

Segregation and discrimination in the united states military during world war two...



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Segregation and Discrimination in the United States Military during World War Two | | | 5/3/2010 | Segregation and Discrimination in the United States Military during World War Two Thesis: Although the U. S. military has been a leader in desegregation and in other social matters, during World War Two fear and prejudice keep many highly qualified people from serving. This weakened every branch of the military by limiting it to a less diverse and therefore less flexible fighting force. 1. History of the U. S. Military a. Leader in social matters i.

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Failures 12. No Recognition 13. Disbanded After the War f. Conclusion xi. Fighting for Rights At Home xii. Inefficiency of Racism xiii. The Present and Future The history of the United States military has been one of contradictions. From the American Revolution to modern times the every branch of the military has evolved into one of the most efficient fighting forces in the world. As society changes so has the military. At times, the service has been at the leading edge inclusion, but it has still dealt with the same problems of segregation, bigotry and hatred.

Although the U. S. military has been a leader in desegregation and in other social matters, during World War Two fear and prejudice keep many highly qualified people from serving. This weakened every branch of the military by limiting it to a less diverse and therefore less flexible fighting force. From its inception, the U. S. military has had what today we call minority troops in service of the nation. They served and continue to serve with honor and pride in a nation that has not always treated them with the respect they deserve.

Even during the American Revolutionary War Minority soldiers served in units that included black and whites, all longing for the right to self-govern. During the American Civil War free black men and former slaves joined the Union Army in large numbers after prominent black leaders including Fredrick Douglas implored them to join to insure the North's victory and the freedom of all blacks in the United States. By the end of the war approximately 179, 000 black men served as soldiers in the U. S. Army and another 19, 000 served in the Navy. This equated to about 10% of the Union Army.

Nearly 40, 000 black soldiers died over the course of the war and many were highly decorated and respected by some of the white soldiers they served with. The United States military has also had a history of including other minorities when there was a need. Many Native Americans were used as scouts and translators by the army during its push westward. One of the most misunderstood and overlooked segment were the black officers. By the end of the Civil War the U. S. Army had some 80 black officers serving in various roles but they did not see the same extensive combat as white.

President Abraham Lincoln went to great lengths to ensure the equal treatment of black soldiers captures in combat. After the Confederate Congress, in 1863, threatened to harshly punish officers of black troops and to enslave black soldiers President Lincoln issued General Order 233, threatening reprisal for any mistreatment of black prisoners of war (POWs) by the Confederates. This simple act should not be overlooked. It was possibly the first time that any high ranking political figure had gone out their way to ensure that blacks were not mistreated and was seen by many as a bold and risky move on Lincoln's part.

Not everyone was welcome in the U. S. military. Women in particular were heavily restricted. Women could only serve as nurses and then nowhere near an active combat zone. Black women, who could not formally join the Army, nonetheless served as nurses, spies, and scouts, the most famous being Harriet Tubman. When the Civil War began, Tubman worked for the Union Army, first as a cook and nurse, and then as an armed scout and spy for the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers. She was the first woman to lead an armed expedition in the war for America. She led a Union raid on the Combahee River in the interior of South Carolina on June 2, 1863.

This single raid was credited with freeing over 750 slaves was a humiliating blow to the Southern cause and a major morale booster for the North.

Tubman will always be remembered for her role in the Underground Railroad but her service to the military in a time of war should never be forgotten.

The history of black soldiers did not change much until December 7th 1941.

On that terrible day forces of the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked the United

States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. This single attack plunged the U. S. into the Second World War and changed the lives of every American.

This was a shock to most Americans but it was simply confirmation to others of what they already knew was coming. Members of the military and many politicians watched as Europe was plunged ever deeper into war and began making preparation for Americans inevitable entry into the hellish fray. Of major concern was the lack of manpower. When a new piece of equipment is built it can be used immediately. Not so with a person. It takes time and training for a service member to reach a level of competence where they can be trusted to do their job without direct supervision.

Many jobs take as much as three years to reach this level. To make up for the lack of suitable men to serve the U. S. military requested that Congress make changes to the selective service draft. The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, was passed by Congress on September 14, 1940 and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed it into law two days later. This was the first peacetime draft in U. S. history and required men between the ages of 21 and 35 to register with local draft boards for a period of one year. When the U. S. entered World War Two, the act was amended to include all men aged 18 to 45. One sweeping change made by this bill was the inclusion of minorities, specifically African Americans. A quota was established and set at 10% for blacks in all four services. Over 2.5 million African Americans registered for the draft before and during World War Two and of that number, approximately half served in one of the four branches. None of the services, however reached the 10% quota; most had from 8 - 9% blacks in

their ranks. Almost three-quarters of all blacks who served in World War Two were in the Army.

The percentage of blacks serving varied from a low of approximately 5.9% at the beginning of the war, December 1941 to a high 8.7% in September 1944. Army policies that had been established during World War I on the proper use of blacks were for the most part carried over into World War Two. Blacks were used mainly restricted to combat support jobs. They made up 15.5% of all support units and rose to only 2.8% of all direct combat arms units who would eventually see combat. Even in the combat support branches, blacks were clustered in Quartermaster units (45.6%) and Transportation units (32. %). These units would never see combat, rarely receive promotions, and were almost always commanded by white officers. One effect of never seeing combat was a loss of points compared to those who did see action. The more points a service member received the faster they would be sent home. Most of the black men who joined the military signed up for the army as the Marines refused to take black volunteers and they were only offered menial tasks in the United States Navy. Three-quarters of those who served in the Army overseas were relegated to jobs like cooks, orderlies and truck drivers.

The training camps were even segregated and black units almost always had white officers. About 200,000 African Americans served in the US Army in Europe, but only 42,000 were classified as combat troops. Many of these were in tank battalions and quickly distinguished themselves in combat. The first black soldiers to arrive in Europe were part of the 369th Regiment from New York. [See Picture 1] The regiment built a reputation of excellence and <https://assignbuster.com/segregation-and-discrimination-in-the-united-states-military-during-world-war-two-assignment/>

earned the nickname “ The Hell Fighters” by the German Army. The 369th were the first Allied regiment to break through the German lines at Normandy and they were the first to reach the Rhine.

The regiment did not have a man captured and never retreated in over 6 months. The military leaders of France were so impressed with the 369th's tenacity and skill at the Battle of Maison-en-Champagne that awarded the regiment the Croix de Guerre medal. This medal is awarded to units or individuals who distinguish themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with enemy forces. One of the most celebrated World War Two fighter squadrons is the Tuskegee Airman. These men are sometimes referred to as the “ Black Knights” but are more often described as the “ Red Tails. The title Red Tails comes from the fact that they painted the tails of their P-51 Mustangs red in order to stand out in combat. These men surely stood out everywhere they went on the ground. They were the first all-black aviators in the U. S. military and they were respected by everyone in the sky, especially the bombers they so valiantly protected. The story of the Tuskegee Airman starts in 1940 when then President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Army Air Corps to build an all-Negro flying unit. As stated earlier the term “ Negro” was a common and polite term for that time period.

The presidential order caused the Army to form the 99th Pursuit Squadron, and to train the pilots for the new squadron, a new training base in central Alabama, at the Tuskegee Institute was created. This process met with a great deal of skepticism and more than just a little resistance. There were some who still believed that, not only did black lack the inelegance to be trained to do complex tasks, there was no way that any negro could learn to

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fly. Before the war was over all the nay-Sayers would be silenced and exposed for the fools they were. The training began not only for pilots but for maintainers as well.

Many enlisted personnel were trained to keep the airplanes flying and repair the damage that the planes would undoubtedly receive in combat. There were 13 pilot candidates in the first group and on March 15th 1942 the 100th Fighter Squadron United States Army Air Corps officially stood up as a part of the 332nd Fighter Group. [See Picture 2 and 3] The black aviators saw combat in Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy. There were many critics who manipulated the information getting out making the black pilots look bad. The Company Commander of the 33rd Fighter Group, Col.

William Momyer, belittled the performance of the 99th Fighter Squadron. He compared the 99ths combat record to white squadrons, although he concealed the fact that the 99th did not operate at the front, but was stationed hundreds of miles to the rear. He did he mention that he excluded pilots of 99th Fighter Squadron from briefing sessions which would have a detrimental effect on moral and hinder their ability to perform their duties. When the 99th was moved to Salerno Italy they were assigned to assist the 79th Fighter Group under the command of Colonel Earl Bates.

It was here that the black aviators found an honorable man who saw past color and saw only pilots. He included them in every aspect of the combat missions, from planning to execution and debriefing no one was left out. They flew numerous fighter/bomber missions, also called sorties, each day. As many as 5 sorties a day for nearly 3 months was brutal and demanding

work but the pilots and ground crews of the 99th Fighter Squadron never complained even though they had just one kill to their name. This of course is exactly what the critics wanted. On January 24th 1944 everything changed.

That day they shot down 8 German aircraft and the next day they added 4 more. The next month they destroyed 4 more and this time they received recognition from General Hap Arnold in the form of a Unit Commendation. Later the 99th and several other Fighter Squadrons were consolidated into the 332nd Fighter Group and were reassigned to escort bombers into German territory. Little did the bomber crews know that the pilots of their favored escorts were black. Luke Weathers the pilot of a B-24 Liberator wrote, " The P-38s always stayed too far out. Some of the Mustang group stayed in too close ...

Other groups, we got the feeling that they just wanted to go and shoot down 109s ... The Red Tails were always out there where we wanted them to be ... We had no idea they were Black; it was the Army's best kept secret. "[See Picture 4] In all the Tuskegee trained black aviators racked up an impressive record. Over 15, 000 combat sorties (including 6000+ for the 99th prior to July '44), 111 German airplanes destroyed in the air, another 150 on the ground, 950 railcars, trucks, and other motor vehicles destroyed, 1 Destroyer sunk by P-47 machine gun fire (Lt.

Pierson's), Thirty-two pilots downed and captured POWs, 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses earned, 744 Air Medals, 8 Purple Hearts, 14 Bronze Stars, The black fighters' greatest victory was in demonstrating the superiority of

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racially integrated military combat units and paving the way for the desegregation of the US armed forces. Although they lost sixty-six pilots who were killed in action or accidents they proved that segregation was an outdated and, at best, archaic institution that had to go. These men served with honor and distinction for a nation that was reluctant to acknowledge their incredible contribution to the war effort.

The history of the United States military has been one of triumph and epic failure in the arena of civil rights. The story of the Tuskegee Airmen is one example of success in the face of incredible adversity. One failure is the Port Chicago Incident. An accident that was caused by careless disregard for safety and cost 320 men their lives. As the United States entered World War Two there was a concerted effort by everyone involved to get every job done as fast as possible. Black sailors were being used to load ships with everything that could be imagined. The labor was backbreaking, hot dirty, and at times slow and tedious.

Special care was to be given when loading munitions. High explosives will kill with total disregard to age, gender or any other factor. A problem arose when the white officers in charge began to make bets on how fast the crews under their commands could load a given tonnage of these very dangerous materials. The safety of the men was secondary since they were just blacks. At the time of the disaster the Navy was still segregated and would remain so until after the war was over. When the war started in 1941 there were African Americans serving in the Navy as cooks (mess attendants) but were not allowed to work in other jobs alongside whites.

The hard realities of war brought pressure on all branches of the military and eventually they relented and opened more jobs but segregation remained.

The problem of segregation caused tensions to run high throughout the Navy even into 1944. There was more to this than simply who was in command or what job a person was allowed to do. Each of the enlisted men had been trained for a naval rating during his stay at Naval Station Great Lakes (NSGL) but the men were instead put to work as stevedores.

None of the new recruits had been instructed in ammunition loading and none of the officers in charge had any training in either loading ammunition or supervising enlisted personnel until they arrived at their Port Chicago assignment. In fact many of the white officers considered the men under their command to be unintelligent and unable to understand and follow even simple instructions. Black sailors working the docks as stevedores (dock workers who load and unload ships) were little better than farm hands and had to be pushed to do their jobs. The man in charge of the entire station was Captain Merrill T. Kinne.

He had served in the Navy for seven years and had returned to service in 1941. Captain Nelson Goss was the Commander of Mare Island Navy Yard and Port Chicago was a part of that command. He had put a standard of ten tons per hatch per hour as the desired level even though most of the officers voiced concerns that the number was just too high but the work went on. Junior officers bet with each other that their 100 man teams could load faster and kept track of averages on a chalk board. The men doing the loading knew to slow down when high ranking officers came around and then speed back up when they were gone.

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Safety is normally a major concern especially when moving any explosive materials. There was no system in place at Port Chicago to ensure that the men were familiar with safety regulations and that they followed established safety protocols. No one working at the Port Chicago facility ever received formal training in the moving and loading of explosive ordinance into ships; this included the officers. Lack of training under any circumstances puts the workers in an unnecessarily dangerous situation, but at when moving explosives the problem is compounded. The list of ordinance being loaded onto the SS E.

A. Bryanby by the men is frightening. Thousands of tons of highly volatile explosives were being moved daily. On the day of the disaster there were sixteen rail cars holding 430 tons of explosives and the ship was about 40% full. Any small mistake would mean disaster. [See Picture 5] For reasons that are still unclear, on July 17th 1944 the E. A. Bryanby exploded killing 320 and injuring 390 more of which only 51 could be identifies due to the horrific damage done to the bodies. The investigation concluded that safety measures had been overlooked by supervisors to expedite the loading.

African Americans made up 202 of the dead and 233 of the injured. This one tragedy accounted for 15% of all African American casualties during World War Two. Witnesses said they heard loud metallic grinding sounds and other sounds like trees breaking. It is believed that safety equipment failed and a faulty steam driven loader that had been malfunctioning caused a pallet load of ordinance to drop uncontrollably which detonated and set off secondary explosions throughout the ship. The official inquiry cleared the officers of any

wrong doing and laid the blame at the feet of the enlisted men doing the work.

No mention was made about the lack of training and Captain Kinne stated during his questioning that the competition to load the most munitions did not play a role in the accident. An article in the New York Times described the loading operation as having had, " heavy supervision and as a result heavy officer loss. " An added insult came from Representative John E. Rankin (D-Mississippi) when he insisted the amount paid to the victims' families be reduced from \$5000 (the amount the Navy had requested from Congress) to \$2, 000 when he learned that most of the dead were black. It got even worst.

It is common for survivors of major accident, where friends or shipmates had been killed, to receive 30-days of paid leave to deal with emotional trauma. In this case none of the survivors or even the men who were hospitalized received leave, while many of the white officers were granted leave. As soon as the cleanup was over the Navy ordered loading to resume with little or no changes to enhance safety and prevent another disaster. A month later, inspired by a lack of safety precautions and a seemingly total disregard for the lives of the men, hundreds of workers refused to load the ships.

This unwillingness to work under unnecessarily dangerous conditions was dubbed the Port Chicago Mutiny. Only 258 men were arrested and placed on a prison barge that had been designed to hold 70, of that number all were black. Tensions began to rise and minor fights broke out between the prisoners and the guards who were also black. Of the 258 men who refused

to work fifty were singled out for court-martial, all were black. The charge was mutiny, and several of the men who went back to work were used as witnesses for the prosecution.

Even those who went back to work were summarily court-martialed and lost pay and rank. The men were split up and sent to assignments so they could not cause unite and cause any more trouble. They were sent to other areas of the Pacific and were never allowed to regain the rank they had lost. There was a fear among senior officers that if the men worked together they might spread feelings of discontent. It should be noted that the charge of mutiny was still punishable by death, especially in a time of war, and even if the death penalty was not invoked a 15 year prison sentence was still available.

During the trial it was learned that the 50 men being charged had simply been asked if they would load the munitions. Two had said " no" because they were cooks and did not know how to load a ship. Another had broken his wrist and still had it in a sling. The defense attorney, Lieutenant Gerald E. Veltmann, tried in vain to have the charges dismissed on the grounds that mutiny is defined by the Navy as, " deliberately conspiracy to usurp, subvert or override superior military authority" according to " Winthrop's Military Law and Precedents. He declared that the prosecution had failed to meet the burden of proof in this case but was denied by the trial judge Rear Admiral Hugo Wilson Osterhaus. During the trial several officers indicated that the men on trial had refused to load munitions but would follow any other order. They feared for their lives but were in no way disrespectful or aggressive in any manner. At one point Seaman Ollie E. Green, who had broken his wrist

the day prior to the work stoppage, made references to the competition between “ divisions” and his fear of the lack of safety.

There were numerous civilian news reporters in attendance who filed stories about this. None of the civilians had heard about this aspect of the case and Navy tried to next day to convince the reporters that the story was not true, but the cat was out of the bag. Celebrated defense attorney Thurgood Marshall even sat in on the case and talked to the accused and their defense council. [See Picture 6] Although not allowed by military law to act as an attorney, he did make a statement to the press the next day about the prejudicial manner that the Judge Advocate was conducting the trial.

As chief counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) his word carried considerable weight. He continued to make trouble for the Navy when he called for an investigation into the working conditions and why only 50 out of 258 man (again, all black) had been singled out for prosecution while 208 had been shipped out for other duties. They were most likely sent to duties elsewhere so they could not testify for the defense. On October 24, 1944, Admiral Osterhaus found all 50 men guilty of mutiny and sentenced to between 8 and 12 years confinement at hard labor.

After the war ended in August 1945 the Navy decided to return 47 of the men to parole on active duty doing menial labor. These men would eventually receive “ general discharges under honorable conditions. ” Two of the men were in the hospital and would stay there recovering from injuries and the last was denied parole because of previous bad conduct. News

reports of the trial were scant and usually relegated to lesser viewed sections of the newspapers. The Los Angeles Times gave only six small paragraphs on the subject and placed those on page 13 for one article in 1944.

The New York Times on the other hand spent considerably more time and effort on their reporting. They also used language that the Los Angeles Times did not. The New York Times included a section on how the “ negro personnel” did an outstanding job in support of the nations war effort. This statement was given by Rear Admiral Carleton H. Wright but was never reported in the Los Angeles Times. Furthermore the Los Angeles Times gave only scant attention to the fact that the Navy overturned the convictions of the vast majority of the sailors.

Only two paragraphs on page 8 described briefly the voiding of the previous convictions. The New York Times gave a full seven paragraphs, also on page 8, the same day January 7th 1946. The Los Angeles Times also made reference to the fact that the sentences were for “ mutiny” while the New York Times simply referred to them as sentences. On January 8th 1946 the New York Times included an article on page 12 about the reinstatement of forty-seven sailors and clearly stated that, at the time, the orders to resume work had only been, “ pleas,” No mention was made of this in the Los Angeles Times.

Thirty-five Members of Congress led by Congressman George Miller and Senator Barbara Boxer (both of California) sent a letter to President Clinton urging him to grant the pardon sought by one of the last remaining black

sailors convicted of mutiny following the Port Chicago disaster. Finally, on December 23rd, 1999 President Bill Clinton pardoned one of the 50 men but most went to their graves refusing to ask for a pardon for something that they felt they never should have been convicted of in the first place. Only three had lived long enough to see their names cleared.

Bad feelings remain in both the survivors who went back to work and those who were court-martialed. Today a memorial stands testament to the men who lost their lives and in 2000 two of the original sailors were brought in as technical advisors on a movie based on the entire affair. Survivors Spencer Sikes and Morris Soublelet were hired to ensure the accuracy of the movie and on July 16, 2000 they attended the Port Chicago Commemoration Ceremony along with Congressman George Miller of San Francisco. One of the most important weapons that any military has is information.

Protecting and gathering information takes on much higher priority in a time of war. Of major concern is protecting vital information in the field. Many combat operations have failed because the enemy breaks a code and is therefore able to read encrypted messages nearly as fast as they can intercept them. The greatest proof of this comes from the Battle at Midway. The United States had broken the Japanese code and knew about the planned invasion and many of its details before the first shot was fired. What was unknown to most at the time was that the U. S. had a secret weapon to transmit and receive information with near impunity. This was not due to a new computer system or a fancy new radio; it was a language that had almost been lost, the Navajo language. At the beginning of the war the

Pentagon knew they needed a secure way of sending and receiving
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messages to troops on the front line. Radios were bulky and primitive at the time. There was no such thing as solid-state electronics and so no hope of building a radio that could transmit or receive an encrypted signal that the enemy couldn't intercept and eventually break.

A solution was needed and there was little time to develop a new code. For help the U. S. military turned to the very people they had tried so hard to wipe out only a few generations earlier. While many people understand that the military used the Navajo language, they may not realize that over a dozen Native American languages were used to protect troops in the combat zone. Chocktaw was used in World War I and it would be used again. During the closing days of World War One, the U. S. Army had enlisted eight Chocktaw speakers to prevent the Germans from knowing what the allies had planned. When the U. S. entered World War Two they turned to Native American reservations for help. Although they people living on the reservations were under no real obligation to join the military over four hundred did and served with distinction. In February of 1942 a Marine Signal Officer convinced his superiors to let him put on a demonstration. Two men in separate rooms would convert a standard message that might be sent by the military from English into Navajo and back again. If they men were using the normal mechanical cryptographic machines of the time, it would take around 30 minutes to for the message to get through.

The Navajo code talkers did it in 20 seconds to the utter disbelief of the observers who had no clue what was being said. This was the beginnings of a secret that would not be declassified until 1968. In all over 400 Navajo were recruited and trained to speak their native language and the enemy never

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broke the code in its 25 years of use. [See Picture 7] No other code in recorded history has lasted that long. The trainees themselves developed a dictionary with 411 terms that had to be memorized by the students. Bombs were called “ eggs” and America was “ our mother. Their service can never be fully appreciated by anyone who did not rely on them for their very lives. Their code was so secret that special escorts were assigned to each code talker in the field. No one but the escorts knew that his real job was to kill his charge if there was any chance that he might fall into enemy hands. At the end of the conflict, five Navajo had received the Congressional Medal of Honor. The highest medal that any member of the military can receive but at home they were still denied many rights. Many of the surviving members get together to talk about what they did and educate young people. See Picture 8] On September 10, 1942 the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) was established by the U. S. Army Air Corp at New Castle Air Base. A short time later the Women’s Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) was established to train pilots. In 1943 the two groups were merged into a single entity called the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) and soon racked up a record that was the envy of many male squadrons. [See Picture 8] They flew every airplane in the USAAF’s inventory, including half of all pursuit planes delivered during the war.

Some male pilots were afraid to fly the new B-29 (Super Fortress) due to mechanical problems that appeared during the first test flights. To prove the safety of the quickly re-engineered planes two WASPs took one, Ladybird, and flew to several air proving the aircraft was safe and reliable enough for the men to take into combat. This proved to the leadership that the women

had truly earned their right to fly and that they were ready to take on additional duties. They began towing targets for aerial gunnery practice, which was a nerve racking and highly dangerous job.

They simulated strafing, served as flight instructors, and ran check out flights for aircraft that had recently been repaired. Thirty-eight WASPs were killed performing their duties. In total, the female pilots logged 60 million miles flying their planes and accounted for ferrying half of all the fighter planes delivered to combat units in Europe. It was more common to see a woman get out of a recently arrived fighter in England than a man. As the war in Europe drew to a close many men were afraid they would be reassigned to the Pacific theater where the war with Japan was still in full swing.

To head off these unpopular transfers the men demanded that they be given the jobs the WASPs were doing. The Army agreed and on December 20, 1944 it was announced that the WASPs would be deactivated. The woman in charge of the WASPs, Jacqueline Cochran, lobbied Congress and the Army to mobilize the women of the WASPs for one day, which would give them veterans status and allow them to use the new G. I. Bill. She was denied this one act of gratitude from an apparently not so grateful nation. It was not until 1977 that the women would receive the recognition they so richly deserved.

Working with a former ferry pilot turned politician, Senator Berry Goldwater, the WASPs were formally recognized for their service and given veterans status. This call for formal recognition came after the U. S. Air Force made

the insulting announcement that they would allow women to fly its aircraft “ for the first time. ” Women mainly served in support capacities in the U. S. military as nurses. These women had served in the Red Cross since the end of World War I. At that time eighteen black Red Cross nurses enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps.

Their first assignment was at Camp Grant, Illinois, and Camp Sherman, Ohio. There they lived in segregated quarters and primarily cared for German prisoners of war and black soldiers. With the signing of the armistice all plans were halted in regards to position black nurses at Camps Dodge, Meade, and Taylor and Fort Riley. From this point on things went from bad to worse for these pioneering women. The Army decided to divest themselves of the women and scrap the entire program. The idea of desegregating the military was no longer appealing to high ranking officers.

During the war necessity had driven them to call on any capable volunteers but since the war was over they did not need to extra manpower and the black women who had answered their nations call were discarded like yesterday’s newspaper. By August 1919, all black nurses had been released from service as the nursing corps was reduced to their peacetime levels and the remaining nurses were all white. Many women who wanted to serve did so as entertainers and hostesses. These women worked serving drinks and taking care of day to day functions that improved the moral of soldiers and sailors overseas.

The Young Men’s Clubs of America (YMCA) called for volunteers to work doing the jobs that the men could not do or would not do. Sewing, cooking,

entertaining and sometimes just listening to a service member was of great importance to the men. A smiling face that was not on another man can do more to uplift ones moral more than the best food ever served. The selfless women who took these jobs were simply called “ Y” women and served in rear positions well away from harm. There were more than a few marriages that resulted from these interactions even though the higher commands discouraged such liaisons.

The need for females in the ranks was nothing new in World War Two. During World War One, women had served overseas as nurses but were not affiliated with the military. They were required to provide their own housing and food and did not receive any of the benefits of military service when the conflict ended. When the winds of war started blowing again there was once again a need to call women to service in larger numbers. Many women who served did so as nurses, entertainers, hostesses and many other jobs that were needed.

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There were more than a few marriages that resulted from these interactions even though the higher commands discouraged such liaisons. One of the most important jobs that women did was in the medical field. To fill the nursing requirements and to make things more equal (a relative term to be sure) the Army saw the need to open its recruiting to minorities. But this only went so far. The Army's backward thinking segregationist policies were still enforced even after they allowed black women to serve as nurses. In January 1941, the Army opened its nurse corps to blacks but established a limit of 56.

On June 25, 1941, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 which created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). Their job was to eliminate racial discrimination in any company that did contract work for the U. S. military or in any government jobs including the military itself. In June 1943, Frances Payne Bolton, Congresswoman from Ohio, introduced an amendment to the Nurse Training Bill to remove racial considerations from being used and soon 2, 000 blacks were enrolled in the Cadet Nurse Corps. The quota for black Army Nurses was finally eliminated altogether in July 1944.

More than 500 black Army nurses served on the home front and overseas during the war, but change was slow and recognition for equal work was rare and pay was never equal to men's pay for the same ranks. From its beginning in 1942, black women were part of the WAAC. When the first WAACs arrived at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, there were 400 white and 40 black women. The black women were referred to as the " ten-percenters," which was a reference to the percentage they were limited to. This number
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matched the proportionality of blacks nationally and was considered by some at the time as progressive and even overly generous by others.

These black enlisted women, were trained, lived in, and used segregated recreation facilities and were forced to eat at separate tables in chow halls. Surprisingly enough officer candidates received their training in integrated units, but had to put up with the same segregated living conditions as their enlisted counterparts. Specialist and technical training schools were finally integrated in 1943 but this was due to budget concerns and the desire to reduce costs wherever possible. Eventually 6, 520 black women would serve in the WAAC/WAC program doing their best to earn the respect they were constantly denied.

The forty black women who entered the first WAAC officer candidate class were placed in a separate platoon. Even though they attended classes and took their meals with the other officer candidates but here again they had to sit at different tables. Post/base facilities like enlisted and officer clubs, theaters, and beauty shops were segregated. The facilities that the black cadets used were inferior in every respect but the women persevered and graduated none the less. Their differences were definitely skin deep and black officer candidates had backgrounds quite similar to those of whites.

Almost 80 percent of the black officer candidates had attended college, and the majority had worked as teachers and office workers for several years.

The Navy dropped its discriminatory policies on January 25, 1945 under enormous pressure from both Congress and the general public. The efforts of Director Mildred McAfee and Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune helped Secretary of

the Navy John Forrestal force their admittance. Over 80, 000 WAVES in the war, but a total of only 72 black women served, normally under integrated conditions due to the late removal of the Navy's segregationist policy.

Mail in wartime is enormously valuable in the reinforcing of good moral. The numerous packages, letters, and boxes, sent to the troops by friends and loved ones were piling up in a warehouse in Birmingham, England (not to be confused with Alabama). The mail was not making it to the soldiers on the front lines and patience was wearing thin. Many of the packages contained food that would spoil in the non-air-conditioned warehouse. The workers who were assigned to take care the mail could not handle the incredible volume they were faced with and their numbers were far too small.

In response to complaints from the troops and pleas of help from the warehouse workers the 6888th Central Postal Directory Women Army Corp Battalion was quickly assembled and trained. They would be the only unit of Black women to serve in the Europe during the Second World War. This was of course a segregated unit, created specifically to handle the problem overseas and get shipments back on schedule. The unit was made up of women from all over the country who had signed up to serve hoping to do their part. The women were trained at Ft. Olgethorpe, Georgia and they had to endure the same rigorous training as anyone else.

This included, but was not limited to, five mile road marches in full battle gear. Such gear included, web belts, gas masks, canteens, full backpacks and steel pot helmets. They made these hikes under what the army euphemistically refers to as, active war conditions. This means, somebody

shoot at them, or set off explosive simulators as they marched or trained in the field. After training, they boarded a special train to Camp Shanks, New York. From there, they took a ship to England. On February 12th, 1945, they disembarked in Scotland and boarded a train for Birmingham, England. See Picture 10] The unit's job was to clean up the mess made of the mail and end the unacceptable backlog. They accomplished it in record time, working sixteen hours every day until the job was done and they could go back to reasonable hours. They processed around 65, 000 pieces of mail per shift, in order to get their job done and did so with little or no complaint. The 6888th CPD also served in Rouen, France as that country was being liberated by U. S. forces. They were also assigned to duty in Paris, France before finally returning home. Not all members made it back home. Three members died while stationed in France.

During their time overseas they learned about the death of President Roosevelt who had worked hard to give them and other blacks a fair chance to serve. They shook hands with America's only African American general, Brigadier General, Benjamin O. Davis [See Picture 11] who was there to greet them when their train arrived in England. When they returned to America, the 6888th was disbanded with no fanfare. Some elected to remain in the service, some retired and went home. The war was over but the country was still segregated, and there was very little said or written about their great service to their nation.

Prior to World War Two, black women had only served in the U. S. military as nurses. These women had served in the Red Cross since the end of World War One. At that time eighteen black Red Cross nurses had enlisted in the <https://assignbuster.com/segregation-and-discrimination-in-the-united-states-military-during-world-war-two-assignment/>

Army Nurse Corps. Their first assignment was at Camp Grant, Illinois, and Camp Sherman, Ohio. There they lived in segregated quarters and primarily cared for German prisoners of war and black soldiers as no one else wanted to care for these two groups. With the signing of the armistice all plans were halted in regards to extending the position of black nurses to include other military installations.

From this point on things went from bad to worse for these pioneering women. The Army decided to divest themselves of black women and scrap the entire program. The idea of desegregating the military was no longer appealing to high ranking officers and politicians. During the war necessity had driven them to call on any capable volunteers but since the war was over they did not need extra manpower and the black women who had answered their nations call were discarded like yesterday's newspaper.

By August 1919, all black nurses had been released from service as the nursing corps was reduced to their peacetime levels and the remaining nurses were all white. The Second World War brought out the best in America but it also underscored the worse problems that America had. Individuals came forward in large numbers to volunteer for a war in foreign lands and to fight for a country that did not appreciate or acknowledge their great sacrifice. African Americans, more than any other group tolerated bigotry and segregation in an attempt to prove that they could serve as well as any other.

One of the saddest aspects of this story came not in war but at home. Many returning black servicemen were told to change into civilian clothes when

they left the ships or left their bases and headed into southern areas.

Numerous blacks had been beaten by angry whites who simply could not accept that a black man could wear the same uniform as a white man. These black sailors and soldiers put on their dress uniforms only when they were inside so that family and friends could see them for a few minutes. They were denied the parades and praise they so richly deserved from their countrymen.

Through all the trials and tribulations, they served with distinction and honor. They were recognized by their peers and their superiors for doing a job that few could do and even fewer were willing to even try. When they left Europe and the Pacific they did so knowing that they had been a part of a great fighting force that had secured liberty and freedom for the people they left behind. They returned to a nation that would continue to deny them the same rights and freedoms they had fought for many more years, until the people decided that enough was enough and began to make the slow march toward equality.

The military had lost valuable time due to the barbaric and senseless practice of racial segregation. Troops that had been well trained for combat were relegated to menial labor tasks that lesser men could have performed just as well. This lack of professionalism on the part of higher authority led to a systemic failure to efficiently use the available resources. Time and money were wasted by individuals who had grown up in a time that is best forgotten and who could not come to terms with the idea of equality; even when the fate of the nation rested in balance.

How many lives were lost, not just at Port Chicago, because the life of a black man was not seen as being valuable enough to ensure that every precaution was taken? How bad did the moral of tens of thousands of service members, and millions of civilians, suffer because of outdated and archaic notions of racial superiority and gender bias? This was an opportunity to come together as a nation united and put old prejudices aside. It was an opportunity that was missed and the nation still suffers for it today. As the military moves forward into this next millennium has looked hard into the mirror and not always liked what it saw.

Changes have been made but challenges remain. African Americans and women who served in World War Two would barely recognize the service today. Promotion boards meet and never see the color of the selectees before them. Every nationality comes together and works to keep each other alive. We have a saying in today's military; " When the bullets start flying race just doesn't seem as important as it once did. " The challenges that the military faces today have nothing to do with the color of one's skin, or where you keep your reproductive organs. Today's problems are far more subtle but just as divisive as race and gender once were.

Now the problem is religion and sexual preference. Future generations will look back on this time and wonder how we could be so short sighted in the belief that one group or another should be excluded. If the Second World War taught us anything, it should be this, " It does not matter! " Bibliography

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