 80,000. Civilian deaths, often from torture, ranged from 40,000 to perhaps as high as 300,000, making it one of the worse massacres of World War II. The brutality was unbelievable – Japanese soldiers were even known to use their bayonets to open the womb of pregnant Chinese women, and then toss the unborn child into the air and then catch them on the bayonets of their rifles. They were also known to have done this with living infants.

Brutal treatment of civilians by the Japanese continued, although usually not to the same degree, throughout China during World War II, especially in the aftermath of the 1942 Doolittle Raid, as well as in the Philippine Islands, and other islands and territories the Japanese Army gained control of. Thus, the propaganda fed the Japanese civilians of islands now being invaded by Americans was believable, and Japanese civilians on Saipan willingly went to their self-inflicted deaths rather than live under the new occupiers.

Operating alone to prevent this useless waste of life by Japanese soldiers and civilians, was a streetwise, Japanese-speaking eighteen-year old Mexican-American private first class from the barrios of East Los Angeles, who would become famous as “*The Pied Piper of Saipan*.” Credited with capturing over 1,000 Japanese soldiers and 500 civilians on Saipan, Guy Gabaldon holds the distinction of probably capturing more enemy soldiers than anyone else in American military history.

Born one of seven children in a Mexican-American family in East Los Angeles on March 22, 1926, Guy Louis Gabaldon, trying to escape the gangs, made friends with Nisei (first generation Japanese-American) twins Lane and Lyle Nakano. Impressed with their self-discipline and honesty, he was taken in by their family when he was twelve years old, and attended Japanese language and culture classes with the family’s children, where he learned to speak what he called “*backstreet*” Japanese.



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After Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, his adopted family, along with all Japanese-Americans on the west coast, were interned in American Relocation Camps that were little more than concentration camps. His Nisei “*brothers*” later enlisted in the 442d Regimental Combat Team (RCT), the all-Nisei unit of the U.S. Army, for service in Europe while their parents and siblings were interned at the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp in Wyoming.

“*I wanted to go with them,*” Gabaldon later recounted, “*but they wouldn’t let me.*” So, at age 15, he moved to Alaska and found work in a cannery. He wanted to enlist in the Navy and serve aboard submarines, but at 5’3”, and with a perforated eardrum, the Navy wasn’t interested. He enlisted in the Marines after turning 17, on March 22, 1943 – the recruiter, aware of the Corps need for Japanese speaking Marines, overlooked his size and eardrum.

After basic training at Camp Pendleton, California, Private Gabaldon was trained in heavy weapons (mortars), and was sent to Enlisted Marine Japanese Language School at Camp Elliott in San Diego. There he qualified as a scout/observer and Japanese translator.

After training in amphibious landings, Gabaldon was assigned to the Headquarters and Service Company, Second Marine Regiment, SECOND Marine Division, which sailed from San Diego to Hawaii on December 23, 1943, aboard the S.S. *Young America*, arriving at Pearl Harbor on December 30. After more amphibious training in Hawaii, the SECOND Marines embarked aboard the U.S.S. *Feland* on May 30, landing on Saipan on June 15, 1944, the first day of battle. When they landed, the diminutive Gabaldon was only an 18-year-old kid.

During the early days of the campaign, Gabaldon found his small size an advantage in the close-in fighting required in jungle warfare, and earned respect among his comrades as a fierce and daring combatant. But, from almost his first night on the island, Gabaldon began going on unauthorized, solo patrols – leaving his position to scout out the enemy lines. With his knowledge of the language, he decided to try to talk some Japanese soldiers into



An American Soldier attempts to get a Japanese family to come out of hiding in their cave refuge.

Guy “Gabby” Gabaldon

surrendering. Gabaldon’s method was to approach a Japanese cave, shoot the guard, and yell to the Japanese inside that they were surrounded.

That first night Gabaldon returned with two prisoners but, instead of praise, his commanding officer threatened to court-martial him for leaving his lines and ordered him not to do it again. Despite this, Gabaldon made another trip the next night and came back with 50 prisoners. Acknowledging his success, his commander granted Gabaldon authority to come and go as he pleased, or as he put it, to be a “*lone-wolf operator*.” Gabaldon entered caves, pillboxes, and the jungle, often under direct fire, to persuade the Japanese troops and residents to surrender. Working alone, at great personal risk, he would speak to them in Japanese, working to convince them that the island was secured and that “*fighting to the last man*,” as the Japanese Code of Bushido (death before dishonor) demanded, would be a senseless loss of life.

As he recounted in a September 5, 2006, interview on National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*; he recalled, “*My ability to speak Japanese (was) very limited, but it wasn’t difficult to say raise your hands and come on out. At night, I’d usually go over to the caves. Saipan is just full of caves, and I’d get to one side of the mouth of a cave, and I’d say ‘you are completely surrounded. I’ve got a bunch of Marines here with me behind the trees. If you don’t surrender, I’ll have to kill you,’ and usually it worked – but not always. He said, ‘I’d have to throw grenades in and kill, and I’d get maybe 10, 15, 20 at a time, and one day I got 800.’*”

On July 8, 1944, Gabaldon was cut off behind enemy lines. A day earlier he witnessed Japanese troops and civilians massing for a *Banzai* charge, the largest of the war with more than 4,000 Japanese killed. Following the charge Gabaldon found himself trapped behind the lines. In a 1998 interview with *War Times Journal*, he recalled, “It was in the morning of 8 July that I took two prisoners on top of the Banzai Cliffs. I talked with them at length, trying to convince them that to continue fighting would amount to sure death for them. I told them that if they continued fighting, our flame throwers would roast them alive.

“*I pointed to the many ships we had lying off shore waiting to blast them in their caves. ‘Why die when you have a chance to surrender under honorable conditions? You are taking civilians to their death which is not part of your Bushido military code.*

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“The big job was going to be in convincing them that we would not torture and kill them, that they would be well treated and would be returned to Japan after the war. I understood that their Bushido Code called for death before surrender, and that to surrender was to be considered a coward. This was going to be a tough nut to crack.

“It was either convincing them that I was a good guy or I would be a dead Marine within a few minutes. I knew that there were hundreds of die-hard enemy at the bottom of the cliffs, and if they rushed me I would probably kill two or three before they ate me alive . . . I finally talked one of my two prisoners to return to the bottom of the cliffs and to try to convince his fellow survivors that they would be treated with dignity if they surrendered.

“I kept the other one with me, not as a hostage, but because he said that if he went to the caves with my message and they did not buy it, off with the head. I couldn’t help agreeing with him. The one that descended the cliff either had lots of guts or he was going to double-cross me and come back with his troops firing away. Who was the prisoner, me or the Japs? “

“The Japanese soldier returned with about a dozen men, including an officer, all of them armed. They (weren’t) pointing their weapons at me, but on the other hand, they didn’t have to. If I go to fire they would have the drop on me. They’d chop me down before I fire a round.”

Once the officer was convinced that his men would receive medical care and be well-treated, he went back to the caves and returned with a group of fifty men, explaining there were hundreds more below. Some were wounded, others were civilians. Gabaldon recalled *“They started coming up. The lines up the trails seem endless.”* To his relief, others had seen the large number of Japanese surrendering to him and he was soon joined by *“hundreds of Marines.”* He was credited with capturing over 800 prisoners in a single day.

Overall, Gabaldon was eventually credited with capturing 1,500 Japanese soldiers and civilians over the course of the campaigns on Saipan and Tinian. He also witnessed the suicides of dozens of Japanese civilians.



A Japanese POW and his family with Gabaldon.

Guy “Gabby” Gabaldon

Later he landed on Tinian where he saw combat and captured additional soldiers and civilians. He then returned to Saipan where he was ambushed and wounded by machine-gun fire while engaged in fighting Japanese guerillas on the island. In the course of his mission, he was forced to kill 33 enemy soldiers, and was twice wounded.

He returned to San Francisco aboard the U.S.S. *Tryon*, (APH-1), arriving on March 11, 1945. Hospitalized in Oceanside, California, while recovering from his wounds he was honorably discharged from the Marines as a private first class on November 10, 1945. His company commander, Captain John Schwabe, stated that Gabaldon's actions resulted in obtaining vital intelligence which shortened the period of combat, resulting in the significant saving of life. He recommended Gabaldon for the Medal of Honor. He was awarded the Silver Star.

In June 1957, Gabaldon was a guest on the NBC television show *This is Your Life*, and in 1960 the Hollywood movie, *From Hell to Eternity*, brought to the big screen an account of the young Marine who captured so many, and saved so many lives. Gabaldon was played by Jeffery Hunter, a blue-eyed, tall Caucasian. The resulting publicity resulted in Gabaldon being awarded the Navy Cross, the second highest award for valor, on December 20, 1960.



Gabaldon (R) with actor Jefferey Hunter on the set of the movie about his exploits.



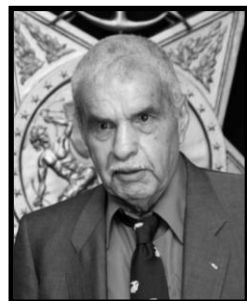
The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Private First Class Guy L. Gabaldon (MCSN: 517054), United States Marine Corps Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty while serving with Headquarters and Service Company, Second Marines, SECOND Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Saipan and Tinian, Mariana Islands, South Pacific Area, from 15 June to 1 August 1944.

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Acting as a Japanese Interpreter for the Second Marines, Private First Class Gabaldon displayed extreme courage and initiative in single-handedly capturing enemy civilian and military personnel during the Saipan and Tinian operations. Working alone in front of the lines, he daringly entered enemy caves, pillboxes, buildings, and jungle brush, frequently in the face of hostile fire, and succeeded in not only obtaining vital military information, but in capturing well over one thousand enemy civilians and troops. Through his valiant and distinguished exploits, Private First Class Gabaldon made an important contribution to the successful prosecution of the campaign and, through his efforts, a definite humane treatment of civilian prisoners was assured. His courageous and inspiring devotion to duty throughout reflects the highest credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service.

Many felt that Gabaldon's actions justified the award of the Medal of Honor, and that he was passed over because he was Hispanic. Efforts were made by some to have the government acknowledge Gabaldon's contribution with the award of the Medal of Honor, but as of 2016, they were still unsuccessful.

Following his honorable discharge, Gabaldon returned to Boyle Heights and married June, a girl from the neighborhood. He had six children with her before divorce ended the marriage. He moved to Mexico, tried his hand at fishing, learned to fly, and started a successful import-export business. He also met and married Ohana Suzuki, with whom he had five more children. In the mid-1970s Gabaldon and Ohana moved to Saipan where he worked as police chief, giving tours, and as a drug-abuse counselor. He also wrote his autobiography, *Saipan: Suicide Island*, published in 1990.



After two decades on Saipan, Gabaldon returned to California in 1995 and moved to Florida in 2003. In 2000, Marine Corps General James L. Jones upgraded Gabaldon's rank from private first class to corporal. *"He told me to keep my nose clean and maybe in another 50 years, I'd be a sergeant,"* Gabaldon said with a laugh.

Gabaldon passed away in Old Town, Florida, of heart disease on August 31, 2006, at the age of 80. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery, Section 8AA, Row 19, Site 1. Gabaldon was survived by his wife, Ohana and nine of his eleven children.

Joseph Medicine Crow

HE NEED TO STEAL A HORSE TO BE CHIEF – HE STOLE 50

BY C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Joseph “Joe” Medicine Crow was born an Apsáalooke Indian on the Crow Indian Reservation near Lodge Grass, Montana, on October 27, 1913, to Leo Medicine Crow and Amy *Yellow Tail White Man Runs Him* Crow. Apsáalooke refers to the Crow people, whose name translates to “*Children of the Large Beaked Bird.*”



Joe’s father died when he was two years old and Joe lived with his maternal grandfather, Yellowtail White Man Runs Him, and later with his mother and step-father John Whiteman. His grandfather was a Crow chief and until his death in 1987 was the last living survivor of the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, better known as “*Custer’s Last Stand.*” There he served as one of Custer’s scouts. Joe’s father at the youthful age of 22 also became a chief. At the age of six or seven his grandfather began training Joe to become a Crow warrior; it included a strenuous physical regiment, and also having to run barefoot through the snow to “*toughen the boys’ feet and spirit.*”

Following grammar school and after completing the eighth grade in 1929, Joe went to Muskogee, Oklahoma, to attend Bacone College, which also had preparatory classes for Indians of high school age. He remained there until receiving his Associate of Arts degree in 1936, and then went to Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, where he studied sociology and psychology and received a bachelor’s degree in 1938. Post graduate studied followed at the University of California in Los Angeles where in 1939 he became the first person from his tribe to earn a master’s degree. The young man who grew up hearing first-hand accounts of the Battle of Little Bighorn from his grandfather received his degree in anthropology. His thesis was titled “*The Effects of European Culture Contact upon the Economic, Social, and Religious Life of the Crow Indians*” became the first of his many historical accounts of the tribe.

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Joe began additional studies, intent on earning a doctorate, until the United States was plunged into World War II in December 1941. He would later say, *“I had an uncle who had other plans for me – Uncle Sam.”* He completed his course work, but before completing his degree. he returned to Montana to teach at the Chemawa Indian School for a year. In 1942 he went to Bremerton, Washington, where he worked in the shipyards.

In 1943 Joe was enlisted in the U.S. Army. After training he was assigned to the 103d Infantry Division. After two years of training, during which the Division was gutted with more than 2,500 of its soldiers transferred as replacements to other divisions, the 103d deployed to war in Europe on October 5, 1944. They arrived in southeast France to relieve the 3d Infantry Division, going immediately into combat operations.



Private First Class Medicine Crow was assigned as a scout in the 103d Infantry Division. Before going into combat, he prepared for battle by wearing war paint beneath his uniform, and placing a sacred yellow painted eagle feather in his helmet. Some accounts contain unverified reports that he also wore white war paint stripes on his face. In a most unusual manner, fighting the Germans Joe completed the four requisite deeds to become a Crow Chief:

- Touch or strike the first enemy fallen, whether alive for dead,
- Wrestle a weapon away from an enemy warrior,
- Enter an enemy camp at night a steal a horse, and
- Command a war party successfully.

During his unit's advance, once his company attacked a small town with just one main street. Joe's commanding officer sent him around the street and down an alley. He saw an opening in a gate and began to enter it, just as a German soldier came around from the opposite direction. Their heads bumped together before either realized the other was there. Joe delivered a swift butt-stroke to the Nazi's head, disarming him and dropping him unconscious to the ground. In that moment two of the requisite Crow deeds were accomplished.

On another occasion, Joe's company broke through German lines, forcing them to retreat into nearby hills. Then, the Germans regrouped and launched a fierce counterattack, surrounding Joe's company, which

Joseph Medicine Crow

was running low on ammunition. Joe led his squad through a mine field and skirting surreptitiously through the Germans that encircled them to reach their own lines. They obtained the needed ammunition and Joe led them back to the company, fulfilling the fourth requisite Crow deed.

His replenished company welcomed him back with the needed ammunition, and prepared to evict the Germans once again. While scouting ahead of his company, Joe saw several Germans mounted on horses along a road. Darkness was falling and he slipped into the shadows to follow them to a shed near a farmhouse, where they tethered their horses and then entered the farm house for the night.

Returning to his company, he learned that his company commander opted to delay an attack until early the next morning, to surprise the enemy. Private First Class Medicine Crow asked his commander to afford him five minutes before the attack so he could *“take care of those horses.”* The officer consented and in the early morning haze, Medicine Crow took one other soldier and crept to the shed where the horses were tethered. With rope he fashioned a simple harness, untied the other horses, and then with a loud war whoop he chased them out of the shed and over a hill. The most improbably of the four requisite deeds was accomplished, times fifty, and the now grounded Germans were quickly routed.

For his actions in World War II, Joe was awarded the Bronze Star and the French Legion of Honor. He returned home in January 1946 and was honorably discharged. The following year he married Miss Gloria Swanson Morrison; they had two children, Ronnie and Vernelle.

In 1958 Joe Medicine Crow was appointed Crow Tribal Historian and Anthropologist; he was the tribe's last Crow War Chief. He was a prolific author. The Billings Gazette remembered his writing, *“His tales of Apsáalooke culture helped students learn about the Crow Indians. He not only literally rewrote the book on the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but was also sure to include humor, stories of its warriors and religion. Medicine Crow broke down barriers and walls that often divided cultures.”*



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Not only did Joe write based on the first-person accounts of the *Battle of Little Bighorn* his grandfather shared, in his youth he personally knew four other of Custer's surviving Indian Scouts including his uncle White Man Runs Him. He wrote the script for the reenactment of that battle held every summer since 1965 in Hardin, Montana. A popular speaker, he often admonished regarding that battle, "*No one wins. Both sides lose. The Indians, so called hostiles, won the battle of the day, but lost their way of life.*"



In 1999 Joe spoke at the United Nations. That same year he received an honorary doctorate from Rocky Mountain College, and another honorary doctorate from his alma mater, the University of Southern California in 2003. A third honorary doctorate was conferred on him by Bascone College in 2010.



In 2008 Montana's three members of Congress introduced legislation to award him the Congressional Gold Medal. They failed to garner the necessary two-thirds vote of the Senat to accomplish this. However, in a White House ceremony on August 12, 2009, President Barack Obama presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Joseph Medicine Crow died in Billings, Montana, on April 3, 2016, at the age of 103. He was buried at the Apsáalooke Veterans Cemetery at Crow Agency, Montana. In 2016 Billings opened the Medicine Crow Middle School, named in his honor.



In 2018 the U.S. Congress voted to rename a Veterans Administration Clinic in Billings to honor Joseph Medicine Crow.

Vernon J. Baker

HE WANTED TO ENSURE THAT HIS MEN STAYED ALIVE

BY C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Following the review to rectify the fact that no Black soldiers in either world war earned the Medal of Honor resulted in Freddie Stowers 1991 posthumous award, a similar review was done for World War II Black Soldiers. Seven were recommended for upgrade to the Medal of Honor, four of whom were killed in action during the war; two others survived the war but died before their medals were presented. When President William J. Clinton presented their posthumous Medals of Honor to surviving relatives in the White House on January 13, 1997, of the one World War I and seven World War two Black heroes, only one was still living to personally receive it from the President.

John R. Fox



Cincinnati, OH
366 Infantry Regiment
KIA: Dec. 26, 1944

Wily F. James, Jr.



Kansas City, MO
413th Infantry Regiment
KIA: Apr. 7, 1945

Reuben Rivers



Tecumseh, OK
761st Tank Battalion
KIA: Nov. 19, 1944

George Watson



Birmingham, AL
29th Quartermaster Regiment
KIA: Mar. 8, 1943

Edward A. Carter



Los Angeles, CA
56th Armored Inf. Regiment
Died: Jan. 30, 1963

Charles L. Thomas



Detroit, MI
614th Tank Destroyer Bn.
Died: Feb. 15, 1980

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Vernon Joseph Baker was born Vernon Joseph Caldera in Cheyenne, Wyoming, on December 17, 1919, to Mexico-born Manuel Caldera and Beulah *Baker* Caldera, the couple's only son with two older daughters, Irna and Catherine. Mr. and Mrs. Caldera were both killed in a car accident in 1923 when Vernon was four years old, and the three young children went to live with their maternal grandparents, Joseph Samuel and Dora Virginia *Lucas* Baker who lived in Cheyenne. His grandmother was confined to a wheelchair, and Vernon's relationship with her was somewhat strained; he spent a few years at the Boys Town orphanage in Omaha, Nebraska, to get away from the stress. In 1939 Vernon graduated from Clarinda High School in Clarinda, Iowa, where his grandfather grew up before moving to Wyoming.



After Vernon graduated he returned to Cheyenne, where he found work as a railroad porter alongside his grandfather who was also employed by the railroad. His grandfather was an important figure in Vernon's life, and taught him to hunt and fish to feed the family. Hunting and fishing would thereafter be a major part of Vernon's life. His grandfather died in 1939.

Baker tried to enlist in the U.S. Army, but the recruiter turned him away due his race. On June 25, 1941, Baker married Miss Helen Stewart. In June 1941 he tried again to enlist, hoping to work in the Army Quartermaster Corps. This time he was accepted for service in the Infantry. Vernon recalled, *"I didn't say anything because I was going to get in."* Before departing for training, on June 25, 1941, Baker married Miss Leola Sessler in what was a short-lived marriage.

Baker was sent to Fort Wolters, Texas, for training, where he experienced the racial prejudice of *"Jim Crow"* bigotry for the first time, and recalled that he had to control himself in order to survive. He recalled his grandfather's words, *"If you want to live, boy, learn how to conform."* Following his training he was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division at Geiger Field in Spokane, Washington, and a year later was sent to Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

Vernon J. Baker

In October 1942 he received the rare opportunity as a Black enlisted soldier to attend Officer Candidate School. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant on January 11, 1943, and was assigned to a weapons platoon in the 370th Infantry Regiment of the segregated Black 92d Infantry Division. On October 2, 1943, he married Miss Helen Conley Stewart, the granddaughter of Paschal Conley, a well-known Buffalo Soldier who served with 10th Cavalry Regiment, during the Spanish-American War, and niece of Congressman Bennett Stewart.



On August 1, 1944, shortly after the liberation of Rome, Second Lieutenant Baker's regiment landed at Naples, Italy. The 92d Infantry Division was part of the FIFTH Army's drive north to breach the German's vaunted Gothic Line north of Rome.

In October, while leading a night patrol, Baker and his squad were trying to capture a German-held house on a hill. During the fighting Baker was wounded and three of his men were killed. He was evacuated to a hospital in Pisa, Italy, for treatment. When he returned to his company in December, due to casualties sustained in further fighting, Baker was the senior officer in the unit that was usually commanded above the platoon level by a White officer. He remained the senior officer until Captain John Runyon became company commander in March 1945.

On April 5, 1945, one month before the war in Europe ended, the regiment's 1st Battalion went on the offensive to capture a German artillery post in the sternly fortified Castle Aghinolfi. First Lieutenant Vernon Baker's Company C was the lead element. The diminutive Black officer who stood only 5'6" tall and weighed 145 pounds became a veritable fighting machine, decades later in an article for Black History Month, one popular author described him as the "*Black Captain America*."

Three previous attempts had been made to capture the castle and been repulsed. On this day, 70% of the men in Company C were replacements with no prior combat experience. Moving out with the first rays of daylight, within two hours they advanced to within 250 yards of the castle, where Baker killed two Germans in an observation post, and then killed two more who were manning a machine gun in a camouflaged position. As Captain Runyon moved up to join Baker, a German grenade landed nearby, but fortunately was a dud and did not explode. It was the

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first sign that the Germans had spotted the approaching company, and was followed by a mortar attack that caused several casualties before American return artillery fire forced the Germans to take cover.

When the Germans mounted a counterattack, Captain Runyon was overcome by fear and told Baker that he was going to the rear for reinforcements. Baker knew it was up to him to lead the effort, but with only eight men and little ammunition, he passed the word to pull back.

"My men wanted to stay, but I wanted to ensure some of them stayed alive," Baker recalled. As they withdrew under Bakers covering fire, two of them were killed by enemy fire. Baker then began to crawl towards the enemy, throwing grenades and destroying two German machine gun nests, but his actions enabled the remainder of his men to reach safety. He then pulled back himself; in the twelve hour battle nineteen of his men had been killed.

The next night Baker lead the battalion's advance under fire through an enemy minefield to capture an enemy-occupied mountain that was the battalion objective. Captain Runyon recalled, *"He moved out under cover of darkness to effect surprise and be in enemy territory before daylight. After reaching the enemy position, he personally led our troops through mine field under enemy fire, without thought for his own safety . . . Lieutenant Baker continued moving with the command group of the leading company and left the unit only when the division objective was in sight, and then under orders. His knowledge of the terrain aided materially in the speedy advance of the battalion, and his courage and leadership played a large part in the destruction of enemy communications and the demoralization of their installations."*

Baker's battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel E. V. D. Murphy described the lieutenant's actions noting it was *"by far the outstanding battle performance ever brought to my attention in any unit in which I have served in this division."* Lieutenant Colonel Murphy submitted Baker for the Distinguished Service Cross.

Vernon Baker remained in post-war Italy until 1947, when he returned home. During the Korean War he served again in the 11th Airborne Division. He retired from the Army in 1968 as a first lieutenant; even then rank was hard to come by for a Black officer.

Vernon J. Baker

Baker married for a third time, and he and his wife Fern Brown had three children. As a civilian, Baker worked for twenty years for the Red Cross. In his free time, he often vacationed in Idaho where he continued to enjoy his passion for hunting and fishing. After Fern died in 1986, Baker moved to a small cabin in the Idaho mountain community of Saint Maries. For eight years he served on the Idaho Human Rights Commission. When Heidy Pawlik came to visit the United States from her native Germany, she and Vernon met, fell in love, and married. Vernon became stepfather to her daughter Alexandria.



When President Clinton presented six posthumous Medals of Honor to Black World War II heroes at the White House on January 13, 1997, he also hung the Medal of Honor around the neck of Vernon Baker. In that moment he became one of only three living Black Medal of Honor recipients with Vietnam War heroes Webster Anderson and Clarence Sasser.



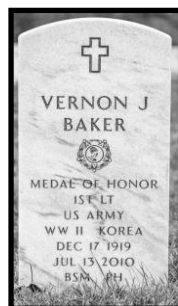
The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Vernon J. Baker, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in action on 5 and 6 April 1945, while serving with Company C, 370th Infantry Regiment, 92d Infantry Division, in action near Viareggio, Italy. Then Second Lieutenant Baker demonstrated outstanding courage and leadership in destroying enemy installations, personnel and equipment during his company's attack against a strongly entrenched enemy in mountainous terrain. When his company was stopped by the concentration of fire from several machine gun



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emplacements, he crawled to one position and destroyed it, killing three Germans. Continuing forward, he attacked and enemy observation post and killed two occupants. With the aid of one of his men, Lieutenant Baker attacked two more machine gun nests, killing or wounding the four enemy soldiers occupying these positions. He then covered the evacuation of the wounded personnel of his company by occupying an exposed position and drawing the enemy's fire. On the following night Lieutenant Baker voluntarily led a battalion advance through enemy mine fields and heavy fire toward the division objective. Second Lieutenant Baker's fighting spirit and daring leadership were an inspiration to his men and exemplify the highest traditions of the Armed Forces.

Baker lived by a motto he often reiterated: *"Give respect before you expect it. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Remember the mission. Set the example. Keep going."* In 2008 he was awarded the Sandor Teszler Award for Moral Courage and Service to Humankind by Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, along with an honorary doctorate degree. He died in Saint Maries on July 13, 2010, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.



When Baker died, Clarence Sasser was the last living Black recipient. In 2014 belated Medals of Honor were awarded to Vietnam heroes Melvin Morris and Bennie Adkins. Morris died in 2020 and Sasser died in 2024, leaving only Melvin Morris. A year before Sasser died, in 2023 Vietnam War hero Paris Davis received a belated Medal of Honor. At this writing there are only two living Black Medal of Honor Recipients.

Melvin Morris



Okmulgee, OK
5th Special Forces Group

Paris Davis



Baton Rouge, LA
5th Special Forces Group

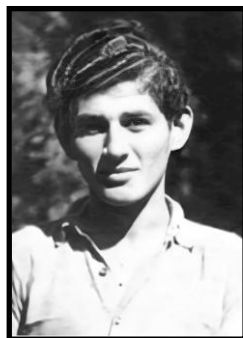
Tibor Rubin

“HOW I MADE IT, THE LORD DOESN’T EVEN KNOW.”

BY SCOTT BARON

To survive being interned for 14 months in a Nazi concentration camp was formidable. To survive being imprisoned in a North Korean Prisoner of War camp known as “*Death Valley*” for 30 months would also be considered incredible. But to survive both is almost beyond belief. However, the man born Rubin Tibor would become the only prisoner of a concentration camp, or survivor of the Holocaust, to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

Tibor Rubin (born Rubin Tibor) was born in Pásztó, Nógrád, Hungary on June 18, 1929, one of six children (by three marriages) born to Ferenc (Ferenz) Rubin. His father, Ferenc, was a soldier in the Hungarian Army in World War I and was a prisoner of war in Russia for over six years. He returned to Pásztó as a shoemaker. His mother died of cancer when he was young, so he was raised by his stepmother Rózá Appel alongside his two brothers and three sisters.



He and his siblings Irene, born in 1926, Ilonka, born in 1933, and Edith, Emory, and Mikos (Mike), grew up in Pásztó, a Hungarian town with a Jewish population of 120 families. In 1938 the Hungarian government enacted anti-Jewish laws and policies, and persecution and violence against Jews grew as the Fascist’s tightened their grip in Hungary.*



In 1942, when Tibor was 13, his parents Ferenc and Rózá tried to send him to safety in neutral Switzerland, but he was caught at the Italian

* Between, 1938-1944, 44,000-63,000 Jews were killed. From 1944-1945, about 500,000 Jew were murdered according to the Holocaust Encyclopedia

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border and sent to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp, a slave labor camp in Austria. His brother Emery tried to flee before the same could happen to him, but was caught and also sent to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Later, Tibor said he was lucky to find his brother there, who helped him survive. Emery, however, did not survive.

Rózá and his younger sister, 10 year old Ilonka, were murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz in 1944. His father survived Auschwitz but was later killed at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Rubin's eldest brother Miklos was forced into hard labor, but escaped to fight with the English and Czech forces during World War II. Rubin's sister Edith survived the camps, while his sister, Irene hid in Budapest and survived the war, dying in 1973.

At Mauthausen, Tibor later recalled *"Dr. Mengele told us to go left or right. If you went left, you went to a gas chamber. If you went right, you went to work in a labor camp."* Tibor was sent to the right, his mother and sister to the left. He never saw them again. *"In Mauthausen, they told us right away, 'You Jews, none of you will ever make it out of here alive,'"* Tibor recalled *"Every day so many people were killed. Bodies piled up God knows how high. We had nothing to look forward to but dying. It was a most terrible thing, like a horror movie."*



Tibor endured 14 months in Mauthausen until American soldiers of the 11th Armored Division, assigned to General George S. Patton's THIRD Army entered the camp on May 5, 1945, and liberated the prisoners. It was a miraculous day for Tibor, a day he never forgot; it was forever imprinted in his heart. *"The American Soldiers had great compassion for us. Even though we were filthy, we stunk and had diseases, they picked us up and brought us back to life."* He credits Army medics for saving the lives of survivors. *"I made a promise to myself that I would go to the United States and join the Army to express my thanks."* Later, he would do exactly that.

Tibor Rubin

He was sent to a camp for displaced persons, spending nearly three years in a camp in Germany. On May 17, 1948, Tibor boarded the S.S. *Marine Flasher* at the docks of Bremerhaven, Germany, and arrived in New York on May 26 on a refugee visa. He said, *“When I came to America, it was the first time I was free. It was one of the reasons I joined the U.S. Army, because I wanted to show my appreciation.”*

Anglicizing his name to Ted or Teddy, he initially found work as a shoemaker, then apprenticed as a butcher at Michael Bela Wilhelm’s Hungarian butcher shop on Third Avenue in the Yorkville neighborhood. His surviving siblings, Edith, Irene and Miklos eventually joined him in the United States.

Tibor’s first two attempts at joining the Army failed as he flunked the entry tests because of his poor English. However, undeterred, after getting some help, he finally succeeded in his third attempt, enlisting in 1949. After basic training, *“Ted”* Rubin served as a rifleman with the 29th Infantry Regiment in Okinawa, Japan. As tensions in Korea began to rise, his unit was transferred there in preparation for war. However, Rubin was told he wouldn’t be allowed to deploy because he wasn’t a U.S. citizen. Rubin protested. *“My commander told me that I didn’t have to go to war,”* Rubin later said. *“So, I told him, ‘Well, what about the others? I cannot leave my fellow brothers.’”*



Eventually, Rubin was allowed to go. On February 13, 1950, he deployed to Korea as a private first class, later corporal, in Company I, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division.

A few months later, on June 25, 1950, war broke out when North Korea invaded South Korea. In late July 1950, North Korean troops surged south, forcing his unit to withdraw toward the Pusan Perimeter in the southeastern tip of the country.

According to lengthy affidavits submitted by nearly a dozen fellow soldiers, mostly from the South and Midwestern United States who served with Rubin in South and North Korea, an antisemitic non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Arthur Peyton, consistently *“volunteered”* Rubin for the most dangerous patrols. During one mission, according to their sworn testimonies of his comrades, Rubin secured a needed route of retreat for

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his rifle company by single-handedly defending a hill for 24 hours against waves of North Korean soldiers.

As his subsequent Medal of Honor citation would document: *“While his unit was retreating to the Pusan Perimeter, Corporal Rubin was assigned to stay behind to keep open the vital Taegu-Pusan Road link used by his withdrawing unit. During the ensuing battle, overwhelming numbers of North Korean troops assaulted a hill defended solely by Corporal Rubin. He inflicted a staggering number of casualties on the attacking force during his personal 24-hour battle, single-handedly slowing the enemy advance and allowing the 8th Cavalry Regiment to complete its withdrawal.”*

Rubin recalled. *“The Koreans were coming up the hill. There were so many, they looked like ants. I didn’t have too much time to get scared, so I went crazy. I was like a machine, a robot. I ran around to every foxhole on the hill and started throwing hand grenades and shooting my rifle to make as much noise as possible.”* For this and his other acts of bravery, Rubin was recommended four times for the Medal of Honor by two of his commanding officers, both of whom were killed in action shortly afterwards, but not before ordering Rubin’s sergeant to begin the necessary paperwork recommending Rubin for the Medal of Honor.



Some of Rubin’s comrades witnessed the order being issued, and all are convinced that Peyton deliberately ignored his orders. *“I really believe, in my heart, that Peyton would have jeopardized his own safety rather than assist in any way whatsoever in the awarding of the Medal of Honor to a person of Jewish descent,”* wrote Corporal Harold Speakman in a notarized affidavit. *“This man did, with full knowledge of his actions, withhold the recommendations from the proper channels, therefore depriving this soldier of the medals which he so rightfully deserves,”* he wrote. *“He used to call me such bad names that I forgot my name was Tibor Rubin,”* Rubin later said. *“He would send me to the most difficult positions so that I would be killed. It scared the hell out of me. I couldn’t even hold my rifle, but I still went.”*

Towards the end of October 1950, as massive Chinese troop concentrations crossed the border into North Korea, attacking the unprepared American troops now trapped far north inside North Korea. By October 30, the 3d Battalion's firepower had been reduced to a single machine gun, which three soldiers had already died manning. By the time Rubin stepped up to the gun, most of his fellow soldiers had been killed or captured. He recalled, *"Nobody wanted to take over, but somebody had to. We didn't have anything else left to fight with."* Rubin's buddies called him a hero, selflessly defending his unit against thousands of Chinese troops. Corporal Leonard Hamm, in his nomination of Rubin for the Medal of Honor, testified *"The enemy suffered, not only tremendous casualties . . . but it slowed the North Korean invading momentum along that route, saving countless American lives and giving the 8th Cavalry precious time to regroup to the south,"*.

The battle continued for three days around Unsan, then the Chinese pushed the Allied soldiers south. Those who survived retreated with little or no ammunition and hundreds of wounded. More than 1,000 men of the 8th Cavalry were listed as missing in action after the battle, with some later returning to friendly lines, and others rescued by tank patrols.

When Hamm himself later lay wounded, it was Rubin who fought his way back for him when the first sergeant issued orders to leave him behind. *"We didn't know if he was dead,"* Rubin said. *"All I could think about was that somebody back home was waiting for him to return."* Rubin was pinned down by snipers and forced to low-crawl for several hundred yards while rescuing Hamm, whose body was so loaded with shrapnel that he could hardly lift a limb. *"Rubin not only saved my life by carrying me to safety; he kept the North Korean snipers off our butts,"* Hamm testified.

When the battle ended in Unsan, hundreds of soldiers were taken prisoner by the Chinese. Wounded by grenade shrapnel in his hand, chest, and leg, Rubin was taken prisoner. The prisoners were forced to march to a prisoner of war camp, ill-dressed for winter's freezing temperatures, exhausted, and hungry; many of them grew sick with dysentery, pneumonia or hepatitis. Others died. *"It was so cold that nobody wanted to move, and the food we got was barely enough to keep us alive,"* said Sergeant Richard A. Whalen. *"But Rubin was a tremendous asset to us, keeping our spirits up when no one felt good."*

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Sergeant Leo Cormier, a fellow POW stated, *"He saved a lot of GI's lives. He gave them the courage to go on living when a lot of guys didn't make it,"* adding, *"He saved my life when I could have laid in a ditch and died. I was nothing but flesh and bones."*

Rubin spent the next 30 months with other Americans at a North Korean prisoner of war camp they called *"Death Valley,"* where his fellow prisoners died at the rate of 40 a day in the winter of 1950-1951. Rubin stated that life as a prisoner under the Nazis and the Chinese was far different. Although life in the camp was difficult, he told reporters from *Stars and Stripes* that the Chinese treated him much better than the Germans had. Of his Chinese captors, Rubin would say only that they were at times *"human and somewhat lenient."* Of the Nazis, Rubin remained perplexed by their capacity to senselessly kill.

His time in a concentration camp taught Rubin how to survive. He knew how to make soup out of grass and what weeds had medicinal qualities. What his comrades needed, Rubin knew, was hope, hope to keep them moving, and hope to make them fight for their lives.

"Some of them gave up, and some of them prayed to be taken," Rubin remembered. He gave pep talks, reminding them of their families waiting for their safe return home. He stole food for them to eat, nagged them to *"debug"* themselves of the relentless lice, and nursed them through sickness.

"He'd go out of his way to do favors to help us survive," said Sergeant Cormier. *"I once saw him spend the whole night picking lice off a guy who didn't have the strength to lift his head. What man would do that? I'd have told him to go down and soak in the cold water so the lice would all fall off. But Ted did things for his fellow men that made him a hero in my book."*

"They (the guards) didn't have much more food to eat than we did," Rubin said. *"One potato would have been worth a million dollars if any of us had had it to give."* When the Chinese planted a *"victory garden,"* he snuck past armed guards to reap the harvest, stuffing his pants full of radishes, green onions, and cucumbers. *"The Chinese would've cut Ted's throat if they'd caught him stealing. It still amazes me that they never did catch him,"* said Cormier. *"What he did to help us could have meant the sacrifice of his own life."*

Tibor Rubin

When the Chinese learned that Rubin was technically still a citizen of Hungary, which was Communist, they offered to send him back. Rubin turned down repeated offers, choosing to remain in the camp with his fellow soldiers.

According to Rubin's MOH citation, his selfless efforts were directly attributed to saving the lives of up to 40 of his fellow prisoners, stating: *"Corporal Rubin disregarded his own personal safety and immediately began sneaking out of the camp at night in search of food for his comrades. Breaking into enemy food storehouses and gardens, he risked certain torture or death if caught. Corporal Rubin provided not only food to the starving soldiers, but also desperately needed medical care and moral support for the sick and wounded of the POW camp."* As Cormier later testified *"He took care of us, nursed us, carried us to the latrine . . . he did many good deeds, which he told us were mitzvahs in the Jewish tradition . . . he was a very religious Jew and helping his fellow men was the most important thing to him"*.

Rubin was later interned at Camp 5 in Pyo tong, where about 1,600 U.S. soldiers died in early 1951. After 30 months as a POW, Rubin was repatriated under *Operation Little Switch*, the initial exchange of sick and wounded prisoners, carried out from April 20 to May 3, 1953.



Rubin was discharged from the Army in 1953. Although he was recommended for the Medal of Honor four times, and was twice recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross and twice for the Silver Star, he left the Army with only two Purple Hearts.

Life moved on and so did Rubin. He finally became a U.S. citizen on November 27, 1953, and moved to California to manage his brother's liquor store in Long Beach. *"When I became a citizen, it was one of the happiest days in my life,"* he said. He spoke little about his wartime deeds.

In 1963 Rubin married a woman named Miss Yvonne Meijers, a Dutch Holocaust survivor he met at a dance for Jewish singles. They had

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two children, a daughter Rosie and a son Frank, who followed in his father's footsteps by serving in the Air Force. His nephew, who eventually ran the ROTC program at the University of Southern California said Rubin maintained steadfast faith in the military. *"He talked me into going into it, even after all he had been through."*

In the 1980s, for the first time since the war, Rubin went to a reunion of his fellow POWs from Korea. That meeting jogged the memories of his comrades, who soon after began to petition the Army to recognize Rubin for his immense bravery during the war.

In 2001, Congress instructed the Defense Department to review the records of Jewish and Latino war veterans. They began investigating cases of soldiers who may have been denied the Medal of Honor because of discriminatory practices. One of those records that was reviewed and approved was Rubin's.

"The evidence from the notarized documents is that [Rubin's] first sergeant did the circular trashcan on these [recommendations] and did not process them," said Major Elizabeth Robbins, an Army spokeswoman. *"Rubin is a true American hero and deserves this honor."*

On September. 23, 2005, 76-year-old Rubin received the Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House. Bush called it a debt *"that time has not diminished,"* despite the 55 years that passed since Rubin's actions in battle.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said: *"Rubin's accomplishments are amazing. It's been a long time coming, but it's wonderful that this has happened."*

Of that moment Rubin said, *"I waited 55 years. I said listen, yesterday I was just a schmuck. Today they call me 'Sir.' How I made it, the Lord don't even know."* Of the Medal of Honor, he was quick to modestly brush off the praise. *"The real heroes are those who never*



came home. I was just lucky,” he said. “This Medal of Honor belongs to all prisoners of war, to all the heroes who died fighting in those wars.”



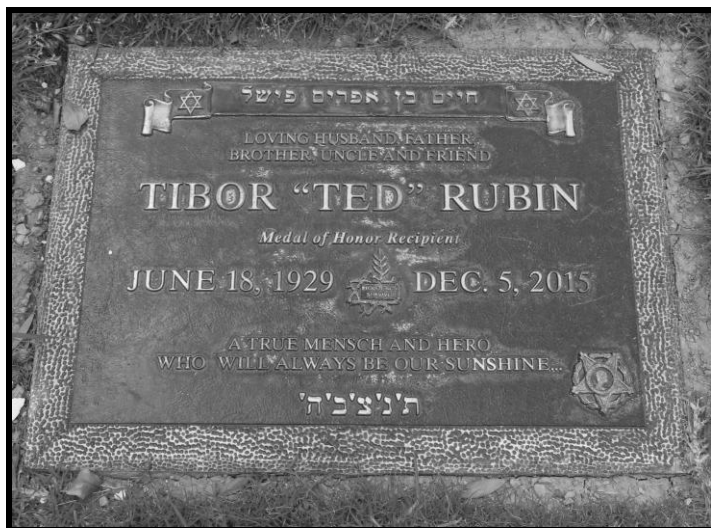
The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Corporal Tibor Rubin (ASN: 19363581), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism during the period from 23 July 1950 to 20 April 1953, while serving as a rifleman with Company I, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division in the Republic of Korea. While his unit was retreating to the Pusan Perimeter, Corporal Rubin was assigned to stay behind to keep open the vital Taegu-Pusan Road link used by his withdrawing unit. During the ensuing battle, overwhelming numbers of North Korean troops assaulted a hill defended solely by Corporal Rubin. He inflicted a staggering number of casualties on the attacking force during his personal 24-hour battle, single-handedly slowing the enemy advance and allowing the 8th Cavalry Regiment to complete its withdrawal successfully. Following the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, the 8th Cavalry Regiment proceeded northward and advanced into North Korea. During the advance, he helped capture several hundred North Korean soldiers. On 30 October 1950, Chinese forces attacked his unit at Unsan, North Korea, during a massive nighttime assault. That night and throughout the next day, he manned a .30 caliber machine gun at the south end of the unit's line after three previous gunners became casualties. He continued to man his machine gun until his ammunition was exhausted. His determined stand slowed the pace of the enemy advance in his sector, permitting the remnants of his unit to retreat southward. As the battle raged, Corporal Rubin was severely wounded and captured by the Chinese. Choosing to remain in the prison camp despite offers from the Chinese to return him to his native Hungary, Corporal Rubin disregarded his own personal safety and immediately began sneaking out of the camp at night in search of food for his comrades. Breaking into enemy food storehouses and gardens, he risked certain torture or death if caught. Corporal Rubin provided not only food to the starving Soldiers, but also desperately needed medical care and moral support for the sick and wounded of the POW camp. His brave, selfless efforts were directly attributed to saving the lives of as many as forty of his fellow prisoners. Corporal Rubin's gallant actions in close contact with the enemy

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and unyielding courage and bravery while a prisoner of war are in the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.

Rubin was one of the Korean War heroes who was honored in the 2013 film documentary *"Finnigan's War."* In 2015, Daniel M. Cohen, published a biography of Rubin: *Single-Handed: The Inspiring True Story of Tibor "Teddy" Rubin — Holocaust Survivor, Korean War Hero and Medal of Honor Recipient.*

Tibor Rubin passed away on December 5, 2015, in Garden Grove, California, and is buried at Mount Sinai Memorial Park in Los Angeles. In June 2022, Rubin's family donated his Medal of Honor to the 1st Cavalry Division during a special transfer ceremony. The medal is now on display at the division's headquarters in Fort Hood, Texas.



77th Engineer Combat Company

THE ARMY'S LAST SEGREGATED UNIT

BY C. DOUGLAS STERNER

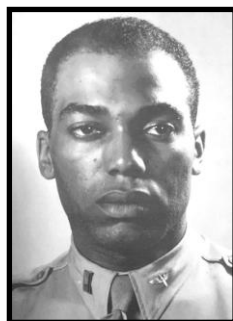
For generations, in large segments of the American public and the military establishment, ethnic minorities were considered inferior and unsuitable for combat service. As a result, they were often excluded from military service, or enlisted out of necessity to serve in menial, non-combat roles. Thanks to segregated Army units like the Indian Wars' "*Buffalo Soldiers*," World War I's "*Harlem Hellfighters*," and World War II Nisei (first generation Japanese-Americans) "*Go For Broke*" regiment, attitudes changed, and in 1948 President Harry S. Truman desegregated the U.S. military services.

When the Korean War began the 25th Infantry Division, serving in post-World War II Japan, was quickly deployed to South Korea to reinforce the Allied forces that had withdrawn to the Pusan Perimeter. Among the elements was the 77th Engineer Combat Company (ECC), assigned to support the 24th Infantry Regiment which also deployed. The Regiment was essentially the Army's last segregated regiment. The 77th Engineers was also composed largely of Black American soldiers.

After intense combat and amid criticism and unfair reports of poor combat performance, largely due to inexperienced White officers, the 24th Infantry Regiment was disbanded. Its soldiers were absorbed into other non-segregated regiments. The 77th ECC, however, continued to serve until the last major battle of the Korean War and was the last segregated unit in the U.S. Army to engage the enemy. Earning two Distinguished Service Crosses and eleven Silver Stars, it was one of the most highly decorated Army companies of the Korean War.

CHARLES M. BUSSEY

Charles Milton Bussey was born in Kern, California, on April 23, 1921, to Edmund Bussey and Charlotte Heinbow Bussey. He grew up in Bakersfield, California, with two brothers and two sisters. After graduating from high school, he enrolled at Los Angeles City College for two years.

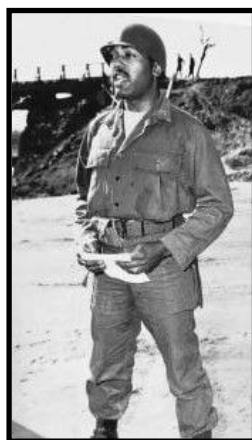


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With the United States at war, Bussey enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces, and received his commission and pilot wings on May 28, 1943. Before deploying to combat, on August 31, 1943, he married Miss Doris J. Wilson, with whom he would have sons Charles and Edmund, and daughters Fe' Angeline and Patricia. Bussey was assigned as a fighter pilot in the 332d Fighter Group, the famed Tuskegee Airmen of the FIFTEENTH Air Force. Flying combat in the European Theater of Operations, he was awarded three Air Medals.

Returning home after the war, he was honorably discharged and became a Los Angeles police officer. Unhappy with his employment, he enrolled at San Francisco State University, and after graduating in 1948, returned to U.S. Army service. On May 26, 1950, Captain Bussey was made commanding officer of the 77th Engineer Combat Company. When the Korean War began he took his company to reinforce the Pusan Perimeter, where U.S. and Allied troops had withdrawn after the overwhelming North Korean invasion of South Korea.

On July 20, 1950, during the *Battle of Yechon*, Captain Bussey was returning to his company with mail when he encountered a group of malingering truck drivers. While urging them to get back to work, he heard gunfire from a small village in the distance that his company was supposed to be proving security for. Less than a mile to the rear of the vehicle column, he saw a large group of white-clad Koreans coming towards them.



In his 1991 published memoir *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War*, he wrote: *"I watched the group of farmer-soldiers coming ever closer and reckoned that farmers scatter and run if you send a long burst of machine-gun fire over their heads, but soldiers flatten out like quail and await orders from their leader . . . I sent a burst from the .50 caliber machine gun dangerously close above the heads of the approaching group . . . True to the form of soldiers, they flattened into the paddy as the bullets flew past them . . . Bullets raked and chewed them up mercilessly . . . The advancing column was under tight observation from somewhere on the mountain because large mortar rounds started . . . overhead. I was nicked by a fragment. the gunner on the .30 caliber machine gunner was hit badly, and his assistant was killed. The enemy mortar was accurate. The*

THE 77TH ENGINEER COMBAT COMPANY

shells were bursting about twenty to forty feet overhead, showering us with shell fragments. And we were now drawing small-arms fire from the rice paddies below . . . I chopped the North Korean troops to pieces . . . I was ashamed of the slaughter before me, but this was my job, my duty, and my responsibility. I stayed with it until not one white rag was left intact."

Bussey and his men were credited with killing 258 enemy soldiers in what an Associate Press reporter called the "*first sizeable ground factory of the Korean War.*" For his actions, Bussey was awarded the Silver Star.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Captain (Corps of Engineers), [then First Lieutenant] Charles M. Bussey (ASN: 0-804548), United States Army, for gallantry in action as a member of the 77th Engineer Combat Company, 25th Infantry Division, in action against an armed enemy in Korea, on or about 20 July 1950. Observing that a rifle company in a small village near Yechon, Korea, was being subjected to severe mortar and machine gun fire from enemy forces occupying high ground nearby, Captain Bussey maneuvered a squad equipped with two .50 caliber machine guns to commanding terrain and, manning one of the machine guns, directed withering fire on the enemy position. When friendly heavy mortars registered on the enemy position and the enemy soldiers attempted to flee, Captain Bussey destroyed them with the intense fire of his weapon. By his conspicuous courage and outstanding leadership, Captain Bussey was instrumental in the destruction of numerous enemy and the relief of a beleaguered unit. His courageous action are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.

Many witnessed Bussey's actions and thought Bussey deserved the Medal of Honor. Lieutenant John T. Corley was commanding officer of the 3d Battalion of the segregated 24th Infantry Regiment; he was a decorated hero who received a DSC in both World War II and Korea, and eight Silver Stars. Corley believe the Medal of Honor should only be posthumously awarded to a Black hero. Bussey recalled Corley told him, "*the country did not need another Jack Robinson.*"

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During World War II, Robinson was drafted and assigned to a segregated Army cavalry unit. He applied for admission to **Officer Candidate School (OCS)**, which after July 1941 was supposed to be race-neutral, although very few Blacks were accepted. Robinson persisted and eventually entered OCS, graduating with his commission as a second lieutenant in January 1943. Remaining in duty stations in the United States, on July 6, 1944, while in uniform, Second Lieutenant Robinson boarded an Army bus. The bus driver ordered Robinson to move to the back of the bus, but Robinson refused. The driver didn't push the matter, but upon reaching the base he called for military police who took Robinson into custody. In a very public scandal, Robinson was court martialed, however by the time of the trial in August 1944, the charges were reduced to two counts of insubordination; he was acquitted by a panel of nine White officers.

Robinson would go on to greater fame as the first Black American to play in **Major League Baseball** in the modern era. His signing with the **Brooklyn Dodgers** on April 15, 1947, broke the color barrier and ended racial segregation in professional baseball, which had relegated Black players to the Negro leagues since the 1880s.

Of the racial prejudice that denied him his country's highest military honor, Bussey only said, *"I loved my country for what it could be, far beyond what it was."*

Captain Bussey continued to lead his 77th Engineer Combat Company in heavy combat in the early months of the war. His engineers earned two Distinguished Service Crosses and nine Silver Stars, all but one of which were for actions in the first 68 days of the Korean War.

Continuing in military service after Korea, Bussey served in Germany when the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961. From 1963 to 1966 he served at Presidio of San Francisco until his retirement from the Army in 1966 as a lieutenant colonel.

In civilian life he worked as a construction consultant. Also, in 1967 he began an African American owned business called Patimik that refinished furniture, and also had contracts to clean phone booths and build crates for shipping of war materiel to Vietnam. In 1969 he was appointed to the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Commission. Bussey died in California on October 26, 2003.



THE 77TH ENGINEER COMBAT COMPANY

WILLIAM M. BENEFIELD

William Maurice Benefield, Jr., was born in Wheatley, Arkansas, on June 23, 1926, the first child of William Murice Benefield, Sr., and Samantha *Parker* Benefield. His father was a veteran of service in the Army during World War II and was honorably discharged after the war as a second lieutenant. His sons William and Adolph, and daughter Katie grew up in Pittsburg, Kansas, attending local schools. William, Jr., graduated from Pittsburg High School in 1943.



Benefield enlisted in the U.S. Army. In 1947, while stationed in Virginia, he married Miss Carrie W. Hilland. By the time he deployed to South Korea to join the 25th Infantry Division, he was married and had two children with a third on the way. After son Steven William was born, Carrie and the three children sailed for Japan to join her husband. They arrived in Japan on July 11, 1950, the same day Second Lieutenant Benefield sailed for the battlefields of South Korea with the 77th Engineer Combat Company (ECC). He never got the chance to welcome them, or to meet his six month old son.

On June 25, 1950, when the North Korean People's Army (KPA) crossed the 38th Parallel that was the northern border of South Korea, those U.S. Army and South Korean soldiers that survived were pushed back. They withdrew to the port of Pusan, far south on the Korean Peninsula, and set up a defensive perimeter while awaiting reinforcements. The 25th Infantry Division's units including the 24th Infantry Regiment and 77th ECC began arriving at Pusan from Japan over the period of several days beginning on July 5.



Upon landing at Pusan July 11, Benefield's company went immediately into action. The EIGHTH Army, with the ocean at their backs, were surrounded on three sides of the Pusan Perimeter by a massive North Korean Army force. While the perimeter was reinforced, the next task was to break out from Pusan. Strategists planned to do this by attacking over the same route the KPA had used in their drive south.

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The valley of the Nakdong River northward towards Sangju was one of strategic importance. The Taegu-Tabu-dong-Sangju road traversed this corridor, with crossings of the Nakdong River possible at Sonsan and Nakdong-ni. From there the EIGHTH Army could advance west toward the Kum River above Taejon and bypass that heavily enemy-invested city for a more direct route towards the South Korean capital of Seoul.

The 25th Infantry Division's assigned engineer unit was and is the 65th Engineer Combat Battalion; the 77th Company was a part of the Division in Korea to support the segregated, largely Black 24th Infantry Regiment. The motto of the 65th Engineers is, "*First In, Last Out;*" it is actually a good description of the role of all Army combat engineer units. In the breakout from Pusan, they were just that – leading the way along with the 77th Engineer ECC.

On May 11, 1950, near Sangju, the 77th ECC was ordered to advance and engage the enemy. In their forward movement they encountered a large minefield the KPA had established as a protective barrier 200 yards from the enemy position. Neutralizing the mine field was a common, but often deadly job for combat engineers, and Second Lieutenant Benefield advanced alone to clear it. Under a hail of small arms and machinegun fire from the enemy, he continued to clear the obstruction. In so doing, he was killed by enemy fire. For his actions he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.



The President of the United States of America, under the provisions of the Act of Congress approved July 9, 1918, takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Second Lieutenant (Corps of Engineers) William Maurice Benefield, Jr. (ASN: 0-1685718), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with the 77th Engineer Combat Company, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. Second Lieutenant Benefield distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces near Sangju, Korea, on 29 July 1950. On that date, during daylight hours, the 77th Engineer Combat Company received orders to advance against the enemy's position. Information was received on the location of an

THE 77TH ENGINEER COMBAT COMPANY

enemy minefield in the path of the company's advance. Realizing the danger to personnel of the company, Lieutenant Benefield, with complete disregard for his personal safety, went forward alone. Although the area was swept by intense small-arms fire, he advanced to within two-hundred yards of the enemy position and attempted to remove the mine field. During this action Lieutenant Benefield was killed. The extraordinary heroism of Second Lieutenant Benefield reflects the greatest credit on himself and was in keeping with the high traditions of the military service.

When Carrie received the news of her husband's death, she and the children quickly sailed back to her husband's family in Pittsburg, Kansas. The following year she, her children, her husband's mother and grandmother, travelled to Washington, D.C. There, on April 5, 1951, Major General Thomas W. Herren,



presented Second Lieutenant Benefield's Distinguished Service Cross to his two year old son, Michael, who is seen looking at it closely. When it was pinned to his coat, he had tears in his eyes; later explaining he cried because he thought it would hurt.



William Benefield was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, in Arlington, Virginia, the first Black hero of the Korean War.

JEROME F. BARNWELL

Jerome F. Barnwell was born in Clearview, Oklahoma, on February 14, 1923, to John Henry Barnwell and Anna Bell *Brucks* Barnwell. He grew up in Chickasha, Oklahoma, with brothers Cornelius and Joe, and sister Annie M. He attended his first year of high school in Oklahoma City, and then entered military service during World War II, and served as a private in the U.S. Army with the 3917th Quartermaster Gasoline Supply in company with the post-war Army in Berlin, Germany.

He then returned to the United States to live with his mother in Wichita, Kansas, and returned to finish his high school education, graduating from East High School in 1947. While living in Wichita he was devout in his faith and was an active member of the Church of God in

THE DIVERSITY OF U.S. MILITARY HEROES

Christ, Holiness. One month after graduation, he returned to service in the U.S. Army.

In September 1949 Barnwell was promoted to corporal and was deployed to Japan with the 77th Engineer Combat Company, 25th Infantry Division. He deployed with his company to Pusan, South Korea, in July 1951, only three weeks after the North Korean Army invaded. On August 6, 1950, during the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, his platoon was advancing against enemy positions near Haman, Korea, when the platoon was pinned down by heavy enemy fire. Alone Corporal Barnwell charged the position but was mortally wounded in his heroic effort; however, his actions inspired his comrades, and they charged and overwhelmed the enemy, taking the enemy position. For his actions he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Corporal Jerome F. Barnwell (ASN: RA-38398287), United States Army, for gallantry in action as a member of the 77th Engineer Combat Company, 25th Infantry Division, in action against an armed enemy in Korea. On 6 August 1950, a platoon advancing across a barren hillside in the vicinity of Haman, Korea, was ambushed by a large hostile force. The strongly entrenched enemy directed devastating machine gun and mortar fire from its position on the high ground and pinned the platoon down. Braving the withering fire, Sergeant Barnwell advanced alone toward an enemy machine gun in an effort to relieve the pressure on his platoon but was mortally wounded before he reached the position. His supreme sacrifice inspired his comrades to assault the position and rout the hostile force. Sergeant Barnwell's conspicuous courage, grim determination and selfless devotion to the welfare of his comrades are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.

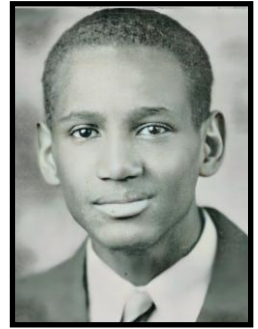
Barnwell's Silver Star was presented to his parents, and his body was returned to Kansas. Funeral services were held in his home church on November 6, 1954. He was buried with military honors at Maple Grove

THE 77TH ENGINEER COMBAT COMPANY

Cemetery, in Wichita. Ten years later a Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Wichita, was named the “*Jerome F. Barnwell Post.*”

CHESTER J. LENON

Chester J. Lenon was born in Glenmora, Louisiana, on October 6, 1919, to Joseph J. Lenon and Easter Elizabeth Williams. His sister Essie, who was six years older than him, was also born in Louisiana. When Chester was two years old the family moved to Independence, Kansas, where brothers John and Robert and sister Maggie were born. Chester attended local schools and graduated from Independence High School in 1938, then enrolled at Independence Junior College where he graduated in 1940. In February 1943 while attending Southern University in Scotlandville, Louisiana, he enlisted for military service in the U.S. Army, serving during World War I.



Returning home after the war, on September 15, 1947, he married Miss Luberta B. Pierce in Cumberland, North Carolina; the couple would have two children. When the Korean War began in June 1950, Lenon was a second lieutenant serving as a platoon leader of the 3d Platoon, 77th Engineer Combat Company, 25th Infantry Division, in post-war Japan.

Second Lieutenant Lenon deployed with his company to the Pusan Perimeter in early July, three weeks after the war began. On July 19 the 77th ECC was ordered to support the Infantry attack on Yechon, Korea. Because the enemy was well concealed in the village, the progress of the company was impeded by heavy enemy fire. Despite heavy machine gun and mortar fire, Second Lieutenant Lenon maneuvered to a point from which he directed accurate fire on the enemy positions.

He then fought with his company through the Nakdong River Valley in an attempt to break out of Pusan. The *Battle of Haman* was one of the bitterest early battles of the war, fought in the Nakdong River Valley. Although the major offensive against Haman did not begin until August 31, lasting until September 19.



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On August 5, 1950, the North Korean Peoples' Army (KPA) launched a major offensive, attacking the Pusan Perimeter in superior numbers. The fighting was bitter and costly for both sides; initially the enemy had the upper hand. On August 6, 1950, Company I of the segregated 24th Infantry Regiment was forced to withdraw south of Haman, Korea, and Second Lieutenant Lenon's platoon was covering their withdrawal when it was pinned down. Lenon took six volunteers and fearlessly led them to flank the enemy, killing and wounding them in large numbers. He was wounded in the action but refused to be evacuated, remaining on the battlefield to direct the fire and movement of his men until the platoon was able to withdraw. Then, despite his own wounds, he focused on the care and treatment of the wounded men of his platoon. For his action he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.



The President of the United States of America, under the provisions of the Act of Congress approved July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Second Lieutenant (Corps of Engineers) Chester James Lenon (ASN: 0-2206421), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with 77th Engineer Combat Company, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. Second Lieutenant Lenon distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces near Haman, Korea, on 6 August 1950. On that date, Lieutenant Lenon, Platoon Leader, of the 3d platoon, was covering the withdrawal of Company I, 24th Infantry Regiment, south of Haman, Korea. During this action the platoon was pinned down by intense enemy small-arms and mortar fire. Despite the intense fire, Lieutenant Lenon and six volunteers, flanked the enemy and inflicted heavy casualties which enabled the remainder of the platoon to withdraw. Although wounded, Lieutenant Lenon refused to be evacuated, but remained in an exposed position delivering effective fire on the enemy until his men had reached safety. He then withdrew and despite his wounds devoted himself to the care and treatment of his wounded men. The extraordinary heroism displayed by Lieutenant Lenon on this occasion reflects the greatest credit on himself and is in keeping with the high traditions of the military service.

THE 77TH ENGINEER COMBAT COMPANY

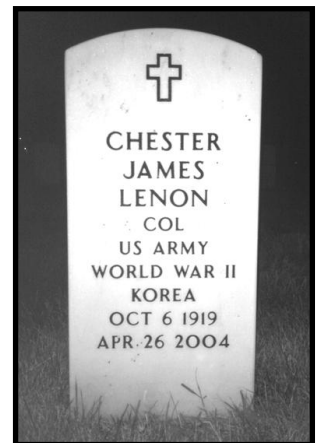
Lenon was evacuated to Frankfort, Germany, for treatment of his wounds. His Distinguished Service Cross was presented in a ceremony by Major General Irra P. Swift. On that day Lenon was also awarded the Bronze Star with Combat "V" for his actions on July 19, and a Purple Heart for his wounds.

Lenon remained in the Army as a career soldier. In 1943 he earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Hampton Institute in Virginia. After graduation, in early 1963 as a major, he completed a tour of duty as Assistant Professor of Military Science there. He then deployed back to Japan and while serving there he also attended the University of Hawaii at Tokyo. He graduated with a master's degree in business administration in 1968.



Lieutenant Colonel Lenon served as chief of the Administrative Services Division, Department of Human Resources, District Government, and as chief, Management Division, Department of Economic Development, District Government. In November 1974 as a colonel, he was named director of the Division of Administrative Services, Office of Management, U.S. Commissioner of Education. There he directed the Office of Education's mail facilities, printing and reproduction, procurement, office property, equipment management, travel, routine public inquiries and the educational materials of the center.

Colonel Chester Lenon retired from the Army on November 6, 1971, after 28 years of military service. Luberta died in Fairfax, Virginia, on April 14, 2004, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Chester died in Fairfax twelve days later and was buried next to her.



THE DIVERSITY OF U.S. MILITARY HEROES

The 24th Infantry Regiment

THE LAST BUFFALO SOLDIERS

C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Following the Civil War, Congress reorganized the regular Army into five artillery, ten cavalry, and forty-five infantry regiments. In recognition of the Black soldiers who had proven themselves in the war, six of these regiments were authorized as segregated regiments with mostly Black enlisted men and non-commissioned officers, usually led by White officers. Three years later during restructuring and reduction, the 38th and 41st Infantry Regiments were combined in the 24th segregated 24th Infantry Regiment of Black soldiers, who became known as “*Buffalo Soldiers*” by the Native Americans they fought in the Indian Campaigns.

The 24th Infantry Regiment served in the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, and the Philippine Insurrection. It was the first Black regiment sent to the South Pacific in World War II, and although they saw limited combat at Bougainville, Saipan, and Tinian in the closing years of the war, were mostly detailed to service and supply positions. After the war the regiment was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division in post-war Japan, and was among the first troops deployed to Korea with the outbreak of war there in June 1950. With its subordinate 77th Engineer Combat Company, it was the last segregated unit of the U.S. Army.

In Korea the Regiment’s reputation was sullied by incidents, including the Han River in 1951. When attacking up steep terrain the 1st Battalion fell apart under heavy fire, some soldiers tossing their weapons away as they fled. The Division commander, General William B. Kean, requested the Regiment be disbanded as “*untrustworthy and incapable of carrying out missions expected of an infantry regiment.*”

Despite a combat record over the first 14 months of the Korean War during which soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment received 23 Distinguished Service Crosses and nearly 150 Silver Stars, their reputation was sullied beyond repair. Although an August 1951 review determined that the White leadership was responsible for many of problems in the Regiment, several of whom were relieved, and despite a heroic bayonet and grenade charge on September 15, 1951, on October 1, 1951, the Regiment was disbanded and its soldiers sent to other units. Only the 77th Engineer Combat Company survived, and fought through the last battle of the Korean War before it, too, was disbanded.

THE DIVERSITY OF U.S. MILITARY HEROES

Notably, during the period in which the number of valor awards belied the criticism of the Regiment, two members of the 24th Infantry Regiment were awarded the Medal of Honor. They were the first Black soldiers since the Spanish-American War to receive the award. As noted in the previous chapter, the commanding officer of the Regiment's 3d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John Corley believed that the Medal of Honor should only be awarded posthumously to Black soldiers, both of these Korean War awards were indeed, posthumously presented.

WILLIAM H. THOMPSON

William Henry Thompson was born out of wedlock in New York, New York, on August 16, 1927, to Mary Elizabeth (last name unknown). He never knew his father, a Black World War I Veteran who died in 1929. William grew up in a New York tenement in abject poverty and dropped out of school at a young age. In his teens he took to living on the streets. One evening Rev. Harry C. Eva found him sleeping in a park and took him to the New York Home for Homeless Boys he founded; William lived there until his 18th birthday.



When he registered for the Draft in 1945, under the line “*Name of Person who Will Always Know your Address*” he wrote “*Nobody;*” under the line “*Employer*” he wrote “*Unemployed.*” He entered military service in the U.S. Army in October 1945, and after training served 18 months of his two-year enlistment in Adak, Alaska. Returning to the continental United States, he found civilian life difficult, and returned to military service in January 1948. As a heavy weapons (machinegun) Infantryman, he was assigned to the 6th Infantry Division in post-war Japan. When the Division returned to the United States, Thompson was transferred to the 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division in Japan, and deployed with the unit to South Korea in July 1950 after the outbreak of war there.

The 24th Infantry Regiment landed at Pusan to reinforce the Pusan Perimeter and support the Allied breakout from the position to which Allied forces withdrew after the stunning North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950. Following the August 6, 1950, *Battle of the Pusan* Perimeter, the Communists launched a counter offensive during the *Battle of Masan*. As Private First Class Thompson's platoon approached the town they were ambushed by a vastly superior number of

THE 24TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

the enemy; many of the soldiers fled in panic. Those who remained in the fight established a defensive perimeter under the leadership of their platoon leader, Second Lieutenant Herbert H. Wilson.

When an enemy grenade fell inside the perimeter, killing the only other machine gunner, Thompson unleashed his own .30 caliber Browning machine gun, pinning down the attacking enemy. The enemy concentrated their fire on Thompson's position, repeatedly wounding him with small arms bullets and grenade shrapnel. When the order came to the platoon to withdraw, Second Lieutenant Wilson rushed to Thompson's position, finding him still firing at the enemy, his uniform soaked in blood. Wilson ordered him to withdraw; Thompson refused saying, *"Get out of here! I'll cover you."* Wilson ordered two non-commissioned officers to evacuate Thompson, but still he refused to leave his comrades undefended. As they withdrew they could hear the continued hammer of his machine gun, then the sound of grenades detonating followed by a larger explosion, and Thompson's machine gun fell silent.

Days later when they moved forward to regain the ground taken in the battle, they found Thompson's riddled body, surrounded by North Korean dead. Thompson's body was returned to the United States where it was claimed by his mother, now Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Henderson, still living in Brooklyn, New York. She told reporters that the news of her son's death in Korea was the first time in many years that she had heard where he was. Thompson was buried at Long Island National Cemetery in East Farmingdale, New York.



Thompson's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Melvin R. Blair, who received a Distinguished Service Cross in World War II, and a second DSC and Silver Star in Korea, submitted the gallant private first class for the Medal of Honor. News reports said Blair *"bucked the Army red tape to see that the 22-year-old soldier's bravery was properly recognized. Blair told the Defense Department that he has seen a lot of heroism and gallantry during the 17 years he has been in the Army, and Thompson was the first soldier he ever recommended for the Medal of Honor."*



THE DIVERSITY OF U.S. MILITARY HEROES



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Private First Class William Henry Thompson (ASN: 42259324), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company M, 3d Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, in action against enemy aggressor forces at Haman, Korea, on 6 August 1950. While his platoon was reorganizing under cover of darkness, fanatical enemy forces in overwhelming strength launched a surprise attack on the unit. Private First Class Thompson set up his machinegun in the path of the onslaught and swept the enemy with withering fire, pinning them down momentarily thus permitting the remainder of his platoon to withdraw to a more tenable position. Although hit repeatedly by grenade fragments and small-arms fire, he resisted all efforts of his comrades to induce him to withdraw, steadfastly remained at his machinegun and continued to deliver deadly, accurate fire until mortally wounded by an enemy grenade. Private First Class Thompson's dauntless courage and gallant self-sacrifice reflect the highest credit on himself and uphold the esteemed traditions of military service.

On August 2, 1951, Blair was present at the Pentagon ceremony where General Omar N. Bradley presented Medals of Honor to eleven Korean War heroes. He proudly watched as Private First Class William Henry Thompson's Medal of Honor was presented posthumously to Thompson's mother, Mrs. Mary Henderson.

CORNELIUS H. CHARLTON

Cornelius H. Charlton was born in Eastgulf, West Virginia, on July 24, 1929, the eighth of nineteen children of Van Charlton and Clara Esther *Thompson* Charlton. His father worked in the West Virginia coal mines to support his large family, and in 1940 Charlton moved to Coalwood, West Virginia to live briefly with his brother Arthur. In 1944 Van and Clara moved with their family to the



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Bronx Burrough of New York City, where Van worked as superintendent of an apartment building. Fifteen-year-old Cornelius joined them there and began studies at James Monroe High School.

Young Cornelius wanted to drop out of school and join the Army to fight in World War II, but his parents refused to sign for him. Since he was underage. When he graduated in 1946, however, his parents finally consented to sign for their 17-year-old son to enlist. After training he was sent to duty in post-war Germany where he served his full two-year enlistment. Returning home, he re-enlisted and was assigned an administrative position with the EIGHTH Army in Okinawa. When the Korean War began, he requested combat duty in Korea, and was transferred to the 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. In early 1951 Sergeant Carlton became a squad leader in the Regiment's Company C, 1st Battalion.

Following the Communist's Spring Offensive in and around the 38th Parallel, the Eighth Army launched *Operation Piledriver*, an effort to push the North Korean and Chinese troops holding areas of South Korea northward into North Korea. The advance of the 24th Infantry Regiment towards Kumwha was slow against heavy enemy resistance. On July 1, 1951, the Regiment's 2d Battalion suffered heavy casualties and had to fall back while the 1st and 3d Battalions continued to attack.

On July 2 Charlton's company was assigned to capture Hill 543 near Chipo-ri, a strongly fortified hill held by a heavy enemy presence with mortars emplaced on the hilltop. When Charlton's platoon leader was mortally wounded, he assumed command of the platoon, but the heavy fire forced his platoon and the rest of Company C back.

Three times Sergeant Charlton returned with his platoon, leading them in a daring offensive action, making slow progress but paying a heavy toll for each yard gained. Charlton was himself credited with single-handedly destroying two Chinese positions and killing six enemy soldiers, before he was wounded in the chest.

Charlton refused to be evacuated, and holding one hand over his chest wound, he continued to lead the attack with his M-1 carbine in the other hand. So far in advance of his platoon was Charlton's daring assault, that he became separated from his men. Private First Class Ronald Holmes, one of Charlton's men, recalled that Charlton, *"Got the rest of the men together, and we started for the top. The enemy had some good emplacements . . . we couldn't get back to him. Grenades kept coming*

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at us and we were chased back down. Again, we tried, but no luck. Sergeant Charlton said he was going to make it this time, and he yelled, 'Let's go,' and we started up again. We reached the top this time. I saw the sergeant go over the top and charge a bunker on the other side. He got the gun but was killed by a grenade." For his actions, Charlton was awarded the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Sergeant Cornelius H. Charlton (ASN: RA-12265495), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company C, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, in action against enemy aggressor forces at Chipo-ri, Korea, on 2 June 1951. Sergeant Charlton's platoon was attacking heavily defended hostile positions on commanding ground when the leader was wounded and evacuated. Sergeant Charlton assumed command, rallied the men, and spearheaded the assault against the hill. Personally eliminating two hostile positions and killing six of the enemy with his rifle fire and grenades, he continued up the slope until the unit suffered heavy casualties and became pinned down. Regrouping the men he led them forward only to be again hurled back by a shower of grenades. Despite a severe chest wound, Sergeant Charlton refused medical attention and led a third daring charge which carried to the crest of the ridge. Observing that the remaining emplacement which had retarded the advance was situated on the reverse slope, he charged it alone, was again hit by a grenade but raked the position with a devastating fire which eliminated it and routed the defenders. The wounds received during his daring exploits resulted in his death but his indomitable courage, superb leadership, and gallant self-sacrifice reflect the highest credit upon himself the infantry, and the military service.

Charlton's Medal of Honor was posthumously presented to his parents in ceremonies at The Pentagon by Secretary of the Army Frank Pace. Most of his family was there for the moment, filling the Secretary's office.



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Charlton wasn't offered a burial at Arlington National Cemetery, usually automatic for a Medal of Honor recipient; he was buried at the segregated Bryant Cemetery in Bramwell, West Virginia. His family believed he was denied the Arlington burial due his ethnicity, although the cemetery claimed it was due to an *"administrative error."* In 1989 the Army offered to rebury Charlton in Arlington in 1989, but the family declined on the grounds that he had been previously denied due to racism. The American Legion rallied around the family and he was reburied at the American Legion Cemetery in Beckley, West Virginia. Finally, in November 2008, Carlton's family finally consented to have the Black hero buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.



William Thompson and Cornelius Charlton were the only Black Americans to be awarded the Medal of Honor during the Korean War. In the 1990s, due the fact that not a single Black American received the Medal of Honor in either of the World Wars, the Army begin a lengthy review of awards to Black soldiers, ultimately awarding one Medal of Honor posthumously to a World War I hero, and seven Medals of Honor to World War II Black heroes. As a result of continued reviews, on January 3, 2025, President Joe Biden awarded five Medals of Honor to ethnic heroes of wars past, including two Black Korean War heroes who served in non-segregated Army regiments.

FRED B. MCGEE

Fred Bernerd McGee was born in Steubenville, Ohio, on May 30, 1920, to Spanish McGee and Perrie Dalton McGee, the sixth of eight children. When he was two years old the family moved to a wood-frame homestead in the countryside near Bloomingdale, Ohio, where he grew up. His father was a self-taught mechanical engineer and business owner, and invented and patented a snow tire chain that the Army used on trucks in World War II. A quick learner, one year after



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watching his father put snow chains on the family car, Fred used rope to similarly attach to his tricycle, and rode off into the snow.

As a corporal in Company K, 3d Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, he was twice wounded in the attack on Hill 528 near Tang-Wan-Ni, Korea. For his actions on June 16, 1952, Corporal McGee was awarded the Silver Star. When news of his combat exploits made it home to the United States, he was contacted by Hero Comics, which released his story in their colorful pages.

Discharged from active duty, he remained in the Army Reserves for three years. In 1954 he married Miss Cornell Yvonne Lewis; the couple had sons Brian, Fred, Jr., and James, and daughters Victoria and Robin. An accomplished baseball player, holding the state championship with a .467 batting average, he received a tryout with the Kansas City *A's* at a time when Major League Baseball was still reluctant to sign Black players. In civilian life he coached and umpired Little League and high school baseball, and was a high school football referee.

McGee worked for 43 years for Wheeling-Pittsburg Steel. Renowned for his public service and veterans' programs, in 2002 he was inducted into the Ohio Military Hall of Valor. In 2009 the Congressional Medal of Honor Society presented him with their distinctive Above and Beyond Citizen Honors Award. He was named Jefferson County, Ohio, Service Commission Veteran of the Year for 2018 -2020. He died on January 3, 2020, at the age of 89, and was buried at Northern Cemetery in Smithfield, Ohio. Five years after his death, as a part of the ongoing reviews, his Silver Star was upgraded to the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Corporal Fred Bernerd McGee, United States Army. Corporal McGee distinguished himself by gallantry in action near Tang-Wan-Ni, Korea, on June 16, 1952, in an assault on enemy fortified positions. As gunner on a light machine gun in a weapons squad of Company K, 3d Battalion 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, Corporal McGee delivered a heavy volume of supporting fire from an exposed position despite intense enemy machine-gun and mortar fire directly on his location.

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Though forced to move his gun several times, he continued to support the assault and give covering fire to the assault elements of his platoon. When his squad leader was wounded, together with several other members of his squad, he assumed command and moved the squad even farther forward to a more exposed position in order to deliver neutralizing fire on an enemy machine gun sweeping the other assault platoon with deadly flanking fire. When his machine gunner was mortally wounded, he again took over the gun. On order, he directed his squad to withdraw and voluntarily remained behind to help evacuate the wounded and dead. Though wounded in the face, he heroically exposed himself by standing straight up in intense enemy machine-gun and mortar fire while attempting to evacuate the body of the company runner. Forced to abandon the body, he aided a wounded man to be moved to the rear and safely through a huge volume of enemy mortar and artillery fire. The gallantry displayed by Corporal McGee reflects great credit upon himself and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.

The Medal of Honor for the hero of Hill 528 in Korea was posthumously presented to his daughter Victoria, by President Joseph Biden in ceremonies at the White House on January 3, 2025. The Army described Fred McGee as *“that shining light on a hill, that light that we are all called to be.”*



CHARLES R. JOHNSON

Charles Robert Johnson was born in Millbrook, New York, on August 11, 1932. He attended Millbrook High School for three years and transferred to Arlington High School in Poughkeepsie, New York. After graduation he attended Howard University for one semester where he played on the football team.



Enlisted in service, on June 11, 1953, he was serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division, at Outpost Harry where he so distinguished himself as to be awarded the Silver Star. Killed in action it was posthumously awarded and he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.



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More than five decades later his Silver Star was upgraded to the Medal of Honor during the ongoing review to identify soldiers who, due to racism, were denied the Medal of Honor. It was presented to his sister Juanita by President Joseph Biden in the White House on January 3, 2025.

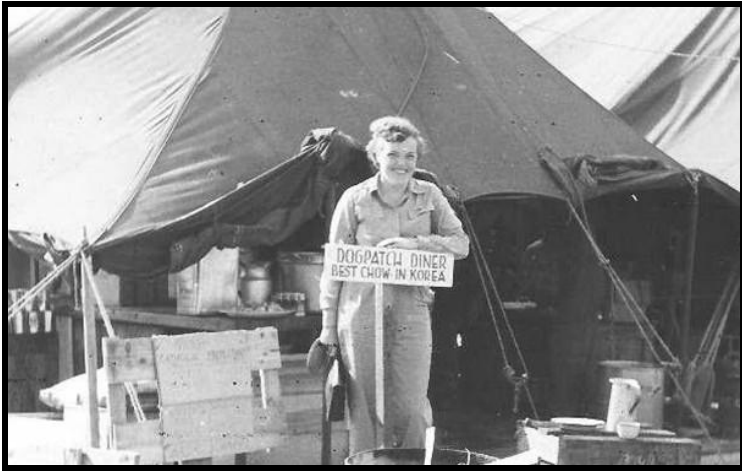


The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Private First Class Charles Robert Johnson, United States Army. Private First Class Johnson distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity beyond the call of duty while defending Outpost Harry against overwhelming odds, and making the ultimate sacrifice to save the lives of his comrades in the Republic of Korea during the period of June 11, 1953, to June 12, 1953. Private First Class Johnson was serving as a Browning Automatic Rifleman with Company B, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Chinese forces attacked his unit during a massive nighttime assault. During the ensuing battle, overwhelming numbers of Chinese troops assaulted the trenches and bunkers defended by Private First Class Johnson and his squad. Private First Class Johnson, wounded from a direct artillery hit on his bunker and subsequently from a hand grenade thrown inside the bunker, at the personal disregard for his injuries, administered first aid to those more seriously injured. Understanding the seriousness of the situation and being under direct fire from the enemy, Private First Class Johnson personally dragged a wounded soldier to the safety of a secure bunker, stopping intermittently to aid injured soldiers and kill several enemy troops in hand-to-hand combat. Departing the safety of the second bunker, he conducted a search for weapons and ammunition then returned to rearm everyone. Recognizing their untenable situation and disregarding his personal safety, he exited the bunker, placing himself between the enemy and his injured comrades, informing them he would hold off the enemy forces as best as he could. His brave and selfless efforts were directly attributed to saving the lives of as many as ten soldiers. Private First Class Johnson's extraordinary actions in close combat with the enemy, unyielding courage and bravery, and profound concern for his fellow soldiers are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Jonita R. Bonham*

Best Care in the Air

BY: PETER STONEFIELD



Jonita (Bonnie) Bonham at Pusan, Korea, 1950 – U.S. Air Force Photo

In September 1947, the United States Air Force was created when combat elements of the Army Air Forces were separated from the U.S. Army. However, some of the support functions, including medical care, remained under the responsibility of the Army. Over the next several years the Air Force and more specifically, Army Air Surgeon, Major General Malcolm C. Grow, worked tirelessly to convince his superiors in the Army and President Harry S. Truman that the Air Force needed its own medical service. In the summer of 1949, he succeeded. Air Force General Order No. 35 established an Air Force medical service that included components for a Dental Corps, a Veterinary Corps, a Medical Service Corps, an Air Force Nurse Corps, and a Women's Medical Specialist Corps. The order allowed personnel to be transferred from their existing Army postings to be commissioned into their corresponding positions within the U.S. Air Force medical service, effective July 1, 1949. One of the individuals affected by this order was a young Army Flight Nurse named Jonita Ruth Bonham.

*Reprinted from: True Stories of Montana Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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Jonita Ruth Bonham was born in Bennington, Oklahoma, on April 2, 1922, to Joseph Lemuel and Katie Louticia *Smith* Bonham. By all accounts, Jonita had a normal upbringing, and after high school she attended the University of Oklahoma's School of Nursing. Upon graduation, just as the United States entered World War II, Bonham enlisted in the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) as a flight nurse and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. For the next year or so she attended USAAF officer and nurse training before being sent to the Pacific Theater to be stationed with the Air Medical Evacuation units. During the war, she served in several locations throughout the Pacific Theater, although not much has been recorded of her time there. When the war ended she continued to serve at postings in both the Philippine Islands and Japan, before rotating back to the United States and leaving active duty.



When, on June 25, 1950, ninety thousand North Korean troops poured across the border into South Korea, putting thousands of American troops in danger, Bonham immediately rejoined the military, taking advantage of the recent changes and was immediately promoted to first lieutenant in the new U.S. Air Force Women's Medical Specialist Corps. In late Summer 1950, Bonham found herself back in Japan and assigned duty as a Flight Nurse with the 801st Air Medical Evacuation Squadron based at Tachikawa, Japan, just outside of Tokyo. Her responsibility was to provide support onboard the evacuation flights, moving men out of the war zone on Douglas C-54 "*Skymaster*" transports converted into emergency hospital planes.

The Douglas C-54 *Skymaster* was a powerful four-engined transport aircraft used by the United States military in World War II and the Korean War. Like its predecessors, the C-54 was derived from a civilian design, so it was spacious and could effectively carry both personnel and cargo. Powered by four Pratt & Whitney R-2000-9 *Twin Wasp* 14-cylinder air-cooled radial piston engines, the C-54 had an effective range



of over four thousand miles with a four-thousand-pound payload at a cruise speed of just over one-hundred ninety miles per hour, making it an essential transport for getting personnel and material in and out of any situation. Converted to an evacuation hospital, the C-54 could hold multiple beds and evacuate multiple patients while providing a stable base for medical personnel to provide immediate, necessary care.

The need for their services was so high that First Lieutenant Bonham and her medical crew, which included another flight nurse, Captain Vera Brown, and medical corpsman Sergeant Foster Steele. They were constantly in action once they arrived in their duty area. Grabbing catnaps when possible, they were constantly in the air flying back and forth between Ashiya Air Base, Japan, and Kimpo, South Korea. On the way to Korea, they flew with fresh troops heading into the war zone, and on the way back, they were supporting wounded soldiers heading to Japan for treatment and/or hospitalization. From the time she arrived on July 25th through that fateful flight on September 26th, 1950, Bonham and her crew logged over 245 flight hours and helped evacuate over 600 wounded soldiers.

With a quick turnaround after delivering another load of wounded soldiers to Japan, Bonham, along with Brown and their corpsman, were taking a short break when they were awakened late on a stormy night on September 26, 1950. Boarding the plane with fifty fresh troops, they found their seats and settled in for the ride to Kimpo while the pilot made the final checks to prepare for takeoff. Rain and gusty winds buffeted the aircraft as the pilot taxied it to the end of the runway and guided it into position, waiting for a break in the gusts so he could apply power and take off.

For a short time, the stormy winds subsided, and he pushed the throttles forward. The C-54 accelerated along the runway, gaining speed as it headed down the runway. Nearing the end of the runway, the pilot pulled back on the control column lifting the nose of the seventy-three-thousand-pound aircraft, guiding it airborne against the heavy winds that buffeted it from all sides. As he fought to gain altitude, the nose rose sharply, and the stall warning wailed. Adding power, he fought to keep the aircraft aloft, but the weight and loss of lift was against him, and the aircraft couldn't maintain altitude. In minutes the aircraft was slowly rolling, then descending sharply and in mere seconds, slammed into the Sea of Japan, immediately breaking into three large pieces before sinking.

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Bonham woke up to find herself inside the submerged part of the airplane that was quickly filling with water. Her head and shoulder hurt badly, she was bleeding, and her left wrist was nearly useless, but somehow, she fought her way out of the broken aircraft and managed to get to the surface. The surface was like the scene out of a nightmare. Wreckage and bodies floated around her, and she could hear the cries of the wounded and dying. The sea was churned up by the storm, and she was tossed around as she tried to get her bearings. Grabbing a floating piece of debris, which turned out to be a barracks bag, she clung to it until she could clear her head. One of the soldiers floating close to her found a tied-up life raft floating nearby, but he didn't know how to inflate it. Bonham grabbed the rope and guided others to the rope, instructing them how to inflate it and how to board it without it capsizing.

Taking command of the situation, Bonham refused to get into the life raft as she continued to search for others who needed assistance. She located another life raft and helped get it inflated as well. She instructed additional soldiers to man that raft and tie it to the other so that the swells wouldn't separate them. Bonham refused to get into this raft either and stayed in the churning waters using her barracks bag as a mini-raft, eventually helping all the surviving seventeen passengers to the life rafts. Finally, exhausted and aching, and when no one else could be located, she allowed herself to be pulled into one of the life rafts.

Once aboard, Bonham tirelessly worked to help the injured and soothe their fears, encouraging them to remain calm and not panic. She theorized that someone must have seen them crash and that help surely was on the way, not realizing that no one on the base knew they had crashed. Bonham ensured the life rafts were properly tied together and everyone remained calm and patient while they awaited rescue. Hours later, when the storm subsided and the sun rose, a Japanese fishing vessel happened upon the small group of life rafts. Bonham instructed the soldiers to tie the rafts to the vessel so they could be safely towed back to land. Only then, when she knew they were safe, did she finally collapse and lapse into unconsciousness.

Once rescued, Bonham was revived in the hospital nearly a day later. She endured multiple surgeries to repair the injuries she suffered in the plane crash; the mental pain would take longer to heal since killed in the crash were eighteen passengers and five crew members, including her medical crew mate and dear friend Vera Brown. Bonham spent nine months in the hospital in Tokyo and then at Maxwell Air Force Base in

JONITA R. BONHAM

Alabama recovering from her injuries which included a broken cheekbone, severe skull fracture, a broken shoulder and a broken left wrist.

For her actions during the missions from July 25 through September 26, 1950, First Lieutenant Jonita Ruth Bonham was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. She was the first woman in the new U.S. Air Force to receive this commendation.



Lieutenant Jonita Bonham receives Distinguished Flying Cross from Gen. George Stratemeyer, Tokyo, Japan, October 18, 1950. (U.S. Air Force photo.)

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The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to First Lieutenant Jonita Ruth Bonham, United States Air Force, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight while acting as Flight Nurse in medical air evacuation flights totaling one hundred seventy (170) hours from 25 July to 26 September 1950. Lieutenant Bonham flew in unarmed cargo type aircraft. On many occasions these aircraft were operating in and out of advance airfields which were being subjected to enemy fire, transporting ammunition, rockets, bombs and other types of high explosives and inflammable material, under adverse weather conditions and over hazardous terrain. Despite these conditions, Lieutenant Bonham carried out her missions willingly and without complaint, continually comforting and caring for her patients. By her courage, ability and unselfish devotion to duty, Lieutenant Bonham has reflected great credit upon herself, her profession and the United States Air Force.

When Bonham sufficiently recovered from her wounds she remained on active duty, although not as a flight nurse. Instead, with a promotion to captain, she transferred to Alabama in 1951 to train other nurses. Soon after arriving in Alabama, she married Major Clifford Bovée, a medical specialist she met while serving in the Air Force. Unfortunately, the damage she suffered in the air crash continued to bother her, and in 1952 she was medically retired from the Air Force.

Jonita and Clifford Bovee had three children whom they raised together. She passed away from cancer at the age of 72 at the home of her daughter Renee in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on December 24th, 1994. In 2021, Jonita Bonham and seven other women heroes were honored with a bronze statue and a plaque at the Fort Walton Beach Veterans Park in Oskaloosa County, Florida for their heroism and service to our Nation. The plaque gives a brief summary of her heroism on the night of September 26th, 1951, and the statue is a representation of the photo taken of her in Pusan, Korea in 1950, by sculptor Jon Hair.



Rest in Peace, Captain Bonham. Your dedication to the Women's Medical Specialist Corps will be long remembered.

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History & Heritage

Jonita Ruth Bonham-Bovée | Okaloosa County

Bonham, Jonita Ruth, Capt | Together We Served

This Day In History: Jonita Bonham, Heroic Flight Nurse

Jonita Ruth Bonham Korean War Memorial Plaque - National War Memorial Registry

An Unassuming Hero — At Ease! Veterans Magazine

Www.Jonhair.Com

Douglas C-54 Skymaster - Wikipedia

Ensign Jesse LeRoy Brown



Air Force veteran and portrait artist from McKinney, Texas, and founder of the North Texas Fallen Warrior project, Colin Kimball specializes in portraying our nation's fallen warriors. This portrait is part of a compilation of portraits he is working on to tell the stories of our nation's posthumous and belatedly recognized Medal of Honor recipients who never got to wear the medal, and other military heroes.

Jesse LeRoy Brown*

“PLEASE TELL DAISY I LOVE HER”

BY: COLIN KIMBALL

The allure of the sky attracted young Jesse Leroy Brown from the earliest age of his childhood. An American of African descent, with a little Chickasaw and Choctaw ancestry as well, from Hattiesburg Mississippi, Brown grew up with five siblings in a small rural home with no central heating or air conditioning and no indoor plumbing. His father was a hard-working grocery warehouse worker turned sharecropper due to the economic decline of the Great Depression and his



mother was a schoolteacher who instilled the love and importance of education in her children. Brown fell in love with flight at age six when his father took him to an airshow. Whenever Brown saw an airplane overhead while out toiling in the cotton fields or enduring manual labor in the hot Mississippi sun, he would point to the sky and say, *“I am going to fly a plane someday.”*

Brown attended a one room schoolhouse three miles away. He was inspired by the rigor his teacher demanded and stayed on top of his studies. In 1939 Brown moved in with his aunt in Hattiesburg to attend Eureka High School. Although racially segregated, Eureka offered a greater opportunity for education compared to the small rural school where his parents lived. A gifted athlete in football, basketball, and track, Brown graduated as salutatorian



in the class of 1944. He met his future bride, Miss Daisy Pearl Nix, while attending Eureka. Offered scholarships to a variety of historically Black universities, and strongly advised to follow up on those offers, Brown wanted a to follow the path of his role model, Jessie Owens -- leave the South and attend Ohio State University. It was a bold move that defied

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Navy Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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the conventional wisdom of his academic advisors. It would be a difficult but fortuitous choice.

Jesse Brown faced many financial and worse yet, racial obstacles in his quest of attaining a college degree from Ohio State. Prior to admission, his high school advisors told him that only seven students of African descent had graduated Ohio State, an infinitesimally small number of the student body. Jesse was determined. He would work multiple jobs in the summer to save the money he needed to enroll, including waiting tables at a local saloon that served Army soldiers. He persevered even though he was the target of racial epithets. He dealt with the discrimination and saved enough money to cover his enrollment. He left Mississippi on a racially segregated train and enrolled at Ohio State in the fall of 1944 to major in architectural engineering. Jesse Brown persevered.

Brown would have to work full time while a student to cover his living expenses and tuition. He initially went out for the track and wrestling team, but ultimately had to quit due to financial pressure. His education, and all that it took to attain it, was his higher calling. He worked as a janitor for a local department store and for the local railroad company unloading box cars until midnight each night. Despite his demanding work schedule, he maintained excellent grades. He repeatedly applied to the aviation cadet program but was denied admittance due to his race.

In contrast, Thomas Hudner, grew up in a comfortable existence, the son of a successful Irish businessman who ran a chain of grocery stores under the banner of the family name. Hudner would attend the prestigious Phillips Academy, an exclusive private school in Andover, Massachusetts, founded in the 1700s. The school had among its alumnae two former presidents of the United States, a Supreme Court Justice, five Nobel Laureates, and five Medal of Honor recipients at the time of his attendance, as well as a host of notable authors, actors, and industry titans. The athletic Hudner loved sports. Phillips Academy was known as a preparatory school that fed Yale University, but Hudner took a different path upon graduation. Instead, he accepted an appointment along with nine other classmates to the U. S. Naval Academy where he entered in 1943 for the Class of 1946.



Jesse LeRoy Brown

Brown would spend his entire academic year in Ohio working and attending class. He came home in the summers to work at a local dry cleaner in Hattiesburg and to continue his courtship of Miss Daisy Pearl Nix. As Brown entered his sophomore year, he learned of a Naval Aviation Cadet Program that was in place at Ohio State. Brown took the entrance exams and endured the scorn and discouraging remarks spiced with derogatory racial epithets from the Navy instructors who told him he would never be allowed to enter the cockpit of a Navy airplane. His dreams were big, and his determination was bigger.

The Aviation Cadet program was operated at fifty-two colleges and none of them were at the historically Black universities that Brown was originally encouraged to attend. Brown persisted with his application and entered the program where he enlisted as a Seaman Apprentice in the Navy Reserve and was accepted as a member of the Naval Reserve Officer Training program in 1946. His respectful defiance of his high school advisors was starting to pay off. He received a stipend of \$50 a month that also allowed him to quit his part-time jobs and focus on his studies.

Thomas Hudner attended the Naval Academy with fellow notable graduates including former President Jimmy Carter, Medal of Honor recipient James Stockdale, and former CIA Director Stansfield Turner. As Brown was entering the Naval Aviation Cadet program, Hudner graduated from the Naval Academy and pursued a path of serving as a Communications Officer. His initial assignments took him to sea duty on the cruiser U.S.S. *Helena* and then on land at Pearl Harbor. Unlike Brown, Hudner had no initial interest in aviation.

Jesse Brown attained his bachelor's degree in architectural engineering in 1947. Of the over 5,000 students enrolled in the Naval ROTC Program nationwide, Jesse Brown was one of only fourteen who were of African descent. Jesse's persistence to become a pilot paid off and in March 1947 he was accepted to flight school in Glenview, Illinois, continuing to Ottumwa, Iowa, and concluding in Pensacola, Florida. He was commissioned as a Midshipman in April 1947.

While training in Pensacola, Brown violated official Navy policy and came home to Mississippi to secretly marry the love of his life, Daisey Pearl. Brown continued his flight training learning to land on aircraft carriers. Finally, the long process of becoming an official Navy aviator was complete in October 1948 when Jesse L Brown received the coveted wings of gold of a United States Naval Aviator. The Associated Press

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made a big deal of Brown's accomplishment recognizing him as the first African American naval aviator. A photograph of him receiving his wings appeared in *Life* magazine. He could now also proudly proclaim his secret marriage to Daisey Pearl. He received his commission as an ensign in April 1949. Although subjected to racial prejudice during his journey to receive his wings, Brown would proclaim that the racial prejudice declined notably once he received his commission as a naval officer.

Meanwhile, as Brown was earning his wings, Thomas Hudner wanted a new challenge and applied to flight school. His training path took him through Pensacola and Corpus Christi, Texas, before earning his Naval Aviator wings of gold in August 1949, slightly less than a year after Brown received his. Brown would serve initially in Rhode Island, and Norfolk, Virginia, and would be assigned to Fighter Squadron 32 (VF-32) aboard the *Leyte* in January 1949. Brown also became the father of a daughter, Pamela Elise Brown, who was born while he was stationed at Norfolk. He flew the WWII-era Chance-Voight F-4U4 *Corsair* for VF-32 who were known as the "*Flying Swordsmen*."



Hudner joined the *Flying Swordsman* as a pilot after he received his wings in August and although he outranked Brown due to his longer time in service, Ensign Brown was one of the "*Old Salts*." Brown got along with all the pilots of the squadron and even the lower ranking stewards, also of African descent. Brown and Hudner were now part of the cadre of Pilots focused on their duty. Brown noted that he was previously ridiculed by the stewards and cooks who were also African American. He attributed this treatment due to jealousy. Brown was now part of a bigger mission, that of serving his nation as a fighter pilot.

Jesse LeRoy Brown

Training off the East Coast of the United States, Brown and Hudner became friends. In June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. The United Nations Security Council voted to aid the beleaguered South Koreans who were forced to retreat to the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. Brown and Hudner were serving on the *Leyte* that was on station in the Mediterranean when the *Leyte* received orders to head to Korea. Commanders at the time believed that the pilots on the *Leyte* were better trained to take on the mission in Korea. After a replacement carrier arrived in the Mediterranean, the *Leyte* transitioned through the Strait of Gibraltar, across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, across the Pacific, arriving on station at Korea on October 8, 1950.

Initially, the war in Korea was perilous for the UN Forces as the better equipped Communist North Korean People's Army (KPA) captured the South Korean capital of Seoul and pushed U.S. Army and South Korean army forces to the southern tip of the peninsula near the port of Pusan. In September 1950, while the *Leyte* was steaming to Korea, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, who had been appointed commander of the United Nations forces being assembled to fight the KPA, orchestrated a Marine amphibious landing deep behind enemy lines at the port of Inchon. Within two weeks, the Seoul was recaptured. The U.S. Eighth Army pushed north from the Pusan Perimeter.

By the time the *Leyte* arrived in Korean waters to support Task Force 77, UN Forces were pursuing the KPA well into North Korea towards the Yalu River on the border with Communist China. The speed and success that they attained led some commanders and the press to boast that the war would be over by Christmas. The Communist Chinese had other plans.

Thomas Hudner got to know Jesse not only from their flying duties but in the less tense moments in the wardroom of the ship. Hudner gained an immense respect for Brown due to the obstacles he faced on his journey to become a naval aviator and



his persistence in attaining his wings. The *Corsair* they flew was outdated as a fighter due to the emergence of faster jet fighters and was tasked with

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Close Air Support (CAS) missions in support of the troops on the ground. Laden with up to 4,000 pounds of ordinance, the *Corsair* proved to be a powerful and successful fighter-bomber.

In November, the 1st Marine Division along with American and British Army units of the X Corps were pushing into North Korea around the Changjin Reservoir. Changjin, the Korean pronunciation, was known by the American and UN Forces as Chosin, the name printed on Japanese World War II maps that U.N. troops used during the Korean War. Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong called for the complete annihilation of the 1st Marine Division at Chosin, believing that the humiliation and public outcry would prompt the United States to abandon their fighting in Korea. The Chinese moved in tens of thousands of troops into Korea undetected by American Intelligence. By mid-November, the Chinese Communist Army launched its attack on U.N. Forces near Chosin. The Marines and other U.N. troops were vastly outnumbered with upwards of 130,000 Chinese troops compared to the 30,000 U.N. troops.

U.S. Marine and Navy air assets on land bases as well as operating off the carriers in Task Force 77, flew upwards of 230 sorties per day in support of the Marines on the ground. The battle took place over an extended front of mountainous terrain that was made more difficult by a severe Siberian cold front that caused temperatures to plunge to 36 degrees below zero. The *Battle of the Chosin Reservoir* would become one of the most remarkable and difficult battles faced by the Marine Corps in its entire history. Hudner and Brown were gaining considerable experience supporting the Marines with CAS missions.

Lieutenant Commander Richard Cevoli was the commander who led the *Flying Swordsmen* against the Chinese Communist Army there. During the battle, the cold weather interfered with everything mechanical from weapons and vehicles to communication equipment. The toll it took on the troops was immense. On December 4, Cevoli was leading six *Corsairs* on a CAS mission over Chosin in bad winter overcast weather. Flying low at 1,000 feet, they were looking for targets of opportunity. The Chinese were well concealed. Although Hudner, a Lieutenant, Junior Grade, outranked Brown, an ensign, Brown had more experience. Hudner was flying as his wingman. The mission was rather unremarkable as the low visibility hampered VF-32's efforts to find targets of opportunity. Initially, no one seemed to notice when Brown announced he was losing power in his large radial engine. All ears stood at attention when this was

Jesse LeRoy Brown

followed with his announcement of “*I think I have been hit, I’ve lost oil pressure and I am having to go in.*”

Apparently, Ensign Brown’s *Corsair* was hit by a “*Golden BB,*” a term coined for a lucky shot by small arms ground fire on a low-flying warplane. With his engine about to quit, Brown had no alternative but to find a clearing on the side of a mountain. Well behind enemy lines, Brown crash landed his *Corsair*. The aircraft broke apart, with the engine separating from the rest of the wreckage. Once the debris had settled, the circling pilots could see Brown’s wrecked plane broken in half, with the canopy still closed. It was presumed that he perished in the crash until Hudner circling overhead made another low-level pass and saw the canopy was now open and Brown waving to him from the severely damaged cockpit.

Lieutenant Commander Cevoli, ascended to higher altitude and got on the radio to request a helicopter rescue. The other pilots circled overhead to fend off any Chinese troops that might advance toward the wreckage. Brown was intermittently seen moving and waving at the planes overhead, and it became apparent that something was wrong as he did not extricate himself from the cockpit. Suddenly Hudner observed smoke coming from the front of the plane where the engine had been. Fearing a fire would engulf Brown, he realized he had to do something and waiting for a helicopter to show up was not an option.

The sanity of Army paratroopers is constantly called into question for their love of jumping out of “*perfectly good airplanes.*” Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Thomas



Hudner found himself compelled to do something and, short of any other available option, radioed, “*I am going in.*” It’s a given in the brotherhood of warriors to do everything possible to help a fallen comrade, but risking one’s own life by deliberately crashing his plane beside that of Brown’s and deep behind enemy lines was beyond his call to duty. At a minimum he was risking his career for destroying a perfectly good aircraft, at a maximum he might perish in the attempt or, in between, become a prisoner. Regardless, Hudner made a wheels-up landing near Brown’s aircraft and came to an abrupt stop about 100 yards slightly upslope and to the right of Brown.

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Once on the ground, Hudner ran over to the cockpit of the wrecked *Corsair* and saw that Brown was trapped. The *Corsair* has a unique design feature that places the cockpit midway back on the fuselage and behind the rear of the wings. During the crash, the front end of the *Corsair* had broken off, flexing and bending the fuselage in front of the cockpit, pinning Brown within the wreckage. Brown was in pain and fading in and out of consciousness, with smoke coming from inside the fuselage.

Realizing that he needed tools and a fire extinguisher, Hudner quickly ran back to his grounded *Corsair* and got on the radio asking for an axe and a fire extinguisher. Fortunately, the rescue helicopter that was warming up was still on the ground and an axe and fire extinguisher were quickly loaded on board. Before Hudner had arrived, Brown had removed his flight helmet and gloves and tried to pull off his parachute harness. During this attempt, his gloves fell into a crevasse in the wreckage. In the subzero conditions, Brown's hands quickly became useless appendages. When Hudner returned to Brown, he pulled out a wool cap and scarf that he kept in his flight suit for emergency use. He placed the cap on Brown's head and wrapped Brown's nearly frozen hands in the scarf. Hudner later said *"wrapping the hands in the scarf was more of a gesture than a remedy."* He added, *"everyone knows that wrapping limbs when they are already frozen will not warm them up, but it was all I could do."*

The severely injured Ensign Brown kept fading in and out of consciousness. Meanwhile the smoke continued to bellow up from the front of the engine cowling. Hudner tried to stuff snow into the cowling while he waited for the helicopter in an attempt to extinguish the fire. After nearly an hour, they finally heard the helicopter coming to their aid. The Marine helicopter landed next to the wreckage and, once the engine was shut down, the pilot, Marine Lieutenant Charles Ward, emerged with an axe and fire extinguisher. The fire was quickly put out. Hudner and Ward frantically beat at the cockpit with the axe, in an attempt to chop Brown free. But the axe just deflected off the cold metal. It quickly became apparent their efforts were useless.

Meanwhile, Jesse was growing noticeably weaker and speaking in a much softer voice. As the sun started to set behind the mountain, Ward told Hudner that they would have to return to base as his helicopter was not equipped to fly at night. Ward and Hudner made plans to return to base and retrieve a blow torch. Hudner returned to Brown's side to tell

him the news. The young ensign, in a soft, fading voice said, *"If I don't make it, please tell Daisy I love her."*

Ward turned to Hudner and let him know it was time to go. Hudner peered one last time into the cockpit and saw Jesse was barely consciousness. When the helicopter lifted off, Hudner noted that Brown sat motionless in the cockpit, despite the cold rotor wash of the ascending helicopter. Hudner found himself haunted by the fact that he had done everything he could, but it wasn't enough. He and Ward flew to Koto-ri where they found themselves for three days grounded due to bad weather. Hudner would remark later, *"one of the worst things when something has happened to you is the feeling that your alone. Just being with him to give as much comfort as we could was worth the effort."* The young lieutenant would also remark that anyone in the squadron would have done the same as he did. Further adding that *"I just happened to be the one that went in that day. If it hadn't been me, it would have been any one of the others."*

Meanwhile at the ship, Navy commanders struggled over their inability to recover Brown or the *Corsairs*. After a few days, a tough decision was made to give Ensign Brown a warrior's funeral by dropping napalm on the wreckage. The condition that Brown was in and his exposure to subzero weather conditions gave no hope for his survival. The Flying Swordsmen of VF-32 returned to the site of the crash to drop napalm bombs on Jesse's body. As they flew over the site prior to making their run, the pilots saw that his body had been disturbed, as some of his clothing had been removed. The *Corsairs* then dropped their napalm on him. As fire consumed Brown's body, the pilots recited the Lord's Prayer.

Upon Hudner's return to the *Leyte*, he was summoned to the bridge to face Captain Richard Sisson and account for his actions. Hudner feared he faced a court martial for his willful destruction of his *Corsair*. But Captain Sisson understood Hudner's rationale. Instead of punishment, Sisson recommended Ensign Jesse Brown for a Distinguished Flying Cross and that Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Thomas Hudner receive the Medal of Honor.

Ensign Jesse Brown was recognized as being the very first American of African descent to become a naval aviator. He also became the first African American naval officer to be killed in action in the Korean War. Jesse Lewis Brown exhibited a level of determination to achieve his dream of becoming a Naval Aviator seldom observed despite the rampant

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institutional and societal discrimination that existed. His ultimate ascendancy into the rare circle of Navy fighter pilots and acceptance as a peer speaks highly of the exceptionalism of our military. It's not uncommon in the brotherhood of military service for warriors to put aside their ethnic differences and risk their lives for the sake of a fellow warrior. Hudner's efforts to crash his warplane behind enemy lines as part of an effort to save the life of his wingman, is a poignant example of the exceptionalism of our nation's Navy and military services.

On April 13, 1951, five months after the incident that took Ensign Jesse Brown's life, Hudner, and his family were summoned to the White House where President Harry Truman awarded Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Hudner the Medal of Honor. Hudner became the first Medal of Honor recipient from the Korean War. Present and clutching a



bouquet of roses, was Brown's wife, Daisy Pearl Brown. Hudner shook her hand through a veil of tears and delivered the last message that his downed wingman gave him, telling her that Ensign Brown's last thought was of Daisy and his last words were that he "*loved her.*"

When Hudner returned home, Fall River proclaimed it "*Thomas Hudner Day*" and hosted a wonderful celebration. The appreciative citizens presented the young pilot with a check for \$1,000, a considerable sum in 1951. Lieutenant Hudner didn't cash it. Instead, he endorsed the back and sent it to



Daisy Brown who had returned to school. On March 18, 1972, the Navy christened a new member of its fleet: U.S.S. *Jesse L. Brown* (DE-1089). It was the first time in our Nation's history that a Naval vessel was named for a Black American. Daisy Brown and Thomas Hudner were there to remind us all of the brave young pilot for whom it was named.

Hiroshi H. Miyamura

HERSHEY'S MEDAL –KOREA'S BEST KEPT SECRET

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER



Hiroshi H. “*Hershey*” Miyamura was born in Gallup, New Mexico, on October 6, 1925, to Japanese immigrants Yaichi Miyamura and Tori Matsukawa Miyamura. He grew up in Gallup with older sisters Chiyo, Momoko, and Momokon, and younger sisters Shieko and Shigeko, and younger brother Reo. Hiroshi was remembered as a “*scrappy if diminutive child who took to wearing boxing gloves around his neck and challenging people to fights.*” It was a grade school teacher who couldn’t pronounce “*Hiroshi,*” that gave him the nickname “*Hershey.*” It was a moniker that stuck and he preferred for the rest of his life.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, December 7, 1941, on February 19, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. That order resulted in tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants and their American-born children being forcibly removed from their homes in the continental United States to relocation camps. The people of Gallup rallied around the Miyamura family. Hershey’s father operated a popular diner in the city, and Yaichi and Tori Miyamura were respected, even loved, members of the community. The family remained in Gallup for the duration of the war, which enabled



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Hershey to complete his studies at Gallup High School, where he graduated in 1943.

After graduation, at age 17 Miyamura tried to enlist in the U.S. Army but was denied. He found employment at **Central Motors** in Gallup and was working there when he was drafted for service. He was enlisted in the U.S. Army on January 13, 1944. After training he was deployed to Europe; he was aboard a transport ship in the Mediterranean five days from landing in Italy when World War II ended on May 8, 1945. There he was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 442d Regimental Combat Team, and served with his unit in post-war with that unit. In the summer of 1946, the 100/442 RCT returned home, making a triumphant parade down Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C. on July 16, 1946. Hershey was discharged from active duty and returned to Gallup and civilian life, although he remained a member of the U.S. Army Reserve.

On March 20, 1948, Hershey married Miss Tsuruko “*Terry*” Tsuchimori. Terry and her family spent the war behind the guarded fences of the **Poston Relocation Center**, built on an Indian Reservation in southwest Arizona. The Tribal Council opposed the use of their land because they did not want to be involved in inflicting the same injustice they had faced on the Japanese internees. Despite their concerns, a series of camps were built there; Terry and her family were interned at the **Parker Dam Reception Center**.

Hershey and Terri raised three sons. When Hershey’s enlistment in the Army Reserves was about to expire, fully aware that he might be called back to active duty, Hershey reenlisted.

When the Korean War began, Miyamura was activated for duty. As a corporal, he was sent to Korea as a squad leader in Company H, 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. On November 5, 1950, the Division landed at Wonson, North Korea. Immediately they went into action, having arrived in the midst of the surprising Allied offensive into North Korea after turning back the North Korean Forces in South Korea. The Division quickly moved north from Wonsan to Hungnam and Majon-dong to support the **FIRST** Marine Division’s ill-fated drive into the Chosin Reservoir. In the midst of the coldest winter in 100 years, the surprising entry of massive



Hiroshi H. Miyamure

Chinese forces to prop up the North Koreans, and the climactic withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir, the Division acquitted itself well.

The 3d Infantry Division established a collapsing perimeter around the port of Hungnam until the last Marines and Soldiers were evacuated. Thanks to their solid defense, it was possible under extreme conditions of weather and overwhelming enemy strength in the region for 105,000 United Nations troops, 91,000 refugees, to be evacuated, as were a quarter million tons of supplies and equipment. On December 25 the 3d Infantry Division was the last to depart North Korea, arriving at Pusan at the southern tip of South Korea on New Years Day, 1951.

The Division was assigned to the I Corps south of Seoul. On January 25 the EIGHTH Army launched an offensive along the Han River. In March the Division crossed the Han River and advanced to a line north of Uijongbu along the Imjin River. During the darkness of night on April 22, 1951, the Chinese attacked in force along the Imjin River. By dawn the swarming enemy overwhelmed the defending forces and the Americans began to withdraw across the river. Hershey's squad of less than a dozen machine gunners and five riflemen was ordered to take up defensive positions on a nearby hill. Noone expected them to last long, their mission was simply to delay the inevitable onslaught of the enemy forces. That onslaught came with bugles and whistles on the night of April 24th.

For hours the enemy poured over the hill in waves. Manning his machine-gun in the face of the horrible assault Corporal Miyamura watched as the sheer force of numbers combined with deadly rifle fire and exploding grenades began to decimate his squad. As the remnants of his squad struggled for survival the young corporal noticed a mounting force to his flank. Without hesitation he jumped from his shelter to attack with his bayonet, incredibly overtaking ten or more of the enemy and buying his embattled soldiers a few more precious moments. Then, returning to his soldiers, he began treating their wounds and directing their evacuation.

Corporal Miyamura used his 30-caliber machine-gun to rain effective fire on the encroaching horde until his ammunition was gone. His squad almost annihilated, he ordered the remaining men to withdraw to safety while he set about disabling the machine-gun before it could be captured by the enemy. Then, as the communists swarmed over his position, he literally bayoneted his way through them to reach a second gun emplacement. From this position he ordered the remaining Americans on the hill to withdraw while he covered them with effective fire. It was the last he ever saw of his men.

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Wave after wave was thrown against the hill now held by a single machine gunner. When he finally could hold out no longer, Corporal Miyamura sought shelter in a covered bunker. The area in front of the machine-gun was littered with the bodies of more than 50 enemy, tribute to his determination to hold them at bay while his men pulled back. But it was only the beginning of a long night for what may have been the only living American on the hill, surrounded by thousands of fanatical Chinese Communists. Wounded, he struggled to return to safety, engaging the enemy in desperate hand-to-hand combat. By dawn the exhausted corporal found himself playing dead in a ditch as hundreds of enemy soldiers walked past his prostrate form. One Chinese officer was not fooled by the bloodied body laying still along the road. Hershey was captured and sent to a prisoner of war camp.

For twenty-eight months he struggled to survive, to defeat the captors who did their best to break his spirit and his mind. For more than a year his family knew nothing of his situation, knew not whether he was dead or alive, for the Chinese had not released news of his status as a Prisoner of War. Throughout long days and the lonely nights when he wasn't thinking of home, Hershey thought of his men. His squad had been ripped away from him by the sheer force of overwhelming numbers. Unaware that, due his own courage, many had reached the safety of the American lines, Hershey believed they were either all wounded or dead. He wanted to go home but his thoughts of home were tainted by the prospects of his future; he was certain in his own mind that if he ever did return, it would be to face a court martial for losing so many of his men.

Life in the POW camp was hard; food and shelter were primitive and scarce. There was the added pain of torture and brain washing. Hershey watched many of fellow prisoners die slow, painful deaths at the hands or the neglect of their captors. He was suffering from dysentery and lost 50 pounds. As a Japanese- American, the North Koreans held a special hate for the young man from Gallup, New Mexico. Now, at last, Hershey felt he had survived their hatred and torture and would finally see his young wife and family once again.

On August 23, 1953; the Armistice was signed and the POWs began returning home. Hershey's excitement home was tempered by fear that once he was on the South Korea side of the Freedom Bridge, he would be arrested and jailed to await court martial for losing so many men.



Hiroshi H. Miyamura

Hershey was escorted with other POWs at Freedom Village near Panmunjom. As Hershey crossed the bridge to freedom, among the waiting officials he heard a strong voice inquire, "*Are you Corporal Hiroshi H. Miyamura?*" Looking up he saw the crisp image of a United States Army general Officer. The moment of truth had arrived and, he thought, momentarily the MPs would arrive to take him into custody to await his long dreaded courts martial. But there was no avoiding the truth. Among the tattered remains of the returning POWs the young Nisei stood out, so he finally nodded in affirmative. To his amazement the general extended his hand with the stunning announcement, "*Congratulations. You've been awarded the Medal of Honor.*"

For Miyamura that statement was more than amazing; it was unbelievable. Just as the Chinese had held the secret of Miyamura's capture for more than a year, the United States Army had maintained a secret about the young soldier for the 28 months of his imprisonment. Later, Corporal Miyamura was told the reason. Had his Chinese captors known of his award, "*You might not be here, alive, today.*"



On October 27, 1953, Army Sergeant Hiroshi H. Miyamura and his family visited the White House. There, President Dwight D. Eisenhower shook his hand and placed our Nation's highest honor around the neck of the Japanese- American boy from Gallup, New Mexico.



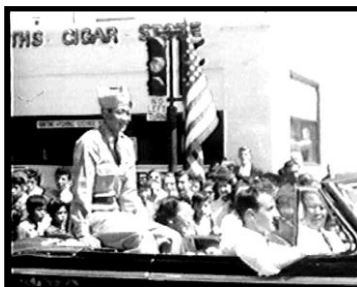
The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Corporal Hiroshi H. Miyamura (ASN: ER-38584192), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company H, 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division, in action against enemy aggressor forces at Taejon-ni, Korea, on 24 and 25 April 1951. On the night of 24 April, Company H was occupying



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a defensive position when the enemy fanatically attacked threatening to overrun the position. Corporal Miyamura, a machinegun squad leader, aware of the imminent danger to his men unhesitatingly jumped from his shelter wielding his bayonet in close hand-to-hand combat killing approximately ten of the enemy. Returning to his position, he administered first aid to the wounded and directed their evacuation. As another savage assault hit the line, he manned his machinegun and delivered withering fire until his ammunition was expended. He ordered the squad to withdraw while he stayed behind to render the gun inoperative. He then bayoneted his way through infiltrated enemy soldiers to a second gun emplacement and assisted in its operation. When the intensity of the attack necessitated the withdrawal of the company Corporal Miyamura ordered his men to fall back while he remained to cover their movement. He killed more than 50 of the enemy before his ammunition was depleted and he was severely wounded. He maintained his magnificent stand despite his painful wounds, continuing to repel the attack until his position was overrun. When last seen he was fighting ferociously against an overwhelming number of enemy soldiers. Corporal Miyamura's indomitable heroism and consummate devotion to duty reflect the utmost glory on himself and uphold the illustrious traditions on the military service.

Hershey returned to Gallup an honored and highly praised native son; a street and park were named for him, and in 2007 Gallup Junior High School was renamed Hiroshi Miyamura High School. He worked as an auto mechanic and for 25 years operated a full service gas station in Gallup. The *Albuquerque Journal* noted,



“He was humble, despite becoming so well-known that he met every sitting U.S. President since Eisenhower . . . He remained a plain-spoken shoulder, even when rubbing shoulders with the elite.

Terry died in 2014, but Hershey continued to be active in veterans' programs and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society until his death in Arizona on November 29, 2022, at age 97. Hershey was buried at Sunset Memorial park in his lifetime hometown of Gallup.



Mineo Inuzuka*

“SAIL AWAY”

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Mineo Inuzuka was born in Portland, Oregon, on April 21, 1925, to Japanese immigrants Takashi and Tomi Inuzuka. He was the fifth of six children and grew up in Portland, attending local schools. He was a seventeen-year-old student at Franklin High School in 1942 when he and his family were forcibly removed from their home and incarcerated at the Minidoka Internment Camp in Idaho.



In June 1944 Inuzuka was drafted into military service from Minidoka and sent to Fort Douglas, Utah, for induction into the U.S. Army. After training he was deployed, joining the 442d Regimental Combat Team in France. The Regiment was recovering from the heavy losses they suffered during their rescue of the “*Lost Battalion*” of the 36th Infantry Division in the Vosges Mountains of France. Assigned to Company F, 2d Battalion, he went with the all-Japanese *Go For Broke Regiment* to Italy in early 1945, fighting with them through their final bitter battles of the war in the Po Valley of northern Italy.

After the war he returned with the Regiment and was honorably discharged. In 1948 he reenlisted and continued in military service. By the time the Korean War began in 1950 he was a corporal in Company F, 2d Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In May 1951 Corporal Inuzuka received a battlefield commission to second lieutenant.

On May 27, 1951, Second Lieutenant Inuzuka’s platoon was attacking an enemy force in an attempt to capture a fortified hilltop position. When his platoon was halted by heavy enemy fire, Inuzuka went forward alone to locate the enemy machine guns. Discovering their camouflaged positions, he called in mortar fire to destroy them, allowing his platoon to move forward. Bravely he moved among his men,

* Reprinted From: True Stories of Oregon Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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encouraging and inspiring them in their direct attack and repulsing several counterattacks by the numerically superior enemy force, gaining their objective. For his heroic actions and inspiring leadership, Second Lieutenant Inuzuka was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.



The President of the United States of America, under the provisions of the Act of Congress approved July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Second Lieutenant (Infantry) Mineo Inuzuka, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company F, 2d Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. Second Lieutenant Inuzuka distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Chango-ri, Korea, on 27 May 1951. On that date, Lieutenant Inuzuka's unit was assigned the mission of attacking and securing a commanding terrain feature from a well-entrenched and determined enemy force. Advancing with his men to within six hundred yards of the objective, his platoon was suddenly subjected to intense enemy automatic weapons fire. Realizing that the present position was untenable, he moved forward alone in an attempt to locate the enemy machine-gun emplacements. Moving from one vantage point to another under a heavy volume of fire, he discovered the camouflaged positions and adjusted mortar fire on them. The men moved forward to attack once more but were again slowed by heavy and accurate enemy fire. Disregarding his own safety, Lieutenant Inuzuka moved among them, encouraging them and pointing out individual routes of attack to them. His display of courage so inspired the men that they moved onward in a spontaneous attack that secured the objective. Selecting their positions and personally directing the fire of his men, he was directly responsible for the successful beating off of the numerous fierce counterattacks hurled at the platoon by the enemy. The extraordinary heroism displayed by Second Lieutenant Inuzuka on this occasion reflects the greatest credit on himself and is in keeping with the high traditions of the military service.

In September 1951 Inuzuka was promoted to first lieutenant. In November during continued fighting in Korea, First Lieutenant Inuzuka ordered a pilot that was flying reconnaissance over the scene of battle to

fly low while he daringly went forward to mark enemy mortar positions. Due to his courage and marked skill in directing subsequent aircraft in knocking out these position, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Over two tours of duty in the Korean War, he also earned the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and two Air Medals.

Returning home from combat in Korea, he married and he and his wife Sachiko raised three daughters: Nora, Jae, and Sandi. Promoted through the ranks, he was a lieutenant colonel when he deployed to Vietnam for his third war. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1966 after 22 years of military service. Despite his numerous military awards that included four Bronze Stars, he remained humble. *"It's no question that the DSC is a great honor,"* he said in 1997. *"But the DSC was won by my men and not me. We entered that fight with 90 men and over 40 were killed or wounded. Those were the real heroes."* He also recalled fond memories with his comrades during time of war when they would talk about going home someday, to live in peace, and how they would then sail around the world.

Mineo returned to civilian life and worked as a contract administrator with Lockheed. After his second retirement Mineo and Sachiko retired to Hawaiï, where in 1992 he began to follow the dream he and his comrades had shared during the wars in which he fought. *"After I got three daughters through college, I decided to do something for myself,"* he said, noting that as he watched his Army comrades begin to die in their old age he decided it was time to sail away. He learned to weld and in 1992, with no knowledge of navigation or sailing, he built a 56-foot sail boat he christened *"Go For Broke."*

During two years of construction he took classes on navigation and prepared to indeed, *"sail away."* In June 1994, at the age of 70, he departed from Keehi Lagoon in Hawaiï, intent on sailing around the world, initially with a comrade. But after enduring engine problems, electrical fires, and storms, his friend came to the conclusion that the voyage was doomed and jumped ship, catching the first flight back to Hawaiï. Inuzuka continued alone.



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His circumnavigation of the planet was never a direct line; he sailed by whim, going wherever his instincts led him, stopping at each location that interested him. Since he really didn't know how to sail, he pretty much let the wind and currents take him where they led. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* described his route as *“more like that of a dazed manatee, taking him thousands of extra miles sailing in circles and drifting in the doldrums as currents pulled him away from land.”*

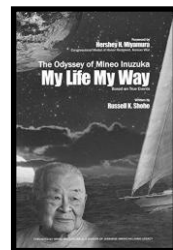
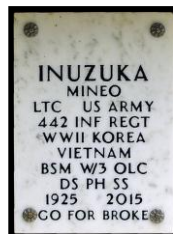
While rounding the Cape of Good Hope he had to ride out 60-knot winds and 60-foot seas on the edge of a cyclone in the Indian Ocean. The wind shredded his sails, but the determined would-be sailor repaired them with the sewing machine he brought on board before his departure from Hawaii.

After nearly two years at sea, his navigation equipment broke down when he was still 1,000 miles from returning to Hawaii, but he pressed on from Panama to Keehl Lagoon. He returned home after sailing more than 30,000 miles in a year and eleven months. *“You know,”* he said, *“I thought this would be a lot like combat, out there on the high seas fighting the elements. But it wasn't at all. You're out there by yourself day after day after day. At least in combat, you're comforted by the men around you.”*

He also noted that with his long hair and weathered countenance, Sachiko hardly recognized her husband upon his return home.

Mineo Inuzuka died in Kailua, Hawaii, on November 7, 2015, at the age of 90. He was buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Mineo Inuzuka's story was published by the Nikkei Writers Guild in a 2013 book titled *The Odyssey of Mineo Inuzuka - My Life My Way* by Russell K. Shoho. The Foreword was authored by Mineo's friend and veteran of the 442d Regimental Combat Team and Korean War Medal of Honor recipient Hershey Miyamura. Although out of print it can still be found from some used book sellers.



Carl Brashear

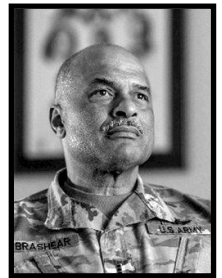
“I AIN’T GONNA LET NOBODY STEAL MY DREAM”

BY: DEBBIE MAULDING

As the sixth of sixteen children born to a Black sharecropping family in Kentucky in the mid-1930s, some may wonder what kind of “dream” Carl could have had. Maybe it was new shoes, an opportunity for a better education, or simply more food for him and his family; but Carl’s dream was bigger than that. Carl had the *American Dream* at a time when the color of his skin held him back from pursuing it. By overcoming incomprehensible odds and exhibiting the strength of character necessary to achieve amazing results, Carl made his dream a reality, and not without facing difficulties all along the way.



Carl Brashear’s son Phillip wrote a story, originally posted on the Naval History and Heritage Command website, about his father, describing Carl Maxie Brashear as: *“One of those individuals who demonstrated unyielding tenacity to overcome his circumstances only to achieve his ultimate goal of becoming a United States Navy Master Diver . . . My father is a true example of the American dream in the fact that whoever you are, or wherever you come from, anyone can achieve their dreams if they work hard and believe in themselves. I often say my father overcame his ‘Five Hurdles’ to prove to the world that dreams do come true. My father overcame racism, poverty, illiteracy, physical disability, and alcoholism during his lifetime, only to pass away with no malice in his heart and a feeling of accomplishment for his work.”*



Phillip Maxie Brashear, a former Chief Warrant Officer Four and Blackhawk Maintenance Test Pilot in the Virginia Army National Guard, was part of Stabilization Force Ten in Bosnia-Herzegovina from October 2001 through April 2002. He is a combat

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veteran who served in Iraq from January 2006 through February 2007 in Operation *Iraqi Freedom*.

HURDLE 1: RACISM

Carl Maxie Brashear was born in Tonieville, LaRue County, Kentucky, on January 19, 1931, to McDonald and Gonzella Brashear, sharecropping farmers. In 1935 McDonald moved his family to a farm in Sonora, Kentucky. Carl attended school at Sonora Grade School from 1937 until 1946, during which time he achieved the equivalent of an eighth-grade education.



Carl dreamed of making a better life for himself, something more than simply struggling to make a living off the land in small town America. He applied to the U.S. Army and was rejected. Since “*giving up*” was never in his vocabulary, he tried the Navy recruiter. He was welcomed into the U.S. Navy at a time when African Americans were limited to menial-task jobs, like messmen or laundry aids, or service as an officer’s valet. Carl was determined to do more.

Brashear enlisted on February 25, 1948, at the age of seventeen and was assigned to Great Lakes, Illinois, for recruit training until May 1948. His first assignment was as a steward in the Officers’ Mess Hall with Squadron VX-1, PBM Beachmaster Unit, Key West, Florida, May 1948 to June 1950. While serving there, he witnessed a Navy diver performing a rescue mission of a downed helicopter off the coast of Florida, thus sparking his interest in diving.

Five months after Brashear’s enlistment, on July 26, President Harry S Truman signed Executive Order 9981 establishing the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services. EO 9981 stated: “*it is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.*”

Desegregation was now the rule, although it proved to be a slowly spreading, unpopular idea with many politicians, military officials, seamen, and soldiers opposed to it. Recognizing the resistance, Truman responded with the pen: “*I am asking for*

CARL M. BRASHEAR

equality of opportunity for all human beings, and as long as I stay here, I am going to continue that fight."

Dedicated, determined men of color, felt a bond with Truman, which encouraged them to keep the push for equal opportunities and acceptance moving forward. They were up against haters and name-callers, officials with a heavy hand when discipline was applied, and coworkers who did not want to stand with them in war- or peacetime. But they persisted. Carl persisted. He began handling aircraft for Squadron VX-1 and achieved the rating of boatswain's mate.

The U.S. Air Force led the way being the first fully integrated branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, putting in place the "*swiftest and most amazing upset of racial policy in the history of the U.S. military*," according to *Ebony* magazine. Their integration included military units, family housing, schools, stores, and recreational facilities for their airmen and families, even at bases in the *Jim Crow* South.

Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal issued a statement removing all restrictions governing assignments for "*Negro naval personnel*" and very clearly stated that "*no special or unusual provisions will be made for the accommodation of Negroes*" in regard to housing, mess halls, and other facilities. Unfortunately, this led to a divide between policy and practice that left most African Americans in the Navy serving as stewards or messmen.

The U.S. Army's Buffalo Soldiers, a segregated "*Black Unit*," made considerable contributions to the military since they were established in 1866, adding to the reluctance of Army brass to enact integration policies. It was not until the onset of the Korean War that Army jobs were open to all, based on qualifications, not color. The last Buffalo Soldier regiment was inactivated on October 1, 1951, with the soldiers reassigned to integrated units.

The United States Marine Corps continued their segregation practices which dated back to segregated training facilities for World War II Marines. They suffered a dramatic decline in number when Black Marines were forced to either accept a role as steward, or retire in 1947. Even though change came slowly, all Marine recruits were training together by 1949, and serving in integrated units by 1952.

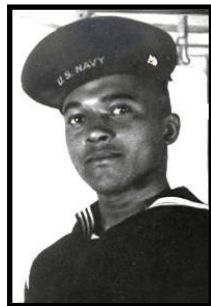
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HURDLE 2: POVERTY

The military provided food, shelter, clothing, and compensation, making it a most appealing opportunity for a person of any race who had faced poverty their entire life. The options may have been limited in the beginning, due to racism and continued segregation, but the security military service provided made it endurable. The wheels of progress often turn slowly, and thankfully, they rarely go in reverse. Brashear did not pave a two-lane road to success, he paved an interstate highway, with many turns, exits, and reentry points, which have continued to lead to a brighter future for those who continue to pursue the dream.

In Kentucky, on a farm with few resources for entertainment, swimming in nearby ponds became a favorite summer activity, mainly because there was no cost involved, just nature and a towel. Basketball was second, because all the kids could play with just one ball, making it less expensive than sports or activities where everyone needed their own gear. Brashear became a proficient swimmer.

He served on the escort carrier U.S.S. *Palau* (CVE-122) in the Deck Division, as a motor whaleboat coxswain from June 1950 through November 1951. His next assignment was to the U.S.S. *Tripoli* from November 1951 to March 1955. As a Second Division Petty Officer and Master-at-Arms, he received temporary additional duty at the Salvage Diving School, which he completed in 1954. He was the first African American diver in the U.S. Navy.



Carl Brashear then served on the U.S.S. *Opportune* (ARS-41) with the Deck Division as the section leader and repair party leader. As a salvage diver, he was making a name for himself and earning the respect of his coworkers and superior officers. He became obsessed with the Navy's elite deep-water rescue corps, and was relentless in his pursuit, submitting hundreds of applications. He did not let the Navy's history of not admitting Black sailors to the prestigious diving program deter him.

In June 1956 he was assigned to Naval Air Station (NAS), Quonset Point, Rhode Island, where he was the leading petty officer and salvage diver. During his time there, he served as an escort for

CARL M. BRASHEAR

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who presented him with a small knife inscribed *"To Carl M. Brashear. From Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1957. Many, many thanks."*

From June 1958 through July 1960, Brashear was stationed in Guam at the Ship Repair Facility, Marianas Islands. As skipper of the yard salvage derrick, he continued to build a reputation for himself. And finally, in late June 1960, he was notified that he had been accepted to Deep-Sea Diving School, Washington, D.C.

HURDLE 3: ILLITERACY

Brashear's struggle, however, did not end there. Upon review of his qualifications, his entry to the program was terminated when, with only an eighth-grade education, he could not meet the academic requirements. He was forced to wait for a second chance. Using his time wisely, Brashear passed the Navy's General Education Development (GED) exam, earning a high school education level. As Brashear said many times throughout his life, *"It's not a sin to get knocked down; it's a sin to stay down."*



From September 1960 through March 1961, Brashear served as the Chief Boatswain's Mate of the Deck Division on the USS Nereus (AS-17). Brashear used his waiting period wisely, adding to his knowledge and studying in preparation for his next opportunity. The wait was not pleasant, as he received death threats, notes that included racial slurs left on his pillow, isolation, name-calling and even fistfights.

Brashear's next assignment was at the Fleet Training Center in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, where he was stationed until April 1962. He was the chief master-at-arms, requalified as a second class diver, and served an additional temporary duty with the Joint Task Force Eight. Next, he served aboard U.S.S. *Coucal* (ASR-8) until October 1963, performing the duties of ship's chief boatswain's mate, second class diver, Underway Officer of the Deck, and In-Port Duty Chief. He still dreamed of becoming a deep-sea diver and continued to apply.

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In September 1963 Brashear's second chance came when he was accepted again into Deep Sea Diving School, Washington, D.C. Again, he faced commanding officers and classmates who clung to racist ideas and hatred, and a captain who refused to have a Black man graduate from "*his school*." Without the benefits of a systematized education beyond elementary school, the complex assignments added to Brashear's struggles.

Brashear was unyielding and uncompromising. His performance was exceptional throughout the program, and he graduated in 1964, in spite of efforts by others to prevent it. He became the first African American first class diver in the U.S. Navy. His first assignment as a first class diver was aboard the U.S.S. *Shakori* (ATF-162), where he was the ship's chief boatswain's mate, leading diver, and Underway Officer on Deck until September 1965. He was finally living his dream. (In his later years, Brashear attended college at Charles County Community College in Great Mills, Maryland, then at Tidewater Community College in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

HURDLE 4: PHYSICAL DISABILITY

In September 1965 Brashear was assigned to the U.S.S. *Hoist* (ARS-40). On March 23, 1966, the crew of the *Hoist*, a salvage ship, was working to recover a B-28 nuclear weapon off the coast of Spain that was lost when two Air Force planes collided mid-air during practice of in-flight refueling procedures. The loss of a nuclear weapon at that stage of the Cold War could have led to irrevocable catastrophe and locating it became a priority.

After two months, the *Hoist* located the missing bomb. Onboard as part of the diving operations team sent to recover the lost warhead, Brashear was on deck when a stern mooring line of a landing craft pulled a steel pipe up from the ship's deck. The pipe was flying across the deck towards Brashear and another sailor. Brashear was able to successfully shove the other sailor to safety, and the pipe struck his left leg. The wound was massive, and the blood lost was life-threatening. Brashear was transferred to the Air Force hospital in Madrid, where doctors gave him numerous blood transfusions and attempted to save his leg. The rough seas and helicopter trip coupled with the effects of the injury were devastating, but Brashear endured. Soon he was transferred to a hospital in Germany for more extensive treatment; his progress was slow when

CARL M. BRASHEAR

an infection developed. The decision was made to get him stabilized and transport him to Virginia where he would be treated at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. For his heroic actions Brashear earned the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, the highest non-combat heroism award in the Navy.



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy and Marine Corps Medal to Chief Boatswain's Mate Carl Maxie Brashear, United States Navy, for heroism while serving aboard U.S.S. HOIST (ARS-40), which was operating in support of Task Force 65 on 23 March 1966, in connection with salvage operations of great importance to the United States. While engaged in transferring stores from a landing craft to HOIST in heavy seas off the coast of Spain, Chief Brashear saw the bowline of the landing craft part. Realizing that a shipmate standing in the stern of the landing craft was in serious jeopardy if the heavily strained stern line also parted, he unhesitatingly pushed his shipmate to safety, but was seriously injured himself when the stress from the remaining line caused a portion of the craft to carry away and hit him in the leg. By his prompt and courageous actions in saving another man from injury or possible death, Chief Brashear, at the risk of his own life, upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Brashear arrived at the Portsmouth hospital in May 1966, with a raging infection and a wound that was not healing. Doctors offered to attempt to fix the leg with pins and braces, and massive doses of antibiotics, but could not guarantee a successful outcome. Brashear refused. Instead, his request was to have the leg amputated below the knee, get a prosthetic limb, and get back to work. He was laughed at, ridiculed, and called a crazy fool when he said *"I can't be tied that long. I've got to go back to diving."*

The doctors felt Brashear did not stand a chance of remaining in the Navy, and even if he made it over that hurdle, he would never be able to dive again. No way. Impossible. Brashear, on the other hand, said *"I ain't gonna let nobody steal my dream."* He fully intended

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to reach Master Diver before his career was over, and no injury was going to stop him.

From May 1966 to March 1967 Brashear remained in Portsmouth for treatment at the Naval Regional Medical Center. Although he managed to walk again with the use of a cane, there was no way he would be able to dive if the leg did not fully heal. Brashear studied everything he could find about prosthetic limbs and decided that was his best route back to active duty. After all other treatment failed, his left leg was amputated below the knee.

After surgery and rehabilitation, first without the prosthetic, then with it, Brashear remain at the hospital until March 1967, a year after the accident. The next year was spent preparing to return to active duty. Aided by an exercise program prepared by Rear Admiral Joseph L. Yon, commandant of the facility, Brashear began to work out. Fitted for a prosthetic limb early in the process, he impressed the doctors and therapists working with him. His goal was to walk up and down a flight of twelve stairs with enough weight (114 pounds) on his back to prove he would be able to handle scuba tanks. Rear Admiral Yon was impressed with Brashear's determination and recommended he be allowed to remain on active duty.

Before he could return to full active duty, Brashear had another hurdle to cross; he had to convince the Bureau of Medicine in Washington, D.C., that he was capable of returning. Brashear dove every day for five days to depths of more than two hundred feet in simulation tanks to prove his ability. Taking twelve steps, totally unaided, dressed in three hundred pounds of gear across the floor during the Bureau's evaluation, he was exhausted when he collapsed in a chair. He was deemed capable and reinstated, returning to full duty.



From March 1967 to March 1968 Brashear was under evaluation by Harbor Clearance Unit Two, assigned to the Experimental Diving Unit, where he became the executive officer of the Diving school barge. From 1968 to 1970, he served on the submarine U.S.S. *Hunley* (AS-31), U.S.S. *Recovery* (ARS-43), the Naval Safety Center, and Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity Norfolk, Virginia. He advanced in rank to master chief petty officer

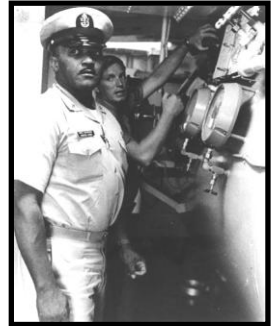
CARL M. BRASHEAR

(CPO). He was also captain of the CPO softball team, leading them in daily exercises during practice. He was known for his pitching, playing shortstop, and holding down *“a mean first base.”*

In 1970, Master Chief Brashear qualified as a master diver for the Navy, the first African American to do so. Reaching the goal represented years of hard work, sacrifices, and determination. His motto, which he later shared with others who had experienced the loss of a limb, became: *“Limbless need not be listless.”*

HURDLE 5: ALCOHOLISM

Over the next nine years, Master Chief Brashear served in positions of leadership with dive teams and as minority affairs officer. He felt his career was starting to wind down, having reached what he felt was a pinnacle. The stress of putting family second to career, along with reflecting on the many obstacles he had endured, led him to dark place, exposing a weakness he hadn't had to deal with in the past.



According to his son, Phillip, he began to drink heavily, even driving his car off the pier at Little Creek Naval Base in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Recognizing his alcoholism, he voluntarily entered a Navy substance abuse course and completed it before retiring on April 1, 1979. Each hurdle in his life prepared Brashear for the next phase, giving him the tools and experience needed to be a beacon of hope for others going through the same hardships he had endured.

In retirement Brashear lived in Virginia Beach and continued to have a strong connection to the Navy that he loved so dearly, and to diving, through his civilian employment. He finally fully retired from government service as a GS-11 in January 1993. Brashear spoke to veterans, students, and other community groups about his *“Can Do”* spirit, and journey to achieve his dreams.

In 2000, Cuba Gooding, Jr., portrayed Carl Bashear in a movie titled *“Men of Honor,”* chronicling the story of Bashear's life. Gooding said, *“He is the strongest man I have ever met.”* Master Chief Petty Officer Kent Robarts, a Master Diver from Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base said, *“He really was a pioneer, and his accomplishments continue to impact today's sailors.”*

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Brashear was married and divorced three times, he and his fourth wife Junetta had four children, a daughter, Shazanta, and three sons, DaWayne, Phillip, and Patrick. When Brashear was admitted to the Naval Regional Medical Center at Portsmouth, Virginia, for the last time in 2006, he was suffering from respiratory and heart failure. Son Phillip took emergency leave to be by his side until the end. Carl Brashear died on July 25, 2006, and is buried at Woodlawn Memorial Gardens, in Norfolk, Virginia. His epitaph reads, *"I Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Steal My Dream."*



In February of 2002, Carl Brashear was inducted into the Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians, for his contributions to human rights. Among the memorials for Carl Brashear, the Lewis and Clark Class Dry Cargo/Ammunition Ship U.S.N.S. *Carl Brashear* (T-AKE 7) was named in his honor. It was placed in service on March 3, 2009, with the Military Sealift Command. The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs renamed their Radcliff Veteran's Center, the state's newest veteran's home, after Carl Brashear in 2017.



The Carl Brashear Foundation was established after his death by his sons, DaWayne and Phillip. Their mission, to promote the life of Carl Brashear and to enhance the lives of others, ensures that Carl's story and incredible achievements will continue to be told. His sons agree: *"People from all walks of life can be inspired, not just Black people. The uneducated, the poor, the handicapped, people dealing with drugs and alcohol can all use my father's story as proof that they can rise above and beat all that, as he did before them."*

Brashear never viewed himself as a hero, he was a humble man who frequently said, *"I'm just an average sailor, doing my job."* His family respected him as a good educator, a man who lived his dreams and set an example for others, possibly inspiring them to do better along the way.

Lawrence Joel*

"I JUST WISH I COULD HAVE DONE MORE."

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

The sacrifice of Milton Lee Olive, III, might well be used by some who opposed the Vietnam War to validate the common, but erroneous perception of many anti-war protesters in the 1960s that the Vietnam War was being fought by poor, youthful Blacks with no education and no job skills, most of whom were drafted and sent unwillingly to war. While to some degree this might be an accurate assessment of Milton Olive's background, it is a narrow view that misses the entire lesson to be learned from his heroism and sacrifice. Indeed, Skipper dropped out of high school to join the military, but he did, in fact, find in his role as a soldier the purpose, identity, and a measure of equality he yearned for. The same could be said for many of his White counterparts who opted for the opportunities military service afforded after they dropped out of school or perhaps ran a fowl of the law. Furthermore, Milton Olive was neither poor nor drafted.

On November 8, 1965, just sixteen days after Milton Olive sacrificed his life to save the lives of four other men, Specialist Fifth Class Lawrence Joel became the second Black American to earn the Medal of Honor in Vietnam. In stark contrast to the aforementioned myths, at the time of his action Joel was 37 years old, a high school graduate, a highly trained combat medic, and enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle in a military career he loved. Amazingly, Specialist Joel also survived multiple wounds in his heroic actions, to become the first living Black Recipient of the Medal of Honor since the Spanish-American War, and the first ever admitted to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.



All the positives aside, Lawrence Joel's early life had not been without its share of problems, far beyond the color of his skin. Born on

* Reprinted from: The Defining Generation

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February 22, 1928, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, he was a year old when the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, and spent his formative years growing up in the poverty of the **Great Depression**. By 1936 the depression had taken so heavy a toll on Joel's parents that they separated and could no longer care for their son. Joel later recalled the many tears he shed during his boyhood as he pondered his unfortunate circumstances. At age eight Joel was given over to foster parents. Thereafter, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton Samuel raised Joel along with their five daughters.

Unlike many of the young men of the World War II era, Joel remained in school and received his high school diploma in 1945. After graduation, at age 17, Joel joined the Merchant Marines. One year later at age 18, he joined the U.S. Army, attended jump school to become a paratrooper, and served overseas in post-war Italy.

When Joel's four-year Army commitment ended he returned briefly to civilian life, but found his options limited. In a 1967 interview for *Time* magazine, he said he had come to realize that *"You couldn't make it really big (as a Negro on the outside)."* Discouraged with his non-military options, and forsaking initial goals to become a beautician, Joel decided to reenlist and make a career in the Army.

Already jump qualified, he received new and extensive training to become a medical aidman. The non-combat role suited well his quiet demeanor and peaceful attitude. Joel wasn't a pacifist; in fact, he was once busted for arguing with a sergeant. He was a simple, peaceful man who cared deeply about others. In the media attention surrounding award of the Medal of Honor years later at a time when the war in Vietnam was becoming increasingly unpopular, reporters asked Joel about the morality of the conflict. Joel replied with firm conviction, *"Most of the men who have been to Vietnam feel this war is right."*

Specialist Five Joel's subsequent assignment to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade, demonstrated just how dramatically the Army had become color-blind in the 1960s. While Black and other minority soldiers had previously been privileged to receive the specialized training of a medical aidman, it was always intended for the healers that would serve in their own, segregated units.

After witnessing the heroism of Buffalo Soldiers in the charge up San Juan Hill (actually Kettle Hill) in the Spanish-American War, one

LAWRENCE JOEL

White Corporal had stated, "*They (Black Soldiers) can drink out of our canteens.*" It was a telling statement that vividly demonstrated his respect for his Black comrades in arms. Half-a-century later in many Southern States, Blacks could not drink out of the same water fountain used by their White neighbors. Meanwhile in Vietnam, Black medics like Joel performed the most intimate and basic life-saving measures on their counterparts, Black, White, Red, Brown, and Yellow.

On November 8, 1965, Specialist Joel accompanied an Infantry Company into combat in the Iron Triangle, not far from where Milton Olive sacrificed his life to save his comrades two weeks earlier. He was unarmed and carrying a medical aid bag filled with bandages, syrettes of morphine, plasma, and instruments to give, not take, life.



After disembarking from their helicopters, the lead squad moved out to pave the way for the rest of the company. Almost immediately they were hit by withering fire from a well-hidden and numerically-superior Viet Cong force. Nearly every man in the lead squad was killed or wounded, while the remaining squads scrambled for cover to begin engaging the enemy in what was to become a bitter 24-hour firefight.

Ignoring the bullets that struck all around, and the explosions of grenades, Joel rushed forward to reach the wounded and dead of the lead squad. While moving from man to man, deadly enemy fire impacting all around him, one enemy machine-gun bullet struck Joel in the right leg. Determined only to help his comrades, he paused only long enough to rip open his pants and stuff a bandage into the ruptured flesh. Gritting his teeth against unbearable pain, he quickly administered morphine to himself to enable him to continue his important tasks. Over the next 24 hours it was the only relief he would seek for himself.

Then he continued to hobble across the battlefield, patching up bullet wounds, giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to the wounded and even to the corpses of those he hoped desperately to revive. Locating one man who desperately needed blood, Joel quickly inserted a needle and then, despite the hail of bullets from both sides that crisscrossed the battlefield, he knelt bravely in full view of all to hold the plasma bottle high enough for the fluid to flow into nearly-drained blood veins. Reaching yet another man from whose chest bubbled the last remaining ounces of blood, he grabbed a plastic bandage bag and firmly held it in place while silently praying for a miracle. The flow of blood slowed, and

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then congealed. Joel administered plasma and treated the wounded man's pain before moving on. Thanks to the intrepid medic's resourcefulness and persistence, that soldier survived.

Even when his medical bag was empty, Specialist Joel refused to leave the wounded men who so desperately needed his help. He sent word to the rear that he needed more medical supplies, and while waiting for them to arrive he continued to do what little he could by shouting words of encouragement to men for whom hope seemed to have vanished. When at last one soldier crept forward with the additional medical supplies Joel had requested, he saw the valiant medic's ripped fatigue trousers and bloody bandaged legs. "*You better head back to the rear and get treatment,*" he suggested.

"*I'll be alright,*" Joel responded. Then, as another platoon charged forward to dislodge the entrenched enemy, Joel took off behind them knowing well there would be many more injuries requiring his service. Throughout the day and into the night, time after time he limped and crawled into the areas under the deadliest fire to find, treat, and comfort his comrades. Time and again his fellow "*Sky Soldiers*" told him to get down, or fall back, or head to the rear for treatment. Each time Joel refused, pushing his own wounded legs to do the impossible, and forcing his exhausted body to sustain.

By the following morning the battlefield was littered with the bodies of more than 400 enemy. Nearly 50 young *Sky Soldiers* were also dead, and many more were wounded. Even when the contact was broken, as Specialist Joel and others moved about the field of battle to locate and evacuate the wounded and recover the bodies of comrades, sniper fire continued to make it dangerous work.

When Joel had done all that he could do, the pressure of the previous 24-hours finally caused him to come crashing back down. *Time Magazine* reported, "*Joel recalls looking at himself: hands encrusted with blood to the wrists, legs thick with edema and dirty bandages. He lay under a tree and cried for the first time since he was a boy in Winston-Salem.*"

An officer found Joel and, stunned by the young medic's wounds, immediately ordered him to the rear for treatment. His comrades, equally stunned by his incredible display of courage, compassion, and absolute fortitude during one of the Brigade's most deadly battles of the war, nominated him for the Medal of Honor.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Specialist Sixth Class Lawrence Joel, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Medical Aidman with Headquarters & Headquarters Co 1st Bn (Airborne), 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade, in action against enemy aggressor forces at Republic of Vietnam, on 8 November 1965. Specialist Sixth Class. Joel demonstrated indomitable courage, determination, and professional skill when a numerically superior and well-concealed Viet Cong element launched a vicious attack which wounded or killed nearly every man in the lead squad of the company. After treating the men wounded by the initial burst of gunfire, he bravely moved forward to assist others who were wounded while proceeding to their objective. While moving from man to man, he was struck in the right leg by machinegun fire. Although painfully wounded his desire to aid his fellow soldiers transcended all personal feeling. He bandaged his own wound and self-administered morphine to deaden the pain enabling him to continue his dangerous undertaking. Through this period of time, he constantly shouted words of encouragement to all around him. Then, completely ignoring the warnings of others, and his pain, he continued his search for wounded, exposing himself to hostile fire; and, as bullets dug up the dirt around him, he held plasma bottles high while kneeling completely engrossed in his life saving mission. Then, after being struck a second time and with a bullet lodged in his thigh, he dragged himself over the battlefield and succeeded in treating 13 more men before his medical supplies ran out. Displaying resourcefulness, he saved the life of one man by placing a plastic bag over a severe chest wound to congeal the blood. As one of the platoons pursued the Viet Cong, an insurgent force in concealed positions opened fire on the platoon and wounded many more soldiers. With a new stock of medical supplies, Specialist Sixth Class. Joel again shouted words of encouragement as he crawled through an intense hail of gunfire to the wounded men. After the 24 hour battle subsided and the Viet Cong dead numbered 410, snipers continued to harass the company. Throughout the long battle, Specialist Sixth Class. Joel never lost sight of his mission as a medical aidman and continued to comfort and treat the wounded until his own evacuation was ordered. His meticulous attention to duty saved a large number of lives and

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his unselfish, daring example under most adverse conditions was an inspiration to all. Specialist Sixth Class. Joel's profound concern for his fellow soldiers, at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

During the Vietnam War 13 members of the 173d Airborne Brigade received Medals of Honor, almost unprecedented at the brigade level. Joel was one of only three of these to survive his moment of heroism. When Joel and his wife, along with his foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Samuel were invited to the White House for ceremonies on March 9, 1967, it was a historic event. The young man who had joined the Army because he believed *"You couldn't make it really big (as a Negro on the outside),"* became the first Black American in history to receive the Medal of Honor from the President of the United States.

To the men of the 173d Airborne Brigade, an elite unit that proved in Vietnam that valor was a common thread among so many *Sky Soldiers*, William Joel became legendary. He retired from the Army in 1973 and died ten years later on February 4, 1984, at age 53, from complications of diabetes. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

Had there ever been any doubt about that young man's potential, it was quickly erased for those who became aware of his actions and heroism on the fields of battle in Vietnam. When awarding the Medal of Honor, President Johnson himself noted, *"As we salute the valor of this soldier, we salute the best in the American tradition."*

When interviewed by reporters about his actions prior to that ceremony, Specialist Lawrence Joels simply said: *"I'm glad to be alive. I just wish I could have done more. It was just my job."*



Fred V. Cherry

“WWFD – WHAT WOULD FRED DO?”

BY: DEBBIE MAULDING

Colonel Fred V. “*Pepper*” Cherry spent seven and one-half years, a total of two thousand six hundred and seventy-one days, as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He was held for seven hundred and two days in solitary confinement. He was tortured for ninety-three consecutive days. Inadequate food, substandard or non-existent medical care, and inhumane harassment continued daily. As if that was not enough, the Vietnamese prison guards decided to try to use “*The Race Card*” as a means of breaking Colonel Cherry.



In a December 4, 1983, speech to the Pennsylvania State University Air Force ROTC, retired Colonel Chery described his experiences as a POW and how that led him to truly appreciate America’s freedoms. Asserting unity, camaraderie, and mutual faith as the tools necessary to remain strong, Cherry described the limitations placed on the POWs by their captors. They found the strength to survive, relying heavily on each other, and through fellow prisoners’ faith, recognizing that not one of them could survive the ordeal alone.

Cherry described severely restricted communication, and how this was an attempt to break the strength of the imprisoned. “*We could not talk to each other; we always had to whisper so as not to be heard by the Vietnamese.*” He went on to describe a secret communication code used within the camps that allowed them to contact one another by tapping on the walls. Cherry expounded on what it took to survive:

“Although the Vietnamese eventually discovered our communication system, we still continued to use it. We were singled out and tried, but the Vietnamese were never able to exploit us as they’d planned. They were never able to break our strength. Faith in God, our country, and our fellow prisoners made it possible for us to keep going. Trust in each other helped us to remain strong. We were all just Americans and were united as such. We had no time for race, creed,

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religion, or color, we were the same in so many aspects that those differences were insignificant. We had confidence in our fellow prisoners and that helped us to maintain our strength."

Enduring the pain of a broken wrist, ankle, and shoulder for five months without any medical attention, Colonel Cherry credits his cellmate with saving his life. Cherry said the POWs had no problems dealing with racial differences among themselves, and he would have known since he was the first African American taken prisoner during the Vietnam war. For the duration of his time in Hanoi, Cherry was the highest-ranking African American POW.



Cherry taking a break during a speech about his time in captivity.

Cherry enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Air Force on June 29, 1951. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant and awarded his pilot's wings at Webb Air Force Base, Texas, on October 25, 1952. Second Lieutenant Cherry's first operational assignment came after he completed F-84 *Thunderjet* Combat Crew Training. He was assigned to fly F-84 fighters with the 310th Fighter-Bomber Squadron of the 58th Fighter-Bomber Wing at Taegu Air Base, South Korea, in 1953.

During the Korean War Cherry flew fifty-two combat missions over North Korea. His missions included flying straight-winged jet fighter-bombers and attacking strategic enemy positions with cannons, rockets, thousand-pound bombs, as well as napalm. After his time in Korea, he received several stateside assignments and a nine-month assignment to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, with the 458th Fighter-Bomber Squadron, later renamed the 458th Tactical Fighter Squadron.

In 1961, Cherry was sent to Itazuke and Yokota Air Bases in Japan, where he was assigned to fly F-100 and F-105 fighters. In support of the

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U.S. Air Force Air War during the Vietnam War, Cherry's unit deployed fighter pilots to Southeast Asia. Cherry was now a major and flying F-105 tactical bombers. His wife, Shirley and his five children were living with him in Japan.

Major Cherry flew his fifty-second mission in the Vietnam War on October 25, 1965, when tragedy struck. He was leading a flight of four F-105D *Thunderchief* Fighter-Bombers from the 35th Tactical Fighter Squadron that had taken off from Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. Their mission was to destroy a



surface-to-air missile installation fifteen miles northeast of Hanoi. Cherry crossed the border between Laos and North Vietnam, descending to treetop level and staying low in an attempt to avoid radar detection. He was three minutes away from his target and low enough that muzzle flashes from the rifles of enemy ground troops caught his attention. Suddenly he heard a loud thump and the aircraft began to shake and swerve. Cherry used his legs to try to lock the control stick in place, while using both hands to try to steady the plane as it began to jerk.

He could see the SAM installation with its missile-launching batteries encircling the site as he pressed on. With grit and determination, he approached the target, released the cluster bombs, and set off a series of explosions. As he pulled away Cherry saw the SAM site erupt into massive fireballs in his rearview mirror.

Mission completed, it was time to fight for his life. Straining to pull the damaged F-105 up and gain altitude, Major Cherry headed for the Gulf of Tonkin where he could bail out and be picked up by the Navy. Safety lay just forty miles east and he was confident. Then, warning lights began to flash, smoke began to pour from his instrument panel, and all hope of reaching the Gulf of Tonkin evaporated as the aircraft exploded and went out of control.



Cherry's only option now was to eject at four hundred feet and six hundred miles per hour. Ejecting is not the smooth pop-up shown in the movies; it is a ferocious eviction from a high-speed aircraft. Cherry suffered a broken left wrist and ankle, and a shattered left shoulder from

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the ejection. He suffered additional injuries upon landing. The parachute finally opened at two hundred feet. Bullets whizzed past as he parachuted onto a grassy hill only about two minutes away from the coast. He was immediately surrounded by Vietnamese military personnel and civilians.

Cherry could hear the Vietnamese yelling “*Kill the Yankee*” as he became the first African American and the forty-third American, taken prisoner in Vietnam. He was in agonizing pain as they took away his gear and weapon, tied his elbows together behind his back, and marched him away to a vehicle that would take him to a prison, which Cherry thought might be an abandoned school building. There he was interrogated and tortured for hours as he refused to answer their questions. Adhering to the U.S. Military Code of Conduct, he recited only his name, rank, serial number, and date of birth. In an interview years later, Cherry described his thoughts when he was captured: “*The first thing I can remember saying is, looking around and I said ‘Damn, I’ll be here a long time.’ But that long time to me at that point in time was three to four months max because we gonna get this thing over with and we’ll be back home. Well, that three to four months, that long time I considered at that time, turned in to be seven and a half years.*”

Major Cherry was taken to Hỏa Lò Prison Camp, which later became known as the “*Hanoi Hilton*” and was the scene of horrifying torture. Refusing to cooperate, Cherry endured escalating abuse from his interrogators, who twisted his arms behind his back, shoved his arms up, and pulled on his obviously shattered shoulder until it came out from the socket. Over the first week, he was interrogated and tortured daily while his injuries worsened without medical intervention.

After a month Cherry was transferred to Cu Loc Prison, known as “*the Zoo*” among the American POWs. Little did he know, this was the move that would save his life. It was where he would meet the self-proclaimed “*Southern White boy.*”

In an attempt to push Colonel Cherry to speak out against racial inequality in the United States, the Vietnamese placed then-Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade Porter Halyburton in the cell with him. Halyburton claim to be a “*Southern White boy,*” gave the guards the idea that a racial conflict with Halyburton would weaken Cherry’s resolve. Their plan failed miserably. The two established a bond that would last the remainder of their lives. To better understand the contrast between

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Colonel Fred Cherry and Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Porter Halyburton, it is important to learn more about each of their backgrounds.

Fred Vann Cherry, the youngest of eight children, was born on March 24, 1928, in Suffolk, Virginia, to a poor farming family. His parents, John and Leolia Cherry, of African American and Native American heritage, were trying to raise their children and scratch out a living on a swampy farm during the **Great Depression**, when segregation and discrimination were strictly enforced by the *Jim Crow* laws. John worked as a laborer on “*White folks farms*” to make ends meet. Fred was nicknamed “*Pepper*” as a child, but no one could remember exactly why.

Neither John nor Leolia received an education beyond primary school, but they were determined to provide better lives for their children. Being the youngest of eight, Fred was still young when his parents passed away, and he was raised by his oldest sister Beulah, and her husband, Melvin Watts, who accepted Fred as his own.

Growing up in a farming community, Cherry was accustomed to African Americans and Caucasians living side by side although they did not treat each other as equals. In an oral history interview, Cherry gave this description: “*You go over to the White farmhouse to get some homemade butter, and you had to ‘Miss’ and ‘Mister’ them. Whites always called Black people by their first name. It was sort of understood you had your place.*”

Fred attended racially segregated schools in Suffolk, Virginia, and graduated from East Suffolk High School in 1947. He spoke about the White children riding a half-full bus to their school while he and his siblings walked the three miles to theirs. Taught to avoid conflict and confrontations, Cherry believed that with hard work and persistence, progress would be possible.

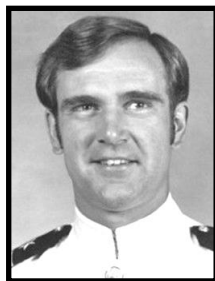
Fred became fascinated by airplanes at a young age, seeing them fly overhead at low altitudes and performing aerial maneuvers. He also found inspiration in the stories of the Tuskegee Airmen, African American fighter pilots in World War II. He decided to join the United States Air Force and fly planes himself. He registered for the draft in March 1946. With a military base nearby, and Fred’s spirit of determination, his family was not surprised when he pursued his dream.



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Cherry attended Virginia Union University, a private, historically Black university affiliated with the American Baptist Churches USA. After graduating in 1951, his encounter with a military recruiting officer created a challenge. The officer seemed biased and disinterested in enlisting an African American. Cherry's determination and persistence paid off when he was finally allowed to take the test for flight school. He was the only African American to test that day, and had the highest score of the twenty who took the test, allowing him to enter the U.S. Air Force Aviation Cadet Program.

Porter Alexander Halyburton, known as "*Haly*," to his friends, was born on January 16, 1941, in Miami, Florida. His parents, Thomas Alexander Halyburton and Katherine Lorimer *Porter* Halyburton later divorced. Haly grew up in Davidson, North Carolina, where he was raised by his mother and her parents, William Lorimer Porter and Carolyn Bassett Porter. Mr. Porter was a professor at Davidson College, and Katherine Halyburton was the women's editor of the *Charlotte Observer*.



Davidson was a small college town of about twenty-five hundred. In an interview, Halyburton described it as "*a nice place to live. Everybody knew what everyone else did.*" Others called it "*a town that largely opposed desegregation*" and "*an intellectual suburbanite's enclave steeped in patriotism, Southern charm, and insidious racism.*" African Americans who lived in the community were treated as if they were intellectually inferior, capable of only manual labor.

Respected in the community as charitable and kind, Halyburton's grandfather had very specific rules for his Black housekeeper and her family. If the family came to his home, they were welcome to enter through the front door, the same as any other guest, but they were not allowed to use the family's bathrooms, kitchen utensils, or glasses. When the housekeeper came to work, she was to use the back entrance, have her meals outdoors, and use separate facilities for any personal needs. This was not unique to Mr. Porter, nor to North Carolina. It was a deep-seated attitude that ran rampant through the Deep South.

Haly attended Davidson School where he sang in the choir, played trumpet in the band, and acted in the school plays. He attended high school at the Sewanee Military Academy, an Episcopal boarding and day

school established in 1868. There he became interested in literature and writing. Porter graduated in 1968 and entered Davidson College. He described his college days: *"It was a liberal arts school, so I mean, you take a wide variety of liberal arts subjects, math and science, language, religion, philosophy, history, all of those things and then I took economics courses, took English courses, writing courses. I was not a wonderful student because I didn't spend very much time at it. I had a pretty good time in college. Wasted a lot of time. But my college experience was a good one, I mean, I learned a lot, in spite of myself. I was able to remember more about it than I thought when I was alone. And I think the value is not in college or perhaps needing higher education. The endeavor is not what you learn, it is not the fact that you learn, but it's the way that your mind responds to situations, how you learn. So, you're really learning to learn. How to approach problems, how to think about things critically, and so on. That's kinda, you know, what I did."*

Although the Cold War was escalating, and the draft was a threat, Halyburton's interest in literature, poetry, and spirituality led him to consider a career in journalism. One of Haly's fraternity brothers recently became a naval aviator and, after spending time with him, Haly decided not to wait to be drafted, or start something he may not be able to finish. He enlisted in the Navy after graduating in 1963, entering the U.S. Navy Pre-Flight program at Naval Air Station (NSA) Pensacola, Florida, on October 10, 1963. He married his fiancé, Marty, on December 23, 1963, then received his commission in February 1964.

Fighting Squadron Eighty-Four (VF-84) deployed on the U.S.S. *Independence* (CVA-62) in 1964 during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the *Bay of Pigs* incident, then made several Mediterranean cruises, flying 8-C Crusaders until they transitioned to the F-4B *Phantom II* in 1964. Halyburton was trained as an F-4B *Phantom II* Radar Intercept Officer (RIO), responsible for navigation and target identification, and assigned to fighter squadron VF-84 at NAS Oceana, Virginia, in April 1965. By May 1965, Halyburton was stationed on the *Independence* in the Gulf of Tonkin, flying missions over North and South Vietnam. His daughter, Dabney was ten days old when he left for Vietnam.

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Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Halyburton was flying his seventy-fifth mission in the Vietnam War on October 17, 1965, when tragedy struck. A group of aircraft from the *Independence* was taking part in a large airstrike to destroy a railway bridge about seventy-five miles north of Hanoi at Thai Nguyen. The F-4 was hit by anti-aircraft fire while traveling the farthest north Halyburton had been. Halyburton ejected but the pilot, Lieutenant Commander Stanley Olmsted, was killed in the crash.



Drifting down by parachute, bullets whizzing near his head, Halyburton was aware he was deep in enemy territory and would most likely be captured. A fleeting thought of *“maybe I should have stayed put”* crossed his mind as he neared the ground. Hearing groundfire and knowing it was intended for him, he realized he had to hurry. He attempted to reach the top of a nearby hill where he hoped Navy helicopters could rescue him, but was not able to avoid capture by the Vietnamese militia. He was the fortieth American to be captured by the North Vietnamese and was taken to the *Hanoi Hilton*.

Halyburton was listed as *Killed in Action*, and his family was notified. They held a memorial service and placed a headstone over an empty grave. As a memorial to him, Sewanee Military Academy placed a plaque over one of the main gateways to the school, renaming it *“Halyburton Memorial,”* in a ceremony with hundreds of attendees. Halyburton was believed to be the school’s first casualty of the Vietnam War. Davidson College provided an educational trust fund for his daughter Dabney, and named a scholarship in his honor. Phi Gamma Delta commissioned an oil painting of Halyburton to display in memory of him. Halyburton obtained the headstone and the plaque from Sewanee as *“souvenirs,”* when he returned home alive in 1973.



Nearly a year and a half later, in late January 1967, a clandestine source provided credible information and Halyburton’s status was officially changed to Prisoner of War. His wife was notified, then about a week later, the news was broadcast by the Department of Defense.

Ironically, about the same time that Marty found out Porter was alive, he found out he had previously been listed as KIA. For almost a year he wondered if his wife had remarried, until a letter arrived saying she was still waiting. Marty later said she never lost faith that he would come home.

Interrogation began almost immediately, lasting for hours and was interspersed with torture. Beatings became a daily routine. Inadequate food, substandard or non-existent medical care, and inhumane harassment continued daily. Communication was forbidden and Halyburton spent a lot of time in solitary confinement during his two thousand six hundred and seventy-five days of captivity. When asked years later what a typical day as a POW was like, he said: *"A typical day was not a typical day because I was there for almost seven and a half years, and I was in eight different prisons; I was moved thirty-five times. I've lived in solitary confinement, in isolation, with one other guy, two other guys, eight other guys, and forty other guys, and each one of those situations was quite different."*

The American POWs were given two meals each day, usually a very watery soup that occasionally contained a piece of vegetable or meat, maybe some rice, and maybe flies or bugs. They were given three cigarettes, and found them useful for many things. Showers were rare, occurring every two weeks. And the punishment for communicating with any other prisoner was torture. Punishment was brutal for any misbehavior, and torture was common, especially when a prisoner refused to cooperate or to provide his captors with information. The guards lacked a standard routine, keeping the prisoners in a state of chaos.

After arriving at the *Hanoi Hilton*, Halyburton suffered hours of interrogation and days of torture. Finally, the guards offered him a choice: cooperate and receive better treatment, or refuse and be taken to a place where conditions were worse. Thinking to himself *"what could be worse than this,"* Halyburton chose to refuse. He was transferred to Cu Loc Prison, known as *"the Zoo"* among the POWs. Little did he know, this was the move that would save his life. This is where he would meet an African American Southern gentleman.

It was Saturday, November 27, 1965, two days after Thanksgiving back home. Standing outside the cell, the guard was yelling at Halyburton: *"You must take care of Cherry."* Halyburton had no idea who Fred Cherry was, just as Fred Cherry had no idea who he was, but as the door

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opened and the guard pushed Halyburton into the dark, ten foot by twelve-foot cell, their worlds collided, and a bond began to form.

Initially, each man was hesitant and guarded in their conversation. Cherry suspected Halyburton of not being an American, possibly being a spy, an informant for the enemy because no one would have chosen to come to *“the Zoo”* unless there was a reward attached. Halyburton had no idea there were Black people flying combat missions, and was stunned to be outranked by an African American Air Force officer.

Trying to make conversation felt like an interrogation, and made both men apprehensive until Cherry began to piece together clues, and surmised the tactics the Vietnamese were employing. He shared his thoughts later in a collection of Black Vietnam War stories edited by Wallace Terry: *“They figured under those pressures, we couldn’t possibly get along – a White man and a Black man from the American South.”*

Recognizing Colonel Cherry’s injuries and poor condition, Halyburton took the charge to care for his cellmate seriously. Sparked by the 14-point peace plan sent by President Lyndon B. Johnson to Ho Chi Min on December 24, 1965, and the ordered pause of the bombing campaign, the Vietnamese finally provided surgery to treat Cherry’s shattered shoulder. Without antibiotics, the incision became infected and Cherry’s condition was rapidly declining. The upper body cast was uncomfortable, holding heat and moisture in and making the infection worse. No further medical treatment was provided for Cherry, and he continued to suffer.

Halyburton did what he could for Cherry, cleaning his wounds, feeding him when there was food, even giving Fred his food in hopes of helping him heal. There was no way for Cherry to shower, so Halyburton bathed him when he had water. It was during a bath that Halyburton found ants burrowing into Cherry’s scalp where layers of dry drainage from wounds had collected. Halyburton carried Cherry to a corner where he could stand using the cell walls for support, and standing in mud and muck, gave Cherry an improvised cold-water shower. With what soap he could find and *“elbow grease,”* he scrubbed Cherry’s head until the ants were gone. Halyburton knew if Cherry was right about the Vietnamese motivation for putting the two of them together, they would not want to let their only Black POW die in captivity, so he began to beg for medical care for Cherry, who was experiencing hallucinations due to the fever

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from the infection. Soon the Vietnamese yielded, and Cherry received surgery at a hospital to treat his infection.

Halyburton was among the POWs paraded through the streets of Hanoi and brutally beaten by civilians on July 6, 1966. Bruised and battered, Halyburton returned to an empty cell. Cherry had been taken once again to the hospital for treatment, which turned out to be surgery, performed without anesthesia, to cut away decaying portions of his wound.



When he returned to the cell, Cherry collapsed into the arms of his friend, exhausted, with blood pouring from his wounds onto the floor. Halyburton asked *"Fred, what in the world did they do to you?"* and later they both recalled the shared tears of that night.

On July 11, 1966, after eight months of sharing a cell, Halyburton was transferred to the prison known as *Briarpatch*, thirty-three miles from Hanoi. He remembered it as: *"One of the saddest days of my life."* Cherry said: *"Tears started to roll down my eyes. We cried. And he was gone . . . I never hated to lose anybody so much in my entire life. We had become very good friends. He was responsible for my life."*

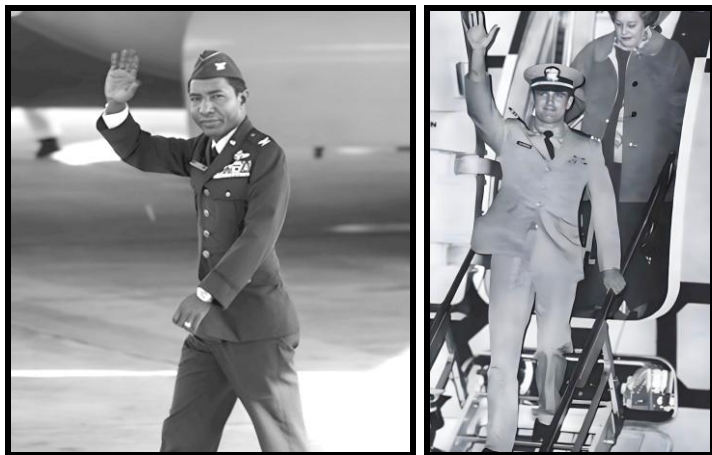
The Vietnamese resumed their attempts to get Cherry to make public statements about racial intolerance in the United States, but Cherry refused, suffering torture and solitary confinement as a result. The struggle to survive further strengthened the bond between Cherry and Halyburton. Each man credited the other for saving his life. Halyburton recalled in an email to journalist James S. Hirsch: *"Caring for Fred . . . I realized how trivial [my concerns] were by comparison and how he bore his pain and suffering with such dignity. The task of caring for him gave a definite purpose to my immediate existence...I received much more from him than I was able to give."*

Cherry later said about Halyburton: *"He was White, and he was from the South, but he taught me that you can grow up in that environment and separate the good from the bad and the right from the wrong. He was one who did that."* Trust, respect, care, compassion, and brotherly love were the foundation of a lifelong friendship.

Colonel Cherry and Lieutenant Commander Halyburton were among the first POWs to return home during *Operation Homecoming*. They

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were released from captivity on February 12, 1973, and reunited again for the first time when they arrived at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. On April 14, 1973, Cherry's hometown of Suffolk, Virginia, provided him a hero's welcome home with a parade and a ceremony presenting him with keys to the city.



For his gallantry in action on his last mission over North Vietnam, Cherry was awarded the Silver Star, and for his courage and resistance while in captivity, he was awarded the Air Force Cross, the Legion of Merit, and two Bronze Stars with Combat "V." He was also awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses for earlier missions.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Title 10, Section 8742, United States Code, takes pleasure in presenting the Air Force Cross to Colonel Fred Vann Cherry (AFSN: 0-2225916/AF-13416845), United States Air Force, for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from 15 August 1967 to 15 November 1967. During this period, Colonel Cherry demonstrated his extremely strong personal fortitude and maximum persistence in the face of severe enemy harassment and torture, suffering critical injuries and wounds. Through his extraordinary heroism and willpower, in the face of the enemy, Colonel Cherry reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918 (amended by an act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Major Fred Vann Cherry (AFSN: 0-2225916/AF-13416845), United States Air Force, for gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as Pilot of an F-105 Thunderchief of the 35th Tactical Fighter Squadron, in action over North Vietnam on 22 October 1965. On that date, Major Cherry led a flight of F-105's against a heavily defended Surface-to-Air (SAM) Missile site deep within hostile territory. Leading the way for the others to follow, Major Cherry courageously rolled in for a low level attack in the face of a veritable wall of anti-aircraft fire and dropped his bombs squarely on target. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Major Cherry has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, 20 July 1942, takes pleasure in presenting the Legion of Merit to Colonel Fred Vann Cherry (AFSN: 0-2225916/AF-13416845), United States Air Force, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from October 1965 to October 1972. His ceaseless efforts, by a continuous showing of resistance to an enemy who ignored all international agreements on treatment of Prisoners of War, in the extremely adverse conditions of the communist prisons of North Vietnam, demonstrated his professional competence, unwavering devotion, and loyalty to his country. Despite the harsh treatment through his long years of incarceration, he continued to perform his duties in a clearly exceptional manner which reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

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First Award

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Executive Order 11046, 24 August 1962, takes pleasure in presenting the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" to Colonel Fred Vann Cherry (AFSN: 0-2225916/AF-13416845), United States Air Force, for heroic actions against an enemy armed force while serving as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from October 1966 to December 1966. The North Vietnamese interrogators and guards kept constant pressure on this officer through harassment, intimidation, and cruelties from which they hoped to gain information and cooperative participation in their propaganda exercises. Colonel Cherry heroically resisted this treatment in a manner which served as an inspiration to others in the camp and reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Second Award

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Executive Order 11046, 24 August 1962, takes pleasure in presenting a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Second Award of the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" to Colonel Fred Vann Cherry (AFSN: 0-2225916/AF-13416845), United States Air Force, for heroic achievement as a Prisoner of War while engaged in operations against an opposing armed force in North Vietnam from July 1969 to July 1970. In an atmosphere of enemy harassment and brutal treatment, he continued to establish and maintain communications through unusual and ingenious methods, which resulted in American and Allied prisoners presenting a posture of increased resistance to the enemy's wishes, and, at the same time, improving prisoner morale. By his heroic endeavors and devotion to duty under adverse conditions of his environment, he reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Unfortunately, Colonel Cherry came home to another "war" of a more personal type. His wife reportedly deserted their marriage soon after she got the news that he was missing. When she received notice that he was *Missing in Action*, she and the children moved from Japan to Portsmouth, Virginia. Confirmation that he was a POW did not come until April 1966. She took his life savings, his salary and allowances, and payments for his children, and began dating another man and had a child with him.

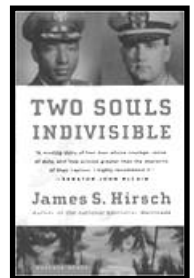
Nevertheless, waiting to greet him when he arrived at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington, D.C. were his sons Fred (left) and Don (right, both Privates First Class in the U.S. Army.



In a letter home in December 1969, days after Cherry's name was included on a list of confirmed POWs from Vietnam, Cherry commented to his wife that he hoped she was continuing to save money for the education of their four children. Once he was home, Cherry fought a legal battle to recover what he could of his military pay. Cherry divorced Shirley on June 11, 1973, and maintained a close relationship with their four children, Fred Jr., Donald, Deborah, and Cynthia and his son, Fredrick Stein, from a previous relationship. Colonel Cherry served in the Air Force for thirty years before retiring on September 1, 1981.

Commander Halyburton was welcomed home by his loving wife, Marty who never gave up hope, even when the Navy had declared her husband *Killed in Action*. During her husband's confinement, she was actively campaigning for the return of the POWs as well as adherence to the terms of the **Geneva Convention**. She and other POW wives met with billionaire Ross Perot who vowed to help them get information about their husbands. Dabney did not understand the situation her family was in, but each time she broke a toy she would bring it her mother and ask her to "*save it for Daddy to fix when he gets home.*"

When Commander Halyburton retired in 1984 his awards and medals included the Silver Star Medal, the Legion of Merit, three Purple Heart Medals, two Bronze Star Medals, and three Air Medals. After retirement, Cherry and Halyburton visited military institutions and colleges to give talks about their experiences as Prisoners of War. When the book *Two Souls Indivisible: The Friendship that Saved Two POWs in Vietnam* by James S. Hirsch was released in 2005, they toured together to promote it. Colonel Cherry's story was featured in a documentary titled "*Return with Honor,*" narrated by Tom Hanks, about Vietnam fighter pilots who were POWs.



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Colonel Cherry contributed to a collection of POW war stories gathered in 1999 and included this statement regarding his guiding principles: *“I know that faith in God, love, and respect for my fellow man that my parents and family instilled in me during my youth carried me through some very difficult years as prisoner-of-war in Vietnam. I was always taught to love and respect others and forgive those who mistreat, scorn or persecute me...[This] allowed me to overcome the damages of discrimination, Jim Crow, and the social and economic barriers associated with growing up a poor dirt farmer.... My standard for making decisions is based on doing what is right.”*



About his life-long friendship, Halyburton said: *“We became very good friends. Hardship draws people together. And Fred, aside from him being a friendly American, he was an extraordinary person. I respected his courage and determination. He thinks I saved his life, and maybe I did on a couple occasions. But, in a way, he saved my life. Every time I was faced with some difficult choice after we were no longer cellmates, I would think back and say, ‘What would Fred do?’ And that helped me to do the right thing.”*

Retired Commander Porter Alexander Halyburton lives with his wife in Rhode Island. They have two daughters and a son. Retired Colonel Fred Vann Cherry passed away on February 16, 2017, due to complications from heart ailments, according to Deborah Thompson, his companion and loving friend of



twenty-four years. Cherry was survived by his five children: Fredrick, Donald, Fred, Deborah and Cynthia. He is buried with full military honors at Arlington National

Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia. A middle school in Suffolk, Virginia, was named in honor of Colonel Fred V. Cherry. The Suffolk Foundation administers an educational scholarship named in his honor.

Matthew Leonard*

“IF I GO DOWN, I’M GOING TO MAKE HISTORY,”

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Matthew Leonard was born in Eutaw, Alabama, on November 26, 1929, to Mr. and Mrs. Larn Leonard. During Matthew’s formative years, he saw little of his father, who was *“in and out.”* Matthew and his brother George and sister Mamie were raised largely by their mother, without much support from her husband.



At an early age the Leonard family moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where Matthew attended Avondale Elementary School *“for us”* his girlfriend Lois would say, noting that there was another Avondale school for White students. Lois met Matthew when she was in the sixth grade; he was in the eighth grade, and was immediately smitten. She recalled him walking the halls in his Boy Scout uniform, and said the night after she first met him she went home and told her mother ‘this was the one. *“I said, ‘I met my husband.’ She didn’t want to hear that, but he was the best looking boy in school.”*

Leonard was also instantly attracted to Lois, and they stayed in touch even after Leonard moved on to Ullman High School. Leonard was busy with studies, and working at a drug store for \$15 a week to help his mother raise his siblings, but he always found some time for Lois. During his junior year the couple married and soon started a family of their own. In 1947, at age 17, Matthew enlisted in the U.S. Army.

Lois said that although she knew her husband dearly loved her, *“the Army was his first wife. I was his second.”* But it was a time when options and opportunities were limited for a young Black man and *“he was also making a career. He was thinking of his family . . . He said if anything happened to him, we’d be well taken care of.”* Then she noted *“It wasn’t as ‘well’ as he thought but it was good.”*

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Alabama Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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Leonard was deployed to combat during the Korean War as a sergeant and survived his one-year combat tour without a scratch. Returning home, he took his family with him to Germany, his next duty assignment, where he was promoted to master sergeant (E-8), but was demoted after getting into a fight with a soldier *“who called him the ‘n-word.’ He never got that stripe back,”* Lois recalled sadly.

After Germany and additional assignments, as the United States geared up for the brewing war in Vietnam, Staff Sergeant (E-6) Leonard was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, as a Drill Instructor training young men who would soon be fighting in Southeast Asia.



He took his job very seriously, having learned from his service in the Korean War that the young men he trained would be facing unthinkable horror and violence. With two teenage boys at home, among the couple's five children, Matthew told Lois not to spoil them – *“I can't turn mama's boys into soldiers who would make it home.”*

Then, to demonstrate his paternal concern for the young men he trained, Leonard volunteered to serve in Vietnam himself. *“He didn't have to go,”* Lois said. Leonard was only one year away from retirement after 20 years of military service. *“I said ‘You're crazy. You ought not to do it.’”*

But having survived one war, Sergeant First Class (E-7) Matthew Leonard could not stand to think of soldiers barely older than his two sons dying in Vietnam. *“He said they are killing them like flies and he could help,”* Lois recalled. She also said he had a foreboding about his own fate. *“He said, he ain't going to git back this time. He said, ‘I have to give my life.’”*

He shared that belief with both Lois and close friends, adding that he *“wasn't going down without being remembered. He said, ‘If I go down, I'm going to make history.’”*

While preparing for deployment, Matthew and Lois went house shopping. They found their dream home, a modest six-room house in

MATTHEW LEONARD

Birmingham which they moved into with hope to purchase it. Because Matthew was being shipped off to war, insurance companies considered him too much of a risk and would not insure it. The couple was told to wait until he returned.

“Lois,” Matthew told her, “*if I don’t make it back, go on with our plan and buy a house.*” In August 1966 he said goodbye to his family, and by September he was in Vietnam, assigned as a platoon sergeant with Company B, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Regiment.

One of the prominent terrain features in the 1st Infantry Division’s Area of Operations (AO) was Nui Ba Den (Black Lady Mountain) known to American soldiers as the “*Black Virgin Mountain.*” The extinct volcano rises from the near-sea-level jungle below to a towering 3,268 feet.



The infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail ended only a few miles west across the Cambodian border, and it was a hot bed of some of the war’s most vicious fighting.

In May 1964, U.S. Army Special Forces captured the crest of “*The Mountain*” and established a radio-relay post there that was supplied by helicopter. *The Mountain* itself was honeycombed with caves and an elaborate tunnel system – late in the war a functioning 100+ room hospital was found in the tunnel system. At night the Viet Cong would move their heavy artillery to the mouths of the tunnels to shell American positions in the jungle below, then quickly withdraw them before American aircraft or artillery could locate and destroy them. It was said, “*We (Americans) owned the top and the bottom, and they (the enemy) owned the middle.*”

At the base of *The Mountain* was the Vietnamese village of Suoi Da, from which American operations were often launched. The village even had a small airstrip the soldiers jokingly called “*Suoi Da International Airport.*”

On February 28, 1967, Platoon Sergeant Leonard and his men came under heavy attack near Suoi Da by a large enemy force employing small arms, automatic weapons, and hand grenades. The platoon leader and several NCOs were wounded in the initial volley, and Platoon

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Sergeant Leonard took charge to steady his men, and organize their resistance. In a lull in the fighting that followed, he organized his men in establishing a defensive perimeter, knowing full well the enemy would be back. Then, noticing one of his men lying wounded in an exposed area beyond the perimeter, Leonard rushed to his aid. While dragging the wounded man back to relative safety, Leonard was shot in the hand by a sniper, but ignored his pain in order to continue leading his men, refusing medical treatment for himself.

When the enemy again attacked, Leonard continued to lead and encourage his men to defend their small perimeter. Under the heavy fire, the enemy moved a machine gun close to the platoon's position where there was a deadly field of fire all across the perimeter. The defense was further made tenuous when the American machine gun malfunctioned.

Leonard ignored the hail of incoming fire to race to the position, and was trying desperately to clear the malfunctioning machine gun when several of his nearby soldiers were struck and wounded by the enemy machine gun. Leonard rose from his task and boldly charged the enemy position. Despite being hit several times, he reached the enemy and knocked out the enemy gun. Then he moved to a nearby tree, life ebbing from his body, and braced himself against it to continue firing.

Sergeant Henry L. Cobb, one of the few survivors, recalled, *"We had left base camp at 7:10 a.m. and were caught by ambush at 10:30. I got it right away when I ran forward. Sergeant Leonard ran into machine guns, too, but he kept firing. He leaned up against a tree, shouting, 'We've got our stuff, we'll whip 'em yet.' He kept on until he died about 3 p.m. We couldn't believe he was dead. He was caught in the vines and couldn't fall."* According to Sergeant Cobb, while caught up in the vines, Leonard used his position to keep himself visible to his men, *"talking it up,"* and urging the platoon on until he died.

The battle continued late into the night. When it ended, only 33 Americans were still alive, according to Cobb.

A few days after the battle, two soldiers showed up at Leonard and Lois' dream home. He had warned her what that would signify, but still, she had trouble accepting it. She remembered feeling as if it was all a bad dream. When confronted with the reality of what happened, in the months that followed she bent to the task that she and Matthew had planned, purchasing the house with her husband's modest Servicemen's Group Life Insurance policy.

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The following year, two more soldiers showed up on Lois' doorstep. This time it was to inform her that her husband was to be awarded the Medal of Honor. True to his promise: *"If I go down, I'm going to make history,"* Sergeant First Class Matthew Leonard did just that.



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Sergeant First Class Matthew Leonard (ASN: 14268817), United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy aggressor forces at Suoi Da, Republic of Vietnam, on 28 February 1967. Platoon Sergeant Leonard's platoon was suddenly attacked by a large enemy force employing small arms, automatic weapons, and hand grenades. Although the platoon leader and several other key leaders were among the first wounded, Platoon Sergeant Leonard quickly rallied his men to throw back the initial enemy assaults. During the short pause that followed, he organized a defensive perimeter, redistributed ammunition, and inspired his comrades through his forceful leadership and words of encouragement. Noticing a wounded companion outside the perimeter, he dragged the man to safety but was struck by a sniper's bullet which shattered his left hand. Refusing medical attention and continuously exposing himself to the increasing fire as the enemy again assaulted the perimeter, Platoon Sergeant Leonard moved from position to position to direct the fire of his men against the well camouflaged foe. Under the cover of the main attack, the enemy moved a machinegun into a location where it could sweep the entire perimeter. This threat was magnified when the platoon machinegun in this area malfunctioned. Platoon Sergeant Leonard quickly crawled to the gun position and was helping to clear the malfunction when the gunner and other men in the vicinity were wounded by fire from the enemy machinegun. Platoon Sergeant Leonard rose to his feet, charged the enemy gun and destroyed the hostile crew despite being hit several times by enemy fire. He moved to a tree, propped himself against it, and continued to engage the enemy until he succumbed to his many wounds. His fighting spirit, heroic leadership, and valiant acts inspired the remaining members of his platoon to hold back the enemy until assistance arrived. Platoon Sergeant

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Leonard's profound courage and devotion to his men are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and his gallant actions reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.

Lois and the five Leonard children were sent to Washington, D. C., where, at the Pentagon on December 19, 1968, Secretary of the Army Stanley A. Resor presented her with her husband's Medal of Honor. Joining her for that moment were all five children (front) Paula, age 8; and (left to right) Brenda, age 16; Wanda, age 13; Carl, age 21; and Lavon, age 17. Lois sadly noted, *"I was proud of him, but I'd be more proud of him if he was here with us today."*



After the ceremony the Leonard family, now minus one, returned to the dream home at 549 Gaston Circle in Birmingham. Life would never be the same, and it was a challenge for Lois. Had Matthew Leonard lived another six months, he would have reached the 20-year-mark with added benefits for his family. Over the decades that followed, Lois did her best to raise her family and honor the memory of her hero-husband. Matthew had been the first and only love of Lois' life since the sixth grade; she never remarried.



After Matthew Leonard's body was returned home in the months after his death, he was buried in Birmingham's Shadow Lawn Memorial Gardens. At the time this was an appropriate final resting place, but in the years that followed, with no funds for upkeep, the graveyard became overgrown with weeds, and the owners faced charges of neglect and bankruptcy.

Thirty-three years after her husband's burial, Lois Leonard despaired for the condition of her husband's final resting place. However, now 68-years old and living on a fixed income, still caring for her two disabled sons, she was powerless to remedy it.

MATTHEW LEONARD

Heartsick, Lois swallowed her pride and appealed to the Birmingham chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. There she found a friend in the chapter's senior vice commander, Bobby Randle. "*It (Shadow Lawn) was a terrible, unfit place,*" he noted. He took the campaign to the National Convention, and was promised \$5,000 to move the body of an American hero to a final resting place. In November 2000, the body of Matthew Leonard was disinterred and transported to Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in Fort Mitchell, Alabama, for proper burial with full military honors.



Author's Note:

The story of Matthew Leonard has long been one that resonated with me, and I will admit unashamedly that I was moved to tears while writing his story herein. In fact, during my own time going through training for service in Vietnam, I went through Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where Sergeant First Class Matthew Leonard had trained young men like me a few years earlier. Every veteran will say that, while those Drill Instructors were hated, we truly loved them, for they molded us for what we would one day face. Most veterans can still recall their DI's names, and even hear their loud, brash, oft-profane voice in our dreams decades later.

Further, my first major combat operation upon arriving in Vietnam in the fall of 1970 occurred just outside Suoi Da at the base of the *Black Virgin Mountain*.

Thirty-two years later I was four years into my work of building my HomeOfHeroes.com website, detailing the stories of Medal of Honor and other heroes, which at that time was receiving 10 million hits each month. One day I received a phone call from a man who had found me through my website. It was Bobby Randle from Birmingham, Alabama. The story he told me of the family of an American hero was heartbreaking.

Lois' dream home was aging poorly, and crumbling. She took out a home equity loan to finance renovations, replacing the roof and fixing the bathroom. And then the repairs began snowballing to the point she could not keep up with it. She had no heat or hot water, and no hope of finding any further funds for repairs. Further, she had fallen three months behind on her \$661 mortgage payments, and the bank told her to

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either come up with \$4,600 or lose the house. The bank ultimately foreclosed and U.S. Bank bought the house. The mortgage company would return the house for \$64,000.

It was far beyond Lois' means, especially since she was suffering from diabetes, severe asthma, and chronic bronchitis, and fallen behind in her medical bills. The sheriff's office was prepared to enforce an eviction notice within days, when one of Lois' neighbors, recalling how Randall had helped raise funds to provide a proper burial, contacted him about her plight.

"I refuse to give up," Randle said of his efforts. "It gives me chills to think of a person dying for their country and his widow not receiving enough funds to help her survive. I am quite confident that one way or the other the Lord will help me . . . this has to work. Something has to give. I refuse to let that lady get tossed out on the street."

It was crunch time – it was a matter of days before the sheriff would arrive to evict Lois, and she had packed as much as she could. After learning this from Randle, I quickly placed a phone call to Barney Barnum, a Marine Corps Vietnam War Medal of Honor recipient who was serving as president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Within 24 hours he got back to Randall that the Society was sending \$40,000 immediately to help. Locally, other Birmingham residents got involved.

To make matters worse, it was a holiday weekend and the banks were closed on the following Monday, with eviction expected to be served by Jefferson County deputy sheriffs on Tuesday. Randle camped out all weekend at the Western Hill Mall in Fairfield, Alabama, collecting donations.

On February 18, 2003, newspapers reported *"War Hero's Widow Receives Reprieve"* – U.S. Bank in Mobile, Alabama, agreed to extend its deadline for a few days. It was enough. On February 28, 2003, 36 years to the day after Matthew Leonard died a hero in Vietnam, Bobby Randle handed Lois Leonard the deed to her home. Sufficient funds were raised not only to buy back the home, but make the needed electrical, heating, and hot water repairs.

Lois said she was embarrassed by all the fuss, but thankful for those who cared. *"I just can't explain it in words. I'm so happy about the way things turned out. I thank God for touching people's hearts to help me. I will be forever grateful to all of you. I feel better than I've felt in a good while."*

In the days that followed I had several opportunities to visit with Lois by telephone, and like Matthew Leonard before me, I fell in love with a beautiful lady I will never forget.

Lois Leonard died on April 2, 2020. She was buried next to her grade school sweetheart and loving husband, Matthew Leonard, an American hero who did indeed, make history.

Jose F. Jimenez

HE OWED A DEBT – AND HE PAID IT!

BY: WYATT KOPKIE

The Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award, may only be presented to members of the U.S. military. Immigrants to the United States have served in every war in our nation's history, including Maquis de Lafayette who became an important leader in the American Revolutionary War. Arizona has long been a territory and then a state, which welcomed immigrants. During World War I, one-third of the men mustered for service from Arizona were aliens, citizens of other countries. Many non-American citizens have died fighting for their adopted country, many have been highly decorated. Only a handful have received the Medal of Honor. One was a young Mexican man from Arizona.

Jose Francisco Jimenez was born March 20, 1946, in Mexico City. His father died while Jose was quite young, and Jose moved for a time to live with relatives in Morella, midway between Mexico City and Guadalajara. In the early 1950s Jose's mother, Basilia C. Jimenez, a Mexican government employee, came to Arizona with her daughter Pilar to work in the home of Mexican Consul Rafael Reyes Spindola, who was vice consul in Arizona. In 1957, Jose came to Arizona to live with his mother and sister in Red Rock Arizona.



Jimenez attended Red Rock Elementary School. and moved to Eloy, Arizona, where he attended Santa Cruz Valley Union High School. He loved ranching, and worked on local ranches when not in class. In school, Jimenez was president of the Future Farmers of America, and in his senior year was named Star Chapter Farmer in Eloy. His cousin Natividad Acosta recalled that Jimenez loved ranching and was *“already a pretty good cowboy.”*

Jimenez graduated in 1968, during the height of the Vietnam War and during a period in which graduating high school seniors were subject to being drafted for military service. As a Mexican National, he was exempt from being drafted. However, upon graduation, on June 7 he

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enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve in Phoenix. He wanted to serve the United States which he said, *“has been good to me and my mother.”*

On August 12 he was discharged to enlist in the regular Marine Corps and reported for Boot Camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, California. After Boot Camp he was promoted to Private First Class and assigned for more training at the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.



He completed his training there in December 1968 and received orders for service in Vietnam. After a brief leave to visit his family back in Arizona, he arrived in South Vietnam on February 27, 1969. Now a lance corporal, he was assigned as a fire team leader in Company K, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, FIRST Marine Division. Lieutenant T. B. Edwards, III, his commanding officer, wrote: *“Jose was a truly excellent Marine. His cheerful disposition and courage were qualities we all admired. Jose was keenly aware of his mission in Vietnam and his devotion to duty, sometimes under the most trying circumstances, reflected the highest traditions of the U.S. Marine Corps.”*

In August 1969, four regiments of the Army's 196th Light Infantry Brigade with supporting artillery, began an offensive action near Hiep Duc at the junction of the Song Lau and Song Ranh rivers. About 4,000 South Vietnamese lived in the village, which was surrounded by 1,500 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers. For the next 13 days they would find themselves in one of the deadliest battles of the war.

On August 17, seven soldiers of Company D, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 196th Light Infantry Brigade were killed in a battle near the French Hooch at An Lam. The following day seven more soldiers of the 196th were killed, and 48 wounded as they moved to reinforce a base camp overlooking the Hiep Duc Valley, known as *“Death Valley.”* On August 19 an American helicopter was shot down inside NVA-occupied territory, killing eight soldiers and a freelance photographer. Eight more American soldiers of the Brigade were killed in a fight with the enemy near the village of Thon Mot.

One American DUSTOFF (medical evacuation) helicopter flew 42 missions from August 20 to 22 to evacuate more than 150 wounded Americans including Private First Class Rocky Bleier who had been

drafted after his rookie year with the Pittsburgh *Steelers*. “*The ground troops were surrounded, low on ammunition and couldn’t give us any covering fire,*” he later said. “*After our medic, Specialist Fifth Class Jon Seebeth was hit, the NVA shot out three of our four radios.*”

The fighting was so intense that in many cases the American dead could not be immediately recovered. For members of all branches of service, this is a difficult situation to accept – no comrade, alive, wounded, or dead, is ever left behind. Not until August 24 were the dead killed in the August 18 ambush recovered. But, to the credit of American servicemen and women, they were recovered.

The Second Battalion, Seventh Marines, were based at Landing Zone (LZ) Baldy, north of Chu Lai. They were deployed to reinforce the Army soldiers in the Hiep Duc Valley. On August 27 they were replaced by Companies I, K, L, and M from the Third Battalion, Seventh Marines. As the battered 2/7 Marines withdrew, Lance Corporal Bill Rolke of Jimenez’ Company K, 3/7 Marines recalled, “*Most of the guys had bandages on their faces, arms, and legs. They were literally walking wounded. They told us, ‘we’ve never seen anything as bad as this.’*” He then added, “*It was a real creepy feeling walking into that valley.*”

The following day, August 28, 1969, the Marines launched an attack up Hill 381. The fighting was bitter and there were many dead and wounded. But their assault forced the enemy to withdraw, and in their wake the Marines found the bodies of an old man, a husband and wife, three children, and a baby, shot in the head execution-style. Amid their horror, the Marines were infuriated.

Two hours after noon, Jimenez’s Second Platoon of Company K was ordered to advance up Hill 381 to destroy a North Vietnamese 12.7-mm antiaircraft gun that had been shooting at Marine Corps F-4 *Phantom* jets. As they charged up the hill, the anti-aircraft gun turned its fire on the advancing Marines, forcing them to take cover in elephant grass that rose in some places over their heads.

Corporal Jimenez seized the initiative and raced towards the enemy position, determined to knock out the enemy gun that was the platoon’s target. Advancing, he killed six enemy before reaching the and the gun and knocking it out of action. Seconds later, he was instantly killed by fire from an enemy AK-47.

Alan Jones, one of Jimenez’s comrades that day recalled, “*(Jimenez) was determined to go up there and bring the enemy down and get that*

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gun. He took out quite a few of the enemy and kept on charging, even though he was being fired at. It was astonishing.”

Inspired by their comrade’s daring assault, seven Marines volunteered to move forward to recover his body. Six of them were killed and nine wounded while fulfilling their Marine Corps creed of never leaving a comrade behind. Two of them, Lieutenant Richard L. Jaehne and Private First Class Dennis D. Davis were awarded the Navy Cross for that and other actions. Davis’s award was posthumously awarded.

In the battle from August 23 – 29, 70 Army soldiers and 46 Marines were killed; 191 Marines and 300 soldiers were wounded. By their valor the Americans prevented the North Vietnamese Army from destroying the Hiep Duc Resettlement Village, in what Major General Lloyd Ramsey called a “*successful pre-emptive battle.*”

Jose Jimenez’s body was returned home, and he was buried in Morelia, Mexico on September 6. Basilia could not afford to transport her son’s headstone to Mexico, and kept it under her bed for 17 years until local veterans and volunteers made it possible to be moved.

In April 1970 Mrs. Jimenez was informed her son would be posthumously awarded the Silver Star. After a couple of delays, in August she flew to Washington, D.C. with daughter Pilar and nephew Natividad Acosta. On August 6, 1970, they were escorted into the East Room of the White House, where President Richard M. Nixon presented the grieving mother with her son’s Medal of Honor. Also attending the ceremony was Mexico Ambassador to the United States Hugo B. Margrain. He stood next to Basilia throughout the ceremony, translating into Spanish when the citation was read.

After the ceremony, Jimenez’s cousin Natividad Acosta perhaps summed it up best. He said, “*He (Jimenez) didn’t have to join the Marines or fight for the United States. But he said he owed this country a great obligation by the way he and his mother had been received and helped here. I think that is why he volunteered and died in Vietnam. This was not his country, but he owed it a debt – and he paid it.*”



The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Lance Corporal Jose Francisco Jimenez, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 28 August 1969, while serving as a fire team leader with Company K, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in operations against the enemy south of DaNang, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam. Lance Corporal Jimenez' unit came under heavy attack by North Vietnamese soldiers concealed in well camouflaged emplacements. Lance Corporal Jimenez reacted by seizing the initiative and plunging forward toward the enemy positions. He personally destroyed several enemy personnel and silenced an anti-aircraft weapon. Shouting encouragement to his companions, Lance Corporal Jimenez continued his aggressive forward movement. He slowly maneuvered to within ten feet of hostile soldiers who were firing automatic weapons from a trench and, in the face of vicious enemy fire, destroyed the position. Although he was by now the target of concentrated fire from hostile gunners intent upon halting his assault, Lance Corporal Jimenez continued to press forward. As he moved to attack another enemy soldier, he was mortally wounded. Lance Corporal Jimenez' indomitable courage, aggressive fighting spirit and unfaltering devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the U.S. Naval Service.

Basilia died in Glendale, Arizona, in 2010 and was buried at Glendale Memorial Park. Pilar began an effort to bring her brother home, and with donations from various organizations Jose was disinterred and on January 17, 1917, was laid to rest beside his mother.



Jose A. Santa Cruz
Russell A. Steindam, MOH (Inset)



Air Force veteran and portrait artist from McKinney, Texas, and founder of the North Texas Fallen Warrior project, Colin Kimball specializes in portraying our nation's fallen warriors. This portrait is part of a compilation of portraits he is working on to tell the stories of our nation's posthumous and belatedly recognized Medal of Honor recipients who never got to wear the medal, as well as other military heroes.

Jose A. Santa Cruz

A MEXICAN HERO THAT CALLED ARIZONA “HOME”

BY: COLIN KIMBALL

The summer of 1968 was a tumultuous time for recent high school graduates. America’s involvement in Vietnam and the negative press from the springtime *Tet Offensive* turned America’s youth against the war. Many burned their draft cards in public protest. Some deserted and fled to Canada. Yet one young man from Glendale, Arizona, Jose Santa Cruz, born in Mexico, answered the call of the nation he grew up in to serve in the United States Army.

Jose Angel Santa Cruz was born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on February 15, 1959. His mother and father, Jose S. Santa Cruz and Maria De Los Angeles Santa Cruz were Mexican Nationals who came to the United States with their children as migrant workers. Theirs was a large family – Jose had five brothers, Lorenzo, Carlos, Efren, Petro and Martin; and seven sisters: Gloria, Connie, Nellie, Yolando, Grace, Mary, and Paulina. The family moved to Glendale, Arizona, shortly after Jose’s birth in 1949.



The Santa Cruz children attended Glendale elementary schools and then high school. Jose graduated from Glendale High School in 1968, and two months after graduation entered the United States Army, and began learning the customs and skills of becoming a soldier. After Basic Training he went through Advanced Individual Training and was classified under the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) as 11B – an infantryman. His chances of going overseas to Vietnam to put his training to use was virtually guaranteed. Santa Cruz did, in fact, arrive in Vietnam on January 1, 1970, and was assigned to Troop B, 3d Squadron 4th Cavalry Regiment (3/4), of the 25th Infantry Division.

The 25th Infantry, known as “*Tropic Lightning*,” was headquartered at Cu Chi in Tay Ninh Province. The city is about 30 kilometers northwest of Saigon, near the border that Cambodia shares with South Vietnam. The base there was also famous for the dust generated at the air fields that the U.S. Army used. One common

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expression stated by soldiers based there was, “*Cu Chi is the only place you can stand up to your ass in mud and still get dust in your eyes.*”

North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong Guerillas travelling down the *Ho Chi Minh Trail* had heavily infiltrated Tay Ninh Province. There was an extensive underground tunnel network throughout the area, often with modern living accommodations including electricity, that the enemy used to store weapons, food caches, and hide from American troops launching well-hidden ambushes.



The dominating feature in the Division's AO (Area of Operations) was an extinct volcano. Nui Ba Den, known to American troops as the “*Black Virgin Mountain,*” which rises 3,268 feet from the flat, nearly sea-level jungle below. There was an American radio-relay base at

the top, and the jungle below was heavily patrolled by different units including the 23d and 25 Infantry Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. The mountain was honeycombed with caves and tunnels, occupied by the enemy. It was reported that circa 1970 a 130-room modern NVA hospital was discovered there. Soldiers joked, “*We owned the top, and we owned the bottom, but Charlie (slang term for the Viet Cong) owned the middle.*”



The AO also included the infamous Ho Bo Woods, 20 kilometers north of Cu Chi and nearly annexing an area called the *Iron Triangle*. It was an area full of hidden spider holes and tunnels, with reinforced bunkers and gun positions that the enemy used to great effect on American patrols that ventured into the woods. The woods was further heavily pockmarked with large craters from extensive American bombing.

The 3d Squadron 4th Cavalry Regiment that Private First Class Santa Cruz joined on New Years Day, was one of the Army's famous legacy Cavalry Regiments that traced its lineage to service on the Western

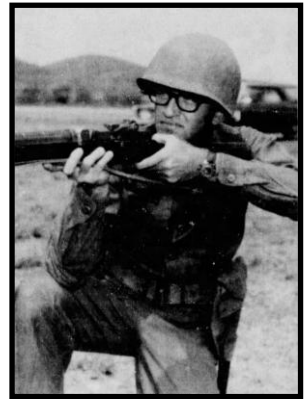
Jose A. Santa Cruz

Frontier of the United States. Colonel Robert E Lee commanded the 4th Cavalry Regiment before leaving the Army and serving the State of Virginia for the Confederacy during the Civil War. In the 1870s, the 4th Cavalry Regiment made a name for itself, pursuing the Comanche Tribe in Texas under the command of Colonel Ranald S. MacKenzie. The Regiment became known as the “*MacKenzie Raiders*. ”

In the 1880s Troop B of the 3/4 Cavalry was based in the Arizona Territory. Its soldiers made expeditionary forays into Mexico, and captured the famous Apache Chief Geronimo.

Private First Class Santa Cruz quickly assimilated into Troop B as a radio operator. His troop was conducting operations in an area of Tay Ninh Province known as the Boi Loi Woods. The NVA and Viet Cong operated clandestinely in his region, infiltrating into the area from Cambodia with supplies and troops at the terminus of the *Ho Chi Minh Trail*. During the early months of 1970, 3/4 operated regularly in this area to disrupt the prevalent enemy activity.

Santa Cruz was assigned to a newly formed Ambush Patrol, led by First Lieutenant Russell A. Steindam (pictured), a Texan and Distinguished ROTC Graduate from the University of Texas. Steindam, Ranger qualified, was not the athletic type one might associate with those who complete Ranger training. He had an intellectual, academic demeanor, and was eager to serve his country. He arrived in Vietnam in October 1969, and was eagerly anticipating the birth of his son by his beautiful wife, who waited for his return in Texas.



The Squadron Commander of 3/4 formed ambush patrols to disrupt the enemy activity in this area. According to David Finzel, Sergeant First Class Retired, “*the CO offered the ambush patrol to all the young Lieutenants and then turned to Steindam and said get it done.*” The reluctance of those willing to volunteer speaks to the tangible danger of the mission, as well as to Steindam’s focus on his duty to lead and care for his troops effectively.

On February 1, 1970, Steindam led a 12-man patrol into the *Ho Bo Woods* after dismounting their armored tracked vehicles. Their mission was to stealthily infiltrate the jungle and set up an ambush position to

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surprise, disrupt, and capture enemy troops traversing this area. Private First Class Santa Cruz had only been *in country* for one month and was the oft-maligned “*new guy*.” Usually, seasoned, experienced troops were selected for such dangerous missions. The fact that Santa Cruz was chosen as Steindam’s radio man speaks highly of his soldierly competence and dedication to duty.

At dusk, after Steindam’s men dismounted from their vehicles and began infiltrating the woods. Santa Cruz spotted some enemy soldiers waiting for the ambush patrol. Perhaps the enemy had been tipped off, since they were waiting to ambush the Troop B patrol. Believing the enemy soldiers were unaware of their presence, Santa Cruz and Steindam advanced stealthily toward their foe.

The enemy knew that the radio man was always near the leader. A common tactic in battle is to take out the leader so that you can disrupt the unit cohesion and enhance your success. Accordingly, the enemy soldiers tossed a grenade directly at Steindam. Santa Cruz acted instinctively and, due to his proximity to Steindam, immediately placed himself between the grenade and Steindam to shield his lieutenant from the lethal blast of the grenade. Private First Class Santa Cruz’s actions resulted in his immediate death, but saved the life of the patrol leader, First Lieutenant Russell A Steindam.

The ambush had been sprung, not by the troopers of Troop B, but by the enemy soldiers the Cav troop sought. The fight was on.

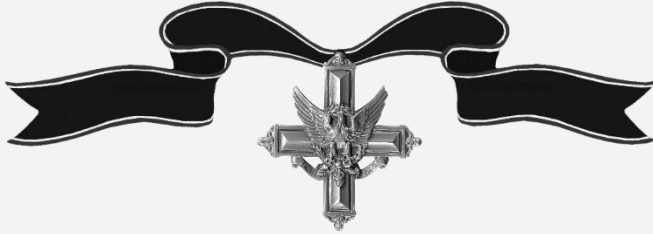
Steindam ordered his men to take cover and found a bomb crater that offered protection. Very soon after Steindam and a few of his fellow troopers took cover in the bomb crater, a grenade was tossed. The enemy clearly identified Steindam as the leader and sought to eliminate him. With no time and no options, Steindam took it upon himself to smother the grenade to protect the soldiers under his command.

No one knows if Santa Cruz’s selfless example moments before inspired Steindam. It certainly must have had an impact. Like the selfless act that he had witnessed earlier, Steindam sacrificed himself valiantly to save the lives of the remaining men of his ambush patrol.

The radio was still operational as the ten surviving ambush patrol members began to call in air and artillery assets and end the fight. When the fight was over, ten men walked out of the jungle – the survivors of the Steindam’s ambush patrol. Two men died as heroes, both of them sacrificing their own lives to save the lives of their fellow soldiers.

Jose A. Santa Cruz

Private First Class Jose Angel Santa Cruz of Glendale, Arizona, was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross, the highest award for valor that the Department of the Army can bestow, for saving the life of First Lieutenant Russell A Steindam. His award was posthumously presented to his grieving parents by Brigadier General I. R. Obenchain, Jr., at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, on February 23, 1971.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by act of Congress, July 9, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Private First Class Jose Angel Santa Cruz, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Troop B, 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division. Private First Class Santa Cruz distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 1 February 1970 while serving as a member of an ambush patrol in Tay Ninh Province. Private Santa Cruz and his comrades were attempting to make contact with hostile forces when enemy movement was detected a short distance from the patrol. Private Santa Cruz and his platoon leader immediately advanced toward the enemy troops in an effort to surprise them. Suddenly, Private Santa Cruz observed an enemy trooper toss a grenade toward his platoon leader. Without hesitation, Private Santa Cruz threw his body between his comrade and the grenade, thus shielding him from the ensuing blast. Although Private Santa Cruz was killed instantly, his unselfish action saved the life of his comrade. Private First Class Santa Cruz's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.



Just 23 days after Steindam was killed in Vietnam, his wife gave birth to the son he would never see – a child who would never know his father.

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Steindam's remains were returned to Texas, and the heroic soldier from Plano was buried at Restland Memorial Park in Dallas. He was subsequently awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor, the highest award for valor our nation can offer, which is bestowed by the President of the United States.

Jose Santa Cruz was born in Mexico, yet he gave his life for the adopted country that gave him the freedoms he enjoyed. As members of the *MacKenzie Raiders*, both men served in a historic cavalry regiment that made its mark serving in both Texas and Arizona some 80 years earlier. At 20 years old, Jose Santa Cruz was too young to buy a beer legally. He died just 15 days before he turned 21, and was buried at West Resthaven Park Cemetery in Glendale, Arizona.

May they both be remembered and may they rest forever in honored peace.



Donald Dunagan

*Immigrant Orphan, Movie Star, & Marine Hero**

By C. Douglas Sterner

When one hears the term “immigrant” these days, there is a common but mis-placed tendency for some to think in terms of race: usually Hispanic, Asian, or Black. In fact, There are many White immigrants as well; Irish immigrants have earned an impressive 264 Medals of Honor. Despite this, in the 1800s in response to increased immigration from Ireland due to Great Famine (1845–1852), there was widespread prejudice against the Irish in particular, and more so towards the hordes who fled Ireland to make a better life in the *Land of Opportunity*. During the Vietnam War, Great Britain immigrant Jon Cavaiani, Canadian immigrant Peter C. Lemon, and Hungarian immigrant Laszlo Rabel earned the Medal of Honor. Numbered among the 28 Medal of Honor Recipients in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is French-born immigrant Florent Groberg. You may not recognize the name “*Donald Dunagan*,” but chances are very high that you have heard this Irish immigrant’s voice.

When Donnie Dunagan was drafted into the Marine Corps in 1952 at the height of the war in Korea, he brought secret. It was one he tried to hide from everyone throughout his 25-year-career as a Marine Infantryman and subsequently as a Marine officer. It was a secret he even kept from his wife when he married. During two tours of duty, the thing he feared most was that one day the men he commanded in battle might learn about his secret past.



Donald “*Donnie*” Roan Dunagan was born at sea while his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Dunagan were en route from Ireland to the United States. When the ship docked at Galveston, Texas, a stranger offered the family a ride to San Antonio. There he received a second birth certificate listing his date of birth as August 16, 1934. An earlier birth certificate recording his birth at sea two or three days

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Marine Corps Heroes

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earlier had been issued by the ship's Captain Roan, whose surname became Donnie's middle name.

His father received a job offer in Memphis, Tennessee, paying twenty cents an hour and the family promptly relocated. The Dunagans lived in poverty on that meager salary, thankful for what they had during the depression years. As he began to talk, Donnie spoke not only English, but at age 13 months learned to count in Spanish from a neighbor. From his parents and friends, he also learned German and French.



He recalled that his mother would walk with him to “*two to three ding-dings*” to watch a street performer named Sam, who with his Victrola, danced and entertained small crowds for pennies and nickels. Donnie began to teach himself, at that young age, to both sing and dance as well, and found himself following Sam's example – becoming part of “*Ding-dings*,” a street act with Sam.

Decades later in an interview with *San Angelo Lifestyles*, he recalled. “*I later learned that Sam was related to a famous Vaudevillian performer on Broadway, Peg Leg Bates, and someone in this fancy car (that pulled up during one performance), knew him. The person in the car handed something to Sam and the crowd cried out, ‘a double sawbuck’ (\$10).*” Sam ran off with the money while Dunagan continued to dance by himself, but he returned minutes later and handed Donnie's mother half of it, having ostensibly made change. Donnie recalled that these five dollars enabled his family to pay rent, and still have left over change.

This was Donnie's first opportunity to contribute meaningfully to his impoverished family's economic needs. Soon thereafter, with a home-made top hat and tap shoes stuffed with tissues so they would fit his small feet, he entered a talent show. Dancing his way through the tune of “*A Tisket, a Tasket*,” he won first place, and the prize of \$100 – equivalent to two-and-a-half years' salary for laborers like his father. He later learned that his mother sold her wedding ring in order to buy the tap shoes and costume that he wore for the contest.

The family returned home exuberant, to find a talent scout for movie giant RKO who had been in the audience, waiting for them.

Donald Dunagan

Dunagan recalled, *“I, like most people of the day, had never seen a movie, so my dad was suspicious.”* After a conference call from the talent scout’s hotel room later that day, Mr. Dunagan was convinced, and soon the family was on their way to Hollywood. Dunagan later said: *“We went from maybe eating one meal a day to being on a train that had a dining car. It was there that I ate ice cream for the very first time and it’s my vice to this day.”*

His Hollywood audition was announced in *The Express* on September 12, 1937, under a headline that read, *“Boy, 3, Prepares for Film Career in Four Tongues.”* They further noted that he was, *“judged in a recent local beauty show to rank 100 per cent in beauty, 100 per cent in personality, and 100 percent in health.”*

For his screen test, his mother curled his hair, which Donnie hated, but which, with his performance, with a goat no less, garnered him a contract and a job in the 1938 movie *“Mother Carey’s Chickens.”* The following year he performed in his second motion picture, *“Son of Frankenstein,”* with veteran actors Basil Rathbone, Boris Karloff, and Bela Lugosi. Dunagan played the role of the young son of Baron Wolf von Frankenstein and his wife Elsa (Josephine Hutchinson).



In 1939 he had roles in *“Fixer Dugan,”* *“Terry Kennedy,”* *“The Forgotten Women”* and *“Tower of London.”* In 1940 he had an uncredited role in *“Vigil in the Night,”* and the following year acted in *“Meet the Camp.”* In 1942 he had one final role before he retired from acting.

When Dunagan joined RKO, as a minor, his contract had to be approved by the Los Angeles Superior Court. It stipulated that his parents set aside half of his salary in a trust fund. The child actor’s success was ample enough that the remaining half enabled his family, for the first time in their lives, to live comfortably. Donnie was the first person to benefit from the new law, passed after the parents of child actor Jackie Coogan (*“The Kid”* 1921), squandered his earnings. Like them, Donnie’s parents also overspent their half of their son’s earnings; wealth was new to them and they handled it poorly, enabling them a lifestyle they had never before known.

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"We'd gone from a one-room tenement to a house in Beverly Hills, and it was too much, too quick," Dunagan recalled. in "The family just ruptured, and I was then farmed out to a bunch of people." Tension mounted and the couple divorced. Both died premature deaths soon after and Donnie became an orphan. At the age of 10 Donnie was placed in an orphanage in San Antonio, Texas and later returned to Los Angeles to live at an orphanage operated by Father Howard, a mentor he came to dearly love.

Father Howard died when Donnie was fourteen years old, and he ran away from the orphanage. Thereafter he was on his own and living in a boarding home, working at a menial, low-paying job as a lathe operator. He made a decision at age nine not to talk about his film career, and began focusing on the future. By age 17 he was hoping to become a doctor, and worked hard to hopefully get a football scholarship to attend college. However, when he turned 18, he received a letter from Uncle Sam.

In 1952 Dunagan received his draft notice to appear for a physical. Instead, in January 1943 he enlisted in Marine Corps for service as an enlisted Infantryman. It was a good fit.

He brought with him a secret from his past that he hoped his new brothers-in arms would never find out. Acknowledging his secret, he later told *The Guardian*, *"You have to understand what it's like in the Marine Corps, or in the CIA, or FBI. Those were the best men I ever met in my life, but they would never talk about their past, or boast about their achievements . . . only tacky men did that."* Of course, in Dunagan's case, he had an ulterior motive for hiding the secret from his own past.



"Standing in the line for medical doctors at a table," he recalled, "from behind me came a 6'3" or taller Marine First Sergeant – World War II type – Marine Recruiter. He is not supposed to be in there . . . (it was) against strong regulations."

"'Son, are you Doonagan (miss-spoken)?' he inquired. I replied that I was. 'Son,' he went on, 'The Marines have a foot ball team and boxing teams. Do you still do both?' I replied that I did.

Donald Dunagan

'Come with me, Son, and you get paid for doing that stuff you do now for free!!! Paid!!!'

"Ha, living in a boarding house since age 14 and school, and for free!!! Paid! Ha. I went right with him, kind of covert out the rear door. That was when I realized that this big guy may not be OK in the recruit room. One day later the Los Angeles recruiting command put me on a trail with a clip board and told me to keep under order with the, I think 15 to 17 new enlistments in San Diego. It was my first leadership challenge . . . great fun life."

Over the years that followed Dunagan continued to perform well in the Corps, and gain additional stepping stones in leadership. After Boot Camp, having tested 167 on the Stanford Test, he was trained as a Drill Instructor through a special program, reportedly becoming the youngest DI in Marine Corps history.

Excitedly, the young Marine sewed his new private first class stripes on his uniform before reporting to DI School. In his haste, they were, by his account, *"about 30 percent crooked."* Reporting to the school, he was met by the first sergeant of the legendary DI School. *"You can't be a DI,"* he shouted angrily, directly into Donnie's face. *"Look at you (shirt). You are even a 'Crooked PFC.'"*

"I got teased for that for months," he remembers. The negative reception aside, however, the following became the Corps' youngest Senior Drill Instructor. *"Years later when I was a hyper young gunnery sergeant, before officer promotions,"* he recalled, *"that old World War II 'Top Sergeant' and I became real close friends."*

Promoted thirteen times in the first 21 years of his career, he was a senior sergeant at age 21, and later a *Mustang* – a commissioned officer who came up through the ranks. Following his time as a Drill Instructor he attended the Army's counterintelligence training in Maryland. *"Credentialed, armed, and in civilian clothes,"* he recalled in a 2001 interview with the *Carlsbad Current Argus*, *"I was engaged in some of the most interesting and risky counter intelligence operations."* Still doing his best to hide the secret from his past that haunted him, he served as an in-the-field counterintelligence agent, all over the world.

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On loan to the Army, he was twice cited by the Secretary of the Army. His first was for designing a shoe-box-size detect system to expose wire taps and induction taps. He was cited a second time, for leading in other intelligence actions.

In 1967 Dunagan deployed as a Marine combat leader to Vietnam with the Third Battalion, Fifth Marines as a Combat Intelligence Patrol leader. Serving through the infamous *Tet Offensive* of 1968. He subsequently served a second combat tour – and was medically evacuated from both tours from serious combat wounds. He was awarded three Purple Hearts a Bronze Star for Valor, and a Navy Commendation Medal for Valor.

“I have some holes in my body that God didn’t put there,” he says. *“I got shot through my left knee. Got an award or two for saving some lives over time.”*



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" to Second Lieutenant Donald R. Dunagan, United States Marine Corps, for meritorious service in connection with operations against insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving in various capacities with the FIRST Marine Division, from 28 June 1967 to 7 January 1968. During this period, First Lieutenant Dunagan performed his myriad duties in an exemplary and highly professional manner. In his initial assignment as Intelligence Officer of the Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, he displayed outstanding ability to provide his commanding officer with concise, logical Order of Battle studies and Intelligence Estimates that were of immeasurable value not only to his own unit, but also to higher headquarters. Constantly seeking means of providing accurate and timely intelligence support, he participated in several major combat operations including Operations PIKE, COCHISE, and SWIFT. In order to improve his ability to advise and assist his command on intelligence matters, he frequently disregarded his own safety to accompany teams on reconnaissance patrols. Aware that the 106-mm.

Recoilless Rifle Platoon had been without an officer for three months, First Lieutenant Dunagan voluntarily assumed the responsibility of this additional duty. Working tirelessly, he planned and supervised a comprehensive training program and rapidly molded the platoon into a highly proficient combat unit capable of accomplishing all assigned missions. On 23 December 1967, he was transferred to the G-2 Section, Headquarters, FIRST Marine Division specifically to utilize his organization talents to realign the Basic Intelligence Unit. Within two weeks, he succeeded in completely reorganizing the file and record system and in improving procedures used in maintaining the Order of Battle information. While conducting a reconnaissance of an enemy rocket launch site, he was seriously wounded and subsequently medically evacuated from the Republic of Vietnam. First Lieutenant Dunagan's superior professionalism, outstanding leadership, and unwavering devotion to duty throughout, materially enhanced the intelligence posture of the Division and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service.

By 1977 Dunagan rose to the rank of major. He was selected for the National War College in Kansas, a major stepping stone to future promotion. A required physical involved a hearing test, which he failed. Angrily, he opted to retire after a quarter-century of Marine Corps service. Years later physicians found a benign tumor inside his hearing tract that impeded his hearing. After it was removed he had no further issues with his hearing. He said, *"I have not forgiven Navy doctors in San Diego for the poor examination error terminating my growing and wonderful career in the Marines."*

In numerous interviews, Dunagan later recalled one interesting incident as his retirement date neared. Major Dunagan was summoned to the office of a Marine Corps General with whom he served and who now instructed him to *"audit the auditors."*

"General, when do you think I'm going to have time to do that?" Dunagan recalled saying in an NPR interview in 2015. *"He looked at me, pulled his glasses down like some kind of college professor. There's a big red, top-secret folder that he got out of a safe somewhere that had my name on it. He pats this folder, looks me in the eye, and says, 'You will audit the auditors. Won't you, Major Bambi'."* Dunagan blanched – the secret he had tried so hard to hide for twenty-five years was known to this Marine general.

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Donnie Dunagan's last movie before retiring, the one he had a major role in, in 1942, was the Walt Disney animated feature *"Bambi."* Dunagan was personally selected by Disney to do the voice for the movie's namesake. (Dunagan did the voice for 70% of the movie, although an older child actor was brought in to do the voice for the latter part of the movie when Bambi was older.)

"This may sound corny to any reasonably intelligent person," Dunagan would later remark. *"I would not have made it as a very young first sergeant, CWO gunner, a regular line lieutenant, company commander, or field grade officer with the nickname 'Bambi.'"* In another interview he noted, *"(In) 1975 I found out that Disney was re-releasing. I was an operations officer and a commander out in San Diego and I was afraid that they were going to show the film where we were stationed. I could just hear all the boys calling home to their mothers and saying, 'Hey mom, guess who my commanding officer is – Major Bambi/'"*

Dunagan's secret remained hidden from all but the general and one other, for decades. He went on to successful civilian careers. He managed offices for national life insurance companies and designed the first pet health insurance company in the United States, which he later sold to the Veterinarian's Association. He served as CEO and CFO of major, close-held corporations. On loan from the Defense Department, he was trained and hired by the Nevada Gaming Commission to inspect game tables and slot machines. Still, he is quick to point out regarding his multiple successes, *"nothing can displace the adventures, hyper challenges, and respect for life that my Marine Corps years loaded me with."*

On September 4, 1992, in New Mexico, he married Dana J. Flanders. The wedding date was for Donnie an unforgettable date in 1967 when he was part of a horrible battle in which one of his close friends was killed in action. Dunagan knew Navy Chaplain, Lieutenant Vincent Robert Capodanno before the two served together in Vietnam with the Fifth Marines. *"Father Capodanno was killed by an AK-47 while crawling around under intense close fire, trying to save lives of several of our*



Dunagan (Left) with
Father Capodanno in
Vietnam

Donald Dunagan

troops, including a couple of my Scout lads,” he recalled. “I wrote the next day, on grim brown ammunition type paper, on of several recommendations for the Medal of Honor. So, me and my lady savor the September 4 date for strongly extra reasons.”

When he married he said nothing about his past, including his role as the voice of Bambi. Three years after they were married, she happened to find a trove of old newspaper stories her husband had hidden away for decades. There, she learned her husband’s secret.

In March 2005 Dunagan finally allowed an in-depth interview with Terry Pace of the *Times Daily*; and his secret was out at last. Two months later he presented an after-dinner speech for a charity organization in his hometown of San Angelo, Texas. Soon after the dinner he was contacted by KLS-TV, and as a result, the Disney Corporation learned that Donny Dunagan was alive and well. They had long thought he died.



“I got a call from a wonderfully grisly old Sergeant in North Dakota,” Dunagan recalled. “He told me, ‘We could’ve handled Frankenstein. We called you worse than that and you know it wouldn’t have mattered because you got us home sir. But we wish we knew about Bambi; we would’ve beaten you up about Bambi.’”

Speaking engagements piled up and his mailbox began filling with fan letters. Despite his penchant for avoiding the spotlight, in his newly found fame he found a new mission. *“It’s the letters mostly from young children and their many drawings and requests for advice and thanks for helping the homeless in the area from Texas, and the warmest thoughts one could savor that I treasure more than four rows of medals,”* he says. *“I was in the Marine Corps for twenty-five years, but I’ve been able to do more good in my life with Bambi.”* In 2017 Disney celebrated the 75th anniversary of *“Bambi,”* and Dunagan became even more in demand. He at last reunited with Peter Benh, who at age four did the voice for Thumper in the movie. It was the first time the two had seen each other since the screening for the film in 1942.

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Dunagan talks openly about his own part in the historic classic. He unashamedly recalls how difficult was the scene in the movie when Bambi's mother is killed by a hunter. *"They told me to call out 'Mother . . . Mother,' And I did,"* he told *Chicago Parent*. *"The film makers made me repeat this several times, and I didn't get it right until they told me that my mother was in the studio and was in danger. They told me to call out to her, and I really thought that she was in danger, so it sounded more authentic."*

He recalled that scene again in relations to his experience in Vietnam in September 1977 when he had been shot the second time in combat noting, *"I'm down and two other lieutenants are down. 'There are a bunch of kids fighting who have a right to go home but we're outnumbered. One of them stands over me and says, 'Skipper, get up, get up, we need you.' Flashing back to 1942 he recalled similar dialogue when Bambi's father says, 'Bambi, get up, you must get up.'"*

"The Marine was telling me to get up just like the movie where the dad was telling Bambi to get up. For me, that was the most significant scene in Bambi, and my own life."

"I am proud as punch – and I don't use that word easily – to be associated with such a beautiful story," Dunagan says unapologetically. *"I was a highly accomplished shooter in the Marine Corps, and at other places and times – I worked at it. I was often invited to go on hunting trips in Montana or the Dakotas. Most often it was deer – and I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. I've done a lot of shooting, but I've never shot an animal – not once."*

My sincere thanks to Donnie Dunagan for affording me an interview for this story. Today, he and Dana make their home in San Angelo, Texas. If he has slowed down any at age 88, he hasn't slowed much. He is unabashed about his role as the voice of Bambi, answering fan mail that still arrives in his mailbox, signing posters, and promoting the wonderful Disney classic that he once did his best to hide from.



Patricia McFetridge

Fishing From Helicopters

BY: PETER STONEFIELD

The waters of the Gulf of Alaska are some of the most fished in the world and boast teeming amounts of all varieties of fish, from salmon to halibut to lingcod. The waters are also well-known for various crabs, including their world-renowned Alaskan King Crab, snow crab, and opilio crab, also known as the *gold of the Bering Sea*. Of course, there are all sorts of other types of fish and sea creatures in these waters. On the morning of September 22, 1990, Ensign Patricia McFetridge, a pilot with the United States Coast Guard, found herself on the receiving end, reeling something entirely different into her Coast Guard HH-3F “*Pelican*” helicopter.



The daughter of an active-duty Navy man stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, George William McFetridge, and an Army flight nurse Mary Ann Cook McFetridge, Patricia McFetridge was born to fly. Although her father, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy (Class of 1942), never flew, he served aboard aircraft carriers in the Pacific War and became a private pilot after the end of World War II. A mere five years after her birth, McFetridge’s father retired from the Navy and took a job with **Lockheed Missiles and Space Company** in the Bay Area of California, where she and her four brothers had a relatively normal childhood.

As a tomboy, sports played a central role in her life, and McFetridge and her brothers gravitated towards swimming, which was big in the Santa Clara area they called home. Young Patricia also shared a love of flying with her father, who was a certified flight instructor. Being a military-influenced family, her two oldest brothers both graduated from the U.S. **Military Academy** at West Point, New York, and one of them went on to receive a Navy commission as a pilot. The other stayed in the Army, eventually attaining the rank of colonel before retiring. Another brother joined the **Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS)** as a civilian

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employee, while the youngest joined the U.S. Army to fly helicopters. After earning her pilot's license in 1980 under her father's supervision, Patricia graduated from **San Jose State University** in 1981 with a degree in Aeronautical Operations, before joining the U.S. Army herself once the way was cleared for women to be military pilots.

McFetridge joined the Warrant Officer Flight Training Class in 1982 at **Fort Rucker**, Alabama, after completing basic training at **Fort Jackson**, South Carolina, becoming a private first class in March of 1982. It was no surprise that as one of the few women in the class, McFetridge was tested time and time again by the male instructors, often given tasks that required her to carry the largest male classmate to safety or something similar. Luckily, being the only girl in her family, she had experience in this type of activity and succeeded where others thought she might fail. Flight training began four months later, and McFetridge was first assigned to the **Bell TH-55** helicopter, a basic helicopter with a large bubble canopy for high visibility and a piston engine mounted aft of the cockpit. From the TH-55, training began in the **Bell UH-1 "Huey,"** and soon she was confidently flying that helicopter solo around the course. In May 1983, Patricia McFetridge earned her Army wings.

Shortly after graduation, Warrant Officer McFetridge was assigned to the 55th Aviation Company (VIP) unit in South Korea, flying the UH-1 *Huey* supporting the United States' United Nations Armistice Commission team. Her job was to be available to fly team members to the scene of any incident between North and South Korea so they could conduct any necessary investigations. Her unit also flew VIPs to wherever they needed to go for troop reviews, or whatever was needed. This assignment was a one-year stint, but she re-upped for a second term and completed a two-year rotation in the 55th.



After completion of her second term in South Korea, McFetridge moved on to **Fort Hood**, Texas, to fly with the 227th Aviation Company. The 227th was another VIP unit that also flew UH-1s but eventually transitioned to the **OV-59 "Kiowas."** The "*Kiowas*" was a single-pilot helicopter since it was smaller and lighter than the *Huey*. A lot of times

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when McFetridge was flying her VIPs around, it was just a general and herself, or maybe a civilian VIP and she was flying to some site. Her stint at **Fort Hood** lasted until her time in the Army came to an end, and although she was still in the ready reserves, she decided to transition to civilian life in 1987.

In addition to transitioning to civilian life, McFetridge transitioned from single to married by marrying a retiring Army pilot with both fixed and helicopter experience who was taking a position with a Salt Lake City, Utah, charter company. Following him to Utah, she attempted to work as a pilot, but the company didn't see her as a relevant fit since she didn't have many hours in fixed-wing aircraft. Stuck in the uncomfortable role of housewife for the next year or so, McFetridge joined the **Utah Army National Guard** to fill the time and was able to keep flying. During this time, she also saw an ad from the Coast Guard that they were looking for pilots.

In early 1989, with her marriage over, she abandoned Utah and headed to San Diego, where her parents had retired. There she saw a Coast Guard recruiter to discuss her options. Her interviews in San Diego were with helicopter pilots, and before long, she made the list and was asked where she would like to go if selected. One of the locations on the list was Kodiak, Alaska, and McFetridge jumped at the chance to fly H-3s in Alaska. After indoctrination training in Yorktown, Virginia, McFetridge was made an ensign in the United States Coast Guard and sent to Kodiak, Alaska, for a brief introductory tour before being sent to the **Coast Guard's Aviation Training Center (ATC)** in Mobile, Alabama.

In August 1989 McFetridge arrived in Mobile, Alabama, for the seven-week training course in the Sikorsky S-61R/HH-3F helicopter. The Coast Guard HH-3F "*Pelican*" was a twin-engine helicopter used in transport and search and rescue roles. The helicopter



was in service with the United States military, designated the CH-3C/E "*Sea King*" for the U.S. Navy and the HH-3E "*Jolly Green Giant*" for the U.S. Air Force. It saw extensive service as an air rescue helicopter in Air Force rescue and recovery squadrons in the Military Airlift Command (MAC), the Air Combat Command (ACC) and other USAF commands worldwide. The helicopter also saw extensive use in Vietnam and even

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completed a trans-Atlantic flight between May 31 and June 1, 1967, which included nine aerial refuelings. It was eventually picked up for use as a Search and Rescue helicopter by the United States Coast Guard as the HH-3F *Pelican* in 1965. The U.S. Coast Guard version was an all-weather air-sea rescue helicopter featuring search radar and water-landing capability. The *Pelican* was distinguished by its offset radome on the nose. The *Pelican* was the workhorse of the Coast Guard until phased out in the late 1990s.

After completion of her ATC training, McFetridge was once again sent to Kodiak, Alaska, where the primary mission of the Coast Guard is sea rescue. Since the major economy of the area is fishing or fishery-based, the presence of the Coast Guard assures the local population that they have security in case of an emergency. Shortly after arriving in Kodiak, McFetridge supported a mission of another kind, the extraordinary situation resulting in the grounding of the large oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* in Prince William Sound. As a result of the numerous fishing vessels and activities surrounding the area, the Coast Guard maintained a small, seasonal air station in Cordova, Alaska, near Prince William Sound. However, when the incident occurred with the *Exxon Valdez*, this operation shifted into overdrive with the influx of cleanup crews and workers to support the investigation. McFetridge and her fellow pilots spent countless hours taking the employees and the workers out to the oil beaches for cleanup, to spot oil spills, and to support the massive cleanup effort. During this time, they worked 24-hour shifts.

Through the end of 1989 and into 1990, McFetridge picked up considerably more experience and hours flying the HH-3F *Pelican*, which would be essential. On the morning of September 22, 1990, she and her crew would need all their training to cope with what the day would bring.

Leaving their port early in the morning of the 22d, a three-person crew of the fishing vessel *Janice N* set out for a spot in the Gulf of Alaska to catch their fill of Alaskan bounty to sell at the market. They had no idea how the day would play out and that they would end up being part of American military history; they simply wanted to fish. As they headed towards their designated fishing spot east of Cape Hinchinbrook, which lies south of Prince William Sound, the *Janice N* experienced some difficulty and caught fire. Around 9 a.m. the crew began to radio distress calls, which were picked up by a nearby private airplane and relayed to the local Coast Guard station around 9:30. The crew donned their survival

suits, abandoned ship for their life raft, and paddled away from the burning vessel. The life raft was pounded by heavy rain, strong winds, and high seas as the weather closed in around them. Visibility was almost impossible, and they were tossed around, not knowing which direction they were headed.

Almost an hour and a half after being alerted to the vessel in distress, Commander Estes, the Pilot-in-Command, Ensign McFetridge, co-piloting the helicopter, Flight Mechanic Mike Proctor and Avionics Mechanic Scott Cumberland arrived on-scene by following the vessel's emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) signal. They found the burning wreckage of the *Janice N*. By the time they arrived, the ship had almost completely burned to its waterline. There was no sign of the crew.

Orbiting above the ship, they searched for a secondary EPIRB signal and soon found a weak signal several miles away. Estes and McFetridge headed towards the signal and initiated a search pattern, flying a mere 100 feet above the waves. Seventy-mile per-hour gusting winds and severe turbulence shook the helicopter. Waves came within inches of the helicopter as they tried to see through near-impossible visibility. For over two and one-half hours, the crew of the HH-3F Pelican" searched exhaustively until they miraculously located the crew on their life raft eleven miles west of the burned-out hulk of the *Janice N*. The tiny raft was being flung back and forth through the waves, and the crew was hanging perilously to the sides in danger of being swept away with each passing wave. Somehow, they continued to hold on in the maelstrom.

With their fuel low, McFetridge and the Estes fought to keep the helicopter steady as the crew brought the battered fishermen up one by one using the single hoist on the right-hand side of the helicopter, just behind the pilot-in-command's position. Since the raft kept being swept in and out of the pilot's view, McFetridge often had to take control of the helicopter to keep it within the pilot's vision and under the hoist. Communication was essential, and when the communications system failed due to the rain pouring into the cabin, she was forced to double duty by having to relay the crew instructions to the pilot and vice versa. When she had the controls, Estes relayed information to her to keep the raft in sight. On several occasions, Estes and McFetridge both had to hold fast to the controls to keep the helicopter from being hit by high waves. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the crew got the exhausted but

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otherwise uninjured fisherman aboard. Relieving an exhausted Estes, McFetridge took command of the helicopter and flew the HH-3F to the Coast Guard airbase at Cordova, where they could get the fisherman immediate medical attention. Amazingly, it was McFetridge's first Search and Rescue mission in Alaska.

For her efforts during the air-sea rescue of the crew of the *Janice N*, Ensign Patricia McFetridge was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the first woman in the United States Coast Guard to receive this commendation.



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Ensign Patricia A. McFetridge, United States Coast Guard, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight on the morning of 22 September 1990 while serving as copilot of Coast Guard helicopter HH-3F CGNR 1467. The aircrew was dispatched to search for the fishing vessel JANICE N which was reported to have caught fire. Ensign McFetridge flew at an altitude of 100 feet through heavy rain, 75 knot wind gusts, severe turbulence, 30-foot seas, and visibility less than one-quarter mile. After an exhaustive two and one-half hour search, until fuel ran low, with visibility reduced to one-eighth mile, the aircrew sighted a raft with three persons onboard. As the survivors were hoisted, Ensign McFetridge carefully monitored the seas, and her quick reaction on several occasions kept the aircraft from striking the water. Demonstrating great composure under pressure, during the hoists, Ensign McFetridge provided communications between the pilot and crew when the intercom system was disabled by the driving rain. Relieving the exhausted aircraft commander, she skillfully flew the aircraft while making arrangements for medical assistance for the survivors. Ensign McFetridge's actions, aeronautical skill, and valor were instrumental in the rescue of three victims. Her courage, judgment and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

After the events of September 22, 1990, McFetridge continued to perform her duties in Alaska. She participated in several additional SAR missions, although none were as harrowing as the *Janice N* affair. In

September of 1991, when her tour was up in Kodiak, she was transferred to Clearwater, Florida, another station that operated the HH-3F. Here, she transitioned from the *Pelican* to the new HH-60 “*Jayhawk*” search and rescue helicopter.

The Sikorsky HH-60J *Jayhawk* is an influential member of the Sikorsky twin-engined S-70 family of helicopters and is based on the Navy’s SH-60 “*Seahawk*” and a derivative of the well-known UH-60 “*Blackhawk*.” The HH-60J *Jayhawk* entered USCG service in



June 1990; some 42 helicopters were produced with this designation and turned over to the Coast Guard. Like the HH-3F, the *Jayhawk* has a distinctive nose radome containing its search and rescue radar apparatus. With a cruising speed of 160 mph and a range of over 800 miles, the *Jayhawk* remains one of the Coast Guard’s most effective SAR tools.

While based in Clearwater, McFetridge learned how to land her massive helicopter on the back of one of the Coast Guard’s large cutters. With the size and power of the *Jayhawk*, this was no easy feat, and her skill and acumen as a pilot showed when she accomplished this on multiple occasions both for training and in real-life situations. While based in Clearwater, McFetridge often patrolled far into the Gulf of Mexico, working with the **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)** as well as routinely flying to and from the Bahamas on drug interdiction mission support. On these flights there would be DEA agents on board and other support aircraft and sea vessels to try to locate and capture any of the number of drug runners trying to enter U.S. waters illegally. In addition to her DEA missions and routine SAR patrols out of Clearwater, she and her crew were rotated in and out of the Bahamas regularly to support Atlantic operations, quite the dynamic change from the cold, stormy seas of Alaska.

While in Clearwater, McFetridge requested and received selection in the Coast Guard’s Aeronautical Engineering program, which was essentially their maintenance officer training program. She was assigned to the air station in Los Angeles for training, and there became an engineering officer flying the new Eurocopter HH-65 “*Dauphin*” or “*Dolphin*.”

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The Eurocopter MH-65 *Dolphin* is a twin-engined helicopter developed for medevac-capable search and rescue (SAR) missions. It is a variant of the French-built Eurocopter AS365 *Dauphin*. It was selected by the United States Coast Guard in 1979 as its new short-range recovery (SRR) air-sea



rescue helicopter and given the designation HH-65A *Dolphin*. The HH-65 typically carries a crew of four, including the pilot, co-pilot, flight mechanic and a rescue swimmer. The HH-65 is known for its enclosed tail rotor and ability to automatically fly search patterns, allowing the crew to engage in other tasks. The HH-65A model was initially powered by two 734s hp (547 kW) LTS101-750B-2 turboshaft engines. The HH-65B represented a significant avionics upgrade undertaken at the Coast Guard's Aircraft Repair and Supply Center (ARSC) in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, with the first aircraft rolling-off the post-depot maintenance (PDM) line in March 2001.

As the base engineering officer, McFetridge was the principal person responsible for maintaining these new helicopters, which enabled her to gain a lot of flight hours in a short time. When the avionics upgrades were introduced in Elizabeth City, and the HH65A became the HH-65B, she was the first pilot to be qualified in the Los Angeles station. Most of her duties, beyond those of the base engineering officer, consisted of deployments along the Southern California coast and down the Mexican coast. She was also one of the first Coast Guard pilots to land the HH-65 on the deck of a Coast Guard cutter at sea during one of these deployments. Preferring terra firma to sea duty, McFetridge was happy to return to her base in Los Angeles.

When her time in Los Angeles was up in early 2000, McFetridge decided to pursue an assistant engineering officer position in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. At the time, Elizabeth City operated a fleet with both helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. This made the move a promotion since she would report to the engineering officer but would have two aircraft engineers, one for each fleet, reporting to her. Additionally, she was able to gain fixed-wing time in the Coast Guard C-130 "*Hercules*," which she needed if she was going to continue to rise in the ranks. After a short stint at the Air Force training school in Little Rock, Arkansas, for a

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course in piloting the C-130, McFetridge returned to Elizabeth City after only completing a few flights. The Air Force determined that she didn't meet the qualifications for training since she hadn't gone through the necessary military training. So, she was sent back to Elizabeth City, where the Coast Guard decided that she could learn on the job, and they trained her to fly the aircraft as a co-pilot.

For the next several years, McFetridge flew out of Elizabeth City, acting as both a C-130 co-pilot and sometimes pilot-in-command while also performing her duties as assistant engineering officer. She would often fly on patrols that would take her up the Eastern seaboard to Newfoundland and back or stay overnight in authorized hotels with her crew. A lot of wintertime flying was also done in the northern area to track icebergs.

All the past prejudices against women pilots and officers were mainly in the past, and she found new opportunities presenting themselves. By this time, McFetridge had risen to the rank of lieutenant commander (O-4) and then commander (O-5) and was considered a rising star in the Coast Guard. Shortly afterward, she also qualified in the HH-65C and with that came a transfer to become the executive officer at **Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen**, which lasted from 2007 to 2010. This position prepared her for a more valuable command in the future.

After a brief stint in Puerto Rico, McFetridge was briefly assigned to Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C., where she served to modernize the National Distress and Response System. In mid-2013 she finally received the opportunity of her career, the chance to head back to Puerto Rico as the new commander at **Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen**. The Coast Guard's only aviation unit in the Caribbean, **CGAS Borinquen** is responsible for conducting Coast Guard missions throughout the area, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The post was considered a prestigious one for her. Captain McFetridge replaced Captain Robert D. Phillips, who had been **Air Station Borinquen's** Commanding Officer since June 24, 2011. After relinquishing command of the unit to her in a ceremony on June 6, 2013, she retired from the Coast Guard after 32 years of service. Captain McFetridge thus became one of the highest-ranking women in the United States Coast Guard, in command of one of its most prestigious bases.

Captain Patricia A. McFetridge retired from the United States Coast Guard on May 3, 2019, at a ceremony in Arlington, Virginia. In addition

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to her service stations with the Coast Guard, she served in three non-flying assignments in Washington, D.C. She was the Chief of Logistics and Engineering for the Coast Guard's **Deployable Operations Group**, responsible for twenty-seven **Deployable Specialized Forces** in support of significant national security and environmental events. She acted as the Project Manager of *Rescue 21* and was responsible for managing a one-billion-dollar major Information Technology acquisition investment to modernize the **National Distress and Response System**, replacing the aging legacy of the **National Distress System** throughout the United States and its territories. She served as the Coast Guard's liaison to the **Federal Aviation Administration** and worked with them to establish policies and procedures to support Coast Guard Aviation's manned and unmanned flight programs.

Throughout her distinguished career she was posted to **Air Station Kodiak**, Alaska, **Air Station Clearwater**, Florida, **Air Station Los Angeles**, California, **Air Station Elizabeth City**, North Carolina, **Air Station Borinquen**, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, **Deployable Operations Group**, Washington, D.C., **Coast Guard Headquarters**, Washington, D.C., and as the **Liaison** to the **FAA** in Washington, D.C.

In addition to her Distinguished Flying Cross, Captain McFetridge has been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, Army & Coast Guard Commendation Medal, the Achievement Medal, and various other medals and ribbons. She also earned her master's degree in quality systems management from the **National Graduate School**. Fair winds and following seas on your retirement, Captain McFetridge.

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Sarun Sar

From 11-Year Old Combat Veteran to American Hero

BY: SCOTT BARON

On March 5, 2005, two UH-60 *Blackhawk* helicopters were flying an armed reconnaissance mission in the Paktika Province, near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, searching out Taliban insurgents. Aboard were 12 members of U.S. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha-372 (ODA-272). The team sergeant, and senior non-commission officer, was Master Sergeant Sarun Sar, a Cambodian refugee and naturalized U.S. citizen. This was not Sar's first time in combat. That was in Cambodia in 1977, when Sar was an 11-year old boy.



Sarun Sar was born in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, sometime in 1966, but Sar has no knowledge of the exact date. He was living on the family's rice farm in a village in the Kampong Speu Province of Cambodia, just west of Phnom Penh, where his father was a schoolteacher. He was one-year-old when, on April 2, 1967, Khmer Rouge Communist insurgents, supported by North Vietnam and China, began a civil war to topple the Kingdom of Cambodia, and for the next 13 years, Sar would know nothing but war.

The "*Cambodian Civil War*" continued, even after a coup toppled the king in October 1970, despite the new Khmer Republic's efforts to make peace with the Khmer Rouge. On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh as the government of General Lon Nol fled the city, leaving the Khmer Rouge in power, beginning a four-year genocide.

The new regime, supported by North Vietnam, ordered the mass evacuation of urban areas into the countryside within three days, and city refugees fled, unprepared, into rural areas. Forced labor, starvation, and summary executions resulted in close to two million deaths between 1976-1978 and extermination of Cambodia's professional and technical class.

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Sar's family was destroyed. His father was arrested by the Khmer Rouge and imprisoned in a re-education camp, where he died from malnutrition and disease. His older brother, caught smuggling arms to anti-government guerillas, was executed. His mother, two brothers and a sister died of starvation. At age eleven, Sar joined the anti-Khmer Rouge guerillas, fighting for almost two years. He was wounded several times, and crossed the border into Thailand to recuperate in 1979, then returned to Cambodia to bring his sister and her two children to Thailand.

They spent 5-6 months in a refugee camp near Kao-I-Dang, and four months at the Kao-I-Dang camp, before being granted asylum on a war refugee Visa in 1981. Sponsored by a Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland, they were settled with a family of the church's congregation, in Rockville, Maryland. Unaware of his date of birth, U.S. Immigration officials assigned him the birthdate of May 15, 1966.

Sar enlisted in the U.S. Army in January 1985, and took basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. He later admitted *"I only planned to do three years. I guess it (the Army) grew on me,"* He remained in military service, getting his citizenship in 1986. But he also confessed he felt the need to give back some of what America gave him. Reflecting on finding asylum in America, he said *"I think we take it for granted that this freedom we're enjoying is always going to be here, and it's not . . . People dislike the military, but when they're in trouble they always come looking for us. So, as a citizen, we need to make an effort to serve and protect the freedom that we took for granted."*

Trained as an Infantryman, Sar served with the 1st Infantry Division during the Persian Gulf War and Operation *Desert Storm* (August 2, 1990, through February 28, 1991). *"We did a lot of reconnaissance, so I didn't see a lot of action,"* he said later.

Now a citizen, Sar was eligible to apply for Special Forces training in 1990. He admits it was a challenging process. *"Out of 100 applicants, only 3 to 4 people are accepted. First, you have to be an American citizen, and secondly you have to be in a training program. After they checked your psychological and physical health, you will go into military training. The training takes approximately two years, and it's very costly. Hence, it's very difficult for them (military) to let you leave the program."*

Sar graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in May 1992. After that, most Special Forces soldiers are sent to language school. But Sar, already fluent in Khmer, the language of Cambodia, was sent directly to a team of the 1st Special Forces Group, stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, near Tacoma Washington. As a member of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Sar said he saw *“a lot of action”* during his five-month combat tour in Afghanistan in 2003 in support of *Operation Enduring Freedom*, fighting the Taliban in the Bagram Valley of the Helmand Province.

In 2003, Sar qualified as an Army Ranger, graduating with honors in his class. Between deployments he earned a bachelor's degree in American history at Campbell University, North Carolina. In October 2004, Sar, now a master sergeant, deployed to Afghanistan on his second combat tour, this time as Team Sergeant in SFOD ODA-372, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the most decorated Special Forces unit since Vietnam.

On March 5, 2005, more than halfway through an eight-month deployment, his team was deployed aboard two UH-60 *Blackhawk* helicopters to conduct an armed reconnaissance of a suspected insurgent shelter located about 9,000 feet above sea level on a ridge line in Afghanistan's Paktika province.

Sar said it was a cold, foggy morning with snow blanketing the ground as the two helicopters carrying his team approached the ridge. *“When the first bird landed on the north side of the ridge, it received fire,”* he recalled. *“I saw the whole thing because we were a few seconds behind them.”* The second helicopter, with Sar aboard, landed to the south. *“We landed and leapt out of the helicopter, and I told my guys to follow me and started running toward the enemy.”*

Sar said *“I was not scared because I experienced combat life under the Khmer Rouge Regime. My parents always told me that, ‘Everyone dies in this life, and you don’t choose where you die,’ and this made me try even harder.”* He immediately confronted two insurgents who were trying to run away. *“One guy dropped his weapon and started screaming at me,”* he said. *“I saw him running away, and he wasn’t a threat to me so didn’t engage him; I let him go.”* Another ran into one of the buildings.

Sar then discovered that his team wasn't behind him and called for their help. On the side of the ridge, he and the team medic were alone and

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trapped near one of the village houses, with one of the enemy fighters inside; the rest of the team was under attack from enemy fire at the bottom of the snowy hill. *"So, I had the enemy shooting over my head, and my team was shooting over my head,"* he recalled.

The team fought its way to Sar, and he and the team medic went after the enemy fighter, who was hiding in a structure. They decided they had to act quickly in order to protect civilians in the village and members of the unit. The squat house was made of thick mud and rock and there was a small cutout door. As Sar peeked inside, thick smoke hung inside the room.

Loading his M4, Sar pushed through the small, low opening, his rifle at the ready, and was halfway inside when the flashlight on his M-4 rifle illuminated the face of a Taliban fighter. The enemy's muzzle flash lit up the darkness as the fighter fired off three shots. Two of the shots missed, but the third struck the edge of Sar's Kevlar helmet at his forehead, the force throwing him back out of the doorway. *"I will never forget that little flash I saw,"* Sar said. *"He was waiting. It felt like I was hit in the head with a hammer."*

Sar briefly blacked out, then came to yelling to the medic, *"I'm hit! I'm hit,"* but the medic found no entry point and no bullet. Further examination revealed that the bullet had struck the lower edge of Sar's helmet, sparing him. Recovering quickly upon realizing he was not injured, Sar pulled a flash-bang stun grenade, tossed it inside the room, then charged in firing, killing the Taliban fighter.

Then, Sar and the medic resumed their charge up the mountain, disrupting the Taliban ambush that had his unit pinned down. Major John Litchfield, the Special Forces team leader at the time, said Sar's actions also inspired the team to push up the hill.

"The rest of the team was under fire and pretty well pinned down," said Major John Litchfield, the Special Forces team leader at the time. *"Human nature takes over, and you start clawing for a piece of ground. Sar did the opposite of that. We certainly wouldn't have achieved the goal in the same manner, and some of us could have been severely wounded."*

Soon afterward, the Special Forces team cleared the rest of the huts in the village and secured a large cache of enemy weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, bomb-making materials, and other explosives.

Sar and another soldier were the only Americans wounded. Sar, a devout Buddhist, credits God for his survival. *“God spared my life so I could come home to my wife,”* he said.

After the battle, Sar and his teammates administered first aid to two injured Afghan civilians, and stabilized them for medical evacuation to a coalition hospital. Asked later by reporters if he was scared, he replied *“Of course I was scared, but I am their leader and as their leader I have to protect my soldiers. I must lead the group- this is the rule. I love the soldiers even more than my own family- because we depend on each other for our lives when we are at war.”*

During another mission, Sar said he and another soldier were conducting a reconnaissance when they observed about 20 enemy fighters in a position on top of a hill. *“I chose to attack them,”* he said. *“But if it wasn’t for artillery support, my whole patrol would have been dead today. Artillery saved my butt a few times.”*

Sar believes that his team did an outstanding job during their deployment, with 14 enemy gunfights, 13 of which they initiated. His team conducted more than 300 patrols in eight months. *“I lost one of my men there,”* he added, referring to his weapons sergeant who died in a separate battle in June 2005. *“He’s the one who gave his life for his country. He was also an immigrant from Mexico. But the enemy paid with more than 63 bodies for that one guy,”*

The deployment ended in June 2005, and his team returned to Camp Smith, Hawaii. In a ceremony on January 3, 2006, Brigadier General David Fridovich, commander of Special Operations Command – Pacific presented Sar with a Silver Star; the recommendation for a second Silver Star was downgraded to a Bronze Star with combat “V.”



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918 (amended by an act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Master Sergeant Sarun Sar, United States Army, for

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conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as Operations Sergeant of Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 732 (ODA-732), 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), during combat operations in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, in Afghanistan, on 2 March 2005. Master Sergeant Sar was part of an Aerial Reconnaissance Force mission that landed to examine a suspicious collection of buildings. His actions under overwhelming direct enemy fire, even after receiving a head wound, were instrumental in securing the objective area and in the survival of his fellow Soldiers. Master Sergeant Sar's actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Combined Joint Task Force Afghanistan, and the United States Army.

Proudly watching the ceremony was his wife, Dobromila. Dobromila is also an immigrant, from Poland; the couple has a daughter together. In an interview after the ceremony, Sar stated, *"My entire team deserves the recognition I'm getting. I didn't do any of this alone. The real hero is the guy in the cemetery right now, he and his family."*



During his more than twenty-year military career, Sar has deployed to fifteen other countries including Thailand, Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Africa, Colombia, and Afghanistan. During his various assignments, many of the missions are so important and classified that he can't discuss them, even with his wife.

Promoted to sergeant-major, Sar was later placed on special assignment to the U. S. Embassy in Cambodia, helping villages with water concerns and providing looms and training in weaving so that the women can make a living. *"I want to do anything that I can to help these people. Most of them still know my family"*



He sums up his life in simple terms noting, *"I am a soldier, so wherever they send me, I will go,"* and he truly believes that *"Absolutely anything you want to do in America, it's possible... In Cambodia, you're born poor, you stay poor. Here, if you work hard, you will achieve something."*

Leigh Ann Hester

Courage Knows No Gender

BY: DEBBIE MAULDING

American women have been trailblazers since 1638 when Anne Hutchison, one of the first settlers, established a Puritan church in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. There are many publications extolling the “*first woman in America*” to achieve certain accomplishments, some to be praised and others to be prosecuted. *Firsts* seem to be of great appeal to readers.

From those who fought in the Revolutionary War disguised as men, or served as nurses so they could stay near their husbands, they have paved the way for today’s women to explore roles that were historically limited to their male counterparts. According to the U.S. Department of Defense official government website, in a statement posted April 27, 2015: “*Since the Defense Department rescinded a 1994 policy that excluded women from serving in direct ground combat positions, the services have opened about 91,000 jobs to female service members, the Joint Staff’s vice director [Air Force Major General Jacqueline D. Van Ovost] said.*”

Since 1776 when Margaret Corbin served in the American Revolution, to 1812 when Lucy Brewer joined the United States Marine Corps, to 1866 when Mary Walker earned the Medal of Honor, to 1978, when Mary E. Clarke became the first woman to achieve the rank of major general in the U.S. Army, there have been celebrated firsts for women. Many women said they would be glad when being the first person to do something meant more than being the first woman to do it. The true sign of equality is to be identified solely as oneself.

Many believe that men are the stronger sex and are to be the protectors and defenders of the women and children, while others encourage a more neutral view that the sexes are equal in strength, capable of equal work, and should receive equal rewards. Women’s fight for equality has continued beyond simply the right to vote, hold a public office, or obtain a credit card in their name. Although history has proven their presence in combat before, American women were not officially granted combat roles in the military until 2016, when the Department of Defense lifted the ban on women serving in combat.

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In the years before that ban was lifted, women were serving with valor and distinction. Assigned to roles such as clerical work, nursing, photography, and for the very bold, mechanics and sheet metal working, women served in both World War I and II. Some were even allowed to train as test pilots for fighter planes. In 1979, enlistment qualifications became the same for both sexes, although women remained prohibited from direct combat roles or assignments.



When new legislation was passed, the laws were slow in being enforced which is obviously demonstrated by the law lifting the longtime ban on women in the cockpit of a warplane, passed by Congress in 1991. It was enacted by the U.S. Department of Defense on April 28, 1993, two years later. The Department of Defense continued to prohibit women from participating in direct ground combat below the brigade level until after 1994, and the number of women in the military continue to climb.

Another turning point in the women's fight for equal rights came with the Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It was a pivotal moment in American history, and in women's fight for ground unit positions. Women were allowed soon after to choose any military occupational specialty leading the way for women to serve in combat roles, not only behind the desk or in a hospital.

Leigh Ann Hester was born on January 12, 1982, in Bowling Green, Kentucky, to Jerry and Sheila Hester. In an interview with National Public Radio, she recalled going to a parade with her father when she was eight years old and seeing the soldiers in uniform, both men and women. She went on to say that seeing them *"looking so strong and brave"* caused her to know *"right then"* that she wanted to be one of them.



Leigh Ann grew up in Kentucky and describes herself as *"sort of a tomboy -- if there was a tree taller than me, I was going to climb it."* She also refers to her grandfather, Oran Sollinger who fought in World War II, and her uncle, Carl Sollinger who fought in Vietnam, as making service a family

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tradition. Carl Sollinger gave her the lasting advice of “*Kick butt, and keep your head down,*” something he later said he was proud to see she was following.

Leigh Ann attended high school at Greenwood High School in Bowling Green, graduating in 2000. She played fast-pitched softball and basketball on the *Lady Gators* teams during her high school years. She attended a year of college at Western Kentucky University.

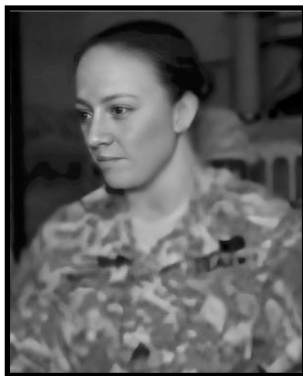
Leigh Ann was a retail clerk at Shoe Carnival near her home in Nashville, Tennessee, when she enlisted with the Kentucky National Guard. She volunteered in April 2001, becoming a military police officer and said she felt it was a good fit soon after graduating from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. In an NPR interview, she described being an MP as one of the few jobs “*open to a woman where you could get out from behind a desk and into the field. Then came 9-11. Everything changed.*” Just as she was preparing for Basic Training, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred, changing everything.

According to an article in the *Detroit Free Press* on April 8, 2005, “*women were permitted to pilot just about any aircraft, to ship out on almost any vessel and to serve most roles in the Army and Marine Corps. In the Army alone, they constitute about 15 percent of 500,000 active soldiers and about 25 percent of 212,000 reservists. Women were barred from infantry, armor, special forces and certain artillery units. Defense Department policy also excludes them from units smaller than a brigade [3000 – 5000 soldiers] with the primary mission of engaging in direct combat on the ground.*”

These directives left some room for women to serve in police, supply, maintenance, and other units that closely supported the troops in combat. Units in Iraq, where traditional frontlines did not exist, were especially vulnerable to attack by insurgents during patrols and along supply lines, placing women in those units at risk of landing in combat, ready or not. Since September 11, 2001, a total of 153 American women who deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria lost their lives while serving the armed forces of their country. Many doubt that women should be placed in a combat position, and some doubt that women should be allowed to hold a position that could lead them into an ambush situation, but few if any can question the courage and bravery shown by those women who served and faced the dangers of war.

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Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester was the Team Leader and a Vehicle Commander for Raven 42B, the 2d Squad, 4th Platoon, 617th Military Police Company, 503rd Military Police Battalion (Airborne), a Federalized National Guard unit from Richmond, Kentucky. Her unit was stationed at *Camp Liberty*, Iraq, in support of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. The team was made up of ten members including a college football player, a truck driver, a hotel manager, a construction worker, a housewife, and a shoe store clerk. Two were women, and three were of Puerto Rican, Mexican, African, and Korean descent. Their primary focus was to provide security escorts for Coalition supply convoys, along with safeguarding main supply routes and providing training for the newly established Iraqi highway patrol. As a Vehicle Commander, it was guaranteed that Sergeant Hester would not only see, but also participate in combat, something the Pentagon did not officially allow at that time.



It was Palm Sunday, March 20, 2005, about midday, when a supply train convoy was making its way through Iraq on the outskirts of Salman Pak, southeast of Baghdad. It was a sunny day, about 75 degrees with a 10-knot breeze from the southwest. What began as a routine convoy escort took a turn for the worse when enemy fighters hiding in irrigation ditches along the roadside and in a nearby orchard began to ambush the unit. The Kentucky Guard unit, in three Humvees, were at the back of the convoy of thirty tractor-trailers when the attack began.

Initially, Sergeant Hester thought there were only a handful of insurgents, but soon found she had underestimated the enemy force. There were as many as fifty well-hidden and well-armed soldiers, attacking a squad of ten guardsmen. It would prove to be one of the largest single insurgent death tolls since the battle for Fallujah in the fall of 2004.

By disabling the lead vehicle and setting it ablaze, the enemy was able to halt the progress of the convoy in the center of the kill zone. Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, accompanied by Sergeant Timothy Nein, sprang into action. With no hesitation the squad leaders put themselves and their vehicles between the convoy they were protecting and the enemy at the onset of an ambush; it would last more than thirty excruciating minutes.

When interviewed after the attack, Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester described the event as follows: *“Bullets were flying everywhere; I could hear them pinging off the truck in back of me. I could hear them hitting the ground next to me. It was pretty crazy. Adrenaline pumping, you didn’t have time to think about everything that was going on. It was basically kill or be killed.”*



The Narrative that accompanied Sergeant Hester’s Silver Star Citation describes the action in even more detail: *“While traveling on ASR Detroit approximately 50 Anti-Iraqi Forces (AIF) ambushed the convoy with heavy AK47 fire, RPK heavy machine gun fire, and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) from the southwest side of the road at 1140 hours. The AIF were utilizing irrigation ditches and an orchard for the well-planned complex attack.*

“The AIF had cars ‘combat parked’ along a road perpendicular to the ASR with all doors and trunks open. The AIF intent was to destroy the convoy, to inflict numerous casualties, and to kidnap several TCN drivers or U.S. Soldiers. The initial ambush disabled and set on fire the lead TCN vehicle, which effectively blocked the southbound lanes of ASR Detroit, stopping the convoy in the kill zone.

“The squad leader, Staff Sergeant Timothy Nein, directed the squad to move forward, traveling on the right shoulder and passing through the engagement area between the enemy and the convoy. Sergeant Hester directed her gunner to provide heavy volumes of MK 19 and M240B fires into the field where an overwhelming number of insurgents were executing a well-coordinated ambush on the convoy.

“Raven 42 elements were outnumbered five to one. Staff Sergeant Nein ordered the squad to flank the insurgents on their right side. The squad continued to come under heavy machine gun fire and rocket propelled grenade fire when Sergeant Hester stopped her vehicle, the middle vehicle, at a flanking position enfilading the trench line and the orchard field where over a dozen insurgents were engaging the squad and convoy. She then directed her gunner to focus fires on the trench line and the orchard field.

“Sergeant Hester dismounted and moved to what was thought to be the non-contact side of the vehicle. She ordered her gunner to

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continue to fire on the orchard field as she and her driver engaged insurgents in the orchard field with small arms. Sergeant Hester began engaging the insurgents with her M203 in order to suppress the heavy AIF fire.

“Sergeant Hester followed Staff Sergeant Nein to the right-side berm and threw two well placed fragmentation grenades into the trench eliminating the AIF threat. Sergeant Hester and Staff Sergeant Nein went over the berm into the trench and began clearing the trench with their M4s. Sergeant Hester engaged and eliminated three AIF to her front with her M4. They then made their way to the front trench and cleared that as well. After clearing the front trench cease fire was called and she began securing the ambush site.



“The final result of the ambush was 27 AIF KIA (killed in action), 6 AIF WIA (wounded in action), and one AIF captured. The squad also obtained many items of profound significance, including a large cache of weapons, a video camera that the enemy was using to record the ambush, and another video

tape found in the pocket of a dead enemy fighter that showed a beheading.”

On June 16, 2005, at the age of twenty-three, Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester became the first woman to earn the Silver Star medal since World War II. She is also the first woman in United States military history to earn the award for participating in direct combat. It was presented to her in



ceremonies with her comrades at *Camp Liberty*, Iraq, by Lieutenant General John R. Vines, on June 16, 2005.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918 (amended by an act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, United States Army, for exceptionally valorous achievement during combat operations in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, on 20 March 2005, in Iraq. Sergeant Hester's heroic actions in Iraq contributed to the overwhelming success of the Multi-National Corps-Iraq mission. While serving as the Team Leader for RAVEN 42B in the 617th Military Police Company, 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne), 18th Military Police Brigade, Sergeant Hester led her soldiers on a counterattack of anti-Iraqi Forces (AIF) who were ambushing a convoy with heavy AK-47 assault rifle fire, PRK machine gun fire, and rocket propelled grenades. Sergeant Hester maneuvered her team through the kill zone into a flanking position where she assaulted a trench line with grenades and M-203 rounds. She then cleared two trenches with her Squad Leader where she engaged and eliminated 3 AIF with her M-4 rifle. Her actions saved the lives of numerous convoy members. Sergeant Hester's bravery is in keeping with the finest traditions of military heroism and reflects distinct credit upon herself, the 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne), the 18th Military Police Brigade, and the United States Army.

Leigh Ann had always looked up to her grandfather and admired the Bronze Star he earned in World War II. As a veteran of battles in Germany and France, Oran Sollinger was hesitant about Leigh Ann's decision when she joined the Army, but he was still supportive and proud of her. After her award he teased her, saying he might have to reenlist, since his *"Bronze Star didn't shine as bright next to her Silver Star."*

After returning home to Franklin, Tennessee, in 2009, Sergeant Hester resumed work at Shoe Carnival where she was promoted to manager. She soon left the Army and became a Franklin police officer, fulfilling a childhood dream. Before long, however, she realized how much she missed Army life and rejoined the National Guard in 2010, this time in Tennessee. She told NPR in a 2011 interview, *"I'm glad that I took a break. I really am. It made me realize that I really enjoyed being*

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a soldier and it's something that I missed and it's something that I'm good at. And I look forward to getting deployed again."

Leigh Ann was deployed again, spending eighteen months in Afghanistan. While there she earned a promotion to sergeant first class. In the wake of *Hurricane Maria*, which hit the Virgin Islands in 2017, she was sent there as part of the international humanitarian effort.

Sergeant First Class Hester remains humble, never seeing herself as a hero or a pioneer, although it would be understandable if she did. She says she was just doing the job she had been trained to do and would do it all over again. She was a little surprised when her heroism led to her uniform being put on display at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. She also became the subject of a documentary, did many television and radio interviews, and appeared in multiple newspaper and magazine articles. and a book. A company even started producing limited-edition action figures, created to resemble her. Leigh Ann told Rachel Martin of NPR, *"The action figure doesn't really look a whole lot like me. The box is better. Well, I don't see me anywhere. Where is me? 'cause that's not me."*

Sergeant Hester was a guest speaker at the American Legion Auxiliary's 25th Annual Awareness Assembly in Washington D.C. in 2006. Troop support, women in the military, and support of the new program by the Department of Homeland Security *"Ready Kids"* were the leading topics of the Assembly agenda.

On September 28, 2006, Sergeant Hester was named the *"Service Member of the Year"* at the 2006 United Service Organization's (USO) World Gala. She attended the event in Washington, D.C., accompanied by her father Jerry Hester, and had the opportunity to mingle with other guests including Sinbad the comedian, actor Gary Sinise, and former basketball star Scottie Pippen.

Sgt. Hester attended the opening of an exhibit in her honor at the U.S. Army Women's Museum at Fort Lee, Virginia, on February 3, 2007. She was accompanied by other members of her squad including Staff Sergeant Timothy Nein and Sergeant Jason Mike, both of whom were decorated for their own actions on that fateful day. Hester said she would not be standing that day without them -- that it was not one person's actions that day, but those of the team that saved them.

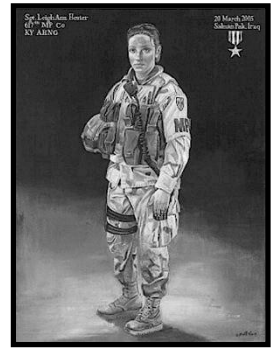
Sergeant First Class Jason Bucklew, who worked with Hester from 2012 to 2014, was quoted in the *Tennessean* describing her: *"You'd*

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never know her accomplishments when you meet her, but you soon realize that she is the type of soldier you want next to you in combat. I'd trust her with my life."

Although hundreds of thousands of women have participated in combat since the beginning of time, there was still somewhat of *"a complex against women being connected with lethal work,"* British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote to his secretary of war during World War II. He added, *"We must get rid of this."*

That same prejudice against women in lethal work continued well into the 21st Century and remains present among some to this day. Jack Kelly, a national security writer for the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette*, cited women such as First Sergeant Hester as examples of why women should be allowed the same assignments as men in the service, stating that *"women soldiers are a big reason why soldiers have higher IQs and more education than the youth population as a whole."* in his article titled *"G.I. Jane is here to stay."*



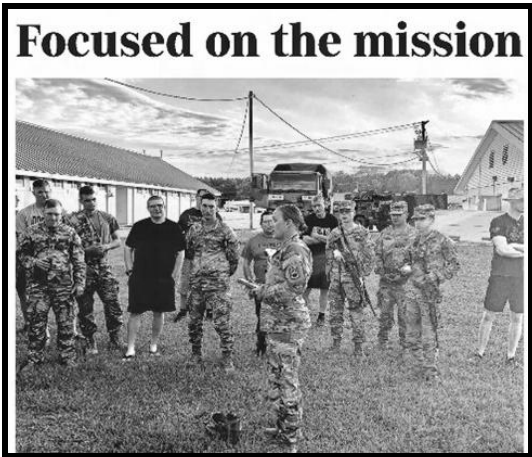
The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff lifted the Combat Exclusion Policy on January 24, 2013, following a unanimous recommendation. All Americans, regardless of gender, are eligible to serve equally in the military in any role, including front line combat and complete combat operations.

On May 26, 2023, First Sergeant Hester led the deployment of more than one hundred and fifty National Guard soldiers of the 267th Military Police Company to the Middle East, marking her largest command and highest rank. Deployment is a sacrifice, it is time away from home, family and friends, and for Hester, her job as a Detective with the Franklin major crimes unit. Her five previous deployments, some of them up to eighteen months long, have always led to her being welcomed back to the department, once with a Blue Star Flag Ceremony.



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The Franklin Police Department, Franklin, Tennessee, announced the promotion of Detective Leigh Ann Hester to Sergeant of the department's overnight patrol shift, Alpha, effective September 1, 2024.



Soldiers from the Tennessee National Guard's 267th Military Police Company listen to 1st Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester. (*The Dickinson Herald*, May 26, 2023)

As noted, Hester was the first woman since World War II to receive the Silver Star. Below are the 16 Women who also received it.

War	Branch		Date of Action	
WWI	Van Norden, Cora L.	Salv. Army	Nurse	Feb. 1, 1918
WWI	Rignel, Jane Isabel	USA	Nurse	Jul. 15, 1918
WWI	Robar, Irene May	USA	Nurse	Jul. 29, 1918
WWI	Leckrone, Linnie Etta	USA	Nurse	Jul. 29, 1918
WWI	Francis, Dorothy	YMCA	Nurse	Oct. 8, 1918
WWII	Truax, Marjorie E.	USA	Nurse	Jan. 1942
WWII	Rourke, Rita Virginia	USA	Nurse	Feb. 10, 1944
WWII	Roberts, Mary Louise	USA	Nurse	Feb. 10, 1944
WWII	Roe, Elaine Arletta	USA	Nurse	Feb. 10, 1944
WWII	Ainsworth, Ellen G.	USA	Nurse	Feb. 10, 1944
WWII	Leones, Magdalena	Filipino	Spy	Feb. 27, 1944
WWII	Granger, Raymonde	French	OSS	Mar. 20, 1944
WWII	Clopet, Evelyn	French	OSS	'Aug 10, 1944
GWOT	Hester, Leigh Ann	USA	MP	Mar. 20, 2005
GWOT	Brown, Monica Lin	USA	Medic	Apr. 25, 2007
GWOT	Hester, Lacie E.	USAF	Pilot	Apr. 13, 2024

Johnny Y. Kim

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AND LONG ODDS

BY JAMES G. FAUSONE, ESQ.

Few individuals embody the spirit of overcoming adversity and reaching for the stars like Jonathan Yong “Johnny” Kim. His journey is marked by an unparalleled series of transitions from a troubled home, to enlistment as a way out. He was a medic, sniper, decorated Navy SEAL, Harvard-trained physician, and ultimately a NASA astronaut. It was an almost unimaginable journey for a first generation American.

EARLY LIFE AND FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Johnny Kim’s path to becoming an American success and hero began in the backdrop of Los Angeles, California, where he was raised by South Korean immigrant parents. His father, who had scarcely completed a high-school education, and his mother emigrated from South Korea in the early 1980s. Many South Koreans immigrated to Los Angeles, California, in the 1970s and 1980s. They were fleeing from economic and political instability in South Korea, which resulted in high unemployment and a military dictatorship. Chun Doo-hwan was a South Korean politician, army general, and military dictator who served as the fifth president of the country from 1980 to 1988. Prior to his accession to the presidency, he was the country’s de facto leader from 1979 to 1980. Chun usurped power after the 1979 assassination of the then president, also a military dictator, who had ruled since 1961. Chun orchestrated a 1979 coup and then in the following year he declared martial law and later set up concentration camps for “*purificatory education.*” Like today, Korean immigrants sought a better life away from dictators and terror.



The Korean immigrants of that era set up social organizations and churches to support the new immigrants. Many gravitated to working in family-owned businesses, where the language barrier and new cultural norms were not overwhelming. The Kim family opened a liquor store in South Los Angeles. His father was an alcoholic and abusive towards Kim,

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his mother, and his younger brother. Kim described himself as a “*scared little boy*” during these years.

Kim does not talk about his feelings as an immigrant’s son. Other life situations, he calls them “*accidents*,” are more controlling factors in his life. Obviously, Kim’s story is lived thru a lens of being a child of immigrants. First generation children often face unique challenges relating to their peers, finding a sense of belonging, and reconciling American culture with the expectations of their parents, which stem from a country to which they may or may not feel a connection. While Kim does not discuss bias or racism he faced in life, it must have happened both overtly and covertly as a Korean American. He admits that on the SEAL teams, *“I felt accepted. I never felt accepted growing up. I am not even sure. I had friends. You know, I went to a Korean Church and I had some Korean friends and from my parents but in a lot of ways I was always felt in between worlds and that had an impact on me like I didn’t really feel well accepted in a lot of ways by the Korean-American community because I was being teased as I was like too white. One time I had skateboarding shoes when I went to my Korean Church and I just got made fun of for it and I just you know, I think just laugh it off like it’s just ridiculous. But when you’re a kid and that’s your world it means a lot, so I never felt like I was accepted into a group until I was in the teams. I was home and I loved it.”*

In an age of internet, podcasts, and blogs, Johnny Kim has told his story several times. He has spent hours talking and answering questions. One of the longer interviews was with his Navy SEAL commander, Jocko Willink, which went nearly five hours. The quotes used in this chapter are taken from Jocko Podcast #221 in 2020 unless otherwise noted.

In Kim’s telling, his uncommon drive is a byproduct of a tragic incident that occurred when he was 16 years old. Jonathan Kim has been open about the domestic abuse and alcoholism of his father, which created a difficult and frightening home environment. Kim said: *“I never wanted to tell my story but my dad was a hard worker, but he was uneducated. I don’t know if he finished high school, but he grew up in a poor rural area in South Korea and my mother was from a middle or well to do class family in South Korea. Her father, my grandfather, was a professor at Seoul University. So, they came over here and my dad worked for what he had. He more than made up for a lack of education with just pure grit and work ethic. Like a lot of Korean Americans, and*

especially in Los Angeles, he owned a liquor store in downtown Los Angeles near South Central. I think a lot of what I've become and a lot of the decisions I've made in my life started with my father and growing up my father had. He had a lot of demons like a lot of people. He did the best he could to live with those demons, but a lot of times he didn't have the mental strength to really not let those demons get a hold of him. So much of what I've learned in my life has been what not to do by example of my father."

One night in February 2002, Kim's alcoholic father came home drunk and brandishing a gun. According to Kim, his father attacked him with pepper spray before proceeding to beat his mother with the pistol. When Kim tried to intervene again, his father struck him in the head with a dumbbell, knocking him silly. Kim recalled that, despite being barely conscious, he pleaded with his father not to kill him and his mother. In a stroke of uncharacteristic mercy, his father ceased his assault, took the gun, and fled the house — or so they thought. When the police arrived, they found him barricaded inside the attic. A brief stand-off ensued, and the officers shot Kim's father, wounding him fatally.

This event, which Kim later described as a catalyst, instilled in him a determination to never again feel helpless and to dedicate his life to protecting others and making a positive impact. This profound personal experience led him to enlist in the United States Navy immediately after graduating from **Santa Monica High School** in 2002. His decision to join the military was not merely a career choice, but a deeply personal response to formative trauma, making a commitment to transform pain into purpose.

He had learned about the SEALs in a 1992 book about special operators, *The Men in Green Faces* by Gene Wentz. Within a week the 16-year-old Kim told his mother *"I'm going to be Navy SEAL, and she had no idea what that was."* He wanted to be a team guy and wanted to transform his life. In high school he played water polo and started training to pass the SEAL fitness test with extra ocean swims, runs, and calisthenics. He did well academically, but knew that college, at that time, was not for him.

Kim has said that while his father's tragedy was terrible, it also liberated him and his mother, and was a pivotal moment in their lives. His mother also worked part-time as a substitute elementary school teacher, while raising Jonathan and his younger brother. This experience is a

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classic example of the immigrant story, where hard work and entrepreneurship were essential for building a new life. With his father's death, the family liquor store failed. Johnny's post-high school path was unclear and the family trauma fresh. Kim sought a new life in the Navy.

Enlistment was a path to regular pay and getting out of Los Angeles. After enlisting in the Navy, Kim was told the quickest path to becoming a Navy SEAL was to become a Hospital Corpsman, as the teams needed medics. He completed Hospital Corpsman "A" school training. Following his completion of Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training, he went on to the Special Operations Combat Medic (SOCM) course at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. Kim states that this was *"the best place to learn that kind of battlefield trauma medicine."*

With hindsight and insight as an adult: Kim says, "I want to be clear I have no ill feelings against my father, and I have forgiven him of the years of abuse that he gave. When I grew a little bit older and I understood where he came from, he also came from a pretty terrible home situation, and I think of his demons. He just didn't have the tools or the aptitude or the mental strength to deal with those demons. And like a lot of people, they pass those on right the sins of our father pass on to us and I don't fault him. With the abuse of most of it was directed at my mother, you know verbal and the physical abuse. I mean it was not as direct with us."

THE PATH OF A NAVY SEAL

Kim's entry into the Navy marked the beginning of an arduous yet transformative period. The Hospital Corpsman "A" School laid the groundwork for his future medical pursuits. However, the scared skinny first generation American had his sights set higher, on the rigorous and legendary Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training. As a member of BUD/S Class 247, Kim endured one of the most physically and mentally demanding training programs in the world, designed to forge ordinary individuals into the nation's most elite special operations forces.



JOHNNY Y. KIM

He proved his resilience and made it through in one class. *“If you just maintain clarity and focus and calm your nerves everything will be okay. It’s when you thrash you panic. You get air hungry that plays on you and that’s when you really people have a hard time I think when it comes to water related activities.”* He mentally had a way to keep himself calm and in control. His successful completion of BUD/S was a clear early indicator of his exceptional grit and determination.

Upon earning his coveted Trident, Kim was assigned as a Special Warfare Operator to SEAL Team 3, specifically Charlie Platoon, based in San Diego, California. Within his SEAL team, Kim served in multiple critical roles, showcasing his versatility and adaptability in high-stakes environments. He was a Special Operations Combat Medic, providing crucial battlefield trauma care to wounded soldiers, often under direct enemy fire. His experiences as a medic in combat would later profoundly influence his decision to pursue a career in medicine. Beyond his medical duties, Kim also functioned as a sniper, a navigator, and a point man, roles that demanded precision, strategic thinking, and leadership in the most dangerous situations.



It was during his time with SEAL Team 3 that Kim faced the crucible of combat, deploying twice to the Middle East in support of **Operation Iraqi Freedom**. He served with some great mentors including Chris Kyle, a famous SEAL sniper who did four tours in Iraq and was the subject of the 2014 movie *“American Sniper.”* Kim’s deployments placed him on the front lines of some of the most intense urban warfare of the conflict, including Ramadi in 2006. That city was Al-Qaeda’s declared capital of a new caliphate. The fighting was brutal and came at a high cost, with significant casualties for both sides, including the deaths of U.S. Navy SEALs Marc Lee and Michael Monsoor (the latter posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor). The battle involved heavy house-to-house fighting, ambushes, sniper attacks, and the use of roadside bombs by insurgents. The battle is the subject of books and films.

After rotation back to the United States, SEAL Team 3 went back and participated in the *Battle of Sadr City* in 2008, also known as the *Siege of Sadr City*. It was a major urban warfare engagement in Baghdad, Iraq, between U.S. and Iraqi forces and the Mahdi Army militia. It took place from March to May 2008, primarily focused on securing the densely

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populated Sadr City neighborhood. The battle involved intense fighting, with both sides employing various tactics and technologies, ultimately resulting in a shift of power in the area.

Kim downplays his role in the SEALs. Yes, he was a Corpsman. Yes, he was a sniper. But he was just doing his job. Across these two tours, Kim participated in more than 100 combat operations, often under extreme duress. He proved himself to the teams and to himself.

His extraordinary courage and selflessness in combat were formally recognized with some of the highest military honors. Most notably, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action. The citation for his Silver Star highlighted an incident in Ramadi where he repeatedly exposed himself to intense enemy fire to drag wounded Iraqi soldiers to safety, providing them with life-saving combat casualty care.



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Special Warfare Operator Second Class (SEAL) Jonathan Yong Kim, United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy while serving as Naval Special Warfare Task Unit-RAMADI Combat Advisor and Hospital Corpsman for Naval Special Warfare Task Group-Arabian Peninsula in direct support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM on 26 June 2006. Petty Officer Kim was Combat Advisor to an Iraqi Army platoon conducting a combined presence patrol with Naval Special Warfare in South-Central Ar Ramadi in a dangerous insurgent-held neighborhood. As the patrol entered a residence, elements on the street came under heavy enemy fire. Observing a wounded Iraqi soldier lying helplessly 30 meters across an exposed street, Petty Officer Kim, with complete disregard for his own safety, ran through a hail of gunfire with another SEAL to reach the wounded Iraqi soldier. With rounds ricocheting off the street around him, he courageously dragged the wounded soldier to the safety of the courtyard. Moments later, another Iraqi soldier was hit in the head inside the courtyard. Again, he exposed himself to enemy fire and dragged the second wounded soldier inside the house and rendered combat casualty care. Through his heroic actions and courage under fire, Petty Officer Kim saved an Iraqi soldier's life. By his bold initiative,

undaunted courage, and complete dedication to duty, Petty Officer Kim reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

In addition to the Silver Star, Kim's distinguished service earned him the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" (for valor), the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Combat "V", and the Combat Action Ribbon, along with various campaign and service awards. His exceptional performance as a combat medic was further acknowledged when he was named the Naval Special Warfare Medic of the Year in 2006.

Despite his immense success and recognition as a SEAL, Kim found that the experience, while transformative, did not entirely fulfill his deepest aspirations. He reflected that while it taught him strength and resilience, it also left him with a sense of anger and bitterness regarding the loss and suffering he witnessed. This realization, coupled with his experiences providing medical aid in combat, began to shape a new direction for his life. In 2009, after seven years of distinguished service as a Navy SEAL and two combat deployments, Petty Officer First Class Kim made the remarkable decision to choose a path that would head him towards more medical education.

TRANSITION TO MEDICINE: A NEW CALLING

To move forward Kim had to first obtain a college degree before applying to medical school. The journey into medicine was facilitated by the Navy's enlisted-to-officer commissioning program, "Seaman to Admiral-21" (STA-21), which provided a pathway for exceptional enlisted personnel to earn a college degree and an officer's commission. Kim's SEAL commanders and teammates wrote in support of his participation in STA-21, and later to getting into medical school.



Through the STA-21 program, Kim enrolled at the University of San Diego (USD), where he pursued a bachelor's degree in mathematics. His academic excellence was evident as he graduated summa cum laude from USD in 2012, demonstrating a formidable intellect that extended far beyond the battlefield. His time at USD not only provided him a strong academic foundation, but also, as he later noted, helped him develop

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crucial “*soft skills*” like communication and an appreciation for the scientific method, which he believed could be applied to any problem in life.

Following his graduation from USD and his commissioning as a naval officer, Kim embarked on the next, even more demanding phase of his education: medical school. He gained admission to the prestigious Harvard Medical School, a remarkable achievement that highlighted his exceptional academic abilities and dedication. In 2016, he earned his Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) from Harvard, marking the culmination of years of intense study, focus, and sacrifice.

After medical school, Dr. Kim completed his medical internship with the Harvard Affiliated Emergency Medicine Residency program, rotating through Massachusetts General Hospital and Brigham Women’s Hospital in Boston. This residency provided him with hands-on experience in emergency medicine, a field that demanded quick thinking, decisive action, and the ability to perform under pressure – skills he had honed during his time as a combat medic. His experiences in emergency medicine further solidified his commitment to healing and directly impacting lives, mirroring the protective instincts that initially drew him to the SEALs.

What motivated Kim to head to medical school? He acknowledges his father always wanted him to be a doctor – every immigrant parent’s dream. This is particularly true for Asian immigrants who tend to lean into the generalization. But Kim’s motivation stems from a sense of duty to make the world better.

Kim explains it thus: *“I made a promise regardless of my rank of where I stood or what kind of power differential, if I saw something wrong like that, and I knew someone would get hurt that I would stand up and speak . . . I made a promise to not just those who died. That I owe it to them to be a positive mark in this world and that can take many forms. For me, that was why I wanted to be a physician. It didn’t really matter that it was medicine, and it was just natural for me because that’s what I was involved in to take that level of service to a higher calling. But taking it to become an astronaut is completely consistent with my promise to leave a positive impact in this world and that’s how I honor the Brothers we lost and I will never stop until the day I die trying to fill in that void because it’s a void that can never be filled.”*

FROM DOCTOR TO DUAL-DESIGNATED NAVAL OFFICER

As he pursued a medical career, Johnny Kim remained an active-duty naval officer, demonstrating his continued commitment to the U.S. Navy. His unique background and exceptional capabilities led him to another specialized path within the Navy, becoming a dual-designated Naval Aviator and Naval Flight Surgeon. This rare designation, part of the Aeromedical Dual Designator (AMDD) program, meant he would be qualified to both fly aircraft and provide medical care to aviators and astronauts.

To achieve this, Kim first attended the Naval Flight Surgeon Course at the Naval Aerospace Medical Institute at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, Florida. This training equipped him with the specialized medical knowledge required to understand the physiological demands of flight and space travel, and to care for personnel operating in these extreme environments.

Following his flight surgeon training, Kim undertook Primary Flight Training at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas, and subsequently helicopter Advanced Flight Training at NAS Whiting Field, Milton, Florida. This rigorous aviation training honed his piloting skills, requiring him to master complex flight controls, navigation, and crew resource management. He excelled, graduating on the “*Commodore’s List with Distinction*” from Naval Advanced Flight Training. His ability to adapt to the challenges of aviation, from pulling G’s to building situational awareness and effective communication, was a testament to his continuous learning and mastery of diverse skill sets. This dual designation as both a Naval Aviator and a Naval Flight Surgeon further solidified his unique profile, preparing him for the ultimate frontier: space.

THE ASTRONAUT CORPS: REACHING FOR THE STARS

In 2017, Johnny Kim’s extraordinary journey took yet another remarkable turn when he was selected by NASA to join its elite Astronaut Candidate Class. Out of an astounding pool of more than 18,300 applicants, Kim was one of only twelve individuals chosen, a testament to his unparalleled blend of military, medical, and intellectual achievements. His selection marked him as only the third former Navy SEAL to become a



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NASA astronaut, placing him in an exceptionally rare echelon of national heroes.

His two years of astronaut candidate training were as comprehensive and demanding as any phase of his previous careers. The curriculum was designed to prepare candidates for the complexities of space flight and life aboard the International Space Station (ISS). This included intensive technical and operational instruction in ISS systems, Extravehicular Activities (EVA) Operations (spacewalks), T-38 jet flight training, robotics, physiological training to cope with the effects of microgravity, expeditionary training, field geology, water and wilderness survival training, and proficiency in the Russian language, essential for working with international partners. Kim's ability to absorb and master such a vast array of knowledge and skills, from the intricacies of orbital mechanics to the nuances of a foreign language, underscored his exceptional cognitive abilities and dedication to lifelong learning.

Upon completing his astronaut candidate training in 2020, Kim began actively supporting International Space Station operations. He is the first Korean-American NASA astronaut. He served as a Capsule Communicator (CapCom) in Mission Control Center Houston, acting as the primary point of contact between ground control and the astronauts in orbit. This role required precise communication, quick problem-solving, and a deep understanding of ongoing mission parameters. In 2021, his leadership capabilities were further recognized when he served as the International Space Station's Increment Lead for Expedition 65, a critical role in coordinating and managing the activities of the crew aboard the station. He currently continues to support crew operations as an operations officer, contributing to the success of ongoing space missions. Looking ahead, Johnny Kim is poised to make history once again. He may never end up in space but he will spend his time as one of the available pool of astronauts. He is ready to serve in space if called upon.

A LEGACY OF SERVICE AND INSPIRATION

Jonathan Y. Kim's life is a powerful narrative of continuous growth, unwavering dedication, and profound impact. From the crucible of personal tragedy, he forged a path defined by service, courage, and an insatiable quest for knowledge. His journey through the ranks of the Navy SEALs, his commitment to healing as a physician, and his ascent to the

stars as an astronaut are not disparate achievements but interconnected chapters of a singular, compelling story.

His philosophy, as articulated in various interviews, centers on the idea of turning pain into purpose and striving to make the largest possible positive impact on the world. He credits his family, particularly his wife and three children, as a crucial support network, emphasizing that behind every accomplished individual is a strong foundation. This humility, combined with his extraordinary achievements, makes him a truly inspiring figure.

Kim's career exemplifies the power of adaptability and the pursuit of excellence across diverse fields. He has demonstrated that with sufficient drive and intellect, one can master seemingly disparate disciplines and contribute meaningfully to society in multiple capacities. His story resonates deeply because it is one of overcoming adversity, embracing challenges, and continually pushing the boundaries of what is possible. He embodies the ideal of a modern polymath, a person who excels in multiple fields, driven by an inherent desire to serve and to leave the world better than he found it.



CONCLUSION

Lieutenant Commander Jonathan Y. “*Johnny*” Kim’s journey from a young enlistee to a decorated combat veteran, a highly educated medical doctor, and a pioneering NASA astronaut is nothing short of extraordinary. Each phase of his career has been marked by exceptional dedication, courage, and intellectual rigor. He has not only achieved individual excellence but has consistently leveraged his unique skills and experiences to serve his country and humanity at the highest levels. His

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life stands as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of resilience, the importance of continuous learning, and the profound impact one individual can have when driven by a genuine desire to make a positive difference. As he prepares for his first mission to space, Johnny Kim continues to inspire countless individuals, proving that with unwavering commitment, the boundaries of human achievement are truly limitless.



Monica Lynn Brown

Combat Reaches Everyone

BY: JAMES G. FAUSONE, ESQ.

The United States has had a tradition of keeping women out of direct combat roles. The debate over this stance has been long and heated. Statistics change over time, but women have served in combat from Biblical time to the present. The proportion of female military personnel varies internationally, with approximately 3% in India, 10% in the United Kingdom, 15% in France, 13% in Sweden, 17% in the United States, 15.3% in Canada, and 27% in South Africa. In addition to requiring women to enlist, the Israel Defense Forces boasts high participation of women in command roles. Thirty-four percent of those serving in the IDF are women, including 23% of all officers. Ninety-two percent of the IDF's jobs are open to women.

Women serve in the U.S. Military in a variety of roles. In every instance they have proven themselves and their dedication to the country and to other service members is remarkable. The story of Monica Lin Brown exemplifies that dedication, courage, and resolve.

EARLY ON IN THE TEXAS SUN

From humble beginnings in Texas, no one would have predicted the courage of Monica Lin Brown in the face of explosions and terrorism. She was born on May 24, 1988, in Lake Jackson, Texas. Lake Jackson is a city in Brazoria County, Texas, within the Greater Houston metropolitan area. It is the proverbial small town with a population around 28,000.

It is a gritty blue collar area. In 1942, a portion of Lake Jackson was first developed as a company town for workers of the Dow Chemical Company where it developed 5,000 acres. The planned community was designed by Alden B. Dow of Midland, Michigan, for workers in support of a new plant of the Dow Chemical Company which his father owned. The City of Lake Jackson was incorporated March 14, 1944, and voted for home



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rule ten years later in 1954. This was not a glamorous area and wanting to get away from it was a natural sentiment for a young girl with visions of a better life.

She was three when her parents divorced. Her brother Justin was a year older. Her mother worked night shifts as a nurse in hospitals in the Houston area. After her mother was seriously injured in a car accident, grandma moved in to help raise the kids. Brown attended nine schools in eleven years. She played tennis, volleyball, softball, was a cheerleader, and ran cross country. Running was her passion. She said, *“Running is like meditation for me, I can just think, without anyone talking to me.”*

Brother Justin knew early on that he wanted to go into the military. Monica graduated from high school a year early, when she was 17. After graduating from high school, Monica and Justin moved to Lake Jackson, Texas, to be near their father’s mother. Monica had become interested in radiology through an aunt who was an X-ray technician.

Accompanying her brother to the Army Recruiter’s office in November 2005, she found that she could obtain healthcare training in the Army. The available school was for a Healthcare Specialist or Combat Medic.

YOU ARE IN THE ARMY NOW!

Moncia Lin Brown went through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, then transferred to Fort Sam Houston near San Antonio, Texas, for AIT (Advanced Individual Training), the 16 week 68W course. After the first eight weeks she passed the National EMT certification test. The second eight weeks were Army combat medic training.



It was there that Monica met a drill sergeant whose impact would help define who she would become in the Army. Brown said, *“She was high-speed and airborne-qualified. Her independence and strong personality set her apart. I wanted to be high-speed like that. She was from the 82nd and had that maroon beret and the Airborne patch. I knew I wanted to be like her.”*

After AIT and Airborne School, she was assigned to the Forward Support Company which was attached to the 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry,

MONICA LYNN BROWN

4th Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division. Less than two years after joining the Army, her unit started preparing for deployment to Afghanistan. On February 7, 2007, she arrived at FOB (Forward Operating Base) *Salerno*. At that time all the medical facilities were in tents. At first, she didn't leave the base. She said, *"The first actual patient I worked on was an Afghani man who had a gunshot to his leg. My reaction was 'My gosh, this is a real person and these are real injuries, this isn't training anymore.' That's when the switch flipped, and I think everything changed over from training to me really liking my job."*

About a month into the tour, a small outpost requested a female medic. Any treatment of an Afghanistan woman had to be by another woman. Brown got the assignment. The outpost was little more than a cluster of tents and no running water. Brown's aid station was an 8-by-5 foot area barely big enough for a stretcher. *"I loved it,"* she said. She also went on some resupply and humanitarian missions.



Charlie Troop was running combat patrols and in April 2007 its medic went on leave. At that time women weren't supposed to be assigned with front line units, but Private First Class Brown was the only available medic. Charlie Troop received orders to go on a Search and Capture mission; they would be out for five nights. The patrol consisted of four up-armored Humvees and one Afghan National Army (ANA) pickup truck.

Having spent the night just outside the small village of Jani Khel, Charlie Troop was informed on Wednesday morning, April 25, 2007, that two Taliban activists lived in the village. They spent the day searching the village and found nothing -- the bad guys were gone. At dusk they started moving out of the village.

Private First Class Brown was riding in the Humvee with the Platoon Staff Sergeant Jose Santos. She didn't hear the explosion, but the .50 caliber gunner on her Humvee yelled down *"Two one's hit. I see smoke and a tire rolling through the field."* The trail Humvee with five soldiers inside rolled over a pressure plate IED (Improvised Explosive Device) causing a fireball as its fuel tank and fuel cans ignited.

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Private First Class Brown immediately grabbed her medical bag and her weapon and opened the door. The .50 caliber gunner yelled down *“Shut the door,”* as incoming machine gun fire started pinging the Humvee. They were caught in an ambush. As the .50 caliber gunner turned around and started putting suppressive fire at the enemy, Staff Sergeant Santos yelled *“Let’s go Doc.”* With Santos a couple steps ahead, they ran through the heavy silt of the riverbed about 300 meters through machine gun and rifle fire to the burning vehicle.



Four of the injured had crawled or were thrown from the vehicle, the fifth, Specialist Larry Spray, was caught inside by his boot and was on fire. Sergeant Zachary Tellier managed to pull him out. All five of the soldiers were stumbling, burned and cut. Specialists Stanson Smith and Larry Spray were critical. Spray had severe burns, and Smith was in shock from a severe laceration on his forehead that blinded him. Brown and one of the less injured grabbed Smith by his body armor and dragged him into a ditch about fifteen yards away.

The other vehicles were turning around to form a crescent formation and began to return fire. As soon as they got to the ditch, the enemy started dropping mortar rounds around them. Brown threw her body over Smith, shielding him, and yelled to another soldier to *“cover up”* the other casualty, as more than a dozen rounds landed around them.

Then the ammunition inside the burning Humvee started exploding, 60-mm. mortars, 40-mm. grenade rounds, and rifle ammunition. Again, Brown lay over the wounded soldier to shield his body with her own. Lieutenant Robbins, the Platoon Leader, moved his Humvee near the injured and was incredulous that Brown had survived. He said, *“I was surprised she didn’t get killed and she’d been there for 10 to 15 minutes or longer. There was small arms fire coming in from two different machine-gun positions, mortars falling, a burning Humvee with 16 mortar rounds in it, chunks of aluminum the size of softballs flying all around. It was about as hairy as it gets.”* Staff Sergeant Santos drove the ANA pickup over to get the wounded; he would later recall that bullets were flying within inches of Brown, but she was focused on the casualties.

MONICA LYNN BROWN

Brown's calm demeanor under fire was noted by Lieutenant Robbins who said, *"She was focused on the patients the whole time. She did her job perfectly."* Brown and Staff Sergeant Santos hoisted Smith onto the truck while Spray crouched behind the back window and Brown dived onto a bench in the back. There, she put pressure on Smith's head, which was bleeding heavily, and also held the hand of Spray, who was charred and shaking.

Moving out of the ambush and across a riverbed, Brown set up her Casualty Collection Point. Smith was bleeding heavily and slipping in and out of consciousness, Spray had extensive burns on his legs, chest and back. Brown bandaged Smith and started IVs on both men. She covered Spray's burns with gauze and put him in a hypothermia bag. She soon had her wounded soldiers stabilized and prepped for medevac, but it was another 45 minutes before the helicopters arrived.

Eighteen year old Monica Brown recalled; *"When the medevac bird was taking off and everything was quiet, my ears were still ringing. I couldn't hear anything. I was walking through the field back to the Humvees, through shin-high green grass, blowing because the bird was taking off. I remember thinking, 'Did that just really happen? Did I do everything right?' When I got back to the trucks the guys were all hugging me and thanking me."*

Staff Sergeant Aaron Best, who was Lieutenant Robbins .50 caliber gunner that day, said; *"I've seen a lot of grown men who didn't have the courage and weren't able to handle themselves under fire like she did. She never missed a beat."*

Two days later she was abruptly pulled from the field. She had attracted too much attention. It was that *"women in combat"* publicity concern, but that misguided concern was not enough for her heroics under fire to be ignored.

THE SILVER STAR

On March 21, 2008, the Army flew Monica's brother Justin to Bagram Air base to stand beside her as Vice President Dick Cheney presented nineteen-year-old, five foot two, 120 pound, Combat Medic, Army Specialist Monica Lin Brown the Silver Star, making her the second and last woman to be awarded the Nation's third highest award for valor in ground combat action since World War II.

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The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918 (amended by an act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Specialist [the Private First Class] Monica Lin Brown, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism while serving with as a Combat Medic with the 4th Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, in action on 25 April 2007, during an enemy ambush in Jani Khel, Afghanistan, in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Specialist Brown displayed great courage in treating two wounded Soldiers while under intense small arms and mortar fire. Specialist Brown's heroic actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service, reflecting great credit upon herself, the 82d Airborne Division, and the United States Army.



NARRATIVE TO ACCOMPANY AWARD:

Private First Class Monica Lin Brown, United States Army, distinguished herself by extraordinary heroism in action on 25 April 2007. On that date, 2d Platoon, Charlie Troop, 4th Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment, was on a combat patrol moving to Jani Khel, Afghanistan, for a leader engagement with the village elders. The element consisted of five vehicles: four M1151 Uparmored HMMWV's (UAH) and one Afghan National Army (ANA) Ford Ranger. They were in a column formation moving north along Route VIPER. In the vicinity of 42S VA263021 the trail vehicle, C23, struck a pressure plate IED on the driver's side rear tire, which ignited the fuel tank and fuel cans mounted on the rear of the vehicle. The explosion of the fuel tank and cans engulfed the vehicle in an intense fireball. This initiated a planned ambush which commenced after the explosion. The patrol began to take small arms fire from the direction of a kholat to the east, approximately 100 meters away. The small arms fire was impacting around the lead vehicle which was 300 meters north of the IED site. The small arms fire began to concentrate on the IED site as the Platoon Medic, Private First Class Brown, moved on foot to evaluate the casualties. She was exposed to the small arms fire until the maneuver element could swing around and begin suppressing the enemy as she treated the wounded Soldiers. After making an initial assessment and treating in order of severity, she moved the casualties

with the aid and direction of the Platoon Sergeant, into the wadi the engulfed vehicle was hanging over. The enemy fighters then engaged the patrol with mortar fire. Private First Class Brown threw her own body over the casualties to shield them as the mortars were impacting 75 to 100 meters away. Approximately 15 mortars impacted within close range of the casualties as Private First Class Brown continued treatment. Private First Class Brown continued treatment in the wadi approximately 15 meters from the burning vehicle, at which time the onboard 60-mm. mortar, 5.56-mm. ammunition, and 40-mm. grenade rounds on board began to explode. Again, disregarding her own safety, Private First Class Brown shielded the casualties with her own body as large chunks of shrapnel and 5.56-mm. rounds began flying through the air from the burning vehicle. The patrol leader arrived on site and found it incredible she was still alive and treating the casualties amidst the extremely dangerous conditions she was operating under. Given the hazards to Private First Class Brown, the platoon sergeant used the ANA Ranger to move the wounded Soldiers and Private First Class Brown to a more protected position. As the truck began driving down the wadi, a large 60-mm. mortar explosion occurred sending shrapnel flying all around where Private First Class Brown had been treating casualties. The platoon leader was dragged by the ANA truck with the casualties as the explosions became incredibly intense and the platoon sergeant moved Private First Class Brown to a more protected position to continue treatment. Private First Class Brown continued treatment of the two wounded Soldiers at the new site as enemy small arms fire began to impact around the new position. Private First Class Brown continued treatment of the casualties as the platoon returned fire in close vicinity of her. She shielded the wounded from falling brass and enemy fire once again, ensuring the casualties were stabilized and ready for MEDEVAC.

The Silver Star Medal is the United States Armed Forces' third-highest military decoration for valor in combat. It is awarded primarily to members of the United States Armed Forces for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States.

Specialist Brown's award made national headlines, such as the *Plain Dealer* which captioned the article, "*Female Teen Soldier Earns Silver Star.*" The focus was on her gender and age, but she felt that she was just an Army medic doing her job. Monica said she never expected to be in a situation like that and credits her training and instructors for her actions that day. She said, "*I realized that everything I had done during the attack was just rote memory . . . Somewhere in the mix, we started taking mortar rounds. It became a huge commotion, but all I could let*

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myself think about were my patients. “I did not really have time to be scared,” Brown said. “Running back to the vehicle, I was nervous (since) I did not know how badly the guys were injured. That was scary.”

All the major news services did stories on Monica, but notoriety sometimes attracts the wrong kind of attention. Brown was the target of scammers and cheats from Africa. She coped by dropping out of the public eye. She was promoted to sergeant before she left the Army.

She is still referenced in speeches as an inspiration. In the Memorial Day Keynote Address at the Military Women’s Memorial on May 27, 2024, the role of women was acknowledged, and that Brown is a star, albeit silver, in that firmament. The speaker further noted: *“In every conflict that has faced our nation, women have answered the call to serve: from Cathay Williams, who rode with the famed Buffalo Soldiers, to the thousands of women who served during the World Wars in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, the Army Signal Corps, and the Women’s Army Corps. Over 10,000 women served in Vietnam, and some of those women went on to be the early integrators of the all-volunteer force in the 70s, 80s, and 90s – often facing discrimination, harassment, or exclusion from competitive positions and advancement. Their struggles paved the way for the women who served more recently during the fight against terrorism – women who fought with courage and bravery, like Army Sergeants Leigh Ann Hester and Monica Lin Brown who both received the Silver Star for valor in combat.”*

JOB TITLES DO NOT LIMIT HEROISM

It matters not whether one has a job as military police or as a combat medic. The circumstances of hostility will place military women at risk, which they know and accept. Brown and Hester are worthy of remembrance as examples of women warriors.

In December 2010, it was reported Monica Lin Brown was in the Bachelor of Science Nursing program at University of North Carolina-Pembroke and was in the Army ROTC program. Her dream of a healthcare career was aided by the GI Bill and her service under fire. She lives on as an inspiration to girls and women looking at military service and yet maintains her privacy that should not be forfeited by receiving the Silver Star.

Conrad Begaye*

A NAVAJO INDIAN'S FAMILY TRADITION OF SERVICE

BY: C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Conrad James Begaye is a Navajo Indian, born on July 24, 1976, on the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico. His mother Patricia Begay is now retired, but his father, David Begaye, continues to work for the NASA Space Satellite Systems in Phoenix, Arizona. Conrad grew up with two younger sisters, Fondren, who joined the Army but was medically discharged after basic training, and Sara, who is currently studying criminal justice at Arizona State University. Both sisters are married with children, and Conrad, who has no children of his own, enjoys being a great uncle and god father to them.



Conrad grew up in Phoenix where his father was working for IBM and attended elementary and junior high school there. He then moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, to attend high school, and graduated in Rock Point, Arizona, on the reservation in 1994. During his military career he furthered his education while serving in the United States and Italy and later attended college.

As a child and young man, he was athletic and played many sports. While living in Tucson he was a member of Boy Scouts of America. Growing up he had a strong desire to serve his country in uniform – there was a family tradition of serving. Many of his relatives had served or are currently serving in the Marine Corps and Air Force. His uncle Ricky Begay was a tanker during two tours of duty in Vietnam, and died of a heart attack in the late 1990s. His uncle Joe Begay served as a Green Beret in Vietnam. After his service, Joe worked as a silver smith, and also acted in many movie roles. He has many customers from all over the world for his Navajo style jewelry.

* Reprinted from: True Stories of Arizona Heroes That Defy Comprehension

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Especially influential in Conrad's young life and his desire to serve in the Army was his grandfather, Ben Deschiney, who served with the 711th Tank Battalion during World War II. Deschiney was wounded in combat in the Pacific Theater of Operations and was awarded the Purple Heart.

Like his grandfather, Conrad joined the U.S. Army, completing Basic Training, Airborne School, and Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1999. He was then assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment at Fort Lewis, Washington. While there he met Idellia Beletso, an Air Force flight medic stationed at McCord Air Force Base across the street from Fort Lewis.

Conrad reenlisted for an overseas tour in Italy with the 173d Airborne Brigade, with which he deployed from 2003 to 2004 to northern Iraq in support of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. In 2005 Conrad deployed to Afghanistan with the 173d Airborne Brigade in support of *Operation Enduring Freedom*. During his tour, Idellia was stationed at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and in 2006, she and Conrad were married there.

Conrad deployed a second time to Afghanistan in 2007 as a staff sergeant with Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade. His platoon was serving at the Ranch House Outpost at Aranas, Afghanistan, when it was attacked by Taliban insurgents on the night of August 22, 2007. Staff Sergeant Begaye recalled, *"I was on radio duty that morning and I was getting off my shift around 0500 hours when I heard the first shot go off. After that, chaos began and we were taking fire from all directions. Intel had told us something was about to happen but that time frame had come and gone, and it finally happened, taking us off guard. Our FOB (Forward Operating Base) had been infiltrated through the Afghan Army post and the enemy was among us."*

Begaye's platoon leader was First Lieutenant Matthew C. Ferrara (pictured) from Torrance, California, a 2005 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. *"Ferrera's courageous leadership and calm demeanor under fire were instrumental in repelling an overwhelming attack by an enemy force three times larger than his own."*



During three hours of intense combat First Lieutenant Ferrara expertly led his men in the defense of the Aranas Outpost until he was able to call for air strikes ‘danger close’ to his own position.” For these actions, Ferrara was submitted for the Silver Star. Ferrara would not live to personally receive it. He left behind grieving parents and a twin brother.

Six weeks later on November 9, 2007, First Lieutenant Ferrara led his headquarters unit to meet with local Afghan leaders in Afghanistan’s Nuristan Province. After the meeting, First Lieutenant Ferrara and his platoon were hiking east along a small path in the rugged mountainous terrain with a squad of Afghan National Army soldiers, to return to the FOB. Suddenly they began taking fire from enemy positions strategically poised in ambush above them. The platoon was in the open and was dangerously exposed to the murderous enemy fire, and pinned down.

Several men were wounded, First Lieutenant Ferrara was killed, and Staff Sergeant Begaye was shot in the arm. Despite his painful wound, Begaye began to organize and direct the fire of the platoon. Eager to get his men out of the kill zone, under continuous enemy fire he bounded over a cliff and called for his men to follow him down the rocky slope to find cover in a ravine below. Several men were wounded and one was killed as they slid down the rocky slope. There, Begaye began treating the wounded while continuing to return fire on the enemy.

One of Begaye’s soldiers had been shot in both legs and was still in the open, and taking continued enemy fire. Begaye called out to the man to “*play dead*,” hoping that the enemy would shift their fire away from the wounded man if they thought he had been killed. The ploy worked, likely saving his life.

Continuing to direct his men, and despite his own wound, Staff Sergeant Begaye went to the rescue of another wounded soldier and moved him to the protection of a nearby cave. Then, obtaining a radio, he called his headquarters and directed mortar fire onto the enemy positions while rallying other soldiers further back in the convoy to hold their positions.

The friendly mortar fire delivered the coup de grace to the enemy ambushers and their fire abated. Begaye then motivated one of his soldiers to organize a defensive perimeter of Afghan soldiers to prevent his platoon from being further harassed or overrun.

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Five soldiers, including First Lieutenant Ferrara, and one Marine were killed in the deadly ambush. It was the deadliest day for the 173d Airborne Brigade during that tour of duty. The toll was heavy but would have been much worse but for the heroism and leadership of Staff Sergeant Begaye. For his heroism that day, and for his leadership and calm demeanor in a volatile and



deadly combat encounter, he was submitted for the Silver Star. It was presented on June 1, 2009, at Vincenza, Italy, by Major General William B. Garrett. Air Force Staff Sergeant Idellia Begaye was present, watching with pride as her husband received the award.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918 (amended by an act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Staff Sergeant Conrad Begaye, United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving with Company C, 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, 173d Airborne Brigade, in action on 9 November 2007, support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, near Aranas, Afghanistan. On that date, Sergeant Begaye was part of a unit that had just met with local leaders in Afghanistan's Nuristan province. They were hiking along rugged terrain when his squad, his platoon's headquarters sections and a squad of Afghan soldiers began taking fire from enemy positions above. Pinned down at first, Sergeant Begaye was struck in the arm while returning fire and directing his men. He bounded over a cliff, calling to his troops to follow him down the rocky slope to find cover. Keeping his composure against overwhelming odds, he directed and encouraged his fellow soldiers under heavy fire. One paratrooper had been shot in both legs and was still taking fire. Sergeant Begaye called out to him to play dead, knowing the enemy would shift their fire away if they thought the soldier was killed, quick thinking

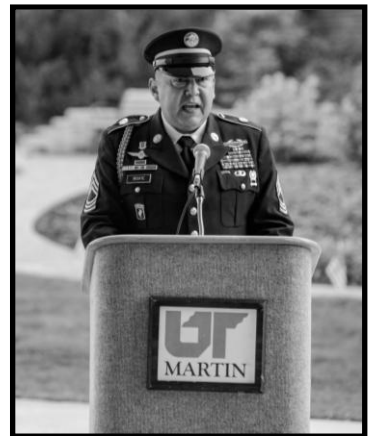
that likely helped to save that soldier's life. Ignoring his own injuries, Sergeant Begaye moved a wounded soldier to a nearby cave to protect him from enemy fire. Using a radio, he called his higher headquarters and directed mortar fire onto enemy positions, essentially ending the battle. Then he motivated a soldier to organize a defensive perimeter of Afghan soldiers to prevent their unit from being harassed or overrun. His gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Staff Sergeant Begaye was humble about his award. He said, *"I really don't know how I feel about getting a medal for just doing my job. So, this medal's not for me, but for the guys who died that day."* He said he would have preferred a simple handshake or a pat on the back . . . *"After all, Infantrymen don't fight for medals; they fight for each other."*

Although Conrad Begaye survived his third combat tour of duty; his marriage did not. The pressures, constant moves, and long periods of separation takes a toll on military families, and Conrad and Idellia subsequently separated.

Begaye returned to Afghanistan for a fourth combat tour in 2016, and returned home to serve as a first sergeant with the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He later was assigned to the Wounded Warrior Transition Unit as first sergeant for two years.

He was preparing to retire when he received orders to be a senior military instructor with the Reserve Officer Training Program for the University of Tennessee at Martin. Speaking there on Memorial Day 2020, he noted, *"What happened there (Afghanistan) is something I think about every day; it's not easy to forget about. Today and every day, I am reminded of the men who fought and died alongside me in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan . . . I got to know these men personally: their likes, dislikes, weird music they listened to, and their future plans when they would eventually leave the service."*



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There is nothing quite like the bond created being in combat with soldiers who would lay their lives down without hesitation for you.

“I am constantly reminded that freedom is not free, and we are guaranteed that privilege from the lives that are given. Sometimes we forget the sacrifice made for the freedom we have. These young men and women stood up for our rights, stood up for those who can't, and stood up for those who are not willing to. The lives laid down for this great country are not forgotten. Let us not mourn them but celebrate their lives with honor, honor the flag that they fought for (and) the nation of freedom, which we enjoy.”

He finally retired from military service on January 1, 2023, after serving 23 years. In retirement he returned to Arizona where he says, *“I am taking this easy, doing the things I wasn't allowed to do in the military. I can travel more now. I currently volunteer where I can at the VFW and American Legion. I promised myself I would take a year off before entering the work force again.”*

Rafael Peralta
“IT CAME AS NO SURPRISE”
BY: DEBBIE MAULDING

FROM IMMIGRANT TO NATURALIZED CITIZEN

According to data available on the Center for Naval Analysis website, there were 68,711 foreign-born service men and women in the United States Armed Forces in 2004, including both naturalized and non-citizens. Of these,



thirty-three thousand four hundred forty-nine were non-citizens. Of the non-citizens, fewer than ten thousand were permanent residents with green cards.

Over 120,000 military personnel have become naturalized United States Citizens since 2001, and many non-citizens remain in the U.S. Armed Forces, in defense of the country they call home. Immigrants in the military have a rich historical background, dating back to the Revolutionary War. Naturalization through military service, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) has drawn thousands of non-citizens to enlist, serve, and become citizens.

Military service in the United States is voluntary, whether a person is a citizen or an immigrant with documentation. Each branch has their own unique requirements that must be met, of which, some are standard for all the branches. One of the standard requirements for all branches is that *“only U.S. citizens can become commissioned officers or work in jobs that require special security clearances in the U.S. military.”*

A documented non-citizen, i.e., a permanent resident with a Green Card, is eligible to enlist in the military, and can become a commissioned officer when they achieve citizenship. Citizens of foreign republics or foreign states are eligible to join the military as long as they are citizens in their home territory, republic, or state. Specific requirements for non-

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citizens are required for eligibility, including that they must have a I-551 Green Card or Permanent Resident Card, or a valid foreign passport stamped “*Processed for I-551.*” The Green Card must remain valid for the entire period of enlistment.

Non-citizens are required to serve for twelve months before they can apply for citizenship in peace time. This requirement is waived for non-citizens serving during combat. Military services have worked closely with the USCIS to improve the citizenship process for all service members. Since September 2001, the USCIS has posthumously awarded citizenship to over one hundred military personnel, allowing their family members to be eligible for naturalization.

In 2002 President Bush signed an executive order that allowed non-citizen military personnel to be eligible for expedited U.S. citizenship. Revised U.S. Citizenship laws since 2004 have allowed USCIS to conduct naturalization interviews and ceremonies for foreign-born U.S. Armed Forces members serving abroad. USCIS data from April 2018 reflects more than 7,200 foreign-born service members have become citizens while serving overseas, in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo.

Between 2013 and 2018, more than 44,000 non-citizens enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces, with the top two countries of origin being the Philippines and Mexico. Seventeen percent of those serving in the Armed Forces during that time were Hispanic. As of 2018, the United States was home to over 525,000 foreign-born veterans.

Other research shows that ten percent more non-citizens who serve in the military remain in the service after their initial enlistment, than citizens who serve, many serving until retirement is reached. Cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is an asset to our armed forces and is particularly valuable when troops are serving in foreign countries.

TRAINING THE BODY TO ACT AUTOMATICALLY:

Another characteristic of the United States Armed Forces is the graduation of their personnel from a **Basic Training** program or **Boot Camp**. Every Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airman, and Coastguardsman has to meet basic physical, educational, and mental standards to be allowed to pursue a military career, whether they intend to serve until retirement or for a single tour of duty. Much of their training includes preparation for the perils, both mental and physical, that arise due to combat.

From the moment a child is born, the training of the autonomic nervous system begins. The infant is hungry; the infant cries. The infant has a soiled diaper; the infant cries. The infant is happy; the infant smiles. Our fight or flight response is simple at birth, and becomes more complex as we add emotional, psychological, and environmental stimulation. Even greater complexity develops when we enter programs designed to train a person for immediate response in a given situation, such as Emergency Medical Training or becoming a Marine Rifleman.

The idea behind basic training is to have every Marine respond in the same manner to the orders of their superior officers or actions of their leaders. The brain tells the body to respond as it is trained, without hesitation. Documented research exists, and techniques have been developed, to help those in the military control their responses to the stress of combat, including stress inoculation and acclimatization, tactical breathing, and debriefing techniques that allow an emotional and physical reset after episodes of extreme stress.

Troops are taught to recognize signs of physical readiness for stress. They learn their best responses to each level, using their heart rate as an indicator. Combat readiness includes being able to function in a *Condition Gray* stress level with the same decision-making skills and cognitive certainty one would have if the same decision were required in a *Condition White* or *Yellow* situation. This includes control of gross motor skills, visual reaction time, cognitive reaction time, and may compromise fine motor skills at its peak. This means that it may be hard to tie your shoes or button your shirt at the peak of a stressful situation, but you can fire your weapon or pull a grenade under your body to shield your comrades from danger without hesitation.

Who stops in an emergency to check their heart rate? No one, especially not a combat-ready Marine, a Navy SEAL, or an EMT. That is

Conditions-of-Physiologic-Readiness¶
• <i>Condition-White</i> :"The-Warrior-at-Rest." (Normal-Resting-HR)¶
• <i>Condition-Yellow</i> :"Psychologically-Prepared-for-Combat-Fighter-Pilot-Ready."(Resting-HR~115-bpm)¶
• <i>Condition-Red</i> :"Optimal-Warrior-Survival~Gross-Motor-Skills,Visual-Reaction-Time,Cognitive-Reaction-Time-Peak-at-expense-of-fine-motor-skills."(HR-115-145-bpm)¶
• <i>Condition-Gray</i> :"A-Transitional-Phase-between-Condition-Red-&-Black,which-may-be-modified-with-training."(HR-145-175)¶
• <i>Condition-Black</i> :"Catastrophic-Breakdown-of-Mental-&-Physical-Performance."(HR~175)¶

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why these techniques are a part of BASIC training, so the individual will not need to know their exact pulse to recognize their level of stress; it becomes “*second nature*,” an automatic response. Further research exists, and may be of interest to the reader, on the effects of the stress of combat techniques to prevent long term effects, and the benefits of alternative training such as mindfulness techniques.

In a combat situation, already injured and incapacitated, even considered “*clinically dead*,” what choice will combat serviceperson’s autonomic nervous system make, “*fight or flight*,” save his comrades or save himself? Multiple sources including UAB Medical School Department of Neurobiology professor Frank Amthor, PhD; Penn State University Neurological Research, the *Merck Manual*, and Patient Research at NYU’s Langone Health, agree that a service man or woman receives basic training that conditions the autonomic nervous system, the “*fight or flight response*,” to fight, and to protect those in harm’s way, putting others’ safety ahead of their own. Based on studies that included monitoring during combat of both air and ground troops, metrical analysis of changes to cognitive load, and the effects of unexpected trauma, mindfulness training enhances the control of emotions and performance, while increased cognitive load, or stressful stimulation, significantly increases the response of the Autonomic Nervous System. The Autonomic Nervous System will respond and trigger automatic action such as firing a weapon, pulling someone to safety even when left exposed by the action, and moving into the line of fire to protect one’s comrades.

RAFAEL PERALTA

The Green Card arrived, and off he went. It came as no surprise to his family when Rafael Peralta came home and announced, “*I’ve joined the Marines.*” With neatly framed copies of the Bill of Rights and the United States Constitution as the décor in his bedroom, everyone anticipated the next item would be his Marine Graduation Certificate. They were right, and, once again, it came as no surprise. Mexican born, and now a legal permanent resident, Rafael was eligible to pursue his dream of a Marine Corps career.



Rafael Peralta

Rafael Peralta was born in Mexico City, Mexico, on April 7, 1979. It was a time of significant political and cultural change in Mexico, with a shift towards tourism and modernization. There was conflict within the government, with left- and right-wing parties pitted against each other. Gangs were more common; cartels were stronger than ever. Rafael was beaten savagely by a local gang, prompting his parents to act. He was sent across the border into the United States to live with family members in San Diego. Although he arrived illegally, Rafael loved his new homeland. Eventually the rest of the family also immigrated to the United States from their home in Tijuana, Mexico, to escape the influence of the socio-economic changes on their children, specifically the gang activity.

Rafael's father, also named Rafael, worked as a mechanic, and his mother Rosa took in laundry before coming to America. Once in San Diego, Rosa got a job as a housekeeper at the nearby hospital. Rafael and his siblings, sisters Icela and Karen, and brother Ricardo, thrived in San Diego. They did well in school and became model citizens, even before gaining citizenship. Their father was killed tragically in his workplace when a truck he was working on rolled and pinned him down, leaving Rafael, the oldest son, as head of the household.

Rafael graduated from **Morse High School** in San Diego in 1997. During his high school years, he participated in weightlifting and other athletics. A Marine Corps recruiter visited the high school and approached Rafael, who was then inspired to become a legal resident and join the military. After graduation, he attended **San Diego City College** while working as a crew leader for the **California Conservation Corps** from 1998 to 1999. In 2000, when Rafael received his **Green Card**, he joined the United States Marine Corps on the day it arrived. It came as no surprise to his family, when Rafael, while serving in the Marines, and prior to deployment to Iraq, became a naturalized United States citizen.

Upon joining the Marine Corps Rafael completed Basic Training and then framed his Boot Camp graduation certificate, adding it to the wall in his bedroom. In 2004 he reenlisted and was in Iraq, waiting for the attack on Fallujah to begin. He wrote two letters home during that time, one to each of his younger siblings.



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To his younger brother Ricardo, he said to *“never feel lonely or sad. Just think about God and we will be together again. If anything happens to me, just remember I lived my life to the fullest and I am happy with what I lived.”* To his younger sister Karen, he wrote to do well in school and to continue her karate lessons. The letters arrived the day after a Navy Chaplain and several Marines arrived at the family’s home to notify them of Rafael’s death.

Rosa Peralta was at work when the Casualty Notification Team visited her home. Ricardo spoke with the Military representatives, and it came as no surprise to him when they told him of his brother’s heroic death. He called and told Rosa to come home immediately. When presented with the news that her son, Rafael, was dead, she was distraught and ordered the Marines to leave her home.

In a *Los Angeles Times* article from December 26, 2005, Rosa recalled what Rafael had told her: *“I want you to be strong and take care of my brother and sisters because I don’t know if I’ll return.”* She feared he was right. Then, in the letter to Ricardo, Rafael told his brother of the plans for the attack and wrote: *“Watch the news. Be proud of me, bro. I’m going to do something I always wanted to do. You should be proud of being an American. Our father came to this country and became a citizen because it was the right place for our family to be.”*

The *Second Battle of Fallujah* was an American-led offensive during the Global War on Terror, codenamed *Operation al-Fajr*, translating to *“The Dawn.”* As part of the Iraq War, it began on November 7, 2004, and continued until December 23, about six



weeks later. Also known as *Operation Phantom Fury*, it was not fought against the Ba’athist Iraqi government, but against the Iraqi insurgency. The United States, Iraqi Interim Government, and the United Kingdom joined forces in the military effort.

Seven months had passed since the *First Battle of Fallujah*, and during that time insurgents had killed four employees of Blackwater, a

private military contractor, and circulated pictures of their mutilated bodies around the world, infuriating the leaders of the coalition.

Operation al-Fajr was an attempt to eliminate the insurgents, led by the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Army. The *Second Battle of Fallujah* became notable as the heaviest urban combat and the single bloodiest battle of the entire conflict for the American troops. What had been previously described as “*pockets of resistance*” proved to be an uprising of rebels revolting against the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the Iraqi government.

Over four thousand enemy insurgents fought from trenches, tunnels, and booby-trapped homes, using rockets, machine guns, and explosive devices. Casualties among the insurgents were high with two thousand dead and fifteen hundred captured. The Coalition forces suffered one hundred and ten killed and more than six hundred wounded. Half of the city of Fallujah was demolished, with over seven hundred civilians dead as a result of the fighting.

The battle proved to be the heaviest urban combat since the *Battle of Hue City* during the Vietnam War’s 1968 *Tet Offensive*. There, although the Allies declared a military victory, it came at a cost of many lives. The *City of Hue* was devastated, with over five thousand civilians killed and over two thousand executed by the communist forces. U.S. and allied forces suffered six hundred sixty-eight dead, and three 3,707 wounded, while the enemy forces lost between 1,042 and 5,133 killed in action.

Thirteen thousand or more United States, British, and Iraqi forces were ordered to fight in the forty-six-day *Operation al-Fajr* or *Phantom Fury*. During the days leading up to the battle, preparations were made, and efforts were taken, to reduce the threat of insurgent insurrection. Houses where weapons were being stored and insurgents were being hidden, were raided and cleared, but not without a toll on the Allied forces. After the battle, Fallujah was controlled by an Iraqi-run security force that began preparing their defenses by collecting weapons and preparing complex plans for defense.

Sergeant Peralta was a perimeter scout serving as a Platoon Guide with 1st Platoon, Company A, First Battalion, Third Marines, Regimental Combat Team 7, FIRST Marine Division. In the three days prior to November 15, 2004, scores of houses had been cleared of weapons and

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insurgents. Instead of continuing to wait for the battle to begin, Sergeant Peralta volunteered to join a squad that was under-strength, Alpha Company, First Battalion, Third Marine Regiment, THIRD Marine Division, also volunteering to stand post during the night of November 14 so the other Marines could get some rest. It came as no surprise since Sergeant Peralta had a reputation as a non-commissioned officer and leader who always put his Marines' needs ahead of his own.

On the morning of November 15, 2003, Sergeant Peralta accompanied his platoon on "*search and attack*" operations. As a scout, assigned to perimeter security, Peralta was not required to participate, but as a Marine, he held himself to the standard of "*always loyal*," being there for his brothers in arms, **Simper Fidelis**. The platoon had been fighting a close-contact battle in the previous days and needed support.

Upon entering the seventh house, which appeared to be empty, Peralta, as the point man, opened a door in the back of the house where three insurgents were hiding. They emerged, firing their AK-47s, placing the squad instantly under close-range, intense automatic weapons fire. The squad returned fire with their M-16 rifles and automatic weapons, wounding one of the insurgents.

Trying to move out of the line of fire during the initial exchange, Sergeant Peralta was shot several times in the chest and once in the head; mortally wounded, he fell to the floor. The insurgents were making their way out of the building and threw a "*yellow, foreign-made, oval-shaped*" fragmentation grenade towards the squad, according to eyewitnesses of the incident described in a *Los Angeles Times* December 26, 2005, article. The grenade landed near Peralta's head with a thud, a sound every combat soldier recognizes as an incoming explosive.

Lance Corporal Travis J. Kaemmerer, a combat correspondent from the 1st Force Service Support Group assigned to the battalion, was present and witnessed Sergeant Peralta reach out and pulled the grenade under his body. Once again, it came as no surprise when he tucked it beneath himself and absorbed the brunt of the blast as it exploded. His fellow Marines were within arms-length of him as he shielded them from the explosion. One Marine was injured, and four others were able to escape safely as a result of Sergeant Peralta's actions.

After the grenade exploded, the house was ablaze. The Marines regrouped outside to plan a second assault. The Marines killed three

insurgents who tried to flee the scene. Within minutes, as Sergeant Peralta was being evacuated to a field hospital, he succumbed to his wounds.

Sergeant Peralta's family said it came as no surprise that he led from the front, that he was a hero, and that he was killed saving his brothers in arms. After the battle, as they had time to process the events, Marines spoke of Sergeant Peralta to one another: *"You're still here. Tell your kids, your grandkids, what Sergeant Peralta did for you and other Marines today,"* Lance Corporal Richard A. Mason said to Lance Corporal Travis J. Kaemmerer.

Kaemmerer said: *"Most of the Marines in the house were in the immediate area of the grenade. Every one of us is grateful and will never forget the second chance at life Sergeant Peralta gave us. If he hadn't done what he did, a lot of us wouldn't be seeing our families again."*

In gratitude for Sergeant Peralta's response in the face of danger, Garry Morrison, the father of Lance Corporal Adam Morrison, said in a trembling voice during a phone call from Seattle, Washington: *"He saved my son and every Marine in that room. I just know one thing: God has a special place in heaven for Sergeant Peralta."*

Other Marines, and other Marine family members, expressed gratitude and respect for Sergeant Peralta. Becky Dyer, wife of Corporal Brannon Dyer, in a phone call from Honolulu, expressed her thoughts: *"The Bible says it all: 'No greater love hath no man than to give his life for another.' My husband and I both feel that way. That's how the whole company feels about Sergeant Peralta."*

Corporal Robert Reynolds, from Peralta's squad said Peralta sacrificed himself because *"he wanted to make sure we all went home. If he wouldn't have scooped up the grenade, the other three of us in the room that day would have been killed."*

The Marines present in the house all gave similar versions of the incident, without contradiction, concerning Sergeant Peralta's action in response to the thud of the grenade. *"He reached out, pulled it to himself, and tucked it under his"* -- one said *"chest"* and one said *"belly."* It was a minor detail in the grand scheme of things, but unfortunately, it was enough to cause some to doubt the story, and others to protest Sergeant Peralta's nomination for the Medal of Honor.

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Saying Peralta was not able to make a conscious decision to “*pull the grenade to him and tuck it under his body*” is like saying he suddenly forgot to be a Marine. Peralta was a Marine to the core. His entire body was trained to exhibit an autonomic response in a situation such as that. The sound of a grenade would have triggered that response.

Joseph A. Blake, of Fairborn, Ohio, a sociologist who researched acts of soldiers throwing themselves on grenades, said that kind of sacrifice is more likely seen in close knit groups. “*A combat situation has not a whole lot to do with patriotism or the folks back home. They are fighting for their buddies. They don’t want to let their buddies down.*” He described the act as a choice made to aid and support one’s comrades, an automatic response to the knowledge that the blast will kill one’s brothers or sisters in arms.

When Sergeant Rafael Peralta’s body was returned to San Diego for burial, with gunshot wounds to the head and chest and badly mangled from the grenade blast, the only feature the family could identify was his Marine Corps tattoo on his left shoulder. Peralta is buried at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego, California.



AFTERMATH AND HONORS

Three years after his death, Sergeant Peralta was recommended for the Medal of Honor, and when the process was complete, that recommendation was denied. He was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.



The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to Sergeant Rafael Peralta, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Platoon Guide with 1st Platoon, Company A, First Battalion, Third Marines, Regimental Combat Team 7, FIRST Marine Division, in action against Anti-Coalition Forces in support of Operation

AL FAJAR, in Fallujah, Iraq, on 15 November 2004. Clearing scores of houses in the previous three days, Sergeant Peralta asked to join an under-strength squad and volunteered to stand post the night of 14 November, allowing fellow Marines more time to rest. The following morning, during search and attack operations, while clearing the seventh house of the day, the point man opened a door to a back room and immediately came under intense, close-range automatic weapons fire from multiple insurgents. The squad returned fire, wounding one insurgent. While attempting to maneuver out of the line of fire, Sergeant Peralta was shot and fell mortally wounded. After the initial exchange of gunfire, the insurgents broke contact, throwing a fragmentation grenade as they fled the building. The grenade came to rest near Sergeant Peralta's head. Without hesitation and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, Sergeant Peralta reached out and pulled the grenade to his body, absorbing the brunt of the blast and shielding fellow Marines only feet away. Sergeant Peralta succumbed to his wounds. By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty, Sergeant Peralta reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Disappointed, Peralta's family refused to accept the award, drawing some criticism from uninformed members of the public. Despite those who disparaged the family, they received an outpouring of support. Members of the media, politicians, and other supporters began to campaign for another review. Supporting the family and publicly sharing the story of the heroic actions of Sergeant Peralta became their means of protesting the unsavory decision.

The United States Marine Corps made the story of Rafael Peralta and his heroic action a part of their Basic Training program for new recruits. Used as an example of how a Marine responds in combat, every Marine hears his story, the story of a fellow Marine, a fellow American, a fellow Hispanic, making the decision to give his life to save his brothers or sisters in arms.

In May 2007, The History Channel released a documentary about Sergeant Peralta that included members of his family and his platoon, sharing their grief and their pride about his sacrifice to save his comrades. The show was titled *An Act of Honor*. A fellow Marine, Sergeant Catcher Cuts-the-Rope, a Native American, described Peralta after the *First Battle of Falluja*: *"He still had that wild look in his eye – fresh out of a fight. But he wasn't scared or anything like that."*

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With the death benefits she received, Rosa Peralta was able to purchase a home in Chula Vista, California. Sergeant Peralta continues to be able to indirectly provide for his mother and family. His premonition that he would not make it home from Iraq was also portrayed in the documentary. In Iraq, he had requested to be baptized by a chaplain, and the movie showed this taking place in a baptismal pool fashioned from boxes and plastic liner. His brother, Ricardo, told of Rafael's promise to enlist in the Marines.

At Rafael's funeral, Ricardo stood by the casket, touched his brother's hand, and promised to follow in his footsteps. Rafael had asked him before to commit to joining, but Ricardo had not, so he said he hoped Rafael, wherever he is in the hereafter, knows and is proud of his choice. Ricardo did join the Marines in July 2010, days after he graduated from high school. He served in Afghanistan during his tour of duty.



Ricardo and his sister Karen both attended the Marine Corps program for teenagers called the *Devil Pups*. Glimpses into the program as well as into bootcamp and other Marine activities made the documentary a video diary, portraying Peralta's life, and showing him as a high-spirited, natural leader, who put his men's lives ahead of his own.

In September 2008, a California Congressional delegation requested that President Bush award the Medal of Honor posthumously to Sergeant Peralta, comparing it to a similar case where the Medal of Honor was awarded. The request was denied on the basis that medical analysis concluded Peralta was already clinically dead from friendly fire and that his bodily actions were involuntary movements. U.S. Representative Duncan Hunter, himself a Marine Corps veteran of service in Iraq and Afghanistan, continued to lobby on behalf of Peralta and his family, requesting reviews and keeping the story in the forefront.

When in 2011, the Navy announced they would name a ship after Cesar Chavez, a farmworker activist, they were highly criticized by Representative Duncan Hunter, a member of the House Armed Services Committee. He recommended the Navy select a more appropriate candidate, such as Sergeant Rafael Peralta. The Navy did not comment right away but in 2015, announced a ship would be named for Peralta.

Unwavering, Rosa stood strong in an attempt to have her son's award upgraded to the Medal of Honor. In fact, she respectfully declined to accept the Navy Cross for years. The case to review the Navy Cross for upgrade to the Medal of Honor was reopened in 2012 by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, and after review by Defense Secretary Panetta, was not overturned. The Navy Cross, second highest award for valor in combat, was awarded in recognition of his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty. The family again chose not to accept the medal at that time.

On February 24, 2014, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article written by Tony Perry which included what he called a "*twist in the debate*" over the Medal of Honor nomination for Peralta. Perry quoted a story in the *Washington Post* that alleged Marines who were present with Peralta had embellished their stories to make Peralta sound like a hero, and that Peralta may have been killed by friendly fire. There was speculation that the Marines "*concocted a false statement*," something that was vehemently denied by Nicholas Jones, Robert Reynold, Steve Sebby, other Marines who were serving with Peralta.

Names were listed, bickering continued, and in the end, the Navy and Marine Corps version of the events continued to remain consistent, with Peralta pulling the grenade under his body to shield his fellow Marines. Terms like proof beyond a reasonable doubt began to be thrown around and there was an inspection of Peralta's rifle and body armor. In the end, the award of the Medal of Honor was still denied, with some claiming it may have been race or status related, referring to Peralta arriving as an undocumented person when he came to the United States. The Medal of Honor was awarded to Army Florent A. Groberg, an immigrant, but the difference was, Groberg immigrated the United States from France, legally. The historian who is widely regarded as the foremost authority on military awards said publicly that it seemed during the War on Terrorism, that the "*Military services were 'cherry picking' Medal of Honor recipients, looking beyond their actions to avoid making the award to any person who might be controversial or who had unwanted baggage.*" Rafael Peralta's illegal entry to the U.S. may have figured in.

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On June 8, 2015, eleven years after the event in Afghanistan that took the life of Sergeant Peralta, Rosa Peralta accepted the Navy Cross on his behalf in a ceremony at Camp Pendleton, California. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus presented the award, reading from the citation which described Peralta's lifesaving, self-sacrifice

noting, *"This man protected his Marines, he protected his country, he protected the values we all hold so dear up to the moment of his final breath."*

Throughout the ceremony, others connected to Sergeant Peralta were given the opportunity to speak. His brother, Ricardo, was first. Speaking on behalf of his family, Ricardo said: *"Nothing can replace the sense of pride they have for Rafael and his actions. Regardless of any sort of award, buildings or ships being named after him, it doesn't take away from the sense of pride that we all share. Those of us that have worked beside him and worn the uniform have a sense of pride and nothing can take that away. In the end, Navy Cross, Medal of Honor, it doesn't matter. It's all good."*

Ricardo told the audience that his brother would not have cared about medals or awards, only about serving as an infantryman. Staff Sergeant Adam Morrison, present in the house with Peralta when the grenade exploded, said that if it were not for Peralta's actions that day, he would have received fatal injuries. He went on to say: *"Because of Rafael Peralta, my father is now the grandfather of three boys."* Peralta's family acknowledged the support given by the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps, thanking them for continuing the legacy of Sergeant Peralta. His rifle and body armor are now on display in the Marine Corps Museum.

In October 2015, an Arleigh-Burke Class destroyer was named in honor of Sergeant Peralta, christened the *U.S.S. Rafael Peralta* by his



mother, first in English then in Spanish after smashing a bottle of champagne against the bow. According to Scot Christenson of the U.S. Naval Institute, Naval historians believe that, at the time of the christening, the U.S.S. *Rafael Peralta* was the first U.S. Navy warship to be named for someone who was born in Mexico.

The family said that naming the vessel after Peralta helped to ease the bitterness of the rejection for the Medal of Honor. Ricardo, on behalf of Rosa, said she finally felt something was done that represented Rafael's spirit, giving her peace of mind and a complete change of heart. Rosa planned to present the Navy Cross medal to the Skipper of the U.S.S. *Rafael Peralta*, to be kept on board. Quoting the former commanding officer of Peralta's Battalion, the Hawaii based "*Lava Dogs*" of First Battalion, Third Marines, General Robert Neller, Marine Corps Commandant on hand for the christening, said: "*He believed more about the goodness of America than most Americans, to the point of fighting and sacrificing everything for what America stands for.*"

Commander Brian Ribota added that the crew of the warship would strive to honor Peralta's legacy saying: "*He's the true American Story of immigrating to the United States and loving this place so much that he sacrificed his life for all.*" He said that he and his crew of three hundred would strive to "*honor the legacy of a Marine who loved his country.*" Icela, Rafael's sister, said of the ship: "*It's going to be strong. I feel like it's going to carry his spirit.*" His mother, Rosa Peralta, said "*I'm proud of him, but my heart is sad.*"

Initially, Rosa was distraught with feelings that this was punishment from God, although she did not know why. The family had suffered the loss of her husband in September 2001, followed by the loss of Sgt. Peralta's fiancée, Maritca Alvarez, who was killed in a car accident in December 2003 when she returned to Mexico to attend her mother's funeral. Ironically, since Maritca's death, Rafael had experienced a recurring dream about her. In the dream she would tell him she was going to take him with her. He felt it was a premonition of his death. Icela said he was "*ready to die. He had reconciled with God.*"

Rafa, as Rafael was called by some of his friends and family, was known for his good heart, for being a "*stand-up*" kind of guy. Friends commented that he was the kind of guy that would give you the shirt off his back, so it came as no surprise that he gave his life for five other

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Marines. His former squad leader, Luke Morgan said *"He was always reliable. When everyone else was always complaining, he always seemed OK with things. He truly was a Marine and anyone who served with him is proud to have. Rest in peace, PG. Simper Fidelis."* Comments such as *"I'm a better man for knowing him"* and *"Don't feel sad for him, respect him. He did what he did because that is who he is"* were published in the *Los Angeles Times'* webpage *"Remembering California's War Dead."*

In January 2016, Representative Duncan Hunter pushed Congress to review certain combat-valor medals for upgrades. Based on the eyewitness accounts, both the Marine Corps and the Navy Department had supported the recommendation for Sergeant Peralta to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Three successive Defense Secretaries, Robert Gates, Leon Panetta, and Chuck Hagel, rejected the nomination for the Medal of Honor, and others raised questions about whether Peralta was shot by friendly fire. The question of Marines who were present embellishing their accounts of the incident came up again. Still others protested that Peralta was not fully conscious when he pulled the grenade under him. Once again, an upgrade to the Medal of Honor was rejected by then Defense Secretary Robert Gates saying Peralta was not conscious of the act he performed.

Acknowledging what he felt was inconsistency in the award of the Medal of Honor, Navy Cross, and Silver Star, Marine General Joseph Dunsford told DoDLive blog that Peralta deserved the Medal of Honor based on the heroism he displayed. Dunsford supported the request by Defense Secretary Ash Carter to review all the service crosses and Silver Stars awarded since September 11, 2001, for consistent standards in the selection and award process.

For the purpose of determining Medal of Honor awards, there is a Recommendation Process that must be followed. Even years later, an event can be reviewed with additional resources that may have come available, and decisions overturned, allowing a medal to be upgraded or downgraded as indicated. Since the Medal of Honor was first awarded, at least sixty-one Hispanics have received it. Thirteen Hispanic Marines have received the Medal of Honor, the first during the Boxer Rebellion. Two Hispanic Navy men, and forty-six Hispanic Army men have received the award. Forty-two of the sixty-one Medals of Honor were presented

posthumously. The Hispanic community has the highest percentage of Medal of Honor recipients relative to their percentage of the population.

During the Global War on Terror, five Marines of Hispanic descent received the Navy Cross in recognition of their courage, honor, and commitment to the United States of America by 2022. One had arrived in the United States illegally, and at the time they earned the award, all five were naturalized citizens of the United States.

Two men received the Medal of Honor for action that involved falling or jumping to cover a grenade in the act of saving their fellow soldiers. Both lived through their ordeals, and neither were immigrants. At this time, a total of fifteen Medals of Honor have been given for actions in the Global War on Terror, with other nominations under review.

According to statistics provided by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an independent, non-profit organization, twenty-two percent of the Medal of Honor awards given since the Civil War, have gone to immigrants. Some received the award soon after the action in which they earned it, while others were honored many years later. Data from a report provided by **Military.com** from 2020, states that three hundred foreign-born soldiers died in combat from 2001-2013. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, casualties in Iran and Afghanistan included immigrants from the Philippines, Mexico, South Korea, Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, Vietnam, Scotland, and Australia. The second U.S. military casualty in Afghanistan, Jose Gutierrez, was a soldier who came to America from Mexico at age 14, undocumented and alone. By age 22 he was a U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal, fighting in *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, and was posthumously awarded U.S. Citizenship by the federal government.

An article on americasvoice.org, posted July 1, 2025, reports that the most recent estimate from data collected in 2022 for the number of immigrants serving in the United States Armed Forces was forty-five thousand on active duty with five thousand legal permanent residents enlisting each year. Since 2002, the USCIS reports that over one hundred eighty-seven thousand immigrants have become naturalized citizens through military service since 2002, adding that in FY 2024, sixteen thousand two hundred and ninety service members were naturalized, an increase of 34% from the previous year. The Philippines, Jamaica, Mexico, Nigeria, and Ghana have been the top five countries of birth for service members who became naturalized since 2020.

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Where do we go from here? Rafael Peralta's family accepted the bittersweet Navy Cross award, a ship has been named in his honor, his brother served in his footsteps, and his comrades have recognized he saved their lives. But Sergeant Peralta has not received the highest award commensurate with the actions he exhibited on November 15, 2004.

Not because he came to America alone and illegally, a non-citizen from Mexico, and not because he joined the Marines as a permanent resident with a Green Card, and not because he was a Hispanic Naturalized Citizen through the expedited process for Military Servicemen, but because he was a United States Marine Corps combat soldier, killed in action, who automatically and without hesitation gave his life for his fellow-Marines, that Sergeant Peralta has earned the prestige associated with the Medal of Honor, regardless of the medal awarded.

In the future, his case will come up again, and be reviewed again, hopefully with eyes willing to see his actions for what they were. Peralta's choice to sacrifice himself for others will come as no surprise; it will be seen as the choice he made when he hung his Marine Corps Graduation Certificate on the wall of the bedroom in his family's home in the United States of America.



Rosa and Karen Peralta at Rafael's gravesite

Moving forward, as diversity in the Armed Forces and in everyday life becomes the accepted norm, we may no longer speak of the Hispanic, the Japanese American, the African American, or the woman that did this or that, but of the person, without adjectives or descriptions other than brave, heroic, undauntedly courageous, with honor and intrepidity, terms that can be used to describe any, if not all, of our United States Armed Forces soldiers, sailors and Marines.

MEET THE AUTHORS

SCOTT BARON

Scott Baron is the author of eighteen books on American military history including *They Also Served, Forged in Fire*, and *Forgotten No More*, and wrote a column for "Stars and Stripes" on celebrities who served in the military. He is a Vietnam-era veteran and former law enforcement officer who has spent the last twenty-one years as a U.S. history teacher. He has a master's degree in teaching and lives in California with Marisela, his wife of forty-three years.



MARIO BIRLOCHO

My name is Mario but I sign my work Birlocho, I am an Ecuadorian artist, born in a small city named Portoviejo. I love to draw sexy girls, adding a bit of humor in the process, and it has turned out into a full time job. When I was a kid, I dreamed of drawing using nothing but computers. Grandma used to say I was "wasting my life." I like to see life through what I like to call "my vision." The main victims of that so-called vision are my characters "Mabú & Lorenzo", the topic of my stories are parodies of world class pop culture through the eyes of a girl from a small city in a coast province in a Sudamerican country . . . and her cat.



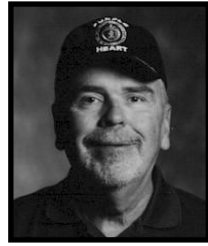
JAMES G. FAUSONE, ESQ.

Jim Fausone has been a lawyer for four decades and a veteran advocate since going to law school on the GI Bill. He founded Legal Help for Veterans, PLLC; is a podcast host for VeteransRadio.net; and maintains HomeofHeroes.com a website dedicated to Medal of Honor recipients. He is a board member of Michigan Military and Veterans Hall of Honor. A former Lt.(j.g.) in NOAA Corps, he graduated from the University of Michigan College of Engineering and Gonzaga University School of Law. He has co-authored the books *How to Get into a Military Academy*; *Answers to Common Veteran Disability Questions*, and *Vietnam Stories - Best of Veterans Radio*. He has hosted the largest and longest Veterans Summit in SE Michigan for a dozen years getting information out to veterans about benefits and health care. He is married to his college sweetheart, a nurse and fellow veteran advocate, Brigadier General Carol Ann Fausone (ret.) USAF/Michigan ANG.



JIM FURLONG

James "Jim" Furlong was a combat infantryman in Vietnam. Serving with Company B, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. Jim was wounded and earned a Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism. After the war, Jim returned home and continued his education receiving his master's degree in Economics from the University of Denver. He started working in the private sector for large computer manufacturers selling integrated services to highly classified government installations. Now retired, Jim is frequently asked to speak about the war, focusing not on his personal experiences but giving voice "to those who will always be twenty-one" in our hearts.



CARLOS GARCIA

I am Carlos Garcia (Bobby). I am the eldest son of Macario Garcia. It means a lot to my family that 52 yrs this Christmas Eve. People are still remembering and talking about my Dad. And many other Recipients. I am Retired from the Education System of Texas. And now live in Leesville La. And work now on Ft Polk. Again, thanks for all the respect and acknowledgement of CMS Macario Garcia.



COLIN KIMBALL

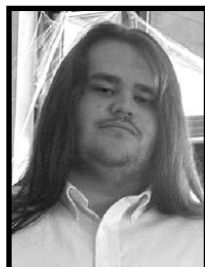
Colin Kimball of McKinney, Texas, served in the U.S. Air Force as a weather radar technician in the post-Vietnam era and used the GI Bill to attain a bachelor's and master's degree in Geology. Growing up as an Air Force brat, he became the "man of the house" when his father served in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970. He was haunted by the loss of the fathers of neighboring friends as well as his childhood best friend and older brother figure, PFC Franklin D. Lacey, USMC, who was killed in at Khe Sanh in 1968. Our nation's rush to forget the war and those who served in it disturbed him for decades. This experience, as well as the negative feelings from the public towards our military after Vietnam that he experienced when he served, inspired him to begin painting portraits of our nation's heroes so that their legacies would not be forgotten. Beginning with Frankie, whose portrait hangs in his mother's home and who has a local ballpark named after him, Colin founded the North Texas Fallen Warrior Portrait in 2013. To date it has placed seventy-nine portraits of local fallen warriors and law enforcement officers on permanent display in the Russell A. Steindam Courts Building in his home county of Collin County, Texas, north of Dallas. Kimball was also influential in persuading the local county commissioners to name their courthouse after 1st Lt Russell A. Steindam, a local



hero who received a posthumous Medal of Honor in Vietnam. An avid historian, he uses his portraits as a vehicle to tell the stories of our military and law enforcement heroes. Colin has completed hundreds of portraits and his work is displayed in homes nationwide and at military and public institutions from Vicenza, Italy, Quantico, Virginia, to the University of Texas.

WYATT KOPKE

Meet Wyatt Kopkie a history and politics enthusiast with a passion for American history and video games. He was born on March 21, 2005, in Tucson, Arizona and he was raised in the small and quaint community of Vail, Arizona. He recently graduated from Pantano High School in October 2023, and is ready to embark on the next chapter of his academic journey. Excitingly, he is a student at Pima Community College .



XAVIER LUNDIN

Xavier Lundin is a recent Arizona State University graduate earning dual degrees in English Literature alongside Film and Media Studies. Growing up as a military brat, he was surrounded by many military heroes of his own and given the opportunity to travel the world. Currently living in Florida, he is pursuing further education in his fields of study.



DEBBIE MAULDING

Debbie Maulding is a retired Registered Nurse who specialized in Hemodialysis and Care Management. She began writing articles for the school newspaper during elementary school, and published a small book of poetry while in high school. She has had poems, letters and short stories published in magazines, newspapers and collaborative books. In March 2002, she received the International Poet of Merit Award from the International Society of Poets for a poem titled "Silver Threads ." Her interest in World War II and American History led to her willingness to participate in the Beyond Belief: True Stories of Colorado Heroes that Defy Comprehension project. Debbie grew up in the Panhandle of Florida and spent most of her life there. She now makes her home in Fruita, Colorado, where she is an active participant in many local events and enjoys spending time with family and friends.



C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Doug Sterner is a decorated, two-tour veteran of the Vietnam War. For the last thirty years he has compiled the largest and most complete database of U.S. Military Award citations, curates the *Military Times* HALL OF VALOR, and has become recognized as one of America's foremost authorities of military awards and American military heroes. A life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, he is one of only two Americans in history to be granted Honorary, Life-Time Membership in the Legion of Valor. He has written scores of articles on U.S. military heroes for periodicals, contributed to *Chicken Soup for the Veteran's Soul*, and authored more than seventy-five reference books of award citations. His books can be found at www.herobooks.store. Doug makes his home in Pueblo, Colorado, a city he and his wife were instrumental in being officially designated as "America's Home of Heroes."



PAMLA M. STERNER

Pamla Sterner is an author, speaker, and public performer. As a ventriloquist and stand-up comic, she has authored numerous books related to these arts. She has a comedy company, Pueblo Pfunny, which she promotes on Facebook. With her husband she has written non-fiction works including the couples' 500+ page treatise on Baby Boomers titled *The Defining Generation*. In 2004, as a political science student at Colorado State University-Pueblo, she wrote a paper for a class assignment that is the basis for the landmark Stolen Valor Act, passed by Congress in 2006, struck down by SCOTUS in 2012, and revised and nearly unanimously passed by Congress the following year. In her hometown of Pueblo, Colorado, she is best known for her efforts to honor and recognize Medal of Honor recipients, and as the driving force behind her city being named "America's Home of Heroes."



PETER A. STONEFIELD

Peter Stonefield is an Aerospace Engineering Consultant and has worked extensively with both the commercial aviation industry and the U.S. military in many capacities. As a businessman, he has long supported our military men and women through fund-raising and other philanthropic efforts including serving on the Board of Directors of several non-profits as well as being an Honorary Board Member at the Woody Williams Foundation. His interests include writing, flying, scuba diving, golfing, sport fishing and traveling. Peter currently resides in Charleston, SC, is



married to Anna Stonefield and has three sons; Morgan, William and Cameron.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN

Dwight Jon Zimmerman is an award-winning, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author. In a career spanning more than forty years he has written everything from comic books (for Marvel Comics and DC Comics) to hundreds of military history articles and more than two dozen books. His book *First Command*, about the first commands of famous generals, was an award-winning documentary aired on the Military Channel. He co-authored *Uncommon Valor: The Medal of Honor and the Warriors Who Earned It in Afghanistan and Iraq* which won the Military Writer Society of America's Founder's Award, the organization's highest honor, and was the first book to contain the complete history of the Medal of Honor. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.



Visit My Website

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U.S. MILITARY HERO BOOKS

81 HERO BOOKS

23 Million Words

37,500+ Pages

If someone had told me that these numbers would define my life-work, I'd have never believed it possible. It was certainly nothing I planned.

More than two decades ago I began building a website (www.homeofheroes.com*) and developing a database containing the citations for the highest valor awards to American Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. Fortunately I had the *shoulders* of great historians like Harry Stringer (WWI), Jane Blakeney (Marine Corps) and above all, the late Colonel Albert Gleim, to stand on.

I understand the passion of these great historians because I felt the same drive and passion to insure that the accounts of men and women who have received our highest combat decoration should never be "lost to history".

The military services neither track awards or compile award citations for any award other than the Medal of Honor. Two decades ago I began the seemingly impossible mission of fixing that problem. Unfortunately, my efforts including testimony before Congress, have failed to get a positive official response to the need for a comprehensive database of highly decorated American heroes.

I have estimated that somewhere near 350,000 awards above the Bronze Star have been awarded in history. My two decades of research has identified 200,000 of these, including 95% of all who received awards of the Silver Star or higher. I have compiled and digitized more than 80,000 of these awards including the citations for every Medal of Honor, Marine Corps Brevet Medal, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, and 85% of the Distinguished Service Crosses.

When I began this project in the early 1990s there were very few books available, even related to the Medal of Honor. In recent years much has been published about the Medal of Honor and recipients of that award, but other highly decorated Americans are vastly overlooked. I am determined to change that. In addition to continued research and digitizing of citations, over the last few years I have begun to these citation compendiums available in print form. It is my way of insuring that my decades of research and work "outlive me."

Feel free to click through the various pages of this, my new website. You are sure to find books that will interest you. In fact, not infrequently have individuals found a friend or relative listed in the database I curate for "Military Times" (<https://valor.militarytimes.com/>) that did not even know that person had received such high awards. In a couple of instances, I have heard from combat veterans who found themselves listed for awards as high as the Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star, who themselves, never knew they had received that high accolade.

These cases, and the fact that I know that these heroes will live on in history, is what motivates me. If all these books become my legacy, I will be satisfied to know I did my best and accomplished something important.



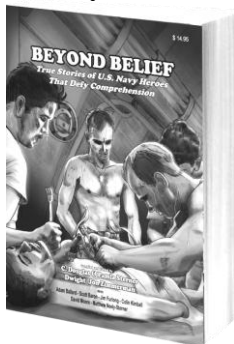
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BEYOND BELIEF

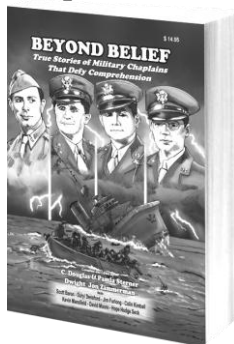
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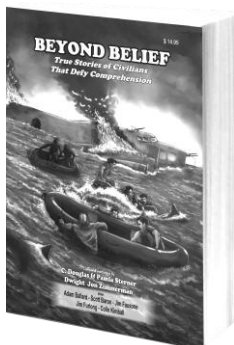
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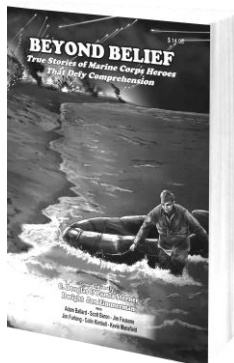
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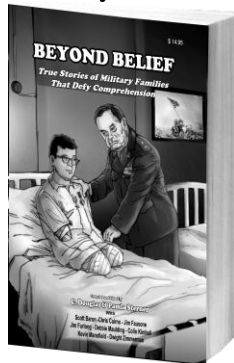
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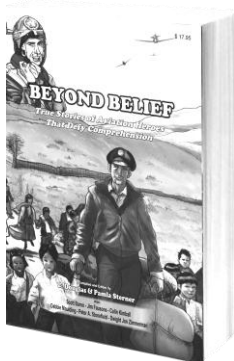
Marine Heroes



Military Families



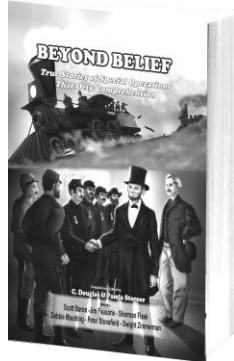
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Great Escapes



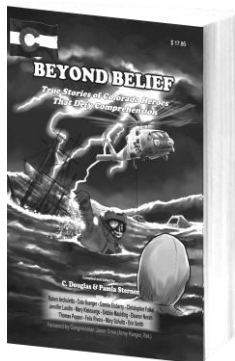
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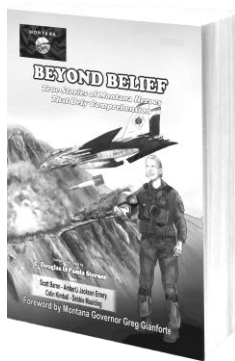
Beyond Belief

STATE BOOKS

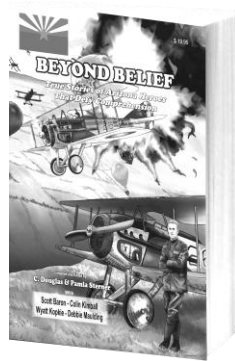
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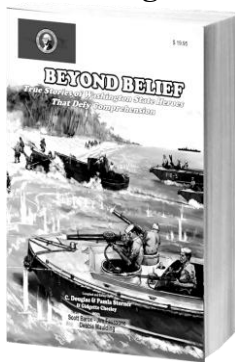
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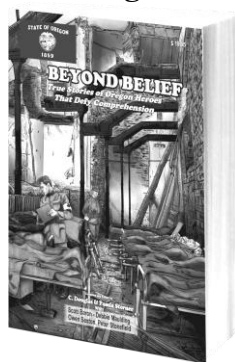
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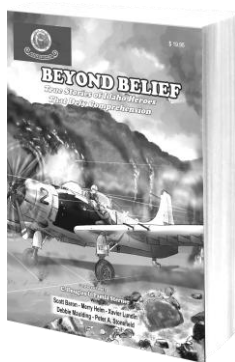
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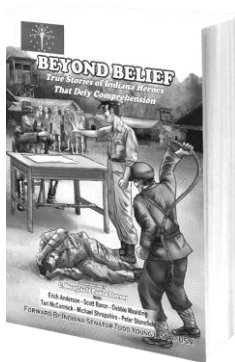
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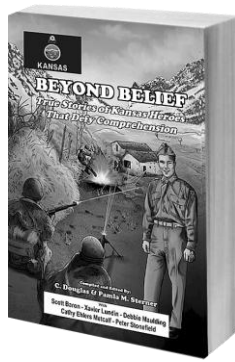
Idaho



Indiana



Kansas



BEYOND WOKE



The Diversity of U.S. Military Heroes

Beyond Woke: The Diversity of U.S. Military Heroes is a book for our time. It details the inspiring and often emotional stories of some of our nation's most overlooked heroes: women, ethnic minorities, and immigrants. These are stories unknown to many, forgotten by some, and biographies some want to dismiss from our history.

Compiled by a team of historian/authors, these inspiring, true, and often emotionally-charged stories detail the lives, military service, and heroic actions of more than 100 heroes who rose to the defense of their native nation, or in many cases, their adopted homeland.

From civilian women who served as men in the American Revolution and Civil War, to women serving in uniform with men in our most recent wars, theirs is a legacy of service to be honored and emulated. The role of Black, Yellow, and Brown heroes, some of whom were citizens of other nations who made their homes here, is nothing short of admirable; their contribution is unmatched in this country, the "Melting Pot" of the world.