

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY



Did you know, there has been no war fought by or within the United States that African Americans did not participate in?

Throughout American history including the arrival of the first black slaves during the colonial period, African Americans have played pivotal roles in the U.S. Military by standing strong in front lines fighting off America's enemies and defending the country. Here is Sweet Blackberry's brief guide of African Americans in the military throughout history:

Revolutionary War

The Revolutionary War marked the United States' independence from Great Britain. During this time there were about 9,000 black Patriot soldiers both slave and free within the Continental Army and Navy, and state militia units. African Americans fought on both sides of the war.

In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, issued an emancipation proclamation promising freedom to runaway slaves who fought for the British. Over 100,000 escaped captivity and while a majority served as orderlies, mechanics, laborers, scouts and guides, as few as 1,000 served under arms.

In response to this, George Washington lifted the ban on black enlistment in the Continental army in January 1776 and all black units were formed in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Peter Salem and Salem Poor were among notable African Americans Patriots to fight in the war.



Peter Salem



War of 1812

In 1812, America once again took on Great Britain, the greatest naval power in the world, who at the time was attempting to restrict U.S. trade, impress American seamen and America's desire to expand its territory.

One quarter of the personnel in the American naval squadrons of the Battle of Lake Erie were black. Due to law of 1792 prohibiting blacks from enlisting the Army, Louisiana gained an exception through a treaty provision forming all-black militia units including the **Louisiana Battalion of Free Men of Color**.



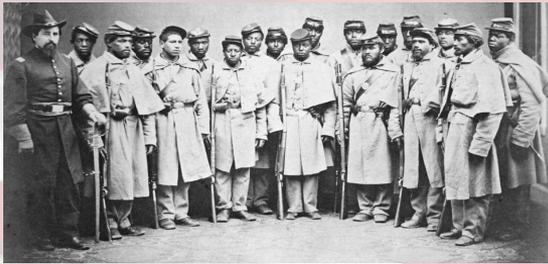
Mexican-American War

The Mexican-American War followed in the wake of the 1845 annexation of Texas, which Mexico once considered a part of its country. During this war, African Americans served on a number of navy vessels including the U.S.S. *Treasure* and the U.S.S. *Columbus*. **The Louisiana Battalion of Free Men of Color** also participated in this war.

U.S. Civil War

Among the many outcomes of the Civil War, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves from captivity is the most notable. More than 180,000 African Americans participated in the U.S. Civil war comprising 163 units serving in the Union Army and Navy.

Black women also began to gain acceptance into the military by assisting with services such as nursing or domestic chores in medical settings, laundering and cooking for soldiers.



TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM, Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States proclaimed FREEDOM to over THREE MILLIONS OF SLAVES. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.

WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, July 31.

"General Order," No. 233.

"The following order of the President is published for the 'informa-' and government of all concerned:—

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 31.

"It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its citizens, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations, and the usage and customs of war, as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person on account of his color, is a crime against humanity, and a crime against the civilization of the age.

"The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is therefore ordered, for every soldier of the United States, killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy, or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to prisoners of war.

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

"By order of the Secretary of War.

E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General."

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON CITY, August 3, 1862.

"Six: Your letter of the 2d inst, calling the attention of this Department to the cases of Otis H. Brown, William H. Johnson, and Wm. Wilson, three colored men captured on the gunboat Isaac Smith, has received consideration. This Department has directed that these rebel prisoners of South Carolina, if there be any such in our possession, and if not, those others, be confined in close custody and held as hostages for Brown, Johnson and Wilson, and that the fact be communicated to the rebel authorities at Richmond.

"Very respectfully your obedient servant,

EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

"The Hon. GUNTER WELLES, Secretary of the Navy."

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

Written with reference to the Convention held at Poughkeepsie, July 15th and 16th, 1862, to promote Colored Emancipation.

BOSTON, July 15th, 1862.

"I think if, in times past, our country could have expiated from colored men any patriotic services. Each service is the return for protection. But now that protection has begun, the service should begin also. Nor should relative rights and duties be weighed with nicety. It is enough that our country, avowed at least to a sense of justice, seeks to enroll colored men among its defenders.

"If my country should reach such progress, I would say, 'well as ours.' Now is the day and now is the hour. Help to overcome your cruel enemies now halting against your country, and in this way you will surely overcome those other enemies hardly less cruel, here at home, who will still seek to degrade you. This is not the time to hesitate or to hizzle. Do your duty to our country, and you will set an example of generous self-sacrifice which will conquer prejudice and open all hearts.

"Very faithfully yours,

CHARLES SUMNER."

Indian Wars

The American Indian Wars were comprised of multiple conflicts between the United States Government and the native people of North America. The most noted amount the groups of African Americans that served the Army during this time were the **Buffalo Soldiers**. The **Buffalo Soldiers** earned their nickname from the Cheyenne Indians they fought during the war. In 2005, Mark Matthews, the oldest living Buffalo soldier died at the age of 111.



Spanish-American War

The Spanish-American War was a conflict between Spain and the U.S. following the sinking of U.S.S. Maine in Havana Harbor. In addition to the African Americans who served in regular army units, five African American Volunteer Army units and seven African American National Guard units also served.

During this time, the yellow fever and typhoid epidemics led Surgeon General Sternberg and Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee, Acting Assistant Surgeon in charge of nurses, to seek out female "immunes"—women who had survived the disease. On July 13, 1898, Namahyoke Curtis was asked to recruit immune nurses. Herself under contract to the Army as an immune nurse, Curtis hired 32 black women who were allegedly immune to yellow fever. Most of her recruits went to Santiago, Cuba, in July and August 1898, to serve in the worst of the epidemics.

World War I

The U.S. Army remained much segregated through WWI though many African Americans still joined the Allied cause. Though most African American units did not see combat, groups such as the “Harlem Hellfighters” served the front lines for six months and 171 of its members were awarded the Legion of Merit.

Corporal Freddie Stowers of the 371st Infantry Regiment, the only African American posthumously awarded a Medal of Honor becoming the only African American to be honored for actions in WWI. Stowers led an assault on German trenches while in France even after being wounded.

Many trained black nurses participated in the war by enrolling in the American Red Cross hoping to gain entry into the Army or Navy Nurse Corps. As the war escalated, public pressure increased to enlist black women.



Cpl. Freddie Stowers



Harlem Hell Fighters

Spanish Civil War

Americans fought in the Spanish Civil War in support of the Republican faction. African American activist and WWI veteran Oliver Law is believed to be the first African American officer to command an integrated unit of soldiers during this war.

Salaria Kea, a young African American nurse from Harlem Hospital, served as a military nurse with the American Medical Bureau during the Spanish Civil War. She was one of two African American female volunteers and went on to write 'A Negro Nurse in Spain' upon her return to the states.



Salaria Kea

World War II

During this time, African Americans serving the military were still not treated equally. During parades, canteens and even church services, races were kept separate. Famous units include the Tuskegee Airmen and 761st Tank Battalion. The 452nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion's success led to the desegregation of all U.S. Armed Forces by President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981.



World War II (cont.)

The Tuskegee Army Airfield was developed through the first all-black military aviation program at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Benjamin O. Davis Jr. served as commander of the Tuskegee Army Airfield. He went on to become the first African American general in the United States Air Force. His father, Benjamin O. Davis Sr. was the first African American Brigadier General in the Army.

Doris Miller, a Navy mess attendant was the first African American recipient of the Navy Cross for his actions during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

During WWII black women enlisted in the WAC (Women's Army Corps), the Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), and the Coast Guard SPARS. Enlisted women served in segregated units, participated in segregated training and lived in separate quarters.



Korean War

When North Korea invaded South Korea, the United States came to aid South Korea while China and the Soviet Union assisted North Korea. During this war, Jesse L. Brown became the U.S. Navy's first black aviator in October 1948. Unable to escape from his plane upon crashing, he died during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in North Korea.



Jesse L. Brown

Vietnam War

The United States validated its involvement in the Vietnam War as a way to prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam. Twenty African Americans received the Medal of Honor for their actions during the Vietnam War. During this time African Americans had higher casualty rates due to lowering admission standards and recruiting those without requiring and attracting many of America's poor including many black men who would previously not qualify for being drafted.



Affirmative action and changing racial policies opened new doors for black women. During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, black women started taking their places in the war zone.

Did You Know? In 1972, John Stewart of the Green Lanterns was created as an African American Marine.

Quiz – African Americans in the U.S. Military

1. True or False: African Americans fought on both sides of the Revolutionary War.
2. Who is the U.S. Navy's first black aviator?
3. What all-black militia fought in the War of 1812?
4. What is the last name of the only African American to be honored for his actions in WWI?
5. How did African American women participate in the U.S. Civil War?
6. Who was the first African American general in the U.S. Air Force? His father was the first African American to do what?
7. What U.S Military divisions did black women enlist in during WWII?



Answers: 1. True 2. Jesse L. Brown 3. Louisiana Battalion of Free Men of Color 4. Stowers 5. Nursing or domestic chores in medical settings, laundering and cooking for soldiers 6. Benjamin O. Davis Jr.; the first African American Brigadier General in the Army. 7. WAC (Women's Army Corps), the Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), and the Coast Guard SPARS