

0. COURT MARTIAL of JACKIE ROBINSON - Story Preface

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From the U.S. Army Legal Services, this document notes the charges against 2nd Lt. Jack L. Robinson. His court-martial resulted in a "Not Guilty" verdict, following a trial on August 2, 1944. Online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. Click on the image for a readable view.

Jackie Robinson was not tried for refusing to move to the back of the bus. He was tried for disrespecting the investigating officers who outranked him:

CHARGE I: Violation of the 63rd Article of War.

Specification: In that Second Lieutenant Jack R. Robinson...did, at Camp Hood, Texas, on or about 6 July 1944, behave himself with disrespect toward Captain Gerald M. Bear, Corps Military Police...his superior officer, by contemptuously bowing to him and giving him several sloppy salutes, repeating several times "OK Sir", "OK Sir" or words to that effect, and by acting in an insolent, impertinent and rude manner toward the said Captain Gerald M. Bear.

CHARGE II: Violation of the 64th Article of War.

Specification: In that Second Lieutenant Jack R. Robinson...having received a lawful command from Captain Gerald M. Bear...his superior officer to remain in a receiving room and be seated on a chair on the far side of the receiving room, did, at Camp Hood, Texas, on or about 6 July 1944, wilfully disobey the same.

Jackie's lawyer, whom the Army assigned to defend him, was from the South. He wasn't sure he could adequately do his job:

My first break was that the legal officer assigned to defend me was a Southerner who had the decency to admit to me that he didn't think he could be objective. He recommended a young Michigan officer who did a great job on my behalf. He had a way of rephrasing the same question in so many clever ways that anyone who was lying would have a hard time not betraying himself. (I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson, page 22.)

Jackie Robinson was acquitted of all charges against him, following a trial at Camp Hood, but the court-martial changed his mind about a future in the Army. Instead of having a military career, Robinson asked to be relieved of active-duty responsibilities:

I appeared before the board 21 July 1944 and was recommended for permanent limited duty and am now with the 659th Tank Destroyer Battalion, North Camp Hood, Texas pending orders from your office [the Adjutant General, in Washington, D.C.].

In checking with the Special Service Branch I was told there were no openings for Colored Officers in that field. I request to be retired from the services and be placed on reserve as I feel I can be of more service to the government doing defense work rather than being on limited duty with an outfit that is already better than 100% over strength in officers. (Jack R. Robinson Letter to Adjutant General, 25 August 1944.)

After the war was over, and Robinson left the Army, he wanted to play baseball. There was a "color line," however, which prevented him from being a Major League player.

No matter how good they were, African-Americans who wanted to "play ball" - during the Jim-Crow era - had to "play ball" in the "Negro League."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/COURT-MARTIAL-of-JACKIE-ROBINSON-42-Jackie-Robinson>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/COURT-MARTIAL-of-JACKIE-ROBINSON-42-Jackie-Robinson>

Questions 2 Ponder

Did Jackie Robinson Take a Stand Against an Unjust Law?

The actual charges brought against Jackie Robinson were for disrespecting superior officers and not for refusing to give-up his bus seat. Do you believe the actual charges were as stated—or—do you think the real motivation for the arrest and trial was Robinson's stand against an unjust law?

Later in life, Jackie's wife—Rachel Robinson—said this about her husband:

His beliefs were his beliefs and he would fight for them.

What were the beliefs that Jackie Robinson was fighting for when he refused to move to the back of the bus, as ordered by a white man?

When did you first realize that Jackie Robinson had refused to give-up his bus seat many years before Rosa Parks refused to do the same thing? Why do you suppose that this episode of Robinson's life is so little-known?

Beginning with the 15th of April, in 2009, everyone involved in Major League Baseball—players and all on-field personnel—wears number 42 on their jerseys to honor Jackie Robinson (whose now-retired number was 42). Why do you think this celebration occurs? Why does it occur on April 15th?

Media Stream

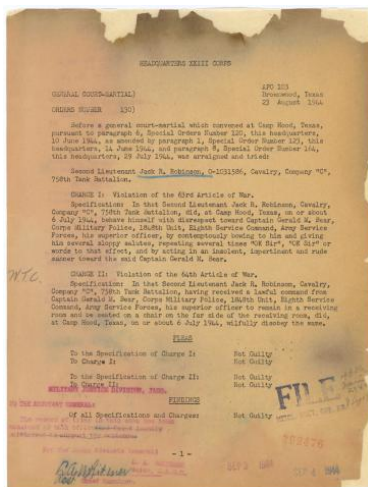


Camp Hood - Court Martial of 2nd Lt. Robinson

Image of Camp Hood, Texas, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Camp-Hood-Court-Martial-of-2nd-Lt.-Robinson>

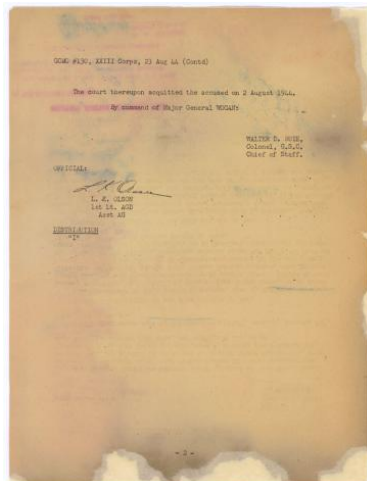


Jackie Robinson - Court Martial Charges

Image of original document online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Jackie Robinson - Court Martial Issues

Image of document online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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AWO 103
Brownswood, Texas
23 August 1944

RETURN OF COURT JUDGE ADVOCATE

United States	:	Residence: Arrest in hospital 17 July 44.
vs	:	Place of Trial: Camp Hood, Texas.
2d Lt. Jack R. Robinson, O-101566, Cavalry, Company C, 788th Tank Battalion.	:	Date of Trial: 2 August 1944.
Present Age: 25 1/2 years.	:	Previous Conviction: None.
Commissioned: 28 Jan 1943.	:	

CHARGE AND SPECIFICATION	PLEA	FINDINGS
CHARGE I: Violation of AW 45. Specification: Reckless with disregard toward Capt Gerald M. Bear, CWO, his superior officer.	NO	NO
CHARGE II: Violation of AW 46. Specification: Willful disobedience of lawful command of Capt Gerald M. Bear, CWO, his superior officer.	NO	NO

An examination of the record of trial discloses that the court was legally constituted and had jurisdiction of the person and the offense. The issues presented were issues of fact. The court, as triers of fact, determined that accused was not guilty of the offenses charged or of any lesser offenses included therein. While the basis for this conclusion is not apparent, nevertheless, the determination of disputed fact issues is peculiarly within the province of the court, whose members had the opportunity to hear the witnesses, to observe their demeanor on the witness stand, and to attach such weight to the evidence as it seemed proper.

The record is legally sufficient to support the findings.

No action by the reviewing authority is required.

The result will be promulgated in general court martial orders.

Attached to the record is a certificate of mailing of accused's copy of the record by the Trial Judge Advocate. Accused, not being present at his station, mailing was the only practical method of serving the record.

WALTER B. HILL
1st Lt. and 2nd Lt.
Judge Advocate

COURT MARTIAL of JACKIE ROBINSON

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