

Chapter 1

American Revolution

By 1770, American colonists were increasingly dismayed about being the subjects of “taxation without representation.” The mixture of British soldiers—the enforcers of taxation—and American colonists—the enforcers—in close proximity to each other was a brewing powder keg. The spark that eventually set off the powder keg five years later actually occurred on 5 March 1770, when British soldiers and British Captain Thomas Preston rushed to King Street in Boston, Massachusetts, to calm a crowd of “motley” and “saucy” boys angry over the treatment of a colonial boy by a British soldier. When the British soldiers arrived, they were met by the growing crowd led by Crispus Attucks. Attucks was shouting, “[t]he way to get rid of these soldiers is to attack the main guard; strike at the root; this is the nest.” At some point during the commotion, shots rang out and five persons would become martyrs.¹ This was the electrifying event that started the colonists on the road to independence. A stone placed above the site where four of the martyrs were buried read:

Long as in Freedom’s cause the wise contend,
Dear to your country shall your fame extend;
While to the world the lettered stone shall tell
Where Caldwell, Attucks, Gray and Maverick fell.²

Attucks was a fugitive slave who, as described by John Adams, stood at the head of a “motley rabble of saucy boys, Negroes and mulattoes, Irish Teagues, and outlandish Jack Tars.”³ Attucks had run away from his Framingham, Massachusetts, enslavement in 1750, at which time he was advertised as “a mulatto fellow, about 27 years of age, . . . 6 feet 2 inches high, short, cur’l hair . . .”⁴ Thus, at the Boston Massacre, a full five years before the official start of the American War for Independence, the individual widely known as among the first to give his life in pursuit of American independence was of African descent. With Attucks’ death on King Street, two distinct issues had been set into motion. First, the revolutionary philosophy of liberty, equality, and fraternity for all—which would become a dichotomy of the era—was undeniably opened. Second, the question of what to do with the 20 percent of the colonial population that was of African descent became paramount. The second issue spawned two additional questions. If you allow them to fight, how could you consciously deny them their freedom? And, if you reject their combat

power, could you win the war against the most powerful country on the globe? This chapter will examine the first issue very briefly, and the second issue at length.

The revolutionary philosophy of liberty, equality, fraternity is most often associated with the French Revolution—which began in 1789, six years after the American Revolution ended—because European philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, who wrote *Social Contract* epitomizing the philosophy of revolution, was a Frenchman. It can be argued, however, that since Rousseau wrote of liberty, equality, fraternity in 1762, he was equally writing about the inevitable American Revolution as much as he was about the anticipated, but distant, French Revolution.⁵ The facts, therefore, are that a Frenchman coined the philosophy, but the American colonists were the first to put it into practice.

Rousseau's philosophy was based on the premise that people, collectively or as individuals, had the right to depose a tyrant and restore freedom on themselves.⁶ When the American colonists adopted this philosophy against England, they should not have been surprised when their black population did so as well. Both white and black colonists were fighting for freedom from England. Colonists of African descent, however, took their cause one step further and also fought in hopes of obtaining freedom from their American oppressors. White colonists were well aware of this and made attempts early in the war to deny blacks the opportunity to serve. Why? Perhaps Mrs. Abigail Adams, wife and mother, respectively, of two future American presidents, expressed it best in 1774, when she wrote to her husband:

It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have.⁷

In short, the war was beginning on a resounding note of hypocrisy. Slaves were to the colonists as the colonists were to the British Crown; each group oppressed the other outright. Most sensible colonists could not rightly see themselves fighting for freedom against an oppressor while at the same time they allowed oppressed subjects under them to fight. The gentlemanly chivalry of the era, which was still very much alive, would demand that they free all oppressed individuals, and their relatives who contributed to the cause. During summer 1775, the Committee of Safety passed a resolution which stated:

Resolved. That it is the opinion of this committee, that as the contest now between Great Britain and the Colonies respects the liberties and privileges of the latter, which the Colonies are determined to maintain, that the admission of any persons, as soldiers, into the army now raising, but such as are freemen, will be inconsistent with the principles that are supported, and reflect dishonor on this Colony; and that no Slaves be admitted into this army on any consideration whatever.⁸

Before the resolution, however, as will become evident in the following pages, Attucks and others at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill had already served and died. Therein, thus, was the dichotomy of the American Revolution. The colonists were eventually forced to relook their policy.

On the second issue of what to do with the 20 percent of the colonial population that was of African descent, it appears that pure necessity dictated that black soldiers, sailors, and marines would have to be used. Indeed, from Lexington and Concord to Yorktown, more than 5,000 blacks served in the colonial forces, roughly 1,000 others served in the British forces, and a few served with the French.⁹ Additionally, an unspecified number, both male and female, served in behind-the-scenes, nonmilitary roles.

When Paul Revere and William Dawes made their famous ride on the night of 18 April 1775 from Boston to Lexington—also hoping to reach Concord—warning the colonists that “the British are coming, the British are coming,” among the colonists who answered the call and handed the Redcoats their defeat in the initial engagements of the American Revolution were black volunteers. Among the recorded names of colonial militia/minutemen of African descent who fought at Lexington and Concord are Peter Salem, Joshua Boylston’s Prince, Pompy, Cato Stedman, Cato Bordman, Cato Wood, Cuff Whittemore, Pomp Blackman, and Prince Estabrook. Estabrook was listed among the colonial casualties, and Salem and Whittemore joined many other blacks in the fight at Bunker Hill two months later.¹⁰ In fact, Salem is among the most noted, yet controversial, figures of Bunker Hill.

There is no doubt that Salem fought heroically during the Battle of Bunker Hill. In the heat of the battle as Major John Pitcairn, the British commander, mounted a redoubt in front of colonial soldiers, Salem was

in the forefront of those who faced the British Redcoats as both sides fired volleys at near point-blank range. Shortly after Pitcairn mounted the redoubt, he yelled, "The day is ours!" and then fell dead from wounds to his body. Controversy surrounds who actually fired the shot that killed Pitcairn. Several noted historians, to include John Hope Franklin, credit Salem with killing the major. Others, such as Benjamin Quarles, question who actually fired the bullet. Four things, however, are certain: Pitcairn was indeed killed on that day; Salem was in the firing line that fired the bullet; several contemporary accounts credit Salem; and most important, Pitcairn's death turned the tide of the battle in favor of the colonists because they fought with much more zeal after his death.¹¹ The exact number of persons of African descent who fought side by side with their white compatriots at the Battle of Bunker Hill will never be known. In addition to the ones intermingled throughout the battlefield, such as Salem and Whittemore, was Major William Lawrence's company, "whose rank and file were all negroes [of whom] he always spoke with respect."¹²

For their contributions in the early months of the war, General John Thomas, one of the two colonial brigade commanders in the Boston area, said, "we have some Negroes, but I look on them as equally serviceable with other men . . . many of them have proved themselves brave."¹³ Regardless of the fact that Salem and other persons of African descent had proved themselves to be valuable at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill, efforts were soon made to discontinue the use of black soldiers. The resolution of the Committee of Safety, as depicted on the previous page, is evidence of earlier efforts.

In October 1775, General George Washington, following the lead of the Committee of Safety but going one step further, and with the majority support of the council of war, declared that Negroes, free or slave, "be rejected [for military service] altogether."¹⁴ As a result, the colonies followed suit, and the ban on Negro soldiers began. It is unclear whether Washington or Congress ever officially lifted the ban on Negro enlistment. It is crystal clear, however, that the ink on the ban had barely begun to dry before it was challenged in November 1775. Officially or not, within three years, all colonies, except South Carolina and Georgia, were freely enlisting soldiers of African descent, slave or free.¹⁵

Washington's ban was seriously challenged on 7 November 1775. John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, commonly referred to as Lord Dunmore, issued a proclamation offering freedom to "all indentured servants, Negroes, or others," if they joined "His Majesty's Troops."¹⁶ This generous offer from the British caused Washington, before the year was out, to ask Congress

for permission to begin reenlisting free Negroes.¹⁷ Again, the colonies followed suit, and by spring 1778, evidence shows that most colonies were freely enlisting blacks, and some had been for more than a year, whether they were slave or free. In neither case was the shift in policy based on benevolence. General Washington shifted his stance in reaction to Lord Dunmore's proclamation, and most colonies had wholly disregarded the October 1775 ban due to the necessity for manpower.

By all accounts, Lord Dunmore's proclamation swayed less than 800 slaves. The battles, foraging parties, and maritime missions they participated in perhaps did little for the British cause. In actuality, it probably hurt the British in the long run because Lord Dunmore's actions caused the colonists to meaningfully accept the fact that blacks were going to be a factor in the war, whether they served for them or for the British. This was best illustrated by Seymour Burr, slave of Aaron Burr's brother. One day Seymour Burr ran away to serve in the British army but was captured before he could join. Instead of punishment, Burr was allowed to join the Continental Army and promised his freedom after his enlistment was up. Burr lived as a free man in Massachusetts after the war.¹⁸ Clearly, manpower for either side was at a premium.

The early years of the war were difficult for the colonists. Bunker Hill, although Pyrrhic, was, nonetheless, a victory for the British. Additionally, although the British had been pushed out of Boston, they won a significant campaign during the summer 1776, culminating in a victory at the



Washington Crossing the Delaware. (Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell depicted on right front.) Paul Girardet, after Emmanuel Leutze. (Print collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Arts, Prints, and Photographs. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Teilden Foundations)

Battle of Long Island in August. The seemingly bright spots in 1776 for Washington were his surprise twin victories at Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey, during mid-December through January 1777. Incidentally, two of the colonial troops who crossed the Delaware River with Washington on Christmas Day were black. They were Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell.¹⁹ Prince Whipple was the bodyguard for General William Whipple of New Hampshire, Washington's aide.

As 1776 turned into 1777, continued British pressure and colonial failure to capitalize on victories at Trenton and Princeton led to increasingly difficult times for the colonists. Although Trenton and Princeton were colonial successes, they failed to attract the necessary soldiers to fill the ranks. Furthermore, by this time, the British had secured greater control of Quebec and much of the upper waterways in New York. By the fall, the British had made it as far south as Saratoga. It was there that the colonists finally gained much-needed victories at two battles—Freeman's Farm, fought on 19 September, and Bemis Heights, fought on 7 October, near Saratoga. The colonial victories at Saratoga are rightfully considered turning points in the American Revolution because they resulted in swaying the French to enter the fray on the side of the colonists. The rigorous training offered by Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben at Valley Forge that winter is also rightfully considered a turning point during this dark period of the war. Another significant positive factor for the colonists during this period of the war was the increased infusion of black soldiers, both slave and free.

Necessity caused every colony, except South Carolina and Georgia, to reach out to the last known reservoir of manpower. In May 1777, the same month that the British took control of Quebec, Connecticut began its campaign for permission to recruit and enlist soldiers of African descent, whether they were free or slave. Connecticut's actions were soon followed by Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Connecticut's General Assembly considered the use of "Negro and mulatto slaves" for military service. In return, the slaves would be offered their freedom, and their masters would receive a paid bounty. Although the General Assembly's report was rejected in the upper house, "hundreds of black slaves and freemen were enlisted . . . in the regiments of . . . the Connecticut line."²⁰

On 2 January 1778, General James M. Varnum, of Rhode Island, complained to Washington that due to the small number of soldiers re-

maining in Rhode Island's two battalions, then training at Valley Forge, junior field officers requested to make "one temporary battalion from the two." Further, they suggested "that a battalion of Negroes [could] be easily raised there."²¹ The following month, the General Assembly of Rhode Island authorized the use of "every able-bodied Negro, mulatto, or Indian man-slave" for military service. As was stipulated in Connecticut, owners of the slaves would be financially compensated, and slaves were to receive certificates of emancipation once discharged from the service.²² In April 1778, Massachusetts followed suit, and all persons of African descent were legally authorized to enlist.²³ The other eight colonies—New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina—in varying forms also enlisted black soldiers, despite the 1775 congressional ban. In New Hampshire, for example, persons of African descent, regardless of their status, were enlisted into service liberally by 1777. New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and North Carolina, largely beginning in 1777, regularly enlisted slaves as substitutes for their white masters.²⁴ Although states such as Virginia and Delaware, respectively, insisted on either enlisting only free blacks or those with less than two years of servitude remaining, most able-bodied men, regardless of status, were enlisted after 1778.²⁴ Last, due to a great need for manpower, Maryland, a Southern state, began enlisting slaves in 1777.²⁵ In none of the above cases were persons of African descent enlisted because of a benevolent spirit within the colonies; the need for manpower drove all decisions. The contributions of these enlistees were, in many cases, quite significant. The service of persons of African descent in Connecticut offers an excellent depiction of how and why blacks came to be used.

Like most states in 1776, Connecticut received a regimental quota to fill from the Continental Government. Connecticut was required to fill eight regiments. As the war dragged on, Connecticut found that it could not maintain its eight regiments without enlisting a portion of its population composed of persons of African descent. Free blacks joined for the same patriotic and monetary reasons that compelled whites to join. Slaves, on the other hand, joined—or more correctly, in most cases, were sent—for the promise of their freedom. Some slaves were sent to the Army in lieu of their masters. Some masters received a bounty for the service of their slaves, while other masters were released from their draft obligation by sending slaves in their stead. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the enlistment of a slave, many did earn their freedom. Prince Duplex,

for example, who was the son of slave parents, enlisted for three years in 1777. After his discharge in 1780, he married, bought property, and eventually became active in his local community. He later moved to New York where he died a free man in 1825. Ironically, some slaves entered the Army without the promise of freedom at all. Jeff Sill, the slave of New Haven resident Samuel Hemingway, enlisted perhaps just for the adventure of being a soldier as opposed to being a slave. Sill understood that on completion of his enlistment he was to return to slavery. At the end of his first enlistment, Sill actually reenlisted for a second three-year obligation.²⁶

In total, more than 289 persons of African descent served in Connecticut regiments. They fought mainly as infantry and generally made noteworthy contributions to their regiments. Regiments were generally integrated; however, in 1781, the Fourth Regiment did raise a “nonwhite” company.²⁷ This company was one of two such companies known to have been formed in Connecticut. The other was a large company of 45 men and was “all black.”²⁸ Connecticut’s blacks fought at Bunker Hill, Norwalk, Danbury, New London, and Fort Griswold, to name a few.²⁹ One of the most heroic, yet tragic, accounts of a Connecticut black soldier was that of Jordan Freeman at the Battle of Groton Heights on 6 September 1781, near New London and Fort Griswold. Freeman was a slave and body servant of Colonel Williams Ledyard, the commander of forces at the battle. The British outnumbered the colonists 800 to 150 as they attempted to take the port at New London. Although the British suffered heavy casualties, they eventually forced the colonists to surrender. As Ledyard was surrendering his sword to a British officer, the officer



Marker at Fort Griswold depicting Jordan Freeman ready to spear Major William Montgomery. Montgomery led a British attack at this location in the Battle of Gronton Heights. (Connecticut Historical Commission photo)

took the sword, turned it on Ledyard, and stabbed him. During the thick of the battle, Freeman and another soldier speared British Major William Montgomery as he attempted to scale the walls of the fort. Freeman and another slave, Lambert Latham, were both killed during the battle.³⁰

Regardless of the circumstances behind the enlistment of persons of African descent, the bottom line was that they fought and served throughout the American Revolution. There were few battles that did not have a black person involved. For example, in spring 1776, Joel Taburn, at the age of 15, enlisted in Nash county, North Carolina, where he served in at least four different units throughout the war until he was discharged in 1783. During his seven-year enlistment, Taburn served at the siege of Charlestown, the Battle of Eutaw Springs, and undoubtedly at many other engagements.³¹ In October 1776, at the age of 19, Philip Rodman enlisted at South Kingston, Rhode Island. Although Rodman only served for 13 months, he was at some of the most significant engagements of the war, to include the battles of White Plains, Trenton, and Princeton.³² In spring 1777, William Thomas enlisted at Charles City Court House, Virginia. During his first enlistment, Thomas served at the Battle of Monmouth. Discharged in February 1779, Thomas reenlisted in 1781 and served at the Siege of Yorktown.³³ In May 1777, Isaac Perkins enlisted in North Carolina and served initially in the Tenth North Carolina Regiment and later in the Second North Carolina Regiment. It is unclear what actions Perkins served in; however, he was probably at the siege of Charlestown when he was taken as a prisoner of war. Perkins subsequently escaped his captors and lived to receive a pension from 1818 until his death in 1830.³⁴ One last example shows that a free, 20-year-old “colored man” named George Buley enlisted in Prince George’s County, Maryland, in 1781. Buley only served for 9 months, but during that time, he participated in the Siege of Yorktown and guarded prisoners of war at Fredericksburg, Virginia.³⁵ The Revolutionary War pension files have hundreds of records confirming the service of persons of African descent. These five selected depict the extent of the service rendered by such individuals. It, however, does not end there.

Although it is a fact, as stated earlier, that South Carolina and Georgia refused to enlist black soldiers, it is also a fact that they, like the other colonies, used black manpower during the war. In South Carolina, it was common practice to hire slaves out for military use. While the masters

would receive the pay, the slaves would serve in the artillery, in semi-military roles, and perhaps in an occasional fighting role.³⁶ Most of the identities and statehoods, as in the case of the young “waiter” who fired a key shot at the Battle of Cowpens to save an officer, have been lost to history.³⁷ A former Georgia slave named Austin Dabney, who had been sent by his master to serve in his place, served in a Georgia artillery unit. During the Battle of Kettle Hill, which was one of the most noted and indeed toughest battles in Georgia, Dabney was seriously wounded in the thigh. For his service, Dabney was awarded 112 acres of land, nearly 40 years after the war ended, for his “bravery and fortitude . . . in several engagements and actions.”³⁸ Certainly, the names, identities, and numbers of many like Dabney and the young waiter in South Carolina have been lost. But there is a reason why many identities are saved in the North as opposed to in the South. Very few persons of African descent actually served in the South because Southerners were afraid to put weapons in the hands of a population of people that they did not trust. Slavery was not yet extremely brutal in the 18th century as it would become in the early half of the 19th century, but it was a harsh living and relative to the era. So, a Southerner putting a weapon in the hands of a slave in 1777 would be very analogous to a World War II German concentration camp guard giving a Jewish prisoner a weapon in 1942. In either case, the oppressed would have been very likely to use that same weapon against the oppressor.

Service by persons of African descent was not limited to land warfare. From the beginning of the war, persons of African descent served in the Continental Marines, the Continental Navy, and other maritime forces. In Philadelphia’s Tun Tavern, considered the birthplace of the Marine Corps, at least two blacks, Isaac Walker and a man simply called Orange, were enlisted there. At least one black, probably John Martin, a black marine from Delaware, served with the marines who supported Washington at the Battle of Princeton.³⁹ Five black marines served aboard the Navy’s *Oliver Cromwell* in 1777 and 1778 when it made its successful voyage off the Lesser Antilles and the Azores.⁴⁰ Although few in numbers, which was in keeping with the tradition of the corps, black marines made a contribution.

It can be effectively argued that naval forces, whether they were continental, state, or private, would have been hard pressed were it not for the presence of persons of African descent. Their services ranged from

cooks and servants to pilots of vessels. Ambrose Lewis enlisted in the Navy at Fredericksburg, Virginia, on 15 April 1776 and served aboard two vessels, the *Page* and the *Dragon*, until he was discharged on 16 April 1779.⁴¹ For at least three reasons, the ratio of black to white sailors was much higher than the ratio of black to white soldiers. First, naval service was austere, difficult, and an unpopular occupation; second, there was a severe shortage of sailors; and third, and perhaps most important, many free-born New England, Virginia, and Maryland blacks were already skilled mariners.⁴² As in the case of the service of persons of African descent on land, it will never become clear how many blacks served in the naval and marine forces, but the fact is that they did serve, and their service enhanced Colonial success.

At this point the three parts of the second issue introduced at the outset of this chapter must be revisited. The first part of what to do with the 20 percent of the colonial population that was of African descent has been addressed throughout the chapter. Quite simply, necessity basically required their service. The second part, if they are allowed to fight how could they consciously be denied their freedom; and the third part, if their combat power is rejected could the war be won, both require further analysis.

The second question of the denial of freedom is concretely supported but with paradoxical results. Based on the fact that four colonies—Vermont in 1777, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania in 1780, and Massachusetts in 1783—in some form abolished slavery before the war was over, and another four—Rhode Island and Connecticut in 1784, and New York and New Jersey in 1785—abolished slavery via gradual abolition shortly after the war ended, one could argue that the colonist's conscience did get the best of them. The paradox, however, is that in all the middle and southern colonies, from Maryland to Georgia, the institution of slavery gradually became more embedded. Since the South was agriculturally based while the North was industrially based, labor was more of a necessity in the South. Furthermore, Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 made cotton even more lucrative to grow. Cotton and the other agricultural cash crops of the South required large labor bases. The industrially based North needed more skilled labor. Thus, it may be argued that it was not conscience at all that swayed the North during the Revolutionary era but, rather, a supply and demand issue.

Last, had the colonial forces rejected the service of persons of African descent it is debatable whether they would have won the war. One could soundly argue that even if the colonial forces had steadfastly adhered to Washington's policy, black soldiers, sailors, and marines would have fought nonetheless. Their service, however, would have perhaps been for the British because they were going to fight for whoever gave them their freedom, thus adding significantly to England's combat power. This would have also meant that less combat power would have been afforded colonial forces, therefore lowering their strength and resulting in their possible defeat. Another consideration that must be addressed when one calculates the service of blacks is the countless numbers of black men, women, and children who worked on fortifications; served as colonial servants; harvested crops; and acted as French soldiers, spies, and so forth. Although they are not included in the number of colonial soldiers, sailors, and marines who carried arms, are these persons not to be considered indirect combat multipliers?

In the end, the reader must ask himself, "what were the contributions of persons of African descent to the revolutionary cause, and did their contributions make a difference?"

When the Revolutionary War officially ended on 3 September 1783, there was a great deal of uncertainty in the atmosphere.⁴³ A young nation had been, once again, born out of conflagration, and a new people had to begin to make decisions and laws for themselves without "big brother" watching them. The first step was to become a nation without a monarchy. In 1788, after several years of postwar debate and political jockeying among the states, the Constitution of the United States was finally ratified.⁴⁴ In 1789, the former commander in chief of the American Army became the first democratically elected president.

By this time, as discussed earlier, eight states had abolished slavery in some form or fashion. This, however, did not mean that life was pleasant or equal for all Americans. In virtually every walk of life, persons of African descent found themselves at a disadvantage, relegated to the least desirable societal roles, and officially denied many rights and privileges associated with being an American. This can be exemplified in the way that they were dealt with as soldiers, sailors, and marines between 1783 and 1860. In fact, the Militia Act of 1792 limited military service to white male citizens between 18 and 45 years of age.⁴⁵ Although the law stood

in effect until 1862, men of color still served and fought throughout the period.

In the 77 years that separated the American Revolution from the American Civil War, the United States participated in five military campaigns of significance—the Quasi-War, the War of 1812, the First Seminole War, the Second Seminole War, and the Mexican-American War. In each war, with the possible exception of the Mexican-American War, persons of African descent participated. Since their numbers in the Quasi-War and the First Seminole War were nebulous, there is little reason to examine their roles except to say that no definitive figure exists stating how many served as sailors during the Quasi-War, which was fought against the French from 1798 to 1800. During the First Seminole War, roughly 400 blacks fought with the Seminole tribe against U.S. forces.⁴⁶ It was, however, during the War of 1812 and the Second Seminole War that persons of African descent made a significant impact. During the War of 1812, they fought with U.S. forces for America. During the Second Seminole War, they fought with Native Americans (The Seminole tribe of Florida) against American forces.⁴⁷

The War of 1812, sometimes called the Second War for Independence, obviously has roots dating back to the American Revolution. The immediate causes, though, date to 1807, when British ships began to heavily impress sailors from American vessels, claiming that the sailors were British deserters. This impressment practice continued for several years until Congress declared war on England on 17 June 1812. Two ironic factors were associated with the impressment period leading up to the war. First, in spite of the Militia Act of 1792, persons of African descent had been filling positions as sailors on U.S. vessels since the Quasi-War. The most significant irony, however, occurred in 1807 when the British man-of-war *Leopold* seized the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake* and impressed four “U.S. citizens.” Request for the release of impressed sailors William Ware, Daniel Martin, John Strachan, and John Wilsons were demanded by President Thomas Jefferson’s administration on the grounds that they were “American citizens.”⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, Ware, Martin, and Strachan were “Negroes.”

In fact, because of the harshness of naval life, large numbers of crews were manned by free blacks or black slaves. England, seeking to enforce its embargo act, mainly directed at Napoleon Bonaparte, felt safe in

impressing blacks because of the general U.S. sentiment toward blacks. Nonetheless, when the war officially began in 1812, the Navy had already been guilty of breaking the 1792 law. Throughout the entire war, persons of African descent made up more than 10 percent of all naval forces. They served on most of the existing naval ships and were believed to have fought in many of the major naval battles. Without doubt, however, during the Battle of Lake Erie, arguably the most significant naval battle of the war, one in every 10 to 12 sailors was of African descent. Oliver H. Perry, commander of the naval forces at Lake Erie, who had initially complained about being sent so many blacks, soon welcomed all able-bodied black sailors.⁴⁹ Apparently, they had proved their value to Perry. Blacks continued to serve in the Navy long after the war was over. In an 1862 letter to the Massachusetts Historical Society, Dr. Usher Parsons, the surgeon who had served in Perry's fleet, wrote:

In 1814, our fleet sailed to the Upper Lakes to co-operate with Colonel Croghan at Mackinac. About one in ten or twelve of the crews were black.

In 1816, I was surgeon of the 'Java,' under Commodore Perry. The white and colored seamen messed together. About one in six or eight were colored.

In 1819, I was surgeon of the 'Guerriere,' under Commodore Macdonough; and the proportion of blacks was about the same in her crew. There seemed to be an entire absence of prejudice against the blacks as messmates among the crew. What I have said applies to the crews of the other ships that sailed in squadrons.⁵⁰

Throughout the period between the War of 1812 and the American Civil War, blacks, although declining in numbers, remained on naval enlistment records. As late as 1859, enlistment records from Norfolk, Philadelphia, and Baltimore show that small numbers of blacks were still joining the Navy. By this time, however, they had been relegated to the positions of cooks.⁵¹

Unlike the Navy, the Marine Corps and Army were able to abide by the 1792 law well into the 19th century. The Marine Corps, as will become evident in chapter 4, successfully banned blacks until 1942. The Army on

the other hand, used them as early as 1814. As in the Navy, it was a case of necessity for the Army. In 1814, the war was nearly over, and only two of the three states known to enlist blacks actually got an opportunity to use them. New York raised two regiments totaling more than 2,000 men, many of whom fought bravely. Pennsylvania organized a regiment of blacks as well, but the war ended before they saw action.⁵² The most noted units composed of black soldiers to serve during the war were undoubtedly two battalions of free black soldiers from New Orleans.

New Orleans was unique in that it had a sizable free black population in a period when most persons of African descent, North or South, were slaves. As early as 1812, Louisiana was the only state in the Union to enlist blacks, as long as they were free and had been property owners, into the militia. This is significant because those in New York and Pennsylvania were not enlisted into the militia; they were simply organized into formed regiments. On a few occasions, some persons of African descent, to include Isidore Honore, a free man of color, were commissioned as officers.⁵³ Not even these militia forces, however, actually saw battle during the war.

The two battalions that actually fought during the Battle of New Orleans were recruited by General Andrew Jackson in 1814 out of a need for manpower to face the invading British, who were then threatening the southern shores of New Orleans. Jackson promised them that they would receive “the same bounty, in money and lands, as their white counterparts.”⁵⁴ This prompted between 430 and 600 free blacks to join Jackson’s forces.⁵⁵ Some of them, undoubtedly, had been in the state militia.

In addition to building the cotton-bag barricades that protected Jackson and participating in several skirmishes, as well as in the initial fight that occurred when the British landed, the two battalions served in frontline positions on 8 January 1815, the decisive day of the Battle of New Orleans.⁵⁶ For their actions, Jackson praised them by saying that the “colored volunteers have not disappointed the hopes that were formed of their courage and perseverance in the performance of their duty.”⁵⁷ The free black population of New Orleans would answer the call again during the American Civil War. But between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, another group of blacks would serve. This time, however, they fought against American forces.

Perhaps the proudest Native American heritage within the United States is that of the Seminoles. The Seminoles are the only Native American tribe to have not been completely beaten and forced from their homeland. Historian Kenneth W. Porter, author of the most recent definitive work on the role blacks played in the Seminole Wars, perhaps stated it best when he concluded that:

Of all U.S. conflicts with Native Americans, the Second Seminole War was the longest—at seven years—and the most expensive. It cost well over 20 million dollars, four times what Spain had received for Florida. It was also the deadliest, with more than 1,500 regular soldiers and sailors lost. In contrast, from 1866 to 1891, when the many tribes in the West were conquered, total U.S. Army losses were less than two thousand. Until the Vietnam conflict, the Second Seminole War was the longest war ever fought by the United States—and like [Vietnam], it did not end with an American victory.⁵⁸

The Second Seminole War was indeed unique and costly in many ways. It officially began in December 1835 and officially ended in August 1842.⁵⁹ During that time, more than 10 significant battles were fought. In mid to late December 1835, Seminoles, joined by several hundred local slaves, destroyed a sugar plantation in the Saint Johns district and set an ambush along the southern tip of the Withlacoochee River—in present-day Sumter County—where Brevet Major Francis L. Dade and more than 100 soldiers were killed. Dade's Massacre, as the ambush on 28 December was subsequently called, was indeed brutal.⁶⁰

A fair question that may come to mind for many readers at this point in the discourse, is why blacks would fight with Native Americans against whites. The answer is quite simple; blacks were fighting for freedom. Most of them were runaway slaves or descendants of runaway slaves. They had fled to Florida not for a love of the indigenous population but for freedom. To not fight and lose would be to just give up on freedom. Furthermore, by the time the Seminole War had begun, Black Seminoles were indeed Seminoles in every sense of the word. Many, by that time, were second- and third-generation Black Seminoles. Interracial marriages were the norm rather than the exception. They were family. Most, therefore, were simply fighting for their way of life.

On the night of 27 December, about 180 Seminoles, roughly 50 of whom were black, waited in the vicinity of Wahoo Swamp. At about 0800,

Dade and his soldiers reached the ambush site. During the initial clash, roughly half of Dade's soldiers became casualties. Dade himself was killed in the fight. For the next 5 1/2 hours, Dade's soldiers fought from hastily acquired barricades and concealed locations within the Palmetto trees. Some accounts say that the soldiers were systematically stabbed and axed to death and that bodies were mutilated. Regardless of what actually occurred that day, only "three wounded men survived the carnage." Blacks were a deciding factor on both sides of the ambush. Luis Pacheco, a local slave who had been hired out as a guide to assist Dade's expedition, was believed to have led Dade's men into the ambush. Pacheco ultimately survived the massacre and subsequently served with the Seminoles until he was captured and shipped to the Indian Territory in 1838. It was Pacheco who, many years later, said that the reported mutilations did not occur because Jumper, the principal chief at the ambush, would not allow it.⁶¹

Only three days later, roughly 200 to 250 Seminoles, including 30 to 50 blacks, ambushed another U.S. force under the command of General Duncan L. Clinch about 100 miles upstream—in present-day Marion County—on the Withlacoochee River. Led by Chief Osceola, the most noted Seminole chief to emerge from the Second Seminole War, the First Battle of the Withlacoochee was not as decisive as Dade's Massacre, but it surely established the Seminoles' resolve. U.S. forces would have to deal with that resolve for many years to come. In January 1839, Osceola wrote Clinch a letter that would prove prophetic:

You have guns and so have we . . . you have powder and lead,
and so have we . . . your men will fight, and so will ours, till the
last drop of the Seminole's blood has moisted the dust of his
hunting ground.⁶²

Although Osceola died of illness in a prison before the Second Seminole War ended, his words lived on. Many U.S. colonels and generals, such as Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor, both of whom became famous leaders in American history, entered Florida to crush the Seminoles and their black allies. They all left without success, and they all found that a significant reason for the Seminole tribe's success was, in part, due to the support they secured from their black brethren.

In this chapter, we have briefly studied the roles that black soldiers, sailors, and even a few marines played in three distinct wars: the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Second Seminole War. In each case, an argument can be made for, and against the viability of having black

soldiers on the left and right flank. Two facts, however, are constant, no matter how one decides to synopsise the black participation from war to war. First, in each case, the black fighting person was on the side that eventually won the war. Thus, maybe their presence did make some level of positive difference. Second, persons of African descent generally fought for a different type of freedom and way of life than their allies, with the possible exception of the Seminoles. True, in all three wars examined, the oppressed were fighting for freedom, but for the blacks, it usually meant a permanent loss of all freedoms should they lose.

Notes

1. Three were killed on the spot, two mortally wounded.
2. Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, The War of 1812 & The Civil War* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1890; reprint New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 26-31. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 4-7.
3. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947; reprinted New York: Knopf, 1988), 65.
4. Quarles, 4-5.
5. Robert Ergang, *Europe: From the Renaissance to Waterloo* (Boston: Heath, 1967), 641-42.
6. Ibid.
7. Franklin, 66.
8. Wilson, 33.
9. Most of the persons of African descent who served with the French had been hired out as body servants, etc., to French officers. Two of the most noted foreign officers, Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Marquis de Lafayette, had colonial slaves as servants of some sort. Agrippa Hull served for Kosciuszko. Perhaps the most famous French general/colonial slave duo was Lafayette and James Armistead. Armistead sought and gained his master's permission to serve under General Lafayette. Armistead, while serving as scout and spy for Lafayette during the Virginia campaign, gained information on an impending British surprise attack. With the information obtained from Armistead, Lafayette was able to save his army from a possible defeat. For his actions, three years after the war, the Virginia Legislature freed Armistead and compensated his master. The largest concentration of persons of African descent who served for the French was the Haitian brigade of roughly 545 "mulattoes and Negros" who sailed with the Comte d'Estaing to Savannah, Georgia, in fall 1779 to assist American forces there. Incidentally, among this Haitian brigade were many of the same men who would defeat the French in 1802 during the Haitian Revolution, including Henri Christophe, the future king of Haiti.
10. Quarles, 9-10.
11. Wilson, 33-38; Quarles, 10; Franklin, 72.
12. Wilson, 38-39.
13. Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York, Free Press, 1986), 10.
14. *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., 13 Vols. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1977), Council of War at Cambridge, Massachusetts, 8 October 1775, Vol. I, Item #31. Minutes of a conference with General Washington by a committee of conference, 23 October 1775. Vol. I, Item #32. Hereafter cited as Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item#.
15. In November 1775, South Carolina did, however, pass a motion to use slaves as pioneers and laborers. This issue of using slaves as pioneers or laborers is a serious factor to consider when the question of "combat multiplier" is raised. For every black slave used in this fashion, a white person could be used to fight. Thus, pioneers and laborers inadvertently added to the combat power of a military force. This also became a factor with services of supply (SOS) troops during the world wars.
16. Proclamation by Lord Dunmore, governor of Virginia, 7 November 1775, Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #23.

17. General George Washington to President of Congress, 31 December 1775, Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #37.

18. David O. White, *Connecticut's Black Soldiers, 1775-1783* (Chester, CT: Pequot Press, 1973), 21.

19. Franklin, 72.

20. Statement attributed to H.H. Trumbull, editor of the Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut; Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #76.

21. J.M. Varnum to General George Washington, 2 January 1778; Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #61.

22. Proceeding of the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, February Session, 1778; Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #64.

23. Thomas Kench [to the Legislature of Massachusetts], 3 April 1778; Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #53.

24. In Virginia, masters got around the enlistment ban by presenting their slaves as free men to recruiters. See Quarles, 69.

25. *Ibid.*, 51-61.

26. White, 17-28.

27. The company of 18 men had at least five Indians. None, except Colonel Durkee, were believed to be white.

28. All black usually meant predominantly black. Officers, senior noncommissioned officers, and some lower enlisted men were white. Rhode Island raised the most successful all-black company. The company was sometimes called a regiment, but was actually too small with only 140 men. The Rhode Island regiment won distinction for its actions at the Battle of Rhode Island in 1778.

29. White, 29-35.

30. Quarles, 76; White, 29.

31. E.W. Morgan, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Pensions, to Adjutant General, War Department, 8 August 1930, Data on Black Veterans of the Revolution; Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #89.

32. *Ibid.*, 16 October 1930.

33. *Ibid.*, 2 May 1930.

34. *Ibid.*, 8 August 1930.

35. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1931.

36. Quarles, 71 and 75.

37. Perhaps one of artist William Ranney's most famous Revolutionary War paintings, completed in 1845, is the best depiction of the blurred lines on the battlefield for slaves. An unidentified "black waiter" fired the pistol at the Battle of Cowpens that probably saved the life of Lieutenant Colonel William Washington, George Washington's nephew. Since the Battle of Cowpens was fought in South Carolina, coupled with the fact that no one of note from the battle remembered or knew the waiter's name, there is a strong probability that the waiter was a hired-out South Carolina slave.

38. Quarles, 75.

39. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO] distributor), 2-3.

40. Quarles, 86-87.

41. E.W. Morgan to Adjutant General, 16 October 1930, Morris, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Item #90.

42. Several factors account for the high percentage of black seamen during the 18th century. Maritime commercial capitalism is perhaps the most significant reason. In the South, “cash crops” were lucrative. In the Northeast, maritime ferrying of goods was lucrative. Many whites, therefore, taught, or had trained, their black slaves the skills of the sea. For example, as many as “25 percent of the male slaves in coastal Massachusetts during the 1740s” were skilled seamen. W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 7. For more on the rise of black seamen during this era, see *Black Jacks*, 1-67.

43. Although the treaties of peace were signed on 3 September 1783, they were not ratified by the United States and Britain until 14 January 1784.

44. There were 13 states in the Union, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island. Nine of them had to ratify the Constitution for it to be placed into effect. On 21 June 1788, New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify. Before the end of the year, Virginia and New York had ratified, followed slowly by North Carolina in November 1798 and Rhode Island in May 1790.

45. Gary A. Donaldson, *The History of African-Americans in the Military* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1991), 24; Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 19.

46. Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 19.

47. The word Seminole literally means “seceders.” During the latter part of the 1700s, many lower Creeks, including Choctaws, Chickasaws, and some Cherokees had fled to Florida, subsequently banding together there with indigenous natives. They collectively became what many refer to as “the Seminole tribe” or the “Seminole nation.” Runaway blacks who joined with them became known as “the Black Seminoles.”

48. Wilson, 73-74.

49. Donaldson, 26; Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 21; Wilson, 78-80.

50. *Ibid.*, 78.

51. W. Jeffrey Bolster, 223-24.

52. Franklin, 99. DOD Publication, *Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1985), 29.

53. Act of the Legislature of Louisiana to Organize a Corps of Militia, 6 September 1812, and Commission of Second Lieutenant Isidore Honore, 12 October 1812, Morris; *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. I, Items #103 and #104.

54. Wilson, 81.

55. The number of British and American forces to oppose each other in December 1814 and January 1815 varies and so do the number of black soldiers. Whether you use the numbers of Franklin, 100-102; Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 25; or Wilson, 85, blacks composed more than 14 percent of the forces during the Battle of New Orleans.

56. Donaldson, 29.

57. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 25.

58. Porter, 106-107.

59. The word *officially* is used very loosely here only because there was neither a declaration of war nor armistice. December 1835 simply marks the date of the first large-scale battle between the Seminoles and U.S. forces, and August 1842 simply marks the date when U.S. leaders were authorized to end fighting with, and pursuit of, the Seminoles.

60. Porter, 38-40.

61. *Ibid.*, 40-43.

62. *Ibid.*, 44-46.

Chapter 2

Civil War

In February 1862, as the Civil War entered into its 10th month, Frederick Douglass prophesied that “the side which first summons the Negro to its aid will conquer.”¹ Although more than one year would elapse before the North began to officially muster black soldiers into service, it was the Militia Act of 17 July 1862 that authorized President Abraham Lincoln “to employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary.”² Throughout the war, approximately 178,892 persons of African descent served as combatants, and more than 38,000 of them gave their lives for the Union cause. They participated in 449 engagements, of which 39 were major battles. Perhaps the most telling statistic of all is the fact that in the latter months of the war, there were as many USCT in active Union service as there were Confederate troops in active service.³ This chapter will explore the military contributions of persons of African descent during the Civil War, thus allowing the reader to decide whether black soldiers were combat multipliers during that conflagration.

When the most pivotal war in U.S. history erupted on 12 April 1861, there were approximately 4 million persons of African descent living in America. Roughly 3.5 million were slaves, and about 500,000 were free. All the slaves lived in the Southern slaveholding states below the Mason-Dixon Line, while free people of color lived in about every state of the Union, with the majority, obviously, living in the “free” states north of the Mason-Dixon Line.⁴

Of the many questions that were raised regarding these persons of African descent, this chapter analyzes three: What should the role of black people be and should they be allowed to serve for the North and/or the South? If they serve, should they be issued weapons and used as combatants? Most important, if people of African descent are used in any capacity during the war, should they be granted freedom? The only one of these three questions that was being freely tossed around in 1861 was the second half of the first question: Should blacks be allowed to serve for either side? The people who were asking these questions were the radical Republicans, white and black abolitionists, and black intellectuals. The one question that could not be pondered in 1861 but has exercised historians for more than a century is, What effect, if any, did persons of African descent have on the outcome of the Civil War?

There were approximately 29 million people in America in 1861; 20 million lived in the North and 9 million lived in the South. Simple mathematics tilts the manpower scale in favor of the North. Moreover, given that 3.5 million slaves and several hundred thousand free blacks were included in the population of the South, the imbalance increases considerably.

The question of what the role of blacks should be and if they should be allowed to serve for the North or the South, became an issue from the very start of the war. Interestingly enough, it was the South that first employed black soldiers. They were, however, soldiers in name only and they were largely confined to the New Orleans area.

The Native Guards, as the unit was called, were three battalions of soldiers raised largely from among the free black population of New Orleans—many of them were the descendants of the battalion that fought there in 1815. All the enlisted soldiers and line officers were of African descent. Although Louisiana Governor Thomas Overton Moore and State Adjutant and Inspector General Maurice Grivot had approved and endorsed, respectively, the raising of the Native Guards in May 1861, they never allowed muskets to be issued to the units because Confederate officials distrusted the free blacks. So deep was this distrust that, even as Union Naval Commander David G. Farragut and his forces were closing in on New Orleans from the south and Union ground forces were handing the Confederates large numbers of casualties well north of New Orleans in the vicinity of Shiloh, Tennessee, Moore rejected the offer extended by the officers of the Native Guards to help defend the city. Subsequently, on 1 May 1862, New Orleans fell into Union hands, and by 1 September, the Native Guards were serving for the Union.⁵

The Native Guards had become bitter due to the treatment and lack of trust they had received from their “countrymen” during the previous 16 months. Furthermore, by September 1862, all notions of a short three- to five-month war were long gone, and the issue of slavery was no longer a hidden cause of the war; it was quickly moving to the front burners. The Native Guards decided to fight for what they considered to be a nobler cause, and Union General Benjamin F. Butler was willing to use them as soldiers.⁶

There is no doubt that the black population of New Orleans was unique among black populations in the South, but the manner in which



Contrabands of war. Slaves reporting to General Benjamin Butler. (Culver Service)

the Confederate officials in New Orleans dealt with the Native Guards was representative of the entire Confederate attitude toward the notion of arming blacks.⁷ Nonetheless, there were many attempts throughout the war among Southerners to raise and use persons of African descent, slave and free, as combatants.

The first serious attempt came on 2 January 1864, when Confederate General Patrick R. Cleburne petitioned to raise slaves as fighting men because the North was using them as “a source of great strength in a purely military point of view.” Confederate President Jefferson Davis flatly rejected the idea and forbade any further discussion on the subject. By the end of that same year, the cry erupted again, this time from a more powerful voice. Confederate Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin wrote on 21 December 1864, “the Negro will certainly be made to fight against us if not armed for our defense.” Again, the cry fell on deaf ears. Finally, on 11 January 1865, General Robert E. Lee, arguably the most respected Confederate figure, advised that the South “should employ them [Negroes] without delay.” Thus, on 13 March, Davis signed the Negro Soldier Law authorizing commanders to enlist slaves.⁸ By this point in the war, the decision was too late to do any good; the following month Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse and the war was over. The question one must ask himself is, Did the South miss a grand opportunity in “combat multipliers” by procrastinating on whether to use persons of African descent as combatants?⁹

The debate of whether to arm persons of African descent to fight for the Union was similar to the one in the South. In the North, however, it was more accelerated. By summer 1862, the Union had reached a point the Confederates failed to reach until March 1865. Arming blacks in the North can be compared to an unattended water main in need of repair. At first there are only drips of water escaping through the pipe. But before long, the drips turn into leaks, and the leaks eventually become an unstoppable waterspout. The drips started in May 1861 when Butler employed runaway slaves in his camp at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, and labeled them “contrabands.” Soon, contrabands were being employed at other Union camps.¹⁰ In fact, on 14 October 1861, Assistant Adjutant General William D. Whipple issued Special Order No. 72 that authorized officers in and near Fort Monroe, Camp Hamilton, and Camp Butler to employ the contrabands and pay the males \$8 per day and the females \$4 per day.¹⁰ When Grant was investing Fort Henry on 6 February 1862 and Fort Donelson on 13 February 1862, General Henry W. Halleck urged him to “impress slaves to work on fortifications.”¹¹

Just as in the South, however, there was a great hesitation about how far to go with these persons. Using black people as contrabands, laborers, or impressed slaves was one thing—in fact, the South used blacks throughout the war in this fashion—but arming them as soldiers was very different. Clearly, arming the slaves would misrepresent the war to all Unionists and sympathetic Confederates, Northerner and Southerner, as a war to free “African slavery.” Furthermore, slaves running away to Union lines and serving as contrabands were already considered “a source of annoyance.” Arming them would almost certainly make them uncontrollable. A part of the North’s hesitation to arm free blacks, was essentially the same as it was for the South; they worried about their trustworthiness. Commanders were advised that if they used contrabands they must keep them “under guard and not [allow them] to communicate with the enemy, nor [allow them] to escape.”¹² After all, contrabands came from within the Confederate lines, and the war was still young. This trend of not arming blacks extended well into 1862 for land forces. Meanwhile, as land commanders were jockeying with this issue, maritime authorities turned the drip of the unattended water main into leaks.

When Union naval forces assaulted the Hatteras inlet in August 1861, fugitive slaves were a part of at least one of the 32-pounder gun crews.¹³ As a result of these actions and other services rendered by black seamen,

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles approved the enlistment “of persons of color” not to exceed the rank of “boy.”¹⁴ These men were paid \$10 per month.¹⁶ Throughout the war, as had been the case since the American Revolution, persons of African descent were easily enlisted into the Navy and served in all capacities from cooks and servants to gun crewmen and ship pilots. Several factors caused the Navy to accept blacks more readily than the Army. A black sailor on a vessel could be controlled and contained much more easily than a black soldier on land. Further, naval duty during this period was still extremely austere and arduous, thus unpopular. Since Northerners were not flocking to become sailors in the midst of a war, manpower shortages became critical early in the war. Last, but perhaps most important, because of the austerity and arduousness of naval service, sickness ran high among naval crewmen.¹⁵ Manpower, black or white, free or slave, became a sought-after commodity. Throughout the American Civil War, sailors of African descent made a lasting contribution. There were not many significant naval expeditions that did not employ them. And although the Union Navy was bound to defeat the Confederate Navy—simply because the Confederate Navy was virtually nonexistent—sheer statistics are evidence of black Civil War naval contributions. Secretary of the Navy John P. Long, under President Theodore Roosevelt, produced a report in 1902, in which he concluded that although “no specific figures” were kept on “the number of colored men” to serve in the Navy during the Civil War, it is estimated that of the 118,044 enlistments during the war, roughly 29,511, or approximately 25 percent, were black.¹⁶ It took nearly a year, but the Army soon followed the Navy’s lead and began to arm persons of African descent.

Initial arming of black troops occurred on a case-by-case basis. Kansas, South Carolina, and Louisiana were the first states to arm black soldiers in fall 1862. In each case, aggressive abolitionist commanders were responsible for raising the units. In Kansas, the effort was led by Senator James H. Lane; in South Carolina, by Brigadier General Rufus Saxton; and in Louisiana, by Butler.

Kansas, the site of pre-Civil War conflagration in what became known as “bleeding Kansas,” had openly enlisted Negroes as early as October 1861.¹⁷ Nothing substantial, however, developed from these enlistments. The Militia Act of 1862 (July), which authorized the “enroll[ment of] persons of African descent [for] any service for which they may be

found competent,” and a philosophical change of attitude toward the use of blacks by Lincoln soon brought about a change. Lane, a proslavery democrat before becoming an abolitionist republican and a brigadier general commissioned by Lincoln, authorized two captains, H.C. Seaman and James M. Williams who were both known abolitionists, to enlist “both white and colored men.”¹⁸ The more successful of the two captains was Williams.

Williams was appointed on 4 August 1862, and he soon established a recruiting headquarters near Leavenworth, Kansas. By mid-October, Williams had recruited 500 men.¹⁹ Most, if not all, had only recently been slaves in Missouri and Arkansas. When the war broke out, fugitive slaves from those two slave states quickly fled to the free state of Kansas. They went from “clanking chains to clashing arms,” explained one colonel. There were men such as Caesar Johnson who escaped from his Arkansas master. Initially, Johnson settled with the Cherokees in the Indian Territory but eventually made his way to Leavenworth via Lawrence, Kansas. Once in Leavenworth, Johnson enlisted in the First Kansas.²⁰ Like other fugitive slaves when offered a chance to fight against a former master, Johnson did not hesitate. It was not long before the new recruits were tested. On 28 October 1862, a detachment of 225 men was ordered into Missouri under the command of Seaman. They were soon surprise attacked by a Confederate Missouri State Militia force at Island Mound near Butler, Missouri. The soldiers of the First Kansas Colored Volunteers defeated their enemy at a cost of eight killed and 10 wounded. This engagement was “the first engagement [during the Civil War] in which colored troops were engaged.”²¹

While the First Kansas was undergoing recruitment and participating in raids like the one near Butler, Missouri, critical events and decisions were taking place that would soon help to officially federalize the First Kansas. On 17 September, Union forces had won a Pyrrhic victory at the Battle of Antietam in Sharpsburg, Maryland.²² As a result, on 22 September, Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which ultimately became the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation was the crowning action that forced the “unattended water main” to burst into full blast regarding enlisting black troops. Shortly thereafter, on 13 January, the First Kansas Colored Volunteers became the fourth regiment of black troops to be mustered into the Union Army. As these units were mustered into service, they became known as the USCT.

Between 13 January and 2 May 1863, four additional companies were recruited, bringing the First Kansas to a full 10-company regiment. On 2 May, the First Regiment Kansas, Colored Volunteers, received orders to march to an encampment at Baxter Springs, Kansas, where it stayed until 27 June. The First Kansas was sent southward near Baxter Springs to support Grant's westward advancement toward Vicksburg. While at Baxter Springs, the First Kansas participated in two engagements, one at Sherwood, Missouri, and the other in Jasper County, Missouri. The latter was unsuccessful for the First Kansas.²³

On 27 June, the First Kansas was ordered to proceed to Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, 12 miles north of present-day Muskogee, Oklahoma. During the march and after being stationed at Fort Gibson for only two weeks, the First Kansas participated in two significant engagements. While en route to Fort Gibson, on 1-2 July, the First Kansas fought at Cabin Creek in the Cherokee nation as part of a mixed detachment. After brief skirmishing on 1 July, Confederate forces occupied strongpoints on the southern bank of Cabin Creek. Union forces occupied strongpoints on the northern bank. The following morning, the two forces engaged each other for more than 2 hours. Confederate forces were driven from their positions "in great disorder" and suffered 100 casualties and eight prisoners. Union casualties were three killed and 25 wounded.²⁴ The skirmish at Cabin Creek was significant for two reasons. First, it was one of the few battles in which white and black soldiers—as well as Indian allies—fought side by side. Second, it changed the attitudes of many in the west about the fighting abilities and spirit of the black soldier. The words of an Irish democrat officer of the Third Wisconsin Cavalry who witnessed the skirmish were, "I never believed in niggers before, but by Jasus (sic), they are hell for fighting."²⁵

The First Kansas' second engagement in 1863 was the Battle of Honey Springs on 17 July. During the battle, the First Kansas, again fighting as a mixed force, held the center of the Union line as it engaged Confederate forces from Texas and their Indian allies. During the battle, Williams moved his men opposite of the 29th and 39th Texas Regiments and an artillery battery. The First Kansas soldiers loaded their weapons, fixed bayonets, and advanced at shouldered arms "under a sharp fire" until they were "within 40 paces" of the Texans. At that point, Williams halted the First Kansas and began firing "well-directed buck and ball" into the enemy line until it went to ground and eventually abandoned its position. The 2-hour battle resulted in 400 Confederate casualties and 100 prisoners,

perhaps many of them opposite the First Kansas sector. Conversely, of all the Union casualties on that day, the First Kansas, specifically, suffered five dead and 32 wounded. The First Kansas also captured one of the Texas regiment's battle flags.²⁶

The Battle of Honey Springs was not only significant for the First Kansas—indeed the battle was its most significant battle of the war—it was significant for all USCT. It helped put to rest, in the west, the notion that black soldiers would not or could not fight. General James G. Blunt, commander of the District of the Frontier and commander of the mixed forces at Honey Springs, spoke for many when he stated, “I never saw such fighting done as was done by the Negro regiment [at Honey Springs.] They fought like veterans, with a coolness and valor that is unsurpassed. They preserved their line perfect throughout the whole engagement and, although in the hottest of the fight, they never once faltered.”²⁷

Throughout the war, the First Kansas continued to serve on the frontier. In September, it participated in a 100-mile pursuit across the Canadian River to Perryville, Choctaw nation, and encamped at Fort Smith, Arkansas, in October. In December, the regiment relocated to Roseville, Arkansas, where it remained until it joined General Frederick Steele's Camden Expedition in March 1864. The Camden Expedition and the Battle of Poison Springs, Arkansas, the latter a devastating defeat for the First Kansas, are just two of the several actions the First Kansas participated in until it was mustered out on 1 October 1865.²⁸

While Lane and many unionists in the Department of the Frontier raised, enlisted, and effectively used soldiers of African descent, Saxton and others successfully accomplished the same in the Federal Department of the South. The effort to raise black soldiers in the Department of the South, headquartered in South Carolina, actually began on 31 March 1862, when General David Hunter assumed command of the department. Within a month, Hunter had put South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida under martial law and declared all slaves in those states “forever free.” This decision was beyond Lincoln's guidance and perhaps was the reason why he disapproved Hunter's request “to arm the Negroes.”²⁹ On 25 August 1862, just four months after Hunter was denied permission to raise black soldiers, Saxton received orders from the War Department authorizing him to enlist “colored troops in the Sea Islands of South Carolina.”³⁰ Why was Hunter denied permission to raise black troops and Saxton granted permission? First, Hunter was very hasty in his actions;

the Lincoln administration was still trying to keep slavery on the back burner and could ill afford to have too many generals such as Hunter and John C. Fremont of Missouri freelancing.³¹ Saxton was more conciliatory in his actions. Second, a lot had happened in those four months to change the direction of the Lincoln administration: Shiloh and New Orleans had fallen into Union hands in April, the Second Confiscation Act and the Militia Act of 1862 had both been passed in July, the Native Guards had changed their allegiance in August, the First Kansas was actively recruiting black soldiers, and, perhaps the most important event, in August, all Union cavalry had to be withdrawn from that region to support General George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac.³² It was not long, before the Battle of Antietam, fought on 17 September, would allow Lincoln to issue the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

Building on the manpower foundation that Hunter had raised during summer 1862, Saxton had enough men by early November to take the First South Carolina on its first expedition.³³ Between 3 and 10 November, the First South Carolina raided along the Georgia and Florida coasts near the Bell and Sapello Rivers, engaging Confederate pickets and destroying saltworks, foodstuff, and other supplies. The expedition also doubled as a training exercise and recruiting drive. In all respects, the expedition was a success. The *Savannah Republican* wrote, "At the residence of Reuben King, Esq., they forced some fifty Negroes to accompany them." Furthermore, "they succeeded in capturing [Colonel McDonald], breaking up his salt-works and stealing a few things." Recruitment was a success as well. When the expedition departed Beaufort on the 3 November, it had 62 men. When it returned a week later, it numbered 156.³⁴ A few weeks later the First South Carolina went out again, this time up the Doby River in Georgia, and achieved similar results. Colonel Oliver T. Beard, the commander of both expeditions, wrote, "On the last expedition . . . the fact was developed that colored men would fight behind barricades; this time they have proved by their heroism, that they will fight in the open field."³⁵

In the last week of November, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Massachusetts abolitionist and veteran of the 51st Massachusetts, took command of the First South Carolina and began to drill and discipline the unit. He was particularly impressed with one company made up entirely of Florida ex-slaves. To Higginson, they were the finest looking group of soldiers, white or black, that he had seen, both physically and in marching abilities. Crediting his white officers for their work in training the ex-slaves, on 16 December, Higginson wrote,



The First South Carolina Volunteers repelling a Confederate attack near the Doby River in Georgia. (*The Harper's Weekly*)

The officers are more kind and patient with the men than I should expect, since the former are mostly young, and drilling tries the temper; but they are aided by hearty satisfaction in the results already attained. I have never yet heard a doubt expressed among the officers as to the . . . drill and discipline [of the soldiers] and the pride they (the soldiers) take in the service.”

A few days later on 19 December, Higginson began to understand why these soldiers, who were only months, weeks, or a few days removed from slavery, worked so hard. “It is very interesting the desire they show to do their duty,” he wrote, “and to improve as soldiers; they evidently think about it, and see the importance of the thing; they say to me that we white men cannot stay and be their leaders always and that they must learn to depend on themselves, or else relapse into their former condition.”³⁶

After Christmas and Emancipation celebrations on 25 December 1862 and 1 January 1863, Higginson felt that his regiment was ready. On 14 January, shortly before taking his men on a 10-day expedition down the Saint Marys River into Georgia and Florida spreading the word about Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation to the slaves,³⁷ Higginson wrote,

In speaking of the military qualities of the blacks, I should add, that the only point where I am disappointed is one I have never seen raised by the most incredulous newspaper critics—namely, their physical condition. To be sure they often look magnificently to my gymnasium-trained eye . . . such splendid muscular development. . . . But their weakness is pulmonary;

pneumonia and pleurisy are their besetting ailments; they are easily made ill.” Higginson goes on to say, however, that “[a]s to availability for military drill and duty in other respects, the only question I ever hear debated among the officers is, whether they are equal or superior to whites. I have never heard it suggested that they were inferior.”³⁸

The Saint Marys Expedition, then and now, has always been relegated to a footnote. And, indeed, in the wake of the battles of Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg in the east, the Confederate invasion of Kentucky in the west, and initial stages of the Vicksburg campaign in the trans-Mississippi theater, the First South Carolina’s expedition pales in magnitude. Yet, it was successful, and its success had some immediate and lasting significance.

Lumber was quickly becoming a rare commodity in the Department of the South. Higginson knew that, so using gathering lumber as his rationale, he sought and gained permission to conduct an expedition. On 23 January, Higginson and his men departed Camp Saxton, near Beaufort, South Carolina, to acquire as much lumber as possible. The expedition sailed with three steamers and 462 soldiers and officers.³⁹ On the morning of 24 January, Higginson sailed into Saint Simon’s Sound on the coast of Florida. After learning of an abundance of railroad iron on Saint Simon and Jekyll Island, he and his men, many of whom had worked on the batteries in the area as Confederate laborers, went ashore. They gathered close to 100 railroad irons. On the 25th, the men did some foraging, and the main body left for Fort Clinch the following morning.⁴⁰ From Saint Simon, the *Ben De Ford*, the largest of the three vessels, proceeded directly to Fernandina, Florida. The other two vessels, the *Planter* and the *John Adams*, the latter carrying Higginson, went down the Saint Marys River. The *Planter* eventually went down a separate tributary.

Once at Fort Clinch, a detachment under Higginson proceeded five miles inland to locate a Southern cavalry unit and distribute copies of the Emancipation Proclamation to local slaves. Some of the men of the First South Carolina had been slaves in this area and knew the countryside well. This aided Higginson greatly on the night the Battle of the Hundred Pines was fought. The First South Carolina had defeated its first foe in pitched battle. As the expedition continued, Higginson learned from Southern newspapers and locals that they had killed one lieutenant and 10 other soldiers and caused the cavalry unit to retreat into the woods. The First South Carolina had only suffered one dead and a few wounded. Higginson explained the importance of the Battle of the Hundred Pines:

I have made the more of this little affair because it was the first stand-up fight in which my men had been engaged, though they had been under fire, in an irregular way, in their small early expeditions. To me personally, the event was of the greatest value: it had given us all an opportunity to test each other, and our abstract surmises were changed into positive knowledge. Hereafter it was of small importance what nonsense might be talked or written about colored troops; so long as mine did not flinch, it made no difference to me.⁴¹

On the day after Hundred Pines, the men arrived at Saint Marys. After discerning that a particular house was being used by spies, Higginson ordered that it be burned. Some lumber was also gathered. Before leaving the town, the boats were fired upon, but the First South Carolina was already on its way, this time to Fernandina, Florida.

At Fernandina, Higginson met with Colonel Joseph Roswell Hawley of the Seventh Connecticut and Lieutenant Commander Hughes of the gunboat *Mohawk*. Hawley's mission was to locate and bring some bricks back to Fort Clinch from a known brickyard, and Hughes' mission was to gather information on the *Berosa*, a Confederate steamer operating in the area. Higginson jumped at the opportunity to continue both missions, especially when he realized that Corporal Robert Sutton, one of his black pilots, was from Woodstock, the location of the brickyard in question and the area where the *Berosa* was suspected to be operating. In both missions, the First South Carolina was successful. It learned that the *Berosa* "was lying at the head of the river . . . broken-down and worthless . . . and would never get to sea . . . [and that] the crew barely escape[d] with their lives."⁴² In addition to bricks, the expedition acquired lumber, various livestock and other provisions, and destroyed some property. After receiving a few rounds from the bluffs as they were leaving, suffering one casualty, the *Ben De Ford* linked up with the *Planter* at Fernandina. The crew of the *Planter* had also conducted a successful mission, destroying "extensive salt-works at Crooked River." On 2 February, Higginson reported to Saxton back in Beaufort. The significance of the expedition is perhaps best explained by Higginson:

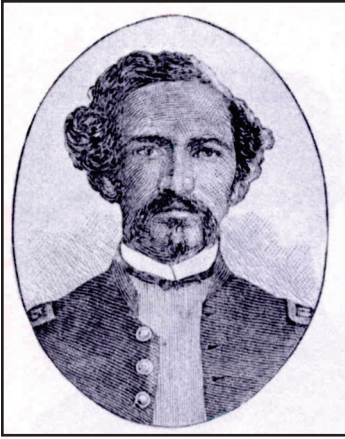
Slight as this expedition now seems among the vast events of the war, the future student of the newspaper of that day will find that it occupied no little space in their columns, so intense was the interest which then attached to the novel experiment of employing black troops. So obvious, too, was the value, during this raid, of their local knowledge and their enthusiasm, that it

was impossible not to find in its successes new suggestions for the war.⁴³

On 31 January 1863, while still on expedition, the First South Carolina became the fifth unit to be officially mustered into the USCT of the federal service.⁴⁴

The First South Carolina never participated in any large-scale engagements or battles before it was mustered out on 31 January 1866. It did, however, participate in many other raids and expeditions in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. In March 1863, the First South Carolina, accompanied by a second Negro regiment, that eventually became the Second South Carolina Colored Volunteers, on 22 May, captured and occupied Jacksonville, Florida.⁴⁵ In early April, the First South Carolina relieved the 55th Pennsylvania, then serving picket duty on Port Royal Island.⁴⁶ But perhaps the most significant thing about the First South Carolina was that the men, unlike the First Kansas, were all slaves at the time of their enlistments.⁴⁷ That fact alone made their presence in the Department of the South a double, if not triple, blow to the South. The first blow was that the South could no longer employ their services. The second blow was that now they were also fighting against the South. And last, they were no longer slaves, a vital part of the Southern infrastructure.

Concurrent with the rise of the First Kansas and First South Carolina was the continuing development of the Native Guards. The Native Guards, as stated earlier, had initially served under the Confederate flag of New Orleans until summer 1862. Shortly after occupying New Orleans, Butler became aware of the Native Guards because of their frequent mention in the local newspapers. The “Negro officers” of the regiments had also approached Butler, inquiring about “the continuance of their organization and to learn what disposition they would be required to make of their arms.”⁴⁸ Throughout the summer, Butler and the officers of the Native Guards kept in touch and forged a cooperative relationship. On 14 August, Butler wrote Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton again, this time complaining of the “need [for] reinforcements [to go] with the Navy against Mobile.” Furthermore, he assured Stanton that the Native Guards stood ready to join him.⁴⁹ Eight days later, Butler issued General Order #63, which, “Subject to the approval of the President of the United States,” required the members of the Native Guards to report for “the service of the United States.”⁵⁰ On 27 September 1862, the First Louisiana



Captain P.B.S. Pinchback, Second Louisiana Volunteers. (Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations)

Native Guards was mustered into federal service; on 12 October 1862, the Second Louisiana Native Guards was mustered into federal service; and on 27 November 1862, the Third Louisiana Native Guards was mustered in. They became the first three units composed of persons of African descent to be officially mustered into the Union Army. At this point, “the line officers of the First and Second Regiments were all Negroes,” while “the officers of the Third Regiment were both white and Negro.”⁵¹

From the time they were mustered in until spring 1863, the Native Guards regiments did their share of foraging and fatigue duty. The First Native Guards, for example, helped the Eighth Vermont Regiment build nine culverts, open 52 miles of railroad, and rebuild a 435-foot-long bridge at Bayou des Allemands.⁵² Although the Second Louisiana Native Guards only saw action briefly, the First and Third got their chance to prove themselves during the Port Hudson Campaign from 27 May to 8 July 1863.

Influenced by several things, including a need for troops, General Nathaniel Banks, who had replaced Butler in December 1862, employed the fighting spirit of the Second Louisiana Native Guards in an expedition up the Mississippi Sound in April.⁵³ He employed the First and Third Native Guards similarly on 27 May 1863. The combat record of the Second Louisiana Native Guards was extremely brief. In April, after many months of mundane duty at Ship Island, they received orders to conduct a reconnaissance mission up the Mississippi Sound to Pascagoula, Mississippi. On their return trip, they encountered and defeated a larger Confederate force. This was their only battle.⁵⁴ The First and Third Native Guards did not have it so easy. Port Hudson, Louisiana, was important to Banks for at least two reasons. First, controlling it would allow Union forces to have greater access down the Mississippi River toward Vicksburg. Second, if Banks could open the Mississippi from the south, he could reinforce Grant who was at that time trying several schemes to take Vicksburg. With a total force of 20,000, Banks began his six-week

campaign for Port Hudson, a fort garrisoned with 12,000 Confederate troops.⁵⁵

Port Hudson was a very-well fortified garrison. “Earthworks along the sinuous brow of an elevated bluff served as formidable protection against the artillery of the Union army.” Furthermore, “[t]here were 20 siege guns and 31 field pieces inside the garrison. The approaches to the fort were fairly well protected against assaulting columns by natural gullies alternating with abatis of felled trees.” Opposed to this formidable defensive position was Banks’ army, which had to fight “from a field position in a dense forest of magnolias, surrounded by heavy undergrowth and ravines choked with felled or fallen timbers.”⁵⁶ Around 0500 on the 27th, Union artillery began bombarding the garrison, and at about 1000, three Union brigades began the assault. Although heavy Confederate artillery fell on the attacking forces, they got to within 200 or 300 yards of the fort before they were stalled. It was at that point that General William Dwight, commander of two of the brigades on the field that day, ordered the First and Third Louisiana Native Guards, then on the far right flank, to attack. Heavy artillery and musket fires drove the Native Guards back.⁵⁷

Throughout the remainder of that first day, the First and Third Native Guards made five or six more charges against the garrison, getting to within pistol shot range.⁵⁸ The results were disastrous. Of the 1,080 men in the two regiments, there were 154 casualties, including two of their black officers, Captain Andre Cailloux and Lieutenant John Crowder.⁵⁹ The failure of Union forces to take Port Hudson caused Banks to conduct a siege operation. The willingness of the Native Guards to charge repeatedly across rough terrain “within pistol shot” of Confederate forces caused many to change their opinions about the fighting abilities of black soldiers. Within three weeks, Banks decided to conduct a second charge. Heat and disease had caused casualty figures to increase. Banks sought volunteers for a “storming party” to assault the Port. “The entire First and Third Regiments of the Native Guards volunteered for the mission.” Due to attrition, however, only 93 men from both regiments were able to take part in the attack. The assaults on 15 June composed of white and black troops, possibly mixed, were just as disastrous as those on 27 May. As a result of the assaults and more than three more weeks of siege warfare, Union strength had dwindled down to 9,000. Fortunately for Banks, Confederate forces had also suffered greatly. They had been “reduced to 3,000 half-starved men.” They finally capitulated on 8 July 1863—just five

days after Union victory at Gettysburg and four days after Union victory at Vicksburg.⁶⁰ In fact, it was news of Vicksburg that caused the Confederate commander at Port Hudson to surrender.⁶¹

In the larger picture of the war, the campaign for Port Hudson was important to Union forces in the trans-Mississippi theater of war. Port Hudson and other Union campaigns and battles in that theater, such as the Battle of Millikens Bend, where two other Louisiana regiments of black troops had fought, directly affected Vicksburg. By having to garrison and fight at numerous forts and ports along the Mississippi River, Confederate forces that perhaps could have enabled Confederate victory at Vicksburg remained occupied and spread thin throughout the theater. For soldiers of African descent, it was significant for other reasons.

Just as the Battle of Honey Springs was important to the First Kansas and the Saint Marys Expedition and many other expeditions into Florida and Georgia were to the First South Carolina, so was Port Hudson to the Native Guards. The actions of the soldiers during this campaign helped to change attitudes about the abilities of black troops in the Department of the Gulf. A white engineer officer who had observed the actions on 27 May wrote, “You have no idea . . . how my prejudices with regard to negro troops have been dispelled by the battle the other day. The brigade of Negroes behaved magnificently and fought splendidly . . . and [are] just as brave [as white soldiers.]”⁶² Even Banks, who would eventually downplay the role of the Native Guards as time passed, had written in his official report after the battle that the men of the Native Guards were among his most daring and determined troops at Port Hudson.⁶³

The belief that black soldiers would not follow black officers into combat or that blacks were not capable of leading in combat was disproved at Port Hudson. Two of the most gallant officers of the First Louisiana Native Guards were Cailloux and his trusted lieutenant, Crowder. On the first advance on 27 May, Cailloux and Crowder both perished in battle. Cailloux, “a man whose identity with his race could not be mistaken for he prided himself on being the blackest man in the Crescent City . . . fell at the head of his company.” The *New York Times* wrote: “he died the death of a hero, leading on his men in the thickest of the fight.” Crowder, who concealed the fact that he was 16 in order to receive a commission, was perhaps “the youngest officer in the Union Army.”⁶⁴

The First Kansas, First South Carolina, and the three regiments of the Louisiana Native Guards are only five of the more than 139 regiments composed of soldiers of African descent to serve during the Civil War.⁶⁵ In total, there were 120 regiments of infantry, 12 regiments of heavy artillery, seven regiments of cavalry, and 10 companies of light artillery.⁶⁶ From Texas, which recorded only 47 black soldiers, to Louisiana, which recorded 24,952 black soldiers, men of African descent served in virtually every state of the Union.⁶⁷ From the Battle of Fort Wagner in South Carolina where the 54th Massachusetts earned its fame to the siege of Petersburg in Virginia where eight black regiments of the 4th Division, IX Corps, served, to the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, where black troops served on picket duty, soldiers of African descent served and fought.⁶⁸

Although the official records state that 178,892 black soldiers served during the war, the actual number may never be known.⁶⁹ Since many light-complexioned black troops passed as white at some point and served in white units, and since many black soldiers may have been enlisted into regiments under the same name as a previous soldier who had recently become a casualty, some historians have estimated that as many as 200,000 black troops actually served.⁷⁰ Whatever the figure might be, simply based on official records, soldiers of African descent constituted 12 percent of the Union forces at the end of the war.⁷¹

As readers are attempting to decide whether black soldiers were combat multipliers or not during the Civil War, perhaps the most significant figure of note is the fact that “black troops in the Union army toward the end [of the war] approximately equaled the total number of Confederate soldiers still present for duty.”⁷² One cannot dismiss the fact that hundreds of thousands of persons of African descent, troops or civilians, made contributions to the Union effort by serving as sentries, foraging parties, and fort/barricade builders and in a myriad of other positions that multiplied the strength of white Union forces significantly. Nonetheless, even after the actions exemplified by the five USCT units examined here, there were many whites still opposed to arming “the Negro.” In response to such a group visiting Lincoln in August 1863, the president, whose attitude on the subject had been completely changed, replied, “You say you will not fight to free Negroes. Some of them seem to be willing enough to fight for you.”⁷³

Notes

1. Dudley T. Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 29.
2. Extract From the Militia Act of 17 July 1862, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 15.
3. Cornish, ix.
4. The original Mason-Dixon Line, as surveyed in 1767, is the Maryland/Pennsylvania state line.
5. New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, 27 April 1861. Donald E. Everett, "Ben Butler and the Louisiana Native Guards, 1861-1862," *Journal of Southern History* (24 May 1958), 204.
6. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: Maxwell Macmillian International, 1935), 94-95; Major General Butler to Secretary of War E.M. Stanton, 25 May 1862; Headquarters Department of the Gulf, New Orleans, Louisiana, Elan A. Woodward and Richard D. Drum, eds., "The Negro in the Military of the United States, 1639-1886" (Microfilm 1888), hereafter cited as Negro in the Military.
7. Charleston, South Carolina; Mobile, Alabama; and possibly Nashville, Tennessee; and Savannah, Georgia, were the only other Southern cities with a substantial free black population.
8. James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 245-48.
9. Recent scholarship has shown that more blacks participated on the Confederate side during the Civil War than previously thought. Their reasons for serving varied. Most, however, simply went along with their master, their master's son, or some other relative or acquaintance of their master. Some had been promised their freedom, while others served out of a sense of loyalty to a person. For further details refer to Charles Kelly, *Forgotten Confederates: An Anthology About Black Southerners* (Atlanta, GA: South Heritage Press, 1995) and Andrew Chandler Battaile, *Black Southerners in Gray: Essays on Afro-Americans in Confederate Armies* (Redondo, CA: Rand and File Publication, 1994). Also see Charles H. Wesley, "The Employment of Negroes as Soldiers in the Confederate Army," *The Journal of Negro History* (July 1919), 239-53.
10. Department of Virginia, U.S. Army, Special Order No. 72, 14 October 1861, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 3. Some have argued that the term "contraband" was Union political double-speak to make the use of slaves a credible military necessity.
11. Major General H.W. Halleck to Brigadier General U.S. Grant, 8 February 1862; *Ibid.*, Item 9.
12. Brigadier General A. McCook to General W.T. Sherman, 8 November 1861, *Ibid.*, Item 8. Brigadier General W.T. Sherman to General McCook, 8 November 1861, *Ibid.*, Item 6. Major General H.W. Halleck to Brigadier General U.S. Grant, 8 February 1862, *Ibid.*, Item 9.
13. Cornish, 17.
14. The rank of "boy" does not appear to be an official naval rank, thus it was perhaps simply developed during the Civil War for persons of African descent.
15. Order of the Secretary of the Navy to Commodore Wilkes, USN, regarding mortar vessels at Hampton Roads and contrabands for crews of vessel, 5 August 1862, *Ibid.*, Item 53. Report of Acting Rear Admiral Porter, USN, regarding the need of men for the squadron, 26 October 1862, *Ibid.*, Item 54.
16. Secretary of the Navy John P. Long to Representative C.E. Littlefield, 2 April 1902, *Ibid.*, Item 61.
17. Cornish, 69-71.

18. Ibid., 73.
19. J.M. Williams to General T.J. Anderson, Adjutant General of Kansas, 1 January 1866, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 28.
20. Glenn L. Carle, "The First Kansas Colored," *American Heritage* (February/March 1992), 82, 84.
21. J.M. Williams to General T.J. Anderson, Adjutant General of Kansas, 1 January 1866, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 28.
22. More blood was shed at the Battle of Antietam in a single day than in any other Civil War battle. Union casualties were 12,350, while Confederate casualties numbered 13,700. Tactically, the battle was a virtual draw. Strategically, however, it was a Union victory because the Confederates abandoned the battlefield and campaign and headed back south.
23. J.M. Williams to General T.J. Anderson, Adjutant General of Kansas, 1 January 1866, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 28.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.; Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 147.
26. J.M. Williams to General T.J. Anderson, Adjutant General of Kansas, 1 January 1866, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 28. Also see Dudley Taylor Cornish, "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (May 1953), 417-29.
27. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 146-47.
28. J.M. Williams to General T.J. Anderson, Adjutant General of Kansas, 1 January 1866, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 28.
29. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 33, 35.
30. Ibid., 79-80.
31. General John C. Fremont, commander of the Western Department, declared martial law and freed the slaves in Missouri on 30 August 1861. This was a devastating blow to the Lincoln administration because at this point in the war Lincoln was still strongly trying to attract Unionists in the South and keep the nation from further turmoil. Actions such as freeing slaves was a recipe for disaster.
32. On 6 August 1861, the First Confiscation Act was issued that stated property (fugitive slaves) used by the owner's consent and with his knowledge in aiding or abetting insurrection against the United States would be kept by the United States if captured. On 17 July 1862, the Second Confiscation Act was issued, giving President Lincoln discretionary authority to use blacks who had escaped from Rebel masters and were thus emancipated as troops. The Second Confiscation Act appeared to complement the Militia Act of 1862.
33. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 92.
34. Ibid., 85-87.
35. Ibid., 88.
36. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1870; reprint New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 42, 51, 53.
37. McPherson, 169; Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African-American Soldiers in the War of Independence, The War of 1812 & The Civil War* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1890; reprint New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 249.
38. Higginson, 72.
39. One of the steamers was the *Planters*, which runaway slave and maritime pilot Robert Smalls had delivered to the Union in Charleston Harbor the previous May. The story of Smalls and the *Planter* is an excellent example of how assets could be taken from Confederate forces and used by Union forces. Smalls is significant in Black military history because he, while serving as a South Carolina congressman during the Reconstruction era,

nominated more African-Americans to the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, New York, than any other individual.

40. During this foraging mission, the unit took cattle, horses, and agricultural supplies and relocated some slaves. This is partly where the First, and later the Second South Carolina got its bad reputation. Like General William T. Sherman's march to the sea, many saw this as looting and stealing, not as wartime foraging. General Higginson also stated that his men only burned property that was used directly to aid Confederate soldiers. For the above reasons, expeditions into the South, especially by black soldiers, were highly controversial. The motion picture *Glory* depicts this sentiment very well in the scene where the 54th Massachusetts encounters a Southern black regiment.

41. Higginson, 88.

42. *Ibid.*, 99.

43. *Ibid.*, 103.

44. Report of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau, 17 March 1866, part IV. A brief history of the recruitment of blacks for the Union Army during the war appears in *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 48.

45. McPherson, 169.

46. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 93.

47. It is possible that a few could have been free men of color, but the likelihood of that in the Department of the South's area was very slim.

48. Major General Butler to Secretary of War E.M. Stanton, 25 May 1862, H.W. Halleck, Department of the Gulf, New Orleans, Louisiana, Negro in the Military Reel 1, Vol. 2, 84.

49. Butler to Stanton, 14 August 1862, H.Q. Department of the Gulf, New Orleans, Louisiana, *Ibid.*, Reel 1, Vol. 2, 945.

50. General Order No. 63, 22 August 1862, H.Q. Department of the Gulf, New Orleans, Louisiana, *Ibid.*, Reel 1, Vol. 2, 956.

51. Mary F. Berry, "Negro Troops in Blue and Gray: The Louisiana Native Guards, 1861-1863," *Louisiana History* 8 (1967): 174-75.

52. *Ibid.*, 178-79.

53. General Banks' attitude toward "Negro soldiers" was much different than General Butler's. While Butler was somewhat benevolent and receptive of their views, in fact, he was the "creator" of the "contraband of War," Banks was neither. In March, he had caused all the "Negro officers" of the Third Native Guards to resign. So, only the First Native Guards had Negro officers by the time the units went into battle.

54. Berry, 181-82.

55. *Ibid.*, 186.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 142.

59. There were more than 74 officers of African descent who served in the Louisiana Native Guards units. They were descendants of the well-educated and financially stable free blacks of the New Orleans region of Louisiana. For more on the officers of the Louisiana Native Guards, see chapter 1 in Salter, "'Sable Officers,' African-American Military Officers: 1861-1948," Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, 1996.

60. Berry, 187-89.

61. *Ibid.*, 188-89.

62. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 142-43.

63. Berry, 189.

64. See *New York Times*, 13 June 1863 and 8 August, 1863; Joseph T. Glatthear, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1991), 124; Robert E. Greene, *Black Defenders of America, 1775-1973* (Chicago, IL: Johnson Publishing Co., 1974), 59; Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) 12-13; James M. McPherson *The Negro's Civil War: How Blacks Felt and Acted During the War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 188-89.

65. See Appendix 1 for a listing of all USCT units during the Civil War.

66. Report of the Provost Marshal Generals Bureau, 17 March 1866, part IV. "A brief history of the recruitment of blacks for the Union Army during the war," *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 48.

67. *Ibid.*

68. The 54th Massachusetts and its road to the Battle of Fort Wagner was the subject of the popular movie *Glory*. For a complete primary-source history of the 54th Massachusetts, see Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment: History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1893-1865* (Boston: The Boston Book Co., 1894; reprint New York: Da Capo Press 1992).

69. Report of the Provost Marshal Generals Bureau, 17 March 1866, part IV. "A brief history of the recruitment of blacks for the Union Army during the war," *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. II, Item 48. The official total to serve in the USCT is 186,017, but from their number must be subtracted 7,122 white officers.

70. P.B.S. Pinchback, a future captain in the Native Guards and first African-American to serve as governor of a state—Louisiana—was perhaps the most well-known person to pass for white in a white regiment. Pinchback had enlisted and served for a time in a white regiment until his identity was "discovered."

71. Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 288.

72. *Ibid.*, ix.

73. Carle, 90.

Chapter 3

World War I

The Civil War is without doubt among the most pivotal events in American history, and it is surely the most pivotal event in American history for African-Americans because of the immediate results it spawned. Politically, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were all direct results of the war. Militarily, the Army Reorganization Act of 1866 was drafted mainly as a result of the war.

There is no mistaking the importance of the three postwar amendments to the newly freed slaves. The 13th Amendment, passed in 1865, stated that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime . . . shall exist within the United States.” The 14th Amendment, passed in 1868, guaranteed that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States . . . are citizens.” The 14th Amendment did, however, “exclud[e] Indians not taxed.” And last, the 15th Amendment, passed in 1870, gave “the right of citizens of the United States to vote [regardless of] race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”¹ In short, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, respectively, freed the slaves, made them U.S. citizens, and afforded them the right to vote.

In summer 1866, Congress passed an act to reorganize the Army. The act, which authorized the Army to establish five artillery regiments, 10 cavalry regiments, and 45 infantry regiments, stipulated that four of the infantry regiments and two of the cavalry regiments be “composed of colored men.”² By 1869, the four infantry regiments had been consolidated into the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments. The two cavalry regiments were designated the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. These four regiments were the start of black soldiers in the regular Army, and much of the history of the black military experience between the Civil War and World War I involved these units.

From 1866 to 1898, more than 12,500 African-Americans served in these regiments, earning 18 Medals of Honor. Their service was crucial to the opening of the American West. Roughly one in five U.S. Army soldiers who served on the Western frontier was African-American. They participated in skirmishes against Geronimo, Nana, and Victorio; built forts and roads; escorted wagon trains, stagecoaches, and mail runs; installed telegraph lines; and patrolled the Mexican border, among many other duties, much the same as all other frontier regiments. Their fierce fighting against Native Americans earned them their prestigious title of

“Buffalo Soldiers.” Although there are several legends associated with the origin of the name, one factor remains constant: Native Americans considered the buffalo to be among the most ferocious of fighters.³

From 1898 to 1918, Buffalo Soldiers fought in the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, and Mexican border skirmishes during the Punitive Expedition, earning an additional five Medals of Honor. The Battle of San Juan Hill is a Buffalo Soldier victory as well as a Rough Rider victory, and the pursuit of Pancho Villa is a Buffalo Soldier success as well as a General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing success.⁴

The period between the Civil War and World War I was also the era when African-Americans began to earn regular Army commissioned officer status. To receive a regular Army officer commission, a young male had to be admitted to, attend, and graduate from the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, New York.⁵ Between 1870 and 1889, approximately 27 young African-Americans were appointed to the USMA. Twelve passed the entrance exam and actually attended the academy for a period of time, but only three successfully completed the rigorous academic curriculum and survived social ostracism to earn the right to wear the shoulder boards of a regular U.S. Army commissioned officer.

In 1877, Lieutenant Henry Ossian Flipper was the first African-American to graduate. After less than five years in active service, Flipper



“It’s Up to Us Now.” Rick Reeves

was court-martialed and dishonorably discharged. Evidence eventually showed that Flipper was railroaded out of the Army, possibly due to racism.⁶ Lieutenant John Hanks Alexander became the second African-American to graduate from the USMA in 1887. Like Flipper, Alexander served in the black cavalry regiments on the Western Frontier. After more than six successful years on the frontier, Alexander was promoted to first lieutenant in October 1893 and subsequently assigned as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at Wilberforce University, Ohio, in January 1894. Two months later on 26 March, Alexander abruptly died of apoplexy. In 1889, after five years at USMA, Charles Young became the third African-American graduate from West Point. After more than 30 years of service and promotion to the rank of full colonel, Young died while serving as attaché to Liberia in 1922.⁷ Because of the “Jim Crow”⁸ laws and the “Separate but Equal” philosophy that sprang up in America after 1877, no other African-American graduated from USMA until 1936.⁹

Two serious “eyesores” were associated with the African-American military experience shortly after the turn of the century and the start of World War I. The first occurred in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906, and the second took place in Houston, Texas, in 1917. In Brownsville, on the night of 13-14 August 1906, a small riot erupted in which one person was killed, one wounded, and one injured. Although evidence was inconclusive, three companies (B, C, and D) of the 1st Battalion, 25th Infantry, stationed in Brownsville were accused of starting the riot and murdering and maiming innocent citizens. In November, President Theodore Roosevelt discharged the entire battalion (167 men) and barred them from further service, either in the military or civil service.¹⁰ Much of the black national community and its white supporters, and other whites who were simply enemies of Roosevelt, were outraged at the hasty and harsh treatment the regular Army soldiers received—to no avail, however, for the soldiers.

Eleven years later, another riot involving African-American infantrymen erupted. This riot was much more serious and thus cannot be analyzed in a capsule paragraph. At this point, the United States had officially entered World War I, and drafting and training American soldiers for deployment was well under way. The War Department had decided, however, not to use its four African-American regular Army regiments in Europe. The 9th Cavalry Regiment and the 25th Infantry Regiment were both stationed in the Pacific. The former was at Camp Luzon, Philippines, and the latter was at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. The 10th Cavalry Regiment and 24th Infantry Regiment were each put on border duty. The

10th was headquartered at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, while the 24th was headquartered at Camp Furlong, New Mexico. The 3d Battalion, 24th Infantry, was sent for duty to Houston, Texas, in July 1917.

The veteran soldiers of the 3d Battalion, some of whom had seen action during the Spanish-American War and others during the latter part of the frontier days, arrived in Houston unwilling to accept the Jim Crow laws of the South. Within a month of their arrival, on 23 August, tempers began to flare. When one of the soldiers tried to stop a local policeman from beating a local black woman, the policeman beat the soldier with his pistol and arrested him. When a military policeman (MP) from the battalion came to check on the soldiers, the local policeman took offense at the MP's behavior and pistol-whipped him also. Although the black MP, who was also arrested, was later released, rumors had spread throughout the battalion that he was dead. In the riot, which had been precipitated by the beating of a black woman and an unfortunate rumor, two black soldiers and 17 white men, including five policemen, were killed.¹¹

Unlike the Brownsville riot, African-American soldiers, without doubt, did riot and perhaps kill their opponents in Houston. Like Brownsville, however, punishment was swift and harsh. Within a month, 156 members of the 3d Battalion, 24th Infantry, were court-martialed. At the conclusion of all trials, 19 soldiers were hanged, 41 received life sentences, and others received various punishments. There were five acquittals.¹²

Brownsville and Houston are two excellent military-related examples of what the state of race relations throughout America was like as much of Europe was speeding headlong into a war. Indeed, Jim Crowism and the separate but equal philosophy rooted in America in the early 1900s were the causes of racial riots whether they were initiated by angered blacks or outraged whites. Regardless of why there was a Brownsville or a Houston, however, two significant facts remain. First, those riots would negatively affect black-white military relations until after World War II. Second, those riots were not enough to negate the facts that America would need to call upon black citizens during the war and that the black citizens were going to answer that call.

The war in Europe was inevitable. For centuries, the land north of the Mediterranean Sea and south of the North and Baltic Seas had been inextricably linked. For example, at least four of the major monarchs of

the soon-to-be opposing forces in Europe were relatives. Queen Victoria had nine sons and daughters who were responsible for the many scattered monarchs in Europe. King George V of England, King Albert of Belgium, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, and Czar Nicholas II of Russia were all descendants of Queen Victoria.¹³

It was virtually impossible for one European country to go to war against a neighbor without causing another country to enter. Prewar plans and political alliances were the causes of these entanglements, otherwise known as “entangling alliances.” The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo was the spark that lit the fuse on the powderkeg that caused the entangling alliances to explode. Because of the assassination and failed negotiations that followed, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July. In support of Serbia, Russia began to mobilize against Austria on 30 July. Germany, fearing that an unopposed early Russian mobilization would give Russia a marked advantage, began to mobilize and declared war against Russia on 1 August. After failing to receive assurances from France that it would not mobilize in the event of a Russo-German conflict, Germany declared war on France on 3 August because Germany’s “lock-step” Schlieffen Plan dictated that it had to defeat France before it could turn and defeat Russia. For the Schlieffen Plan to be successful, Germany had to attack France through Belgium. By violating Belgian neutrality, Germany triggered an 1839 British-Belgian agreement, leading England to declare war on Germany on 4 August.¹⁴ Between 28 July and 6 August, a period of less than two weeks, seven nations—Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Germany, Russia, France, Belgium, and England—were at war. It would be nearly three years before the United States entered the Great War.

The brewing European powderkeg, however, meant very little to the average American in 1914. Thus, it was no surprise that most African-Americans gave it little or no thought at all. African-Americans were battling their own internal struggles. In 1914, there had been approximately 69 documented lynchings.¹⁵ Thousands of Southern African-Americans were economic slaves of the sharecropping system. Each year a sharecropper, black or white, planted and harvested his crop only to find that his surplus was not enough to cover the landlord’s overhead. By 1914, many Southern tenant farmers were second-generation sharecroppers, obligated to their landlords for years of overhead. To add insult to injury,

the boll weevil had severely damaged much of the Southern agricultural economy around 1916.

African-Americans had the lowest paying jobs, traveled in segregated public transportation, and lived in the poorest neighborhoods in the country. Education was definitely separate but not nearly equal. During the school year of 1911-1912, Southern states spent \$2.89 annually to educate a black child. Conversely, they spent \$10.32 yearly to educate each white child. In 1917, an Atlanta school board discontinued a black seventh grade class to fund a local white school.¹⁶ Clearly, the state of “black” America when World War I erupted was bleak. That, however, did not stop roughly 370,000 African-American soldiers from serving during the war.

Once the United States declared war against Germany on 6 April 1917, there were three sources of African-American manpower. In addition to the four regular Army regiments, which would not be deployed, several states had African-American National Guard units and the draft.

Surely, the best trained and most combat-ready African-American soldiers were the men of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments. But as we have already seen, these units were selected to remain on duty in the Pacific and along the United States-Mexico border. The War Department, however, did not completely overlook the four regiments. The first sergeants and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in the newly formed labor units were selected from “suitable enlisted men . . . from the . . . regular Army.”¹⁷ In addition, 250 former NCOs of the 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments were selected to attend Officer Training School at Fort Des Moines, Iowa.¹⁸

The second likely source of manpower came from National Guard units. Seven states—New York, Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, and Tennessee—and the District of Columbia (DC) had African-American National Guard units. One could argue that some of these National Guard units were as trained or as ready for combat as many regular Army units. The 9th Battalion, Ohio Infantry, which was formed before the Spanish-American War, was commanded by then Brevet Major Charles Young during that war, and “the 8th Illinois had seen actual combat service on the Mexican border.”¹⁹ The War Department began looking to the National Guard to fill NCO slots as a testament to their capabilities. The black National Guard units that became federalized during the war were the 15th New York Infantry; 8th Illinois Infantry; 1st Battalion, DC Infantry; 9th Battalion, Ohio Infantry; 1st Separate

Company, Massachusetts Infantry; Company L, 6th Massachusetts Infantry; 1st Separate Company, Connecticut Infantry; 1st Separate Company, Maryland Infantry; and Separate Company G, Tennessee Infantry.²⁰ At the time of federalization, only the 15th New York and 8th Illinois were near full-regimental strength. The 1st DC Infantry and the 9th Ohio each had less than 1,000 men, and the various separate companies had roughly 150 men each.²¹

As white National Guard divisions were training and preparing themselves for overseas duty, they began one by one to point out that “it [was] impracticable to use the . . . (colored) . . . part of their Division.” The 26th Division actually sailed to France, leaving both the Massachusetts and Connecticut Separate Companies in the United States. To solve the dilemma, the War Department decided to make a provisional (not full) division out of the National Guard units. The 15th New York and the 8th Illinois, respectively, became the 369th and 370th Infantry Regiments. The various units from DC, Ohio, Tennessee, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Connecticut all became the 372d Infantry Regiment. To round out the provisional division, draftees were trained and formed into the 371st Infantry Regiment. Collectively, the four regiments became the 93d Division (Provisional).²²

The third likely source of manpower came from within the general population. In May 1917, the War Department passed the draft law, which required all men between 21 and 31 years of age to register for the draft. As a result, approximately 367,710 African-American citizens were inducted into the service.²³ The majority of African-American draftees ended up serving in services of supply (SOS) units because many Americans believed that, regardless of evidence proving otherwise dating back to the Revolutionary War, African-American soldiers were unfit for combat service. To placate the African-American population, however, a number of the draftees were formed into a combat division. After careful screening, the “best” 26,000 African-American draftees were selected to form the 92d Division. Unlike the 93d Division (Provisional), the 92d Division was organized and brought to full strength. Its four infantry regiments were the 365th, 366th, 367th, and 368th. The 349th, 350th, and 351st were the division’s three field artillery regiments. The division also included the 317th Engineer Battalion; the 325th Signal Battalion; the 349th, 350th, and 351st Machine Gun Battalions; the 316th Laundry Service Company; the 317th Trench-Mortar Battery; the 322d Butchery Service Company; and various other small specialty units. Like the 93d, each regiment of the 92d and several of the specialty units were trained at separate locations

in the United States, only to be brought together as a complete division once in France.²⁴ No other American division was organized and trained in that manner. Every other American division trained as a complete division while on American soil before being thrown into the fray.

Between summer 1917 and spring 1918, American divisions remained busy organizing and training for combat. As early as December 1917, U.S. units, including the 369th Infantry Regiment, were on their way across the Atlantic. It has been estimated that only 20 percent of all African-American soldiers who went to Europe saw actual combat. Certainly, the 92d and 93d Infantry Divisions, both of which participated in combat, only accounted for a small percentage of the African-American combat personnel. Although nearly all of the National Guard soldiers (93d Division [Provisional]) and most of the regular Army transfer soldiers (92d Division) saw combat, most of the drafted African-American soldiers served in SOS, or labor, units. In fact, as the next segment of this chapter explores the service of African-American soldiers in France, the reader may conclude that a combat multiplier may not necessarily be a “trigger puller” or “cannon cocker.”

Once in France, African-American service members either served in labor units, pioneer infantry units, or in the two infantry divisions. Labor units were generally stationed well behind enemy lines and did manual labor. It has been estimated that one-third of all U.S. labor troops were African-American. Most pioneer infantry units, although they were not “infantry” units, were trained in the basics of infantry tactics and drill because of their potential to be deployed near the front. African-American pioneer infantry units, on the other hand, usually were pioneer infantry in name only. Most received little, if any, infantry training. They could, however, perform pioneering missions.

From the outset, the War Department never intended to use most of the African-American drafted soldiers in combat units. Shortly after the first African-American draftees were called in September 1917, most were earmarked for labor units. Initially, labor companies numbered 200 men.²⁵ By the time units deployed, the War Department concluded that to make more efficient use of “laborers in uniform,” as the African-American draftees came to be called, 3,500-man battalions should be formed. By the time the war ended, the laborers in uniform had been organized into “46 engineer service battalions, 44 labor battalions, 24 labor companies . . . three stevedore regiments and two stevedore battalions.” Their duties

included loading and unloading ships, both in the United States and abroad. They dug ditches; policed (cleaned) camps; hauled wood, stones, and coal; disposed of garbage; cared for animals and livestock; and cut trees. Once the war was over, they were given the worst assignment for any soldier, graves registration, which is locating, retrieving, recording, and reburying the dead.²⁶ In these roles, nonetheless, their contributions were apparent.

When U.S. convoys began sailing as early as June 1917, more than 400 African-American civilian stevedores were on board. Their mission was to ensure that the ships were unloaded quickly. Gradually, as the draft took shape and the war continued, the civilian stevedores were replaced with SOS troops. Stevedores accomplished unheard-of tasks by working in shifts around the clock. On one particular occasion, stevedores unloaded 5,000 tons of cargo and 42,000 men with their gear in a single day. A stevedore unit in Bordeaux, France, unloaded nearly 800,000 tons of needed materials in a single month. At nearly all major French ports, laborers in uniform made it possible for men and materiel to get to the front expeditiously. A group of soldiers at Brest, France, unloaded 1,200 tons of flour in 18 hours. In a competition of sorts against themselves, they unloaded an average of 2,000 tons daily for the next five days. Stevedore units would start work the moment ships docked and would not stop until the mission was complete. As one white observer noted, they “packed and unpacked the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in a manner never attempted since Noah loaded the Ark.” A white Southern journalist echoed that idea by saying, “The victory that we are going to win will not be an all-white victory by any . . . means.”²⁷ It is not this type of work that makes war sound glamorous to the child bouncing on his grandfather’s knee, but it was, and is, this type of work that enhances the chance of victory in wars.

African-American pioneer infantry regiments were not organized until summer 1918. In addition to conducting labor tasks, they also went to the front. Of the 17 that were organized, seven earned the right to fly battle ribbons because of their proximity to the front. On many occasions, the line between laborer, technician, and infantryman merged as one for them. There is no doubt that the roles of combat support and combat service support troops are vital to a war effort, but as always, the soldiers in the combat units normally received much of the spotlight. This universal attitude was also true for African-American soldiers during the Great War.



Black laborers in uniform performed incredible feats, unloading vital supplies in France. Here, men of the 301st and 303d Stevedores form a chain to empty a lighter at Brest. (U.S. Signal Corps No. 111-SC-18315, National Archives)

Although the 92d and 93d Divisions were only roughly 20 percent of all African-American soldiers who went to Europe, their participation is more known by students of history.

As discussed earlier, the 92d and 93d Divisions were organized and trained beginning in fall 1917. The 92d was a complete division composed mainly of draftees. The 93d was a provisional division composed of national guardsmen, except for one regiment. Both divisions were trained “in a vacuum,” only to be brought together once in France. Before examining each division’s role, participation, and contributions to the war effort, a brief look at the general war situation will be helpful.

After the entangling alliances erupted into full-blown war and the Schlieffen Plan was set into motion, the war on the Western Front evolved into a “race to the sea”—the English Channel—with each side desperately trying to outflank the other. Unable to outflank each other, both sides

settled on their frontages and began to build bunkers, fortifications, and trenches. This defined the warfare on the Western Front for the next two years, trench warfare. Concurrently, the Germans were engaged in a much greater war, some would argue, on their Eastern Front against the Russians. Great innovations were introduced into warfare to break the stalemate of attrition warfare. Technological innovations included the tank and airplane, tactical innovations included shorter artillery barrages and shock troopers, and operations away from the main fronts, known as peripheral operations, were conducted at Gallipoli and the North Sea. None proved to be overly decisive.

By the time the United States declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917, both the Allies and Central Powers had nearly “bled each other white.” Since all belligerents were proportionally attrited and tired, the war, especially on the Western Front—but also on the Eastern Front due to internal Russian strife—could have gone either way. It is correct to conclude that had the United States not entered the war, the Allies could have lost. It is not correct to conclude, however, based on the magnitude and length of the war before U.S. involvement, that the United States won the war. The question for this study, though, is whether the United States could have sustained itself enough to support the Allies without the support of its African-American soldiers. We have already seen that as much as one-third of all U.S. labor troops were African-American and that a fighting force cannot operate without support from noncombat forces. So, what about the other 20 percent of the African-American soldiers? The next sections will examine the contributions of the 93d Division, followed by those of the 92d Division.

The 93d Division (Provisional) was officially organized in December 1917. Wasting little time, the War Department deployed the 369th Infantry Regiment out of Hoboken on 12 December. The other three regiments sailed in February, March, and April.²⁸ The 369th Regiment’s initial duties were as SOS troops. After three months of SOS duty, the regiment moved to Givry-en-Argonne on 12 March and was attached to the 16th Division (French). Following one month of training with the French, the 369th Regiment was given a 4.5 kilometer sector near the west bank of the Aisne River to defend. During the occupation of this sector from mid-April through 4 July, the 369th, which was only 1 percent of all American troops in France at the time, held roughly 20 percent of all territories assigned

to the AEF. In May, 369th's Sergeant Henry Johnson, became the first American soldier to be awarded the French Croix de Guerre for single-handedly killing four German soldiers and wounding approximately 32 others. Johnson's observation post teammate, Private Needham Roberts, perhaps inflicted some of the casualties, but he had been so severely wounded in the opening moments of the raid that he was able to offer Johnson very little help.²⁹ Johnson and Roberts were among the first American heroes of the Great War. Although they epitomized the fighting will of many African-American soldiers in the 369th and, indeed, the other seven infantry regiments of the 92d and 93d Divisions, most American officials were still reluctant to praise or embrace them.

In June, the 369th continued to support the French 16th Division near Belleau Wood as the Germans continued their spring offensive. After successfully helping the 16th Division stop the Germans' all-important spring attack, the 369th was reassigned to the French 161st Division in July to help spoil additional German attacks. The German spring and early summer attacks—also known as the Ludendorff Offensive—were extremely critical for the Germans, because they realized they had to break the will of the Allies and force a capitulation before most of the U.S. Army might was ready for action. With the help of the few American forces that had been committed by April, May, and June, essentially the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and U.S. 93d Division, the much-needed German victory was thwarted.³⁰ Throughout the summer months, the 369th participated in the Champagne-Marne defensive and occupied several other key sectors in the 161st Division's area of operations. These areas included the Beausejour subsector, the Calvaire subsector, and ultimately the Somme-Bionne area. The occupation of these zones was in preparation for the final offensive of the war, which was to be initiated on 26 September. Colonel William Hayward, the 369th's white regimental commander was proud of his men's performance during summer 1918. Commenting on their role, he said, “[t]he first thing I knew all there was between the German Army and Paris on a stretch of front a little more than four miles long was my regiment of Negroes. . . . No German ever got into a trench with my regiment who did not stay there or go back with the brand of my boys on him.”³¹

While the 369th was receiving its baptism in fire beginning in April, the other three regiments of the 93d Division were completing training with their French counterparts and moving into sectors near and on the front. The 370th joined the French 10th Division near the Swiss border on 1 June and was baptized in battle in July. One of the greatest moments

in the 370th's history came in August when the regiment captured 200 machine guns, 45 trench mortars, and four cannons, and took nearly 1,900 German prisoners.³² The 371st was sent to Rembercourt, 15 miles west of Verdun, in April as part of the famed French 157th Division.³³ Because of its proximity to the front during training, the 371st became used to daily artillery barrages during two months of training with the 157th. The 371st finally began to see action in July, but much of it was raiding and patrolling missions. The 372d, on arriving in France in April, was also immediately assigned to a French unit. Initially assigned to the XIII Corps, on 26 May, it was assigned to the 63d French Division and began occupying the Aire sector on the Meuse-Argonne Front on 4 June. Throughout the remainder of the summer, the 372d, like its sister regiments, was bounced around from division to division, but it did not see any serious action until the final American/Allied offensive in September. By the last week of September, all regiments of the 93d Division were fully integrated into their French units, ready to assist in delivering the coup de grace to the Central Powers. The 369th, 371st, and 372d were with the French Fourth Army in the Meuse-Argonne, and the 370th was with the French Tenth Army in the Oise-Aisne.

From 26 September until the Armistice on 11 November, the Allies were poised from the English Channel to the Swiss Border, ready to go on the counterattack after reacting for the past several months to German offensives. With the Belgians and British on the left, the French and AEF on the right, and two French armies in the center—to which elements of the 93d Division were assigned—the Allies were in the position of either losing or winning the Great War.

At 0525 on 26 September, a rolling barrage led elements of the French Fourth Army into battle. During the attack, the 3d Battalion, 369th Infantry, closed a gap that had developed between the French 163d Infantry on its right and the 2d Moroccan Division to its left. While closing the gap, the 369th was able to continue the attack and subsequently capture the town of Riport. At 1530 and 1700, the 2d and 3d Battalions, respectively, attacked but had little success reaching their objectives. They had also suffered heavy casualties. By nightfall on the first day, the “3d Battalion, 369th Infantry, was assigned to the assault echelon, the 2d Battalion to the support and the 1st Battalion to division reserve . . . the 371st and 372d Infantry Regiments [as part of the 157th Division] were . . . moved forward to . . . Butte du-Mesnil.”³⁴ The 371st made its first attack during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive on 28 September, and the 372d had attacked on 27 September. For the next week and a half, the 369th, 371st, and 372d

Regiments performed as well as any other Allied regiment in the Meuse-Argonne. Each had its good moments and bad moments. One regiment of the 93d Division though, achieved many accomplishments that no other American regiment could boast. During the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the 369th spent nine consecutive days in sustained attack—the average was four days. It had perhaps the largest percentage of French-speaking soldiers, owing to the fact that most of the African-American soldiers took time to learn the language. It spent an incredible 191 days in the trenches—more than any other U.S. unit. It was the first Allied unit to reach the bank of the Rhine River, and the entire unit earned the French Croix de Guerre.³⁵ The 369th, also widely known as the Harlem Hellfighters, was among the most celebrated units to emerge from the Great War. As time passed, however, the 369th's efforts soon became a footnote and eventually disappeared from many popular history accounts. Units such as the 3d Infantry Division, which definitely earned its name, "Rock of the Marne," would be made legendary by numerous popular historical accounts.

While the 369th, 371st, and 372d Infantries fought in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign, the 370th Infantry was fighting in the Oise-Aisne Campaign with the French Tenth Army. As discussed earlier, the 370th arrived in theater in April and saw its first action in July. The rest of the summer was fairly quiet for the 370th, but its troops finally began to proceed to the front on 14 September with the French 59th Division. "During the night of September 22-23, the 1st Battalion, 370th Infantry, relieved French troops in the front . . . 2nd Battalion was placed in support . . . and the 3rd Battalion in reserve. . . . The 370th took command of the left subsector of the French 59th Division on September 24."³⁶ Isolated enemy actions occurred on the division's right flank between 25 and 27 September. During this period, the 370th was involved in minor incidents on the left. Concurrently on 26 September, the Allied First Army (U.S.) and Fourth Army (French), with the 369th, 371st, and 372d attached, launched their Meuse-Argonne Offensive. As a result of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the German crown prince withdrew most of his forces opposite the Oise-Aisne sector to reinforce the Meuse-Argonne sector. News of the German withdrawal inspired the French Tenth Army to attack on 28 September. Early on the 28th, the 370th Regiment had little success on its own right flank, but succeeded on its left in occupying its objective by noon. The overall objectives given the 59th Division on the 28th were first to control a bend in the canal near Pinon and east of Ferme de la Riviere to Ecluse and then to occupy a line from Lizy to Bois de Mortier. "The French 59th Division with three regiments in line, was to make a turning

movement, pivoting on the 370th Infantry. . . . The 370th Infantry was charged with protecting the left flank of the division from attacks coming from the wooded area northwest of Anizy-le Chateau.”³⁷ After three days of fighting, the division accomplished its mission except for 30 September, when elements of the 370th Regiment “became confused and lost,” the 370th was successful on the left flank throughout the offensive.³⁸

From 1 to 3 October, the 370th Regiment conducted mopup missions south of the canal and, along with the 59th Division, was taken out of front-line action on 6 October. Between 6 October and 4 November, the 370th Infantry Regiment performed in a support and reserve role and spent a fortnight (13 to 27 October) on road construction duty while it reorganized. The September fighting had taken a heavy toll on the 59th Division. The 370th alone had suffered “450 to 600 killed and wounded.”³⁹

On the night of 27-28 October, the 370th Infantry Regiment began its movement back toward the front to the north and east of Laon. The 59th Division’s mission was “to join in the attack . . . and to be ready to pursue vigorously any German withdrawal.”⁴⁰ The Germans finally made a move on the night of 4-5 November, and the 59th Division initiated pursuit on 5 November and stayed with it until 11 November. Throughout the pursuit, the 370th did not fight as a regiment. Each battalion served separately with a different French regiment. As a regiment, the 370th was not awarded the Croix de Guerre, but 71 members of the regiment received the award.

Analogous with the way it was trained in the United States—separately—the 93d Division fought separately. Nonetheless, the 93d Division’s record speaks for itself. Under French divisions and senior leaders, who treated and respected them as equals, the 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372d Regiments enhanced the success of the French Fourth and Tenth Armies. With a total of 3,167 casualties—which was more than 32 percent of the division strength—the 93d Division more than shed its share of blood on French soil.

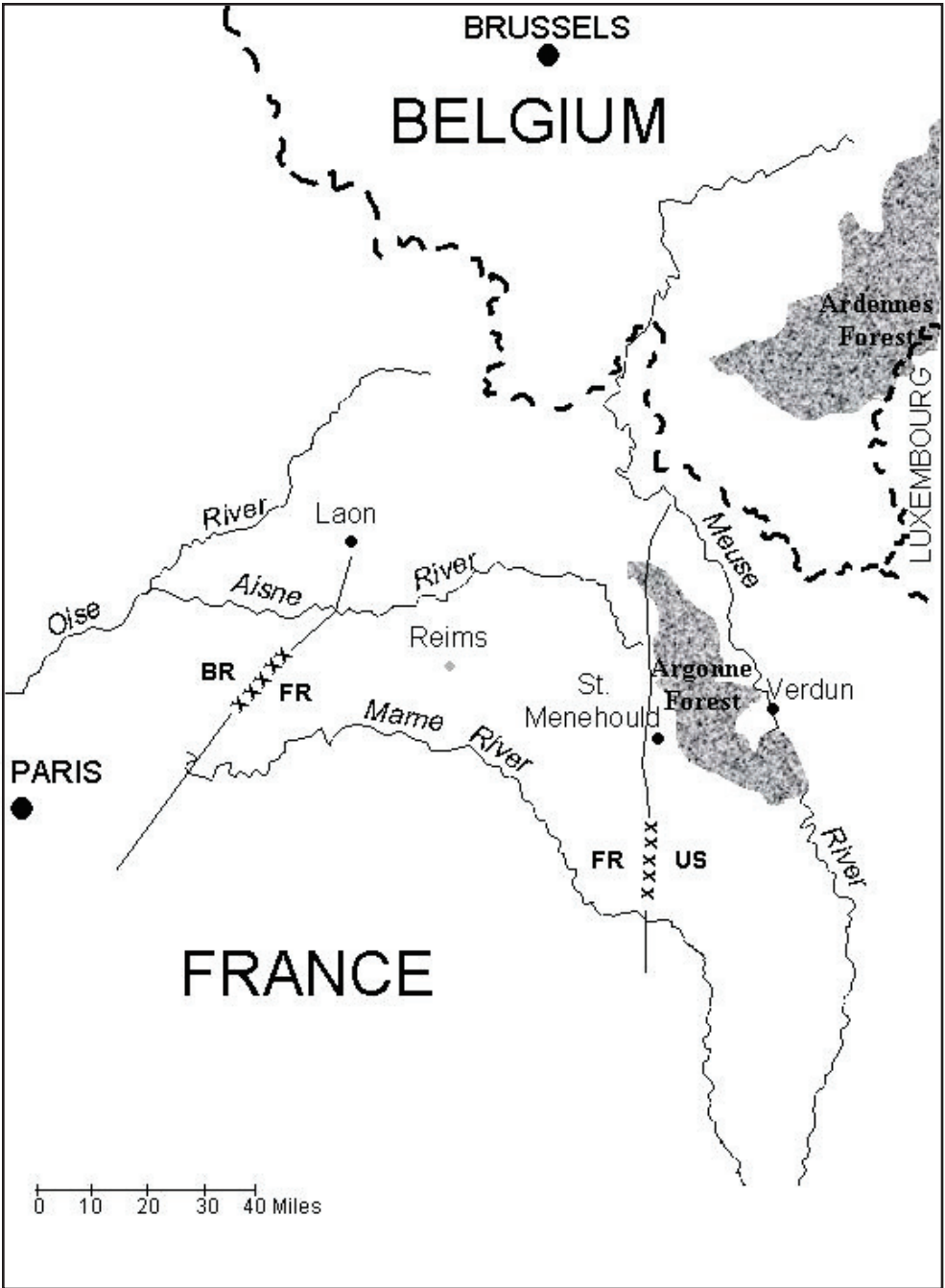
The 92d Division was officially organized in November 1917. It did not reach full strength, however, until May 1918 and sailed for Europe in June. By 12 July, the entire division was finally in country. During the last week of August, most of the division (minus artillery) began occupying the Saint Die sector, and by late September, it had moved southwest of Verdun where it was assigned to the American I Corps. Between late August and

19 September, the 92d Division conducted many successful patrols. By the time it was rushed to the front for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, set to begin on 26 September, it had been baptized. Patrols, though, were a far cry from frontline trench warfare.⁴¹

When the offensive began, the 365th, 366th, and 367th Regiments of the division were placed in reserve. The 368th Infantry Regiment was assigned to the Franco-American liaison detachment, known as Groupement Durand, to coordinate actions between the French Fourth Army and the American First Army. "The plan for the Meuse-Argonne offensive [was] that the First Army would advance rapidly east of the Argonne Forest, and that the main attack of the French Fourth Army would be made west of the Aisne River. By this enveloping action, the enemy was to be forced to evacuate his strong positions in the Argonne Forest."⁴² As the two armies advanced, an 800-meter gap developed within the sectors between the armies. The 368th did its best as the gap developed, but its best was not nearly enough. The specific mission of the 368th was to "keep the enemy under surveillance and maintain contact [and maintain] liaison to both flanks."⁴³

At roughly 0525 on 26 September, the 2d Battalion, 368th Infantry, attacked. By the end of the day, it had not been successful in establishing liaison between the French and American forces. The 3d Battalion, except for Company G, that had initially established liaison and an organized front, also eventually lost contact with Allied forces by the end of the day. The 1st Battalion remained in division reserve. From that point on, things began to go downhill for the 368th Infantry. To further complicate matters for the 368th, during the attack, the French artillery failed to provide barrage fire, and no heavy wirecutters were issued to the battalion. As a result, the 368th was vulnerable to enemy fire and its movement hampered by its inability to cut through the wire.

On 27 September, the 368th continued its mission. For most of the morning, the 2d Battalion was confused and spent a lot of time trying to get organized. Once it did begin to advance late in the day, several companies became separated from each other. Concurrently, the 3d Battalion experienced a similar fate. It did not commence its attack until 1730 and failed to maintain liaison with units on its flanks and front. No noticeable progress was realised on 27 September, but 28 September proved to be another bad day for the 368th, although the 2d and 3d battalions attacked in the morning this time, neither was able to establish or maintain liaison. On that day, the 1st Battalion was finally put on notice to begin preparations



Map 1. Meuse-Argonne Front

to move out of the reserve.

At approximately 0055 on 29 September, the French command ordered the 1st Battalion to relieve the 3d Battalion. After a disorganized relief, both the 2d and 3d Battalions withdrew from frontline positions. On 30 September, the entire regiment was ordered to withdraw from the front and directed to a rear area. Ironically, however, the 368th's one success occurred in the wake of miscommunications during the withdrawal. The 1st Battalion did not receive the withdrawal order in time and, as a result, continued its mission and subsequently entered Binerville about 1600. First Battalion's success was too little too late. When the 368th returned from the frontline, its reputation had preceded it. The other three regiments had already heard from critics that the African-American soldiers had shown no promise. Yet, within days, the entire division was ordered to participate in another crucial mission, and men of the 92d Division knew they were entering an uphill race. It had to be difficult to go into battle knowing that your leaders and fellow Americans felt disdain for you.

On 9 October, at approximately 2300, the 92d Division assumed command of the right flank sector of the First Army, IV Corps, in the Marbache sector. "The mission of the 92d Division was to hold the line of the First Army east of the Moselle. It was to harass the enemy by frequent patrols, thus ensuring control of the immediate foreground in the divisional sector."⁴⁴ For the remainder of the war, most of the actions of the division consisted of active patrolling in which many more casualties were suffered. Although the 92d Division successfully accomplished its patrolling missions throughout October and held its line during the last Allied offensive in November, it could not shake the scar inflicted on it by the 368th's performance in late September. With a total casualty figure of 1,294, the 92d Division, like its sister division, shed its share of blood on French soil.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that the 368th performed poorly in battle between 26 and 30 September. Several historians have raised interesting issues over the years concerning the 368th in the Meuse-Argonne. Why, after only a few months in theater and no combat experience beyond patrolling, was the 92d Division assigned such a difficult mission? Liaison duty between two adjacent units, especially in the heat of combat, requires not only coordination and synchronization but it also requires experience. The 92d Division possessed none of those qualities. For more than half a century after the Great War ended, no one other than veterans of the division and "nonmainstream" scholars and historians defended the 92d

Division. Similar failures by white divisions were articulately defended. For example, on 29 September, elements of the 35th Division failed on the battlefield. The same writers who vociferously condemned the entire 92d Division for 368th's poor showing explained that "this was the 35th Division's first battle; liaison and headquarters organization proved inefficient; food and supplies were delivered with great difficulty; so morale disintegrated, and . . . the entire division fell back."⁴⁶ Clearly, there existed a double standard.

Another issue to consider when examining contemporary accounts of the 92d's performance, as well as the 93d Division's, was the percentage of African-American officers in each regiment. The higher the percentage of African-American officers, the lower the regiment was rated.⁴⁷ In the overall scheme, percentages, ratios, comparisons, and so forth mattered little because all African-American soldiers were generally put in one category based on the least common denominator. If one was bad, they all were bad. If one was good, he was an anomaly. Noted historian Edward M. Coffman perhaps said it best, "On the very days in late September that the 368th had its difficulties . . . the 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372d were carrying out successfully their missions . . . in Champagne and the Oise-Aisne Sectors. And the 370th was officered largely by Negroes. The French praised these regiments but white Americans chose to remember the 368th."⁴⁸

It is completely possible at this point for the reader to make a logical conclusion about the participation and contributions of African-American soldiers during the Great War and answer the question, "Were they combat multipliers?" There are, however, a few other factors to consider before analyzing their role. In addition to living in a socially, politically, and economically segregated society, yet asked to defend democracy in a faraway land, African-American soldiers, while the war was still raging, had to face and deal with German propaganda, secret directives issued by the United States to the French about the inferiority of blacks, discrimination against the highest-ranking African-American commissioned officers, lynchings, and much more.

Propaganda has long been a tool of war. Some belligerents have used it successfully, while others have failed. During the Great War, Germany employed a vigorous propaganda campaign directed at African-American

soldiers. During summer 1918, the Germans dropped leaflets into African-American units' lines stating:

Hello, boys, what are you doing over here? Fighting the Germans? Why? Have they ever done you any harm? Of course some white folks and the lying English-American papers told you that the Germans ought to be wiped out for the sake of humanity and Democracy. What is Democracy? Personal freedom; all citizens enjoying the same rights socially and before the law. Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of freedom and Democracy, or are you not rather treated over there as second class citizens?

Can you get into a restaurant where white people dine? Can you get a seat in a theater where white people sit? Can you get a seat or berth in a railroad car, or can you even ride in the South in the same street car with the white people?

And how about the law? Is lynching and the most horrible crimes connected therewith, a lawful proceeding in a Democratic country? Now all this is entirely different in Germany where they do like colored people; where they treat them as gentlemen and as white men, and quite a number of colored people have fine positions in business in Berlin and other German cities. Why, then, fight the Germans only for the benefit of the Wall Street robbers, and to protect the millions that they have loaned to the English, French, and Italians.

You have been made the tool of the egoistic and rapacious rich in America, and there is nothing in the whole game for you but broken bones, horrible wounds, spoiled health, or death. No satisfaction whatever will you get out of this unjust war. You have never seen Germany, so you are fools if you allow people to make you hate us. Come over and see for yourself. Let those do the fighting who make the profit out of this war. Don't allow them to use you as cannon fodder.

To carry a gun in this service is not an honor, but a shame. Throw it away and come over to the German lines. You will find friends who will help you.⁴⁹

The crafty and greatly insightful leaflet prepared by the Germans in 1918 still captures the soul of the 21st-century reader. But because of loyalty, patriotism, a strong sense of worth, and the hopes of returning to an America that in the end would embrace them, African-Americans were not swayed by the German propaganda machine.

Perhaps more damaging to the spirit of African-American troops was

the American document titled “Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops,” issued in August 1918. Excerpts from the document speak for themselves:

1. It is important for French officers who have been called on to exercise command over black American troops, or to live in close contact with them, to have an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States.

2. The American attitude on the Negro question . . . is unanimous on the “color question” and does not admit of any discussion.

The increasing number of Negroes in the United States (about 15,000,000) would create for the white race . . . a menace . . . were it not [for] an impassable gulf [established] between them.

As this danger (large black population) does not exist for the French race, the French [have] become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence.

This indulgence and this familiarity are matters of grievous concern to the Americans. They (white Americans) are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations. . . . It is of the utmost importance that every effort be made to avoid profoundly estranging American opinion.

Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being.

CONCLUSION

1. We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. . . . We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service.

2. We must not commend too highly the black American troop. . . . It is all right to recognize their good qualities and their services, but only in moderate terms.

Military authority cannot intervene directly in this question, but it can through the civil authorities exercise some influence on the population.⁵⁰

The effect that this document had on the African-American/French relationship is unclear. It is clear, however, that most Frenchmen treated and respected African-American soldiers as equals.

Among the most devastating blows to the African-American elite and soldier population was the treatment of African-American commissioned officers. Several field grade African-American officers were reassigned or relieved of leadership roles throughout the war. The 8th Illinois, which became the 370th, had African-American officers from Colonel Franklin A. Dennison, the regimental commander, on down to platoon leaders. Once in France, Dennison was relieved, allegedly for ill health. The highest-ranking African-American officer to serve in France was Lieutenant Colonel Otis B. Duncan, a battalion commander in the 370th.

The most egregious injustice, though, was done to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young.⁵¹ Young was the only African-American West Point graduate still on active duty when the United States entered the war. He was by far the senior-ranking African-American line officer in active service. With more than 27 years of successful active service, Young was as well qualified as any other commissioned officer to lead and command troops. During the Spanish-American War, he had commanded the 9th Battalion, Ohio Infantry. Young had led troops during the Punitive Expedition in 1916 while serving under General John J. Pershing. In 1917, he was commanding a cavalry battalion in the 10th Cavalry Regiment. Obviously, this meant Young had white junior officers under his command. Led by First Lieutenant Albert B. Dockery, white officers began to complain about having to serve under a black officer. Not only was Young removed from his command position in spring 1917, as a result of these complaints, he was also forced to retire in the summer for alleged ill health—the same fate that would await Dennison of the 370th.

After several unsuccessful attempts from the black elite and their white supporters, coupled with a 497-mile horseback ride by Young from his station in Ohio to Washington, DC, to prove his health, Young was still put on the retired list. Why was Dennison relieved? Why was Young retired? As stated, the official reasons were tied to health. Several historians, however, have suggested reasons other than health. It is interesting to note that in Young's case, he had recently passed a physical examination with flying colors. More important, was the fact that due to Young's seniority and successful service to that point, he was number six on the list to be promoted to colonel and would definitely have been promoted to brigadier general because of the rapid wartime promotion schedule.⁵² Jim Crow America was just not ready for an African-American general officer in 1917. Forced retirement may have been the scapegoat solution because Young was brought back on active duty on 6 November 1918, just five days before the war ended.



West Pointer Charles Young in 1916, then a major leading U.S. troops in Mexico under Pershing's command. Two years later he was fighting to stay on active duty, but lost that battle. (Adjutant General's Office No. 94-UM-204046, National Archives; Underwood and Underwood)

Through it all, the soldiers in the SOS units, pioneer units, and the 92d and 93d Divisions continued to serve, just like their fathers before them had done. Their beliefs and hopes were the same as their ancestors. Some believed, while others hoped, that this time their war participation would result in a positive change for their race; that America would welcome them home with open arms and a warm embrace of "well done my good and faithful servants."

Parades down New York's Fifth Avenue in early 1919 were jubilant for all returning American soldiers, especially for the Fighting 15th New York, Harlem Hellfighters, and the 369th Regiment. It appeared that their beliefs and hopes of full equality and acceptance had come to fruition. It was not long, however, before mob violence

proved that things had not changed much. Among the lynching victims of 1919 were 10 African-American soldiers still in uniform. In fact, summer 1919, known as Red Summer, was the worst season of mob violence in America after the turn of the century. The significant difference, was that victims included white, as well as black, casualties. After fighting for democracy on foreign soil, African-Americans returned with a new sense of fighting for democracy on their own soil.

A Harlem Renaissance-inspired poem written by Claude McKay, *If We Must Die* exemplifies it all:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!⁵³

In this chapter, we have seen that the roles and participation of African-American soldiers actually decreased during World War I. Whereas during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, we see persons of African descent playing significant roles, relatively speaking, as fighting soldiers. During World War I, we see their level of participation decrease. Why? Because of the philosophy of the era, or attitude if you will, associated with the ending of Reconstruction in 1877. Post-1877 philosophy evolved into “separate but equal,” but it was all too often “separate but not equal.” During the post-Reconstruction era, there was a move to turn back the hands of time. One major way to ensure that the progress of blacks would not continue was to remove that which allowed them to demand equality. As stated in chapter 1, “how could you deny someone freedom [or progress], once you have allowed them to fight” for their country. As a result, their military roles were deliberately reduced to deny them any sense of “clout,” or deserving in the American way of life. As will become evident in the next chapter however the “New Negroes” and their white supporters were not giving up so easily.

Notes

1. Lucius J. Barker and Twiley W. Barker, Jr., *Civil Liberties and the Constitution: Cases and Commentaries* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982), 690-91.
2. War Department, Adjutant General's Office, General Orders No. 56, 1 August 1866. *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*. Vol. III, Item 10.
3. Native Americans dubbed the black cavalrymen Buffalo Soldiers because of the hue of their skin, the buffalo fur overcoats they wore in the winter, and their fierce fighting style. These three similarities reminded Native Americans of the buffalo. Native Americans respected the buffalo greatly; thus, the name Buffalo Soldier was given out of respect and was an "endearing term."
4. For more detail on the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments, refer to William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of Negro Cavalry in the West*. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967). For the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments, refer to Arlen Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West, 1869-1891* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1971). For the Spanish-American War, refer to Willard B Gatewood, Jr., "*Smoked Yankees*" and *the Struggle of Empire: Letters From Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971).
5. Although there were rare occasions during the 19th century when a regular Army (RA) commission could be earned by competing. During an officer examination board at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, nearly all RA commissions earned before the establishment of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and Officer Candidate School (OCS) programs in the 1910s came out of the USMA.
6. Lieutenant Flipper was posthumously pardoned by President William J. Clinton on 19 February 1999.
7. Much of the information in the previous two paragraphs is taken from chapters 4, 5, and 7 of a dissertation titled *Sable Officers: African-American Military Officers, 1861-1948* written by this author.
8. Jim Crow was a character played by a white man, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, in black face in the 1830s. Rice portrayed blacks as bumbling fools. His song "weel a-bout and turn a-bout, and do just so, every time I weel about, I jump Jim Crow," became a national hit in the 1830s. Eventually, Jim Crow came to symbolize blacks. "Jim Crow" laws are simply another name for "Black" laws, just slightly different eras. See Kenneth C. Davis, *Don't Know Much About History: Everything You Need to Know About American History, but Never Learned* (New York: Crown, 1990), 215-16.
9. In 1877, Southern democrats and Northern republicans made a compromise that catapulted Republican presidential candidate Rutherford B. Hayes into the White House and started the erosion of civil rights and liberties that the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments had afforded to blacks. In 1896, the Supreme Court case Plessy versus Ferguson established "separate but equal" as "just and fair."
10. For 66 years, the official verdict for the 167 men of 1st Battalion, 25th Infantry was guilty. Once all the evidence was looked at with fair and critical eyes six decades later, the men of 1st Battalion were honorably discharged. See John D. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970; reprint College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1992).
11. Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974; reprint New York, Da Capo Press, 1996), 27-29.
12. *Ibid.*, 29-30.

13. The family ties in Europe actually extend from Norway to Spain in various degrees. For further details, see Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan, 1962; reprint New York: Bonanza Books, 1982), 1-14.

14. Clearly, this description of the European road to war is oversimplified. Much occurred during the month of negotiations, and many other factors affected the entangling alliances.

15. "The Lynching Industry," *Crisis* (February, 1915), 197-98.

16. Salter, "Sable Officers," 99-100.

17. War Department General Orders No. 125, 22 September 1917, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, Vol. IV, Item 19.

18. Memorandum, Brigadier General Joseph E. Kuhn, Chief of War College Division, for the Chief of Staff, 15 May 1917, *Ibid.*, Item 53.

19. Barbeau and Henri, 70-71.

20. Memorandum, Colonel William S. Graves for the Adjutant General, 31 December 1917, "Training Cadres for Colored Units."

21. Barbeau and Henri, 70-71.

22. Memorandum, Major T.W. Hammond for the Chief of Staff, 13 November 1917, Subject: Utilization of Colored Units of the National Guard and the Colored Draft. *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, Vol. IV, Item 21; Barbeau and Henri, 81.

23. Appendix, Table 73-A: Colored and White Inductions, compared by states. "Race and Color Groups," A summary of the Status of Negroes Under the Draft Law, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, Vol. IV, Item 15.

24. Memorandum, Major General Tasker H. Bliss for the Secretary of War, 3 September 1917, *Ibid.*, Item 6; Memorandum, Brigadier General Lytle Brown, Assistant Chief of Staff, for the Chief of Staff, 12 June 1918, Subject: Disposal of Colored Draft, *Ibid.*, Item 12; Barbeau and Henri, 81-85.

25. War Department General Orders No. 125, 22 September 1917, paragraph IV, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, Vol. IV, Item 19.

26. Barbeau and Henri, 93-194, 104-105.

27. *Ibid.*, 102-104.

28. Unless otherwise footnoted, the following paragraphs detailing the accounts of the 93d Division have come from *93d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*, prepared by the American Battle Monuments Commission, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1944.

29. Barbeau and Henri, 116.

30. *American Military History and the Evolution of Warfare in the Western World* Robert A. Doughty and Ira D. Gruber., eds. (Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Co., 1996), 619-21.

31. Barbeau and Henri, 118.

32. *Ibid.*, 124.

33. The 157th is famous for its courageous defense of Verdun in 1915.

34. *93d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*, 13.

35. Barbeau and Henri, 121-29; Doughty and Gruber, 603.

36. *93d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*, 27.

37. *Ibid.*, 28.

38. Barbeau and Henri, 125.

39. *Ibid.*, 127.

40. *93d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*, 31.

41. Unless otherwise footnoted, the following paragraphs detailing the accounts of the 92d Division have come from *92d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*.

42. Ibid., 9.

43. Ibid., 12.

44. *92d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*, 27.

45. Barbeau and Henri, 160, states 1,700 total casualties.

46. Ibid., 152-53.

47. For detailed analysis on the subject of African-American officer battlefield performance, see chapter IX in Salter, 135-49. The rank ordering of the battlefield performance of regiments in the 92d and 93d Divisions is interesting to examine. It appears that the higher the percentage of white officers in a regiment, the higher the postwar rating was. Of the four regiments in the 93d Division, the 371st had no black officers, the 369th had only five, the 372d had a large amount, and the 370th was all black. They were conveniently rank ordered as such. See Gerald W. Patton, *War and Race: The Black Officer in the American Military, 1915-1941* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 80.

48. Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford Press, 1968), 320.

49. Barbeau and Henri, 148-49.

50. *Crisis*, May 1919, W.E.B. Dubois, ed. This document was written by Lieutenant Colonel Linard of the AEF Headquarters. Refer to Barbeau and Henri, 114.

51. For more on the dismissal of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, see Salter, 115-19.

52. Ibid., Just as in today's military, officer active duty promotions were generally based on performance plus time in service. Many West Pointers much younger than Young served as generals during World War I. Douglas MacArthur, West Point class of 1903, served as a brigadier general during the war. By all accounts, there is little reason why Young should not have been selected to command either the 92d or 93d Division. His performance was as solid as any other officer, and he definitely had seniority. Perhaps the real reason was that he would certainly have had to command white officers.

53. *The Black Poets*, Dudley Randall, ed. (New York: Bantam Books, reprint 1981), 63.

Chapter 4

World War II

After World War I, African-Americans began to experience some positive changes. The Harlem Renaissance, spurred on by the “New Negro,” was a very successful cultural awakening. Black artists, musicians, novelists, poets, stage actors, dancers, and educators began to achieve an enormous amount of success, both locally and internationally. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was in its second decade of existence and was very successful. Its official organ, *Crisis* magazine, was making the country and the world aware of the black cause, and the NAACP’s Legal Defense Team was winning important civil liberty cases on behalf of African-Americans. In 1928, Oscar DePriest of Chicago was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Although the Great Depression hit African-Americans harder than any other group of Americans, they remained resilient. Progressing from being unable to vote during Abraham Lincoln’s presidency to electing democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) into the White House in 1932. During FDR’s administration, African-Americans became a key part of the political structure. FDR’s administration appointed more African-Americans to government posts than any other administration; so much so that they were known as Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet.” In 1936, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. graduated from the USMA, becoming only the fourth African-American to do so, and, in 1940, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. was promoted to brigadier general. Although these successes did not guarantee a pleasant climate for African-Americans in general, they marked the beginning of a toehold, that would be expanded into a foothold to secure greater equality for African-Americans.

In the military arena, however, things progressed even slower. The aspersions cast on all African-American soldiers because one regiment’s failure during five days of combat during World War I reinforced general post-reconstruction attitudes that African-American soldiers were a poor investment. As the military rapidly downsized following the war, it was not long before the four African-American regiments, the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments, again became the only units with African-American soldiers. These regiments were completely relegated to menial duties that resembled nothing of the duties that had earned them the name Buffalo Soldiers and 23 Medals of Honor. Basically, they performed garrison duties at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; Fort Meade, Maryland; West Point, New York; and Fort Riley, Kansas.

In the first decade after the war, several studies were conducted to determine how, if at all, African-American troops should be used in the future. A 1924 War Department study surveyed 84 faculty and class members at the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and came away with mixed conclusions. Seventy-six of the 84 officers surveyed felt that there *was* a place in the military for African-American soldiers, but that they should be excluded from technical branches such as aviation. The general consensus of these officers was that outside forces—political or otherwise—would demand that African-American soldiers be used. Regardless of the fact that World War I findings concluded that they were ineffective—no matter how biased the findings—planning considerations should at least include them. Very few officers felt that African-American soldiers deserved to be in the military. One officer, however, went as far as to recommend that “individual Negroes [be assigned] at a ratio of about 2,000 to a division, 300 to a regiment, 20 to a rifle company, and one to an [infantry] squad.”²¹

Those opposed using African-American troops were just as adamant as always and staunchly held to the stereotypical views of the past. One lieutenant colonel who was surveyed stated, “the Negro race is thousands of years behind the Caucasian race in the higher psychic development.” Furthermore, he went on to say, white troops by their “bravery, confidence, honor, esprit, through generations of schooling and tradition are able to overcome the innate reactions of fear, fright, and the impulse of self preservation. All of this . . . is . . . lacking in the Negro race not many generations removed from that of an African primitive man and only one or two generations out of slavery.”²²

For more than a decade following this initial study, subsequent War College classes debated and examined the issue and generally came away with the same conclusions. Any officer who was advancing in his military career spent some time at the War College and undoubtedly came across, and perhaps was influenced by, these reports. Nearly each class between 1924 and 1937 reexamined and reanalyzed the issue. The interwar years were indeed lean years for the military as a whole. It was even leaner for African-American soldiers due, in part, to the prevailing attitudes that those studies fueled.

In actuality, the conclusions of the 1924 survey and subsequent surveys are not surprising. These studies were in line with the official War Department 1922 Mobilization Plan. In this plan, there was virtually no mention of the four African-American Regular Army regiments, and all the African-American National Guard units were deemed the responsibility of

the states. Significant changes to the Mobilization Plan, including the role of African-Americans, did not occur until 1937 and were not implemented until 1938.³ Further, in 1931, the War Department diverted manpower slots from the 10th Cavalry and 25th Infantry to expand the Army Air Corps, a branch that was closed to African-Americans. This move further reduced the abilities of these regiments to maintain strength and to achieve effective combat status.⁴ As a result of the World War I report card; the 1922 Mobilization Plan, the 1924 War College study, and subsequent War College studies; the diversion of slots from black units to white units; and several other inequalities that cropped up in Jim Crow America during the interwar years, African-Americans made up less than 2 percent of all active duty and national guardsmen by the mid- to late 1930s.⁵ The inequity would soon be exacerbated by the fact that the Brownsville and Houston riot incidents would rear their ugly heads in the 1940 Selective Service debate.

The outside agitation that some of the military officers had predicted in the 1924 survey began to come to fruition in the early 1930s. Walter White, secretary for the NAACP, on learning about the shifting of slots from the 10th Cavalry to the Air Corps, initiated a writing campaign to General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.⁶ White explained the chagrin of the “colored people” on learning of the diversion of slots, citing the fact that Mr. Albert Roberts, an African-American Air Corps applicant, apparently fully qualified,⁷ was denied entrance simply because “the War Department would not feel justified in mixing colored and white enlisted men in the same squadron.”⁸ Just how much of an effect White’s campaign—or the more detailed one initiated only one month later to President Herbert Hoover by Dr. Robert R. Morton, principal of Tuskegee Institute—had on the Army is up for debate.⁹ One thing is certain; if the War Department had any intentions of eliminating any of the African-American regiments, that plan was foiled. In response to Morton’s letter, MacArthur wrote—apparently Hoover forwarded his letter to MacArthur—that the 9th, 10th, 24th, and 25th Regiments “must be maintained in the Regular Army which can contribute most effectively to the national defense not only in an emergency but in preparations in time of peace for such an emergency.”¹⁰

In February 1938, the Pittsburgh *Courier*, one of the most widely read black newspapers in the country, initiated a two-year campaign pushing for an all-black division in the United States’ inevitable entry into the brewing war.¹¹ The following year, the *Crisis* magazine published a serial article attacking the Army’s Jim Crow policy.¹² In 1940 and

again in 1941, A. Philip Randolph initiated plans for a march on the nation's capital to demand equality in the Armed Forces and the growing national defense industry.¹³ As a result of these increasing pressures from national organizations, black presses, activists (both white and black), and Roosevelt's Black Cabinet—namely, Mary McLeod Bethune—Roosevelt's War Department administration approved some significant changes in September and October 1940. On 9 October, the White House released a seven-point policy change to the press:

1. Negro personnel in the Army will be in proportion to that in the general population (about 10 percent).
2. Negroes will be maintained in each major branch.
3. Negro reserve officers will be eligible for active duty.
4. Negroes will be allowed to compete for Officer Candidate School (OCS) slots.
5. Negroes will be trained as pilots and aviation mechanics and technical specialists.
6. Negro civilians will be offered equal opportunity for employment at arsenals and Army posts.
7. Racial segregation will be maintained.¹⁴

To put icing on the cake, in late September, just one week before the 1940 presidential election, Roosevelt announced that Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., after more than 40 years of successful active service, had been placed on the brigadier general's promotion list.¹⁵ Despite the fact that segregation would remain as official policy in the Army, all signs seemed to suggest that African-Americans were on the verge of complete equality in the military. Meanwhile, powers outside the continental United States were setting the wheels of war increasingly into motion.

The period between 1914 and 1945 has often been referred to as one great war, meaning the interwar years were simply a period to allow some belligerents, unchecked, a respite to rebuild their war machines. That is exactly what occurred in the case of Germany. Although the Third Reich was officially born on 30 January 1933, when Adolf Hitler took the oath as chancellor of the German Reich, its origin easily dates back to that autumn, Monday, 11 November 1918, when the armistice was signed. For the next six months, the victorious Allies drafted the official terms of the armistice treaty and presented them, without condition, to German leaders on 7 May 1919. The terms, from the German perspective, were harsh

and unacceptable. Without the means to resist or negotiate, the Germans accepted the agreements on the last day of the deadline, 24 June. The Treaty of Versailles was then signed on 28 June 1919, requiring Germany to return provinces to France (Alsace-Lorraine), Belgium, Denmark (parts of Schleswig), and Poland (including the eastern corridor to the Baltic Sea near Danzig). Further, it required Germany to turn over Kaiser Wilhelm II and roughly 800 other “war criminals,” accept all responsibility for the Great War, and pay large war reparations. Last, and perhaps most damaging, the treaty restricted the German military machine to a navy that was banned from building vessels larger than 10,000 tons and no submarines at all. No general staff was allowed to be formed, the army could have no more than 100,000 volunteers, and no tanks or planes were allowed at all.¹⁶ To the conservatives, which included Hitler, the “strict” terms of the Treaty of Versailles fueled the rise of the Nazi Party.

Unfortunately for the world, the Treaty of Versailles went virtually unenforced. As early as 1925, the Nazi war machine was covertly forming, allowing a man who was from peasant Austrian stock, a high school dropout, an unknown soldier during World War I, and a postwar derelict to rise as German dictator by January 1933. Shortly thereafter, the chain of events that led to World War II began.

In March 1938, Hitler annexed Austria; in September, he acquired the Sudetenland; and in March 1939, he marched into the remainder of Czechoslovakia and took it. On 1 September 1939, the first actual shots were fired when Hitler attacked Poland. In six weeks the Polish Campaign was over. On 10 May 1940, Hitler attacked France and six weeks later, France was defeated. By now much of the world was stunned, especially England, Hitler’s next target. Fortunately for England, Hitler’s forces could not negotiate the English Channel.

Not to stand idly by, Russia had inadvertently involved itself in the ensuing war when it signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939. The pact guaranteed Germany freedom to attack Poland without worry of Russian support to Poland. After Germany conquered Poland west of Brest, Russia marched into eastern Poland and also launched an ill-conceived invasion in Finland. In August, the Soviets and Japanese had been engaged against each other in an operation in Nomonhan, Manchuria. Russian victory at Nomonhan and German success in the west prompted Japan to focus its attention more toward southeastern Asia. France and England had colonies there, and perhaps Japan hoped to capitalize on them while France and England focused

on Germany's aggression. Meanwhile, on 19 June 1939, Italy declared war on France and England because it, like Germany, felt slighted by the Treaty of Versailles. By now most of the globe was at war for the second time in barely over two decades. Isolationist America, protected by the largest tank ditch in the world—the Atlantic Ocean—was next.

Since signing the Treaty of Versailles, the United States had been determined to stay out of European affairs. It is true, however, that through billions of dollars of loans from American investors in the mid to late 1920s and early 1930s, Germany was able to partially rebuild itself.¹⁷ It is also true that the United States had extended its influence into the Far East. Hawaii was heavily occupied, and U.S. bases existed in the Philippines. Even though Japan initiated attacks on China in 1937 and attacked a U.S. gunboat near China in December, the United States remained calm. As Hitler set his eyes on England after conquering France, Roosevelt assured England that the United States was committed to its stability and safety. It nonetheless took the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 to propel America into World War II. America had not been standing idly by. In 1939, industry slowly shifted toward wartime production. On 16 September 1940, the first peacetime Selective Service Act was passed. Two antidiscrimination clauses in the act stated that all men between 18 and 36 were eligible for service in the naval and land forces and that there could be no racial discrimination in selecting and training men. As previously discussed, African-Americans were further incorporated into the movement by FDR's revised racial policy, released on 9 October 1940. Things were looking up for the future of African-Americans in the military.

In actuality, the service of African-Americans during World War II can best be described with the old cliché, “sometimes you have to take one step backward to gain two steps forward.” World War II was unlike the Revolutionary War and World War I. During the latter two, African-Americans went on the battlefield from the outset of hostilities. World War II, however, was more like the Civil War, which slowly trickled African-American soldiers into service; but, once allowed, they fought in significant numbers during the Civil War. African-Americans sent to the combat zones during World War II, however, were more often used as service and support troops, and their numbers never quite exceeded 10 percent of the total population. Throughout the war and in the decade

following the war, more significant changes for the better occurred, however slowly.

Since this discourse is mainly focused on the soldier, most of the rest of the chapter will address the Army. Brief mention must, however, be made to the Marine Corps, the Navy, the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and the Nurse Corps.

When the Continental Marine Corps—established on 10 November 1775—was reestablished in 1798 as the U.S. Marine Corps, it banned the enlistment of all “Negroes or mulattos.”¹⁸ This ban was not overturned until 144 years later. In May 1942, the Marine Corps finally announced that it would begin enlisting African-Americans. Private Howard Perry from Charlotte, North Carolina, became the first to arrive at Mumford Point, near Camp Lejeune, on 26 August. During the war, approximately 19,168 African-Americans served in the Marine Corps. They were organized into two defense battalions, 12 ammunition companies, 49 Marine Corps depot companies, and 1,200 served in a volunteer stewards' branch. Thirteen thousand ultimately served overseas. Beginning in June 1944, Mumford Point marines began to contribute to the war effort in the Pacific. On 15 June 1944, D-day on Saipan, the 3d Marine Ammunition Company encountered Japanese soldiers and subsequently helped to repel the enemy at Charon Kanoa. Several of the depot companies participated on the Marianas, Palau, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.¹⁹ The first African-American Marine Corps officer was not commissioned until 10 November 1945; ironically, this was the 170th birthday of the Marine Corps.²⁰

Like the Marine Corps, the Navy also banned the enlistment of blacks in 1798. As has already become evident, the Navy did not survive during much of the 19th century without the service of African-American sailors. With the introduction of the “Great White Fleet” around the turn of the century and better conditions for sailors, the Navy, now able to recruit more whites, eventually placed a ban on the further recruitment of African-Americans in 1919. The Navy had slowed its recruitment of blacks since before the turn of the century. With the ban, which was not lifted until 1933, the Navy's African-American population dropped to 55 percent by 1932.²¹ By 1942, nine full years after the ban was lifted, the Navy's African-American population had increased to approximately 5,026, or 2 percent. At war's end, more than 165,500 were in the Regular Navy, and throughout the course of the war, roughly 133,000 had served overseas.²² The total never exceeded 10 percent. Most of these men, however, served as stewards and messmen because the Navy would not promote “Negroes

[to] become petty officers or chief petty officers.”²³ One of the American heroes at Pearl Harbor was Steward Dorie Miller, who came from below deck and shot down two Japanese aircraft. Miller was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions on that day.²⁴ In May 1942, perhaps as a result of Miller’s actions but more likely because of outside pressure, the Navy announced a new policy. African-Americans could serve in a number of naval services, excluding combat vessels. In actuality, the situation remained nearly unchanged.²⁵ By war’s end, African-Americans had served on only six seagoing vessels in positions other than stewards, servants, or messmen. Further, to maintain segregation, the crews of these six vessels were all black while the officers, until much later, were all white.²⁶ Lost to history for nearly 50 years, the most famous of these all-black crew vessels was the USS *Mason*, Destroyer Escort (DE) 529. The *Mason* made a total of six escort missions in 1944 and 1945, is credited with possibly sinking one German U-boat, and received extraordinary commendations for one voyage in particular—Voyage NH 119 in October 1944—for escorting a convoy of barges in tow, some with oil, at about 5 miles per hour across the North Atlantic.²⁷ Fifty-eight African-American males were commissioned by the Navy during the war, and two females earned commissions in the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES).²⁸ In addition, 22 other African-American women were enlisted into the WAVES and four were allowed to join the ranks of naval nurses.²⁹ Clearly, there was a lot of progress to be made by the Marine Corps and Navy. The progress was monumental, given the bans and policies that had existed only half a decade before.

The plight in the Army was not significantly different. Its story, like the Navy’s, which had temporarily banned enlistments during the interwar years, was truly a classic tale of taking one step backward to gain two steps forward. When the Selective Service Act was passed in October 1939, the intent was to draft blacks on equal terms and conditions with their white counterparts. African-Americans were also to be drafted proportionally with their segment of the general population, which was just above 10 percent. The Selective Service Act got off to an inauspicious start.

When African-Americans volunteering for the draft showed up at induction centers, many centers turned them away. The First Army headquarters—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—for example, secretly ordered its boards not to accept African-Americans in the initial draft. Many other draft boards throughout the country routinely rejected African-Americans with I-A registration classifications.³⁰ As a result, at no time during the war did

African-Americans reach their proportional 10 percent of the Army's total strength. They did, however, come close by 1945. In December 1941, there were 99,206 (6.32 percent); in December 1942, there were 399,454 (7.95 percent); in December 1943, there were 633,448 (9.25 percent); in December 1944, there were 691,521 (9.50 percent); and in September 1945, there were 653,563 (9.68 percent).³¹ Those who did find their way into active duty within the first year of the draft did not always find favorable welcomes. "In April 1941, during the prewar mobilization, a black soldier, Private Felix Hall, his hands bound behind him, was found hanging from a tree at Fort Benning, Georgia."³² Throughout the year, brawls between black and white soldiers erupted at such places as Alexandria, Louisiana; Fayetteville, North Carolina; and Tampa, Florida. After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, despite Jim Crowism and tensions between the races, many African-Americans decided that they had an obligation and right to fight for *their* country. Regardless of the racial climate, they were going to serve.

The great majority of African-Americans, including women, served as service and support troops in signal units, smoke-generation units, quartermaster battalions, transportation battalions, port battalions, balloon battalions, chemical units, and medical units. Other African-Americans served in combat arms fields such as engineers, cavalry, infantry, and artillery—field, coastal, and antiaircraft. A few made their way into specialty units such as armor units, tank destroyer battalions, aviation units, and paratrooper units, and women served in the Nurse Corps. African-American men and women served also in the European and Pacific theaters. The following five case studies will demonstrate the wide range and depth of the African-American World War II military experience: the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, the Red Ball Express (transportation), the 761st Tank Battalion, individual infantry replacements in Europe, and the 6888th Postal Battalion (women). There will also be brief mention of engineer units that built the Ledo Road and Alaska Highway, the Tuskegee Airmen, and the 555th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR).

One of the most recognized photographs of the D-day invasion on 6 June 1944, is that of the low-tethered, miniature blimp-looking balloons protecting the sea and ground forces from strafing German fighters. The 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, the only unit of its kind in the U.S. Army that operated the balloons, came ashore in landing craft with the



Members of the 555th in a parachute jump. (DOD, Office, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Equal Opportunity and Safety Policy)



Generals Omar Bradley and James M. Gavin speak with personnel of the 555th. (DOD, Office, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Equal Opportunity and Safety Policy)

third wave on Omaha Beach. Although by summer 1944 the German Luftwaffe had suffered greatly, it was still able to launch a few aircraft. It would be difficult to calculate the full significance of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion. At least two FW-190s, however, were forced to fly higher than normal for strafing missions because of the 320th, causing them to be less effective. In addition to the 320th, another 1,200 African-American soldiers who landed on Utah Beach on D-day were truck drivers and quartermaster soldiers.³³ None of the nearly 2,000 African-American soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy on 6 June 1944 served as infantry. According to the opinion of one D-day veteran, Technical



End of the day at Omaha Beach. American equipment coming ashore in staggering numbers. (U.S. Coast Guard)

Sergeant Monroe Blackwell, “[T]he consensus of whites was they didn’t want blacks to get any glory, especially on that day.”³⁴ Whether infantrymen, barrage balloon operators, truck drivers, or quartermaster suppliers, all Allied soldiers who stormed onto the five Normandy beaches on D-day caught hell and played a crucial role in establishing the foothold in Europe that led to further degradation of Hitler’s *wehrmacht*.

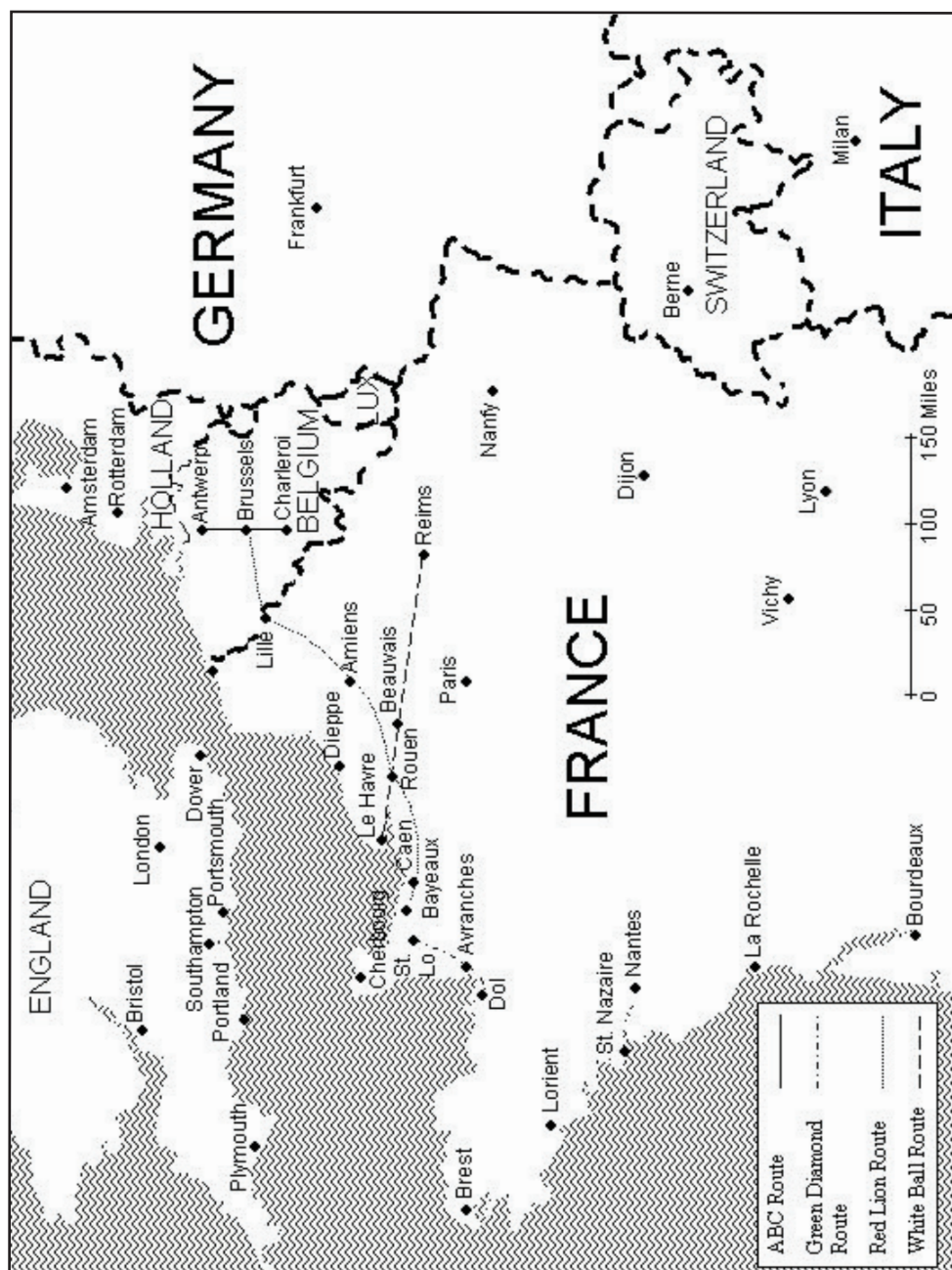
After the beaches of Normandy were secured, it took the Allies another seven weeks before they were ready to launch Operation COBRA, the breakout from the Normandy beachheads. Critical to the pursuit operations that followed COBRA, was the flow of logistics along the long lines of communications (LOCs) to keep the attacking Allied forces supplied with “beans, bullets, and fuel.” Much of that LOC mission fell on the units that operated the trucks on the Red Ball Express, the White Ball Route, the Red Lion Route, the ABC (Antwerp-Brussels-Charleroi) Route, and the Green Diamond Route. On 25 August, shortly after Allied forces broke through the bocage, the Red Ball Express went into operation, running from Saint Lo to Paris. As the First and Third Armies continued to push toward the Rhine River, the LOC routes extended as well. By the time the Red Ball Express stopped operations on 13 November 1944, the 12th Army Group—the First, Third, and Ninth Armies—had extended well beyond Paris and was east of the Meuse River. The truckers of the Red

Ball Express had been right along with them. The fact that the retreating Germans had destroyed all the railroad lines in France made the mission of the truckers on the Red Ball Express even more significant. On an average day, approximately 899 vehicles, including general supply trucks, gasoline trucks, dump trucks, and ammunition trucks, traveled the Red Ball Express. The route was a reserved two-lane highway with one lane exclusively for eastbound traffic and the other exclusively for westbound traffic. If a vehicle mistakenly got caught up within a convoy going the wrong way, it was generally stuck until the mission was complete, because vehicles were not allowed to simply turn around.³⁵ During the two and a half months of operations, 412,193 tons of supplies were delivered on the Red Ball Express, and approximately 121,873,929 ton-miles were traveled. As in any war, the missions of the SOS troops are not the glamorous ones that produce the “combat hero.” As in any war, their jobs were significant to the fight and dangerous in many other ways. One veteran of the 3418th Trucking Company explains:

As the combat troops moved further, of necessity we had to split the trip at a half-way point. One driver would drive from the beach to the half-way point, where another driver would take over. The second driver would take it to the front, return to the half-way point and the first driver would be on his way again back to the beach. All of this driving was done at night with black-out lights. . . . When General Patton was breaking through and running all over the place, it was the Red Ball that kept him supplied. . . . Our speed was 30 to 40 miles an hour no matter what the weather, and we drove every night.³⁶

On many occasions, the line between SOS troops and combat troops became blurred. Drivers and crews sometimes had to stop and exit their vehicles, with weapons in hand, to join in combat actions. Approximately 73 percent of the soldiers in the motor transport services who operated on the Red Ball Express were African-Americans.³⁷

Although the Red Ball Express was the best-known transportation system, it was not the only route in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). There was the White Ball Route, initiated on 25 September, that transported supplies from Le Havre and Rouen to Beauvais and Reims in support of the campaigns in Belgium and northern France. There was the Red Lion Route, initiated on 16 September, that carried British fuel and other supplies from Bayeaux, France, to Brussels, Belgium, for the 21st Army Group. There was the ABC Route, started on 30 November, that



Map 2. European Theater of Operation Routes

carried supplies in the area for which it was named. The Green Diamond Route, operating from 10 October to 1 November, conveyed supplies from beaches and ports between Dol and Normandy. Each of these routes had a large percentage of African-American troops. Four of the nine companies on the Red Lion Route and one of the two battalions on the Green Diamond Route were African-American units.³⁸

While the various SOS units were in full swing transporting supplies across France, the 761st Tank Battalion made its way into the ETO. The uniqueness of this battalion was simply due to its composition. The soldiers were black, but more significant, the battalion was a tank battalion. All other tank battalions in the ETO were exclusively composed of white soldiers.³⁹ The 761st, rounding out the 5th Tank Group, was activated on 1 April 1942; the 758th, initially the 78th, was activated on 1 June 1941; and the 784th was activated on 1 April 1943. Following more than two years of training at Camp Clairborne, Louisiana, and Camp Hood, Texas, the 761st finally received orders on 9 June 1944 to prepare for overseas movement.⁴⁰

It was perhaps no coincidence that the 761st received orders within 72 hours after the D-day invasion. Many of the units that burst through the bocage saw combat in North Africa and were battle worn. Further, the invasion of Normandy took a great toll on many Allied forces. Manpower and replacements were becoming increasingly critical. In fact, nearly all of the trained white armor units were committed or allocated. When General George S. Patton requested the best tank battalion the War Department had to offer, the 761st fit the bill. Patton addressed this issue in his colorful language when he spoke to the 761st shortly after it was attached to the 26th Infantry Division, XII Corps, Third Army. One veteran recalls Patton telling them the response to his request was, “the best tank unit [is] black.” He countered with, “who the f--- asked for color, I asked for tankers!”⁴¹ The 761st landed on Omaha Beach on 19 October and was committed to battle on 31 October.

Between 31 October 1944 and 6 May 1945, the 761st served with seven different divisions from three separate armies: the 26th Infantry Division, 87th Infantry Division, 17th Airborne Division, 95th Infantry Division, 79th Infantry Division, 103d Infantry Division, and 71st Infantry Division. Being a separate battalion and bastardized among units of the Third, Seventh, and Ninth Armies, the 761st operated almost continuously for 183 days.⁴² Throughout this period, the 761st fought in six countries—France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Germany, and Austria—and



Above: View from right turret area, Sherman tank. Tank commander Sergeant Harold Gary. (U.S. Army Signal Corps photo)

Below: 761st in Sherman Tanks, medium M48, crossing the Moselle River at Moyenvic, France, 1944. (U.S. Army Signal Corps photo)



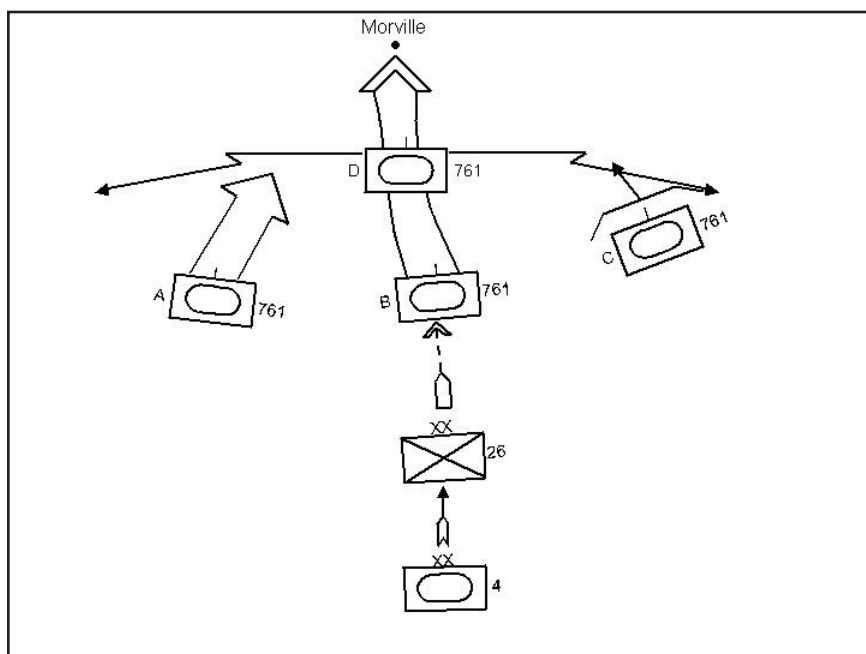
was “responsible for inflicting thousands of enemy casualties and for capturing, destroying, or aiding in the liberation of more than 30 major towns, 4 airfields, 3 ammunition supply dumps, 461 wheeled vehicles, 34 tanks, 113 large guns, 1 radio station, and numerous individual and crew-served weapons.”⁴³ Of significant note were the battalion’s actions at Morville-les-Vic in France, Tilley in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, the Siegfried Line in Germany, and in Steyr, Austria.

On 31 October, the 761st was attached to the 26th Infantry Division and received its first full-scale combat action between 8 and 13 November. The morale of the 761st was extremely high at this point, because, on 2 November, Patton had given them one of his charismatic speeches:

Men, you are the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army. I would never have asked for you if you weren’t good. I have nothing but the best in my army. I don’t care what color you are as long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sons of bitches. Everyone has their eye on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to your achievements. Don’t let them down, and damn you, don’t let me down.⁴⁴

The main battle during this period was the Battle of Morville-les-Vic. The 761st Tank Battalion was the spearhead battalion for the 26th Infantry Division, which reportedly was to create a hole for the 4th Armored Division at Morville. This was one of the few times the 761st fought as a battalion. Alpha Company advanced on the left, Bravo Company was in the center with the mission of getting into Morville, Charlie Company was on the (right) northwest side advancing onto the high ground to overwatch, and Delta Company had the screening mission. On the second day, after a tough fight on 9 November in which Charlie Company had seven tanks immobilized, the 761st, led by Bravo Company, succeeded in capturing Morville. The 4th Armored Division was able to exploit these gains. One German officer captured by the 26th Infantry Division, commenting on the actions of the 761st tankers, remarked, “Never before have I seen such bravery except once, and that was on the Russian front.”⁴⁵

After Morville and fights in four other nearby towns, the men of the 761st Tank Battalion felt like veterans. Bravery previously hidden in some came out, and the fear of combat became evident in others. The single most important lesson learned by the men—especially the drivers—was the zeroing technique employed by the German 88s. “The first shot



Map 3. Battle of Morville-les-Vic, 9 November 1944.

would be long, the next one would be short, and, that third shot . . . would be right in there . . . it paid to not be there when it came . . . our drivers [by backing up and going forward to act as a moving target] kept us from being there.⁷⁴⁶ After the Battle of Morville, the 761st made its way to the Bastogne-Saint Vith region, through the battles at Benestrof and Dieuze, to take part in the Battle of the Bulge.

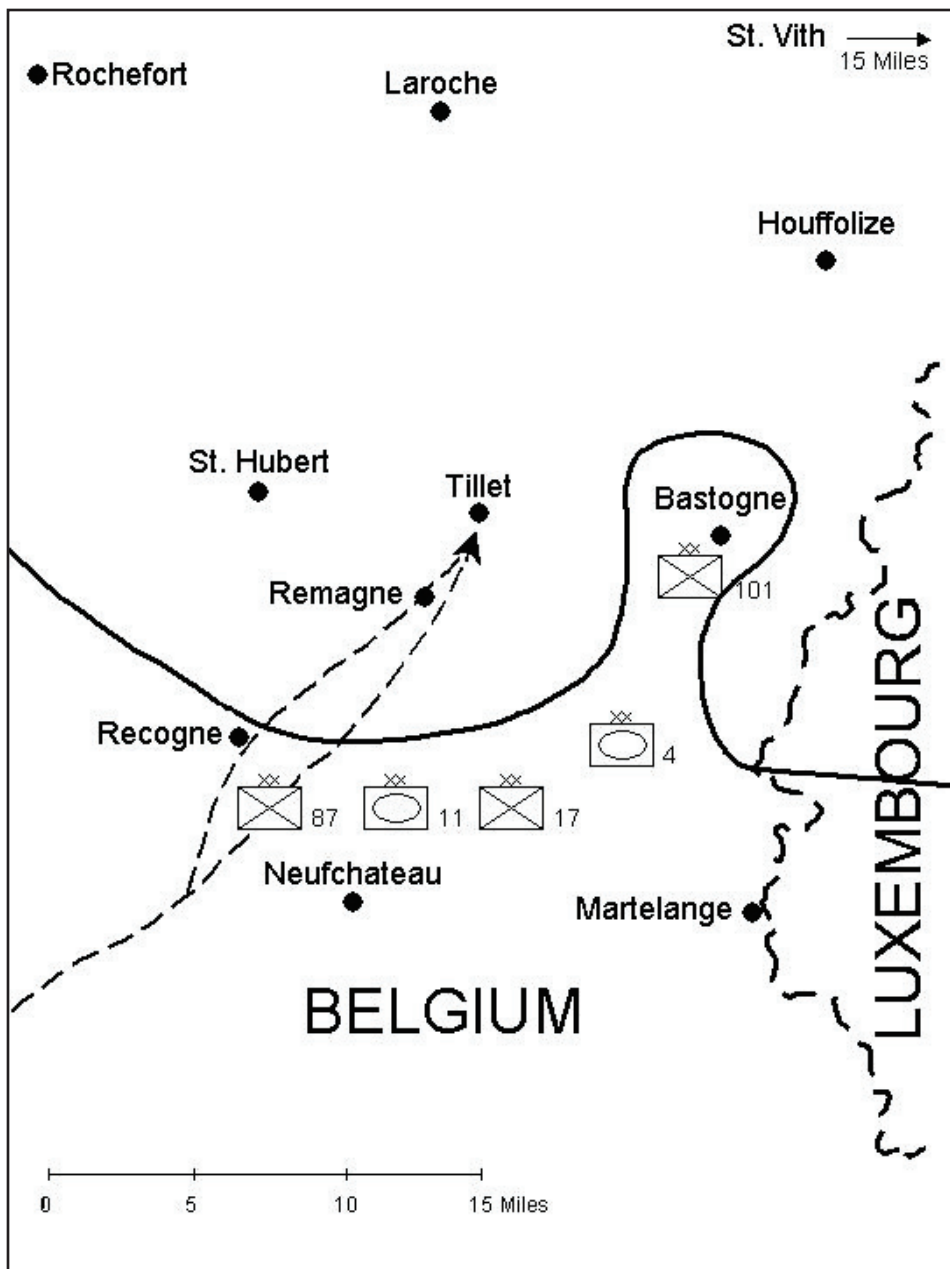
On 11 December, the 87th Infantry Division relieved the 26th Infantry Division, and shortly thereafter, the 761st was attached to the 87th. The 87th Infantry Division was one of the many divisions in Patton's Third Army poised on the southern flank of a bulge being created by the Germans in the Ardennes on 16 December. From 16 to 25 December, the Germans launched their last all-out attack before being forced east of the Rhine River. The Germans were able to penetrate 50 miles to the west before U.S. forces were able to counterattack when favorable weather conditions allowed close air support to resume on 26 December. From 26 December to 16 January 1945, U.S. forces reduced the bulge in preparation for the Rhineland Campaign. Tillet, a small town 8 miles northwest of Bastogne, was the mission of the 761st Tank Battalion during the Battle of the Bulge.

It was mid-December when the 761st received notice to move out toward the bulge. Joseph Kahoe, a platoon leader in the 761st, recalled, “Then the notice came to pull out. . . . At that level, we didn’t know anything about the Battle of the Bulge. . . . All we knew was that we were going to go off somewhere. We thought that it was crazy because what we were doing was driving all night and sleeping in the daytime, and we didn’t realize why. You know its no fun driving in blackout with tanks and then sit around all day long.”⁴⁷

The 761st finally saw action on 31 December. En route to Tillet, it inflicted damage on several German-held French towns, including Reconge and Remagne. The big battle, however, started on 5 January and lasted until 9 January. The weather was bitter cold, so cold that one’s face literally froze. The Germans of the 13th SS Panzer Division fought brilliantly, making the infantrymen of the 87th and the tankers of the 761st pay dearly. The 761st finally took Tillet on 9 January. Capturing Tillet was significant because “the splitting of the enemy’s Saint Vith-Bastogne lines at points on the Houffalize-Bastogne Road . . . effectively preventing the enemy from exerting further pressure from that direction against the Bastogne area to the south.”⁴⁸

After the Battle of the Bulge, the 761st penetrated 60 miles farther east; it was now serving with the 17th Airborne Division. On 3 February, the battalion entered Holland where it served brief tours under the 95th and 79th Infantry Divisions. During this period—the Rhineland campaign—the 761st participated in several other engagements and battles while making its way back through Luxembourg and Germany to the French-German border near Wissembourg, France. On 14 March, the 761st was attached to the 103d Infantry Divisions preparation for one of its most important missions, the spearhead of Task Force Rhine along the Siegfried Line in the 103d’s assigned sector. The spearhead mission to create a gap for the 103d began on 20 March, when tanks from Charlie Company assaulted and softened up pillbox fortifications. Later that afternoon, tanks from Alpha Company entered the fight. For the next two days, advancing from town to town in the 103d’s sector, sometimes operating in only two-tank elements, the 761st helped punch a hole in the Siegfried Line. The next stop was the Rhine River and then on to link up with the Russians.

On 29 March, the 761st joined the 71st Infantry Division, and it crossed the Rhine River on 31 March at Oppenheim. From that point on, the Germans were in fast retreat and the Allies were in hot pursuit. The 761st went to Frankfurt, Fulda on 7 April, captured Coburg on 12 April, crossed the Danube River entering Regensburg on 27 April, to Landau,

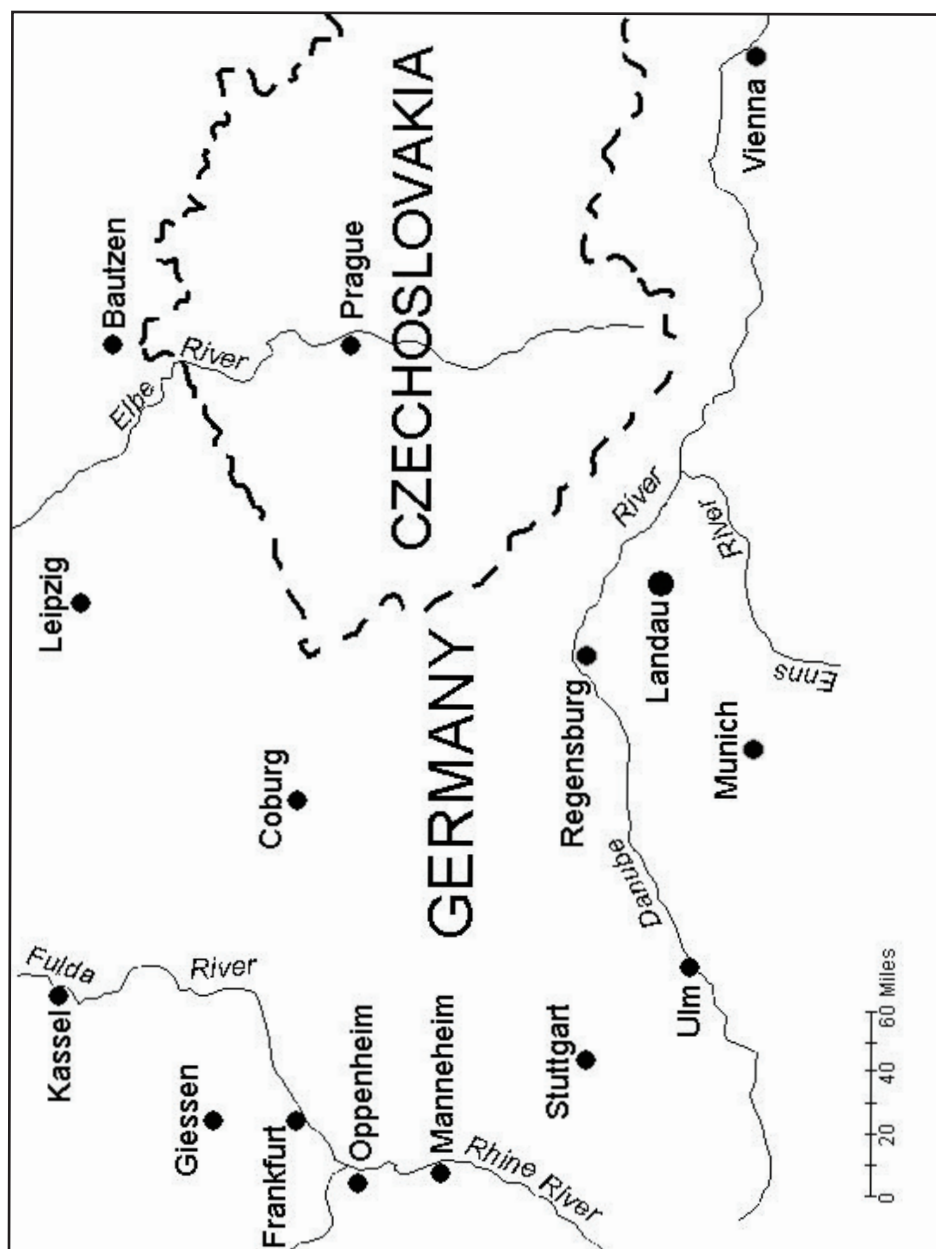


Map 4. Belgium. Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945.

and finally crossed the Enns River into Austria on 4 May. It was about this time that the men of the 761st received the order that they would never forget. "You will advance to the Enns River, and you will wait there for the Russians!"⁴⁹ Two days later, "Dog Company was located with the 71st Division command post . . . to act as 'honor guards,' while German General Lothar von Rondulic, Commanding General of the German Army Group South, signed the surrender paper."⁵⁰ The war was over for the 761st Tank Battalion. It had played a small but significant role in 183 days of combat. These tankers, however, were not the only African-Americans to serve as combat soldiers within the ETO.

By summer 1944, manpower shortages were becoming critical. The campaigns in North Africa and Italy, as well as the war in the Pacific, were beginning to take a heavy toll on U.S. forces. Like the call that went out for tankers that netted the 761st, a similar call went out for riflemen. As early as July 1944, the ETO was experiencing shortages in riflemen. By December, something had to be done. After some debate in late 1944, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower expressed his desire "to continue fighting aggressively throughout the winter" despite heavy casualties. So he "decide[d] to infiltrate them [black soldiers] as individuals, into units already in the frontlines."⁵¹ On 26 December, the commanding general of the ETO communication zone wrote to all commanders of "colored troops" in the theater, "The Supreme Commander desires to destroy the enemy forces and end hostilities in this theater without delay. . . . The men selected are to be in the grades of Private First Class and Private. NCOs may accept reduction in order to take advantage of this opportunity. . . . Your comrades at the front are anxious to share the glory of victory with you. Your relatives and friends everywhere have been urging that you be granted this privilege."⁵² The first replacements began arriving for a six-week training cycle in January and early February 1945. Although more than 4,562 volunteered, including several first sergeants who accepted rank reductions, only 2,800 were taken.⁵³

A total of 53 platoons were formed, and beginning on 1 March, they were sent to the 12th Army Group and were further distributed to the 1st, 2d, 9th, 60th, 78th, 89th, 99th, and 104th Infantry Divisions and the 12th and the 14th Armored Divisions. Most divisions employed them as a company's fourth rifle platoon. Depending on the situation, some received additional training from their gaining units, while others went directly into the fray.⁵⁴ In most cases, the African-American infantrymen were a welcome sight. Private Harold Cothran, a white infantryman from Greenwood, South Carolina, when asked what he thought about the new



Map 5. Germany and Czechoslovakia during World War II.

platoon, answered, “I don’t care what color a man is as long as he’s up here helping to win this war.” Up there is where many African-American troops actually wanted to be, as expressed by Private First Class George Freeman of Dunn, North Carolina, “I came into the Army to fight, not to labor. That’s why I volunteered for this.”⁵⁵

Clearly, the African-American “Joe” got into the war late, entering combat in March and April 1945, with V-E Day (Victory in Europe) 4 to 60 days away. During this short time, the black GI proved to be not much different from his white GI counterpart. Some acted cowardly in battle, being mere mortals, while others proved to be brave and courageous. While commanders of the two armored divisions were satisfied but not extremely pleased with their African-American replacements, the commanders of the infantry divisions uniformly expressed high praise for their replacements.⁵⁶ Overall, though, as was evident by a postwar survey given to 250 white officers and NCOs who led black soldiers, the introduction of African-Americans as infantrymen was well received on the frontlines (see survey below).⁵⁷ This was true perhaps partly because of the old cliché “misery loves company” and partly because of the heroic deeds of black soldiers.

Question: “How did you feel at first about serving in a company that had white platoons and colored platoons?”

	<u>White Officers</u>	<u>White NCOs</u>
Relatively unfavorable	64 percent	64 percent
Relatively favorable	33 percent	35 percent
No Answer	3 percent	1 percent

Question: “Have your feelings changed since having served in the same unit with colored soldiers?”

	<u>White Officers</u>	<u>White NCOs</u>
No, still the same	16 percent	21 percent
Relatively favorable	77 percent	77 percent
No answer	7 percent	2 percent

Question: “How well did the colored soldiers in this company perform in combat?”

	<u>White Officers</u>	<u>White NCOs</u>
Not well at all	0 percent	0 percent

	<u>White Officers</u>	<u>White NCOs</u>
Not so well	0 percent	1 percent
Fairly well	16 percent	17 percent
Very well	84 percent	81 percent
Undecided	0 percent	1 percent

Such deeds were exemplified by men such as Private First Class Jack Thomas. While serving in the 60th Infantry, Thomas led his squad against a German tank that was laying heavy-caliber firepower in support of an enemy roadblock. As Thomas advanced, he threw two hand grenades at the enemy, wounding several. The Germans fired back, wounding two members of Thomas' squad who were manning the rocket launcher. Thomas assumed control of the rocket launcher and fired back at the German tankers, preventing them from accomplishing their mission. Thomas then rescued one of the men who had been seriously wounded and, braving enemy fire, "carried him to safety."⁵⁸ Thomas won the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on 9 April 1945. Perhaps because of similar actions by other men in replacement platoons, Major General Edwin F. Parker, commander, 78th Infantry Division, expressed to Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., when Davis visited the front in April to inquire about the replacement platoons, that he wished he could get more of such replacements.⁵⁹

African-American infantrymen had another effect on the war effort, "competition-emulation." In the 26th Infantry Division, one replacement platoon was engaged in continuous combat from 12 March to 8 May. It was estimated that the combat-efficiency level in the regiment the platoon was assigned to went up from 30 percent to 80 percent.⁶⁰ As one officer who was surveyed stated, "each tried to make a good showing."⁶¹ This may sound like a small thing, but it is believed that no matter how patriotic a soldier is on the field of battle, in the heat of it all, he is rarely thinking of "God and country," but, rather, of his "buddy and himself." Little means more to a soldier in battle than the opinion of his buddy; no one wants to be considered a coward. In the latter stages of World War II, America was a country divided, and Jim Crowism was still very much alive. White and black soldiers serving as comrades side by side on the frontlines had something to prove to each other, resulting in increased combat efficiency. No white man wanted to be seen as a coward by a black man, and likewise,

no black man wanted to be seen as a coward by a white man. White and black soldiers generally performed better when intermingled during World War II. Like their armored brethren in the 761st, the replacement platoon's contributions were only a small part of a large war, but they still had significant meaning.⁶²

The last group of African-Americans to be addressed were those who also served in the ETO, but at a good distance from harm's way. They were, in fact, perhaps the most unique group of service persons of all the women of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. Major Charity Adams commanded the 6888th and eventually became the highest-ranking African-American female during World War II.

Women have contributed, in some form or fashion, to the American military cause dating back to the Colonial era. During World War II, they again answered the call. Norman Rockwell's famous poster, "Rosie the Riveter," has come to symbolize the might that women added to the effort from the industrial realm. They, however, also donned military uniforms while serving in the Women's Army Corps (WAC).⁶³ The primary role of the WAC was to free men to be used for combat duties. During the war, more than 140,000 women served in the WAC,⁶⁴ and 6,500 of them were African-American.⁶⁵ Being minorities and women, they had to deal with the "twin problems" of racism and sexism. Despite the twin problems, the 6888th deployed to Europe in February 1945 and accomplished its mission.

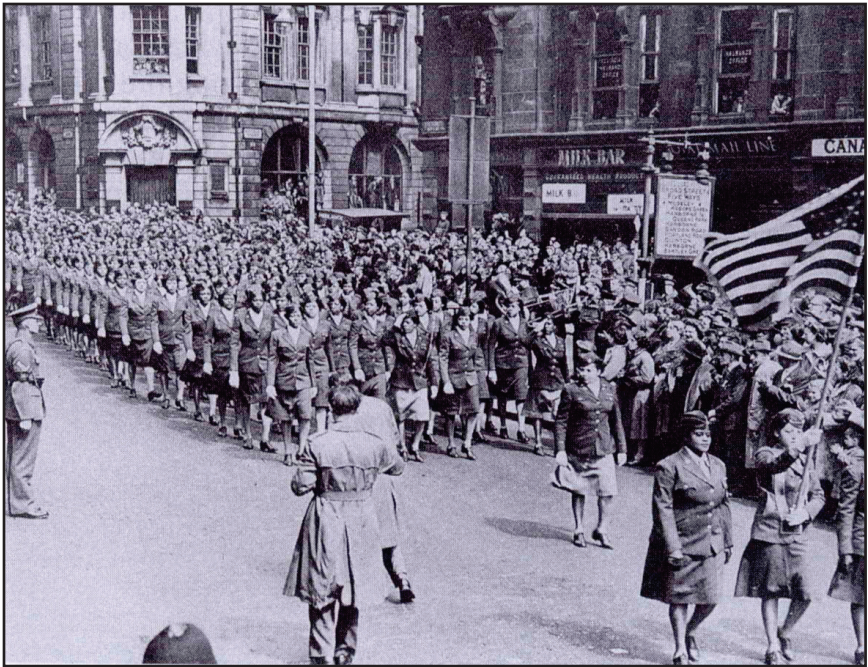
By February 1945, white WACs had long been receiving assignments to overseas duty. The black press noted that African-Americans saw no reason why black WACs, who had been in service from its inception, were all stationed stateside. In mid-December 1944, Adams' commanding officer asked, "How would you like to go overseas?" She had a matter-of-fact answer, "when I first entered the service I wanted to go . . . [now] it makes no difference to me. . . . If I get orders to go, I'll go."⁶⁶ In February 1945, five companies, eventually totaling more than 800 women, arrived in England. Their mission was to sift through, sort, and redirect stalemated mail to frontline soldiers who were pushing Hitler's army to the Rhine River.⁶⁷ Adams and Captain Abbie Noel Campbell, her



Rosie the Riveter.

executive officer, arrived by plane in January. Adams and the more than 900 African-American WACs who served overseas were all volunteers. Other volunteers did not successfully complete an intense screening and rigorous training process. Training included physical examinations, gas mask drills, obstacle course drills, and so forth.⁶⁸ It can be said that the women of the 6888th were among the finest caliber of soldiers, male or female, to serve their country.

On 12 February, the main body that arrived in England was greeted by Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. On 15 February, Lieutenant General John C.H. Lee, ETO Commander, Communications Zone, led them in a mass parade for Davis' review. Shortly thereafter, the 6888th went to work for the war effort. By February, the Battle of the Bulge was over, and most frontline soldiers, indeed all soldiers in the ETO had not received mail for months. Any person who has spent time in uniform and away from loved ones understands the importance of a simple letter. In fact, one of the mottoes in the ETO was "no mail, low morale."⁶⁹ Thus, the significance of the 6888th's contribution was in morale building. Its task was a monumental one.



The 6888th Central Postal Battalion participating in a V-E Day parade in England.

Margaret Y. Jackson, who served as an enlisted soldier in the 6888th and later earned a Ph.D. from Cornell University, recalled:

When the unit arrived at a rambling old discarded boys' school in Birmingham, England, we were, after settling in our quarters, shown a gigantic auditorium with an extremely high ceiling. It contained nothing but mountains of mail and packages that almost touched the ceiling. Understandably, we were both appalled and intimidated by this extraordinary sight. Our orders were to redirect this mail, getting it to the ever-moving troops on the front lines and throughout the ETO. Of course, we realized the enormity of the task ahead of us: the necessity of reestablishing for thousands of constantly uprooted soldiers ties with their loved ones, relatives, and friends. These ties, we felt, would strengthen their morale and, hence, improve the overall performance of their duties, whatever they were.⁷⁰

There were more than 7 million U.S. personnel in the ETO who required mail. This included Marine Corps and Navy personnel as well. In addition to what Jackson described, there were "six airplane hangars of Christmas packages [that] had been returned to the United Kingdom from the continent during the Battle of the Bulge."⁷¹ The mission was made even more difficult due to the fact that many names were duplicates. For example, there were over 7,500 Robert Smiths.⁷² Often their nicknames, such as Bert, Bob, Robby, Rob, or Bobby were used. In such cases, the WACs had to resort to serial/service numbers. Additionally, Bert or Bobby may have been serving in a fast-moving frontline unit; therefore, he was likely to have submitted several address changes per month, which made the task of locating them that much more difficult.⁷³

The battalion commander explained:

The system worked as follows: Every piece of mail was subjected to attempted delivery at the address on the face of the envelope. If the mail was undelivered at that address, it was sent on to the directory service, where an address card was on file for all U.S. personnel in the ETO. The directory service checked the files for a new address, and the mail item was forwarded for attempted delivery again. Each time a piece of mail was handled, the date and initials of the handler were noted on the face of the envelope. Each piece of mail was "worked" for thirty days and, if undeliverable, was returned to sender.

As a result of this regimen, more than 65,000 pieces⁷⁴ of mail per shift were handled, and mail finally reached thousands of soldiers.⁷⁵ To accomplish this task, the 6888th worked seven days a week in three 8-hour shifts.⁷⁶ The mountains of mail soon became only small hills.

With few exceptions, one involving a general officer who failed to receive his mail, the 6888th received high praise for the work it accomplished while serving in Birmingham, England, and Rouen and Paris, France, between February 1945 and March 1946. The greatest rewards, however, according to Jackson, were from the soldiers on the streets who recognized them and knew who they were. “Wherever we went after work hours” in Birmingham, stated Jackson, “we were constantly approached by servicemen . . . profusely thanking us for the packets of mail and packages that they had been expecting for weeks or months, but had received only after our arrival.”⁷⁷

Indeed, the approximately 824 enlisted WACs and their 31 commissioned officers, at peak strength, were never on the frontlines in harm’s way. They never had to fire a weapon at the enemy, and they never slept on the cold ground while enemy artillery fell from overhead. In some small way, perhaps enormous to many soldiers, they contributed to the victory in Europe.⁷⁸

These ETO vignettes about the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, Red Ball Express, 761st Tank Battalion, infantry replacement platoons, and the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion have been carefully selected to offer the reader a look at some of the various ways African-Americans contributed to the war effort. There are similar service experiences in the Pacific, in Alaska, three of the seven engineer regiments that built the Alaska Highway were African-American units, and in China-Burma, 60 percent of the engineers who worked on the Ledo Road were African-Americans.⁷⁹ Also, in March 1944, elements of the reactivated 93d Infantry Division began entering combat in Bougainville, and its sister division, the reenacted 92d Infantry Division, entered combat in Italy in August 1944. The 93d ended the war with a laudable record. The 24th Infantry, which was attached to it, was awarded a battle star for the unit’s campaign ribbon, and members were eligible for combat infantrymen’s badges. The 92d ended the war with the reputation of one of the worst divisions in the Army.⁸⁰

Perhaps the most celebrated of all World War II African-American units was the 332d Fighter Group, better known as the Tuskegee Airmen. The 332d Fighter Group consisted of the 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302d Squadrons. From the time the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first squadron of the 332d to be activated, flew its first mission on 2 June 1943 until the 332d Group was deactivated on 19 October 1945, over 900 African-American pilots had flown more than 15,000 sorties. Collectively, the

group had destroyed roughly 350 enemy aircraft on the ground and at least 111 in air-to-air combat, destroyed 17 vessels and 57 locomotives, and never lost an Allied bomber to enemy aircraft while on escort missions.⁸¹ The 555th PIR, the first African-American airborne soldiers, was trained in 1944. Before the war ended, the 555th PIR had conducted 376 fire-fighting missions—smoke jumps—in over 1,000 individual jumps on the U.S. Pacific Coast. The 555th PIR's mission was to fight fires that had been started by Japanese atmospheric balloons that were launched from Japan, drifted over the Pacific Ocean, and were designed with an incendiary device that started a fire as the balloons descended on the U.S. West Coast.⁸²

No one can say with certainty whether World War II would have turned out differently for the United States and its Allies if men and women of African descent had been left on the sidelines. What can be said with certainty, however, is that without their service and contributions, many of the successes that the United States achieved would have been very difficult to achieve or would not have occurred at all. A significant reason why Patton's and other armies were able to push full steam ahead in 1944 and 1945 without concern for dwindling LOCs was due, in large part, to units such as the Red Ball Express. Further, one contributing reason why those tank and infantry units were able to sustain their momentum in the push across the Rhine during the closing months of the war was because of the 761st Tank Battalion and individual black infantry volunteers. Similar conclusions can be made for the contributions of the 6888th Postal Battalion in Europe, the 93d Infantry Division in the Pacific, the Tuskegee Airmen over the skies of Europe, and a host of other African-American units that answered the call to the fray in either the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, WAC, or Army Air Corps.

Although this discourse may seem to end on a cliff-hanging note, the fact of the matter is that it ends where the story of African-American military participation begins to take a significant turn. Shortly after World War II ended, President Harry S. Truman signed EO 9981, which dramatically affected the post-World War II military. We will discuss EO 9981 briefly in the conclusion. The significant point for this chapter, is that the resilient determination of African-Americans during the interwar years and during World War II helped get the nation to a point where it was no longer realistic to deny them, men or women, full and equal participation in military service. The obvious answer to why EO 9981 was issued is World War II.

Although blacks were still used sparingly as fighting soldiers during World War II, their contributions could not be downplayed. Had World War II lasted well into 1946, there is little doubt that African-Americans would have played an ever-increasing role as combat arms soldiers, sailors, air corpsmen, and marines.

World War II was indeed the turning point for African-Americans in military service. It was not so much what they accomplished on the battlefield as it was what happened as a result of their service. The most significant difference between World War II and earlier wars was that African-Americans were not completely disbanded from the military when the war ended.

From chapter 1, where we saw persons of African descent choosing to fight for freedom, to chapter 4, where we saw African-Americans choosing to fight for equality, the one constant that remained the same through the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, and World War II was the black fighting patriotic spirit. The black soldier in 1780, fighting for freedom for himself from foreign oppression, believed in America; the soldier of African descent, who was fighting for freedom at Battery Wagner on 18 July 1863, believed in America; the black soldier in 1918, fighting for his rights as a citizen that had been granted to him a half-century earlier, yet denied them, believed in America; and, the African-American soldier who fought for equality in 1944, after his forefathers had already theoretically secured his equality, believed in America. It all can be summed up in the words of an unknown World War I African-American soldier who said, "My country, right or wrong, my country."

Notes

1. Extracts from Memorandum for the Commandant, Army War College, 30 August 1924, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. IV, Item 124.
2. Ibid.
3. Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, DC: Center of Army History, 1994), 32-41.
4. Ibid., 25.
5. Gary A. Donaldson, *The History of African-Americans in the Military* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 1991), 103; Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 133.
6. Walter White to General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff, 10 September 1931, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. IV, Item 150.
7. Walter White to General Douglas MacArthur, 15 September 1931, Ibid., Item 151.
8. Major General George Van Horn Mosely, Acting Chief of Staff to Walter White, 21 September 1931, Ibid., Item 152.
9. Robert R. Morton, Principal, Tuskegee Institute, to President Herbert Hoover, 27 October 1931, Ibid., Item 154.
10. General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff, to Dr. Robert R. Morton, 18 November 1931, Ibid., Item 156.
11. Pittsburgh *Courier*, 19 February 1938 to 28 September 1940.
12. *Crisis*, February and March 1939.
13. John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 53, 170-71.
14. Lee, 75-76.
15. Marvin Fletcher, *America's First Black General: Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., 1880-1970* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989) 83-85.
16. William L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960, reprint 1990), 57-59. Shirer's classic book is perhaps the most detailed account of the Third Reich. Students interested in studying the rise of Hitler and the Third Reich should refer to this discourse.
17. Ibid., 177.
18. Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995), 2.
19. "Negro Marines in World War II," RG 107, National Archives, Washington, DC, 1-6.
20. "The Negro in the Marine Corps," *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. VI, Item 112, 1-2.
21. *The Golden Thirteen: Recollections of the First Black Naval Officers*, Paul Stillwell, ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), XVII.
22. Historical Selection, Bureau of Naval Personnel, "The Negro in the Navy in World War II," Washington, DC, 1947, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. VI, Item 101.
23. "The Negro in the United States Navy," *Crisis* (July 1940), 200-201.
24. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 186.
25. "New Navy Policy," *Crisis* (May 1942), 166.
26. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 143.
27. "Proudly We Served: The Men of the USS Mason," Video, Blue Jacket Enterprises, 1995.
28. Lieutenant Dennis Denmark Nelson, USNR, "The Integration of the Negro Into the United States Navy: 1776-1947," (Master's Thesis, Department of Sociology, Howard University, 1948) 158.
29. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 192.

30. *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters From Black Soldiers in World War II*, Phillip McGuire, ed. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), XXVI-XXVII. The irony here is that within 35 years draft boards had swung 180 degrees. During the Vietnam conflict, minorities, the poor, and less-educated Americans were drafted at a disproportionately higher rate. Thirty percent of eligible blacks versus 18 percent of eligible whites were drafted during the 1960s. See John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro American* (New York: Knopf, 1947; reprint New York: Knopf, 1988), 488. African-Americans fit the bill for all three categories.
31. Lee, 415.
32. Nalty, *Strength for the Flight*, 164.
33. Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), 371-72. Lee, 592.
34. "Black Veterans Recall Their Role in D-day Invasion," *Jet Magazine* (20 June 1994), 4-6, 8.
35. One veteran tells of a jeep driver who was missing for two days. When the driver finally returned, his captain asked him where he had been. In anger the driver replied, "On that goddamn Red Ball Express. I accidentally got into one of their convoys and it was 100 miles later before I could get a chance to turn around."
36. *The Invisible Soldier: The Experience of the Black Soldier, World War II*, Mary Penick Motley, ed. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 188.
37. Lee, 633.
38. All the information in the preceding paragraphs on the Red Ball Express was derived from Lee, 632-33; Motley, 187-88; and Department of Defense Publication, *Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 99-101.
39. On Christmas Day, a second all-black tank battalion, the 784th Tank Battalion, entered the ETO. The 758th Battalion, the third all-black tank unit, served in Italy, the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO).
40. Unless otherwise footnoted or a direct quote, the information in the following paragraphs detailing the 761st Tank Battalion is derived from the following sources: Captain Ivan H. Harrison, 761st Tank Battalion, Commanding, to the Commanding General, U.S. Forces, European Theater, 25 July 1945, "Recommendation for Award of Distinguished Unit Citation." National Archives, Suitland, MD, RG 497, Entry 427, Box 16792; Captain August W. Bremer, 761st Tank Battalion, S-2 Report, 6 August 1945, "761st Tank Battalion Wiped Out Equivalent of Three or Four German Divisions During Combat Period In Europe," National Archives, same RG, entry, and box; Captain Ivan H. Harrison, 761st Tank Battalion, Commanding, to the Commanding General, U.S. Forces, European Theater, 22 November 1945, "Recommendation for Award of Second Cluster to the Distinguished Unit Citation," National Archives, same RG, entry, and box; David J. Williams, *Hit Hard* (New York, 1983); Major Joseph A. Kahoe, Jr., (Ret.) oral interview conducted by this author, 8 December 1994; Trezzvant W. Anderson, *Come Out Fighting: The Epic Tale of the 761st Tank Battalion, 1942-1945* (Salzburg, Austria: Salzburger Druckerei und Verlag, 1941); George S. Patton, Jr., *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1947; reprint New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 153; Lee, 121, 584-85, 672-79; Motley, 149-66. *Hit Hard* was written by a veteran white 761st company commander. *Come Out Fighting* was written by a black reporter who traveled with the 761st during the war.
41. Motley, 157.
42. The Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for Extraordinary Heroism to the 761st Tank Battalion, U.S. Army, President Jimmy Carter.

43. Ibid. Furthermore, the 761st rarely got the chance to fight as a battalion. Joseph Kahoe, a platoon leader in Alpha Company, explains, "Now one of our problems was that . . . we had been trained to fight, hopefully as a battalion, but most of the time as a company and never any lower than a platoon. But when we got with the infantry it was just the opposite. . . . so, the way [we] were utilized is the thing that got to us because we weren't trained that way. But it worked out."
44. Williams, 143. Privately, however, Patton had some reservations. Shortly after his visit to the 761st, Patton wrote in his memoirs, *War As I Knew It*, "I inspected and made a talk to the 761st Tank Battalion. A good many of the lieutenants and some of the captains had been my sergeants in the 9th and 10th Cavalry. Individually they were good soldiers, but I expressed my belief at that time, and have never found the necessity of changing it, that a colored soldier cannot think fast enough to fight in armor." Whether Patton would have changed his views if he had had time to edit his memoirs is only speculation. He died in a jeep accident in December 1945.
45. Captain Harrison, 761st Tank Battalion, 25 July 1945, "Recommendation for Award of Distinguished Unit Citation," National Archives, Suitland, MD, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 16792.
46. Anderson, 25.
47. Kahoe interview.
48. Captain Harrison, 761st Tank Battalion, 25 July 1945, "Recommendation for Award of Distinguished Unit Citation," National Archives, Suitland, MD, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 16792.
49. Anderson, 89, 92.
50. Ibid., 92.
51. Letter, Dwight D. Eisenhower to General Bruce C. Clarke, 29 May 1967, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. V, Item 101.
52. Draft Memorandum, Commanding General, Communications Zone, ETO, for Commanders of Colored Troops, Com Z, 26 December 1944, Ibid., Item 98.
53. Bureau of Public Relations Press Branch Release, 29 March 1945, Ibid., Vol. V, Item 100; Lee, 693.
54. Ibid., 695.
55. Bureau of Public Relations Press Branch Release, 29 March 1945, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. V, Item 100.
56. Lee, 697, 699.
57. Army Service Forces, Information and Education Division, "Opinions About Infantry Platoons in White Companies of 7 Divisions," 3 July 1945, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. V, Item 102.
58. Lee, 698-707.
59. Ibid., 698.
60. Ibid., 697.
61. Army Service Forces, Information and Education Division, "Opinions About Infantry Platoons in White Companies of 7 Divisions," 3 July 1945, *Blacks in the Armed Forces*, Vol. V, Item 102.
62. The 761st Tank Battalion also received its replacements as a result of the 26 December call for volunteers. See Anderson, 57; Lee, 691.
63. On 15 May 1942, Public Law (PL) 77-554 established the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The WAAC was not an official part of the Army. On 1 July 1943, the WAAC became the WAC, an official corps of the Army, meaning these women were now soldiers.

64. Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1990), 25.
65. Martha S. Putney, *When the Nation Was in Need: Blacks in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 1. Putney was a World War II WAC officer, then Martha S. Settle. This author interviewed Martha S. Putney, Ph.D., on 9 December 1994.
66. *Ibid.*, 121.
67. Charity Adams-Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 144, 147-48. Margaret Barnes Jones, recorded interview, sent to this author, 3 January 1995.
68. Putney, 99; Adams-Earley, 122, 125.
69. Adams-Earley, 151.
70. *Ibid.*, 100.
71. Adams-Earley, 14, 150-51.
72. Many have undoubtedly seen the movie "Saving Private Ryan." The episode where actor Tom Hanks indeed finds a Private James F. Ryan, who turns out not to be James Francis Ryan, exemplifies the same problem the women of the 6888th experienced with mail.
73. Adams-Earley, 149.
74. *Ibid.*, 148.
75. Putney, 103; Adams-Earley, 151.
76. Adams-Earley, 150.
77. Putney, 101-102.
78. *Ibid.*, 99.
79. Lee, 609-10.
80. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 169-74.
81. History of the 332d Fighter Group, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Roll B0279, Classification GP-332-HI, Frame 0835, October 1942-1947. Special Accounts, 332d Fighter Group, April 1945, Frame 1753; Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., *American: An Autobiography* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991), 137. Davis commanded the 99th and eventually the 332d.
82. For more on the 555th PIR, refer to Bradley Biggs, *The Triple Nickles: America's First All-Black Paratroop Unit* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1986).

Conclusion

Although black service members had fought in just about every American military conflict, with the possible exception of the Mexican-American War, hoping to obtain equality, there was little noticeable progress. Progress, however, was just on the horizon.

After nearly 400 years of service on America's battlefields, progress in the military, once it came, was swift for black servicemen. One decade after World War II ended, the military was virtually desegregated, although not completely integrated. Two decades later, it was, arguably, fully desegregated and integrated. What factors contributed to these rapid changes? Some have credited President Harry S. Truman's EO 9981 for the quick change, while others have credited the Korean war. In actuality, it was perhaps a combination of both.

On 26 July 1948, Truman issued EO 9981, which directed that "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin."¹ As a result, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and newly formed Air Force all made some strides to integrate. The Air Force, however, was the only service to actually make any substantial progress. This was due, in large part, to the fact that the Air Force was a young service, not yet a year old, when the order was issued. The other services just simply failed to put much effort into integrating. Clearly, EO 9981 needed some type of enforcement organization or some event to force services to follow its mandates.² The event soon came.

In a surprise move on 25 June 1950, North Korean Communist forces attacked U.S.-supported South Korea. Within five years of victory in Japan (V-J Day), the United States found itself once again in conflict in Asia. Just like in 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the United States was not ready. Unlike in 1941, when United States involvement in the European war was imminent and some prewar preparations had been made, no prewar preparations had been made in 1949 and 1950, nor were many Americans interested in preparing for war. American forces went onto the Korean battlefield ill prepared and without the will of a nation to prepare itself for war.

During the initial stages of the war, the nation went into the fight as it always had, with all-white units.³ High casualties soon plagued American forces. Due to apathy toward the war in Korea, Americans were not swarming to join the ranks as they had in 1939 to 1942. The

only viable manpower pool to select from was African-American units already in service. In an unprecedented move, albeit a somewhat forced one, American commanders were forced to substitute white soldiers and units with black soldiers and units into the fray. It was well documented that the first black unit to enter into battle on the Korean peninsula, the 24th Infantry Regiment, performed poorly—as did most American units during the initial stages of the war. It was also true that by the time the Korean war was over, black soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines had gained a place of respect among the men and women they had served with in the Pacific.⁴ For the first time since the Spanish-American War, two black soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor.⁵ By the end of the Korean war in 1953, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps in the Pacific had indeed become an integrated force. The military in Europe was still segregated, while the military in the United States was slowly moving toward integration. It appears that the bloodshed of war forced the military to do something that the Fahy Committee could not, implement



Companies B and C, 24th Infantry, battle Communist counter-attack on rocky mountain slopes on the Western Central Front.

the mandates of EO 9981.⁶ Where great hardship did not exist, in Europe and the United States, progress was slow.

During the peaceful years between the Korean war and the official start of the Vietnam war, the military defied social odds and indeed became a fully integrated and desegregated force.⁷ This did not mean that being in the military one was not racially discriminated against when outside the confines of a military installation. Secretary of State and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin L. Powell remembers one particular night very well in Columbus, Georgia, right outside Fort Benning, “Home of the Infantry,” in 1964.

One night, exhausted and hungry, I locked up the house and headed back toward the post. As I approached a drive-in hamburger joint on Victory Drive, I thought, okay I know they won't serve me inside, so I'll just park outside. I pulled in, and after a small eternity, a waitress came to my car window. ‘A hamburger, please,’ I said.

She looked at me uneasily. ‘Are you Puerto Rican?’ she asked. ‘No,’ I said.

‘Are you an African student?’ She seemed genuinely trying to be helpful.

‘No,’ I answered. ‘I’m a Negro. I’m an American. And I’m an Army officer.’”

‘Look, I’m from New Jersey,’ the waitress said, ‘and I don’t understand any of this. But they won’t let me serve you. Why don’t you go behind the restaurant, and I’ll pass you a hamburger out the back window.’

Something snapped. ‘I’m not that hungry,’ I said.⁸

As early as 1955 on most military installations, black soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines no longer had to sit at the back of the bus, in the balcony of the theater, swim in separate pools, or sit outside to hopefully be served a hamburger. On duty, they were treated equally and received the same pay and allowances as their white counterparts. These great strides during the decade between Korea and Vietnam did not come without a high price.

During the Vietnam war, the concept of using black soldiers took a 180-degree turn from the sentiments when World War II ended, only two decades earlier. In 1945, although blacks had received limited recognition as fighting soldiers and had proved themselves capable in several previous

wars, they were not viewed as such. Even in 1950 when the Korean war broke out, no black fighting soldiers were seriously considered until the necessity for manpower became evident. By 1966, the United States was deeply involved in its third war in Asia, another unpopular war. High numbers of black soldiers were there from start to finish due to several factors. To increase the number of fighting soldiers, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's regime instituted Project 100,000, which eased qualification standards for military service. The project's goal was to assist "the unemployed and poorly educated by lowering standards, admitting them to the armed forces, and teaching them skills they could not otherwise acquire."⁹ Although Project 100,000 was started with ostensibly benevolent sentiments, it primarily attracted the poor, uneducated, minority individuals. Many African-Americans fit perfectly into all three categories. It is not surprising, then, that a shocking 41 percent of the young men inducted as a result of Project 100,000 were black.

African-Americans were more susceptible to the draft. Many affluent whites found loopholes to avoid the draft, while most of the uneducated found themselves filling the voids created by those vacancies. Two examples of how unfair the draft boards were is that only two of 1,500 draft-age men in one Harvard graduating class went to Vietnam, while 25 men from a working-class Boston neighborhood with a population of 35,000 were killed in action.¹⁰ Throughout the 1960s, blacks were drafted at a 30-percent rate, while whites were drafted at an 18-percent rate.¹¹

As a result of Project 100,000 and unfair draft boards, African-Americans finally got what they had sought for more than 300 years, easy and fair entrance into the military. By 1967, blacks were about 11 percent of the American population constituted more than 14 percent of the soldiers in combat units and were estimated to be a staggering 23 percent of all combat casualties during the early years of the war.¹² Over the course of the entire war, however, African-American casualty rates were about 12.4 percent, which was just over 1 percent higher than their national percentage.¹³ Similar shady draft and substituting practices put many Civil War-era poor whites in uniform while affluent whites stayed on the sidelines and watched. Eventually, these programs led to changing the phrase that had been coined during the Civil War by white soldiers as being "a rich man's war, poor man's fight" to a "white man's war, black man's fight" during the Vietnam war.

These practices, future programs, and figures would not be completely lost on black America. Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as if clairvoyant, recognized the coming imbalance early and

publicly came out against the war as early as 1965. Three years later, on 4 April 1968, when King was assassinated, many black soldiers who had previously paid little or no attention to the antiwar rhetoric, immediately began to take note. Riots broke out in military units in all services. The Army, and indeed all military services, remained in a state of crisis for much of the next decade. Mixed in with this were the additional social problems of high drug and alcohol use, limited discipline, and lack of respect for authority. Everyday racism became the norm rather than the exception. Several events came to fruition before things started to change for the better—the all-volunteer Army, the ending of the Vietnam war, and the establishment of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida.

In 1973, the Army went to an all-volunteer force. Blacks, as well as poor whites, could no longer claim that their sons were being inducted into a “meat grinder” against their will to fight for a nation that was not willing to fight for them. The intent of President Richard M. Nixon’s administration was to reduce racial tensions, and it was successful in doing so. When the war ended in April 1975, the healing process began. As in any event, there has to be closure, good or bad, for progress to take root. In 1979, the Department of Defense took the initiative to accelerate the healing process by establishing the DEOMI. Initially established as the Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI) in 1971, in addition to adding human relations to the race relations curriculum, DRRI’s mission was to establish racial harmony within the ranks by training Air Force personnel who would then be instructors at other installations around the country. Because of DRRI’s success, it was renamed DEOMI to incorporate the broader mission to support all services.¹⁴ Equal opportunity training is still conducted at Patrick Air Force Base today.

By the mid-1980s, the American military was, without a doubt, once again the premiere fighting force in the world, both externally and internally. It has remained the most powerful force to this day and has proved itself to be on several occasions, most notably during Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama in 1989 and Operation DESERT STORM in the Persian Gulf in 1991. During both conflicts, African-American soldiers made up more than 25 percent of the fighting forces, and the top soldier was Powell, that same young soldier who could not buy a hamburger outside of Fort Benning in 1964.



General Colin L. Powell with troops in the Gulf during Operation DESERT STORM. (Department of Defense)



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin L. Powell using the “six-gun” method to call on reporters at the Pentagon. (Department of Defense)

Still, there are hurdles and barriers to cross. One question that is well beyond the scope of this study but needs further examination is, Why, even without a draft, was the African-American military population so high in the post-Vietnam conflicts? By just scratching the surface, two distinct answers come to the forefront. The first is truly ironic. Blacks had finally achieved what they had been fighting for the past 300-plus years—full equality, acceptance, and respect as servicemen from their white counterparts. When they flew military aircraft, they flew like their white counterparts. When they sailed as the commander of a destroyer fleet, they sailed like their white counterparts. When they commanded troops in peacetime as well as war, they commanded like their white counterparts. And, when they studied and taught at the service academies, they studied and taught like their white counterparts. For the most part, the Army cliché that proudly states, “the only color in the Army is green” is genuinely true and can be applied to all branches of service.

The second answer to why the black military population was—and indeed still is—high, was because much of America still had not followed the example set by the military and hired people based on their capabilities. As a result, while the economy may have been bright for some high school and college graduates, it was often dim for others. Thus, the military looked very attractive to many African-Americans. An article in *Military Review* synthesizes it clearly:

Direct economic incentives such as pay, cash bonuses, loan repayment programs and college money appeal most to those who have the greatest economic disadvantages. . . . In America, this means mostly poor, predominately inner city (and in some cases rural) youth. Continuing with business as usual will lead to an ‘economic conscription.’ Our military manpower acquisition programs will appeal only to the more disadvantaged segments of American youth.¹⁵

I believe that, given the relative success that African-Americans have achieved in the military in the past 50 years alone, the service of those World War II warriors was not in vain. Given the inroads that black men and women in uniform, and indeed all African-Americans, achieved during the World War II years, the service of those SOS troops and black doughboys on the Flanders fields in France during World War I was not in vain. Given the birth of the “new Negro” as a result of the pride that World War I soldiers brought back to America in 1919, the service of units such as the Native Guards, First South Carolina, 54th Massachusetts, and

First Kansas during the Civil War was not in vain. Given the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments that were each direct results of the American Civil War, the service of those American Revolution warriors was not in vain. So, like a domino chain, it took the combined advancements from all the wars mentioned in this discourse, in conjunction with the political and social struggles, and the help of Americans—both white and black—to put the black soldier, sailor, airman, marine, and coast guardsman on the same foundation as his white comrade in arms.

Notes

1. Lieutenant Dennis Denmark Nelson, USNR, “The Integration of the Negro Into the United States Navy, 1776-1947” (Master’s Thesis, Department of Sociology, Howard University, 1948), 161.
2. In actuality, President Truman had established the Fahy Committee in 1948 to ensure that his EO was being implemented. However, an executive order is not a law; therefore, implementation was still essentially at the discretion of each service.
3. The American Revolution, as was seen in chapter 1, was the one exception.
4. For many years, the 24th Infantry Regiment was labeled a unit of “cowards” who were neither willing nor able to fight. Indeed, when it went to the front and met the North Korean forces, it turned and ran. It quickly discovered that it was no match for the foe it had encountered. These actions were well publicized. The actions of the 24th Infantry, however, were exactly the same as the actions of most other American units that went to the Korean front during summer 1950. Only, as has been seen before in this study—especially during World War I, the 24th Infantry was held to a higher standard. Recent scholarship sponsored by the U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) has finally told the full story. It does not exonerate the 24th for its actions; it simply puts them into perspective. For a full account see William T. Bowers et al., *Black Soldier/White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea* (Washington, D C: CMH, 1996).
5. In 1997, President William J. Clinton awarded five World War II veterans the Medal of Honor posthumously. A sixth veteran was alive to receive his award.
6. The Fahy Committee, named for Georgian Charles Fahy, the committee chairman, who was a former U.S. Solicitor General, was formed in August 1948 to ensure that the Army, Navy, and Air Force carried out President Truman’s EO 9981 directives. The Fahy Committee asked each service to develop a program that would support EO 9981’s mission of desegregating the forces. The Fahy Committee was to then monitor—it could not force—the progress and report to President Truman. In January 1949, the services submitted their plans. Except for the Air Force, very little progress had been made to desegregate the military by the time North Korea crossed the 38th Parallel.
7. There was never an official declaration of war for the Vietnam conflict. Chronology of U.S. involvement is vague as to when and exactly how the United States officially got embroiled in Vietnam. As early as September 1945, America began to support French efforts to recolonialize Vietnam. In August 1950, the Military Assistance Advisory Group arrived in Vietnam. In October 1955, the United States recognized the rigged election of Ngo Dinh Diem, an anti-Communist. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy sent Special Forces to Vietnam. By the time the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was enacted on 7 August 1964, the United States already had a long history of involvement in Vietnam. For a complete and detailed chronology, see George Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994).
8. Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 107-108.
9. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 299. Also see Gary Donelson, *History of African-Americans in the Military* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 1991), 157-58, 161.
10. Bernard C. Nalty, 298.
11. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947; reprinted New York: Knopf, 1988), 488.
12. *Ibid.*, 491; Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984), xiv.

13. Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Equal Opportunity, "Negro Participation in the Armed Forces" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), Vol. XIII, item 61.
14. Nalty, 316, 331, 333, 346. Donelson, 171.
15. Major Keith B. Hauk, U.S. Army, and Colonel Greg H. Parlier, U.S. Army, "Recruiting: Crisis and Cures," *Military Review* (May-June 2000), 75-76.