

Navy Hero

John Henry "Dick" Turpin was born in Long Beach, New Jersey. He dedicated his life to the U.S. Navy, his first enlistment being on board the U.S.S. *Vermont*, in New York.

The Navy at this point had never commissioned any blacks, limiting all black sailors to stewards and messmen. In spite of these obstacles, Dick Turpin succeeded in making significant contributions during World War I. He was a Chief Gunner's Mate by the time he retired and was called back to serve as Lieutenant Commander.

Dick Turpin proved to be a hero twice during his Navy career. He saved the life of his Captain, Chas D. Sigsbee, when the *Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor. Turpin was also aboard the cruiser *Bennington* in San Diego when it exploded. He succeeded in saving the lives of seven shipmates. This is how he became known throughout the nation as the holder of two Medals of Honor.

One of his greatest contributions to the service he loved was a collaboration in which he helped devise the underwater welding acetylene and arc-electric processes. Each was of great value to the Navy in saving the lives of men trapped in ships and in saving costs on routine repair work.

Clearly, Turpin was a hero many times over. He will be remembered by generations to come as the most legendary figure of the "Old Navy," ramrod-straight, moustached, proud and fiery. Although it is not certain that the medals were formally bestowed, he will be remembered as one of the only Negroes of his time to receive a Medal of Honor – and not only one, Turpin held two of them. He was a warrior of the Spanish-American War and World War I, representing the last of the unbreakable breed of men who manned the sailing ships.



First Black Deputy Sheriff

William Walter Simmons was born in Boston on August 4, 1877, to Mr. and Mrs. David Simmons. At the age of six his parents moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he attended grade school. In his early years, he lived in Amherst, Nova Scotia; Dorchester, New Brunswick; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1910, he came to Spokane, Washington, where he was hired by the Northern Pacific Railroad Co. as head end porter for 18 months. He then moved to Seattle and worked at The Bon Marché store for a short while. Later, he moved to Everett and worked for the Butler estate as gardener until 1914. After going into business for himself in 1915, he married his first wife, Miss Ella Whitlow, to whom were born his two children, Walter and Margaret.

In 1918, he obtained employment in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and, under a wartime housing plan, moved to Bremerton. In 1919, with a special permit from the Secretary of the Navy, he became a part of the law enforcement agencies in Bremerton while continuing to work in the shipyard.

Mr. Simmons went into Masonry in 1919; he also joined the Elks Lodge, Mt. Rainier No 3512 in Seattle and was a member of the Furlough Club. He became active in the NAACP in 1920. In 1921, he and two other members established Pure Gold Lodge No. 21.

In 1927, he married Miss Sylena Cambell. After 31 years of service, Mr. Simmons retired from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in 1946, but continued to work in the sheriff's department and was hired as a regular deputy. He has received a commission from every sheriff elected to office in Kitsap County since 1921. In 1946, he also set up Hama Hama Lodge No. 35, F.&A.M., and Madrona Chapter No. 14, O.E.S.