

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, New York, 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 has 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 Congressional Medals of Honor when in reality he never received any medals.

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 lives of men trapped in ships and in saving costs on routine repair work.

The things that are certain about him is that he was a hero many times over and a hero of the Navy. He will be remembered by generations to come as the most legendary figure of the "Old Navy", ramrod straight, moustached, proud and fiery. Also, by those who won't and can't be told otherwise, he was one of the only Negroes to receive a Congressional Medal of Honor, holding two of them. He was a warrior of the Spanish-American War and World War I, representing the last unbreakable breed of men who manned the sailing ships.



FIRST BLACK DEPUTY SHERIFF

WILLIAM WALTER SIMMONS was born August 4, 1877, in Boston Mass., to Mr. and Mrs. David Simmons. At the age of six his parents moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, where he attended grade school. For periods of time he lived in Amherst, Nova Scotia; Dorchester, New Brunswick, and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

In 1910 he came to Spokane, Washington, where he obtained employment with the Northern Pacific Railroad Co., as head end porter for 18 months. He then moved to Seattle and worked at The Bon Marche store for a short while and then moved to Everett, Washington, 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 was 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 Navy, he became a part of the law enforcement agencies in Bremerton and continued to work in the Shipyard.

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

In 1927 he married his present wife, Miss Sylena Cambell. After thirty-one years of service, Mr. Simmons retired from the P.S.N.S. 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 of Kitsap County since 1921. In 1946 he also set up Hamma Hamma Lodge No. 35, F.&A.M., and Madrona Chapter No. 14, O.E.S.