

## **BOOKER TOWNSELL WORLD WAR II COURT MARTIAL OVERTURNING FACT SHEET**

- The longest and largest court martial of World War II, that most of us do not know about.
- African Americans have NEVER been accused of a hanging crime of this magnitude.
- There were 43 defendants American soldiers based in Seattle, all of them **African American**.
- One night in 1944 after a riot broke out between the black and Italian prisoners of war, an Italian prisoner was found lynched.
- The Army underwent what turned out to be a flawed, brief investigation and placed the blame of the death of this Italian prisoner on the black soldiers.
- The confidential investigative report conducted by the army indicated that this prisoner was most likely killed by white MP's, however the crime scene was compromised and evidence that could have exonerated these men was destroyed.
- The special prosecutor had access to this report but it was suppressed from the defense attorney. There were only two attorneys assigned to represent 43 men with 9 days to prepare.
- As a result 22 of the men were convicted. Nineteen of the men were convicted of rioting and 2 were convicted of manslaughter. All were sentenced to prison and received dishonorable discharges.
- In 1997 Jack Hamann, who was a reporter for CNN stumbled upon this information, which turned out to be monumental. He eventually wrote a book called "On American Soil: How Justice Became a Casualty of WWII" that details the events at Fort Lawton.
- He petitioned Congress to read his book and review the information.
- Congressman McDermott felt the information was compelling and sought Congress to overturn the convictions of the 22 black soldiers.
- The Army Review Board required that families would be required to apply individually and each case would be reviewed on a case by case basis.
- **THE TOWNSELL FAMILY WAS THE FIRST FAMILY TO APPLY FOR THE ARMY BOARD TO REVIEW THE CASE OF BOOKER TOWNSELL.**
- **BOOKER TOWNSELL SERVED TWO YEARS IN PRISON FOR A CRIME HE DID NOT COMMIT. HIS FAMILY PERSISTED TO HAVE HIS NAME CLEARED AND HIS DISHONORABLE DISCHARGE REVERSED TO HONORABLE.**
- The Army review board reviewed **BOOKER TOWNSELL'S CASE FIRST**. Based on the evidence in his case, it will set the precedent for 27 other men to be exonerated. His case was the **PRECEDENT CASE**.

- The Secretary of the Army will grant all back rights, privileges due to him and a “mock military burial” which he never received in January of 2008 at the Milwaukee County War Memorial. Dignitaries from the local, state, county and federal level will issue proclamations in his honor at this ceremony.
- **Just one month after, the Army stated that an “egregious error” had occurred in the justice system, and granted rights and privileges to the defendants affected in this case, one of the defendants, still alive, Samuel Snow, received his reimbursement check for back pay from 1944. A whopping \$725. The Townsell family expects a similar settlement and has already set in motion a request for further review.**
- Wisconsin State Senator Spencer Coggs is serving as the local host for the event. Here is just a sampling of persons who will be present for the event: Jack Hamann, author of “On American Soil, the primary catalyst for this cascade of events. Congressman Jim McDermott (D) from Seattle Washington, the champion in Congress who presented information to the Army board and Congress to have this case re-reviewed after 60 years and have the statues of limitations thrown out. Attorney Howard Cooley of Annadale Virginia, national civil rights attorney and military law expert who defended the family before the board who will discuss the legal interests in the case.
- Although the military will grant these privileges to Mr. Townsell, the family will be required to pay for this historic event. LEGACY BANK has set up the “BOOKER TOWNSELL RESTORATION CELEBRATION FUND”, in which donations can be made in order to offset the cost.
- This is African American, military and Milwaukee history that is unfolding in present day and the Townsell family would like to share it with as many community persons, leaders, historians, legal experts or whoever has an interest as possible.
- The date of the event is January 19, 2008 at the Milwaukee County War Memorial 750 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive, Milwaukee, WI from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m... Electronic RSVPs will be taken at [bookertownsellcelebration@gmail.com](mailto:bookertownsellcelebration@gmail.com). Please include **January 19, 2008 RSVP** in the subject line, your full name (s), number attending, and email address (for confirmation of available space) in the body of the email. RSVPs are necessary as space will be limited. There is NO COST to the public. Come out to learn more and participate in this historic event.