

AMERICAN PATRIOTS

THE STORY OF BLACKS IN THE MILITARY
FROM THE REVOLUTION
TO DESERT STORM

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World War II

THE DOUBLE V

The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries . . . then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within. For surely those who perpetuate these ugly prejudices here are seeking to destroy our democratic form of government just as surely as the Axis forces.¹

—James G. Thompson, a cafeteria worker at Cessna Aircraft, from a letter written in January 1942 to the Pittsburgh Courier

I. PEACE

THE BATTLE TO CHANGE THE JIM CROW MILITARY

In December 1941 Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, sent a proposal to General George C. Marshall, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, urging the creation of a volunteer Army division “open to all Americans irrespective of race, creed, color, or national origin.”² White believed that such a division would “set a new and successful pattern of democracy.” He was inspired by the actions of young Roger Starr, a recent graduate of Yale, who had read his article in the *Saturday Evening Post* about how discrimination against blacks in the army and private industry “was retarding our preparations for what everyone feared but understood was coming.”³ Starr told White that he planned to ask his draft board to let him serve with black troops, not as an officer but as an enlisted man. The NAACP released his letter to the press. Starr became something of a celebrity, and the NAACP was suddenly inundated with letters from other young whites pledging to follow Starr’s example. Drafted in 1943, Starr was eventually dropped into China by the clandestine Office of Strategic Services (OSS), but his request to enlist in a black unit kept him out of officer candidate school and followed him wherever he was assigned in the Army.

"With elaborate casualness," Walter White mentioned his proposal for a nonsegregated division at a talk at the University of California at Berkeley in mid-1942.⁴ "An avalanche of young men" poured down the aisle at the end of the meeting. "Ah want to be the first as a native of Jawja to volunteeah for youah mixed division," a young southerner told White. "A lettah will be too slow—Ah'm goin to telegraph the Wah Depahment." Despite "sympathetic support" from Assistant Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson, the War Department remained unmoved. "The tradition-bound and prejudice-indoctrinated majority," wrote White, felt that "we must not indulge in social experimentation in time of war."

Roy Wilkins, editor of *The Crisis*, had been "bleakly amused" in 1940 when the Nazi theorist Hans Habe described life for black Americans under a global Third Reich. "Germany would control their jobs and all forms of association that might lead to assimilation," Habe said. Voting, intermarriage, and access to all public accommodations (including roads, streetcars, and motion pictures) would be forbidden under the global Reich. Blacks would also be forbidden to serve in the military, except in labor battalions. For Wilkins, it could have been a page from American Jim Crow. "Negroes did not need us at the NAACP to tell them that it sounded pretty foolish to be against park benches marked JUDE in Berlin but to be *for* park benches marked COLORED in Tallahassee, Florida," Wilkins remarked in his autobiography, *Standing Fast*. "Negroes were not being sent to any concentration camps, of course," he wrote, "but what a thing to be thankful for."⁵

Home-front fascism was alive and well in America's 1940 military policy. The bases of that policy were the racist 1920 report on the use of black troops and a 1925 Army War College study stating that blacks were "physically unqualified for combat duty" because the black brain weighed ten ounces less than the white. Blacks, moreover, "subservient" by nature and believing themselves "inferior" to whites, were "susceptible to the influence of crowd psychology" and unable to control themselves in the face of danger. Thus, the War Department would not "intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organization." Neither would it assign "colored Reserve Officers other than of the Medical Corps and Chaplains" to existing black combat units of the regular Army.⁶

What blacks called the "Negro is too dumb to fight" policy was backed by statistics. Twenty percent of blacks, and 74 percent of whites, had the highest Army grades of 1, 2, or 3. Eighty percent of blacks, and 26 percent of whites, were in 4 and 5, the lowest achieving grades. Seventy-five percent of black registrants came from southern states or

border states, where four out of five blacks had not even completed the fourth grade of grammar school. Seventeen percent of blacks, as compared with 41 percent of whites, had graduated from high school.⁷ The policy was to blame blacks themselves, rather than their limited educational and economic opportunities. The Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, was in favor of overlooking white illiteracy, however: "The Army had adopted rigid requirements for literacy mainly to keep down the number of colored troops and this is reacting badly in preventing us from getting some very good but illiterate [white] troops from the southern mountain states," he wrote in his diary.⁸

American racial policy in World War II is the story of the struggle between what Walter White called the "decent" and the "bigoted." Commander-in-Chief Franklin D. Roosevelt proved a master at juggling the two to serve both his better instincts and his political purposes. His wife was free to speak out, mostly because he agreed with her and because he famously, and usefully, could not "control" her. But no black issue, from making lynching a federal crime to desegregating the military, was more important than appeasing the southern wing of the Democratic Party.

Unfortunately, the day-to-day running of the war was in the hands of far less enlightened men than Roosevelt—men like Henry L. Stimson and the secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox. Stimson, whose diaries revealed his racial prejudice, had been secretary of state under Herbert Hoover. Frank Knox, a colonel in World War I, had been the publisher of the *Chicago Daily News* and was the Republican vice presidential candidate in 1936. As a Rough Rider in the Spanish-American War, Knox had fought side by side with black cavalry. He said at the time that he had never seen "braver men" anywhere, yet, invoking "tradition," would adamantly combat Roosevelt's efforts to integrate the Navy.

Eleanor Roosevelt took it upon herself in World War II, as she had in the Depression, to see to it that black civilians and service members got as fair a deal as possible. "The nation cannot expect the colored people to feel that the U.S. is worth defending if they continue to be treated as they are treated now," she said to a group of District of Columbia churchwomen shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.⁹ "I am not agitating the race question," she said. "The race question is agitated because people will not act justly and fairly toward each other as human beings." In *No Ordinary Time*, her wonderful history of the Roosevelts during the war years, Doris Kearns Goodwin reports this exchange: "Looks like we're entertaining most of the blacks in the country tonight," remarked C. R. Smith, president of American Airlines, at a White House meeting.

"Well, C.R.," Mrs. Roosevelt replied, "you must remember that the President is their President also."¹⁰

Mrs. Roosevelt consistently brought black demands to the attention of those who could actually change things. In the first week of February 1943, she received a letter from Sergeant Henry Jones of the 349th Aviation Squadron, based at Carlsbad, California. The men in his unit were "loyal Americans," he wrote.¹¹ "The fact that we want to do our best for our country and to be valiant soldiers, seems to mean nothing to the Commanding Officer of our Post as indicated by the fact that 'Jim Crowism' is practiced on the very grounds of our camp." Complaints focused on discrimination in recreation and transportation. The post's theater had a thousand seats, but blacks were relegated to twenty seats in the last row. They could buy refreshments at the post exchange but, unlike white soldiers, they could not eat there. On buses to and from camp, blacks had half a row of seats in the back. Most were forced to walk. "We do not ask for special privileges," Jones wrote; "all we desire is to have equality; to be free to participate in all activities, means of transportation, privileges and amusements afforded any American soldier." There were 121 signatures on the letter.

Mrs. Roosevelt wrote to Henry Stimson, but received no reply. She then wrote so many letters to George Marshall on the subject that he assigned two members of his staff to respond. The War Department mandated segregation but it officially opposed "discrimination"—a fine line involving "treatment" rather than "condition." Marshall was persuaded to make changes. He may have been influenced by his World War I experience of discovering, en route to France, that black stevedores were not assigned lifeboats, but were expected to use floating debris.

On March 10, 1943, within a month of Jones's letter, the War Department officially banned segregation in all recreational facilities, "including theaters and post exchanges," in all services. "White" and "Colored Only" signs were also forbidden. In July 1944, the department finally directed that "all buses, trucks or other transportation owned and operated either by the government or by government instrumentality will be available to all military personnel regardless of race."¹² It also stated that "restricting personnel to certain sections of such transportation because of race will not be permitted either on or off a post camp, or station, regardless of local civilian custom."

The South was outraged. Blacks complained of beatings, shootings, and killing of those who disobeyed Jim Crow transportation rules. A black Army nurse, Lieutenant Nora Green, stationed at Tuskegee Army Air Forces training school in Alabama, was beaten and thrown into jail

for refusing to move from a "white" bus seat while traveling from the base to the town. When the NAACP protested to the War Department and the Department of Justice, "Lieutenant Green was ordered not to talk about it," wrote Walter White, "and the case was hushed up."¹³

Carlsbad's Jim Crow regulations were no different from those in most camps, where black officers were routinely insulted and where black enlisted men, denied regular military privileges and recreational facilities, were excessively court-martialed and given "less than honorable" discharges. Blacks lived in separate, vastly inferior quarters. They received separate, often vastly inferior training, and were given vastly inferior weapons and equipment. In some Army camps, black soldiers were forced to sit behind German or Italian POWs for all entertainment, including United Service Organizations (USO) shows. The War Department argued that since it "could issue only one rule," the Jim Crow rule, which could apply "South and North alike," was most convenient.¹⁴

As in World War I, no blacks in World War II were awarded the Medal of Honor. Acts of black heroism, except the most undeniably extraordinary, were always overlooked—not by white commanders in the field, who were often surprisingly fair about frontline medal recommendations for black enlisted men, but by superior officers at headquarters, who usually filed the recommendations in wastebaskets. World War I was actually marginally better than World War II. Blacks who fought with the French in 1917–1918 were treated like soldiers and heroes, but the 500,000 black American men and women who served under their own flag in Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific in the 1940s would have bitter memories of the military. Despite Allied complaints and official War Department interdiction, the U.S. military enforced American-style racism wherever it went. Black GIs fought fascism on two fronts in World War II—at home and abroad, where, as often as not, the enemy wore an American uniform.

THE SELECTIVE SERVICE ACT AND THE ELECTION OF 1940

On September 1, 1939, World War II broke out in Europe. Most Americans considered this less important than the issue of Roosevelt's coming third term. The 1940 election was far more preoccupying than the steady encroachment of Japan and Germany on their respective continents. By May 1940, having already taken Peking, Shanghai, Nanking, and Hangchow, Japan was determined to conquer China. The Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek had joined forces with the Communists Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai against the common foe. Germany looked equally un-

stoppable; it controlled Central and Eastern Europe and the Low Countries and was about to take France, where the entire British Expeditionary Forces, their backs to the sea, were trapped in the north at Dunkirk. In a miraculous nine-day amphibious evacuation, a military-civilian armada of pleasure boats, fishing boats, tugs, and battleships saved the beleaguered BEF. "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be," said Prime Minister Winston Churchill, with the clarion fervor that helped sustain the country through the worst of the Battle of Britain. "We shall never surrender, and even if . . . this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and liberation of the old."

Despite vocal and well-financed isolationism, Americans had begun to understand that they would soon be joining the war. Roosevelt gave the order for rearmament in the summer of 1940. Late that summer, while Congress debated the new Selective Service Act, an NAACP-led drive against discrimination in the military went into high gear. The 230,000-man peacetime U.S. Army had fewer than 5,000 blacks. Senator Robert Wagner, a Democrat from New York, introduced an amendment declaring that no one could be denied the right to volunteer because of creed or color. Hamilton Fish introduced another amendment outlawing discrimination in the selection and training of men. Fish was an anti-New Deal isolationist but an ally of the NAACP. And Rayford W. Logan, who taught at Howard University and was chairman of the integrated Committee for the Participation of Negroes in National Defense, reiterated black demands for "equal opportunity" and black military service "in proportion to their numerical strength in the whole population."¹⁵

The military managed to circumvent Wagner's and Fish's nondiscriminatory language. In its final incarnation, the Selective Service Act stated that no man would be inducted unless he was "acceptable" to the Army and "until adequate provision shall be made for shelter, sanitary facilities, medical care and hospital accommodations." "Acceptable" could mean anything, and "adequate provision" meant segregation. Walter White and A. Philip Randolph asked to meet with Roosevelt to protest, but Steve Early, FDR's press secretary, chose not to respond to their request. When FDR signed the act on September 14, 1940, blacks flocked to recruitment centers only to be turned away because the Army had too few segregated facilities.

That same month, Eleanor Roosevelt spoke at the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters convention, pledging her "faith, cooperation and

energy" to make America a place of equality and opportunity for all. She received a standing ovation. That night she wrote to her husband about the need for a conference on "how the colored people can participate in the armed forces." "There is a growing feeling amongst the colored people," she wrote, "[that] they should be allowed to participate in any training that is going on in the aviation, army, navy. . . . This is going to be very bad politically besides being intrinsically wrong and I think you should ask that a meeting be held."¹⁶

The week of the Pullman convention, fifteen messmen who had joined the Navy on the promise of learning a trade wrote an open letter to the black newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier*. "We sincerely hope to discourage any other colored boys who might have planned to join the Navy and make the same mistake we did," they wrote. "All they would become is seagoing bellhops, chambermaids and dishwashers. We take it upon ourselves to write this letter regardless of any action the Navy authorities may take. We know it could not possibly surpass the mental cruelty inflicted upon us on this ship."¹⁷ Never given the opportunity to defend themselves in court, the signers were placed in the brig, indicted for conduct prejudicial to good order, and given dishonorable discharges. Hundreds of messmen immediately began protesting in open letters to black papers. Meanwhile, the Navy secretary, Knox, refused to let black reporters attend his press conferences.

Within a week of Mrs. Roosevelt's memo and the Navy messmen's letter a White House meeting was arranged to discuss military discrimination. White, Randolph, and T. Arnold Hill (former secretary of the Urban League) met with assistant secretary of war Robert Patterson, Knox, and the president. White and Randolph emphatically urged the "immediate and total abolition in the armed services of segregation based on race or color." Roosevelt, apparently sympathetic, promised to look into possible methods of "lessening, if not destroying, discrimination."¹⁸ An NAACP memo urged that Army officers be assigned without regard to race, that specialized personnel like doctors and dentists be integrated, that Navy assignments other than menial services be opened to blacks, that blacks be placed on selective service boards, that aviation training centers for blacks be established, and that black civilian assistants be assigned to the secretaries of Navy and War.

"Why not put white and black regiments in the North side by side?" Roosevelt asked. Then, in case of war, "the thing gets sort of backed into."¹⁹ Knox was discouraging. "We have a factor in the Navy," he said, "that is not so in the Army, and that is that these men live aboard ship. And in our history we don't take Negroes into a ship's company." Knox

(who was, of course, wrong about U.S. naval history) remained adamant. Clearly somewhat desperate about his beloved Navy, Roosevelt suggested that "Negro bands" be put on ships to accustom white sailors to a black presence. The meeting ended in a stalemate but Roosevelt promised to reconvene. "According to [Patterson] it was a rather amusing affair—the President's gymnastics as to politics," wrote Secretary of War Stimson in his diary. "I saw the same thing happen 23 years ago when Woodrow Wilson yielded to the same sort of demand and appointed colored officers to several of the Divisions that went over to France, and the poor fellows made perfect fools of themselves. . . . Leadership is not embedded in the Negro race."

There was no second meeting—only silence from the White House. Then, on October 9, Steve Early announced the official new government policy on blacks in the Army and Navy. It gave with one hand and took away with the other. Yes, black strength in the Army would reflect the percentage of blacks in the population. Yes, black combat and noncombat units would be organized in every branch of the service, including the formerly barred-to-blacks Air Corps and Marines. Yes, blacks would have the opportunity to attend officer training schools. But all officers in present and future black units, except for three existing black regiments, would be white. And although blacks and whites would enjoy equality of *service*, they would not be integrated into the same regiments because that would "produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparation for national defense." Concessions had been granted, but not the ones White and Randolph really wanted. "Far from diminishing Jim Crowism," White wrote, "the new plan actually extended it."²⁰

Roosevelt faced a race relations crisis in the election of 1940, when 19 percent of black men were still unemployed and some had come to refer to the New Deal as the "Dirty Deal." Many responded favorably to the Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie. The 1940 Republican platform pledged that "discrimination must cease" and that blacks "be given a square deal in the economic and political life of this nation." The Democratic platform's less forthright pledge to "uphold due process and the equal protection of laws for every citizen regardless of race, creed, or color" was that party's first platform reference to blacks in the twentieth century. Angered by continuing military segregation, blacks were openly questioning Roosevelt's policies.

"I am an old campaigner and I love a good fight," Roosevelt said at the great Madison Square Garden rally of October 28, 1940, where he masterfully castigated Republican congressmen Joseph Martin, Bruce Barton, and Hamilton Fish for their anti-British isolationism, making a

game of their names: "Martin, Barton, and Fish." Later that night Steve Early kicked James Sloan, a black New York City policeman, in the groin for blocking his path to the presidential train. Republicans had a field day. Early's victim proved to be a New Deal loyalist. "If anybody thinks they can turn me against our great President who has done so much for our race because of this thing they are mistaken," said Sloan, from his hospital bed.²¹ While Steve Early was reported disconsolate at the possibility of costing FDR the black vote, black leadership seized the moment. "The Negroes are taking advantage of this period just before the election to try to get everything they can in the way of recognition from the Army," wrote Secretary Stimson in his diary.²²

Black leaders had four demands. They wanted Judge William Hastie, the first black elevated to the federal bench, appointed assistant secretary in the War Department. They wanted Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., the highest-ranking black officer, promoted to brigadier general. They wanted Major Campbell C. Johnson, also black, named an assistant to the selective service director. And they wanted the desegregation of the armed forces. These demands were granted—except for desegregation.

Two of the great black trailblazers of World War II, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., and Judge William Hastie, figured in the four demands of 1940. The third, Dr. Charles Drew, figured in the crucial background history of the war. Drew's research and development into the properties of blood radically advanced medicine and made a difference in life and death on the battlefield. Hastie and Drew, like Davis, came from prominent middle-class families in Washington, D.C. Hastie and Drew were also graduates of Dunbar High School, the best black high school in the country.

BENJAMIN O. DAVIS, SR.

When World War II broke out, five of the five thousand black members of the U.S. Army were officers. Three of these were chaplains. The father-son duo of Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., and Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the latter the first black graduate of West Point since 1889, were the sole line officers.

Like most experienced black combat officers, Colonel Davis had sat out World War I in the Philippines. His career trajectory was typical, given the perceived necessity to avoid assigning a black officer to a position in which he would either command white enlisted men or outrank other white officers. Between 1905 and 1940, Davis was four times professor of military science and tactics at Wilberforce University. He was

twice the U.S. military attaché in Liberia, and twice professor of military science and tactics at Tuskegee, where he stood ramrod straight on his front porch in a white dress uniform as the Ku Klux Klan paraded in front of his house. He was an instructor in the black 372nd Ohio National Guard, and, in 1938, commanding officer of New York's 369th National Guard Regiment (of World War I fame). As America's first black general, Davis commanded the 4th Cavalry Brigade, all black, with mostly white officers. He requested that his son, Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., become his aide. General Davis would become a War Department troubleshooter in World War II. Most black soldiers regarded him as an Army public relations figure: they knew that there was little he could do within the military structure to change conditions.

WILLIAM HASTIE

Born into the black Republican middle class of Knoxville, Tennessee, William Hastie moved to Washington when his father took a job as a clerk in the U.S. Pension Office (an important job for a black). At Harvard Law School, his constitutional law professor, soon to be associate justice of the Supreme Court Felix Frankfurter, called him "not only the best colored man we have ever had but he is as good as all but three or four outstanding white men that have been here during the last twenty years." Hastie would not have been flattered. "This notion that Negroes have to be better than other people is about as disgusting as the notion that Negroes are inferior," he wrote in 1931, when he was twenty-seven. "As a matter of fact, I very much fear that they are rationalizations of the same thing."²³ Like the other Dunbar graduates, Hastie had been educated to believe in his own excellence. Self-confidence also came from belonging to Washington's education-oriented black middle class. Coming from a community that was both sophisticated and segregated, he had an acute understanding of the subtleties of racism.

Hastie returned to Washington after Harvard and became a partner in the Washington law firm of Charles Houston, a black World War I officer and civil rights activist. A member of Roosevelt's "black cabinet," Hastie served from 1933 to 1937 as assistant solicitor in the Department of Interior, under Harold Ickes. In 1937, Roosevelt appointed him federal judge of the U.S. District Court of the Virgin Islands, the first black federal judge in history. (He was then one of only 1,175 black lawyers in the United States.) Four years later he was appointed assistant secretary in the War Department. His job was to help develop policy on the fair and effective use of black manpower in the U.S. armed forces, but his office

soon became the focal point for black GI mail decrying military racism. While his appointment was seen as a crucial step in achieving the integration of the armed forces, his strategy of "locating the problem, investigating it, and achieving quick remedial action" was effected "within the confines of segregation." There were some victories, however. Under pressure from Hastie and the NAACP, the War Department withdrew a January 1942 order from a Pennsylvania camp stating that "any association between the colored soldiers and white women, whether voluntary or not, would be considered rape."²⁴

Hastie resigned from his War Department position in 1943 to protest continued segregation in Army and Air Force training. Between 1939 and 1949 he figured as co-counsel in twelve of the nineteen Supreme Court cases argued by Thurgood Marshall on behalf of the NAACP and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. "There were, in the forties, two citadels of civil rights in the United States," wrote Gilbert Ware, an early biographer. "One was the NAACP, the other was Howard University Law School; and both were what they were largely because of William Hastie."²⁵

CHARLES DREW

One of America's 3,939 black physicians, Charles Drew was a classmate of Hastie's at Dunbar High School. Drew was Best Athlete (four letters) and Most Popular Student, and Hastie was valedictorian. They were classmates again at Amherst, where Drew won an athletic scholarship (and an honorable mention as the Eastern Division All-American half-back) and Hastie, again valedictorian, graduated magna cum laude.

Drew, whose mother was a Howard graduate, was born in his maternal grandmother's sixteen-room house on E Street in Washington, D.C. His father was the financial secretary and only black member of Local 85 of the Carpet and Linoleum Layers Union. With the red hair and freckles of his Irish grandfather, young Charles could almost pass for white. Later in life he would tell people that he had decided on medical school when an Amherst dean remarked, "Mr. Drew, Negro athletes are a dime a dozen."²⁶ Rejected by Howard University Medical School for deficiency in English credits, he enrolled instead at Montreal's McGill University—where, as "Charlie" Drew, he won Canadian championships in track and field. In 1935, after two years of internship and residency in Montreal, Drew became an assistant surgeon at Howard University's Freedmen's Hospital. The hospital's white chief surgeon, Dr. Edward L. Howes, recommended him for advanced training at Columbia University.

Midway through his first year at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, Drew began to research blood chemistry and transfusion under Dr. John Scudder. By 1938, Scudder and Drew knew more about blood transfusion and preservation than anyone in the world. Drew wrote to his fiancée that he dreamed in his "wildest moments" of "playing some part in establishing a real school of thought among Negro physicians and guiding younger fellows to levels of accomplishment not yet attained by any of us."²⁷ Two years later Scudder and Drew developed their own blood bank at Presbyterian. In June 1940 Drew became the first black to receive the degree of doctor of science in medicine. His dissertation, "Banked Blood," was the size of the New York City telephone directory. Drew was set to return to Howard, but the war in Europe intervened.

In the late summer of 1940, John Scudder was invited to head the American Red Cross "Blood for Britain" program. He urged the Red Cross to give the job instead to Dr. Drew, who was also recommended by an old McGill friend, Dr. John Beattie, now chief of transfusion services for the British Royal Air Force. The Battle of Britain had shown the desperate need for banked blood in cities under aerial attack. "Blood for Britain" was actually blood plasma—blood protein and fluid without red blood cells—which Scudder and Drew had discovered to be more convenient and storable. Drew recommended that all plasma be processed in one laboratory and collected in refrigerated mobile units. (Thermo Control truck refrigeration was patented in 1940 by Frederick McKinley Jones, a black inventor whose portable cooling units were also used in the cockpits of B-29 bombers.) The first shipment of "Blood for Britain" left New York in August 1940. By January 1941, Britain was able to produce its own plasma. Drew now became director of the New York City Red Cross Blood Bank, in charge of blood collection for the U.S. armed forces.

The inevitable problem of what to do about "black blood" was confronted in the winter of 1941, when the military ordered white blood only. Blood segregation was mandated by the military—not the Red Cross. When blacks began to be wounded and killed in numbers, black donors' blood was collected for black use. In the meantime, blacks received blood from white donors. Drew was initially ineligible to donate blood for his own program.

"Dr. Drew is not known to have murmured" against the policy, said Dr. W. Montague Cobb, a black Amherst classmate. Others reported that he made one public statement. In any case, Drew resigned in the spring of 1941 and returned to Howard as a professor and chief of surgery. Perhaps he had decided not to protest because his eye was on an-

other prize: he was creating his black medical "school of thought." As chief of staff to a generation of black physicians who called him Big Red, Drew was building esprit de corps in the black medical community. "In the individual accomplishments of each man lies the success or failure of the group as a whole," he wrote to a friend. "The success of the group as a whole is the basis for any tradition which we may create. The sense of belonging is of extraordinary importance. . . . The sense of continuously being an outsider requires the greatest type of moral courage to overcome before actual accomplishments can be begun."²⁸

Drew remained an eternal outsider in the white medical community. He was a surgical consultant to the U.S. Surgeon General, the first black examiner for the American Board of Surgery, and a fellow of the U.S. chapter of the International College of Surgeons, but was rejected throughout his life for membership in the American Medical Association. He died in 1950, at the age of forty-six, in a car accident in North Carolina. In death, his extraordinary achievements were capped by the legend that Drew (like Bessie Smith) had died because a white hospital refused to admit him. The hospital did, in fact, admit black patients, although they were kept in the basement. And the three white attending physicians not only knew exactly who Drew was, but made extraordinary efforts to save his life. Nothing, including blood transfusions, could have succeeded.

LEND-LEASE, THE DEFENSE FUND, AND THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

February 1941 was a dark time for Britain. At home, the Royal Air Force valiantly confronted the Luftwaffe as British civilians suffered relentless aerial bombardment. Abroad, British Tommies faced Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's vaunted, and so far victorious, Afrika Korps in North Africa, and Hong Kong was poised to fall to the Japanese.

"Sail on, O Ship of State! / Sail on, O Union, strong and great! / Humanity with all its fears, / With all the hopes of future years, / Is hanging breathless on thy fate!" read FDR's handwritten copy of a verse by Longfellow—delivered by his onetime rival Wendell Willkie to Prime Minister Churchill in February 1941. "Give us the tools and we will finish the job," Churchill replied with thunderous optimism in a worldwide broadcast.

Condemned by isolationist Republicans, the Lend-Lease Act of March 1941 allowed the President to transfer munitions and supplies from congressionally appropriated money to "the government of any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the

U.S." Churchill called it "the most unsordid act in the history of any nation." As one Londoner put it, "Thank God! The tanks are coming."²⁹ Lend-Lease not only gave eleventh-hour support to the British, it enabled the defeat of the Germans in Russia, by financing the pivotal Red Army victory at Stalingrad. At the three-way Yalta conference of 1945, Stalin toasted Churchill as "the bravest governmental figure in the world," for standing alone against Hitler. And he saluted Roosevelt as the man "with the broadest conception of national interest; even though his country was not directly endangered, he had forged the instruments which led to the mobilization of the world against Hitler."³⁰ Roosevelt had first used his presidential powers to save America from the Depression. Now he used them to save the world from Germany and Japan. Lend-Lease was decidedly anti-isolationist, but it also reflected the miracle of American industry's seemingly overnight conversion from peacetime to wartime production.

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"Negroes will be considered only as janitors," announced the general manager of North American Aviation in the spring of 1941. "We have not had a Negro working in 25 years and do not plan to start now," Standard Steel informed the Urban League. "It is not the policy of this company to employ other than of the Caucasian race," said California's Vultee Air.³¹ Discrimination in the defense industry had become a major issue.

A. Philip Randolph decided to mobilize his troops. "You possess power, great power," he said, addressing the black community early in 1941. "The Negro stake in national defense is big. It consists of jobs, thousands of jobs. It consists of new industrial opportunities and hope. This is worth fighting for. . . . To this end we propose that 10,000 Negroes march on Washington." The march was scheduled for July 1, 1941. By the first week of June, there were march committees in eighteen cities, North and South. It appeared that blacks were prepared to go to Washington, "crying for their rights," wrote the young Washington journalist Murray Kempton, "to the boundless embarrassment not merely of politicians but of the arsenal of democracy which had forgotten them."³²

In late May, Roosevelt wrote to William Knudsen and Sidney Hillman, the directors of the Office of Production Management, with a novel suggestion. Why not take "Negroes up to a certain percentage in factory order work?" he asked. "Judge them on *quality*—the first class Negroes are turned down for 3rd class white boys." Knudsen, the conservative head of General Motors, and Hillman, leader of the liberal and integrated Congress of Industrial Organizations, both turned him down. "If we set a

percentage," they wrote, "it will immediately be open to dispute; quiet work with the contractors and the unions will bring better results."³³

Although both Roosevelts were sympathetic to Randolph's demands, they were firmly opposed to the March on Washington and asked him repeatedly to call it off. Mrs. Roosevelt was emphatic: she called the march a "very grave mistake" and insisted that any "incident" could create "even more solid opposition" from certain groups in Congress. But Randolph continued to mobilize for July 1.

On June 18, Randolph and Walter White finally met with the president. Also at the White House that afternoon were Robert Patterson, Frank Knox, Knudsen, Hillman, and three New Deal liberals: Aubrey Williams, head of the National Youth Administration; New York City's mayor, Fiorello H. La Guardia; and Anna Rosenberg, the regional director of the Social Security Board for New York.

Bypassing the famous FDR charm, Randolph went straight to the point. The march would be called off only if the president issued an executive order banning segregation in defense industry jobs. "Well, Phil, you know I can't do that," Roosevelt had said. "In any event I couldn't do anything unless you called off this march of yours." The president asked Randolph how many people were expected. He was clearly stunned when Randolph told him that 100,000 marchers were ready to come. "It is clear that Mr. Randolph is not going to call off the march," said Mayor La Guardia, and he suggested they begin to "seek a formula." Despite angry opposition from Knudsen, Roosevelt asked Randolph to "make a draft of the kind of order" he wanted issued. The final order, written by a young government lawyer named Joseph Rauh, banned defense industry discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, and national origin. Executive Order 8802, forbidding discrimination in industries holding government contracts for war production, and in training for jobs in war industries, was signed on June 25, less than a week before the scheduled march, which was then called off.³⁴

Executive Order 8802 also established the Fair Employment Practices Commission. Responsible only to the president, the FEPC had the power to investigate and take action against discrimination. By early 1942, thanks to FEPC pressure, more than half of government contractors had committed themselves to integration. Black shipyard employment rose from six thousand to fourteen thousand in a year. In 1940 the aircraft industry had no blacks; by 1942 it had five thousand. Black women now had a choice between domestic service and war work, although they often had the worst jobs, working with ammunition, gunpowder, and poisonous plastics. The FEPC was effectively killed in 1944,

8: World War II

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when the agency was placed under the control of the southern-dominated Congress, which ultimately refused to fund it. But by the end of the war blacks, who had been 2.5 percent of workers in war production, made up nearly 10 percent—and black union enrollment had increased by 700,000.³⁵

“The American people are united as never before in their determination to do a job and do it well,” Roosevelt said in a radio address in October 1942, after a tour of defense factories.⁴⁹ But he was disappointed that some employers were still reluctant to hire women, blacks, or older people. “We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudices or practices,” he said. Home-front battlegrounds now included the urban North, where black and white southerners both flocked for defense work. One of the worst of the wartime race riots took place in Detroit in the spring of 1943, when 26,000 white Packard workers went on strike to protest black employment. (Walter White heard one striker yell that he would rather Hitler and Hirohito won the war than work next to a “nigger” on the assembly line.) Between May and August 1943, race riots in Detroit, Mobile, Los Angeles, and New York City left forty dead and twelve hundred injured. The Harlem riot in August, which began when a black soldier objected to the way a white policeman spoke to a black woman, saw five blacks killed, four hundred people of both races injured, and property damage estimated as high as \$5 million.³⁶

THE BLACK PRESS AND “DOUBLE V”

The black press was vital to black GIs, headlining military racism and serving as an outlet for their rage. It would be criticized for spotlighting acts of discrimination and equating them with Nazi practices, as well as for giving voice to black sympathy for Japan. (“If Japan goes down every black man’s rights will go down with her,” New York’s *Amsterdam News* was quoted as saying in “Japanese Propaganda Among the Negro People,” a 1939 confidential report prepared, according to the FBI, for the Chinese government.³⁷) Critics of the black press included the president, the FBI, the Army, the Office of War Information, the Office of Censorship, the Office of Facts and Figures, the Post Office, and even many black GIs, who would blame it for “pushing” them into combat. Unlike its white counterpart, the black press had virtually no lucrative advertising accounts and depended on readership alone for survival. Charging hard at discrimination, black publications grew in circulation and influence during the war. In 1933 the average total circulation was 600,000; by 1940 that figure had more than doubled, to 1,276,600—and by the end of 1945 it would reach 1,808,060.

Military intelligence reported in January 1941 that John Sengstacke, publisher of the *Chicago Defender* and founder of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, had encouraged blacks to protest military discrimination by becoming conscientious objectors. In the summer of 1941, the *Defender* praised a speech by Dr. Harold M. Kingsley, of Chicago’s Church of the Good Shepherd, in which he said that blacks must fight in any future war but must not give up the battle against discrimination at home. “It is sound wisdom,” said Kingsley, “that we fight both of these battles at the same time.”³⁸

Sengstacke was one of twenty black columnists, editors, and publishers who met with General George C. Marshall and other Army officials on December 8, 1941—the meeting had been scheduled before Pearl Harbor—to discuss Army discrimination. Marshall impressed the group when he stated that he was “not personally satisfied” with the progress made toward ending discrimination in the Army. He praised black enlisted men and said a black division might be formed. Optimism turned to anger, however, when at the end of the meeting Colonel Eugene R. Householder read a prepared statement: “The Army is not a sociological laboratory,” he said. “To be effective it must be organized and trained according to principles which will insure success. Experiments to meet the wishes and demands of the champions of every race and creed for the solution of their problems are a danger to efficiency, discipline and morale and would result in ultimate defeat.”³⁹ This line—the official Army position on integration—was to be repeated many times.

In the spring of 1942, administrators of the Office of Facts and Figures, directed by the poet Archibald MacLeish, met with fifty black editors and civic leaders to discuss ways to improve morale among black civilians as well as military members. Despite directives opening all branches of the service to blacks, the Marines and Coast Guard still refused black enlistment, while the Navy still accepted blacks only as stewards and messmen. To add insult to injury, although the Red Cross had finally accepted blood from black donors—it stressed, under military orders, that their blood would be strictly segregated. Such headlines in the black press as “Red Cross Has No Use for Negro Blood” and “Negro Air Raid Warden Will Be Trained in Jim Crow Classes” raised government hackles. The FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover, recommended voluntary press censorship. The black press had no intention of censoring itself—it planned to go further many times in any number of ways over the next decade, as the struggle for integration went from a dream to a reality.⁴⁰

If the black press had a sometime enemy in FDR, it had a friend in Francis Biddle, the Justice Department solicitor general, who became the U.S. Attorney General in September 1941. “In so far as I can, by the use

of the authority and the influence of my office, I intend to see that civil liberties in this country are protected," Biddle told *The New York Times* in 1941, "that we do not again fall into the disgraceful hysteria of witch hunts, strike breakings and minority persecutions which were such a dark chapter in our record of the last World War."⁴¹ Biddle integrated the new Justice Department cafeteria, and instructed division heads to increase the number of black lawyers. Threatening to resign as an honorary member of the Federal Bar Association if blacks were excluded, he forced a policy change.

By mid-1942, the tide was turning on black morale and the black press began to relent. There were now blacks in the Air Corps, the Marines, the Coast Guard, and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. As racial policies changed, the Double V campaign was softened. Importantly, the black press got its first white advertisers. Philip Morris, Chesterfield and Old Gold cigarettes, Pepsi-Cola, Seagram's whiskey, Pabst Blue Ribbon beer, and Esso oil began advertising in the larger papers. The danger of sedition charges had passed. "The Negro press throughout the country, although they very properly protest, and passionately, against the wrongs done to members of their race, are loyal to their government and are all out for the war," Biddle said in a speech in Philadelphia in 1943.⁴² It had been determined by the White House, as well as the Justice Department, that enemy propaganda would thrive if black papers were suppressed, because that would leave no source to which blacks could turn for news about themselves.

The black press had been campaigning for access to Roosevelt's press conferences since 1933, but it faced a veritable brick wall in Steve Early. Then, in the last week of May 1943, the administration made its first concession. Black reporters were admitted to the White House and the congressional press gallery for twenty-four hours, to cover the visit of Liberian president Edwin Barclay. In July, Biddle suggested to Roosevelt that a black reporter be admitted to White House press conferences. Roosevelt liked the idea.

On February 8, 1945, Harry S. McAlpin of the *Atlanta Daily World* became the first black correspondent accredited to a White House press conference. "I'm glad to see you, McAlpin, and very happy to have you here," Roosevelt said, reaching out his hand, and flashing a "genuine smile of friendliness" from the desk where he sat for press conferences, surrounded by standing reporters.⁴³ When Roosevelt died in April 1945, McAlpin was one of thirteen reporters allowed to cover the funeral service. Originally twelve whites were selected, but Jonathan Daniels, FDR's last press secretary, pointed out that a black should be included. Black editors and publishers met with President Harry Truman as soon as

he assumed office, but black journalists were not admitted to the congressional press galleries until 1947.

II. WAR

DORIE MILLER AT PEARL HARBOR

The first American hero of World War II was black. On December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor, Dorie Miller was a messman on the burning deck of the U.S.S. *West Virginia*. Miller, the shy twenty-two-year-old son of a Texas sharecropper, carried the ship's mortally wounded captain to safety, then manned an antiaircraft gun to bring down what witnesses said were four Japanese planes (officials listed two). Miller had never been taught to fire the antiaircraft gun; it was against Navy regulations for blacks to do so. Only when the ammunition was exhausted and the *Arizona* was sinking beneath him did he abandon ship. It took three months for his heroism to be officially recognized.

The first Navy dispatches from Pearl Harbor described him as an "unidentified Negro messman." Apparently embarrassed that the first hero of the war was black, the Navy found a white hero in Captain Colin Kelly, killed on December 9 in a crash-dive onto the Japanese battleship he had just bombed.⁴⁴ When Miller's name was officially released in March, the *Pittsburgh Courier* campaigned futilely for him to receive the Medal of Honor. In May, after considerable pressure from civil rights organizations, he became (to the disapproval of Secretary Knox) the first black to win the Navy Cross. It was presented by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

In a front-page column, George Schuyler of the *Pittsburgh Courier* questioned why it had taken five months for the decoration to be awarded, and why Miller was not brought back to the United States, like white heroes, to boost morale and help sell war bonds. "The Navy finds Dorie Miller too important waiting tables in the Pacific to return him so that his people might see him."⁴⁵ Miller finally was sent home for a national war bond tour in December 1942, one year after Pearl Harbor. Returning to action, he remained a messman until he died on Thanksgiving Day, 1943, when all hands went down on the torpedoed carrier *Liscome Bay*. In the aftermath of Miller's heroics, Navy regulations were changed to require that all hands, including messmen and stewards, receive antiaircraft training. The U.S.S. *Harmon*, launched in 1943, was named for another Navy Cross messman, Leonard Roy Harmon, who had been killed a year earlier in the Battle of Guadalcanal.

AMERICA ENTERS THE WAR

Japan's attempt to destroy the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor caught the professional military, as well as ordinary citizens, by surprise. But America was quick to retaliate. Once it entered the war, it committed all its resources and manpower to secure a decisive victory. By early 1942, the Allied grand strategy was in place: to back Germany into a corner and to take back the Pacific, island by island. A great multinational army was envisioned to choke off Germany. Under British or American command, it would come from North Africa in the south, Britain in the north, and, eventually, Russia in the east. Whereas in World War I, Germany's opponents had reveled in national pride, in World War II they suppressed it. Allied forces, although fighting in national groups, were in many ways treated as a single unit. The term "United Nations" began to be used in 1942, the year that the twenty-six Allied nations pledged not to make separate peace treaties with the Axis powers.

The first half of 1942 was a terrible time for the Allies. Germany controlled most of continental Europe, and British and American soldiers and sailors were forced into a devastating two-thousand-mile retreat from the Philippines to Australia. Japan, which controlled much of China, now seized the Dutch East Indies, Kuala Lumpur, Burma, Singapore, Java, Rangoon, Mandalay, Corregidor, and Bataan—where, in the emergency of the Japanese invasion, elements of the black 25th Regiment fought side by side with white Marines.

Then, in 1942, the tide of war began to turn. Major General Jimmy Doolittle (of the "Flying Tigers") bombed Tokyo and other cities in Japan. The American Navy defeated Japan in the Coral Sea and at the pivotal Battle of Midway. And U.S. Marines landed on Guadalcanal, beginning the process of recapturing the Pacific islands. In Europe the RAF, which had won the Battle of Britain, bombed Berlin; by the end of 1943 there would be round-the-clock bombing of Germany. On the eastern front, in November 1942 the Red Army stopped the Germans at Stalingrad (where Hitler demanded a scorched-earth retreat). And that same month Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, Commander of the Eighth Army, finally defeated Rommel's Afrika Korps at Tobruk.

In late 1942, 400,000 American troops landed in French North Africa, where all Allied armies were placed under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, commander in chief of U.S. forces in the European theater. In July 1943, a multinational Allied force under British command landed in Sicily and captured Palermo. The Sicilian invasion forced Mussolini's ouster and replacement by Marshal Badoglio, a veteran of the Ethiopian War. (Mussolini later set up a short-lived puppet

state in German-occupied northern Italy.) In September 1943, the Allies finally invaded mainland Italy and captured Salerno. Despite the heavy German counteroffensive and the rugged terrain, they swept past Anzio and Monte Cassino to capture Rome on June 4, 1944. It was the first Axis capital to fall. On June 6, D-Day, the greatest amphibious force in history hit the beaches of Normandy in occupied France, to establish a second front. On August 25, General Charles de Gaulle, head of the French Committee of National Liberation (the "Free French"), a World War I veteran who had refused to accept France's World War II capitulation, was given the courtesy of being the first Allied military leader to officially enter liberated Paris.

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World War II, for black Americans, was a matter of "old" and "new." General Mark Clark's calling the black 92nd Division the "worst division in Europe" was old racism. Reputation aside, the 92nd fought and died, and won (belated) Medals of Honor, in Clark's Italian campaign. The 93rd Division, the 92nd's Pacific counterpart, saw action under General Douglas MacArthur on Bougainville and Morotai, but from Hawaii to Australia fought more white racists than Japanese. Despite their anger at military racism, black Americans were elated by the fact that blacks were going to war in revolutionary new ways: there were black fighter pilots, naval officers, Army (WACs) and Navy (WAVES) female personnel, Marines, paratroopers, and armored tank crews. They even won (as usual, belated) Medals of Honor, in integrated warfare during the Battle of the Bulge.

America's first black fighter pilots, the 332nd Fighter Group, led by Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., were in the battle for Sicily and the Italian peninsula, seeing action at Anzio and Monte Cassino. As fighter-escorts over Western Europe and the Balkans, the 332nd flew more combat missions than any other unit in Europe. The squadron's record was unmatched by any other escort group: in two hundred missions they never lost a single bomber. They were probably the first American pilots to meet and down German jets. They were certainly the only fighter pilots, of any color, ever to sink a destroyer with machine guns. Of the 450 black fighter pilots who saw combat during World War II, 65 were killed in action and 23 were shot down to become German prisoners of war. The 332nd Fighter Group won 3 Distinguished Unit Citations, 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Silver Star, a Legion of Merit, 14 Bronze Stars, 744 Air Medals and Clusters, 8 Purple Hearts, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

America's first black Marines, joining the last military service to

open its ranks to black volunteers, saw action in the South Pacific in 1944. Although 75 percent of the seventeen thousand new Marines had some college education, none became officers. They had been accepted in 1942 under segregated training conditions at the black Marine training center at Montford Point, North Carolina; only a token two Marine defense battalions—the 51st and 52nd—were trained for combat. The majority of black volunteers were trained either as messmen and stewards or for noncombat depot and ammunition companies. Depot companies loaded and unloaded ships and hauled supplies onto beaches during offensives. Ammunition companies loaded, unloaded, sorted, and guarded ammunition, moving it to frontline troops. Black Marine defense battalions in the South Pacific, though combat-trained, saw little action—but noncombat depot and ammunition companies, trained only with light weapons, fought and suffered casualties in the bloody battles for Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima. The nine black Marines killed and seventy-eight wounded in action during World War II were not supposed to have come into contact with the Japanese.⁴⁶

America's first black armored combat unit, the 761st Tank Battalion, was called experimental, but General George S. Patton was happy to have them to reinforce his bogged-down Third Army just before the Battle of the Bulge. The 761st fought nonstop from October 31, 1944, to May 6, 1945, in four major Allied campaigns and six European countries. "The German army couldn't see how we could be in so many darned places," said one ex-tanker, Lieutenant Colonel Charles "Pop" Gates, in Studs Terkel's *The Good War*.⁴⁷ (The 730-member battalion, with ten white officers, was actually split into three platoons, with platoons split in two again.) The 761st, whose motto was "Come Out Fighting," spearheaded the American infantry advance through France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Germany, and Austria. In front all the way from the Saar Basin to the "Bulge" to the Siegfried Line, they beat the Russians to the Rhine, spending 183 consecutive days on the front line, more than any other armored battalion, and suffering a 50 percent casualty rate. They also won (belated) Medals of Honor. By November 1945, the 761st had the first black armored combat commander, Captain Ivan H. Harrison.

Although the U.S. military remained rigidly segregated throughout the war, the defense of Bastogne in the Battle of the Bulge saw a brief racial experiment. In January 1945, in the face of great losses and a strong German counteroffensive, a dramatic call went out to all black units for volunteers to replace fallen white GIs. More than four thousand men, mostly from service divisions, were enlisted. At first, volunteers were to be integrated as individuals into white units. But volunteer indi-

viduals soon became volunteer platoons: segregating a platoon was much easier than segregating one person. Black platoons were distributed among eleven combat divisions of the First and Seventh Armies, fighting in the crucial stages of the Battle of the Bulge and the subsequent Allied drive through Germany. Sixty-four percent of white troops had been skeptical when first informed of integrated platoons. Three months later, 77 percent were in favor of them.⁴⁸ Excellent reports appeared on black fighting abilities and black-white relations—but black combat volunteers were immediately (and unceremoniously) returned to their segregated units when the Battle of the Bulge was over.

Roosevelt had promised that black military strength would be 10 percent of the total military, reflecting the proportion of blacks in the United States generally. But three-quarters of blacks in the U.S. armed forces went into service and supply units. Although much of their duty was menial, much was also essential. Black troops built bridges, constructed airfields, drove trucks, and loaded and unloaded ships. Black engineering and transport groups, like the legendary Red Ball Express, built the great war highways: Burma's Stilwell Road and the Alaskan Highway.

More black noncombatants saw action than combat-trained black soldiers. The 387th Separate Engineer Battalion was not a combat unit, but three of its members won Silver Stars at the Anzio beachhead, where sixty-one men were wounded and eleven men and four officers were killed. The 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion was crucial to the initial assault at Omaha Beach. Huge barrage balloons, or blimps, to deter low-flying planes, were installed in the third wave to prevent Luftwaffe strafing.⁴⁹ Members of the 490th Port Battalion, a thousand-man unit of stevedores who landed at Utah Beach on D-Day, were awarded the Croix de Guerre and Bronze Arrowhead for their service to assault troops.

The 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion—the "Triple Nickels"—comprised America's first black paratroopers. Created in 1942, with all black officers, they never saw combat against Axis soldiers, but they did fight an old natural enemy of man. Sent to the Pacific Northwest in the spring of 1945 for the highly classified mission called Operation Firefly, the 555th became smoke jumpers. Firefly was an operation to fight forest fires started by Japanese incendiary bombs that had been carried across the Pacific by silk and paper balloons floating on the jet stream. The bombs' existence was kept secret from the public, to prevent panic. The 555th conducted more than twelve hundred individual jumps, putting out fires and defusing the bombs. The hot, dry summer of 1945 saw the Nickels fighting powerful Pacific Northwest forest fires as well. At the end of 1945, the 555th was administratively attached to General James Gavin's

82nd Airborne Division. They never saw combat with the 82nd, but Gavin insisted that they march in the January 1946 New York City victory parade with the division and wear its battle patches.⁵⁰

The combined efforts of black leaders, the black press, and government and military reformers ultimately brought real change in the status of blacks in the military. Between 1941 and 1945, the number of black enlisted personnel grew from 5,000 to over 900,000, and the number of black officers grew from 5 to over 7,000.⁵¹ Some 500,000 black men and women served overseas in North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific. The Army, with 701,678, had the largest black enlistment. The Army Air Force had 677,966 black enlisted men and 1,050 officers. Sixty-five thousand black men served in the Navy: 53 were officers, but 95 percent were still messmen or stewards at the end of 1945. There were 17,000 black men in the Marine Corps, and no black officers. There were 4 black officers and 4,000 black enlisted men in the Coast Guard. There were 4,000 black women in the Army and Navy, as members of the WACs (Women's Army Corps) and WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).⁵²

The quasi-civilian merchant marine was the most integrated of all World War II services. In 1942, the U.S.S. *Booker T. Washington* became the first U.S. merchant ship with a black captain: Hugh Mulzac, veteran of the British Royal Navy, the World War I merchant marine, and Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line. Although the Navy remained World War II's most segregated service, by the end of the war there was a black midshipman at Annapolis. Wesley A. Brown became the first black graduate of the Naval Academy in 1949. The final battle of military integration was yet to be won, but it had announced its coming in the "Bulge" experiment, as well as in the attitudes of many younger white combat officers.

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

The American public had to be sold on World War II. The Office of War Information (OWI) led the propaganda campaign, aimed at synchronizing popular culture with war goals. Initially led by Archibald MacLeish, writers included E. B. White, Malcolm Cowley, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. In terms of race, the best liberal intentions were always at odds with southern congressmen, who denounced "The Negro and the War," for example, an OWI effort written by Chandler Owen (World War I partner in socialism of A. Philip Randolph). Walking a fine racial line, the OWI also made a military training film, *Teamwork*, that depicted Germans trying to drive a wedge between otherwise

friendly black and white Americans. The best propaganda films, because they used major studio talent, were Hollywood-made, government-commissioned documentaries. Among the best was Frank Capra's production *The Negro Soldier*. Beautifully made, with a cast of real soldiers and attractive nonactors, it was praised by blacks and whites alike and shown everywhere—except the South. *Why We Fight*, Capra's propaganda series (inspired in part by Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi epic *Triumph of the Will*), explained the war as a crusade. It was not merely a matter of helping friends or safeguarding interests; it was, in Churchill's words, a matter of saving "civilization as we know it."

While the powerful print media, such as Henry Luce's *Time* and *Life*, strongly supported black fighting men and favored an integrated military, Hollywood, the most important cultural outlet of all, studiously avoided putting black soldiers into war films. In early 1942, Walter White and Wendell Willkie began a campaign to purge Hollywood of *Birth of a Nation*-esque stereotyping. Preaching brotherhood abroad meant practicing it at home, was their message. David O. Selznick, Walter Wanger, and Darryl Zanuck arranged a meeting of Hollywood VIPs to discuss the issue. Blacks were not asking to be portrayed as heroes, it was pointed out, only as an integral part of the war effort. Willkie argued that many of America's allies disliked Hollywood's cartoon-stereotype depiction of people with dark skin. He also reminded his audience that many of those responsible for Hollywood films "belonged to a racial and religious group" that had been a target of Hitler. Few could have made this point, Walter White noted, "without giving offense," but Willkie was cheered—and *Variety* headlined, "Better Breaks for Negroes in H'Wood."⁵³

White issued a "statement to the Negro public" stressing the importance of blacks being depicted as "normal human beings" instead of menials and comics. He wanted more roles for black actors, as well as black employment on the technical side of production. He added a gentle warning to "those actors in Hollywood who can only play comic or servant roles," hoping that they would not "spoil the opportunity" for change.⁵⁴ In 1942, with the proviso that she would not play menial or demeaning roles, my mother, Lena Horne, was signed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to the first long-term Hollywood contract for a black player. Angry actors who specialized in comic or servant roles called her before a committee to give her a lecture on loyalty. How dare she refuse to play a maid? Everyone else played maids or servants. The only member of the committee to take her side was the first black Oscar winner, Hattie McDaniel ("Mammy" of *Gone With the Wind*).

Stereotyping was now exchanged for tokenism. The 1940s saw a step

forward: 20th Century-Fox's *Crash Dive* (based on the life of Dorie Miller), Columbia's *Sahara*, Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*, and two Humphrey Bogart movies, *Bataan* and *Casablanca*, all featured dignified, *individual* black soldiers and civilians—among the first in American movies. (Bogart had volunteered to help the cause.) None of these movies could be shown intact in the South. Racially vigilant southern censors, who preferred stereotyping to tokenism, would cut blacks out of films until the 1960s. In 1943 two expensive, all-star black movie musicals, *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*, both starring my mother, were banned in the South except for black audiences. They were shown throughout the British fleet, but the American military labeled them for black soldiers only. (When she appeared later in otherwise all-white movies, her scenes were specially shot to be excised in the South.) Black GIs, left out of so much of wartime culture, were vocally grateful to Hollywood for giving them a black pinup. Lena Horne was equally grateful, but sorry and a little embarrassed that black GIs had only one.

Willkie's sudden death in 1944 put an end to the aggressive pursuit of racial balance in American movies. If Hollywood grudgingly acknowledged a black presence, real black heroism was completely ignored.

THE LONELY EAGLES: BENJAMIN O. DAVIS, JR., AND THE 99TH PURSUIT SQUADRON

In January 1941, one day after a Howard University student named Yancey Williams threatened to sue the secretary of war to consider his Air Corps cadet training application, the Army announced the formation of the first black Air Corps unit, the 99th Pursuit Squadron. One-man pursuit flying was the most dangerous of all combat flying, but single-seat fighter pilot training worked best in terms of segregation. Bomber training, for example, would have necessitated separate black training facilities for bombardiers, navigators, and gunners.

With twenty-seven planes, thirty-three officer pilots, and four hundred enlisted technical crew, the 99th Pursuit Squadron was listed as "experimental." Black pilot candidates were chosen according to the same rigid criteria as whites; all were college graduates. Enlisted men had to have a mechanical background and college training. The new million-dollar Army Airfield Tuskegee in Alabama became the center of black World War II military aviation. The 99th Pursuit Squadron was the first unit of the future 332nd Fighter Group. Known to some white Americans as the Spookwaffe, they were also, less elegantly, called Eleanor Roosevelt's niggers. They preferred to be known as the Lonely Eagles.

Black military flying officially began in 1939, when six black colleges were finally permitted to join the Civil Aeronautics Authority Civilian Pilot Training Program, or CPT, providing a pool of pilots for wartime emergency. Charles A. "Chief" Anderson, America's first black licensed pilot, headed the Tuskegee Institute program. In 1933, Anderson and his copilot, Dr. Albert E. Forsythe, had been the first black aviators to make a round-trip transcontinental flight. In 1934, Anderson and Forsythe were the first pilots of any color to go by airplane (as distinguished from a seaplane) from Miami to Nassau, the Bahamas. Anderson became a legendary trainer of future black fighter pilots. In March 1941, to the consternation of the white South, and of the First Lady's Secret Service agents, Chief Anderson gave a clearly delighted Eleanor Roosevelt her first and probably only spin in a two-seater with a black pilot.

One of the most important things to any fighter pilot, of any race or nationality, is style. Fighter pilot style, born in World War I, had already been refurbished by the time America entered the war. American pilots strove to combine the insouciance of Colonel James H. Doolittle's China-based Flying Tigers (inspiration for the comic strip "Terry and the Pirates") with the elan and raffish nicknames of Britain's Royal Air Force. The writer and airman Albert Murray remembered Tuskegee's white pilot instructors as a "wild group" of ex-Flying Tigers, but black American fighter pilots—like Charles "Buster" Hall, Lee "Buddy" Archer, Clarence "Lucky" Lester, Wendell "Hot Rock" Pruitt—put their own spin on daredevil panache. According to the 332nd pilot Lee "Buddy" Archer, whom I interviewed in 1990, most bombers flew twenty-five to fifty missions and most fighters flew fifty to seventy-five, but all black pilots flew at least a hundred. Archer himself flew 139.

A fighter pilot's style was only the outer expression of his "heart," best described in June 1943 by legendary ex-Flying Tiger Lieutenant Colonel Philip Cochran, a friend and mentor of the 332nd. "The fighting heart is what the fighter pilot has to have," said the thirty-three-year-old Cochran ("Flip Corkin" in "Terry and the Pirates") at a press conference in New York City.⁵⁵ "He must feel vicious, he has to want to fight. He's got to be exhilarated. We want him to go into the fight yelling and bouncing up and down in his seat. The fighting heart has to be inside right at the beginning."

Technical Sergeant John "Red" Connell, a white radio operator from Philadelphia, met the 332nd—known as Red Tails, for the red tailpieces of their silver-gray P-51 Mustangs—when he served as a waist gunner on a B-24 Liberator bomber over Europe in 1944. Fighter-escort duty required taking bombers up to their targets, waiting for them, and returning

them to the rendezvous. "On a tough raid, maybe Munich, they would have to beat off fierce German fighter attack—you'd be shooting too," Connell, now an actor, told me over forty-five years later. The 332nd was "different" from other units. "You would look out the window off the wing and see your fighter coverage," he remembered. "Ordinary guys did a certain precision rollover to show you they were friendly, but the Red Tails would roll that wing over and over and float through the formation like dancers. If you didn't know who was in that plane, you *knew*. When you saw them you were happy. They were that hot, that good. They had class and finesse." There were many southerners on Connell's plane, but he never heard a racial remark from anyone. They were "respectful" of the Red Tails.

Conveniently for the Army Air Corps, Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., had always wanted to fly. With Davis in command of the first black squadrons, there was no need for the Army to commission another black line officer.

Born in Washington, D.C., in 1912, Benjamin Davis, Jr., had been "overwhelmed" by his first flight, at a Washington air show in 1926. Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic a year later capped his desire to fly. In October 1935, after receiving aviation training with his West Point class, he had applied for the Air Corps and passed the physical with flying colors. Despite his high class standing, Davis was rejected: he was informed that the Army Air Corps would have no black units. Six years later, when the Air Corps changed its policy, he failed his physical, having been diagnosed with epilepsy—under orders, doctors routinely failed all black Air Corps applicants. A second physical found him fit, although, at over six feet, he was tall for a pilot. (His fighter-pilot nickname was "The Thin Man.")

Davis graduated from West Point in 1936, sixty years after the first black graduate, Lieutenant Henry Ossian Flipper. In sixty years, West Point's racial mind-set had changed little. Davis's first month was deceptively peaceful; the only indication that he was unlike other "Beasts" was the fact that he lived alone in a room designed for two or three. He was friendly with the cadets across the hall and had even been "recognized" by upperclassmen. Recognition could be bestowed by any upperclassman on any plebe but was usually reserved for the end of the first year, when it was proffered in the context of a mass ceremony. Within days of Davis's arrival, Warren S. Everett, a first-year cadet from Wichita, Kansas (a home to Buffalo Soldiers), told him that he would "look out" for him. Happening to meet Davis in the "sinks" (toilets), his "Beast" company commander, first classman Charlie Rich of West Virginia, told him if he

continued in the future as he had begun, he would "get along all right."⁵⁶

Everett and Rich spoke the last "few kind words" Davis heard at West Point. One evening at the end of the first month, as Davis was polishing his shoes and brass, he was informed with a rap on the door that there would be a meeting in the basement "sinks." "What are we going to do about the nigger?" he was stunned to hear just as he entered the basement. From that moment on, Davis was either invisible or insulted. No one spoke to him again for four years, except in the line of duty. The only exception was Charlie Rich, commander. Rich never became the promised friend, but he was at least always "neutral."

"Besides learning to withstand physical hardships, I had become hardened to personal abuse," Davis later wrote. "An impassive look in response to insult became one of my most useful strategies." Many upperclassmen made a point of "recognizing" Davis at the year-end ceremony. The next day he was "invisible" again. Cadets refused to eat with him, or to sit next to him on the way to football games. "The situation was ridiculous, but in no way funny," he wrote. "I had enough intelligence to know that complaints about my situation would not help me." Davis kept his letters home cheerful, asking for things just to get mail. He read voraciously, ran daily solo cross-country in all weather, and (for some "obscure psychological reason") ate an enormous amount of candy. "My father had taught me to be strong; he had endured adversity, and so could I."⁵⁷

Davis could not fathom how Academy officials and cadets, "with their continually and vociferously stated belief in 'Duty, Honor, Country,'" could rationalize their treatment of him. Their aim was to drive him out of West Point, but he graduated thirty-fifth in a class of 276. (The future general William Westmoreland was among Davis's "silent" classmates.) Like Henry Flipper in the nineteenth century, Davis received prolonged applause at his graduation.

When Benjamin Davis married the beautiful Agatha Scott, who had visited him nearly every Saturday for two years and never met another cadet, at the West Point chapel a week after graduation, there was no arch of swords; no guests attended besides the immediate families. Davis and his young bride went to Fort Benning, Georgia, his first assignment, with nine of his West Point classmates. The silent treatment continued. No officer spoke to him except when duty required it, and no officer's wife spoke to Agatha. Davis received his first West Point "mea culpa" letter at Fort Benning. It came from an underclassman, Cadet J. P. Conner: "All I wanted to tell you was what a hell of a lot I thought of you and how nice it had been to know you the three years we were both here. The narrow mindedness of some people is astounding and I believe that this place in-

stead of diminishing that quality in men, increases it.”⁵⁸ Through the years, Davis would receive many such letters and apologies from classmates.

TUSK’GEE TRAINING: LEE “BUDDY” ARCHER AND CAPTAIN DAVIS

On March 7, 1942, after eight months of training, Lieutenants Lemuel Custis, Charles DeBow, George “Spanky” Roberts, and Mac Ross became the first black pilots of the newly named Army Air Force. Roberts (from West Virginia), Ross (Ohio), and DeBow (Indiana) were all college Civilian Pilot Training graduates. Custis, a Howard graduate from Connecticut, was a former policeman. The five were photographed with their white advanced training director, Lieutenant Robert M. “Mother” Long (short for “Mother Hen”). These five men, and others who joined them under the thirty-year-old Captain Davis, were idols of the black press, black America’s favorite sons.

Every four and a half weeks, under a rigid quota system, a few new men entered pilot training. Tuskegee was soon producing more black pilots than the Air Force would allow itself to use. The 99th (with the 100th, 301st, and 302nd Squadrons) now became part of the 332nd Fighter Group, activated in mid-1942. A handful of blacks were eventually admitted to Air Corps Officers Training School in Miami. In 1942, Lieutenant Percy Sutton (a future borough president of Manhattan) was the first black to attend. When I interviewed him in 1990, Sutton told me that Clark Gable was the only white officer candidate to speak to him like a human being. “Don’t let them get to you,” Gable told him.

Lieutenant Lee “Buddy” Archer, one of nine children of a Harlem Tammany district leader, was one of Tuskegee’s earliest recruits. He fell in love with flying at small barnstormer shows in Saratoga, in upstate New York, where his father went to gamble. He grew up making model airplanes and knew the names of World War I aces. In 1939, after graduating from Manhattan’s integrated DeWitt Clinton High School and spending a year at New York University, the nineteen-year-old Archer and two white friends took the seven-hour Air Corps test. Grading was immediate, and Archer had the highest score, but the Air Corps rejected him and took his lower-scoring white friends. After he had taken the exam twice more, each time receiving a higher score than the one before, an honest young white lieutenant told him not to waste his time: there would be no blacks in the Air Corps. Archer was soon drafted into the Army. Within three months of joining Camp Wheeler’s 16th Training Battalion outside Macon, Georgia, he was an acting sergeant and a telegraphy in-

structor. There he met his future wife, the inspiration for his future fighter plane, *Ina, the Macon Belle*. With the creation of the 99th, the Air Corps asked Archer if he was “still interested.” This time, he finished the seven-hour test in two hours.

Archer believed that the Tuskegee experiment was “designed to fail.” Placing it in Alabama, he told me, was the proof. But the saboteurs had made a mistake. “If you’re going to have a system designed to fail,” he said, “you find failures to put into it.” Archer’s fellow candidates, mostly graduates of black colleges, had been taught not to fail. His first impression was that the other cadets were “arrogant and egotistical.” But in class and training, watching Mother Long’s “hair turn gray” as they took off and landed, the arrogance and egotism began to look like aggression and intelligence—perfect fighter-pilot attributes. Sporting a full-blown RAF mustache, Archer became first captain of the Tuskegee Cadet Corps, its best student, its best military man, and its best pilot.

The Tuskegee Army Airfield base commander was a reactionary West Point graduate, Colonel Frederick von Kimble. Kimble had replaced Major James A. “Straight Arrow” Ellison, who defied white townspeople by arming black military police. Kimble now disarmed the MPs and segregated the formerly integrated base. “For Colored Officers” and “For White Officers” signs were posted everywhere. In reverse discrimination, whites were now barred from the officers’ club and the theater, because Ellison had already admitted blacks. When Kimble announced that no black officer would be promoted above the rank of captain as long as he was in command, the black press was notified and began an immediate campaign for his removal.

In mid-1942 Kimble was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Noel F. Parrish. This time, the Air Force got it right. Parrish had studied black history and attended the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s lectures on race relations at the University of Chicago. According to Davis, he was “eager to understand blacks and treat them on an equal man-to-man basis.”⁵⁹ A native of Kentucky, Parrish did not try to change the system, but he “made it his business to ask black personnel what effect racial tensions were having upon them as individuals.” Buddy Archer remembered: “Whenever I got mad at all white people and made plans to destroy them, I would meet someone like Parrish, or Mother Long. They were as fair as you could be under the system. They were crackers and rednecks, but they were *fair*.” Parrish would become the only white member of the 99th Pursuit Squadron Veterans Association.

Benjamin Davis, Jr., became a colonel in mid-1942, the only black Air Force officer above the rank of captain. He had been promoted so

swiftly that he skipped a grade; the Davises named their new dog Major. Davis believed that “within the bounds of segregation and racial prejudice”—not to mention obsolete equipment—the Air Force did a good job of training black combat pilots.⁶⁰ By July 1942, the men of the 99th were, in his opinion, as ready as they were “ever going to be.” But their only mission seemed to be public relations. There were rumors that they would never see combat. Meanwhile, antagonism between black airfield personnel and the white town was reaching the boiling point. In early 1943, when town police attempted to seize the weapons of black MPs on Tuskegee property, a riot was barely averted. Far worse, the beating of black Tuskegee Army nurse Nora Greene in a bus incident nearly precipitated armed warfare. In March, Tuskegee’s director, Frederick Patterson, turned to Eleanor Roosevelt. “Morale is disturbed by the fact that the 99th Pursuit Squadron trained for more than a year and is still at Tuskegee and virtually idle,” he wrote.⁶¹ Mrs. Roosevelt sent Patterson’s letter to Secretary of War Stimson, with a covering note of her own: “This seems to me a really crucial situation.” On April 5, the 99th was off to North Africa.

SICILY AND D-DAY ITALY: BUSTER HALL AND THE FIRST KILL

With the end of the costly but victorious Tunisian campaign, the squadron joined the rest of the Allies in the Mediterranean theater in preparing for the Sicilian campaign, the first step in the battle for Italy. They had received brand-new P-40s from Lieutenant Colonel Cochran, who, wrote Davis, “imbued all of us with his own very remarkable fighting spirit, and . . . taught us what to do and what not to do in aerial combat.”⁶² Based at Cap Bon, Tunisia, and attached to the white 33rd Fighter Group, they made their first combat sortie on June 2, over the heavily fortified Sicilian island of Pantelleria. The twelve-day assault on Pantelleria’s air defenses marked the first time in any war that airpower alone had completely destroyed enemy resistance. But 99th pilots, flying as wingmen for the 33rd, saw no enemy in the first week—a bad omen. A fighter pilot’s confidence depended on quick kill, evasion, and escape reflexes, all requiring practice. It would be another month before the 99th achieved its first victory.

On July 2, 1943, Buster Hall, escorting B-25s over Sicily, made the first 99th kill, bringing down a Focke-Wulf 190. There is a photograph of Hall, very young and slightly stunned, the first black American pilot to shoot down an enemy aircraft, holding a rare celebratory bottle of Coca-Cola instead of champagne. Louis R. Purnell, a member of the squadron, related the story of Hall’s Coca-Cola in *Black Wings*, a publication of the

National Air and Space Museum. “Although Charlie Hall was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross,” he said, “his most appreciated prize may well have been an ice-cold bottle of Coca-Cola.” Purnell had obtained the precious bottle in Tunis, and upon arriving back at the 99th base, deposited it in the squadron safe. “The day of Charlie’s victory,” said Purnell, “we obtained a block of ice from a town that was fifteen miles from our base. We chilled the bottle of Coke in a one-gallon fruit juice can packed with ice. It was in the shade of a grove of olive trees that the bottle of Coke—probably the only one in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations—came to a well-deserved end.”⁶³

Hall’s victory brought important visitors: Major General James H. Doolittle, Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz, and Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower. But Hall’s victory was an exception, not the rule. The 99th’s short-range P-40s kept them out of the initial invasion, and they spent the rest of the Sicilian campaign out of the war zone, covering shipping and escorting bombers to Salerno.

Sicily did not hold out for long. Now that they had secured a foothold in Italy, the Allies planned an all-out assault. The invasion of Italy (Italian D-Day), planned for September 9, necessitated the use of all available combat air units. The 99th was ordered to rejoin the 33rd Fighter Group. Colonel William “Spike” Momyer, the commander of the 33rd’s P-40 squadrons, made life as difficult as possible for them—from giving pilots the wrong briefing times to publicly criticizing their low kill count. He then submitted a report to the Air Force stating that the 99th was “not of the fighting caliber of any squadron in this Group.”⁶⁴

Although they were known to have been out of the war zone, the failure of the 99th to gain “victories” was seized upon by critics as proof that the Tuskegee experiment had failed. Air Force Commanding General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold recommended to Army Chief of Staff Marshall that the 99th be removed from combat, that the 332nd be sent to a non-combat area, and that plans for a black bombardment group, the 477th, be shelved. In the late summer of 1943, Phil Cochran was the lone white voice in support of the squadron.

Benjamin Davis was called home at the height of the controversy, officially to take command of the 332nd Fighter Group but in reality to fight not just for the 99th but for the future of blacks in the Air Force. With his father by his side, Davis held a press conference at the Pentagon to condemn the idea that “the utilization of black men as pilots had to be regarded as an experiment.” Apologizing for his own inadequacies as an unseasoned leader, Davis said that the 99th had gone for months without seeing the enemy, much less shooting at them.

Time reported the conference in its September 20, 1943, issue, with a photo of the grim-faced Davises. Calling Davis Junior "lath-straight," *Time* reported: "So little operational data on the 99th had reached Washington that it was impossible to form a conclusive opinion about its pilots. It has apparently seen little action, compared to many other units and seems to have done fairly well, that is as far as anyone would go," although "unofficial reports" from the Mediterranean theater suggested that the top air command was not altogether satisfied. Taking a liberal tone on integration, *Time* wrote: "Most thoughtful Army officers probably would agree that the Negro will never develop his potentialities as an airman or any other kind of soldier under the system of segregation in training." *Time* believed, however, that "the Negro pilot training experiment" would continue, proved or not—and black cadets would soon begin medium-bomber training classes. "This squadron, too, is an experiment, and will be one until a question as old as U.S. independence is answered: Is the Negro as good a soldier as the white man?"⁶⁵

Later, Davis scored a decisive victory before the McCloy Commission, under Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, on the employment of Negro troops. He pointed out that the "experiment" was, in fact, a "serious challenge" to the men of the 99th. "Our airmen considered themselves pioneers in every sense of the word, and every one of them was stared at when he landed at a new field because of the novelty of seeing a black pilot. And yet nothing mattered to them as long as no bad mark was registered against the squadron."⁶⁶ They would go through any ordeal, in garrison or combat, to prove their worth. Davis's spirited defense not only saved the 99th for combat but expanded the "experiment": the 477th Bomber Group was activated.

While Davis was at home the 99th, now led by Major George Roberts of the first Tuskegee graduating class, was reassigned to the 79th Fighter Group, where it finally saw combat. The 79th's commander, Colonel Earl Bates, was very different from Momyer. The 99th flew integrated missions and was treated like any other squadron in the group. On November 30, 1943, the 79th Fighter Group set a record of twenty-six missions—nine of which were flown by the 99th alone. Within weeks the 99th was flying thirty-six to forty-eight sorties a day. American air action enabled Montgomery's Eighth Army to finally establish an Italian beachhead, but Charlie Hall's victory four months earlier was still the only 99th "kill." Criticism seemed to have taken its toll on squadron morale. Within two months, however, at the Anzio beachhead, the 99th proved to itself and the Air Force that it could "fly and kill." And Anzio Beach was the key to Rome.

January 27 and 28, 1944, were two of the best Allied air combat days of the entire Italian campaign. Allied bombers counted fifty kills, and Allied fighters counted eighty-five—twelve of which belonged to the 99th. On January 27, outnumbered two to one, Captain Clarence Jamison's flight of twelve planes knocked out five German planes in less than five minutes, causing those remaining to turn and run. When they returned home to Naples's Capodicino airfield, each of the twelve pilots buzzed the field and made a slow victory roll. Later that day, Captain Lemuel Custis and Lieutenants Charles Bailey and Wilson Eagleson knocked out three more Germans. The next day, Lieutenants Lewis C. Smith and Robert Deiz each claimed one. And Buster Hall, owner of the first kill, knocked out two more enemy, winning the Distinguished Flying Cross. In the next two weeks, the 99th's total rose to twenty-four—a fighter-squadron record. The unit received an official commendation from the formerly inimical Hap Arnold.

Now recognized combat veterans, the 99th suddenly became, according to Major Roberts, "the outfit if you needed to have a bomb placed on a target."⁶⁷ The war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who brought the Sicilian campaign memorably home to America in the Scripps-Howard press, wrote of the 99th in his book *Brave Men* (1944): "Their job was to dive bomb, and not get caught in a fight. The 99th was very successful at this, and that's the way it should be."⁶⁸ In mid-February they joined the Allied assault on Monte Cassino, a sixth-century hilltop Benedictine abbey fortified and inhabited by 100,000 Germans. They were assigned to circle up from the valley and drop bombs through the abbey windows, something Roberts believed no other squadron could do.

THE 332ND AT SELFRIDGE FIELD AND IN NAPLES: BUDDY ARCHER, ROSCOE BROWN, JR., AND HOT ROCK PRUITT

While the 99th was winning its wings in the Mediterranean, the rest of the black units of the 332nd Fighter Group were at home with serious morale problems. In April 1943, they had been transferred from Tuskegee to Selfridge Field, outside Detroit. Selfridge was almost as bad as Tuskegee. The base commander, Colonel Robert R. "Jesus Bob" Selway, personally barred the 332nd pilots, under threat of arrest, from the Selfridge officers' club—this despite War Department A-R (Army Regulation) 210-10, specifically stating that all officers' clubs were open to all officers. Colonel Selway skirted the problem by calling all the black officers transients, even if they were assigned to the base. He directed Selfridge Women's Army Corps members not to walk the base unescorted

because of the possible "threat" posed by black officers and enlisted men.⁶⁹ The pilots of the 332nd were angry, and they expressed their anger in the air. "We flew rather excitingly," Buddy Archer said. "They had other terms for it."

Detroit, scene of a race riot in June 1943, was even worse than the airfield. Black officers in downtown Detroit constantly confronted white soldiers who refused to salute. "Didn't you see me!" Lee Archer demanded of a nonsaluting white soldier. "Yes," the man replied. "Yes, what!" Archer barked. "Yes, sir! I was gonna salute, but she held my arm," indicating his girlfriend. Archer made the soldier salute, to his girlfriend's fury. When Colonel Davis finally assumed command of the 332nd in October 1943, racial tension was near eruption. "They decided to get us overseas," Archer said.

The 332nd arrived in Naples in February 1944. The Office of War Information had assigned the black photographer Gordon Parks to accompany and cover their mission, but at the last minute his papers were found to be "out of order," he told me when I spoke to him in 1990. A southern congressman had protested against publicizing black pilots at government expense.

In March, General Ira Eaker asked Davis to help him solve a serious problem. The Fifteenth Air Force was suffering a great loss of men and planes. Eaker's experience with the Eighth Air Force indicated that Germans were reluctant to attack escorted bombers, but the Fifteenth Air Force fighter pilots were averse to looking after bombers, preferring to pursue the kill. Escort flying was equally unpopular with black fighter pilots, but Davis made it clear to his men that they had no choice. "Our job is to protect and not be heroes," Archer remembered him saying. Any pilot who left his bombers to chase the enemy would be subject to court-martial. "White boys would leave their bombers in a minute to get a kill," Archer told me. "We couldn't do that." The 332nd became as good at defense as they were at offense.

The 332nd emblem was a fire-spitting black panther over a white star. "A lot of people didn't know we were black," Archer said. When one wounded B-24 could not make home base across the Adriatic, Archer nursed it to the 332nd. He "was in complete shock finding all these black people," Archer reported. But the enemy knew exactly who they were. "The colored boys have arrived," said the Nazi radio propagandists Axis Sally and Lord Haw-Haw—listing all the 332nd by name. The roster included Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., a future president of New York City's Bronx Community College; William Coleman, a future U.S. transportation secretary; and Coleman Young, a future mayor of Detroit.

The squadron's new Italian home was a villa in Ramitelli, in the hills above Naples. Pilots rose at six A.M. to fly combat missions two out of every three days for five weeks; then they rotated back to Naples for four or five days of "R and R." As Dr. Brown put it when I interviewed him in 1990, "R and R" meant "music, games, and women." Not welcome in the Naples overseas officers' club, the 332nd organized its own club, with a reputation for good music and beautiful women. The men of the 332nd found no prejudice among Italians. (Black GIs would be featured in the postliberation films of Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica.)

The 332nd saw heavy action in support of Allied ground troops converging on Rome in May 1944. The city finally fell on June 4, two days before the Normandy invasion. June was a busy month: Allied strategy was to keep the enemy fully occupied in Italy. On June 25, Captain Wendell Pruitt and Lieutenant Gwynne Peirson knocked out a German destroyer in Trieste harbor with machine guns—a feat unique in Air Force history. Pruitt hit the magazine, setting it on fire, and Peirson's coup de grâce created the explosion. Wing cameras furnished proof to the skeptical Fifteenth Air Force. Pruitt was awarded the Air Medal with six oak leaf clusters, and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

"Hot Rock" Pruitt was unofficially regarded as the best pilot in the outfit. Archer flew wing man for him. "No one could beat Pruitt and myself," Archer told me. "Wendell Pruitt was probably—no, positively—the most popular pilot in the 332nd," remembered the 332nd's intelligence officer Major Robert Pitts in Mary Penick Motley's *The Invisible Soldier*. "The second man would be Lee Archer. Both of these men had something very important in common. They were both top flyers, they were superb in the air, and they were veteran flyers, but both had time to talk to and give advice to a novice. They flew like birds but they kept their feet on the ground."⁷⁰

With four and a half verified victories, Archer was the black pilot closest to being an ace. In the air, he practiced a philosophy he called nonchalant vigilance. "Never get comfortable; you get sloppy," he told me—but also never be less than nonchalant. Known as the Whistler, Archer always whistled or sang in his plane. His confidence that he could kill, evade, and escape in the air was total. He believed that nothing could hit him from the ground.

Pruitt was more of an artist. After each mission, when all the other pilots had landed, he would entertain the ground crew. "He would circle the base, tip his wings, go into chandelle and a couple of rolls," said Robert Pitts. "After about ten or fifteen minutes of beautiful flying he would come in for a perfect three-point landing. Any other pilot would

have been chewed out by the boss." Pruitt was apparently the only pilot whom Colonel Davis could never severely reprimand. "Maybe it was because all the men on the ground and particularly his crew chief really loved the guy," said Pitts. "Everybody respected him, and he knew the guys that kept them flying would like to see a little show now and then."⁷¹ Pruitt was to crash fatally in the midst of a victory roll at Tuskegee in April 1945.

* * *

The spring of 1945 saw the final Allied assault on Germany as all fronts converged—north, south, and east. The 332nd took part in the all-out offensive against industry in the German-occupied Balkans, especially the vast and heavily defended Romanian oil fields at Ploesti. On March 24, 1945, they took off on the longest mission in the history of the Fifteenth Air Force, escorting B-17 Flying Fortress bombers sixteen hundred miles round-trip from Italy to the Daimler-Benz tank factory in Berlin. On the way back, in a dogfight over Berlin, Captain Brown, Lieutenant Earl Lane, and Flight Officer Charles Brantley together shot down a new Messerschmitt 262 jet. "We were doing figure-eights over the bombers, and as we flew over Berlin, I noticed these streaks above us," Brown remembered when I interviewed him in 1990. "They were German jets. Instead of peeling up to meet them, we peeled down and then up and caught one of the 262s from underneath." After the war, the Defense Department used film of Brown's jet encounter as combat training for new pilots.

On March 31 and April 1, the 332nd shot down a total of twenty-five enemy planes. On April 26, they were responsible for the last four enemy kills in the Mediterranean theater. By this time, the 332nd under Davis had shot down 111 enemy aircraft, destroyed 150 other planes on the ground in strafing runs, and flown 1,578 combat missions, more than any other unit in Europe.

In their spare time during the war, Archer recalled, the men of the 332nd often discussed their future life and how they felt about America. They thought things would be different when they returned, that "there must be some appreciation for what they had done." But Buster Hall, winner of the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the first black American pilot to down an enemy plane, became a restaurant manager after the war. No airline or commercial transport company would give him a job. The story is typical of the racism they faced. In pursuits other than postwar civilian aviation, however, the story of almost every man was one of high achievement and success. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., went on to supervise the fighter program of the U.S. Air Force worldwide during the Korean War, and, later, became a four-star Air Force general.

THE WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS: MAJOR CHARITY ADAMS, SERGEANT SALLIE, AND THE "SIX TRIPLE EIGHT"

The Army led the way for black women in the military. Approximately 130 black Army nurses and Red Cross women, and one large black Army Postal Directory Battalion of the Women's Army Corps went to England in World War II. The eight hundred black Army women of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the "Six Triple Eight," who arrived in Britain in February 1945, were in charge of redirecting all "V-Mail" for Europe. Its mid-twenty-ish commander, Major Charity Adams, was the first black officer in the Women's Army Corps.

In June 1942 Charity Adams received what seemed to her to be an "invitation" to become a candidate for officer training in the new Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, the WAAC. (The WAAC would become the WAC in 1943.) Four years out of Wilberforce, Adams was a math and science teacher in Columbus, South Carolina. The tall, attractive daughter of a minister and a teacher believed that the Army would be "so pleased" to receive her application that she would "hear from some general within twenty-four hours," Adams wrote in her autobiography, *One Woman's Army*. After a week of silence, she turned her attention to graduate school at Ohio State University. She was about to board the train for Ohio when a telegram came "ordering" her to report immediately for a physical and an interview. The interview panel consisted of two "distinguished"-looking white middle-aged civilian women and an equally "distinguished" white colonel. Leaving the interview room, Adams heard one of the women say, "Let's take her and see if she is as good as she thinks she is."⁷²

Fort Des Moines, Iowa, the WAAC training center, was an elegant old cavalry post, complete with golf course and officers with swagger sticks. Adams was the only black among the first twenty-five WAAC officer candidates from Ohio. The first stop was the mess hall, where she was followed by a swarm of media. "Every move we made was watched and recorded," she wrote. The first WAACs were big news—this was their introduction to the press. Adams's picture appeared in *Liberty* magazine.

The Ohio group had traveled to Fort Des Moines under integrated conditions, but on arrival black WAACs were placed in their own building. Although segregated, WAAC quarters were strictly equal. Black and white, WAACs received \$21 a month in officer candidate pay. (Male candidates, black and white, received \$50 a month.)

Living quarters were segregated, but training was not. White male officers and NCOs were responsible for all WAAC training. Fort Des

Moines was more integrated than most camps. Black WAAC officer candidates encountered more sexism than racism from the men assigned to work with them: "Their problem," Adams wrote, "was having to train women." She could remember only one incident of racist behavior from a fellow officer candidate. After a gas mask drill, the women lined up to clean their individual masks, all with the same chemically treated cloth. One of the white women said that she could not use a cloth that had been used by "colored girls" because she had to put the mask on her face. "Absolute silence" followed her remark. No one offered another cloth. Red-faced, she used the offending cloth.

"We were thirty-nine different personalities, from different family backgrounds and different vocational experiences. . . . We were the ambitious, the patriotic, the adventurous. We were whomever our environments had made us, and that was what we had to contribute to the WAAC," wrote Adams of the 3rd Platoon of the 1st Company of trainees, the first black Women's Army Auxiliary Corps officers-to-be. They were married, single, divorced, engaged; college professors, housewives, and domestic workers. The uniform, the great equalizer, was a source of tremendous pride. The Army furnished everything, from toothbrushes to underwear (bras and girdles were pink, slips and panties khaki). The various shades of khaki and the "Hobby" hat, named for the WAAC director, Oveta Culp Hobby, were curiously flattering. Adams was photographed in all degrees of uniform, from Class A summer weight to winter dress uniform to fatigues. Publicity was the norm: WAACs were the public's darlings. They were photographed "eating, marching, at play, at rest, in quarters, in the company area, in classrooms, at the Coke machine, in the post exchange," Adams wrote.⁷³

Classroom training, except for the omission of tactical studies, was basically the same as for male candidates, although math major Adams was disappointed to find that map reading was no snap. Physical training was even more challenging. No athlete, she was suddenly required to do handsprings and push-ups. Seven consecutive push-ups constituted a major victory. Making the perfect military bed was another problematic endeavor. "Inspection Day" became a weekly "test of whether we were tough enough to make it," she wrote. Close-order drill, surprisingly, was enjoyable. The "command" voice, however, was daunting. "Miss Adams, did I hear someone say something?" the lieutenant-in-charge had asked, the first time she barked a parade-ground command. Depending on who was addressing her, she was "Miss," "Auxiliary," "Private," "Officer Candidate" or "Soldier." Life had become a matter of the Army and "Before." It was not easy, she wrote, but "in spite of everything, or because of it all,

we were made into soldiers." Graduation day was August 29, 1942. The first WAAC Officer Candidate School class of 440 women included 40 black women. If the 3rd Platoon "colored girls" had not been graduated last, Charity Adams would, by virtue of alphabetical order, have been the first WAAC officer commissioned in World War II.⁷⁴

Two black WAAC companies were formed: a basic training company and a specialist training company. Adams was appointed Fort Des Moines Basic Training Company commander. Male officers were removed from the company level, but remained regimental and battalion commanders. The tall (five feet, eight inches) Adams admired the six-foot-three-inch "slender blond" regimental commander, Major Joseph Fowler, in more ways than one. He was "a striking figure in his Cavalry uniform"; Adams envied his riding crop and wished she could carry one. She credited Fowler with most influencing her success as an Army officer. "He was military to the letter of the regulations, tolerated no foolishness, and gave none. He demanded the best of every member of his command and as a result kept all of us in a state of fear." Fowler invited Adams for a drink at the officers' club—to the outrage of the racist colonel, who did not believe in "race mixing." A nondrinker trying to think of a drink, Adams ordered Scotch with Coke. "Adams, don't ever let anyone else hear you say Scotch and Coke," Fowler said. "It's club soda or water."⁷⁵

Because the few black WAACs could not be trained with whites, Adams and her officers trained four different companies, each with different duties, learning in short order what other officers assimilated over a much longer period. She believed that the training center produced "no better trained" troops in the Women's Army. Promoted to headquarters as the only black training supervisor, overseeing white as well as black troops, Adams socialized with her fellow supervisors, all white female officers.

Riding the Carolina Special for her first visit home in December 1942, Adams was on her way into the dining car for breakfast when the white steward put his arm against the door and announced that the car was full. She waited. A few minutes later, the steward announced, "All persons in uniform first." Adams stepped forward, but the steward put his arm across the door again and repeated angrily, "I said all persons in uniform first." Before she could answer, an angry southern male voice coming from a "very tall, very blond second lieutenant" said, "Well, what in hell do you think that is that she has on? Get your ——— arm down before I break it off for you." The lieutenant was red-faced with anger. "What in the world are we fighting this damned war for? She's giving her

service, too, and can eat anywhere I can. And, by Jesus, I am going to eat with her in this diner." By now Adams, rather alarmed, wondered what would happen next. The steward silently led her to a table for four in the middle of the car. The lieutenant followed, and sat down opposite her. The dining car was absolutely still until they were seated. When people began eating again, there was no sound except that of cutlery. The lieutenant continued his tirade against "crackers" and "cheap whites" who did not understand "what this war is all about." Breakfast over, he escorted Adams back to her seat, bowed, and left. He never introduced himself, and she never saw him again.⁷⁶

By early summer of 1943, the public fascination with the WAACs was dissipating. Then a June 9 item in John O'Donnell's "Capitol Stuff" column of the *Washington Times-Herald* started the great WAAC contraceptive controversy: "Contraceptives and prophylactic equipment will be furnished to members of the WAACs according to a super secret agreement reached by the high ranking officers of the War Department and the WAAC chieftain, Mrs. William Pettus Hobby, wife of the publisher of the *Houston Post*," said O'Donnell.⁷⁷ "The health of the girls in uniform and a determined feminine punch to smash through any out-moded double standards won the day. . . . It was a victory for the New Deal ladies who produced the cold turkey argument that the girls who want to go into uniform and fight what men have called the 'total war' have the same right here and abroad to indulge their passing fancies."

The next day, O'Donnell's column noted that Colonel Hobby had declared there was "no foundation of truth" to the contraceptive story. O'Donnell insisted, however, that the story came from "an intelligent and trustworthy official who swore that his eyes had passed over an official memorandum which dealt with this specific issue." On June 11, Secretary of War Stimson, with an interdenominational delegation of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy and two congresswomen, held a press conference to discuss "sinister rumors aimed at destroying the reputation of the WAACs through charges of immorality." Representative Edith Nourse Rogers, a Republican congresswoman from Massachusetts and author of the bill creating the WAACs, stated that "nothing could please Hitler more" than efforts to discredit the service, and American women in general. Charity Adams remembered the cartoons, dirty jokes, and "vile insinuations." WAACs were now seen either as providing "organized prostitution for the Army," or as women looking for "women associates."⁷⁸ But the WAACs had grown up. Big enough to discuss contraception, they were also big enough to finally join the Army. In the summer of 1943, the WAACs became the WACs, when "Auxiliary" was dropped from the corps name.

In the summer of 1943, Charity Adams became a major—a surprise event, with silver oak leaves and tears. It was now proposed that a separate black training regiment be created, to provide promotional opportunities for black officers. But Adams announced that she would not command such a unit. She wanted to make it as a WAC officer, "not as a Negro WAC officer." Her fellow black officers walked out of the meeting and refused to speak to her after she announced her decision. As suddenly as it had appeared, the plan for the "Negro regiment" was dropped.

That year, a black WAC colleague of Adams was beaten by whites in a southern railway waiting room, but Adams's own racist confrontations were never physical. When a white southern "lady," not wanting to share her sleeping car, demanded that one of the patrolling white military police "check" on Adams, he replied: "Ma'am, I am here in case of trouble, or a problem of some kind. There is no problem here. If I check, to use your word, that officer and she is not an imposter, I might not be a sergeant tomorrow. Besides an imposter would not pick a rank that high; there are too few WAC majors in the Army."⁷⁹ In November 1944, Adams was informed that she would be among the first group of WACs to attend U.S. Army Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the Army's highest level of schooling. She never got to Leavenworth. A month later, she was assigned to overseas duty.

Adams and black WAC Captain Abbie Noel Campbell flew Priority II (Priority I was reserved for the president and his top commanders) to Europe, final destination and assignment unknown, on a C-54 cargo plane with bucket seats. Adams and Campbell were two of three women among the nineteen passengers. The third woman was a civilian, who arrived with suitcases, hat boxes, and a cosmetics case, and ignored the black WACs. She would speak only to the most senior male VIP. The male passengers included military officers, civilian VIPs, and a war correspondent who wrote nonstop throughout the trip. A very young captain, doubtless thinking that "the three of us were the most lost souls in the group," attached himself to Adams and Campbell. Another man later made the group a foursome, dining together to staves on the Bermuda stopover.

Like most of their fellow passengers, Adams and Campbell carried sealed envelopes with instructions to open sometime after takeoff. About forty-five minutes over the ocean, envelopes began appearing, all fingered self-consciously. "I'm going to open this thing," said one man, breaking the ice. Reactions varied from surprise to pleasure to indifference. Adams and Campbell were "shocked" to discover that their secret orders were for London. In their bags they carried lists of places and people to see in Paris.

Arriving in England, Adams made her first and familiar observations

(cold, fog, and people driving on the “wrong side” of the road) along with everyone else. “We had forgotten how strange we seemed, to military as well as civilian personnel.” Salutes were slow in coming and, frequently, returned with great reluctance. “For most of the military personnel we encountered, accepting any Negro officer in the U.S. Army was hard enough, but accepting Negro women officers was a real burden.” London, however, was different. “London was filled with representatives of all the Allies and neutrals, and every conceivable kind of uniform could be seen on the streets, worn by all races, colors, shapes, sizes, sexes, and religious persuasions.” The V-2 bombs were also indiscriminate. Adams soon became as studiously cool as the Londoners: “It was only when the motor stopped that we held our breath.” Every morning the streets had been cleared of the night’s damage and destruction.⁸⁰

Adams was now the commanding officer of the 6888th Central Postal Directory of the European Theater of Operations Postal Directory Service. Based at King Edward School in Birmingham, the Six Triple Eight was responsible for redirecting mail to all U.S. personnel in the European theater. Some seven million men and women (only the War Department knew the exact number), they included Red Cross workers, civilian specialists, and junketing congressmen as well as the uniformed military. But before Adams and Campbell could prepare for troop arrival, they were ordered to Paris to report to the commanding general of the European Theater of Operations, and to the ETO Women’s Army Corps director. They were “invited”—that is, ordered—to dine with Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee, commanding general of the Services of Supply, or Com Z, in his elegant and expansive quarters at the Hôtel George V. There were twelve for dinner, including four WAC officers. “For strictly wartime female soldiers we were operating at a very high level,” Adams wrote. “It was a great evening as we tried to relax and be socially proper as well as act according to military courtesy.” During the course of dinner, General Lee turned and asked, “Adams, can your troops march?” (A classic question for black troops.) For an officer conscious of her “overseas duty efficiency report,” there was only one answer: “Yes, sir, they are the best marching troops you will ever see.”⁸¹ Adams knew, regretfully, that she would have to prove her words or eat them. Her troops arrived in Birmingham on February 12. The general would be there on the fifteenth for review.

Fortunately, General Lee’s parade was a great success. Photographs show a seemingly pleased Lee, short and bulky, standing next to a taller and seriously military Adams, equally bulky in her winter overcoat. The coated and Hobby-hatted troops themselves, marching in orderly preci-

sion, look confident and attractive, ready to go to work. “No mail, low morale” was the battalion motto. The Six Triple Eight worked seven days a week in three eight-hour shifts.

* * *

Pretty Sergeant Sallie Smith of Pocahontas, Virginia, joined the WACs in her second year at West Virginia’s Bluefield State College because it sounded “exciting” and because she hoped to be near her boyfriend, who was based in Italy. She described her experience when I interviewed her in 1991. She remembered twenty-five to thirty in a stateroom, rough seas and seasickness with the rest of the Six Triple Eight, during the zigzag voyage to Glasgow on the *Ile de France*—where they were met on arrival by Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., of Headquarters Staff Com Z. In Glasgow, they boarded the train that night in a total blackout. The next morning, Smith was shocked by the bombing devastation in Birmingham. Press attention on their arrival was so enormous that Major Adams had to give instant public relations lessons to the troops.

Smith found the transition from civilian to military life traumatic. She hated drilling, she hated the lack of privacy, and she hated making military beds (though once she learned, she made them all her life). She felt that the black women officers played favorites but found Major Adams—known to the troops as “Big Ma”—tough but fair. Sallie Smith’s sense of being “scared and far from home” was compounded by sirens, bombs, and orders to “take cover.”

She was a supervisor of the directory search room, in charge of thirty-five women working at tables with boxes full of name cards. Every man in the ETO was in those boxes. They kept the locator cards up to date, and if a man died, wrote “deceased” on the card. Their responsibility was to forward and redirect mail and packages. Most civilians had no idea how to wrap packages. Damaged packages addressed to officers were usually confiscated by the civilian aides, or redirected to an enlisted man. British civilian aides called Smith “Sergeant Sallie.” She felt no racism from the English, only a certain resentment about material goods. People would promise anything for a carton of cigarettes. Smith and her friends enjoyed sight-seeing (they were near Stratford-upon-Avon) and visiting pubs, but she rarely came in contact with any whites other than the “nice” German POWs who furnished straw for the beds and did everything around the school. There were dances with black GIs, but black officers seemed to feel “superior” to everyone—especially, Smith felt, to black enlisted women.

The English did not consider themselves bigots, professing to prefer

those they called blacks, with their “nice manners,” to those they called Yanks, “overpaid, oversexed, and over here.” This was also true of the typical British soldier, as many military units were integrated with black British colonials. “During the summer of 1942 there was that Army order about keeping aloof from coloured troops to avoid the risk of rows with white US troops,” wrote Dennis Sargent, of the British Signal Corps. “That, I’m glad to say, was very unfavourably received by the troops—both non combatants and Royal Engineers of the bomb-disposal company in which I was at the time. . . . ‘Just like Hitler’ was one typical RE [Royal Engineers] reaction to the order.” An Office of War Information film called *Welcome to Britain* included a segment (“Lesson in Tact”) in which an amiable old English lady invites a black and white GI to tea, as the narrator speaks: “Here is a problem. Let’s be frank about it. There are less racial restrictions here. Just what you saw; an Englishwoman asking a Negro to tea. She was polite and so was he.” But black soldiers’ popularity in Britain would lessen with their length of stay and the degree of their popularity with English women. Approximately 130,000 black GIs went to Britain, the first arriving in mid-1942. By 1945, the British had tabulated at least 553 certifiable “brown babies.”⁸² (A 1990 British-made television documentary, *No Father, No Mother, No Uncle Sam*, interviewed several surviving “brown” British orphans.)

Adams’s biggest racial battles were fought against the U.S. military. After a troop review mixup, a visiting general told her that he would order a “white first lieutenant” to show her how to run her unit. Not knowing which was worse, “white” or “first lieutenant,” she responded, “Over my dead body, sir.” The comment was grounds for court-martial. Just before midnight, an “advising” (warning) call came for Adams’s adjutant: instructions had been received to draw up court-martial charges. The “advising” call meant that the general might consider an abject apology. Not abject in the least, Adams decided to draw up her own court-martial charges against the general, for disobeying a SHAEF directive cautioning all commanders about using language that stressed racial segregation. Admittedly stretching what had been a memorandum into a “directive,” Adams figured she had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Three days later her adjutant received another call: charges had been dropped. By the end of the war, the general himself apologized: “It’s been a long time since anyone challenged me, black or white, but you took me on,” he told Adams. “You outsmarted me and I am proud that I know you.”⁸³

At midnight on April 12, 1945, Adams received the news of President Roosevelt’s death from a Six Triple Eight telephone operator who

got the signal from a Birmingham overseas operator in the process of putting through the call to Churchill at Downing Street. “The main reaction of Negro troops in the ETO,” Adams wrote, “was to wonder whether we would get home again or, at best, whether we would have to remain in Europe until all white personnel were safely home.”⁸⁴ She was the ranking American Army officer in Birmingham, so it was her responsibility to represent the United States at all memorial services for the commander-in-chief.

The Six Triple Eight was now reassigned to Rouen. The date of her preliminary trip, to inspect the new headquarters, May 7, was, as it turned out, V-E Day. Adams had no idea; she wondered why so many people were lining the tracks to wave and cheer as the boat train sped nonstop through towns and villages. From the moment she stepped off the train in Paris, her uniform was the target of victory hysteria. By the time she reached the U.S. billeting office—having been hugged, kissed, and forced to cede bits of her uniform—the lieutenant in charge could barely control his laughter.

With fighting over in the ETO, the Postal Directory unit was moved closer to the majority of troops. Their headquarters at Rouen was a small post originally built for Napoleon’s army. They were a separate and self-sufficient unit, with the usual German POWs for labor and repair work. At Rouen the unit was besieged by black GIs, something that had not happened in Birmingham. “Major, there are 725 enlisted men for each enlisted woman and thirty-one male officers for each female officer,” Adams was informed. When Adams replied, “I guess you mean in the ETO?,” the noncom answered, “No, ma’am, I mean outside our gates.” Troops were being routed through Rouen from the front, and there were white soldiers among the hordes. Without male MPs, the disorderly if cheerful crowds became a problem—solved in part by jujitsu lessons, volunteered by a D-Day veteran British paratrooper, for the unarmed female guards.

Sergeant Sallie Smith kept a copy of a newspaper story on Rouen (headlined “White Skin No ‘Must’ in France”): “The U.S. was never like this! This is the general feeling of Negro GIs stationed in and around this bomb-shattered French city, who have learned that the petite mademoiselles and the men of Rouen have no racial prejudices.” The correspondent Hal Foust of the *Chicago Tribune* reported: “One sees Negro soldiers and French girls walking with their arms around each other in the city’s streets.” Foust interviewed a black D-Day veteran, Lieutenant George Woody, of Danville, Virginia, a twenty-six-year-old officer of the 490th Port Battalion: “I know from personal experience as well as obser-

vation that the French family makes no distinction between colors in inviting United States soldiers into their homes. It is a contrast to the general custom in America which has a different cultural background. Unless conditions are changed in the United States we have lost the war for world-wide freedom."⁸⁵ Charity Adams also commented to Foust on interracial relations in Rouen: "It is regrettable that Americans are so race prejudiced that anything you write will offend many, each in light of his own prejudices. Yet the story should be written, as part of the history of the European war, as part of the current news of America's army still in Europe."

During her first month home, traveling by train in her uniform, Adams was lifting her suitcase to the overhead rack when a young black corporal moved forward to help. But as soon as he noticed her rank, he passed right by, muttering, "If she's strong enough to hold up those silver oak leaves, I guess she's strong enough to put her suitcase up on that rack."⁸⁶

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Sallie Smith briefly considered staying in France. Instead, she went home to finish college on the GI Bill, becoming the first black woman to receive a master's degree from West Virginia University. She married and divorced the boyfriend who had fought in Italy. She moved to New York City, intending to work on her doctoral degree, but instead worked in the CBS photography department, where she remained for thirty-five years.

Charity Adams retired from the service as a lieutenant colonel, the highest rank possible in the WAC, which by law could have only one full colonel: its director. The prospect of a peacetime job in the Pentagon did not appeal. She decided to go home and get on with her life, becoming a college dean and, in 1949, marrying a man she had first met in Rouen as a soldier. He studied medicine at the University of Zurich, where Adams studied at the Jungian Institute of Analytical Psychology. Back in America, she had two children and became an active participant in civic and corporate affairs. She had "accomplished much" since her military service, she wrote, having "opened a few doors, broken a few barriers," and she hoped, "smoothed the way for the next generation."⁸⁷

THE DESEGREGATION OF THE NAVY: THE GOLDEN THIRTEEN

The merchant marine, representing the war effort of America's civilian shipping fleet, was the only fully integrated service in the World War II U.S. military. It was also one of the most perilous. Carrying everything

from troops to food to fighter planes, merchant fleets of tough, squat "Liberty" ships dodged torpedoes back and forth across the Atlantic. The merchant marine casualty rate was second only to that of the Marine Corps. Some five thousand seamen were killed in 1942 alone, braving the Murmansk Run to the northern Soviet Union. (Humphrey Bogart's *Action in the North Atlantic* told the Murmansk story.) Quasi-civilian seamen, among them many members of the integrated National Maritime Union as well as veterans of Spain, refused to wear uniforms. Their only concession to the military was a badge on their caps. Hugh Mulzac, veteran of the World War I merchant navy and of Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line, was the first black captain in the U.S. merchant marines. His ship was the *Booker T. Washington*. (The *George Washington Carver*, another Liberty ship, was christened by Lena Horne in May 1943.) Officers serving under Mulzac on the *Booker T. Washington* included Joseph Williams, the first black graduate of the merchant marine officers academy, and John Beecher, the great-grandnephew of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the ship's history, *All Brave Sailors*. The oldest merchant seaman was William Lew, a sturdy seventy-eight-year-old, who volunteered in August 1943. Lew was the great-great-grandson of the black Revolutionary musician-soldier Barzillai Lew.

If the merchant marine was the most integrated service, the U.S. Navy continued to be the least. As a Harvard man and a former assistant secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt was profoundly critical in the spring of 1941 when Annapolis refused to let its lacrosse team play Harvard if Harvard's lone black player appeared on the field. Finally, stung by a January 1942 speech in which Wendell Willkie excoriated Navy racial policy as a "mockery" of democracy, Roosevelt wrote to Knox: "I think that with all the Navy activities the Bureau of Navigation might invent something that colored enlistees could do in addition to the rating of messmen." A Navy study board insisted that, because of close association on board ship, "members of the colored race be accepted only in the messman branch." Roosevelt told Knox that the report was unsatisfactory. "Officers of the U.S. Navy are not officers only but are American citizens," he wrote. "They should, therefore, be expected to recognize social and economic problems which are related to national welfare. . . . It is incumbent on all officers to recognize the fact that about 1/10th of the population of the United States is composed of members of the Negro race who are American citizens. . . . I [ask] you to return the recommendation of the General Board to that Board for further study and report."⁸⁸

On April 7, 1942, Knox announced that 277 black volunteers per week would be accepted for enlistment, to be trained for general service,

not just as stewards and messmen. The first-year goal was fourteen thousand blacks in service as clerks, gunners, signalmen, radio operators, ammunition handlers, and so on. They would be trained in segregated units, and could rise in rank no higher than petty officer. Except as stewards and messmen, they were still barred from seagoing duty.

It was a large step for the Navy, but the restrictions outraged blacks. The National Urban League's *Opportunity* magazine concluded that the service had chosen "to affirm the charge that Japan is making against America to the brown people . . . that the so-called Four Freedoms enunciated in the great 'Atlantic Charter' were for white men only."⁸⁹ (The "Four Freedoms," articulated by Roosevelt in January 1941, although not part of the Atlantic Charter, were freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.)

Black enlistment began on June 1, 1942, at Camp Robert Smalls (named for the black Civil War naval hero), an isolated section of the Great Lakes Naval Training Center outside Chicago. Under the benevolent if paternalistic leadership of Lieutenant Commander Daniel Armstrong, an Annapolis grad whose father had founded the all-black Hampton Institute, black recruits received training that was in some respects superior to that of whites.

By February 1943, under the Selective Service Act, the Navy had a new quota of twelve hundred black sailors a month for general service, fifteen hundred for the messmen's branch. Approximately half of all blacks would be detailed to shore billets within the continental United States and most were assigned to ammunition and supply depots. In June and July 1943 there were two serious incidents of racial unrest, the first of many throughout the war: at a Virginia ammunition depot, and in a construction battalion on a Caribbean transport.

In their wake, a small "Special Program Unit" was created to deal with racial problems and coordinate policies for black sailors. Thirty-one-year-old Commander Christopher Sargent (a former member of Dean Acheson's law firm) was the unit's leader; a superior once called him "a philosopher who could not tolerate segregation." The Special Program Unit encouraged the training of a black shore patrol (Navy police), established a remedial training center with black faculty for illiterate draftees at Camp Robert Smalls, and got the Navy to rule that, except for special units, no black sailor could be assigned to maintenance or stevedore work in the continental United States. The unit was also responsible for two "experiments": the commissioning of the U.S.S. *Mason*, a destroyer escort with a crew of 196 black enlisted men and 44 white officers; and the assignment of 53 black seamen and 14 white officers to the

submarine chaser PC 1264.⁹⁰ Both ships would eventually replace their white petty officers and some of their other officers with blacks. The crew of the *Mason* was recognized (fifty years later) for its heroism in battling ninety-mile-an-hour winds and forty-foot waves as an escort support ship to England in 1944. A convoy commander's recommendation of letters of commendation for the *Mason* had been "lost" in official channels.

By the fall of 1943, after congressional queries and much protest from civil rights organizations, the Navy began to examine the question of black officers. The Navy special assistant Adlai E. Stevenson, an Illinois lawyer and a future Democratic presidential candidate, was a strong advocate for black officers. There were then three roads to Navy commission: the Naval Academy at Annapolis; the V-12 reservist training program; and direct commission from enlisted ranks or civilian life. Annapolis remained closed to blacks until 1945, and only a few black V-12 reservists had been enlisted. The first sixteen black officer candidates to begin segregated training at Great Lakes on January 1, 1944, were chosen from among top enlisted personnel. They would receive only eight weeks of training—half the normal period.

Suspecting that they were being sabotaged, the candidates covered their windows with blankets after lights-out and continued studying, teaching one another what they knew. Their exam scores were so high that they were ordered retested. The second results were even higher: the best class scores ever recorded at Great Lakes. The Navy decided, however, that only twelve of the sixteen would be commissioned. Among the chosen twelve, ten had gone to college and two to technical schools. A thirteenth, with outstanding grades, was permitted to become a warrant officer. There was no graduation ceremony, but the men were commissioned on March 17, 1944, and photographed in a handsome group portrait for *Life* magazine. They were known as the Golden Thirteen: Ensigns Jess W. Arbor, Phillip S. Barnes, Samuel E. Barnes, Dalton L. Baught, George Cooper, Reginald Goodwin, James E. Hair, Graham E. Martin, Dennis D. Nelson II, John W. Reagan, Frank C. Sublett, and W. Sylvester White, and Warrant Officer Charles B. Lear. (Lena Horne had never heard such "roars of approval" in her life as when she made a 1944 appearance for black sailors at Great Lakes. She realized that the roars might not have been for her, but for her escort, Ensign Reginald Goodwin, one of the "Thirteen.") Upon receiving their commissions, each of the Golden Thirteen was officially designated "Deck Officers Limited—Only," a category usually reserved for officers whose physical or educational deficiencies kept them from performing all line-officer duties.⁹¹

In February 1944, after much opposition, the Special Program Unit, through the Bureau of Naval Personnel, published a pamphlet entitled "Guide to the Command of Negro Naval Personnel." Among its many controversial statements: "The Navy accepts no theories of racial differences in inborn ability, but expects that every man wearing its uniform be trained and used in accordance with his maximum individual capacity determined on the basis of individual performance."⁹² The Navy eventually decided that maintaining duplicate training facilities was too expensive and desegregated officer training. By the end of the war there were some sixty black officers.

Frank Knox died in April 1944 and was replaced by his former undersecretary, James Forrestal, a Wall Street liberal and longtime member of the National Urban League. With the help of his special assistant Adlai Stevenson and the Special Program Unit's Christopher Sargent, Forrestal began moving the Navy toward integration. Too many blacks were relegated to shore jobs, he wrote; it seemed they had simply "swapped the waiter's apron for the stevedore's grappling hook." Forrestal concluded that the time had come to "expand the use of Negro personnel by assigning them to general sea duty." In the summer of 1944, he met with Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations and Commander in Chief of the U.S. Fleet. Forrestal described the meeting to Lester Granger, a black member of the National Urban League, later Forrestal's special representative on Navy racial matters. "I don't think that our Navy Negro personnel are getting a square break," Forrestal told King. "I want to do something about it, but I can't do anything about it unless the officers are behind me. I want your help. What do you say?" Admiral King sat for a moment looking out the window, then replied, "You know, we say that we are a democracy and a democracy ought to have a democratic Navy." While he doubted the success of the efforts, King told Forrestal that he was behind him "all the way."⁹³

Accepting arguments against integrating fighting ships in mid-war, Forrestal outlined an "experimental" plan for the integration of auxiliary ships, based on the merchant marine model: black signalmen, electricians, and boatswain's mates would mix with their white counterparts on tankers and troop transports. Forrestal presented this idea to Roosevelt in a letter in May 1944: "From a morale standpoint, the Negroes resent the fact that they are not assigned to general service billets at sea, and white personnel resent the fact that Negroes have been given less hazardous assignments." He explained that blacks would be used only on the larger auxiliaries and would make up not more than 10 percent of the ship's complement. If the plan worked, they would be used in small numbers on

other ships, "as necessity indicates." The White House response was "OK, FDR."⁹⁴

The experiment worked: official records indicated that black personnel had been "successfully absorbed in the ships' companies." The scheme was extended to smaller vessels with similar success.

CARL ROWAN: OFFICER AND GENTLEMAN

Lieutenant Carl T. Rowan, one of a handful of black V-12 graduates, participated in the first integration experiments. The son of a World War I veteran, Rowan entered the V-12 program in Topeka in 1943—the lone black among 334 whites. The war was a "great liberator," he wrote in his autobiography, *Breaking Barriers*. It opened "new horizons of opportunity and potential achievement." Rowan's white roommate quipped that he was too busy trying to pass the physics course "to count the pigment" in his skin. The V-12 unit commander commended Rowan, the "lone Negro in a white world," for the "icy stare" with which he handled overt bigotry.

In 1944, Rowan was transferred to Northwestern University's V-12 program, but the university refused to permit a black to live on campus. Sent to the Oberlin College program, Rowan joined two other blacks. Oberlin, "citadel of liberalism," made them all roommates. Now there were "two separate worlds," and Rowan had no white friends. At New York City's Fort Schuyler Naval Reserve Midshipman School, he was one of three black "guinea pigs," but billeting was strictly alphabetical. Rowan's bunkmate, a Mississippi white, confessed before washing out ("sort of one Southern boy to another") that if anyone had told him that one day he would be "sitting beside a Nigra" and "not minding it," indeed "liking it and appreciating it," he would have "knocked somebody's teeth out." But there he was, sharing a final Hershey's bar with Rowan, and he wanted to wish him "luck." The change of heart was a two-way street. "As my bunkmate left, so did some of my bitterest feelings about my native South."⁹⁵

At nineteen, Rowan was commissioned "an officer and gentleman" in the United States Navy. Unlike the "Golden Thirteen," he was qualified for officer duty anywhere, including oceangoing vessels. Fighting ships, however, remained off limits. He became a communications officer on the tanker U.S.S. *Mattole*. The commander's fitness report found Rowan "satisfactory," but recommended duties ashore as "administrator of colored personnel," or on a ship "manned by colored personnel." Transferred to a larger tanker, the U.S.S. *Chemung*, Rowan became deputy commander of the thirty-five-man communications crew, including two

blacks. The men took orders from him "without protest or even the slightest hesitation." He credited the ship's commanding officer, C. K. Holzer, who had refused, despite an official advisory, to "prepare the crew" for a black officer. Holzer did not want the crew to think of Rowan as different from any other officer. "I'm a Navy man," he told Rowan. "We're in a war. To me, it's that stripe that counts—and the training and leadership that it's supposed to symbolize." Rowan appreciated the statement. "The skipper had shown an acute understanding of what I—and other Negroes—wanted: no special restrictions and no special favors; just the right to rise or fall on merit."⁹⁶

After the war, fellow Navy man John F. Kennedy made Rowan deputy assistant secretary for public affairs in the State Department and, later, U.S. ambassador to Finland.

THE PORT CHICAGO MUTINY

On July 17, 1944, the Navy suffered the worst home front disaster of the war with the explosion of two military cargo ships at Port Chicago, California. Three hundred and twenty sailors were killed, including 202 black Navy ammunition loaders. The accident represented more than 15 percent of all black naval casualties—and the worst domestic loss of life—in World War II. Congress proposed compensation of up to \$5,000 to families of victims, but Mississippi's Representative John Rankin objected because most of the prospective recipients were black. Maximum compensation was reduced to \$3,000.⁹⁷

Less than a month after the explosion, 258 of the surviving black seamen, denied the thirty-day leave granted to white survivors, refused to load ammunition at a nearby port under the same unsafe conditions, and were arrested. Fifty of those arrested were singled out and charged with mutiny, a crime punishable by death. Despite massive civilian protests, the war's largest demonstration of unified black anger, all the sailors were convicted and given long prison terms. "This is not fifty men on trial for mutiny," said the NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall, defending the accused sailors. "This is the Navy on trial for its whole vicious policy toward Negroes. . . . Negroes in the Navy don't mind loading ammunition. They just want to know why they are the only ones doing the loading!"⁹⁸ Thanks in large part to Marshall's efforts, forty-seven of the fifty protestors were released two years later.

Acknowledging that racism was responsible for the fact that only blacks had been assigned to load ammunition, but denying that prejudice tainted the fifty-year-old mutiny verdicts, in 1994 the Navy rejected a re-

quest to overturn the verdicts against the 258 original Port Chicago mutineers. In July 1999, fifty-five years after the explosion, the black Navy Veterans of the Great Lakes Naval Center and the NAACP were among those asking President Clinton to clear the names of the court-martialed sailors, for the sake of the last two known survivors. One was pardoned in December 1999.

THE WAVES: HARRIET PICKENS AND FRANCES WILLS

On July 28, 1944, Navy Secretary Forrestal, overturning his predecessor's adamant refusal, recommended that black women be accepted into the Navy. Black WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services) would be trained on an integrated basis and assigned "wherever needed within the continental limits of the United States, preferably to stations where there are already Negro men."⁹⁹ The charge by the 1944 Republican presidential candidate, Thomas E. Dewey, that the White House discriminated against black women helped accelerate their enlistment. An October 1944 directive ordered the Navy, the Coast Guard, and the Marines to enroll black women on a nondiscriminatory basis.

The integration of black women into the Navy found a strong ally in the WAVES director, Captain Mildred H. McAfee, who in peacetime was president of Wellesley College, but she could not combat entrenched Navy racism. While the first Women's Auxiliary Army Corps officer candidate school class of 440 had included forty black women, the *last* training class of WAVES included only two: thirty-year-old Lieutenant, junior grade, Harriet Pickens, and twenty-six-year-old Ensign Frances Wills. Both New Yorkers, they graduated from training at Smith College on December 21, 1944. Despite the handicap of joining the class when one-third of the eight-week course was over, Pickens, daughter of the highly respected NAACP official William Pickens, graduated third. She received a personal letter of congratulation from Eleanor Roosevelt—and endless GI fan mail. A "poor soldier somewhere in the South Pacific" hoped she would write; another, from "somewhere in the ETO," asked her to say "hello to all the girls in your outfit"; and one, "lonesome goodness knows," was looking to correspond with "a cute little WAVE." Lieutenant Harriet Pickens (engaged to my great-uncle Sergeant John Burke Horne) was a distinct public relations asset for the Navy.

Within six months of graduation, seventy-two black women were enlisted in Navy basic training and Pickens and Wills were part of the officer personnel aboard the "U.S.S. *Hunter*." The "*Hunter*" was not a ship, but a group of buildings leased from Hunter College in New York City,

where WAVE boots (new recruits), including thirty-two blacks, were trained on an integrated basis. Wills continued to train incoming WAVES, and Pickens had supervisory and public relations assignments.

In January 1945, Phyllis Mae Daly became the first black member of the Navy Nurse Corps. Six more black nurses were eventually commissioned. The Coast Guard accepted a small number of black female enlistees, but the Marine Corps Women's Reserve did not enroll blacks until 1949.

THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES: "THE CHOSEN FEW"—
EDGAR HUFF, GILBERT "HASHMARK" JOHNSON, BILL DOWNEY

"The Negro race has every opportunity now to satisfy its aspirations for combat, in the Army," said Marine Corps Commandant Major General Thomas Holcomb in January 1942. "And their desire to enter the naval service is largely, I think to break into a club that doesn't want them."¹⁰⁰ Grudgingly bowing to government pressure, the Marines were the last military service to accept black volunteers. General Ray A. Robinson complained to a Selective Service officer: "Eleanor says we gotta take in Negroes, and we are just scared to death; we've never had any; we don't know how to handle them; are afraid of them." The Selective Service officer promised to help Robinson "get good ones": "I'll get the word around that if you want to die young, join the Marines. So anybody that joins [has] got to be pretty good!" Robinson later admitted that they got "some awfully good Negroes." The black recruits, 75 percent of whom had some college education, included specialized technicians, teachers, ROTC grads, and even Army professionals who had relinquished commissions for the Corps. But there would be no black Marine officers, despite the superior quality of these recruits.

Montford Point Marine training center, in North Carolina, was home to the first black Marines. A token two defense battalions (seacoast artillery, antiaircraft artillery, and infantry and tank units for overseas base defense)—the 51st and 52nd—would be trained for combat. The rest of the seventeen thousand black Marines were trained for the noncombat messmen and stewards branches and for depot and ammunition companies. Depot and ammunition companies, which often served in the line of fire hauling supplies onto beaches during offensives and guarding and delivering ammo, were trained only in the use of light firearms. From October 1943 until September 1944, one ammunition company and two depot companies were organized every month at Montford Point. The Marines had discovered a useful role for the new, unwanted black re-

cruits. Placing them in formerly white labor battalions as Pacific support troops would, according to Marine leadership, free more white Marines for fighting.

The Montford Point Marines, like the Tuskegee Airmen, were named for their segregated training camp. Montford Point, in the Sea Islands of black Civil War history, was a swampy, mosquito-ridden, snake- and bear-infested forest behind Camp Lejeune. The nearest civilization was Jacksonville, North Carolina, a sand-and-palmetto coastal town. Despite general hostility, Montford had a relatively benign white command staff. Black Marines respected Colonel Samuel A. Woods, Jr., the first commanding officer of the 51st Composite Defense Battalion, a veteran of World War I who had fought in China, Cuba, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic. Drill instructors, also old-line Marine types, were chosen from among the least openly racist. Nevertheless, the traditional welcome to Marine recruits—"I'm going to make you wish you had never joined this damn Marine Corps"—was given new significance for Montford Pointers.

"Are you sure you want to join the Marines?" the recruiting officer asked twenty-two-year-old Edgar R. Huff of Gadsden, Alabama. It was June 1942; Huff had read in the paper that qualified blacks would be admitted. "Sergeant, I am more sure I want to join the Marines than about anything else in my life."¹⁰¹ The recruiting sergeant walked to the window, looked out, then turned and said, "Well, I'll take a chance on you." Huff, who stood over six feet tall and weighed nearly two hundred pounds, enlisted "from a log cabin in the cornfields of Alabama" with a quarter in his pocket, a quarter he was to carry for thirty years, for good luck. "I wanted to be a Marine because I had always heard that the Marine Corps was the toughest outfit going, and so I wanted to be a member of the best organization," said Huff in a later interview with the authors of *Blacks in the Marine Corps*.¹⁰² His father, Edgar R. Huff, Sr., a World War I veteran who grew up among Alabama Creek Indians and was fluent in their language, had served in Signal Corps Intelligence and died from mustard gas in France.

"You may as well go over the hill, or go home tonight," white DI's yelled at the black recruits standing at attention in their undershorts at one A.M. on the second night of boot camp, "because you'll never make good Marines!" They stood at attention for two hours, as mosquitoes attacked. When they were finally allowed to return to their huts, several began to pack. "Unpack your bags, men!" said Huff, calling a meeting and making the first of his many speeches. "They want us to fail," he went on. "Don't let anybody push you out of the Marines . . . hold on like

a bull dog on a bone. Don't let our race down; they are depending on us to succeed. Unpack your bags and stick to it like men." A black Marine who survived boot camp, Huff believed, "could go through hell singing a song."¹⁰³

Huff dropped out of school in the tenth grade because his widowed mother, a domestic, had been fired by her white employers when she needed a major operation. As a Marine recruit, he passed his high school equivalency test and also enjoyed "regular balanced meals, electric lights, running water and an inside bath" for the first time in his life. Boot camp, for Huff, built "muscles, alertness, discipline, courtesy and military pride."¹⁰⁴ By the end of November 1942, after eight weeks of the "purity" of boot camp nutrition, the recruit platoons found that beer and candy bars made them sick.

The Marine Corps decided to develop black noncommissioned officers. Exceptional black recruits were singled out as acting "jacks," or drill instructors. In January 1943, Private Edgar R. Huff, promoted to private first class, became the first black Marine NCO. A month later, Huff recommended that a fellow Alabaman, Private Gilbert Johnson, also be promoted. Johnson, with two years of college and sixteen years' combined service in the Army and Navy, should have been promoted faster than Huff, but was considered "outspoken." Johnson was thirty-seven when he arrived at Montford Point, and was so impressive in his naval uniform (officer's steward, First Class) with three stripes up and three stripes down his arm (thus his nickname, "Hashmark"), that Huff stood at attention until Johnson said, "Son, sit down." Huff had never seen anyone so "squared away." Over time the two would become best friends; they married identical-twin sisters.

By May 1943, black sergeants and drill instructors were in charge of all training platoons at Montford. "Hashmark," now Sergeant Johnson, was chief DI. Other black NCOs were George A. Jackson, a former Army lieutenant, and John T. Pridgen, a veteran of the 10th Cavalry. Arvin L. "Tony" Ghazlo, a former bodyguard and jujitsu instructor from Philadelphia, and his assistant Ernest "Judo" Jones became senior instructors in bayonet and in unarmed combat for all black recruits. Many recruits believed that with black NCOs boot camp became even tougher. Johnson admitted to being something of an "ogre," but the goal—to shape in a few weeks "a type of Marine fully qualified in every respect to wear that much cherished Globe and Anchor"—was "nearly impossible."¹⁰⁵

Everyone had been awed when Huff, a "rangy-built dude" with a "high-pitched voice," became the Marine Corps' first "real live Negro Private First Class," wrote Bill Downey, then a private in the 16th Pla-

toon, in *Uncle Sam Must Be Losing the War*. Recruits had been told to salute anything, "even a zebra," that had a stripe. "The first time we saw our black PFC we followed him around like cubs," he wrote. "We were so proud of our PFC that we saluted the man at every corner of the company area." Downey, whose grandfather had been the first black policeman in Iowa, enlisted from his hometown, Des Moines, after reading a newspaper headline that "Marines are suffering 50 percent casualties on Guadalcanal." The trip to Montford was Downey's first time in the South. Traveling in the "cattle car," with no bathroom and no food, he noticed a black Army officer with an "aura of withdrawn dignity," reading a paperback as if he were in the Jim Crow car "by choice."¹⁰⁶

The 16th Platoon had been in limbo for nearly a month, waiting for enough recruits to begin training. Meanwhile, they had no uniforms, no equipment, no boots or shoes. The men cleaned toilets and hauled garbage in civilian clothes—some in zoot suits. They were forced to stand naked at attention in the sun for hours, so that "mosquitoes could feast," and ordered to memorize the Marine Corps manual, with more laws and rules than the Constitution. For the first ten days, Downey believed that the chief drill instructor's intent was to drive recruits either to "commit suicide or go mad." The white chief DI was, oddly, named Sergeant Germany. Downey remembered his first words: "I did not come here to make friends. I came here to undertake the impossible assignment of making Marines out of you goddam people. When the first load of y'all got here it made me want to puke, then go get drunk. The material gets worse with each platoon. The Marine Corps is not for cooks and janitors. Which is about all you son of a bitchin' people are qualified to do as far as I can see. Just remember that I am going to try and get as much out of you people as I would from a platoon of white recruits. If I have to kill you to do it then you are dead. . . . My name is Sergeant Germany. I'm a red-necked peckerwood and I hate a goddamn nigger."¹⁰⁷

The platoon, completely at Sergeant Germany's mercy, felt an "acrid hatred" of its drill instructor, "much more than the animosity of black for white or the hatred of the oppressed for the oppressor," Downey wrote. Midway through boot camp, Germany was abruptly transferred to the South Pacific. Downey remembered his farewell to the troops: "You people are about as far along as a patient man can take you. . . . There are buds of leadership among you. . . . This has been an interesting two and a half months. You ain't the worst bunch I ever seen." Later, hearing that Germany had been killed in the first wave during the assault on Peleliu, they all raised bottles "to a bad-assed redneck son-of-a-bitch!" Soon after, Downey himself made PFC.¹⁰⁸

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In the summer of 1943, Major General Henry L. Larsen, the new Camp Lejeune commander, was invited to a Montford "boxing smoker" (so called because officers smoked cigars), where he delivered an unforgettable speech to the assembled Montford troops. Having just returned "from the hellish battles of Guadalcanal," he was stunned by the new Marine Corps: "Dogs in the infantry to serve as sentries. Women in the Marines. Then when I saw YOU people in uniforms—Uncle Sam surely must be losing the war."¹⁰⁹ The response of the black troops was immediate and tumultuous. At least one white witness was equally unhappy. "It broke my heart," the musician and composer Bobby Troup recalled when I spoke to him in 1991. In 1943, he was twenty-five-year-old Lieutenant Robert W. Troup, Jr., of New York City, camp recreation director and band organizer.

Black USO shows, intramural sports, and, especially, music were Montford's morale boosters. Men who had played with Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Erskine Hawkins were in the 51st Battalion Band. Lieutenant Troup, the band organizer, was a jazz musician, the composer of such hits as "Daddy, I Want a Diamond Ring" (on the 1941 Hit Parade for fourteen weeks), "Snootie Little Cutie" (a Tommy Dorsey favorite), and "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66." He was most popular at Montford, however, for a song called "Jacksonville": "Take me away from Jacksonville, 'cause I've had my fill and that's no lie. / Jacksonville stood still while the rest of the world went by." In Downey's words, the men of the 51st considered Troup "the best paddy [white] on the base" and "would have followed him to hell if he had asked." Troup was not big on discipline; the men called him Bobby within earshot: No one in the Marine Corps was supposed to call a lieutenant by his first name . . . but Bobby Troup kept playing like the only thing that would upset him was if someone tried to take away his piano." Troup was a reminder to Downey "that there were still civilized white men in the world."¹¹⁰

Despite rumors that no black Marines would actually see combat, the new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Floyd A. Stephenson, recommended in mid-1943 that the 51st become a regular heavy defense battalion. Now they were separated from the rest of the unit for intensive training. The men of the 51st were wary of Marine Corps promises, however: "We went through the motions of training to become a composite defense battalion but none of us had many illusions left," Downey wrote. "We felt the 51st had been a front for getting blacks to enlist so they could be used as servants and stevedores. . . . The general anger and re-

sentment for being hoodwinked into thinking we would someday be a crack combat Marine force became a catalyst. We began to work harder and even stayed up nights to improve our defense battalion skills. We would make them notice us if we had to declare a war of our own."¹¹¹

In September 1943, the 51st Defense Battalion moved out of the main Montford Point area to special quarters at Camp Knox. The last use of Camp Knox, formerly belonging to the Civilian Conservation Corps, had been war dog training, and the quarters were badly in need of repair, but the move was popular with the battalion. As the only black Marine unit engaged in extensive combat training, the men felt that they were "a bit different [from], superior even" to the rest of Montford Point. Morale soared with the arrival of brand-new 155mm artillery guns—"not the tools of a work battalion." The guns were named Lena Horne, Joe Louis, and Zombie. The men had seen such guns in movie newsreels but never dreamed of having them.

"When the new pieces were assigned to gun crews," wrote Downey, "the guys were so excited they worked all one weekend sandbagging their guns into mock positions." With artillery placed toward the ocean, and target ships towed by small Navy craft, the first shot fired by black Marines in U.S. history was a direct hit on a moving target on the ocean off Onslow Beach. The beach, of course, was otherwise off limits to blacks. "Discrimination had become such a way of life we tried to take it in our stride, although inside it was a festering sore that refused to heal," wrote Downey. "To retain our sensibility we put all our energy in our work."¹¹²

The 51st became known as a hotshot shooting outfit. Words like "remarkable" and "unbelievable" were heard and passed on to the company. A young white Marine whose jeep Downey helped tow out of the sand reported that everyone had heard that the 51st was a "hot outfit," but "the brass didn't want the outside world to know."¹¹³ In November 1943, on the last day of gunnery training, with more military brass on the beach than ever before, the men broke all existing coastal and antiaircraft firing records. The achievement remained a secret, but their scores shot them into the war. They were sent overseas. In January 1944, they were on their way to the Pacific.

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"This is a troop train of the United States Marines on their way to a port of disembarkment," a lieutenant argued with a southern sheriff who refused to let the men get off the train for food. "I don't give a good goddam if them niggers is going to Tokyo," the sheriff replied. "They ain't

goin' to eat in Atlanta, Georgia, with white folks." When one of the officers returned with news that German POWs were eating in the station cafeteria, the men wanted to empty the train and take the station apart. "It was so frustrating that some of the guys actually wept," Downey wrote. "There was no place to hide their tears or their shame."¹¹⁴

San Diego was almost as bad. Proudly wearing new shoulder patches, red ovals with a blue 90mm antiaircraft gun superimposed over a large white "51," they disrupted the show when they were told that they would have to sit in the back at the open-air movie. Morale fell further when the weapons and equipment the battalion had brought from Montford were turned in to San Diego quartermasters. The men feared a non-combat assignment. But on February 11, 1944, they sailed for Nanumea and Funafuti, the Ellice Islands, to relieve the white 7th Defense Battalion. Eager to leave, the 7th were "never so glad to see black people in their lives."¹¹⁵

The 51st got their first look at Marine life in the Pacific. "We must have looked as strange to them as they did to us," Downey wrote. "Their dress violated all Corps rules and should have been good for at least two hundred years imprisonment. . . . All dungarees were cut off at the knees. Their shoes were slashed open at the toes and along the sides. Everyone was bearded, mustachioed and bushy-headed. Shirts looked like vests."¹¹⁶ The 51st was in the field, but there would be little combat: the unit's job was to maintain and defend island airfields. The greatest dangers, the men were told, were mildew, fungus, and warts.

Funafuti itself, which no one had heard of (Tarawa, Bougainville, and Midway were the islands in the news), was a disappointment. About three miles long, three-quarters of a mile wide at its widest, and with a maximum elevation of twelve feet, its chief vegetation was coconut trees. The island was populated by lizards, rats, and mosquitoes, its human elements consisting of a small British Colonial Office detachment, American sailors, Marines, a company of Seabees (Navy construction battalions), and a few Polynesian women. "There was no doubt we were being dumped," wrote Downey. "As sure as the Gilberts and the Marshalls were stepping stones to Japan, Funafuti was heading the other way." The Japanese radio propagandist Tokyo Rose echoed his sentiments: "I beseech you black men of the Marines to listen to me. Don't you know you are being used? They make you do the menial work and fill your head with lies about the Japanese people being your enemies. . . . Please don't hate us for killing you and your black brothers. Especially those of your black brothers who at this very minute work as stevedores for the whites on Japanese islands north of your base."¹¹⁷ They liked

Rose. She played the best jazz in the Pacific—Ellington, Basie, and the Benny Goodman trio.¹¹⁷

Funafuti was followed, six months later, by Eniwetok atoll, "the general shape of a dead whale," with all vegetation "blasted off." This time the 51st took over the weapons and equipment of the 10th Antiaircraft Battalion. The Seabees on Eniwetok kept busy making "Japanese souvenirs": swords from American bayonets, and flags out of parachute silk. The men of the 51st sharpened their gunnery talents; according to the record books, they were the best gunners in the Corps. But the first black combat Marines spent nineteen months in the Pacific, until the war's end, without seeing combat.¹¹⁸

The only black Marines to see combat were not combat troops. Members of the 3rd Marine Ammunition Company and 18th and 20th Depot Companies hit the beach on D-Day Saipan—June 15, 1944. The island was the first target in the Japanese-held Mariana Islands. Men from the 3rd Ammo Company helped repulse an enemy counterattack during the night and were credited with knocking out a Japanese machine gun. An exploding mortar shell produced four 18th Depot Company casualties as they unloaded ammunition and other supplies. "My company landed about 2 p.m. on D-Day," wrote the 20th's commander, Captain William C. Adams. "We were the third wave, and all hell was breaking when we came in. It was still touch and go when we hit shore, and it took some time to establish a foothold. My men performed excellently. Among my own company casualties, my orderly was killed." Adams's orderly, Private Kenneth J. Tibbs, trained as a noncombatant, was the first black Marine killed in action in World War II.¹¹⁹

The Marine Corps and the national press recognized the actions of black Marines on Saipan. "The Negro Marines are no longer on trial," said the Marine commandant, General Alexander Vandegrift. "They are Marines, period." *Time* reported: "Negro Marines, under fire for the first time, have rated a universal 4.0 on Saipan."¹²⁰ The 3rd Ammunition and 18th, 19th, and 20th Depot were included in the 4th Marine Division Presidential Unit Citation. Black Marines of the 2nd and 4th Ammunition Companies were also in the thick of the recapture of Guam in July 1944, and were included in the Navy Unit Citation.

The recapture of Guam did not mark the end of encounters with the Japanese. Two black Marine companies took part in the bloody battle for the island of Peleliu in September. The 11th Depot Company, with seventeen men wounded, had the highest casualty rate of any black Marine unit. In December, Private First Class Luther Woodward of the 4th Ammunition Company earned the highest decoration won by a black Marine.

Following fresh footprints near the ammunition dump he was guarding, he crawled through thick brush and spotted six Japanese. He immediately opened fire, killing one and wounding another before they fled. Returning to camp, he got five Marines to join him in hunting down the enemy. Woodward killed two more Japanese. He was awarded the Bronze Star, later upgraded to Silver.

GENE DOUGHTY AND THE 8TH AMMO AT IWO JIMA

In February 1945, twenty-year-old squad leader and acting platoon sergeant Gene Doughty and the 8th Ammunition Company were transported to Guam aboard an LST (Landing Ship, Tank). A "floating hearse," Doughty called it when I interviewed him in 1990, "the worst transport ship that any soldier, Marine or Navy man would want to be on, particularly heading for a combat zone." The men of the 8th had no idea where they were going, but they knew that "something big" was up. Their destination was Iwo Jima in the Marianas, halfway between Tokyo and U.S. Air Force bases on Saipan, the site of the largest Marine amphibious operation in the Pacific.

The 8th Ammo landed after the first assault wave, just before sunset on D-Day plus 5, in the face of flying bullets, shell fire, and long-range-gun fire. All they saw on the beach were dead bodies and black volcanic ash. To Doughty it was a "hellish" landscape. Seasoned fighters who had seen Tarawa said it was "nothing like this." Outnumbered 5th Division Marines faced intense mortar fire from enemy soldiers dug into caves with labyrinthine tunnels and underground transits. With one landing beach for armada and assault troops, the Americans were easy targets. It took Doughty forty-five minutes to dig a foxhole in the black ash, and even that did not protect from shells.

Five days after landing, Doughty and the 8th Ammo saw six Marines from the 2nd Battalion, under heavy enemy fire, raise the American flag on Mount Suribachi, a long-inactive volcano. A mile away, the Americans on the beach applauded and cheered. (The flag raising was done twice, once for real and again for the famous photograph—both times under fire.) From February 19 to March 25, Marines and Japanese battled for Iwo Jima. Black Marine service and supply troops saw more action than the white 3rd Division, waiting offshore.

The "time for heroism," said Doughty, came on D-Day plus 25, when "all hell broke loose." That night, a company of Japanese sprang on Doughty's unit and made for the ammunition they were guarding. They came from underground, although the Marines had believed that all caves were sealed. Some of the Japanese appeared to be unarmed; others car-

ried spears, anything they could fight with. Korean slave laborers fought with bare hands, the Japanese having forbidden them weapons. Doughty could see that these were "much fiercer fighters" than American troops: highly disciplined, and trained to kill at the cost of their own lives. They seemed to come wave on wave, from skirmishes to minor engagements to pocket battles. Fighting in the dark, Doughty and his men had no idea how many they were killing. At sunrise, he could not believe his eyes. His men had killed a full company or more. Private Harold Smith was killed and two other 8th Ammo men were wounded. Private Vardell Donaldson of the 36th Depot was also killed, and two members of the 36th were wounded. Black Seabees were used as medical corpsmen, so that white corpsmen would not have to touch black Marines.

Twelve black Marines were wounded and three were killed in the first month of the battle for Iwo, the single fiercest contest in the Pacific. All told, more than six thousand Marines were killed and close to twenty thousand wounded, the most in a single Pacific encounter in World War II. Captain Robert C. Johnson, commander of the Seabees, called it "the most expensive piece of real estate the United States has ever purchased. We paid 550 lives and 2,500 wounded for every square mile."¹²¹ Two men of the 36th Depot were awarded Bronze Stars for "heroic achievement against the enemy." The secretary of the Navy announced that support units of the V Amphibious Corps were authorized to wear the Navy Unit Commendation ribbon.

When the Marines left Iwo, black Seabees and the 8th Ammo stayed behind for graves registration, a function traditionally reserved for black troops. Sunday, March 3, 1945, was a day Doughty would never forget. A Navy supply ship arrived, and the men were invited on board for bacon and eggs, milk, toast, and coffee. Doughty remembered feeling "so grateful to be alive and to have fresh food." The Navy left a portable shower unit, and the Seabees rigged a hot sulfur shower from a natural underground lava spring. It was Doughty's twenty-first birthday. He felt the shower was "God's blessing."

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The battle for Okinawa, the last Japanese island bastion, lasted from April 1 until June 21, 1945. Three black ammunition companies, the 1st, 3rd, and 12th, and four depot companies, the 5th, 18th, 37th, and 38th, were at Okinawa D-Day. Fourteen black Marines were wounded in the campaign; one, Steward Second Class Warren N. McGrew, Jr., was killed. The island was declared secure, but there was little letup for black troops: Okinawa was to be the principal supply and staging area for the invasion of Japan.

President Roosevelt died on April 12. The war in Europe was over on May 7. Now four Marine divisions were preparing for the October 1 invasion of the Japanese mainland. But the Marines' war was unexpectedly brought to an end in August. Hiroshima and the atomic bomb were beyond Doughty's "wildest dreams." He believed that dropping the bomb was a wise decision: "America never could have successfully invaded the Japanese mainland," he told me in 1990. "They had one-man submarines everywhere. Everyone was kamikaze—little children would be strapped in grenades."

Back home, on November 10, 1945, Private First Class Frederick C. Branch became the first black commissioned reserve officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. Shortly after, however, the Corps abolished its combat-lacking, but record-breaking, black antiaircraft units. "So long as social conditions make segregation desirable," reported Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Moore to the Marine Corps commandant, "it is believed that Negro Marines would be more advantageously employed in almost any other type unit."¹²²

The Marines were perhaps the fiercest in their resistance to integration. The Army, fighting in Europe, was confronted with such dire manpower shortages that shortly before the end, in an ad hoc field experiment, black soldiers were asked to volunteer for integrated combat.

"INTEGRATION": THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

In December 1944, in the midst of the fiercest fighting of the Ardennes offensive, Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee officially suggested that black service troops be permitted to volunteer for combat. Desperately needing manpower, Eisenhower agreed (as did Generals George Patton and Omar Bradley), and Lee's Com Z issued a late-December circular calling for black volunteers. The call was limited to privates who had some infantry training in the upper four categories of the Army General Classification Test. Noncommissioned officers wishing to apply would have to accept a rank reduction. "It is planned to assign you without regard to color or race to the units where assistance is most needed," read the appeal, "and to give you the opportunity of fighting shoulder to shoulder to bring about victory."¹²³ General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., drafted the directive. "Yesterday," he wrote to his wife, "I secured a decision from the High Command which I think is the greatest since the enactment of the Constitutional Amendments following the emancipation."¹²⁴ Two thousand two hundred and twenty-one black troops volunteered for combat in December 1944, to fill in for white troops already killed in the ongoing Battle of the Bulge.

The "invitation," worded as if it resulted from War Department beneficence rather than urgent need, was a definite policy departure—too much so, as it turned out, for the Supreme Headquarters American Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) under Eisenhower in Paris. Advised by Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith to warn the War Department that civil rights spokesmen might seize the moment to demand wider integration, Eisenhower revised Davis's circular.¹²⁵ The black volunteers would be trained in *platoons*—not as "individuals." They would remain in segregated groups, to which white commanders could assign white platoon sergeants and white platoon and squad leaders. Although it was no longer a serious issue, "integration" nevertheless made a point. An Army poll revealed that while only 33 percent of white officers had favored integration before the experiment, 77 percent favored it after. Among white enlisted men, the figures were 35 percent and 77 percent.¹²⁶

Alan Morrison was the only black correspondent for the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. In a postwar article in *Ebony*, he wrote: "When the news reached Washington that Negro and white Americans were battling the enemy in mixed companies, tempers flared on Capitol Hill and the War Department brusquely cabled European Theater headquarters for an 'explanation' of this violation of American racial policy."¹²⁷ A December 1944 letter to Mississippi's notoriously racist Senator Theodore Bilbo from Robert Byrd, a future U.S. senator from West Virginia, indicated the depth of white-supremacist reaction. "Integration of the Negro into White regiments is the very thing for which the Negro intelligentsia is striving and such a move would serve only to lower the efficiency of the fighting units and the morale of the average white serviceman as well," Byrd wrote.

I am a typical American, a southerner, and 27 years of age, and never in this world will I be convinced that race mixing in any field is good. All the social "do-gooders," the philanthropic "greats" of this day, the reds and the pinks . . . the disciples of Eleanor . . . the pleas by Sinatra . . . can never alter my convictions on this question. . . . I am loyal to my country and know but reverence to her flag, BUT I shall never submit to fight beneath that banner with a negro by my side. Rather I should die a thousand times, and see old Glory trampled in the dirt never to rise again, than to see this beloved land of ours become degraded by race mongrels, a throw back to the blackest specimen from the wilds.¹²⁸

Unlike the black soldiers with whom he would "never submit to fight," Byrd did not serve in the military in World War II.

The twenty-five-year-old black infantry medic Bruce M. Wright heard the Lee-Eisenhower announcement in Cardiff, Wales. Wright was insulted, he told me in our 1990 interview, by the message of "To Our Negro Troops": "You may now fight at the side of your white brothers who have borne the brunt of combat." Black GIs knew of the manpower shortage. Wright volunteered to leave his service unit for combat, "hoping to prove something, hoping that things would be better." He was one of three blacks assigned to K Company, 26th Regiment, 1st Infantry, and their welcome was memorable. "I never thought I'd live to see the day when a nigger would wear the Big Red One," said a "short, angry" white captain, as remembered by Wright in his autobiography, *Black Robes, White Justice*.¹²⁹

Wright had been drafted in 1942, in his second year at New York's Fordham Law School. Sent to basic training at Camp Rucker in Alabama, he earned ninety days in the stockade for protesting a two A.M. order for black troops to put out a fire started in the woods by a white artillery unit's target practice. Wright wrote letters to *The New York Times* about racism at Rucker, and to the black New York City congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., requesting help for a transfer. He found out later that none of the letters had left camp. Having studied pre-med at Lincoln University, he became a quartermaster battalion medic and, in February 1943, was sent overseas to England, Scotland, and Wales. In Swansea, before the black Red Cross was created, he became the object of a southern white Red Cross hostess's "fancy." More important, he befriended an English soldier who shared his interest in Dylan Thomas. Wright's new friend had worked for a publishing house. "I will see what I can do with this," he said, taking some of Wright's poetry. Several months later, Wright went to a German airport to meet a jeep with fifty copies of his collected verse, *From the Shaken Tower*, which described, in traditional poet-soldier fashion, idealism destroyed by war.

As an infantry medic, Wright had participated in the third-wave assault at Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944. As the landing craft hit the beach against a backdrop of hills belching fire and smoke, he saw panicked men drowning in four feet of water. He would never forget the sight. Wright won his first Purple Heart in Normandy, and was out of combat for thirty days in an English hospital. He won his second Purple Heart and first Bronze Star in Germany, wearing the Big Red One, in the aftermath of the "Bulge." In *Black Robes, White Justice*, Wright never speaks about his medals or how he won them; but he told me about them in 1990. Under counterattack on a lonely road, with German machine guns firing from the top of hill, he heard a white soldier say, "Oh, shit,

I'm hit." Always called when someone was hurt, Wright took off his pack and crawled under covering fire through a mine field, to a man who had been hit in the stomach by German dum dum (expanding) bullets. He put antiseptic powder on the wound and covered the man with his body until the attack subsided. The Bronze Star and a battlefield promotion came together. Three weeks later, he received a note from Missouri: "Thanks to the colored boy who tried to save my Jim." When the unit first moved to Germany, Wright informally defended black GIs accused of rape and other crimes. An officer told him, "If you'd forget race problems you'd make a good corporal."

Wright was in Czechoslovakia in May 1945 when he learned that the European war was over. He wrote a poem, "Journey to a Parallel":

*I remember the tired tumult of my urges
and the sun shining, and the dust, and the clouds,
and how I turned my rifle down;
I remember a cow stinking in the street
and a woman sweeping dung,
With Prague and Pilsen just forty kilometers;
I recall that songs were sung, attention stood, allegiance reasserted,
and I saw two colonels cry.
There was the first night of awkward peace
with pillows
trimmed in Slavic lace and lettered "schlafe wohl,"
and hugged into humanity;
I trembled and felt quite old.*

The 1st Infantry was reassigned to duty at the Nuremberg war crimes trial, but all black volunteers were taken out of the integrated units and sent to a redeployment camp outside Paris to dig sewage trenches with German prisoners of war. On some labor details, Germans drove trucks and supervised black American soldiers.

The assignment was in direct violation of Eisenhower's promise that those who had fought in line divisions as infantrymen would never have to serve in quartermaster units again. Wright joined thirty black soldiers in protest. They dug foxholes and slept outside camp perimeters. When they were accused of insurrection, he posted an open letter "To whom it may concern":

All of the men who were combat men, and who were assured and reassured that they would never again have to serve in the Quarter-

master, are completely demoralized by the impotence of the promises which were made them. They volunteered for combat infantry at a time when they felt that their country needed them, and at a time when no one knew just how successful von Runstedt's Ardennes offensive would be. Now they are being neglected and cast off, much in the manner of cheap shoes which are no longer serviceable.¹³⁰

Wright's posted open letters, often signed "Adgee Taitor," were famous. He was accused of inciting to riot. Let off lightly because of his medals and combat record, he was reassigned to a laundry unit, from which he went AWOL. He spent his second tour in an Army prison.

Wright may have been sent to prison, but his letter eventually made its way to Paris. Sergeant Herbert L. Wheeldin, another veteran of the "Bulge" experiment, took the letter to Eisenhower's headquarters. Wheeldin belonged to the black 5th Platoon, assigned to the white 310th Infantry Regiment, 78th Division, among the first Americans to cross the Rhine. "The fighting had no more stopped than we found they were taking men out of platoons and sending them to labor battalions scheduled for shipment to the Pacific," Wheeldin said in a postwar interview. But every man was a combat veteran, entitled to a trip home and a thirty-day furlough before being sent back into combat. Borrowing clean quartermaster corps uniforms, and sticking some papers under their arms to make themselves look official, Wheeldin and friends "borrowed" a jeep and drove straight to Paris and into the SHAEF courtyard. Ducking past the door of the officer on duty, and marching past the paratrooper outside Eisenhower's offices, they knocked on the door and stood there as if they "belonged." Surprisingly, they found a sympathetic colonel. He listened, made a few phone calls, and managed to get the men of the 5th Platoon home.

When Wright was finally sent home, he marched onto the troop ship with his duffel bag and a typewriter he had "liberated" in Czechoslovakia, wearing all his medals and decorations, including a combat infantryman's badge. A Navy officer sneered, "I didn't know niggers were fighting." Wright turned around, walked right off the ship, and went AWOL again, in Paris. He found his way to Léopold Sédar Senghor, the poet and future president of Senegal, who looked after him and fed him. Wright was caught eighteen months later, and again those who found him did not believe his medals were genuine. When they proved to be so, Wright was assigned to barracks instead of the stockade, but he was put in chains aboard the troop train to Ostend and the ship that would take him back to Fort Dix.

Back in the States, Wright graduated from New York University Law School on the GI Bill and became a judge in the New York State Supreme Court, known to his enemies as "Turn-'Em-Loose Bruce" for what they perceived as his excessive sympathies for the accused.

THE 761ST TANK BATTALION: E. G. McCONNELL AND THE "BLACK PANTHERS"

In late October 1944, with his Third Army bogged down in France's Saar Basin, General George S. Patton, Jr., needed replacements. The only combat armored units still in America were black. Of three "experimental" black battalions on maneuvers in Texas, Patton chose the 761st, welcoming them to Normandy on November 2, 1944, in typical "Blood and Guts" style: "Men, you're 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, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to you. Don't let them down, and, damn you, don't let me down."¹³¹ Afterward, Patton climbed aboard Private E. G. McConnell's tank to examine the new 76mm cannon. McConnell, remembering Patton in our 1991 interview, found him "dapper as he could be—pearl-handled revolver and all." "Listen, boy," Patton said, "I want you to shoot every damn thing you see—little children, old ladies, everybody you see." McConnell's response was "Yes sir!"

A "very patriotic" sixteen-year-old ex-Boy Scout from Queens, McConnell had volunteered for the tank corps in 1942, enlisting with parental permission. He went to training camp in his first pair of long pants, and was embarrassed when his mother asked the sergeant to look after him. Camp Upton was McConnell's first taste of discrimination. Soon after his arrival an order for black soldiers to perform KP (kitchen patrol) duty for whites was rescinded after black protest. It was withdrawn, McConnell believed, only because Joe Louis was stationed at Upton and authorities feared publicity. With Boy Scout resourcefulness, McConnell started his own laundry business, charging fifty cents for a "suntan" shirt and pants with military crease. He was so successful he eventually hired an assistant.

When they moved by train to Fort Knox after basic training at Upton, the unit was ordered to pull down the shades, for Kentucky whites were in the habit of shooting at passing black troops. At Fort Knox and, later, at Army Command Training School at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, McConnell learned enough about maintaining motorcycles and other

wheeled vehicles to become an accomplished mechanic. He also, at age seventeen, became disillusioned with the Army and with military and civilian racism. When he was promoted to corporal, he handed one stripe back in protest against the system.

McConnell had enlisted to fight; he wanted to get out of maintenance. In September 1944, choosing to risk a summary court-martial on his first furlough home, he stayed three days after leave to see his father, back from a California defense job. He was given six months in the stockade with some tank corps pals who had stayed with him. They were released under "company arrest" twenty-nine days later, to join the 761st when it went overseas.

A Sherman tank with a 76mm gun weighs thirty-five tons and requires a five- or six-man crew: driver, assistant driver, bow gunner, turret gunner, cannoneer, radio operator, and commander. McConnell, still under company arrest, was trained to handle all positions. In late October 1944, four months after D-Day, the 761st crossed the Channel to Normandy and Omaha Beach. As their tanks rolled out onto shore, they saw the wreckage of D-Day ships, tanks, and trucks, and of German bunkers. The 761st had been assigned to the 26th Infantry Division of Patton's Third Army, now stalled in front of Metz in the upper Saar Basin. They were welcomed on October 31 by Major General Willard S. Paul, 26th Infantry commander: "I am damned glad to have you with us. We have been expecting you for a long time, and I am sure that you are going to give a good account of yourselves. I've got a big hill up there that I want you to take, and I believe that you are going to do a great job of it."¹³² Two days later, standing atop the same half-track as General Paul, Patton gave his "kill those Kraut sonsabitches" speech.

November 8, 1944, D-Day in the Saar Basin, found the 761st leading 26th Division infantrymen toward the town of Bezange-la-Petite and Hill 253 (General Paul's "big hill"), through a landscape of snow, sleet, and mud. "A" Company's popular young white captain, David Williams II, author of *Hit Hard* (a 761st history), described himself as "a young punk out of Yale who also changed as the action went along." He knew no blacks except for the family maid and chauffeur, and considered himself a "most unlikely candidate" for black troops. "But I got my manhood with them," he later told *The New York Times*. "These guys were better than heroes because they weren't supposed to be able to fight, and they were treated worse than lepers. I can tell you, it took a rare sort of character to go out there and do what they did. I used to ask myself, why the hell should these guys fight? Why?"¹³³

Rolling in a mile and a half behind Williams, E. G. McConnell saw

"A" Company "slaughtered," and white infantrymen sprawled all over the ground by the German counteroffensive. Private Clifford C. Adams, a medic from Waco, Texas, was the first of the 761st to be killed—hit by an exploding shell while rendering aid to an injured soldier. Captain Garland N. Adamson, the battalion surgeon, operated on a wounded tanker while shells fell around him. Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers of Tecumseh, Oklahoma, opened the way for the capture of the town and the hill by climbing out of his tank under heavy fire to dismantle a roadblock. One of the acknowledged heroes of the 761st, Rivers would be responsible for more than three hundred German deaths between the towns of Hampont and Guebling alone. "Rivers led the way!" became a byword for bravery. Whenever his company attacked, Rivers's tank was always first into a town. But Rivers met his fate at Guebling, where his head was blown off. He won a posthumous Silver Star. Fifty years later, Captain David Williams, himself a Silver Star winner, joined Rivers's family in a campaign to have him awarded the Medal of Honor. According to Williams, Rivers refused morphine and even evacuation when his leg was torn to the bone by shrapnel. "You need me," Rivers said. "We did need him," said Williams. "Only he got killed."¹³⁴

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As three Third Army divisions slowly encircled the town of Metz, the 26th Infantry, the Ninth Air Force, and the 761st Tankers were closing off all entrances and exits. Resistance was stiff, and every inch was contested, even as the enemy withdrew. Five out of eleven tanks were lost at Honskirch on November 25. The night before that battle, McConnell dreamed that he had been killed. The next day the town was so familiar that he was convinced he had been there before. Then his tank was hit several times and he was knocked out, wounded in the head and arm. Waking up in a ditch, he thought he was dead or blind: his eyes were closed by blood. V-mail wadded in his helmet probably saved his life. When medics tried to put him in a jeep, he insisted on walking. "Get the other guys," he said. Forced onto the jeep, he found hundreds of moaning and crying wounded at the aid station, and a stack of bodies five feet high.

A two-star general visited the hospital, passing all the beds and greeting each man. At McConnell's bed, the general said, "What's wrong with you, boy? Got the clap?" McConnell was too stunned and angry to respond, but a white 26th Infantry man in the next bed said, "Hey, General, if he got it, he got it from your mother." When the general returned later that day with McConnell's Purple Heart, McConnell held up a

comic book in front of his face (normally he never looked at them), as the general read his commendation and placed his medal on the bed. McConnell was reassigned to the quartermasters after his wounds healed, but he demanded to return to the 761st, hitching his way back to the front.

In early December, Company "B" broke through the French Maginot Line at Aachen and Etting. Next stop was the Reich. Major General M. S. Eddy commended the unit for the "speed with which they adapted themselves to the front line under most adverse weather conditions," and the "gallantry with which they faced some of Germany's finest troops."¹³⁵ On December 11, the exhausted 26th Infantry was relieved. Infantry front lines were sent back to rest every three or four weeks, but there was no rest for the 761st. "Never once," remembered E. G. McConnell in 1991, "never once a shower truck. We washed with snow. Never once a Red Cross doughnut truck." McConnell refused ever to contribute to the Red Cross, because it "totally ignored" black GIs.

The unrelieved 761st and the green 87th crossed into Germany just as the order came to turn around and dash back to the Ardennes and Belgium for the Battle of the Bulge. On Christmas Eve, in two to four feet of snow and ice, the 761st was streaming northward, around and above beleaguered Bastogne, to relieve Lieutenant General Courtney S. Hodges's First Army. The 761st encountered what was left of the gradually retreating 13th SS Panzers. The Germans made their toughest stand at Tillet, but after five furious days, during which neither side yielded an inch, they began to retreat. The men of the 761st and the 87th had pushed Karl von Runstedt's army sixty miles back into Germany. Now they were following the Germans into their own land.

In March, joining the 103rd Infantry in Alsace-Lorraine, the 761st was ready to crack the Siegfried Line, the zone of heavy fortifications built in Germany directly in front of the Maginot Line, and make for the Rhine. They rode so far and fast along icy mountain curves that they were soon out of range of their own artillery. But the 761st and the 103rd overran retreating enemy columns. After knocking out Siegfried defenses at Reisdorf, tankers from "C" Company of the 761st shared celebratory fried eggs with infantrymen of the 103rd's 409th Regiment. In the fifteen miles between Reisdorf and Klingenstein—the latter on the far side of the mountains, beyond the Siegfried Line—"C" Company took out two antitank guns, twenty-four pillboxes, and nine machine-gun nests. They killed 265 Germans and captured 1,450. They had faced elements of fourteen different German divisions.

With white infantry riding the tanks or flanking them in the woods, the 761st set off across Germany to capture a thousand SS troops of the

Mountain Division, "liberate" camera factories and a cognac factory, and find beds to sleep in for the first time in months. Two platoons of the 761st, led by Second Lieutenants Frank C. Cochrane and Moses E. Dade, took part in the fighting that led to the capture of Hermann Göring's castle. Germans were surrendering by the thousands—though one fanatical SS trooper pulled a razor and slashed his throat before an American tank. Coburg, the ancient capital of Saxe-Coburg, fell on April 12, 1945. The 761st ate a victory dinner of fresh eggs, chicken, and wine in the square, beneath the monument to Coburg's black patron saint, St. Maurice of the third-century Theban Legion. Two days later, after much resistance, Bayreuth fell. The German defeat was imminent.

The 761st crossed the Danube on April 27. The next morning, they were the sole armored spearhead of the assault on Regensburg, future headquarters for Patton and the Third Army. They were now instructed to move toward Austria and a "destination unknown." The order finally came in early May: "You will advance to the Enns River, and you will wait there for the Russians." The entire 761st crossed into Austria on May 4 and headed for Steyr, on the Enns. Marshal Ivan Konev's First Ukrainian Front arrived on May 6. It was the great meeting of East and West, a hugely photographed and celebrated event. Between March 31 and May 6, the 761st took 106,926 prisoners, an average daily rate of 2,813, including twenty German generals. They also liberated the Gunskirchen concentration camp.¹³⁶

Major General E. H. Hughes, a former personal aide to Eisenhower, recommended the 761st for the Distinguished Unit Citation, but Eisenhower refused to sign the recommendation—although at least twelve white units to which the 761st had been attached did receive citations.

In 1978, after much campaigning on the part of 761st veterans, President Carter finally signed the Distinguished Unit Citation. The 761st was commended for "extraordinary heroism" in "operating far in advance of friendly artillery" and encountering "the fiercest of enemy resistance in the most heavily defended area of the war theater." They were also cited for spearheading the attack on the Siegfried Line: "The accomplishments of the 761st were truly magnificent as the successful crossing of the Rhine River into Germany was totally dependent upon the accomplishment of their mission."

When the movie *Patton* was released in 1970, no mention was made of the 761st. Patton had called on them in America's darkest hour. They had "come out fighting," staying longer on the front line than any other armored battalion, and riding deeper into Germany. But only one black was portrayed in the film: Patton's orderly.

"LIBERATORS"

"On April 11, 1945, I was liberated in Buchenwald at the age of 17, when the spark of life was almost extinguished," wrote the concentration camp survivor Benjamin Bender in an April 1985 letter to *The New York Times*. "The recollections are still vivid—black soldiers of the Third Army, tall and strong, crying like babies, carrying the emaciated bodies of the liberated prisoners." Bender was particularly struck by his liberators' tears. "In Buchenwald they didn't cry," he said, "they moaned like wounded animals."¹³⁷ He wrote the same words in a polite letter to President Ronald Reagan at the time of Reagan's controversial visit to a military cemetery containing SS graves in Bitburg, Germany. The last of his middle-class Polish Jewish family, Bender was one of five or ten survivors from a group of approximately two thousand, the rest of whom were murdered two days before liberation. To Bender, his black American liberators were "giants"—"not from this planet." In his memoir, *Glimpses*, he described his first sight of them: "The huge roll call square was full of American soldiers, General Patton's best, tall black men, six footers, with colorful scarves around their necks. I had never seen black men before. They were unreal to me."¹³⁸

"The most moving moment of my life was the day the Americans arrived, a few hours after the SS had fled," wrote Elie Wiesel, a Buchenwald survivor and Nobel laureate, in *The New York Times* on April 11, 1989. "It was the morning of April 11. I will always remember with love a big black soldier. He was crying like a child—tears of all the pain in the world and all the rage. Everyone who was there that day will forever feel a sentiment of gratitude to the American soldiers who liberated us."¹³⁹

In October 1991, the New York public television station WNET brought together thirty camp survivors and forty black veterans to see the documentary film *Liberators: Fighting on Two Fronts in World War II*. The film dealt with the 761st Tank Battalion and the 183rd Combat Engineers and the liberation of Buchenwald and Dachau. The film's creators, the respected black documentary filmmaker William Miles (creator of *Men of Bronze*, on World War I's 369th Regiment) and Nina Rosenblum, whose father had photographed the liberation of Dachau, hoped that the film might help repair damaged black-Jewish relations. In the film, some "survivors and liberators," including Benjamin Bender and the 761st veteran E. G. McConnell, traveled to Buchenwald.

By February 1993, *Liberators* was being called a fraud. An article by Jeffrey Goldberg in *The New Republic*, calling the film *The Exaggerators*, pointed out that the 761st was miles away in the west, at Coburg, on

April 11, when Patton's 4th Armored Division liberated Buchenwald.¹⁴⁰ E. G. McConnell was quoted in a *New York Post* editorial attacking *Liberators*, as calling the film "a lie." "We were nowhere near those camps when they were liberated," he said.¹⁴¹ He claimed that he had stopped collaborating with the filmmakers when he realized that they were "faking material." The editorial went on to state that several survivors who had said they were freed by black soldiers now no longer remembered when they first saw them, although they never retracted the fact that black soldiers were, indeed, their liberators.

By September 1993, WNET had withdrawn *Liberators* as "seriously flawed"; it would no longer be distributed or shown at public gatherings, nor would videotapes be sold. WNET did not question the film's premise—that black Americans were involved in liberating concentration camps—but "there are details, names of towns, locations of concentration camps, that through oral history and documentation and lack of documentation put some question as to who's got it right."¹⁴² It was agreed that the 761st did participate in the liberation of several smaller camps, but not Buchenwald or Dachau.

Despite its withdrawal of the film, WNET/Channel 13 produced a report to answer the most critical challenges. Throughout combat, the 761st were attached to various other units, some of which did indeed participate in the liberation of Buchenwald and Dachau. (As Pop Gates had said in *The Good War*, "The German Army couldn't see how we could be in so many darned places.") Black veterans had described running their tank into the Dachau gate; one had photographs he had taken; another had kept in touch with a family of Jewish prisoners who invited him back to Germany to visit them. The report also uncovered why E. G. McConnell had so adamantly denied being present at the camps: at the time of liberation, he was recovering from the shell wound that won him a Purple Heart. The film narration states that "two veterans of the 761st Tank Battalion returned to Buchenwald with Ben Bender, who was imprisoned there." Critics took this to mean that McConnell had been there before. "All the film meant was that McDonnell was accompanying Bender, as a representative of the 761st," the producers said of the careless wording. The film's producers questioned why the entire film had to be censored, when they might simply have corrected problems by changing a few words or a few sequences.

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In 1945, black veterans once again came home to a country where they could be lynched for wearing a uniform. America was the same, but vet-

erans, again, were different. In 1918, many black vets had looked to Communism for ways to change their country. In 1945, they looked to democracy, coming home to use the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution to nourish the frail shoots of civil rights and to make sure that black soldiers would never again fight and die for a country that did not treat them like Americans.



TRANSITION

The great pity of it all was that so many good men had to die needlessly because the U.S. Army refused to send qualified white combat soldiers as replacements to a black infantry regiment, even in desperate combat.¹

—*Lieutenant Colonel Charles M. Bussey, author of Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War*

CHANGING THE SYSTEM

In April 1945, while black American fighter pilots of the 332nd Fighter Squadron were shooting down the last enemy aircraft over the Mediterranean, 101 black Air Force officers of their sister unit, the 477th Bombardment Group, were shooting down military injustice at home. The 101 pilots were arrested at Freeman Field, Indiana, for staging group sit-ins at the illegally barred-to-blacks officers' club. A-R 210-10, passed in December 1940, opened all officers' clubs to all officers on post. Freeman Field's commander, "Jesus Bob" Selway, had labeled black officers "transients" at Michigan's Selfridge Field; now, once again, he evaded the law, this time by calling all black officers "trainees," including the flight surgeon and the chaplain.²

The Freeman action was strictly by the book and according to military regulations. Advised by the NAACP as well as their own barracks lawyer, Lieutenant William Coleman, Jr., the men expected arrest and pledged themselves to nonviolence. The "Freeman Field 101" were forerunners of the civil rights movement.

Of the 101 officers who were arrested, only Lieutenants Roger Terry, Marsden A. Thompson, and Shirley R. Clinton were tried. Terry, accused of shoving a superior officer, was charged under Article 64, which comprised military crimes punishable by death. The three became a black cause célèbre. Their mothers wrote to congressmen. It was Colonel Selway who broke the law, blacks maintained, not the three young officers.