

Seven blacks awarded Medal of Honor for WWII

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vernon Baker was standing in the White House with glistening eyes and a brand new medal around his neck, but his mind was on the Italian mountainside where he earned his place in history 52 years ago.

Baker, 77, was reliving the April 1945 firefight in which he took out German gun posts and killed nine enemy soldiers with a gun and hand grenades. He thought of the other black men



Vernon Baker

who fought beside him and died around him as they awaited reinforcements that never came.

"We've all been vindicated," Baker said. "Those that are not here with me, thank you, fellas, well done and I'll always remember you."

Baker, of St. Maries, Idaho, was one of seven black soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor on Monday for World War II valor that was overlooked by the Army of a tense, segregated era. Medals were awarded posthumously to Staff Sgt. Edward A. Carter Jr. of Los Angeles; 1st Lt. John R. Fox of Cincinnati; Pfc. Willy F. James Jr. of Kansas City, Mo.; 1st Lt. Charles L. Thomas of Detroit; Pvt. George Watson of Birmingham, Ala.; and Staff Sgt. Ruben Rivers of Hotulka, Okla. Fox, James, Rivers and Watson were killed in action. Carter died in 1963, and Thomas died in 1980.

"We're just happy the country we believe in has done this," said

Thomas' niece, Sandra Thomas. "My uncle was an humble man. He believed in this country and he fought for it. I believe young people need to take a lesson from this."

In presenting the medals, President Clinton praised the seven men for fighting selflessly "to lead the forces of freedom to victory" in spite of the freedom they didn't have in their native America.

"They were prepared to sacrifice everything for freedom even though freedom's fullness was denied to them," Clinton said. "Now and forever, the truth will be known about these African Americans who gave so much, that the rest of us might be free." A single tear rolled down Baker's left cheek as he listened to Clinton. He received a standing ovation as he entered the East Room and took

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Items from an Egyptian Odyssey

Winston-Salem Native: Happy Hills to Haven of History

How probable is it that an African-American family from Winston-Salem would encounter another Winston-Salem family in Egypt? Surely it is more than 65 million-to-one, which is the population of Egypt. Anything is possible, for last week, it did occur, resulting in smiles bright as the

ton, D.C., grew up in Happy Hill Gardens, through their "adolescent years." He fondly remembers his friends Larry Little and Willard McCloud Jr., though he "has too many friends in Winston to mention (any) without insulting any, since all can't be named." The R.J. Reynolds grad attended Diggs Elementary, and, for a time, Anderson High.

Witten remembers Thomas Hinton well, and he sends a hearty "hello and thanks" to Moses Lucas of the YMCA. Witten recalls Hinton and Lucas fondly as memorable adult role models; but, he quickly adds, "My mom and dad are my most significant role models; they taught me the meaning of hard work and sacrifice." Mrs. Thompson worked as a secretary for many years at Western Electric. Mr. Thompson was a dock worker for the McLean Trucking.

After a couple years of study at North Carolina A&T, where he met and married his wife, Dorothy, Witten joined the U.S. Army — he now has two dozen years of service. He took an undergraduate degree from Florida State and a master's in General Administration from Central Michigan University.

Mrs. Witten, a NC A&T

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Villagers in Uganda receive water from a clean water system, which was built by the local YMCA.

Winston Lake, Uganda YMCAs join to build relations, provide assistance

By MAURICE CROCKER
Community News Reporter

The Winston Lake YMCA allows parents and children of Winston-Salem the opportunity to enjoy family entertainment through a variety of physical and educational activities.

Most people are familiar with the kinds of programs offered by the YMCA. But what isn't common knowledge is the service-and help the YMCA is doing for young men and women in Africa.

For the past 10 years, ambassadors from the Winston Lake YMCA have traveled to Africa in an effort to develop a relationship between the YMCAs in Africa and those in America.

Every two years, the Board of Man-

agement chooses someone to serve as an ambassador and make the trip.

"The purpose of the trip is to establish a partnership between the YMCA in America and those in Africa, and the object is to identify the needs of their YMCAs and try to provide them," said Cheryl Harry, chairman of the public relations committee for YMCA.

Harry, who is also a board member, was chosen to travel to Africa as a YMCA ambassador.

According to Harry, the 19-day trip took them on a four-city tour to Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Harry said the Winston Lake YMCA has developed a partnership with the Jinja branch YMCA in Uganda.

Although this is only the fifth African Connection trip, made by Winston Lake, the Africa Alliance of YMCAs is celebrating its 20 anniversary.

Harry said she is sure the YMCA was present in Africa, providing services, before the Alliance was formed.

According to Harry, the Uganda YMCA is in need of financial support, so they can continue building clinics and schools.

"They build the clinics for the women in the villages, because the hospitals are so far away," she said. "They also build the schools for the children who aren't able to afford public education."

In Uganda, parents are required to pay a fee for their children's education, Harry said.

The YMCA offers free educational classes for those people who can't afford the fee.

When a school is built, the YMCA

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Al Martin still maintains his broadcast skills and can "hook up to a station at anytime."

A Gathering of Good Men ▲ Al Martin: Radio Godfather of Gospel Music

For many years, the city of Winston-Salem has had the privilege of being home for a number of fine craftsmen. Here the Winston-Salem Chronicle pauses to recognize a few who have offered their services for more than 30 years.

When he worked as the DJ, announcer, religious director and music director at WSMX Radio, Al Martin earned the title "Godfather of Gospel Music." He has been in radio announcing for 30 years, from 1966 to 1996.

Born in Winston-Salem as Alphonso Norris Martin, he attended the local schools. He is a graduate of Atkins High School, Friendship Junior College of Rock Hill, S.C., and New York School of Announcing and Speech. The walls of

his home are covered with various awards he has earned in is field.

Martin received honors and a plaque from the New York School of Announcing in 1966 for being the best announcer in his class of 32. He holds a third-class Radio Operator's License. He said he could go to his control room and sit all night working on various projects.

He has taught a course on how to be a DJ/announcer at Forsyth Technical Community College for four years.

He began his career one month after graduating from the New York School of Announcing and Speech at station WEUP in Huntersville, Ala. He returned home in September 1966 and began working for WAAA in February 1967. He worked

there until 1974, when he resigned and worked for eight months as gospel announcer for WEAL in Greensboro.

Martin returned to WAAA in late 1974 and reclaimed his former position as gospel announcer. In 1981, he took a position at WAIR as gospel director and announcer until 1982, when he joined the staff of WSMX. He has also worked for WTNC in Thomasville, and WMQX and WOKX in High Point.

He is married to Lillian Martin, who is also a licensed radio personality, who began working at WAAA in 1968. The Martins have one daughter, Beverly Clark, and one granddaughter, Denise Clark, of Marietta, Ga.