



OPERATION HERO HOMECOMING

Honoring World War II Medal of Honor Recipient

Private First Class Willy Frederick James Jr., United States Army

Friday, April 7, 2023

**Ceremonial wreath laying at Black Veterans Memorial
12th Street & The Paseo**

**Operation Hero Homecoming Display
BLACK ARCHIVES OF MID-AMERICA
1722 E. 17th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64108**

PFC Willy F. James, Jr., 1920 - 1945, Medal of Honor

Willy F. James, Jr. was one of seven African Americans to receive the Medal of Honor for service in World War II, an award delayed decades by bias and discrimination. "He enlisted as a young man and he died as a young man," recalled Margaret Pender, James's family member, in the 2015 event, *Unsung Heroes*.

James was born on March 18, 1920 in Kansas City, Missouri and grew up there the only child of a widowed mother. He was drafted into the Army in September 1942, but before he left Kansas City, he married, not even having time for a proper honeymoon with wife, Valcenie.

In the last days of 1944, during the **Battle of the Bulge**, certain African American troops, formerly largely barred from combat duty, were called upon to volunteer and form replacement battalions to supplement depleted infantry regiments. James was one of more than 2,200 Black soldiers selected for an expedited four-week training course at the Ground Forces Reinforcement Center in France. He was recognized in that training for his marksmanship and leadership, and emerged as Private First Class James—a scout with the 413th Infantry Regiment, 104th "Timberwolf" Infantry Division.

Just two days after his 25th birthday, on March 20, 1945, PFC James and the other 413th Infantry Regiment reinforcements arrived in the ruins of **Cologne, Germany**, just two weeks after Americans first entered the ancient city. Joining up with the 2nd Battalion, they didn't stay put for long. The next day, they crossed the Rhine River and relieved the 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. Pinned down by German artillery for several days, the 413th slowly began to resume the offensive and gain ground. German POW numbers grew as some defenders were overrun, but SS troops remained at the attack, withdrawing to regroup as the Allies pushed ahead.

PFC James was one of several tapped to lead rifle squads in pursuit. After a firefight, near Paderborn, nearly 100 miles from Cologne, the three Black squads

gained the advantage, ultimately capturing or killing 40 SS troops, an event that was reported on by Ann Stringer, a United Press war correspondent, who wrote, "An all-Negro platoon saw action for the first time today and licked Adolf Hitler's supermen." The 413th continued deeper into Germany, westward toward the Weser River.

On April 7, 1945, James's unit crossed the Weser near Lippoldsberg. He was sent forward to scout the enemy position and made critical observations while pinned down by heavy fire for more than an hour. Still under fire, he raced back to his company to report his observations. Undaunted, James volunteered to lead the attack on Lippoldsberg. As the men advanced, they drew fire from every direction. SS troops emerged from the windows and doorways of the town. Platoon leader, Lieutenant A.J. Serabella was gravely wounded in the attack. James raced to his aid, intending to pull him to safety. Before he could make any movements, James was struck and killed by German sniper fire.

James's legacy lives on at The National WWII Museum and in the exhibition **Fighting for the Right to Fight: African American Experiences in World War II**. His grave in Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten, and those of the other 8,300 Americans buried there, is lovingly tended by the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Dutch people, and visitors who come year-round to pay their respects.

In 1996, the United States Government affirmed that seven African Americans, including PFC James, had been unjustly denied the Medal of Honor for actions during World War II. In a 1997 White House ceremony, President Bill Clinton presented Valcenie James with her husband's Medal of Honor, the US military's highest decoration. It had taken more than 50 years for this belated recognition of his heroic acts performed under the most adverse conditions.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Lieutenant General Milford H. Beagle, Jr.

**Commanding General, U.S. Army
Combined Arms Center and Fort
Leavenworth, KS**

**Commandant, U.S. Army Command and
General Staff College**

**Deputy Commanding General for
Combined Arms, U.S. Army Training and
Doctrine Command**



Lieutenant General Milford “Beags” Beagle, Jr. was commissioned as an Infantry Officer upon graduation from South Carolina State University in 1990 as a distinguished military graduate.

Lieutenant General Beagle holds master’s degrees from Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, and the United States Army School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Lieutenant General Beagle has served in multiple leadership capacities from the platoon to division level. He has served in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan in positions ranging from operations officer in tactical combat units to Advisor as part of NATO missions. His career assignments have spanned the globe from Hawaii to the Republic of South Korea.

His most recent assignments were as the Deputy Commanding General (Support), 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), Fort Drum, NY where he was forward deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, Iraq. He then served as the 51st Commanding General of the United States Army Training Center and Fort Jackson, SC. He next served as the Commanding General, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) and Fort Drum, NY. He currently serves as the Commanding General, Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, KS.

Lieutenant General Beagle and his wife Pamela have two children, Jordan (Spouse - Valencia) and Jayden.



Program

- 1100 - Wreath Ceremony**
Master of Ceremonies 1stSgt Robert Gray III (Ret.)
Location: Black Veterans Memorial, 12th & The Paseo
- 1105 - Chaplain Benediction**
Dr. Israel Grove, Post Chaplain American Legion-Wayne Miner Post #149
- 1108 - Placement of Wreath**
- 1110 - Firing Salute (Three Volleys)**
- 1112 - Playing of Taps (Band)**
- 1114 - Color Guard starts memorial procession to the Black Archives of Mid-America**
1722 E. 17th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64108
- 1145 - Memorial procession arrives at Black Archives of Mid-America**

Program

- 1150 - Master of Ceremony**
Remarks Chief Warrant Officer 5, Walter Schley (Ret)
- 1153 - Biography of PFC Willy Frederick James Jr. Read**
1stSgt Robert Gray III (Ret.)
- 1155 - KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
LTG Milford Beagle, Jr.
- 1200 - Proclamation**
Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II {Tentative}
- 1202 - Proclamation**
Kansas City Mayor, Quinton Lucas {Tentative}
- 1204 Presentation**
Commander Eddie L. Brown, American Legion Wayne Miner Post 149
- 1205 - Private First Class Willy F. James Jr. USA, Medal of Honor Display Open**

Challenge Coin

One of the earliest known examples of a Soldier being monetarily rewarded for valor took place in Ancient Rome. Today, the use of coins in the military is much more nuanced with the use of challenge coins. Most challenge coins are handed out as tokens of appreciation for a job well done, especially for those serving as part of military operations. However, challenge coins are also used as a method of paying homage to someone admired and respected. Along with the placement of the traditional four-coin denominations at Veterans' graves challenge coins are also left as tokens of the utmost respect.

Guests are welcome to leave personal or unit challenge coins at the new exhibit to commemorate Medal of Honor Recipient Private First Class Willy F. James Jr. USA sacrifice on 7 April 1945.

***Reception at Gregg Klice Community Center for March Participants
Reception for Family/VIPs at Black Archives of Mid-America***

Ceremony Participants

Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard, Fort Riley, KS
312th Army Band, Lawrence, KS
U.S. Army Rifle Detail, Fort Leavenworth, KS
American Legion Wayne Miner Post 149, Kansas City, MO
Buffalo Soldiers of Kansas City/Leavenworth, KS
East High School, Kansas City, MO. JROTC
Leavenworth High School, Leavenworth, KS. JROTC
The American Legion Band of Greater Kansas City Wind Ensemble
Kansas City Fire Department (American Flag display)
Kansas City Police Department (Traffic Control)

Special Guests

Colonel Donald "Doc" Ballard, USN, Medal of Honor Recipient
Frank White, Jr., Jackson County Executive, Missouri
Brigadier General Bryan Wampler, USA Retired, President, Greater Kansas City Chapter of the Association of the U.S. Army
Colonel John B. Montford, Deputy Commanding General-Support, 1st Division, Fort Riley
Colonel Kevin M. Payne, 15th Military Police Brigade, Ft Leavenworth
Colonel Kevin Clark, Commanding Officer, Marine Corps Detachment, Ft Leavenworth
Colonel Mark Morgan, CAC G-1, Ft Leavenworth
Command Sergeant Major Clarence Raby, 1st Division, Fort Riley
Command Sergeant Major, Joshua M. Kreitzer, 15th Military Police Brigade, Ft Leavenworth
Command Chief Olatokunbo Olopade, 509th Bomb Wing, Whiteman AFB
Chief Stacey Graves, Kansas City, Missouri Police Department
Major Stevie Brooks, Manager of Student Retention and Success, Kansas City Public Schools
Dr. Marjorie Williams, Chair, Board of Directors, The Black Archives of Mid-America
Dr. Carmaletta M. Williams, Chief Executive Officer, The Black Archives of Mid-America
Mr. Leonard D. Jones, Mayor Grandview Mo., (LTC) Retired
1stSgt Robert Gray III, USMC (Ret), President
Ms. Margaret Pender, Vice President (PFC Jame's Niece)
Mrs. Patricia Greene, Board Member (PFC James' Niece)
CSM Steven Mentor, USA (Ret), Secretary
1SG Allen Roberson, USA (Ret), Treasurer
CWO5 Walter Schley, USMC (Ret), Board Member
MSgt Linda Holliday-Sillimon, USAF (Ret), Board Member
Mr. Chris Cotten, Director Kansas City Parks and Recreation Dept.
LtCol C. J. Craig, USA (Ret) WW II Uniform from Sgt Lee A. Craig
Ms. Janina Greene, Caterer
Mr. Jonathan Roberts, Starbucks, Kansas City, MO
Ms. Ruth Ramsey, Ramsey & Associates Design, Inc.
Mrs. Catherine Hoffman, Kansas City PBS



Thank You

The Family of PFC Willie F. James, Jr. extend our deepest gratitude for your support and participation in honoring our family member by welcoming him home and acknowledging his heroism while serving in World War II.

The Congressional Medal of Honor that was awarded to his spouse Valcenie James posthumously in January of 1996 by President William Clinton will now be displayed in the Black Archives of Mid America near where he grew up. It is greatly appreciated that PFC Willy James, the only African American from Kansas City, Missouri to receive this distinguished medal, is now being honored in his own hometown. We greatly appreciate your efforts that helped us to reach this goal.

Every donation of time, skills, organizing, and monetary gifting has made this celebration possible from the Wreath Ceremony to the Opening of the Display to the reception and for this we are thankful and grateful.

A special thanks to 1st Sgt Robert Gray III USMC (Ret) for his vision, leadership and relentless efforts in this endeavor, the MOH PFC James USA Memorial Fund Board Members: CSM Steven Mentor, USA (Ret), 1SG Allen Roberson, USA (Ret), CW05 Walter Schley, USMC (Ret) and MSgt Linda Holliday-Sillimon, USAF (Ret); Catherine Hoffman, Journalist for her unique skills in capturing the Willy F. James story and reporting it to the public via PBS; Ruth Ramsey with Ramsey & Associates Design for the extraordinary illustration that captures PFC Willy's warmth and humanity; and all of the US Military participants.

Everyone's support and participation in "Operation Hero Homecoming" has truly made a difference in bringing honor to an unsung hero. We are extremely thankful!

To God be the Glory!

The Family of PFC Willy F. James Jr.



President Bill Clinton presented Valcenie James with her husband's Medal of Honor



Special Appreciation



**BLACK
ARCHIVES**
OF MID-AMERICA
IN KANSAS CITY



Kansas City  **PBS**



American Legion Wayne Miner Post 149





WILLY F. JAMES JR
PFC 413 INF 104 DIV
MISSOURI APR 8 1945

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Interment, Plot P Row 9 Grave 9,
Netherlands American Cemetery,
AM Begraafplaats 1, 6269 NA,
Margraten Netherlands