

Pentagon sends wronged Central Florida soldier WWII pay: \$725

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LEESBURG—Samuel Snow was a skinny and scared Army private in 1944 when he was sent off to a military prison for allegedly taking part in a bloody riot at Fort Lawton, Wash.

In the uprising, American soldiers lynched an Italian prisoner of war. Snow ended up among 28 black soldiers who were convicted and dishonorably discharged for starting the melee. But it was a crime that Snow — then 19 — said he could not have committed. The conviction robbed him of his dream for a military career.

Prompted by a review of the case more than six decades later, the Army in October overturned the retired janitor's conviction, telling him the U.S. military made a mistake.

Then the Pentagon settled up with the wronged soldier. But Snow, now 83, was shocked by the small size of the check he received for back pay withheld while he served nearly a year in a military brig. The \$725 check he got in the mail included no interest or adjustment for inflation.

"That hurt my feelings. I was disappointed," Snow said Thursday at his Leesburg home. "I feel I was cheated out of a career [with the Army]."

He said the money is not enough for the decades of humiliation and anguish he suffered for being wrongly convicted, locked up and later dishonorably discharged. Snow said he has no plans to cash the check.

"I'd like them to pay my back-time with inflation and interest," he said. "And I would like my retirement benefits."

It's not enough for Snow that an Army review board issued a ruling that effectively overturned his and other former soldiers' convictions on the rioting and other charges.

According to the board, the convictions were flawed because only two lawyers were called to defend 43 soldiers. The lawyers had only 13 days to hastily prepare for the trial. And the prosecution — led by Leon Jaworski, a young lieutenant colonel at the time who would later gain fame as a Watergate special prosecutor — withheld critical evidence that might have helped the soldiers.

"All rights, privileges and property lost as a result of the conviction should be restored to him," the board said in October regarding Snow and the other 27 black soldiers.

Initially, 43 soldiers were charged with taking part in the riot. But charges were dropped against two defendants, and the other 13 were acquitted.

The board launched the review this year after a Seattle journalist, Jack Hamann, published a 2005 book about the case, *On American Soil*.

Today, Snow — who received his check Nov. 13 — is one of two convicted soldiers still alive. It was unclear whether the other soldier, Roy Montgomery of Illinois, was issued a check.

U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, D-Jacksonville, called Snow's case an injustice and said Thursday that she will ask Congress to launch an investigation into why Snow's back pay was not adjusted for interest and inflation. According to a calculator on the U.S. Department of Labor's Web site, \$725 from 1944

would amount to more than \$8,600 today when adjusted for inflation.

"They should have put the interest and the inflation [in his check]," Brown said. "It's an injustice in every form. I come from the South, and I know the importance of the military and the opportunity it avails young people. . . . We're going to work to get it resolved."

Snow said that when he was drafted into the Army at age 19, he knew it would give him an opportunity to leave segregated Leesburg, launch a military career and receive an education.

But he said he had nothing to do with a riot that started on the night of Aug. 15, 1944. He said he was packing his bags and heard a loud commotion and whistles going off. Snow ran down a flight of stairs to investigate and was hit in the face, knocked out and rushed to a military hospital. The next day, he was arrested by military police. The riot was apparently set off because some American soldiers felt that the Italian prisoners at the base were receiving lenient treatment. Guglielmo Olivotto, an Italian prisoner of war, was lynched in the uprising.

When Snow was released from the military prison almost 12 months later, he had no choice but return to Leesburg. He went to work as a janitor for a local church and later for the Florida Highway Patrol.

Debra Snow of Leesburg, Snow's daughter-in-law, has joined in helping the elderly man appeal his case. She knows it's impossible to give him back those lost years or a military career, but at least the military can reward him the correct amount of his back pay and retirement benefits.

"They destroyed someone's life and now say it's only worth \$725?" she said. "That's not right."