

Final payment delivered in case of wrongly accused soldier

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An injustice that spanned 64 years and countless miles of red tape ended yesterday with a simple car ride. The family of the late Samuel Snow drove from their home in Leesburg, Fla., to the office of Sen. Bill Nelson, (D-Fla.) who presented them with a check for \$27,580 — back pay, plus interest — owed to Snow by the U.S. Army.

Snow was one of 28 soldiers wrongly court-martialed after a riot between African-American and Italian soldiers at Seattle's Fort Lawton coincided with the lynching death of Pvt. Guglielmo Olivotto in August 1944.

It took the publication of Jack Hamann's 2005 investigative book, "On American Soil," and pressure from Congressman Jim McDermott for the Army to admit it was wrong and correct history. (Records point to a military policeman in the lynching; and a corrupt and ambitious Army prosecutor in the court-martial).

In July, Snow came to Seattle to receive an honorable discharge from the Army in a ceremony at Fort Lawton. But he fell ill the night before, so his son, Ray, attended the ceremony and then delivered the discharge certificate to his father at Virginia Mason Medical Center.

Snow held it to his chest and smiled. He died a few hours later.

On Thursday, Ray Snow accompanied his mother, Margaret, to Nelson's office, along with his father's niece and Ray's son, Ray Jr.

"She is just riding high right now, both happy and sad," Ray Snow said of his mother. "But we are hoping that the happiness will outweigh the sadness.

"The love of my father's life was there for him," Snow said. "So it's comforting. It is good. It closes a chapter."

Initially, the Army only offered Snow \$725 — money withheld when he served a year in prison on the rioting conviction.

Snow never cashed the check; he knew he deserved more.

Hamann recalled asking Snow what he would do if he received a bigger amount.

"He said he would do what any grandparent would do — make sure his grandchildren could go to college," Hamann said. "The first thought was to take care of his grandchildren."

Fourteen of the convicted 28 have yet to come forward or even be found because they have "painfully common" names like Brown, Hamann said. That is compounded by the difficulty of finding people in newspaper or government records from 60 years ago.

"It's up to families to make the connection," Hamann said.

With Snow's payment, and honorable discharge, Hamann feels satisfied, that the story doesn't end with an ellipsis, but a period.

"Everything up to now had 'Yeah, but there's one more step,' and now this final step has occurred, and that's big-time," Hamann said. "These men are being made whole, and the government is not making excuses."