



THE UNITED STATES WORLD WAR ONE CENTENNIAL COMMISSIONSM

Valor Medals Review Task Force: Aims and Overview

Executive Summary:

- In every American war after World War One—but not for that conflict—the Department of Defense has retroactively and systematically reviewed minority veterans who may have been unjustly denied a Medal of Honor in spite of deserving service.
- All World War One veterans who received the Medal of Honor since 1991 were reviewed as individuals, not as part of a systematic study. This came at the expense of other veterans who are probably equally deserving. The only large-scale postwar 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 such a systematic review of World War 1 veterans to generate recommendations for Congress and the Department of Defense to actualize into reconsiderations for the Medal of Honor.
- The Task Force's efforts are endorsed by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The World War One Centennial Commission, and faculty from several major research universities. It is comprised of volunteers, and financially supported by tax-deductible contributions to the George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War.

Established by resolution of the United States World War One Centennial Commission in June 2018, the Valor Medals Review Task Force consists of volunteers who are advocating 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 consists of three subcommittees. The research subcommittee is chaired by faculty at Park University and New York University, and coordinates the efforts of scholars and volunteer researchers across the country. An external affairs subcommittee includes specialists such as lawyers, outreach personnel, and a historian of the Medal of Honor. Finally, the advisory subcommittee includes several retired flag officers and congressionally-appointed members of the United States World War One Centennial Commission.

The Task Force enjoyed its first success when several of its members coordinated 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 Medal of

Honor. In particular, servicemembers worthy of that award may have been downgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross or received only a French Croix de Guerre with Palms.

While the United States military has authorized reviews 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 completed for minority veterans of the First World War. Likewise, the awards of a Medal of Honor to Corporal Freddie Stowers in 1991 and Sergeants Henry Johnson and William Shemin 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.

Through Congressional legislation, the Task Force hopes to instigate a systematic and impartial review of World War One 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 that award during the war.

In this effort, the Task Force has received the endorsement of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars through resolutions adopted at their 2018 national conventions (numbers 109 and 308, respectively), and the support of the Congressional Black Caucus Veteran's Braintrust. After an establishing gift from the United States World War One Centennial Commission, the Task Force has been funded entirely by private donations to Park University's George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War, a 501(C)(3) nonprofit. 100% of donations received support the operations of the Task Force's 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.

For further questions, or to contribute to the Task Force, visit ww1cc.org/valor or contact:

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