

Black History Month Spotlight “Heaven, Hell or Glory”

Staff Sergeant Clifford Sims was awarded the Medal of Honor for service in Vietnam in which he gave his life. S/Sgt. Sims distinguished himself while serving as a squad leader with Company D of the U.S. Army, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry.

Company D was assaulting a heavily fortified enemy position concealed within a dense wooded area when it encountered strong enemy fire. Sims led his squad in a furious attack against an enemy force which had pinned down the 1st Platoon and threatened to overrun it. His skillful leadership provided the platoon with freedom of movement and enabled it to regain the initiative. S/Sgt. Sims was then ordered to move his squad to a position where he could provide covering fire for the company command group and to link up with the 3d Platoon, which was under heavy enemy pressure.

After moving no more than 30 meters S/Sgt. Sims noticed that a brick structure in which ammunition was stocked was on fire. Realizing the danger, S/Sgt. Sims took immediate action to move his squad from this position., S/Sgt. Sims' prompt actions undoubtedly prevented more serious casualties from occurring.

While continuing through the dense woods amidst heavy enemy fire, S/Sgt. Sims and his squad were approaching a bunker when they heard the unmistakable noise of a concealed booby trap being triggered immediately to their front.

S/Sgt. Sims warned his comrades of the danger and unhesitatingly hurled himself upon the device as it exploded, taking the full impact of the blast. In so protecting his fellow soldiers, he willingly sacrificed his life. S/Sgt. Sims' extraordinary heroism at the cost of his life is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.



Staff Sergeant Clifford Sims is pictured at the top right.



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Private George Watson, Medal of Honor recipient

For extraordinary heroism in action March 8, 1943, Private George Watson was awarded the Medal of Honor. Private Watson was on board a ship which was attacked and hit by enemy bombers. When the ship was abandoned, Watson, instead of seeking to save himself, remained in the water assisting several soldiers who could not swim to reach rafts.



This heroic action, which subsequently cost him his life, resulted in the saving of several lives. Weakened by his exertions, he was dragged down by the suction of the sinking ship and drowned. Private Watson was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by then President Clinton for valor, daring leadership, and self-sacrificing devotion.



Private George Watson is pictured at the top left.

Black History Month Spotlight

Harlem Hellfighters of World War I

Henry Johnson

One Harlem Hell Fighter had an unusual date with destiny that would lead to a Medal of Honor nomination. On May 14, 1918, A World War I soldier of the all-black 369th Infantry Regiment , Pvt. Henry Johnson, single-handedly fought off a German raiding party on a forward listening post in France with a rifle and later with a bo knife after he ran out of ammunition. Wounded 21 times, he rescued a wounded comrade.

He signed up with the 369th Infantry Regiment when it was formed from the National Guard's 15th New York. Sent to France with the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, the unit was lent to the French Army to help fill out depleted ranks. As a result, the Guard soldiers entered combat within a month of their arrival in France.

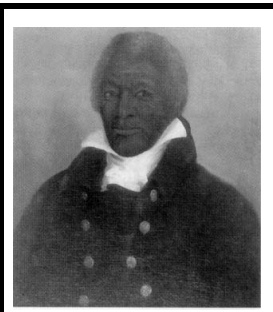
One night in mid-May, Privates Johnson and Needham Roberts were on patrol in an advance listening post along the front line when a 24-man German raiding party caught the post by surprise with a violent grenade attack. Both Johnson and Roberts fought back and were seriously wounded, but managed to fight off the first attack and crawl to their grenade supply.

Throwing grenades one after the other like baseballs, they peppered the next attack with explosive. Grabbing his rifle, he shot down a German and then clubbed the next one to death with its buttstock. Turning, he spotted Roberts surrounded by three who were choking him into submission.

Out of grenades and with his rifle jammed and broken, Johnson pulled out his hefty bolo knife and cleft the skull of one German in a single stroke. Roberts broke free and continued fighting. Another shot rang out and Johnson fell wounded and dazed, but grab a grenade off a dead German and threw it at his attackers. Johnson and Roberts were both peppered with shrapnel and shot several times, but remained in good humor. When reinforcements arrived, the two black soldiers were laughing and singing.

Johnson and Roberts were awarded the Croix de Guerre with palm leaf for Valor, France's highest medal for bravery in combat and among the first given to Americans. Upon his return, Johnson and Roberts were hailed as heroes in the NYC Victory Parade. Theodore Roosevelt referred to him as one of the nation's five bravest Americans.

After the war, Johnson was unable to return to his old job because of his injuries. Post tramatic stress and pain from war injuries caused him to turn to alcohol. He died in 1937 a premature death and undecorated by his own country. A Medal of Honor application for him, submitted in 1996, was approved by then-Secretary of the Army Caldera in 2001. But Joint Chiefs Chairman Harry Shelton did not concur.



Henry Johnson is pictured at the bottom right.