



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patricia Fahy

Capital Region Lawmakers and Local Veterans Resist Trump Admin. Attempt to Erase Sgt. Henry Johnson's Story

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Federal government removes article on renaming Fort Polk to Fort Johnson

ALBANY, N.Y. – On National Medal of Honor Day, New York State Patricia Fahy, Assemblymembers Gabriella Romero and John T. McDonald, III, Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan, President of the Albany District of the 369th Veterans Association Ronald Wilson, Commander Jackie Jones of North Albany's American Legion Post 1610, and local veterans denounced Department of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's and the Trump administration's removal of an article renaming Fort Polk to Fort Johnson under an Executive Order. Sergeant Henry Johnson is a Medal of Honor recipient and has also received France's highest military honors.

The base was originally named for Leonidas Polk, a Confederate general, and was renamed in 2023 as part of a bipartisan initiative to rename bases that honored Confederate generals and the Confederate war effort. Sgt. Henry Johnson, an infantryman from Albany, first enlisted in 1917 with the segregated, all-black 15th New York National Guard Regiment, ultimately becoming the 369th U.S. Infantry Regiment, aka the 'Harlem Hell Fighters'.

While on duty in the Argonne Forest in May 1918, Sgt. Johnson and a fellow soldier came under attack by a German raiding party of at least a dozen men. Despite being outnumbered, Johnson fought until his rifle ran out of ammunition, then using it as a club before resorting to a bolo knife in hand-to-hand combat. During the encounter, Johnson suffered 21 wounds but managed to prevent his wounded comrades from being captured.

For decades, efforts by historians, Black veterans, and New York lawmakers sought to ensure that Johnson's extraordinary bravery was properly acknowledged; recognition long denied due to racial discrimination. It wasn't until 1996 that he was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart for the severe injuries he sustained in combat. In 2002, he received the Distinguished Service Cross, and in 2015, after nearly a century of advocacy, Johnson was finally honored with the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award.

Two other bases also had their 2023 renaming recently reversed, under a policy requiring federal agencies to review materials and information to erase 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' initiatives. While no official renaming of Fort Johnson has been proposed or reported, those present were united in their calls for the base to retain its name honoring Sgt. Henry Johnson.

"The renaming of Fort Johnson wasn't just about changing a name—it was about rightfully honoring Sgt. Henry Johnson, a hero among heroes who gave everything for this country," **said Senator Patricia Fahy (D—Albany)**. "His bravery and sacrifice deserve to be remembered, not quietly erased. Our nation's military history should reflect the contributions of all those who fought for and served our nation with honor and that includes Albany's Sgt. Henry Johnson."

“Henry Johnson died a broken man because our military failed him. They stripped him of his uniform and denied him his pension because he spoke truth to power,” **said Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan**. “After local residents and Senator Schumer fought for justice, Henry Johnson finally received the Medal of Honor that he earned. We stand here almost 107 years to the day since the Battle of Henry Johnson, and watch in disbelief as the Trump administration works to erase his heroism and bravery. We are raising our voices as Henry Johnson did to call out racism and bigotry. His legacy must be protected.”

"It took nearly a century for Sergeant Henry Johnson to receive the Medal of Honor for his indisputable valor during World War I,” **said Senator Jake Ashby (R—Castleton)**. “It was far too long. His courage on and off the battlefield speaks for itself. Calling into question the significance of his service is just wrong, and I'm urging the administration to reverse course," said Ashby.

Assemblymember John T. McDonald III, RPh (D—Cohoes) said, "The decision to remove Sgt. Henry Johnson's page from the U.S. Army website is an insult to every American who has fought for this country. Sgt. Henry Johnson is not only our local hero, but a national hero as well, serving our country with distinction and honor during World War I. He never received the recognition that he deserved during his lifetime but was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Medal of Honor. Sgt Henry Johnson was honored and recognized here in our New York State Capitol in a bipartisan manner as thousands joined to honor his time delayed recognition. In addition, due to the advocacy of many in our community, a military base was renamed in his honor in 2023 and still stands as of today. As much as some want to erase our history, we will not let Sgt. Henry Johnson's sacrifices and courage be forgotten."

"It took nearly a century of advocacy for Sgt. Henry Johnson to be rightly honored for his immense bravery and heroism in the line of duty, and we can't and won't stand for any erasure of his legacy," **said Assemblymember Gabriella A. Romero (D, WF-Albany, Guilderland, New Scotland)**. "Articles about the Louisiana Army base being renamed in his honor disappearing from the official U.S. Army website sets a dangerous precedent. If we let this stand, we're perpetuating the racism that prevented Sgt. Henry Johnson from being honored and respected in his own lifetime. This is part of the Trump administration's work to dismantle DEI, a transparent attempt to undermine and erase communities of color. Sgt. Henry Johnson is an American hero, and

deserves respect and recognition, as do all of our veterans who valiantly served this nation."

Ronald Wilson, President of the 369th said, "Taking down a website will never take away the greatness, courage, and dignity of Sergeant Henry Johnson. His story is of legend and always will be."

Sgt. Henry Johnson Veterans House Director Jeffrey Turner said, "I am disappointed in the US Army's decision to remove the article regarding the renaming of Fort Polk to Fort Johnson due to DEI review. SGT Henry Johnson, a Medal of Honor recipient, loved this country and believed in its founding principles. I wonder when, or if, this country will ever fully love him back.

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