

## 64 years later, Army repays convicted veteran

Family Accepts Over \$27,000 for Late WWII Vet Implicated in Lynching Case

By MEGAN CHUCHMACH  
*ABC News*

More than six decades after Samuel Snow was court marshaled for the lynching of an Italian prisoner of war, imprisoned for the crime, and then dishonorably discharged from the Army, his family today received what he wanted all those years: justice.

It came in the form of a check for \$27,580 - the pay he lost compounded 64 years at six percent interest - after the Army Board for Correction of Military Records found last year that his conviction, and those of three others charged in the same case, was flawed. The board said prosecutors withheld potentially exculpatory evidence and the conviction was based on faulty eyewitnesses, among other issues.

“When I first heard, I came down in tears because he wasn’t here to receive what they are going to do for him,” said his widow and wife of 61 years, Margaret Snow, of the check. “But I think it’s really nice that they finally recognize. I’m just sorry that he’s not here to receive the recognition that he wanted.”

The only other surviving veteran associated with the incident could not make the trip from Chicago for the ceremony. Family members, on behalf of the “Ft. Lawton 28,” received certificates and a formal apology from the Army in a tearful but celebratory ceremony that capped three days of commemorative events, some of which Snow had attended.

Samuel died of congested heart failure in July, just one day after the Army publicly apologized to him and the other convicted soldiers and gave them honorable discharges. Samuel and his family had traveled from their home in Leesburg, Florida to the ceremony in Seattle, but once he arrived on the west coast, he was too ill to attend.

Instead, his grown son Ray took his place, accepting the apology and a plaque commemorating the honorable discharge on his father’s behalf. Ray then took the plaque to Samuel, who had been admitted to the hospital. There, Ray says, he watched his father hold the proof of his newly-changed discharge status close to his chest and smile.

“It was like he returned to Seattle to close that chapter in his life,” Ray said of his father, “and little did we realize that he was closing his earthly life. That was the last thing he needed.”

But others thought Samuel should be compensated for the amount he would have received if he hadn’t been wrongly discharged and began lobbying the military. Last November, the Army sent him a check for \$725, roughly the amount he lost from when he was convicted in December 1944 to his intended discharge date of March 1946. But Samuel, who moved back to Florida and worked as a janitor, didn’t think it made up for all he endured. Beyond the trial, imprisonment, and dishonorable discharge, he missed out on many benefits, including the GI Bill.

He [told the New York Times](#) last December that he didn’t plan on cashing the \$725 check because he “didn’t think it was appropriate.”

When the Army said it wasn’t authorized to make adjustments, Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) and Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA) introduced legislation to force the military to pay interest on back pay to veterans whose convictions are overturned.

Nelson’s office said the measure was part of a defense spending bill that President Bush signed last week after Congress passed it last month, paving the way for Samuel’s family and others to recoup money owed to them.

A spokesperson for the Army did not immediately return a call from ABC News for comment.

Samuel was one of 43 defendants who were court-marshaled for the lynching of an Italian prisoner of war at Seattle’s Fort Lawton in 1944. Twenty-eight of them were convicted in a trial that is thought to be the longest and largest in the history of World War II. But questions always remained unanswered, said Seattle-based reporter Jack Hamann, who, along with his wife, began searching through national archives and testimonies to learn more about the lynching. Their book, [On American Soil](#), exposed the injustices committed against the African American soldiers and prompted the Army’s investigation.

Ray said his mother doesn’t know what she’s going to do with the money, and that today was bittersweet because his father isn’t here to enjoy the recognition.

“To see the smile that was on my mom’s face, how proud she was,” said Ray, “it was a sad and joyous occasion all in one.”