



Valor Medals Review Task Force: Summary and Objectives

Executive Summary:

- There have been reviews of the military's process for awarding valor medals to ensure fair treatment of ethnic minority veterans who served in all US wars of the twentieth century after World War I, but not for that conflict.
- Modern studies of World War I veterans who were unjustly denied Medals of Honor have focused on specific individuals at the expense of others who are probably equally deserving. The only systematic review was done in 1919, and made demonstrable mistakes (for example, it recommended no African Americans from World War I receive the Medal of Honor; subsequently two have).
- The goal of the Valor Medals Review Task Force is to conduct research to provide the "state-of-play" and generate recommendations for Congress and/or the Department of Defense to actualize.
- The Task Force's efforts are officially endorsed by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The World War One Centennial Commission, and faculty from several major research universities.

Established by Resolution of the United States World War I Centennial Commission on June 20th, 2018, the Valor Medals Review Task Force is a group of volunteers who have convened to advocate for an investigation into veterans of the First World War who, in spite of deserving deeds, may have been unjustly denied high-level valor awards owing to their minority backgrounds. Currently, the Task Force includes members of the Commission, faculty members at New York University and Park University, two retired Major Generals, a historian of the Medal of Honor, and a supporting group of researchers.

The Task Force's first success was coordinating the introduction of a bill by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Dean Heller (R-NV) calling for a Congressional Gold Medal to be awarded to the "Hello Girls" female switchboard operators in World War One. Subsequently, the Task Force has concentrated on efforts to authorize a systematic review of minority servicemembers of WWI who may have been denied the nation's highest valor medals owing to racial bias. In particular, servicemembers worthy of a Medal of Honor may have been downgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross or received only a French Croix de Guerre with Palms.

While the United States military conducted a review of Medal of Honor awards to minority servicemembers in WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and all subsequent American wars, no such systematic review has ever been made for minority veterans of the First World War. Likewise, the awards of a Medal of Honor to Corporal Freddie Stowers in 1991 and Sergeant Henry Johnson in 2015 set a precedent for challenging the postwar review of World War One cases conducted in 1919, which resulted in zero Medal of Honor awards to African-American veterans and few for members of other minority groups.

Whether through Congressional legislation or a contract from the Department of Defense authorizing an endeavor similar to the Shaw University study of World War II veterans undertaken in the mid-1990s, the Task Force hopes to instigate a systematic and impartial review of World War I service records to determine if any veterans whose deeds warrant a Medal of Honor failed to receive one owing to bias, discrimination, or confusion sparked by the changing standards surrounding Medal of Honor awards during World War One.

In this effort, the Task Force has received the endorsement of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars through official resolutions (numbers 109-110 and 308, respectively) adopted at their 2018 national conventions, and the support of the Congressional Black Caucus Veteran's Braintrust. Furthermore, Park University's George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Commission to build on its special commitment to American servicemembers by supplementing the research work undertaken by Task Force volunteers.

America has a sacred bond with those who swore to defend her, and there is no more powerful manifestation of that covenant than the Medal of Honor. The gravity of these awards means their rarity must be jealously safeguarded; they can never be allowed to be diluted in the name of making a political point. But it is precisely for that reason that the Task Force firmly believes that every hero from the First World War whose deeds warrant the award receives it, regardless of the circumstances of their birth or the color of their skin.

To that end, the Task Force will be introducing its efforts publicly on the first day of the Association of the United States Army Conference on October 8th. For further questions, or to get involved in the Task Force, please visit ww1cc.org/valor or reach out to:

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