MEDAL OF HONOR AND THE NEGRO - The following letters were originally printed in "Army Times" and were submitted by Robert Lehmacher.

28 December 1966 - Seat Pleasant, Md.: In the interest of objectivity and fairness to all of our troops, it is desired to correct a story which appeared on page 3 of Army Times, issued on November 30. The story concerned four soldiers who have been approved by Pentagon officials to receive Medals of Honor. One of the recipients, Sp6 Lawrence Joel, will be the first Army medical corpsman to receive the Medal of Honor in Vietnam.

I was especially interested in the section of your news item which stated that Joel "will become the second Negro to receive the Medal of Honor..." Instead, he will be the second Negro to receive the Medal in Vietnam. The first Medal of Honor awarded to a Negro in Vietnam was issued posthumously to the father of PFC Milton Lee Olive III by President Johnson on April 21.

Although Negroes have fought in every war in American history, records of their heroic deeds unfortunately have not always been kept up to date. This was revealed when the speech prepared for use by President Johnson credited PFC Olive with being "the eighth Negro to receive this nation's highest award." The article in Army Times can be equally misleading as written.

As a matter of information, John W. Cromwell records the names and deeds of 41 Negroes who won the Medal of Honor before World War I in "The Negro in American History," published in 1914. It is my understanding that no Negroes were given the highest award during World Wars I and II, but three won the Medal of Honor in the Korean War and two have won it in the war in Vietnam thus far.

William Thompson, Cornelius Charlton, and Claire R. Stokes, members of the 24th Infantry Division, were the three in Korea who received this award. PFC Olive, who served in the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry and medical corpsman Sp6 Joel, a paratrooper in the 173d Airborne Brigade, are the two so honored in Vietnam. Actually, therefore, Sp6 Lawrence Joel becomes the 46th Negro in our history, the fifth since 1950, the second in Vietnam, and the first medical corpsman in Vietnam to be signally honored in this fashion.

In view of the foregoing and because of the morale boost which such knowledge will have on our Negro troops around the world, it is thought that you may wish to publish an early correction.

HUBERT E. POTTER, SR.

Undated - Dolton, Ill.: The letter entitled "Medal of Honor and the Negro" by H. E. Potter Sr. (Army Times 12-28-1966), was very interesting. He writes in order to clarify errors with regard to Negro Medal of Honor recipients. However, his letter contains several errors.

One - there were only two Negro Medal of Honor recipients in the Korean conflict, William Thompson and Cornelius Charlton. Claire R. Stokes did not receive the Medal of Honor. He may have been recommended, but the actual award was never made.

Two - omitting G. R. Stokes as a recipient, it becomes necessary to change the numerical listing for Sp6 Lawrence Joel from 46th to 45th.

Three - assuming the book by John W. Cromwell entitled "The Negro in American History" is absolutely correct, then Sp6 L. Joel is indeed the 45th Negro recipient of the Medal of Honor. But the Army records themselves do not clearly list the names of Negro recipients. More research, with the help of the Army, is necessary.

Other points of Mr. Potter's letter are well taken. He is to be commended for his efforts in behalf of the Negro troops now serving in the Army and other armed forces.

IRWIN R. ABRAHAM

SAN DIEGO, AUGUST 19/20 - This is the date of our 1968 Convention - plan to enjoy the sunny climate, your fellow members and your own unique interest in orders, decorations and medals.
WASHINGTON, D.C.: DECORATION DAY - The Germans, as all the world knows, are not people to do things by halves, and nowhere is this more evident than in their self-indulgences. Over the past fifteen years, the citizens of West Germany, by the testimony of German sociologists, have successfully embraced a FRESSWELLE (eating craze), a REISEWELLE (travel craze) and a GESUNDHEITSWELLE (health craze). And now they are in the grips of another fad. Not since the days of Hermann Goring has Germany seen anything like its present ORDENSWELLE (medal craze).

In part, West Germany's latest craze stems from a period of enforced abstinence. In the years immediately after World War II, the Allies forbade the issuance of decorations in Germany. But in 1951, Theodor Heuss, the first President of the Federal Republic, put his country back on the honors trail by introducing the Federal Cross of Merit. Already some 82,000 Germans hold the Federal Cross and their ranks are being swelled at the rate of 5,500 a year. So loud, however, is the clamor for still more decorations that the state governments and private organizations have taken to striking their own medals, and there is now something in brass or bronze to reward everything from outstanding achievement in goat-breeding (a medal issued by the Bavarian Interior Ministry) to serving the same employer for 50 years (Federal Cross of Merit, seventh class).

In fact, medals are now taken so seriously by West Germans (Free Democrat party leader Erich Mende proudly sports no fewer than five) that the government has passed a law permitting the wearing of medals awarded during the Nazi era - provided they do not bear the mark of the swastika. Recently, when Foreign Minister Willy Brandt's teen-age actor son, Lars, appeared in a movie irreverently twirling an Iron Cross, he was denounced in the press for "besmirching" the national honor.

Opportunists: Not surprisingly, the medal craze has provided confidence men with a golden opportunity. Take the case of Otto Josef Zumkell. Working out of a Bonn hotel and using phony Presidential letterheads, he fleeced dozens of eager government officials out of $12.50 each "to cover the manufacturing cost" of medals he alleged they were about to receive. By the time the police got wind of the scheme, Zumkell was $6,000 richer.

The Germans have no medal for Zumkell's achievement - yet.

The above was submitted by George H. Kuchen, Jr., from the 6 March 1967 issue of "Newsweek".

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DoD ORDER CURBS 'PREMATURE' MEDAL OF HONOR INFORMATION - On the heels of press reports from South Korea last week that U.S. officials were recommending award of the Medal of Honor for one to six soldiers killed in an ambush, the Defense Department called for a clampdown on Medal of Honor information. The DoD order comes in a directive (1348.18, Nov. 1, 1966) now being printed.

"Premature public disclosure of information concerning recommendations, processing and approval/disapproval action is a potential source of embarrassment to those recommended and, in the case of finally approved recommendations, could diminish the impact of ceremonies at which the awards are made," says the order just approved by Deputy Defense Secretary Cyrus Vance.

To prevent premature disclosure, the former Army official says, Medal of Honor processing will be handled on a "For Official Use Only" basis until the awards are officially announced.

Officials here wired the U.N. Command in South Korea reprimanding those responsible for public discussion of the Medal of Honor recommendation for Pvt. Ernest L. Reynolds of the 2d Inf Div.

Shortly before press time Associated Press reported from Seoul, Korea, that the official recommendation for Reynolds would be for the Silver Star. Nothing was said about a Medal of Honor recommendation for the Kansas City, Mo., soldier.

The Vance directive also orders a new centralized system for award of the medal. It requires that "recommendations for the award of the Medal of Honor must contain the endorsement of a subordinate unified commander, if involved; the unified or specified commander concerned; and the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

Recommendations that originate in the services must be sent to the unified or specified commander for his endorsement, Vance says. Before the recommendation can be considered by the secretary of the military department concerned it must be endorsed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Sources here say that in previous memos, Vance used the term "affirmatively endorsed," and the meaning of the directive now remains somewhat unclear. The services apparently feel that they can live with a system that requires only JCS endorsement and not JSC approval or rejection.

The "nuts and bolts" of the Medal of Honor process remain to be worked out, sources here say.

Submitted by Robert Lehmacher from the 16 Nov. 1966 issue of "Army Times".

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ARMY OFFICER POSTHUMOUSLY PRESENTED MEDAL OF HONOR - The Medal of Honor was presented posthumously October 19 to an Army officer who was killed while waging a one-man rifle and grenade attack on enemy bunkers in Vietnam on his 23rd birthday last year.

First Lt. James A. Gardner was the 20th American to receive the award for gallantry in Vietnam. It was accepted in a Defense Department ceremony by his widow, now the wife of an Army captain.

Gardner was leading a platoon to relieve a company that had been pinned down for hours by enemy fire. The Tennessee soldier charged alone across a fire-swept rice paddy and attacked three enemy bunkers before he was shot.

"With the last valiant effort he staggered forward and destroyed the bunker and its defenders with a grenade," said the citation. "Although he fell dead on the rim of the bunker, his extraordinary actions so inspired the men of his platoon that they resumed the attack and completely routed the enemy."

The above article was submitted by Lester L. McDowell from the 11 January 1967 issue of "Navy Times".

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