

Veteran's family gets back pay with interest

BY MIKE SCHNEIDER
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ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — It took six decades, but a wrongly convicted World War II veteran's family is finally getting his back pay with interest.

Samuel Snow's widow, Margaret, and son, Ray, received a check for \$27,580 on Thursday, 64 years after Snow was wrongly convicted of participating in a riot that led to his imprisonment for more than a year. Snow died at age 83 in July, hours after the Army apologized and reversed his dishonorable discharge.

Ray Snow compared his father to the Biblical hero Job — an upright man who was punished for no good reason.

"A good, upright man who was struck down ... yet he held on," Ray Snow, 56, a school teacher, said after his family received the check. "He held onto to the belief that this could be done."

Snow was among 43 black soldiers court-martialed for participating in a 1944 riot at Fort Lawton in Seattle that led to the lynching of an Italian prisoner of war. Those found guilty of rioting, 28 in all, were sentenced to as much as 25 years in prison. It was one of the largest courts martial of World War II.

A year ago, the Army Board for Correction of Military Records set aside Snow's conviction, noting that prosecutors had withheld important evidence and that the defendants were denied access to their attorneys. The board also ruled that four soldiers who petitioned the board, including Snow, should be given honorable discharges and compensated.

Not long afterward, Snow received a check for \$725 — the amount the Army said he would have been paid between the time he was convicted and the time he was released from prison about 15 months later. It was not adjusted for inflation and failed to include 64 years worth of interest. At the time, the Army claimed the amount was in keeping with regulations.

Earlier this year, U.S. Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., and U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., filed legislation to award interest on the back pay owed Snow and any other soldier who has a conviction overturned by courts or the Army Board for Correction of Military Records. It was passed as part of the Defense Authorization Bill.

"This is an American tragedy, along with an American success story," said Nelson, who presented the

check to Snow's family at his office in Orlando. "It's the story of a young man who served his country and was not treated right by his government."

For most of his life, Snow never talked about his dishonorable discharge or what happened at Fort Lawton, his son said. He led a quiet, humble, church-going life as a janitor in Leesburg, Fla., and raised and educated two sons with his wife. In the mid-1970s, his status was upgraded to "general under honorable conditions discharge," allowing him to get medical benefits, but it fell short of his goal of an honorable discharge.

The momentum to get an honorable discharge gained strength after Seattle reporter Jack Hamann wrote a 2005 book about the incident, "On American Soil: How Justice Became a Casualty of World War II."

"I feel very sad because he wasn't here to see this," said Margaret Snow, 79. "He did get to see his honorable discharge and I know he would be pleased about this too."