

R. & P. 574,146.

CASE OF

WILLIAM HARVEY CARNEY,

sergeant, Company C, 54th Massachusetts Volunteers (Colored).

Application for award of medal of honor to him for gallantry in action at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, July 18, 1863, he being at the time sergeant of Company C, 54th Regiment Massachusetts Infantry. (Colored).

Under date of January 15, 1900, Christian A. Fleetwood, formerly sergeant major, 4th U. S. Colored Troops, now residing at No. 319 Spruce Street, NW., Washington, D. C., submits the following application:

"I have the honor most respectfully to petition for the issue of 'The Congressional Medal of Honor' to William Harvey Carney, Sergeant Co. C, 54th Regiment Massachusetts Infantry Vols., under the Act of Congress approved July 19, 1862, and in support thereof beg leave to state:

"That in the assault upon Fort Wagner, S. C., July 18, 1863, while serving as a file-closer in Co. C, of said 54th Mass. Inf. Vols. he saw the color sergeant of the regiment fall at the beginning of the charge. Carney threw away his rifle, snatched the flag, and springing to the front, led the way up to the parapet, planted the staff in the top of the parapet, and lying down behind it, kept it flying over the rebel works for over a half hour, when finding himself left alone, he pulled up the staff and retreated under a storm of shot and shell being wounded three times before reaching our lines. Weak as he was from loss of blood, he positively refused to be carried to the hospital or to have his wounds treated or to surrender the flag to any one until he could turn it over to the survivors of his regiment. Accordingly he was sent over in an ambulance to find them and when the boys cheered him, he simply said: 'Boys I only did my duty. The old flag never touched the ground.'

"A Medal of Honor was issued to him by General Gilmore commanding the Department, but by some oversight, the case was never brought to the attention of the War Dept. This oversight was only discovered by me within the past few weeks in looking up data for the Paris Exposition Negro Exhibit. While not serving in that Department, the facts in the case are perfectly familiar to me, and we are personal friends of long standing, hence my desire to see justice done him by this award. I beg leave to refer you further in support:

"1. To Rebellion Records Series 1, Vol. 28, pt. 1, page 362. Report made by Col. E.N. Hollowell, commanding 54th Mass. Vols. to Genl. Seymour, commanding U. S. Forces Morris Island, S. C., under date Nov. 7, '63.

"2. 'History of the Negro Race in America,' (George W. Williams) page 330. Copy of communication under date Oct. 15, '63, addressed by Milton S. Littlefield, Col. Commanding 54th Mass. Vols. to Col. A. S. Brown, Jr., Military Secretary to His Excellency John A. Andrews, Gov. Mass.

"3. 'Negro Troops in the Rebellion,' pp. 199-200, relative to the award of a medal by General Gilmore. (All in Library of War Department).

"4. Affidavit of John W. M. Appleton, formerly Capt. Commanding Co. A, 54th Mass. Vols. Now Brig. Gen. and Adjutant General State of West Va.

"5. Affidavit of Chas. H. Harrison, formerly of Co. C, 54th Mass. Vols. and

"6. Affidavit of Lewis H. Douglass formerly sergt. Major 54th Mass. Vols.

"And respectfully petition your favorable consideration and speedy award."

Mr. Fleetwood entered the service as sergeant, Company G, 4th U. S. Colored Infantry August 11, 1863, and was mustered out as sergeant major, same regiment, May 4, 1866. He is not a witness in this case, and his statement is not based upon personal observation of the incidents related by him.

The testimony of Mr. Appleton referred to consists of a sworn statement of which the following is a copy:

"STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA,
"Adjutant General's Office,
"Charleston,
"December 26, 1899.

"State of West Virginia)
"County of Kanawha) SS.

"This day personally appeared before me, a Notary Public in and for said County, Gen. J. W. M. Appleton, who being by me first duly sworn, deposes and says: That on the 18th of July 1863 I was Captain commanding 'A' Company of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, and as such, in the line of duty, was in the front line of the attack upon Fort Wagner, Morris Island, Charleston Harbor, S. C. The regiment was formed for the attack by wing, half the companies in the front line and the remainder a few paces behind them, the Color company was to my left in the front line.

"As we approached the Fort, we broke through some palisading and ran over some rifle pits in which were men of the enemy's forces and I heard afterwards the color bearer fall at that time. Sergeant William H. Carney, a Duty Sergeant of 'C' Company, picked up the colors and carried them forward with us in the charge. I was near the colors when they crossed the moat and they were planted on the top of the curtain of the fort between the two main bastions, some twenty yards to my left as I stood on the top of the rampart. There was severe fighting for me in my front, but I could see that the colors kept rising and falling as the men fought around them. Once I thought they were taken, but Carney hung on to them and finally, to my great relief, I saw them slowly go down the exterior slope of the rampart and cross the moat. Carney was wounded in three places in the fight about the colors. The State flag was torn from its staff and captured.

"After our long fight in the Southeast bastion, which occurred after the time I speak of above and in which I was wounded twice, I made my way down the beach and found a remnant of the Regiment, and Carney had brought the colors to the officer commanding. Carney's action throughout was very heroic. It is my opinion that he well deserves a medal for his deed.

"John W. M. Appleton,

"Brig. Gen.,

"Adjutant Gen. of W. Va."

"Subscribed and sworn to before me at Charleston, W. Va., this day of December, 1899. .

"Edwin M. Keatley,

"Notary Public."

(SEAL)

The records show that John W. M. Appleton was enrolled February 7, 1863, at Boston, Mass.; that he was mustered into the service February 9, 1863, as second lieutenant in Company A, 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored); that he was wounded at Fort Wagner July 18, 1863, and that he was honorably discharged the service, as major, November 21, 1864. It will be remembered that Mr. Appleton declares positively that he was an eye-witness of the act of bravery referred to.

The testimony of Charles H. Harrison referred to consists of a sworn statement of which following is a copy:

"New Bedford, Mass.,

Jan. 8th, 1900.

"I, Charles H. Harrison, a member of Company 'C', 54th Mass. Volunteers, was on the 18th of July, 1863, at the battle of Fort Wagner and as such was in line of duty; was in the front line of the attack upon Fort Wagner, Morris Island, Charleston Harbor, S. C. The regiment was formed for the attack by wing, half the companies in the front line and the remainder a few paces behind them.

"The color company was to my left in the front line. As we went up to the Fort amid the sound of cheers and yells, we went through the palisades, and ran over some rifle pits which were of the enemy. The regimental color-bearer fell, carrying the colors on to victory. Sergeant William H. Carney picked up the colors and carried them with us through the charge.

"I was a private in Co. 'C' of the 54th Mass. Vols. I saw Sergeant Carney carrying the colors across the ditch, and on he went across the curtain of the Fort, and I saw him wounded with the Stars and Stripes in his hand. He said 'The old flag never touched the ground.'

"I would request that a Congressional medal of Honor should be awarded him under the joint resolutions of Congress of July 19th, 1862, and May 2nd, 1896.

"Charles H. Harrison."

"Bristol SS.

January 8, 1900

"Then personally appeared the above named Charles H. Harrison on oath depose and says that the above statement subscribed by him is true.

"Before me William B. Smith,
"Justice of the Peace."

The records show Charles H. Harrison, a private of Company C, 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored), was enrolled February 14, 1863. He is reported present on the muster roll dated August 31, 1863, and was mustered out with his company August 20, 1865. Mr. Harrison also declares positively that he was an eye-witness of the act of bravery referred to.

The testimony of Lewis H. Douglass consists of a sworn statement of which following is a copy:

"Washington, D. C.,
Jany. 15, 1900.

"I, Lewis H. Douglass, now of Washington, D. C., was on July 18, 1863, Sergeant Major of the 54th Mass. Infy. Vols., and was on that date engaged with my regiment in the assault on Fort Wagner, Morris Island, South Carolina. I have read the affidavits of John W. M. Appleton and Charles H. Harrison as to the part taken by Sergeant Wm. H. Carney of Co. C, 54th Mass. Vol. Infy. From personal observation and information I certify that the affidavits are true statements of the facts in regard to Carney's gallantry at Fort Wagner. My position on the left of the regiment was such that I was some distance from the color guard. I however saw Carney when he came to the rear and when he was the recipient of the plaudits of his comrades for his pluck in keeping the flag from trailing in the dirt.

"Lewis H. Douglass."

"Sworn and subscribed to before me
this 15th day of January, 1900.

"J. J. Nelligan,
"Notary Public."

(SEAL)

The records show that Lewis H. Douglass, private of Company F, 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored) was enrolled March 25, 1863. The muster roll dated August 31, 1863, shows him present as sergeant major, and he was honorably discharged the service for disability March 2, 1864. It will be observed that Mr. Douglass states that he was not an eye-witness of the act of gallantry referred to, but that he saw Carney when he came to the rear and was the recipient of the plaudits of his comrades.

The records show that William H. Carney was enrolled February 17, 1863, at New Bedford, and that he was mustered into the service of the United States March 30, 1863, as a sergeant in Company C, 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored), to serve three years. He was wounded in hip and head in the assault on Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863, and was honorably discharged for disability June 30, 1864, at Morris Island, S. C., while holding the grade of sergeant.

Following is an extract from the report upon the assault upon Fort Wagner, S. C., of Edward N. Hallowell, colonel, 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored), dated Morris Island, S. C. November 7, 1863, and addressed to Gen. Truman Seymour, commanding U. S. Forces, Morris Island, S. C.:

"So many officers behaved with marked coolness and bravery, I cannot mention any above the others. It is due, however, to the following named enlisted men that they be recorded above their fellows for special merit: * * * * * Sergeant William H. Carney,
* * * * *
Enlisted men killed, 9; wounded, 147; missing, 100; total, 256."
(Rebellion Records, Series 1, Vol. 28, Part 1, pages 362 and 363).

No medal of honor has been awarded to the principal nor to any of his witnesses, but such a medal was awarded April 6, 1865, to Christian A. Fleetwood, sergeant major, 4th U. S. Colored Troops.

Chief, Record and Pension Office.

Record and Pension Office,

War Department,

January 24, 1900.

S U P P L E M E N T A L

In Williams' History of the Negro Race in America, Volume 2, Pages 330 and 331, reference is made to the conduct of Sergeant Carney as follows:

"The following letter, addressed to the Military Secretary of Gov. Andrew, of Massachusetts, narrates an instance of heroism in a Negro soldier which deserves to go into history:

'Headquarters 54th Massachusetts Vols.,
'Morris Island, S. C., Oct. 15, 1863.

'Colonel: I have the honor to forward you the following letter, received a few days since from Sergeant W. H. Carney, Company C, of this regiment. Mention has before been made of his heroic conduct in preserving the American flag and bearing it from the field, in the assault on Fort Wagner on the 18th of July last, but that you may have the history complete, I send a simple statement of the facts as I have obtained them from him, and an officer who was an eye-witness:

'When the Sergeant arrived to within about one hundred yards of the fort -- he was with the first battalion, which was in the advance of the storming column -- he received the regimental colors, pressed forward to the front rank, near the Colonel, who was leading the men over the ditch. He says, as they ascended the wall of the fort, the ranks were full, but as soon as they reached the top, they melted away" before the enemy's fire "almost instantly." He received a severe wound in the thigh, but fell only upon his knees. He planted the flag upon the parapet, lay down on the outer slope, that he might get as much shelter as possible; there he remained for over half an hour, till the 2nd brigade came up. He kept the colors flying until the second conflict was ended. When our forces retired he followed, creeping on one knee, still holding up the flag. It was thus that Sergeant Carney came from the field, having held the emblem of liberty over the walls of Fort Wagner during the sanguinary conflict of the two brigades, and having received two very severe wounds, one in the thigh and one in the head. Still he refused to give up his sacred trust until he found an officer of his regiment.

'When he entered the field hospital, where his wounded comrades were being brought in, they cheered him and the colors. Though nearly exhausted with the loss of blood, he said: "Boys, the old flag never touched the ground."

'Of him as a man and soldier, I can speak in the highest term of praise.