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## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS SERIES**

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### **THE COLOR OF BLOOD NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS & EVENTS IN BLACK MILITARY HISTORY**

**1639**

The Virginia House of Burgesses passed the first legislation to exclude blacks from the militia. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, all of the colonies had enacted similar laws.

**1689**

During King William's War, France and its Indian allies threatened England's North American colonies. Black militia fought and died in this imperial conflict. They also served later in Queen Anne's War (1702-13), the second of three major confrontations between the French and English for control of North America.

**1708**

Charles Town, South Carolina, employed "slave cowboys" to help protect the settlement from Indian attack.

**1715**

South Carolina used slaves to help fight during the Yamasee War.

**1756-1763**

Black soldiers served during the French and Indian War. Barzillai Lew fought during this conflict as a member of a Massachusetts militia company. He later saw action at the Battle of Bunker Hill during the American Revolution.

**1770**

Crispus Attucks and four other colonists were killed during the Boston Massacre, becoming the first African American killed during the American Revolution.

**1775**

Shortly after assuming command the newly established Continental Army, Washington ordered his officers not to recruit black troops. He later rescinded this order to allow the enlistment of free blacks.

Black soldiers took part in the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Seven-hundred British soldiers sent to seize colonial arms and arrest rebel leaders encountered armed resistance instead. Pomp Blackman and Prince Estabrook were two of the black Minutemen who took part in the event immortalized as the "shot heard 'round the world." Estabrook was killed during the fighting.

Several black soldiers (most notably Peter Salem and Salem Poor) helped defend Breed's Hill in the Battle of Bunker Hill on Charlestown Heights overlooking Boston Harbor.

### **1780**

An all-black unit known as the Connecticut Colonials served for over two years. Disbanded in November 1782, the company's 52 free blacks and slaves were integrated with the state's white units in the final months of the war.

Two black soldiers aided in the capture of British spy Major John Andre, who served as adjutant general to British General Sir Henry Clinton. They caught him after his meeting with American turncoat General Benedict Arnold.

### **1781**

British General Charles Cornwallis hired slave James Armistead to spy on the Americans. Armistead, however, was actually an undercover agent for the patriots, forcing Cornwallis to surrender at Yorktown, Virginia. In recognition of his services, the Virginia legislature emancipated Armistead in 1786.

### **1783**

American and British representatives signed the Treaty of Paris, recognizing American independence and ending the American Revolution. Almost 10,000 blacks served during the war, 5000 of whom were regular soldiers in the Continental Army.

### **1791**

The U.S. Congress passed legislation excluding blacks and Native Americans from the peacetime militia.

### **1798**

Secretary of War James McHenry and Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert issued separate directives prohibiting African-American enlistment for use on warships of the U.S. Navy or in the U.S. Marine Corps. These decisions reversed the non-racial enlistment policy that had been in effect since the Revolutionary War.

## **1812-1815**

Free blacks and slaves served during the War of 1812. The British once again recruited slaves for their Navy as well as armed escaped slaves in Florida and various Indian tribes.

African-Americans fought during the Battle of Lake Erie, a significant U.S. victory during the War of 1812. About 10 to 25 percent of Admiral Oliver H. Perry's men were black.

Two battalions of 430 black soldiers fought with General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, ending the War of 1812.

## **1814**

General Andrew Jackson issued a proclamation urging the "Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana" to volunteer for service in his army. Black recruits were offered equal pay and the same bounty in money and lands as white volunteers and were organized into segregated units with white officers and black noncommissioned officers.

## **1831**

Greenbury Logan, one of the first blacks to settle in Texas, was one of the few African Americans who fought for the Lone Star Republic's independence from Mexico.

## **1861**

President Abraham Lincoln declared a state of insurrection and called for 75,000 volunteers to serve for three months. At this time, the Union Army officially rejected black volunteers as many northern whites did not think it appropriate for blacks to fight a "white man's war;" and most whites did not think blacks would be good soldiers. However, the Secretary of the Navy authorized the enlistment of escaped slaves.

The Tennessee legislature authorized the governor "to receive into the military service of the State all male free persons of color, between the age of 15 and 50, who should receive \$8 per month, clothing and rations."

The Secretary of the Navy authorized the enlistment of blacks into the U.S. Navy.

## **1862**

The U.S. Congress passed the Militia Act, which authorized the president to use black troops in combat.

The first use of black troops in combat during the Civil War involved a 225-man detachment from the 1<sup>st</sup> Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, who fought in a two-day engagement at Island Mound, Missouri.

Harriet Tubman, probably the most well known "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, served as a nurse, cook, and laundress to Union troops in South Carolina. She also supported the Union cause as a spy, scout, and guerilla leader.

The first use of black troops in combat during the Civil War involved a 225-man detachment from the 1<sup>st</sup> Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, who fought in a two-day engagement at Island Mound, Missouri. A total of 10 men were killed and 12 were wounded.

### **1863**

Secretary of War Stanton ordered that black volunteers be paid at a lower rate than white volunteers, because blacks were considered to be auxiliaries. In addition to less pay initially, African Americans also faced other forms of discrimination: longer enlistment periods, little chance for promotion, inadequate medical care, inferior weapons, and usually no prisoner-of-war status.

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. Provisions for the use of black troops were included in the document. In response, Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts ordered the organization of the all-black 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment.

Harriet Tubman led Union troops in a raid along the Combahee River. Described as "the only American woman to lead troops, black or white, on the field of battle," she and men under the command of Colonel James Montgomery freed 750 to 800 slaves, confiscated property worth thousands of dollars, and destroyed several million dollars of commissary stores and cotton.

Probably the best known of the all-black regiments mustered during the Civil War, the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts earned widespread fame for its unsurpassed bravery during the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. The unit's white commanding officer, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, and 116 enlisted men died in the unsuccessful attempt to take the Confederate fort. Another 156 members of the 54<sup>th</sup> were wounded or captured during this battle.

Sergeant William H. Carney's bravery under fire during the assault on Fort Wagner earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was the first African-American to receive this prestigious award. Another 14 black soldiers were also honored with this medal for their heroism during the Civil War.

### **1864**

Officers in the Confederate Army of Tennessee proposed recruiting blacks for military service in exchange for freedom. Confederate leaders rejected the suggestion.

After months of debate, Congress passed a law giving African Americans equal pay, arms, equipment, and medical services.

After the Union surrender at Fort Pillow, Kentucky, troops under the command of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest massacred about 300 unarmed white and black soldiers.

## **1865**

President Lincoln made Martin R. Delany a major, the first African-American to be commissioned at this rank in the U.S. Army.

Black troops were among the Union forces at Appomattox Court House when General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia.

## **1869**

The Army reorganized its black infantry units, which saw action in the ongoing Indian wars that troubled the West between 1865 and 1898. The Native Americans began referring to the black troopers as "buffalo soldiers." This nickname was derived partly from the soldiers' physical characteristics (i.e., dark skin and tightly curled hair) which were reminiscent of the buffalo, and partly from the Indian warriors' respect for the black troopers' fighting abilities.

## **1870**

9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Sergeant Emanuel Stance led an attack against the Kickapoo tribe in Texas, capturing horses and defending a small wagon train. He later became the first buffalo soldier to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic service. Congress awarded a total of 18 Medals of Honor to black soldiers who served during the Indian wars.

## **1877**

Henry O. Flipper became the first African-American to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

## **1881**

Tennessee enacted the first in a series of laws passed throughout the South segregating public transportation. Additional laws were passed restricting black access to most public accommodations and educational facilities.

## **1898-1917**

During the period between the Spanish-American War and World War I, the federal and various state governments began restricting black military service.

Members of the all-black 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry participated in the famous charge up San Juan Hill led by Lieutenant Colonel Teddy Roosevelt during the Spanish-American War. Edward Baker, Jr., was one of five African-Americans to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in this war.

## **1903**

Soldiers from the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry served as the first black military escort for a President of the United States, when unit members were made part of an Honor Guard during Theodore Roosevelt's visit to San Francisco.

### **1906**

A U.S. Army War College study begun this year ultimately recommended blacks continue to be denied admission into the artillery branch because of their supposed inferior intelligence and inability to master the required technical skills.

Beginning this year and continuing every year for the next decade, various congressmen introduced bills attempting to prevent blacks from serving in the U.S. armed forces.

### **1916**

After joining the French Foreign Legion before the war, then serving with the French infantry in 1915, African American Eugene Jacques Bullard transferred into the French Air Service, where he became a highly decorated combat pilot. Known as the "Black Swallow of Death," Bullard flew over 20 combat missions. Despite his outstanding record, Bullard was never allowed to fly for the United States, even after entering the war.

### **1917**

The American Red Cross rejected the applications of qualified African-American nurses on the grounds that the U.S. Army did not accept black women.

The United States entered World War I. Over 367,000 African-American soldiers served in this conflict, 1400 of whom were commissioned officers. Despite the American restriction on the use of blacks in combat units, about 40,000 African Americans fought in the war. Leo Pinckney was the first black soldier drafted in this war.

The Army forced its highest-ranking African-American officer to retire, supposedly because he was unfit for duty. Although Colonel Charles R. Young suffered from high blood pressure and Bright's disease, he rode his horse from Ohio to Washington, D.C., to demonstrate his fitness for duty. However, he was never reinstated for battle.

Emmett J. Scott was appointed Special Assistant to the U.S. Secretary of War. A former secretary to Booker T. Washington, Scott worked to assure the non-discriminatory application of the Selective Service Act.

The 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (or "Harlem Hellfighters") was the first all-black U.S. combat unit to be shipped overseas during World War I. The Germans dubbed the unit the "Hellfighters," because in 191 days of duty at the front they never had any men captured or ground taken. Almost one-third of the unit died in combat. The French government awarded the entire regiment the Croix de Guerre. Sergeant Henry Johnson was the first African-American to win this prestigious award when he single-handedly saved Private Needham Roberts and fought off a German raiding party.

### **1918**

In an editorial written for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) publication **Crisis**, W.E.B. DuBois urged black Americans to put the war effort before their own needs by "closing ranks" with white Americans in support of the fighting in France. His sentiments were partly based on the continuing belief that African-American military participation might help win greater acceptance and freedom for all blacks in the United States.

German propaganda leaflets dropped on African-American troops attempted to exploit the contradictory attitudes reflected in American society. They noted that black troops were sent to fight for democracy in Europe, while being denied this same personal freedom at home. The leaflets were unsuccessful.

The Army Nurses Corps accepted 18 black nurses on an "experimental" basis following the influenza epidemic.

The all-black 92<sup>nd</sup> ("Buffalo") Division, which had been activated in October 1917, arrived in France, then moved to the front in August 1918. Formed entirely of African-American draftees, many of the division's men were assigned to road-building details. The unit was disbanded after World War I, but was reactivated in 1942 for duty during World War II.

Members of the 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment won 21 American Distinguished Service Crosses and 68 French Croix de Guerre during World War I. This all-black unit from Illinois fought in the last battle of World War I and captured a German train a few minutes after the Armistice was declared.

### **1925**

An Army War College study reported that African Americans would never be fit to serve as military pilots because of their supposed lack of intelligence and cowardice in combat.

### **1932**

The U.S. Navy again allowed African Americans to enlist, lifting the restriction in place since the end of World War I that excluded blacks from serving in this branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

### **1937**

Willa Beatrice Brown, the first African-American woman to get a commercial pilot's license, and her flight instructor, Cornelius R. Coffey, co-founded the National Airmen's Association of America to promote African-American aviation. The following year, they established the Coffey School of Aeronautics, where Willa Brown served as director.

### **1940**

Judge William H. Hastie of Knoxville, Tennessee assumed the position of Civilian Aid to the Secretary of War in Matters of Black Rights.

President Roosevelt approved the promotion of Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., to the rank of brigadier general, making him the highest ranking African-American in the Armed Forces. General Davis pioneered the way for the next generation of black officers who attained even higher positions of authority in the U.S. military.

Judge William H. Hastie, dean of the Howard University Law School, assumed the position of Civilian Aid to the Secretary of War in Matters of Black Rights.

### **1941**

The Army opened its integrated officers candidate schools. For the first six months, however, only 21 of the more than 2000 men admitted were black. The Army justified its policy of ignoring race in regard to officer training on the grounds of efficiency and economy.

The U.S. Army Air Corps began training African-American pilots at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The Tuskegee Institute, which prepared the 926 members of the famed "Tuskegee Airmen" for combat in WWII, remained the only official military flight training school for black pilots until its program closed with the graduation of the last class on 26 June 1946.

Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., was the first African-American to officially complete a solo flight as an officer of the U.S. Army Air Corps.

During the Japanese assault at Pearl Harbor, U.S. Navy mess man Doris (Dorie) Miller helped move his mortally wounded commander to shelter, then manned a machine gun on the USS *Arizona* and shot down about six of the Japanese aircraft. The Navy awarded Miller the Navy Cross.

### **1941- 1945**

While on assignment with the Army's Inspector General, Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., completed several notable inspections involving black troops stationed at northern and southern posts. Davis pointed out the nearly impossible task required of African-American soldiers in developing "a high morale in a community that offers him nothing but humiliation and mistreatment."

Many black leaders used a dual response to WWII, known as the "Double V" campaign, urging African Americans to support the war effort as a way to fight racism abroad, while still criticizing and trying to eliminate segregation and discrimination in the United States. Many African Americans refused to back the war unless they received better treatment.

Over 2.5 million African Americans registered for military service during WWII, but only one million actually served.

### **1942**

The U.S. Coast Guard recruited its first 150 black volunteers. Over 5000 African Americans served as coast guardsmen in WWII, about 965 of whom were petty or warrant officers.

President Roosevelt signed the act which created the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later reorganized as the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Over 150,000 WACs served in WWII. The voluntary organization enlisted both black and white female recruits.

The U.S. Marine Corps began admitting African-American recruits for the first time in 167 years.

The Army Nurses Corps selected Lieutenant (later Captain) Della H. Raney to be its first black Chief Nurse, while she was serving at Tuskegee Air Field, Alabama. There were about 500 African- American Army nurses in World War II who served in segregated units in the United States and overseas.

Charity Adams (Earley) was the first black woman to be commissioned to the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later reorganized as the Women's Army Corps (WAC).

### **1943**

Judge William H. Hastie resigned his position as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War because of continuing discrimination and segregation in the armed forces.

Gordon A. Parks, Sr., was the first African-American to work for the U.S. Office of War Information as a photojournalist and war correspondent. He later worked for *Life* magazine and was the director of the movie *Shaft* (and five other films). Parks is a prolific author, poet, screenwriter and ballet composer.

Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., was promoted to major then to lieutenant colonel in the course of one day. Davis commanded both the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron and the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group.

Lieutenant Charles B. Hall shot down the first German plane officially credited to the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. This outstanding Army Air Corps unit participated in campaigns in North Africa, the Mediterranean, Italy, and Germany. One of the squadron's most notable feats was its destruction of five enemy aircraft in less than four minutes. For this and numerous other accomplishments, the unit earned three Distinguished Unit Citations during World War II.

Launched in Quincy, Massachusetts, on this date, the USS *Harmon* was the U.S. Navy's first fighting ship named for an African-American. Leonard Roy Harmon was killed in action while trying to protect a shipmate.

### **1943-1945**

Charles F. Anderson was the first black Marine to be promoted to Sergeant Major.

The U.S. Navy commissioned 13 African Americans as its first black officers. These men later dubbed themselves the "Golden 13".

The U.S. Army Air Corps' all-black 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group first saw combat. The famed "Tuskegee Airmen" flew 1,578 missions during which they destroyed 261 enemy aircraft and damaged another 148 planes. The 332<sup>nd</sup> received a Presidential Unit Citation for "outstanding courage, aggressiveness, and combat technique" while escorting heavy bombers over Germany. Between 1943 and 1945 the Tuskegee Airmen earned 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 14 Bronze Stars, eight Purple Hearts, three Distinctive Unit Citations as well as several other awards for their combat service in Europe.

Commissioned at Boston Navy Yard, the USS *Mason*, a destroyer escort, was the first naval warship with a predominantly black crew.

The D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy, France, began. The 320<sup>th</sup> Negro Anti-Aircraft Barrage Balloon Battalion assisted with this assault against the Germans, the only African-American combat troops to take part in D-Day.

The *PC 1264* was the first submarine chaser with an all-black crew.

Army Lieutenant John Roosevelt Robinson, one of the 761<sup>st</sup> "Black Panther" Tank Battalion's few black officers, refused orders to sit in the back of a military bus at Fort Hood, Texas. After the war, Jackie Robinson went on to break the "color line" in baseball by being the first African-American to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The worst home front disaster of World War II occurred when two ships, the *E.A. Bryan* and the *Quinalt Victory*, docked at Port Chicago, California, exploded one night while African-American sailors were loading ammunition for use in the Pacific theater. Both ships and the loading pier were destroyed, while many of the nearby town's buildings also suffered severe damage. Of the 320 men killed, 202 of them were black enlisted men. The worst military loss of life in the continental United States during World War II, this one incident involved 15 percent of all African-Americans wounded or killed in this conflict.

First Lieutenant John R. Fox, a member of Cannon Company, 366<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 92<sup>nd</sup> Division, sacrificed his life to direct defensive artillery fire to slow the German advance on Sommocolonia, Italy.

## 1944

The Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES), the women's auxiliary of the U.S. Navy, was opened to African-American recruits.

American film director Frank Capra produced *The Negro Soldier*, the first U.S. Army training film to favorably depict African-American servicemen, which was designed to improve race relations in the U.S. military. It had a powerful impact on the soldiers who saw it as well as on civilian audiences when it was released to the public after the war.

After intense pressure was placed on the voluntary organization, the WAVES accepted its first 72 black women, two of whom became officers.

## 1944- 1945

The 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion participated in the American counter-offensive during and after the Battle of the Bulge. The "Black Panthers" were able to split the German lines at three points, thereby preventing the re-supply of the enemy forces surrounding American troops at Bastogne.

## 1944- 1945

The U.S. Army integrated black volunteers with white troops to fight during the Battle of the Bulge. Over 5000 African-American soldiers in the Army's service units volunteered; 2500 of them were accepted. This was the first and only example of an integrated Army fighting force in WWII.

After the defeat of Germany in June 1945, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., took command of the 477<sup>th</sup> Composite Group of Godman Field, Kentucky. He was the first African-American to command a military base in the United States and the first to command a U.S. Army Air Force installation.

The only one of the seven World War II African-American Medal of Honor winners still alive to receive his award in January 1997 was Second (later First) Lieutenant Vernon J. Baker. In fighting near Viareggio, Italy, Baker showed extraordinary heroism by single-handedly destroying two enemy positions as well as two more with his men's aid. He then covered the evacuation of his company's wounded by drawing enemy fire to an exposed position. The following night he voluntarily led a battalion assault against the enemy through minefields and heavy fire.

The 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division had lost almost 25 percent of its men: 330 killed in action, 2215 wounded, and 616 missing in action by the end of World War II. A member of the division—Private Woodall I. Marsh—was the first black to win the Silver Star in Italy. Other members of the 92<sup>nd</sup> received over 12,000 decorations during WWII, including two Distinguished Service Crosses, one Distinguished Service Medal, 16 Legion of Merit awards, and 95 Silver Stars.

Although the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion never served overseas during World War II, it was sent to the west coast to fight forest fires. The "Triple Nickels" made more than 1000 jumps to fight these fires in Oregon and California, thereby earning another nickname: "Smoke Jumpers."

Second Lieutenant Frederick C. Branch was the first African-American to be commissioned in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Pressure brought to bear by the National Association of Colored Nursing forced the U.S. Army Nurse Corps to drop its racial restrictions on qualified nurses.

The U.S. Navy began allowing black women to enlist in the Navy Nurse Corps. Ensign Phyllis Mae Dailey became the Navy's first African-American nurse.

## **1947**

The President's Committee on Civil Rights presented President Truman with a comprehensive survey on civil rights conditions in the United States, calling for laws and policies to end discrimination and segregation in the Armed Forces and urged the President to use the military "as an instrument of social change."

## **1948**

President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, providing for equal treatment and opportunity for African-American servicemen.

## **1948-1950**

Executive Order 9981 actually had little immediate affect on the U.S. military in this period due to the fact that it did not consider segregation to be discriminatory. The Air Force complied most quickly while the U.S. Navy took the longest.

## **1951**

The Marine Corps' segregated racial policy ended with the cancellation of the last all-black designation. The Army's nine training divisions were fully integrated by this year.

Project CLEAR confirmed earlier findings that African-American soldiers in integrated units fought as well as whites. It also reported that integration improved black morale and did not lower that of whites, concluding that segregation hindered the Army's effectiveness while integration increased it.

## **1953**

Because of the Korean War, the number of African-American marines rapidly grew from 1525 in May 1949 to 17,000 by this time. The competence and lack of racial tension during integration opened the way for general integration of the Marine Corps.

## **1954**

The Secretary of Defense announced that the last racially segregated unit in the Armed Forces of the United States had been abolished.