MEDALS OF HONOR AWARDED — 50 YEARS AFTER

By Karel Margry

On January 13, 1997, American President Bill Clinton put right an historical injustice when he presented Medals of Honor to seven black soldiers who had served in World War II, making them the only black recipients of the medal for that war.

The award of seven Medals of Honor — the United States' highest decoration for heroism in combat — to African-American soldiers more than 50 years after the end of the war in which they were won marked the conclusion of an issue that had been widely discussed in the US, especially among the black community and World War II veteran organisations. Some commentators considered the new awards to African-American soldiers a rewriting of history, a concession for the sake of political correctness, and, however well intentioned, the wrong way to correct past injustice; others judged it a long-overdue recognition of valour that should have been awarded at the time, and probably would have, if it had not been for racial prejudices prevailing then. The debate was not about the individual courage of the seven men honoured — their valour and the bravery of their wartime acts were undisputed — but about the desirability of such belated nominations.

The award of the Medal of Honor to representatives of minority groups as a result of political pressure by lobby groups was not a new phenomenon in the United States. In 1977, the only Medal of Honor ever awarded to a woman — to army surgeon Dr Mary Walker — which had been revoked in February 1917 (when a War Department reviewing board struck all awards which did not involve actual combat from the official Medal of Honor list), was posthumously restored under political pressure from women groups. And in 1991, the fact that no black soldier had been awarded the Medal of Honor for service in World War I was corrected when Corporal Freddie Stowers, a black soldier who had served with the 93rd Division in

MEDALS OF HONOR AWARDED TO US ARMY PERSONNEL

(Number of Medals awarded to blacks in parentheses)

Civil War	1,196 (16)	Korean War	78 (2)
Indian Campaign	428 (18)	Vietnam Conflict	155 (15)
Spanish-American War	30 (5)	Grenada	0 (0)
Philippine Insurrection	70 (0)	Persian Gulf	0 (0)
Boxer Rebellion	4 (0)	Somalia	2 (0)
Mexican Campaign	1 (0)		
World War I	96 (1*)		
World War II	294 (0)	Total	2,354 (57)

Note: Figures are for US Army (and US Army Air Force) only. Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps Medals of Honor are not included.

* Posthumous award to Corporal Freddie Stowers in 1991.

The question whether racial prejudice had prevented black soldiers from winning the Medal of Honor in World War II was finally laid to rest when the American government awarded the nation's highest combat decoration to seven black servicemen in January 1997, nearly 52 years after the end of the war. The belated awards were the result of an Army-commissioned academic study which had investigated the question and found that, although there had been no official policy to exclude African-Americans from the Medal, racial bias and Army practices during the war had guaranteed that no black soldier would receive it. *Top:* **President Clinton awards the first of the medals to former 1st Lieutenant Vernon Baker, 77, the only veteran alive to receive the medal in person.**

The Medal of Honor is the Unites States' highest decoration for valour in combat. Because it is bestowed 'in the name of the Congress' it is frequently, but erroneously, called the 'Congressional Medal of Honor'. It was instituted during the American Civil War, first for Navy personnel by the act signed by President Abraham Lincoln on December 21, 1861, and then for Army personnel by a similar act on July 12, 1861. It became highly coveted in the decades after that, and there were several cases of misuse and imitation which necessitated a redesign of the medal and a tightening of regulations governing its award. In June 1916, in order to truly reserve the Medal for gallantry involving actual combat, Congress directed the Secretary of War to appoint a board of five retired generals to review the past awards. By the time the board concluded its review on February 15, 1917, it had stricken 911 names from the official Medal of Honor list. The act of July 9, 1918, established the criteria for the Medal which were in effect during World War II, and still are today: 'The President may award, and present in the name of Congress, the Medal of Honor to a person who, while a member of the Army and in action involving actual conflict with an enemy, distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty'. Since its establishment, some 3,400 Medals of Honor have been awarded, more than 2,300 of which to Army servicemen.

1918, received a posthumous Medal of Honor, 73 years after he was killed in leading his platoon in an attack against entrenched mortar and machine gun positions in France.

Out of 433 Medals of Honor bestowed for service in World War II, not a single one went to any of the 1.2 million black soldiers who fought in that war. A few blacks did win the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), the nation's second-highest decoration for bravery (and several more the Silver Star, the third-highest decoration), but none received the top award. There were periodic calls to investigate the phenomenon, but a full-scale probe was launched only in 1993 when Secretary of the Army John Shannon commissioned an academic study. Under contract MDA903-93-C-0260, the Army directed Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, to discover why no black soldier received the Medal of Honor during World War II and to determine if there was a racial disparity in the way Medal of Honor recipients were selected. More specific, the university was directed to document the process by which the Medal was awarded during and immediately after the war (the period for processing awards ended on September 1, 1948); to identify all units in which African-Americans served; to identify by name all black soldiers who were submitted for the Medal and document any errors in the processing of their nominations; and to compile a list of all black DSC recipients with descriptions of the actions which produced the decoration.

The investigative team consisted of Professor Daniel K. Gibran of Shaw University (chairman), Professor Richard H. Kohn of the University of North Carolina, Colonel John A. Cash (retd) and Colonel Robert K. Griffith (Retd) of the US Army, and Colonel Elliott V. Converse (Retd) of the USAF, all experienced researchers with a degree in history. Only one of the commission members was black himself. Professor Gibran — a Guyana-born, British-educated, West-Indian — later commented that his non-American background had permitted him to approach his commission's task with some detachment and 'without perhaps some of the cultural baggage others might have had'.

Most of the research involved searching through thousands of official Army records, from the War Department down to company level, with special attention to awards policy and practice. In addition, a wide variety of government documents, newspapers, private papers collections, books and articles was consulted, and over 40 people were interviewed.

Studying the historical and socio-cultural background of black soldiers in the war, the Shaw commission found that the absence of black Medal of Honor recipients was a relatively new thing. The medal had been awarded to black veterans of both the Civil War and the Spanish-American War in numbers roughly proportional to the number of blacks to whites in the armed services. The disparity had begun after World War I. Racial assumptions about the inferiority of blacks as combat troops, based in part on a misreading of the experience in World War I, dominated Army thinking at the beginning of World War II. This led to the policy of segregating black soldiers in separate units led by white officers, and relegating them overwhelmingly to service in non-combat units. Their morale was further undermined by racial policies and conflicts between white officers and black enlisted men. All this resulted in black units lagging behind in training and effectiveness. Under pressure from the black community, black combat units were formed, and eventually separate black divisions were created. As the war progressed, pressure mounted to use these units in combat and in early 1944 the 93rd Division was deployed to the Pacific and in the summer of 1944, the 92nd Division was sent to battle in Italy. Soldiers in these and many other black units, such as artillery, amphibian truck, and engineer units, came under fire and many of them were decorated for feats of bravery.

President Clinton (right) rises for his speech at the ceremony at the White House. Seated next to Clinton is Vernon Baker, and next to him, the representatives of the six deceased recipients: (from left) Sergeant Major of the Army Gene McKinney on behalf of Private George Watson (for whom no descendants could be traced); Sandra Thomas for her uncle Major Charles Thomas; Grace Woodfork for her brother Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers; Edward A. Carter III for his father Staff Sergeant Edward Carter, Jr; Arlene Fox for her husband Lieutenant John Fox; and Valcenie James for her husband PFC Willy James.

Citation: 'First Lieutenant John R. Fox distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism at the risk of his own life on 26 December 1944 in the Serchio river valley sector, in the vicinity of Sommocolonia, Italy. Lieutenant Fox was a member of Cannon Company, 366th Infantry, 92nd Infantry Division, acting as a forward observer, while attached to the 598th Field Artillery Battalion. Christmas Day in the Serchio valley was spent in positions which had been occupied for some weeks. During Christmas night, there was a gradual influx of enemy soldiers in civilian clothes and by early morning the town was largely in enemy hands. An organized attack by uniformed German formations was launched around 0400 hours, 26 December 1944. Reports were received that the area was being heavily shelled by everything the Germans had, and although most of the US infantry forces withdrew from the town, Lieutenant Fox and members of his observer party remained behind on the second floor of a house, directing defensive fires. Lieutenant Fox reported at 0800 hours that the Germans were in the streets and attacking in strength. He called for artillery fire increasingly close to his own position. He told his battalion commander, "That was just where I wanted it. Bring it in 60 yards!" His commander protested that there was a heavy barrage in the area and the bombardment would be too close. Lieutenant Fox gave his adjustment, requesting that the barrage be fired. The distance was cut in half. The Germans continued to press forward in large numbers, surrounding the position. Lieutenant Fox again called for artillery fire with the commander protesting again, stating, "Fox, that will be on you!" The last communication from Lieutenant Fox was, "Fire It! There's more of them than there are of us. Give them hell!" The bodies of Lieutenant Fox, and his party were found in the vicinity of his position when his position was retaken. This action, by Lieutenant Fox, at the cost of his own life, inflicted heavy casualties, causing the deaths of approximately 100 German soldiers, thereby delaying the advance of the enemy until infantry and artillery units could be reorganized to meet the attack. Lieutenant Fox's extraordinarily valorous actions exemplify the highest traditions of the military service.'

The Shaw team made a thorough study and analysis of the Medal of Honor award process. During the war, the War Department, in an effort to reserve the medal for truly extraordinary acts, and to apply the same rules uniformly across several theatres of war, had reserved for itself final authority for accepting or disapproving a Medal of Honor nomination. (Awards below the Medal could be authorised independently by commanders in the theatres and commands.) A recommendation for the Medal of Honor had to be forwarded to Washington, even if a field commander disapproved of it. A War Department Decorations Board would then evaluate the nomination and recommend approval or disapproval to the Chief-of-Staff and Secretary of War.

However, although this was the theory, practice was different. The Shaw team found that War Department regulations contained ambiguities of language which unintentionally permitted variations amongst the different theatres and commands. Also, documents revealed a lack of clarity in recommendation processing procedures which, coupled with the actions of a few commanders, prevented some cases from reaching the War Department. For example, it was initially not clear to all commanders that they had to pass on all recommendations, regardless of their own opinion of them. General Douglas MacArthur, the Southwest Pacific Theater Commander, withheld from the War Department Medal of Honor recommendations that he disapproved and released them only after the fighting ended, after two formal request from Washington and a visit to his headquarters by a General Staff officer. Similarly, processing irregularities in the Mediterranean Theater prevented some Fifth Army Medal of Honor recommendations from ever reaching Washington.

Another problem was the difficulty of distinguishing among the degree of heroism which each of the three top awards — the Medal of Honor, DSC and the Silver Star — intended to recognise. The definition of each award was quite general and often overlapping. For example, 'gallantry' was needed for both the Medal of Honor and the Silver Star, and all three awards required 'heroism'. Furthermore, the Medal required 'incontestable proof' in the form of eyewitness testimony, and the officer initiating the recommendation had to have 'personal knowledge' of the heroic act. However, the number of witnesses required was never specified, and whether 'personal knowledge' meant that the officer had to have witnessed the act himself was never clarified. The Shaw team found that, in practice, the dividing line between the bravery required for a Medal of Honor and that for a DSC was indistinct and very much a matter of interpretation.

The Shaw researchers found no explicit, written evidence in official documents proving that black soldiers were discriminated against in the awarding of medals in general or the Medal of Honor in particular. However, evidence from other sources indicated that racial bias did influence the matter. In one of the interviews, the wartime Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War for Negro Affairs, Truman K. Gibson, testified that the climate of racism and segregation in the Army was the cause for no black soldier being awarded the Medal of Honor. Analysis of contemporary newspapers showed that the African-American press at the time certainly complained about the problem. Also, many black veterans then and now insist that there were informal unwritten policies at the unit level that no black should win the Medal of Honor. After the war, the Army stated that medals were awarded without knowledge of race, but this was patently false for the personal files assembled for each individual decoration case clearly identified the nominee's race.

Arlene Fox receives the medal awarded to her husband, John Fox, who was killed on December 26, 1944, while calling in artillery strikes on his own position while being engulfed by Germans.

After the White House ceremony, Army Chief-of-Staff General Dennis Reimer hosted another ceremony at the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes for the induction of the seven new Medal of Honor recipients. Pictured behind Reimer is former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell; Secretary of the Army, Togo D. West, Jr.; and family members of the honorees. (US Army)

The 92nd Infantry Division was one of two 'all-black' divisions to serve in combat during the war (the other was the 93rd which served in the Pacific). Activated in October 1942 and deployed to Italy, the division's first unit, the 370th Regimental Combat Team, arrived in Naples in July, receiving its baptism of fire on the Arno river on August 27. The 371st Infantry arrived in October and the 365th in November. A fourth regiment, the 366th, which had been doing air-base guard duties in Italy since May, was attached to the 92nd on November 30. Assigned responsibility for the Fifth Army's left flank, on the Ligurian coast, the 92nd Division, commanded by Major General Edward M. Almond, suffered several defensive debacles and offensive failures, notably in the Serchio valley around Christmas 1944 (when the 366th broke in panic under a limited counter-attack) and, again, in February 1945. By March 1945, in a wholesale reorganisation, the 365th and 366th were made reserve regiments, their men used to fill up the ranks of the 370th, and the 371st was removed from the division and placed under Army control elsewhere. In their place came the 442nd Infantry (Japanese-Americans) and the 473rd Infantry (converted from white anti-aircraft units). In this new set-up, no longer an 'all-black' formation, the division fought till the end of the war, capturing La Spezia and Genoa. Two of the new Medal of Honor winners served in the 92nd Division — 1st Lieutenant John Fox in the 366th Infantry, and 1st Lieutenant Vernon Baker in the 370th.

Citation: 'First Lieutnant Vernon J. Baker distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action on 5 and 6 April 1945. At 0500 hours on 5 April 1945, Lieutenant Baker advanced at the head of his weapons platoon, along with Company C's three rifle platoons, toward their objective: Castle Aghinolfi, a German mountain strong point on the high ground just east of the coastal highway and about two miles from the 370th Infantry Regiment's line of departure. . . . In reconnoitering for a suitable position to set up a machine gun, Lieutenant Baker observed two cylindrical objects pointing out of a slit in a mount at the edge of a hill. Crawling up . . . he stuck his M-1 into the slit and emptied the clip, killing the observation post's two occupants. Moving to another position . . . Lieutenant Baker stumbled upon a well-camouflaged machine gun nest, the crew of which was eating breakfast. He shot and killed both enemy soldiers. After Captain John F. Runyon, Company C's commander, joined the group, a German soldier appeared from the draw and hurled a grenade which failed to explode. Lieutenant Baker shot the enemy soldier twice as he tried to flee. Lieutenant Baker then went down into the draw alone. There he blasted open the concealed entrance of another dugout with a hand grenade, shot one German soldier who emerged after the explosion, tossed another grenade into the dugout and entered firing his sub-machine gun, killing two more Germans. As Lieutenant Baker climbed back out of the draw, enemy machine gun and mortar fire began to inflict heavy casualties among the group of 25 soldiers, killing or wounding about two-thirds of them. When expected reinforcements did not arrive, Captain Runyon ordered a withdrawal in two groups. Lieutneant Baker volunteered to cover the withdrawal of the first group, which consisted of mostly walking wounded, and to remain to assist in the evacuation of the more seriously wounded. . . . Lieutenant Baker's fighting spirit and daring leadership were an inspiration to his men and exemplify the highest traditions of the military service.'

General Reimer talks with Vernon Baker and Sergeant Major McKinney after the official ceremony. By the Medal of Honor act as amended on October 18, 1978, each recipient of the Medal is entitled to have his name entered on the Medal of Honor Roll, to receive a pension of $200 per month for life, to free transportation on military aircraft within the continental United States and for his children to be admitted to the US Military Academy without regard to quota. Enlisted recipients who retire after 20 years of service are eligible for a 10 per cent increase in their retirement pay. Interviewed after the ceremony, Baker said: 'I was a soldier and we had a job to do and we did it. I never thought about getting any medal. I was just an angry young man at the time about the racial injustices we faced. I knew things would get better and I'm happy here to see it.'

The 761st Tank Battalion (Colored) was the only 'all-black' tank unit deployed to Europe in World War II (six of its 36 officers were white). Activated on April 1, 1942, it landed in Normandy on October 10, 1944, and was assigned to the US Third Army, seeing its first action on November 7 with the 26th Division. The battalion fought with Third Army in the Ardennes, participating in the relief of Bastogne, and into Germany. By war's end, its members had won 11 Silver Stars and 69 Bronze Stars. One of the Silver Star winners, Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers, has now been made the 761st's only Medal of Honor recipient. He was also the only one of the seven new Medals of Honor to receive the medal not as an upgrade from an earlier decoration, but as a reward for another act of heroism previously unrecognised. Citation: 'Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action during 16-19 November 1944, while serving with Company A, 761st Tank Battalion. On 16 November 1944, while advancing toward the town of Guebling, France, Staff Sergeant Rivers' tank hit a mine at a railroad crossing. Although severely wounded, his leg slashed to the bone, Staff Sergeant Rivers declined an injection of morphine, refused to be evacuated, took command of another tank, and advanced with his company into Guebling the next day. Repeatedly refusing evacuation, Staff Sergeant Rivers continued to direct his tank's fire at enemy positions beyond the town through the morning of 19 November 1944. At dawn that day, Company A's tanks advanced toward Bourgaltroff, their next objective, but were stopped by enemy fire. Captain David J. Williams, the company commander, ordered his tanks to withdraw and take cover. Staff Sergeant Rivers, however, radioed that he had spotted the German anti-tank positions: "I see 'em. We'll fight 'em!" Staff Sergeant Rivers, joined by another Company A tank, opened fire on enemy tanks, covering Company A as they withdrew. While doing so, Staff Sergeant Rivers' tank was hit, killing him and wounding the rest of the crew. Staff Sergeant Rivers' fighting spirit and daring leadership were an inspiration to his unit and exemplify the highest traditions of military service.'

The Shaw team could find no official evidence in the archive records documenting that a black soldier had been nominated for the Medal of Honor during the war. However, other evidence, such as statements from memory by individuals interviewed for the project and review of contemporary letters and writings, revealed that four blacks may have been recommended for the Medal. The men involved were Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers, 1st Lieutenant Vernon J. Baker, Corporal Waverly B. Woodson and Staff Sergeant Edward A. Carter, Jr. In the case of Rivers, who served in Company A of the 761st Tank Battalion (Colored) in North-West Europe, his white company commander, former Captain David Williams, stated that he had personally put Rivers up for the Medal in 1944. In the case of Baker, who was with the 92nd Division in Italy, a company clerk testified that he had typed a Medal of Honor nomination for him in 1945. In one case, circumstantial evidence indicated that the recommendation may have been stopped by the acting battalion commander on racial grounds. (Of the four men, Baker and Carter eventually received the DSC).

Although the Shaw team could find no explicit, official documentation for racial bias in the awards process for the Medal of Honor, they concluded that the failure of a black soldier to win the Medal most definitely lay in the racial climate and practice within the Army during the war.

Firstly, because the black units were seen as less effective and efficient — itself the result of racial segregation and its side effects: bad relations between officers and men, undermined morale, flawed training — they were less sought after by higher commanders for use in the field.

Secondly, because the Army assumed that African-Americans were inherently inferior as fighting soldiers, they were at first relegated primarily to service and support roles, serving in ordnance, quartermaster, service-truck and bridge units. This policy was later changed and black combat units activated, but the nett effect was that black soldiers had far less chance to experience combat and thus win awards for valour than their white compatriots.

Thirdly, within the 92nd Division — the largest black unit and the one to spend most time in combat — key commanders, all white, were most definitely racially prejudiced. Throughout the division's eight months in Italy, they consistently attributed the division's poor performance to the black soldiers' inherent inability to perform effectively under fire, lack of pride and fear of combat, and to a lack of initiative, aggressiveness, dependability and responsibility on the part of black officers and NCOs, without considering other explanations, including white commanders' own policies, actions or racial attitudes. These views undoubtedly prejudiced judgement and objectivity about black soldiers' heroism, and this quite likely explains why not a single black officer or soldier in the division was nominated for the Medal of Honor. The only man recommended for the Medal by the 92nd was a white company commander whose black platoon leader in the same fight acted demonstrably more courageously and inflicted far more damage on the enemy (both men received the DSC).

In the Pacific, the black 93rd Division and 24th Infantry Regiment were mostly used for garrison duty and mopping-up operations on

Citation: 'Lieutenant Charles L. Thomas distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action on 14 December 1944. One platoon of Company C, 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was designated as the leading element in a task force formed to storm and capture the village of Climbach, France. Lieutenant Thomas, the commanding officer of Company C, realized, with the obscurity of information regarding the enemy and a complete lack of reconnaissance, the mission would be an extremely dangerous one. Fully cognizant of the danger, Lieutenant Thomas volunteered to command the selected platoon of his company and ride in the column's leading vehicle, an M-20 scout car. Lieutenant Thomas knew that if there was a concentration of enemy armor in the village, as was believed, he would absorb the initial shock of the first enemy resistance. The task force left Preuschdorf, France, at 1023 hours, and proceeded to advance toward Climbach. Lieutenant Thomas in his scout car stayed well in front of the column. At 1400 hours, upon reading the high ground south-east of the village, Lieutenant Thomas experienced initial contact with the enemy. As his scout car advanced to an exposed position on the heights, he received intense direct fire from enemy artillery, self-propelled guns, and small arms at a range of 700 yards. The first burst of hostile fire disabled the scout car and severely wounded Lieutenant Thomas. He immediately signaled the column to halt. Before leaving the wrecked vehicle, Lieutenant Thomas and the crew found themselves subjected to a veritable hail of enemy fire. Lieutenant Thomas received multiple gunshot wounds in his chest, legs, and left arm. In spite of the intense pain, Lieutenant Thomas ordered and directed the dispersion and emplacement of his first two anti-tank guns. In a few minutes these guns were effectively returning the enemy fire. Realizing that it would be impossible for him to remain in command of the platoon because of his injuries, Lieutenant Thomas then signaled for the platoon commander to join him. Lieutenant Thomas then thoroughly oriented him as to the enemy gun positions, his ammunition status, and the general situation. . . . Throughout the action, Lieutenant Thomas displayed magnificent personal courage and a complete disregard for his own safety. His extraordinary heroism spurred the soldiers of the platoon to a fierce determination to triumph, and resulted in a mass display of heroism by them. Lieutenant Thomas' intrepid actions throughout the operation reflect the highest traditions of military service.'

Citation: 'Private George Watson distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism on 8 March 1943, while serving in the Pacific Command with the 2nd Battalion, 29th Quartermaster Regiment, near Porlock Harbor, New Guinea. Private Watson was onboard a troop ship, the Dutch Steamer (United States Army Transport) *Jacob*, when it was attacked and hit by enemy bombers. Before it sank, the ship was abandoned. Private Watson, instead of seeking to save himself, remained in deep waters long enough to assist several soldiers who could not swim to reach the safety of a life raft. This heroic action, which subsequently cost him his life, resulted in saving the lives of several of his comrades. Weakened by continuous physical exertion and overcome by muscular fatigue, Private Watson drowned when the suction of the sinking ship dragged him beneath the surface of the swirling waters. . . . Private Watson's extraordinarily valorous actions, his daring and inspiring leadership, and his self-sacrificing devotion to his fellow man exemplify the finest traditions of military service.'

No portraits are available for PFC Willy James and Private George Watson. Pictures of James were lost when his widow moved back to Kansas from California, and the Army authorities were unable to trace any photos of Watson. Apart from the lack of black Medals of Honor recipients, there is also a distinct lack of photography of black soldiers in action in US official files. These black artillerymen were pictured emplacing a 155 mm M1 Howitzer in a camouflaged position.

islands captured by other units earlier, and thus had relatively little chance to experience combat. And although some of the black combat support units performed extremely hazardous duties (at Iwo Jima in February 1945, 14 of the 19 Silver Stars awarded to the three Army DUKW companies were won by black soldiers), none of them produced a Medal of Honor nomination.

When, after about eight months of research, the Shaw team had not found a single reference in the official records documenting a black nominee for the Medal of Honor, the Army requested the team to turn their attention to finding black recipients of the DSC. Until then, only six black soldiers were publicly known to have won the DSC during World War II, but the Shaw team uncovered another three. The nine men were: 1st Lieutenant Vernon J. Baker, Staff Sergeant Edward A. Carter, Jr; Staff Sergeant Leonard E. Dowden; 1st Lieutenant John R. Fox; PFC Willy F. James; 1st Lieutenant Robert J. Peagler; 1st Lieutenant Charles L. Thomas, PFC Jack Thomas, and Private George Watson.

The DSC was often referred to as 'the Negro Medal of Honor' by black World War II veterans because of their conviction that the very few black soldiers who got it actually deserved the Medal of Honor. Indeed, the Shaw commission found that there seemed to be a general understanding during the war that the DSC was the highest award worthy of a black man's bravery.

On the basis of its findings and conclusions, the Shaw team recommended that the Army consider for elevation to the Medal of Honor the nine DSCs earned by black soldiers in the war, and also that Sergeant Ruben Rivers, who may have been nominated for the Medal in 1944 but received no recognition for the heroism that caused his death (he had been given the Silver Star, but for another action which had occurred eight days earlier), be also awarded the same decoration.

Such corrective action, so the Shaw team advocated, had several compelling prece-

Citation: 'Private First Class Willy F. James, Jr. distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism at the risk of his own life on 7 April 1945 in the Weser river valley, in the vicinity of Lippoldsberg, Germany. On 7 April 1945, Company G, 413th Infantry, fought its way across the Weser river in order to establish a crucial bridgehead. The company then launched a fierce attack against the town of Lippoldsberg, possession of which was vital to securing and expanding the important bridgehead. PFC James was first scout of the lead squad in the assault platoon. The mission of the unit was to seize and secure a group of houses on the edge of town, a foothold from which the unit could launch an attack on the rest of the town. Far out in front, approximately 150 yards ahead of his nearest comrade, PFC James was the first to draw enemy fire. His platoon leader came forward to investigate, but poor visibility made it difficult for PFC James to point out the enemy positions with any accuracy. PFC James volunteered to go forward to fully reconnoiter the enemy situation. Furious crossfire from enemy snipers and machine guns finally pinned down PFC James after making his way forward approximately 200 yards across open terrain. Lying in an exposed position for more than an hour, PFC James intrepidly observed the enemy's positions which were given away by the fire PFC James was daringly drawing upon himself. Then, with utter indifference to his personal safety, in a storm of enemy small arms fire, PFC James made his way back more than 300 yards across open terrain under enemy observation to his platoon positions, and gave a full, detailed report on the enemy disposition. The unit worked out a new plan of maneuver based on PFC James' information. The gallant soldier volunteered to lead a squad in an assault on the key house in the group that formed the platoon objective. He made his way forward, leading his squad in the assault on the strongly-held enemy positions in the building and designating targets accurately and continously as he moved along. While doing so, PFC James saw his platoon leader shot down by enemy snipers. Hastily designating and coolly orienting a leader in his place, PFC James instantly went to the aid of his platoon leader, exposing himself recklessly to the incessant enemy fire. As he was making his way across open ground, PFC James was killed by a burst from an enemy machine gun. PFC James' extraordinarily heroic action in the face of withering enemy fire provided the disposition of enemy troops to his platoon. This key information enabled the platoon to execute a flanking maneuver. Inspired to the utmost by PFC James' self-sacrifice, the platoon sustained the momentum of the assault and successfully accomplished its mission with a minimum of casualties. PFC James contributed very definitely to the success of his battalion in the vitally important combat operation of establishing and expanding a bridgehead over the Weser River. His fearless, self-assigned actions, far above and beyond the normal call of duty, exemplify the finest traditions of the American combat soldier. . . .'

In the European Theater of Operations, by the end of June 1944 there was a total of 140,656 black personnel assigned to combat and service organisations. This is obviously a posed publicity shot taken 'somewhere in England'.

Citation: 'Staff Sergeant Edward A. Carter, Jr. distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action on 23 March 1945. At approximately 0830 hours, near Speyer, Germany, the tank upon which Staff Sergeant Carter was riding received bazooka and small arms fire from the vicinity of a large warehouse to its left front. Staff Sergeant Carter and his squad took cover behind an intervening road bank. Staff Sergeant Carter volunteered to lead a three-man patrol to the warehouse where other unit members noticed the original bazooka fire. From here they were to ascertain the location and strength of the opposing position and advance approximately 150 yards across an open field. Enemy small arms fire covered this field. As the patrol left this covered position, they received intense enemy small arms fire killing one member of the patrol instantly. This caused Staff Sergeant Carter to order the other two members of the patrol to return to the covered position and cover him with rifle fire while he proceeded alone to carry out the mission. The enemy fire killed one of the two soldiers while they were returning to the covered position, and seriously wounded the remaining soldier before he reached the covered position. An enemy machine gun burst wounded Staff Sergeant Carter three times in the left arm as he continued the advance. He continued and received another wound in his left leg that knocked him from his feet. As Staff Sergeant Carter took wound tablets and drank from his canteen, the enemy shot it from his left hand, with the bullet going through his hand. Disregarding these wounds, Staff Sergeant Carter continued the advance by crawling until he was within 30 yards of his objective. The enemy fire became so heavy that Staff Sergeant Carter took cover behind a bank and remained there for approximately two hours. Eight enemy riflemen approached Staff Sergeant Carter, apparently to take him prisoner. Staff Sergeant Carter killed six of the enemy soldiers and captured the remaining two. . . . Staff Sergeant Carter refused evacuation until he had given full information about what he had observed and learned from the captured enemy soldiers. This information greatly facilitated the advance on Speyer. Staff Sergeant Carter's extraordinary heroism was an inspiration to the officers and men of the Seventh Army, Infantry Company Number 1 (Provisional) and exemplify the highest traditions of the military service.'

dents. When at the end of World War I, General John I. Pershing learned that only four Medals of Honor had been awarded by the time of the Armistice, he ordered a review of all DSC winners to see if they merited upgrade to a Medal of Honor. This resulted in 78 additional Medals of Honor. Similarly, in 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then the North-African Theater Commander, instructed the US Fifth Army to review a number of DSCs for a similar upgrade because he felt the number of Medals of Honor in his theatre was not in proportion to that in other theatres. Of the six candidates forwarded to Washington as a result, four were approved for the Medal of Honor.

Shaw University's ten recommendations were put before a board of generals at the Pentagon, and they selected seven from the list. They were:

2nd Lieutenant (later 1st Lieutenant) Vernon J. Baker of St Maries, Idaho, of Company C, 370th Infantry of the 92nd Division for an action on April 5-6, 1945, near Viareggio in Italy;

Staff Sergeant Edward A. Carter II of Los Angeles, of the US Seventh Army Infantry Company No. 1 (Provisional) for an action near Speyer in Germany on March 23, 1945, while attached to Company D, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 12th Armored Division;

1st Lieutenant John R. Fox of Cincinnati, Ohio, of Cannon Company, 366th Infantry of the 92nd Division for an action on December 26, 1944 in Sommocolonia in Italy;

PFC Willy F. James, Jr, of Kansas City, Montana, of Company G, 413th Infantry of the 104th Division for an action on April 7, 1945, near Lippoldsberg in Germany;

Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, of Company A, 761st Tank Battalion (Colored) for actions on November 16-19, 1944, near Guebling in France.

1st Lieutenant (later Major) Charles L. Thomas of Detroit, of Company C, 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed), a unit attached to the 103rd Division, for an action on December 14, 1944, near Climbach in France;

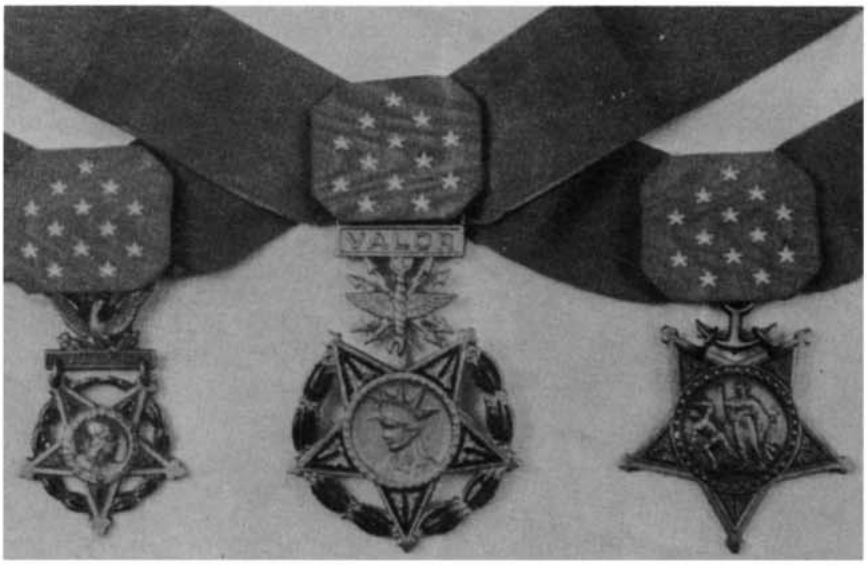
Private George Watson of Birmingham, Alabama, of the 2nd Battalion, 29th Quartermaster Regiment, for an action at sea near Porloch Harbour in New Guinea on March 8, 1943;

Of these seven medals, six were posthumous: four of the soldiers — Carter, Fox, Rivers and Watson — had been killed in the act that was now being honoured; two veterans had died since the war — Carter on January 30, 1963, and James on February 15, 1980; and only one veteran — Vernon Baker — was alive to personally receive the award.

Before the medals could be presented, Congress had to pass special legislation, because the statutory limit for presentation had expired in 1952. The waiver was authorised in October 1996. Such a waiver had a precedent too, for the same had been done in 1991 for the World War I Medal of Honor awarded to black Corporal Stowers.

By late 1944, the US Army had difficulty finding enough replacements for its infantry divisions fighting in Europe — a problem that became acute during the Battle of the Bulge in December. To solve the problem, Eisenhower instituted a programme under which black rear-echelon soldiers could volunteer to get small-unit infantry training and fight in squad, platoon or company strength with previously all-white infantry divisions. By February 1945, 4,562 blacks had volunteered for the programme, some of them even accepting reductions in rank to do so. Two of the new Medal of Honor recipients served in units that had benefited from the programme, PFC James with the 413th Infantry Regiment and Staff Sergeant Carter with the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. Born in 1917 as the son of missionaries working in China, Carter ran away from home as a teenager and served in the Chinese Army until they discovered he was underage. He then fought on the side of the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. Returning to the States, he enlisted in the Army on September 26, 1941, becoming a mess sergeant within a year. In 1945, he volunteered for the US Seventh Army Infantry Company No. 1 (Provisional) from where he was attached to Company D, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. His Medal of Honor action took place on March 23. He was discharged in September 1945 and died on January 30, 1963. *Above:* **The day after the Medal of Honor award ceremonies, a related ceremony took place when he was reburied with full military honours in Arlington National Cemetery. Carter had originally been interred at Sawtelle National Cemetery in Los Angeles, But after the announcement of his award, his family decided to have him exhumed and transferred to the nation's foremost military cemetery. The eight pallbearers and seven-man rifle-salute party came from the 3rd Infantry Division (The Old Guard).**

In recent months, the Medal of Honor received media attention in another way too. In December 1996, HLI Lordship Industries Inc. of Hauppage, NY, a company making 60 per cent of all US military medals and the sole producer of the Medal of Honor since 1978, was fined $80,000 by the US District Court in Newark, NJ, after admitting to having sold 300 unauthorised copies of the Medal at $75 each to a militaria dealer between 1991 and 1995. The dealer resold the medals at memorabilia shows, until he was caught selling two to FBI agents. Judge William G. Bassler said: 'True Medal of Honor recipients and their families have a right to be outraged by [Lordship's] conduct'. As part of its plea bargain and sentencing, the family-owned firm, which was doing $9 million in business with the government annually, was also to return the $22,500 which it earned from the illegal sales. On December 30, the Pentagon announced that HLI Lordship was barred indefinitely from any future government contracts.



On January 13, 1997, President Clinton presented the medals in a ceremony in the East Room of the White House. Before a crowd of honorees' descendants, top Army officials and members of the Press, Clinton placed the ribbon about the neck of former Lieutenant Baker, now 77 years of age, and presented encased decorations for the six deceased soldiers — five to family members and one (for Private Watson for whom no living family could be traced) to the Sergeant Major of the Army, Gene C. McKinney, on his behalf.

'History has been made whole today', Clinton said in his speech. He recalled the day in August 1945, when President Harry Truman had presented 28 Medals of Honor to veterans of World War II, describing them as a 'great cross-section of the United States'. But though Truman was the one who abolished segregation in the Armed Forces and 'had not a shred of discrimination in his bones', from that cross-section of America, said Clinton, 'something was missing . . . No African-American who deserved the Medal of Honor for his service in World War II received it'. The legacy of segregation and discrimination had long denied the Medal of Honor to any black veteran of that war no matter how deserving. In the end, Clinton said, 'their deeds could not be denied . . . Today, America is profoundly thankful for the patriotism and the nobility of these men . . . They helped us to find a way to become a more just, more free nation . . . more worthy of them and more true to its ideals.' Praising the Army officials who commissioned the study and the Shaw University team who carried it out, Clinton said: 'Your support and painstaking research made this possible. Without it, we would not be able to meet our obligation as a people to an extraordinary group of soldiers to whom we owe the greatest debt'.

Later in the day, General Dennis J. Reimer, the Army Chief-of-Staff, inducted the seven new recipients in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon in a ceremony attended by the soldiers' relatives and Secretary of the Army Togo D. West, Jr.

Vernon Baker, interviewed afterwards, said: 'It's a great day. The only thing I can say to those who were not here with me today is "Thank you, fellows. Well done, I'll always remember you."'

Arlene Fox, widow of Lieutenant John Fox, said the award was a vindication not just for her husband and the other men but 'for black people everywhere. A tremendous wrong has been righted.'

THIS WEEK

Company admits selling bogus medals

Medal of Honor society 'disgusted' with firm for its deceptive actions

By Andrew Compart
Times staff writer

Paul Bucha does not like to talk about the reason he received his Medal of Honor. In the modest manner typical of the medal's recipients, Bucha explained he was just doing his job and does not consider himself a hero.

But Bucha, president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, was not reluctant to talk about H.L.I. Lordship Industries Inc., the Hauppauge, N.Y., company that has the sole contract for making the

have received it.

Stiffer penalties

THIS WEEK ■ UPDATE

Maker of bogus medals wins appeal extension

Firm banned from government deals gets 30 more days to argue its case

By Andrew Compart
Times staff writer

The Long Island company that admitted making and selling 300 unauthorized Medals of Honor has been given more time to appeal its ban from future government contracts.

The Defense Logistics Agency

port Center has 40 open contracts with Lordship for various medals, and Lordship will keep those contracts until the orders are completed.

But the center decided in August it would not enter into any new contracts with the company.

Lordship already had completed the Medal of Honor contract it signed with the center in 1989, making 200 of the medals for

Firm Admits to Medal Flap

■ NEWARK, N.J.—The company that holds the government contract to manufacture the Medal of Honor—the nation's highest combat decoration—admitted it sold 300 unauthorized medals for $75 each.

H.L.I. Lordship Industries Inc. of Hauppauge, N.Y., said it will plead guilty in federal court Nov. 4 to making unauthorized medals and pay up to $225,000 in fines. Under the plea bargain, there will be no further prosecution of Lordship or any individuals, according to its lawyer, Frederick Hafetz.

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Defense Department won't deal with firm that sold bogus Medals of Honor

Company loses government

dustries had been the government's sole producer of the nation's highest decoration for combat valor, and it manufactured 60 percent of all other U.S. milita— medals.

No new contractor has been selected to produce the medals because the government has a sufficient stock

THIS WEEK

Company fined $80,000 for selling fake Medals of Honor

By Andrew Compart
Times staff writer

The family-owned business with the sole contract for making the Medal of Honor pleaded guilty Dec. 3 to illegally manufacturing and selling 300 of the medals for $75 apiece from 1991 to 1995. The firm, HLI Lordship Industries in Hauppauge, N.Y., was fined $80,000. It also must return $22,500 it made from the illegal sales and faces a five-year "organizational probation." But there is no indication that it will lose its millions of dollars in contracts with the Defense Department.

Stern was sentenced Dec. 3 to one year of probation and 250 hours of community service in a VA hospital. He also must run an ad in a general-circulation newspaper on Memorial Day and hand-write letters to all 170 living Medal of Honor recipients apologizing for his actions.

The convictions are the result of an 18-month FBI crackdown on the illegal manufacture, sale, trade or use of the nation's highest and most revered military medal. FBI officials said they have active investigations in several states regarding Medal of Honor impostors.

Only 3,401 people have legitimately received the medal since it was created in 1861 to honor people who demonstrate

"American heroism is simply not for sale."

Faith S. Hochberg
U.S. Attorney

Impostor pleads guilty

The resolution of the ... ship case in Newark, N.J.

Medal Manufacturer Fined for Bootlegging

■ NEWARK, N.J.—The company that holds the government contract to make the nation's highest combat decoration was fined $80,000 for selling 300 bootleg Medals of Honor.

H.L.I. Lordship Industries Inc., of Hauppage, N.Y., also will give the government $22,500 it received for illegally selling the bogus medals for $75 apiece at memorabilia shows from 1991 to 1994.

"True Medal of Honor recipients and their families have a right to be outraged by [Lordship's] conduct," U.S. District Judge William G. Bassler said in imposing the maximum fine allowed under federal guidelines.

The family-owned company also could lose its status as a government contractor. Its only business is

Medal Firm Is Debarred By Pentagon

Bogus Awards Sold at Shows

Associated Press

The Pentagon will no longer do business with a contractor that made bootleg Medals of Honor. It also recommended Monday that H.L.I. Lordship Industries Inc. of Hauppauge, N.Y., be denied any other government work.

The company admitted last month that it sold 300 unauthorized copies of the nation's highest combat hon or to a dealer who sold the medals at memorabili shows. The company wa fined $80,000 in U.S. Di trict Court in Newark.

Lordship has 30 days t appeal the decision of th Defense Logistics Agenc The company makes 60 pe

In a related case, also in December 1996, Jackie A. Stern, 67, was sentenced at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to a year's probation and 250 hours of community service in a Veterans Administration hospital for posing as a Medal of Honor winner using one of Lordship's bootleg medals. Among other occasions, Stern had worn it at a parade to honour Gulf war veterans.