

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 4, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
US Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Panetta,

For nearly 100 years, our nation has failed to properly recognize the heroic actions of Sergeant Henry Lincoln Johnson. We are writing to ask you to take the opportunity to correct this injustice by personally reviewing the new evidence that has been submitted to support awarding Sergeant Johnson the Medal of Honor. We also ask that you expedite the review process, which we understand can normally take more than two years. After reviewing the evidence and learning more about Sergeant Johnson's story, we believe that you will agree that America has already waited far too long to properly honor one of its most distinguished heroes.

The story of Sergeant Henry Johnson is one of the most remarkable sagas in American history. The prejudice at the time was so severe that Sergeant Johnson, an American soldier who happened to be black, was forced to serve his country wearing a French uniform and serving under French command. Army documents we have submitted as part of this review state Sergeant Johnson was issued substandard equipment and poorly trained. However Sergeant Johnson and his companion Private Needham Roberts, isolated and forward of the French lines without reinforcements, fought off a German raiding party of over twenty men. In addition, Sergeant Johnson was shot multiple times and suffered more than twenty significant knife wounds in the battle. However he continued to fight and prevented his partner from being captured by the enemy.

His French commanders did not hesitate to reward Sergeant Johnson's heroic feat with its highest award for valor, the Croix de Guerre Avec Palme. In fact, he became the first American of any race to receive France's highest military medal for heroism in battle. The U.S. military initially hailed him as a hero and asked him to speak publicly about the war, until he dared to say that black soldiers could be just as brave as white soldiers. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on Omaha Beach in World War II, wrote that Sergeant Johnson as one of the top five American heroes of the First World War.

Sergeant Johnson finally received his long overdue Purple Heart in 1996. In 2003 after a herculean effort by his family, friends, and supporters, Sergeant Johnson was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Yet these awards do not properly recognize Sergeant Johnson's heroism. With the new evidence that has been uncovered, it is now possible for our nation to at last give Sergeant Johnson the recognition he deserves: the Medal of Honor.

We understand that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs recommended against awarding the Medal of Honor in 2002 on 'technical' grounds. The new evidence meets the threshold required by the Army for reconsideration. This new evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A memorandum acknowledging Sergeant Johnson's actions written by Gen. John J. Pershing, World War I Army Commander in Chief.
- An eyewitness original description from the soldier Johnson saved during his heroic actions, Mr. Needham Roberts.
- A letter written by one of Johnson's commanders, Colonel William Hayward, which confirms Johnson's actions.

These documents provide the written chain of command endorsement and eyewitness testimony needed to overcome the previous rejection based on 'technical' grounds, and now overwhelmingly meets the Army's standards to award the Medal of Honor. You will see that the evidence documenting Sergeant Johnson's gallant action is irrefutable. The complete packet is downloadable online at <http://dl.dropbox.com/u/36615092/HJFINAL.pdf>

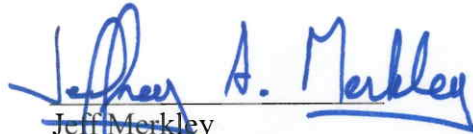
We ask that you ensure that this overdue recognition occurs as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator