



VFW Donates \$70,000 to Park University's Valor Medals Review Project

'We have a real opportunity to help make history right here'

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz presented a \$70,000 donation to Park University President Dr. Greg Gunderson today in support of the university’s research initiative into the awarding or denying of World War I military service medals based on racial bias.

More than 367,000 African Americans fought during World War I, yet during that time not one was awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest possible military decoration awarded by the U.S. government to those distinguished by an act of conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. Historians, scholars and researchers believe systematic racism may be to blame, thus prompting the Valor Medal Review project.

The project is being conducted by Park University’s George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War, the Valor Medals Review Task Force, and in conjunction with the Foundation for the Commemoration of the World Wars on behalf of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission.

In September 2018 the task force began the arduous research task of collecting and reviewing archival records, and genealogical and descendant outreach with the goal to provide the “state-of-play” and generate recommendations for Congress or the Department of Defense to actualize.

Park University pushed for legislation included in the pending National Defense Authorization Act which would require the Department of Defense to execute a systematic review of the valor medals awarded to African American service members, and those of

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

other minority groups who were potentially denied medals due to racial bias.

Thus far, researchers have identified 70 African Americans, 203 Jewish Americans, 18 Native Americans, three Alaskan Natives and three Hispanic Americans as recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross/Navy Cross or the Croix de Guerre with Palm, the second highest military decoration awarded for extraordinary heroism.

“The VFW is proud to support this important initiative,” said Schmitz. “These men served their country unequivocally and so their recognition should also come without condition or exception. We have a real opportunity to help make history right here.”

“We are so grateful to the VFW for their partnership,” said Greg Gunderson, Ph.D., Park University president. “Park is an institution that takes pride in our enduring relationship with the military; it is our honor and obligation to help ensure that all service members’ valiant acts are appropriately recognized. This significant gift from the VFW will go a long way in moving forward the historic work that is happening through the Valor Medals Review.”