



225th Anniversary
1789-2014



Robert Porter Patterson, Sr.

Born:

February 12, 1891
Glens Falls, NY

Received Commission:

May 13, 1930

Service terminated due to appointment in 1939 to the United States Circuit Court for the Second Circuit.

Subsequently served as Assistant Secretary, Undersecretary and Secretary of War.

Died:

January 22, 1952
Elizabeth, NJ

The son of a lawyer, Robert Porter Patterson received a B.A. from Union College in 1912, and his law degree from Harvard in 1915, where, among other honors, he was president of the Harvard Law Review. He began practice with a prestigious New York law firm, but in 1916 his regiment of the New York National Guard was called to fight Pancho Villa. He then transferred to the U.S. Army's Officers Training School and received his commission in 1917 and served in World War I. Patterson was decorated several times for his bravery in Europe and left the Army in 1919 as a major.

For the next 10 years, he had a well-respected practice in Manhattan, when President Hoover appointed him to the District Court. Judge Patterson's cases addressed some difficult Depression era issues, and he is noted for upholding the conviction of Communist leader Earl Browder for passport fraud.

With the advent of World War II, Judge Patterson wanted to return to the infantry, but President Roosevelt had other ideas and appointed him Assistant Secretary of War, in charge of the Army's procurement program. After Henry Stimson retired as Secretary of War in 1945, President Roosevelt offered Patterson either that position or a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court. Patterson left the decision to Roosevelt, and Patterson served as Secretary of War 1945-1947. In that position he opposed the continued segregation of African Americans in the military, and worked to improve the situation of the average soldier.

Returning to private practice in 1947, Patterson joined the firm of Patterson, Belknap and Webb. As a leader in the legal community, he was elected president of the New York City Bar Association, and also served on the Council on Foreign Relations. He remained active in public service until his untimely death in a plane crash.

Sources:

Biographical Directory of Federal Judges, available at <http://www.fjc.gov/>

American National Biography online.

Robert Porter Patterson: Soldier, Judge, Statesman, Citizen. Available on the website of Patterson, Belknap, Webb and Tyler, LLP at http://www.pbwt.com/files/Uploads/Documents/RobertPorterPatterson_book.pdf.