

Heroes in another's country.

By; Will Johnson

Ever since Alexander Hamilton left the WEST INDIES to go to school in the British colonies in the North and on to fame in the new country he helped to establish, our people have been going there to live and to contribute. From Harry Belafonte, Marcus Garvey, Colin Powell, Malcolm X and numerous others the contribution of West Indians to the United States had been great. A number of people who I have highlighted in the past from Saba like Dr. Moses Crossley, Howard Lovelace Hassell and others have also made contributions in the sciences. And in war which seems to be a curse of violence on the people of the United States a number of Sabans have also made a contribution worth taking note of. From Charles F. Hassell who died in the sinking of the U.S.S. "Maine" in the harbor of Havana to the many captains and sailors from Saba who took part in the two World Wars. Even when the U.S.S. "Cole" was bombed in Yemen some years ago a niece of the late Mr. Carl Hassell was on board when it happened.



For this article I will highlight two Sabans who served in the United States armed forces and were recognized for their contributions by the government of that country. Needless to say we are proud of Sabans contributions everywhere and we continue you to bring these interesting stories to the fore, so that our children here will know them and hopefully try to emulate them.

This article is taken from "THE BLAST" (Naval Newspaper of Newport News, Virginia) of 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1945:

Lt. Commander W.P. Simmons completes fifty years of Naval Service.

Congratulations were in order when Lieutenant Commander W.P. Simmons, Little Creek's First Lieutenant, completed fifty years service with the U.S. Navy. Ever since his enlistment in 1895, he had been attached to the navy in one capacity or another. His naval career began January 23, 1895, when he, a lad of seventeen, joined forces with Uncle Sam. His lure for the sea, however, is of an earlier date.

When he was but twelve years old he sailed with his father [Capt. Peter Simmons of Saba] to San Francisco via Cape Horn. A while later he went to Australia. These voyages made him certain that he wished to devote his life to the navy. He took his boot training aboard the U.S.S. "Constellation" and on shore at Newport, R.I., where he was assigned to the Atlantic fleet. Even then the world was unsettled for one could hear the rumbling of the Spanish-American War in the distance, a war which our First Lieutenant saw from aboard the U.S.S."Massachusetts". After this ten weeks war he settled back to the peacetime Navy. He climbed the ladder rung by rung and in 1909 he was appointed Warrant Boatswain. Seven years later he was made Chief Boatswain and placed on retirement, a retirement of only two months duration, for in September of the same year, 1916 he was recalled to active duty to play his role in the First World War. His assignment at that time was the receiving ship and training station at St.Helena, Va., where he served as Assistant Executive Officer. In 1919, when peace again reigned, he went to work in the Norfolk Navy Yard. Fifteen years between the two wars were spent there. Again he retired only to be called back to take part in this war being assigned in 1940 to naval Frontier Base, Little Creek. During his navy career he has circled the globe five times, seeing duty in all parts of the world. To his credit is the Gold Life-Saving Medal and the Bailey Medal, the latter going to the apprentice seaman having the highest grade upon 'graduation' from boot camp. Lieutenant Commander W.P. Simmons was born on Saba and his father was Captain Peter Simmons who in 1894, on his way from the United States to Saba, was lost in a storm off Cape Hatteras." His mother was Inez Horton sister to Anna Augusta Horton and Robertina Dinzey Horton who married the two Hill brothers from Sint Eustatius.

Photo # 80-G-367897 USS Nevada & USS Texas in Belfast Lough, Ireland, 14 May 1944



Edwin Joseph Hill, a nephew of Waldron E.A.R.P. Simmons, earned the Navy Medal of Honor in Pearl Harbour in 1941. A short biography about Edwin appears in the official website at statemaster.com. The Hill family of Sint Eustatius and the Horton family of Saba/Sint Eustatius were intermarried. Two brothers Henry Martin Hill born Statia 21.06.1847 married Anna Augusta Horton of Saba (born 1851), and his brother Theodore Heyliger Hill (born 01.06.1842 on Statia) married Robertina Dinzey Horton (born Saba 1850). The Hills were the sons of John Heyliger Hill of Statia and Maria de Monte Martins de Clarenceux of St. Barths, and the Horton girls were daughters of Capt. Benjamin Wright Horton of Saba and his wife Joanna Dinzey Heyliger. The Hills were also intermarried with the Simmons' of Saba.

Edwin Joseph Hill posthumously received the Nay Medal of Honour for heroism during the attack on Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, On December 7, 1941. Hill's birth records indicate that he was born 4 October 1894 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, it is suspected that he was actually born on the tiny Dutch island possession of Saba in the Caribbean Sea. Following the tradition of many in his seafaring Saban extended family, he may have forged an American birth certificate so that he could serve in the United States Navy.

The island of Saba being a mere 5 square miles in the middle of the ocean, Hill's family had a rich history of seafaring; service in the United States Navy was the natural profession of choice for many of the men. Hill's uncle U.S. Navy Commander Waldron P. Simmons is known to have forged his own birth certificate using Philadelphia as his "hometown" in order to enter into the U.S. Navy. Simmons eventually served 47 years and founded the Navy base at Little Creek, Virginia. Another Hill uncle, Thomas Kane, was serving on the U.S.S. "Maine" as a blacksmith when it was blown up in Havana Harbour in February 1898, killing him as well as launching the United States into the Spanish-American war. Hill's cousin was Lt. Commander ( and later Rear Admiral) Herman Kossler a recipient of the Navy Cross, two Legions of Merit, and three Silver Stars; Kossler commanded the submarine U.S.S. "Cavalla" and radioed the position of the Japanese Fleet prior to the pivotal Battle of the Philippine Sea in 1944 (also known as "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot").

Regardless of the question of the place of his birth, Hill enlisted in the United States Navy in 1912, rising to the rank of Chief Boatswain.



During the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was serving on board USS "Nevada" (BB-36). In the midst of the attack, he led the ship's line-handling detail in casting off from the quays alongside Ford Island, so that "Nevada" could get underway. He was killed by enemy bombs while attempting to drop anchor at the end of the battleship's brief sortie. For his heroism during the Pearl Harbour action, Chief Boatswain Hill was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honour. The Medal of Honour is the highest military decoration awarded by the United States. In 1943, the destroyer escort USS Hill (DE-141) was named in his honour. The Medal of Honour citation reads as follows: "For distinguished conduct in the line of his profession, extraordinary courage, and disregard of his own safety during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbour, by Japanese forces on 7 December 1941. During the height of the strafing and bombing, Chief Boatswain Hill led his men of the line handling details of

the U.S.S. "Nevada" to the quays, cast off the lines and swam back to his ship. Later while on the forecastle, attempting to let go the anchors, he was blown overboard and killed by the explosion of several bombs."



The New York Times carried a few articles throwing some light on his family. His death at Pearl Harbour was reported by a Navy Department telegram in a message to his sister, Mrs. Charles A. Fuery (Rose) of Cape May in New Jersey. The article states that Edwin was 45 years old and a native of Philadelphia and further mentioning Edwin's wife and three children living in Honolulu.

I could not find any record of his birth on either Saba or Sint Eustatius so he must have been born in Philadelphia as that is where his uncle lived as well. However there is no doubt that he was of Saba/Statia descent, and we are proud to bring this information to our readers.

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