1944 Conviction of Black G.I.'s Is Ruled Flawed

SEATTLE, Oct. 26 — Guglielmo Olivotto, an Italian prisoner of war, died with a noose around his neck, lynched at a military post on Puget Sound 63 years ago. Samuel Snow, 83, hopes that people will stop blaming him and the 27 other black soldiers convicted of starting the riot that led to Mr. Olivotto's death. It was one of the largest Army courts-martial of World War II.

This week, a review board issued a ruling that could lead to overturning the convictions of all 28 soldiers, granting honorable discharges and providing them with back pay.

The board found that the court-martial was flawed, that the defense was unjustly rushed and that the prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, a young lieutenant colonel who went on to fame three decades later as a Watergate special prosecutor, had important evidence that he did not share with defense lawyers.

All of the 28 have died except for Mr. Snow and another soldier.

"It means a lot to me that it's going to come out in the paper," Mr. Snow said Friday from his home in Leesburg, Fla. "Now people are going to see that I wasn't a villain. And I'm not a villain."

Mr. Snow's son Ray, 55, said his father came home from prison "highly disappointed."

"He walked with it all his life," Ray Snow said.

Samuel Snow, who said he spent 45 years working as a janitor in Leesburg after serving one year in a military prison for his conviction on the rioting charge, requested the review, as did the families of three of the dead soldiers, Pvt. Booker M. Townsell, Pvt. William G. Jones and Cpl. Luther L. Larkin. Private Jones and Corporal Larkin were also convicted of manslaughter.

United States Representative Jim McDermott, a Democrat whose Seattle district includes Fort Lawton, where the riot occurred, said a senior military officer in charge of the review told him that the convictions of all four men would be overturned.

The ruling, by the Army's Board for Correction of Military Records, specifically set aside the conviction of Private Townsell, and an Army spokesman said Friday that he could confirm only that the one conviction had been overturned.

Last year, the House, led by Mr. McDermott and Representative Duncan Hunter, Republican of California, passed a measure directing the Army to open the review after the 2005 publication of a book, "On American Soil," by a Seattle author and journalist, Jack Hamann. The book detailed evidence from the case that had not been made public.

Mr. McDermott has suggested that the convicted soldiers were "victims of racial injustice."

The case could be the largest Army court-martial of World War II. The largest court-martial of

By WILLIAM YARDLEY
Published: October 27, 2007
STEALING A SHIP TO FREEDOM

IN 1862 ROBERT SMALLS, AN ENSLAVED DECKHAND, TOOK COMMAND OF THE CONFEDERATE STEAMER PLANTER AND SAILED IT INTO UNION WATERS. HIS DARING ACT WOULD EVENTUALLY LEAD HIM TO A SEAT IN THE U.S. CONGRESS. BY SHEILA TURNAGE

IT IS MAY 13, 1862. A LOOKOUT SQUINTS FROM A UNION SHIP BLOCKADING CHARLESTON THROUGH THE DENSE FOG. THERE! TO THE PORT! A SHIP! “A CONFEDERATE RAM!” HE SHOUTS.


FROM THE STEAMER’S DECK, 16 AFRICAN-AMERICANS—MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN—WAVE AT THE UNION SAILORS. THEIR ELEGANTLY DRESSED YOUNG PILOT DOFFS HIS HAT. “GOOD MORNING, SIR!” ROBERT SMALLS CALLS OUT TO THE DUMBFOUNDED CAPTAIN. “I’VE BROUGHT YOU SOME OF THE OLD UNITED STATES GUNS, SIR.”

BUT ROBERT SMALLS, WHO BEGAN THE DAY A SLAVE, HAS BROUGHT MUCH MORE THAN JUST A SHIPMENT OF GUNS OUT OF CHARLESTON. HE HAS DELIVERED AN ARMED CONFEDERATE STEAMSHIP, THE PLANTER, INTO THE HANDS OF THE U.S. NAVY. HE HAS BROUGHT VALUABLE INFORMATION ON CHARLESTON’S DEFENSES. HE HAS CARRIED HIS YOUNG FAMILY OUT OF SLAVERY AND INTO FREEDOM. AND HE HAS GIVEN LIFE TO A STORY OF BOLDNESS AND DARING THAT WILL CAPTURE THE COUNTRY’S IMAGINATION AND EVENTUALLY PROPEL HIM TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS.

“HIS HIJACKING OF THE PLANTER GAVE HIM A PUBLIC PLATFORM, AND A PUBLIC VOICE,” SAYS DR. STEPHEN WISE, THE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM AT THE PARRIS ISLAND MARINE CORPS RECRUITING DEPOT. “THAT’S WHAT CARRIED HIM TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE AND GAVE HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A SOLDIER FOR HIS RACE.”

WHEN ROBERT SMALLS DREW HIS FIRST BREATH, IN BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA, ON APRIL 5, 1839, HIS MOTHER HAD LITTLE TO GIVE HIM, EVEN A LAST NAME. LYDIA, A SLAVE OWNED BY A PLANTER NAMED J. K. MCKEE, “WAS ABOUT 13 OR 14 WHEN MRS. MCKEE TOOK HER TO THEIR PLANTATION ON LADY’S ISLAND, RIGHT ACROSS THE RIVER FROM BEAUFORT,” EXPLAINS SMALLS’S GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER, JANET D. NASH. “WE DON’T KNOW ANY LAST NAMES.”

LYDIA, WHO CARED FOR THE MCKEES’ CHILDREN, GAVE BIRTH TO ROBERT IN THE SLAVE QUARTERS BEHIND THE TWO-STORY HOME ON PRINCE STREET. THE IDENTITY OF ROBERT’S WHITE FATHER REMAINS A MYSTERY. “IT SEEMS LIKELY IT WAS MCKEE,” NASH SAYS.

“(GREAT-)GRANDPA DIDN’T HAVE THE WORST LIFE,” SHE ADDS, “HE GREW UP IN TOWN. HE WENT FISHING AND HUNTING. HE ATE GOOD FOOD, AND HIS MOTHER WAS THERE. BUT RIGHT AWAY HE DIDN’T SEE HIMSELF AS A SLAVE.” IN FACT, LYDIA SAW TO IT THAT HE UNDERSTOOD SLAVERY REALLY WAS. “SHE USED TO TAKE HIM DOWN TO THE SLAVE MARKET ON CRAVEN AND CARTERET STREETS, WHERE THEY BOUGHT AND SLAVER.” THERE HE SAW BLACKS HE KNEW BOUND AND BEATEN. “SHE WAS TAUGHT THAT JUST BECAUSE HE WASN’T OUT THERE IN THE SLAVE REGIONS, IT DIDN’T MEAN HE WASN’T A SLAVE,” NASH SAYS.

AS ROBERT GREW OLDER AND MORE REBELLIOUS, LYDIA, WHO FOSTERED HIS SAFETY, ASKED MCKEE TO SEND HIM TO CHARLESTON. SHE ARRANGED LODGING AND WORK FOR THE 12-YEAR-OLD, POCKETING HIS WAGES. ROBERT TOILED AS A LAMPLIGHTER, A WAITER, AND A DAYBOAT DRIVER UNTIL, AT THE AGE OF 17, HE MADE A DEAL WITH HIS OWNER. HE WAS TO PROVIDE MCKEE $15 A MONTH AND KEEP ANYTHING HE EARNED BEYOND THAT SUM.

THE DETAILS OF THE NEXT YEARS IN SMALLS’S LIFE ARE SKETCHY. BUT WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT HE SERVED AS A VALET TO THE MCKEES’ ELDER DAUGHTER, ROSA, WHO AT 19 WAS ENGAGED TO A CONFEDERATE OFFICER. SMALLS SOMETIMES ACCOMPANIED HER TO DINNER AT HER FUTURE MOTHER-IN-LAW’S HOUSE, THE PLANTATION OF J. K. MCKEE. HE TOLD HER OF THE SLAVERY HE HAD SURVIVED, AND SHE TOLD HIM TO “COME AND WORK FOR ME.”

WHEN THE WARS Began, MCKEE AND ROSA WERE AWAY ON A TALENTED TOUR THROUGH THE SOUTH, LEAVING SMALLS AND A FELLOW SLAVE, JOSEPH RICE, TO RUN THE PLANTATION. SMALLS, WHO HAD BEEN SAVING HIS WAGES, HAD$30. WHEN HE SAW THE PLANTER, WHICH HAD BEEN AMMUNITIONED AND RENAMED THE PLANTER, HE TOOK IT AND SIGNED ON AS THE PILOT.

ON MAY 13, 1862, SMALLS TOOK COMMAND OF THE PLANTER AND SET SAIL FOR THE U.S. NAVY. HE CARRIED WITH HIM INFORMATION ON CHARLESTON’S DEFENSES. HE CARRIED WITH HIM THE PLAN TO FREE HIS FAMILY. HE CARRIED WITH HIM THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.
South Carolina it was illegal for slaves to read or write, so naturally he kept no journal. Still, clues to his life survive in interviews from years to come, congressional records, and the family’s oral tradition.

In 1856 Robert, who was 17 and had taken the name Smalls (earlier he had been called “Small” because he was short), married 31-year-old Hannah Jones. “My idea was to have a wife to prevent me running around—to have somebody to do for me and keep me,” he said years later. Their marriage, which would last until Hannah’s death in 1883, may also have reflected a meeting of the minds. Observers often commented on Hannah’s quick intelligence. “Hannah was probably born in Charleston,” Nash says. “And Charleston is where her daughter, my grandmother Elizabeth, was born in 1858.” Smalls arranged to buy Hannah and Elizabeth from Hannah’s owner for $800. At the same time, her owner agreed that Hannah could pocket any wages she earned above $5 a month. Eager to free his family, Smalls began to raise money. Such arrangements were as varied as they were rare. In some cases, African-American men or women first bought themselves out of bondage and subsequently worked to secure freedom for their spouses and children. But an individual might also opt to remain enslaved while working extra hours to buy his or her family’s freedom, slowly and incrementally. Robert and Hannah Smalls settled on a compromise; they both remained enslaved while working toward their family’s manumission.

When Robert Smalls came onboard the Planter in July 1861, as a deckhand making $16 a month, the scene was typical, explains Dr. Wise: “White officers and slave crew.” But being able to travel along the coast gave him opportunities to buy finished goods for resale on Sea Island plantations, where slaves had no access to stores.

Everything changed on April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter. In reply, the Union Navy threw a blockade around Charleston, and seized Beaufort and the Sea Islands. In early November white citizens, including the McKees, fled Beaufort, leaving behind some 10,000 slaves. Ironically, if Smalls had stayed in Beaufort, he would have been a free man. Instead, the Confederate government chartered the steamship Planter and pressed its black crew into service. “The Planter was being used to build fortifications around the harbor,” Wise says. As the ship’s wheelman, Smalls found himself arming forts and laying mines for the very people who enslaved him.

Frustration at home grew too. The Smallses had raised $700 of the $800 they needed to buy Hannah’s and Elizabeth’s freedom. But since Hannah was still a slave, their baby boy, born in 1861, belonged to her owner and would also have to be bought out of slavery, which meant they would need even more money.

Smalls’s thoughts turned to the Federal ships blockading Charleston, only a few miles away. But they were deadly miles guarded by Confederate forts. The 23-year-old Robert Smalls looked into the faces of his wife and children and began to plan. He gathered the Planter’s crew into his home and proposed a mutiny. The crew, he later said, agreed to leave the details of their mission to him, promising they would be ready at a moment’s notice.

“To try to steal a ship was a big thing,” Nash says. “Had he gotten caught, he would have been it.” Wise agrees. “They were all putting their lives on the line,” he says. “This would have been seen as a slave revolt. I’m sure he would have been executed.”

Smalls’s chance came on May 12, when the ship’s three white officers, disobeying orders, left to spend the night on shore. Smalls roused members of his crew, who slept aboard. Six of them went along with him.

In an interview published in H. Weekly soon after, Smalls explained he then alerted the mutineers’ far though he didn’t explain how. They stole away to Charleston’s North A
Wharf and managed to hide on a small steamer, the *Etowah*, that was docked there. Smalls had the *Planter* under way by 3:00 a.m. He and his crew raised the South Carolina and Confederate flags and steamed toward the *Etowah*, at one point passing directly by the headquarters of the Confederate Brigadier General Roswell S. Ripley. Under cover of darkness, his passengers slipped aboard, but their activity wouldn't have raised too many eyebrows on the waterfront anyway, Wise says. “It was not unusual for these ships to be going up and down the river and picking up passengers and crew,” he explains.

With 13 adults and three children onboard, Smalls maneuvered past Fort Johnson, giving the required two long pulls and a short toot on the steam whistle, as he had heard the vessel’s white owner, Captain Relyea, do a hundred times. A shout came back: "Pass, the *Planter*.”

"Of course, that put the captain in a very bad position,” Nash admits. “He had taught Smalls everything he knew.”

Smalls reached Fort Sumter at dawn. Now he stood in the pilothouse window, wearing Captain Relyea’s large straw hat and folding his arms across his chest, as Relyea often did. Again he gave the correct signal. Again he heard the words “Pass, the *Planter*.”

He barreled straight for the block-African,” and Southern papers vilified him. At Port Royal, the Union Navy’s headquarters in South Carolina, Smalls made a very favorable impression on the officers. The Confederate steamer was valuable, but Smalls’s information was priceless. “The *Planter* had been involved in evacuating a Confederate position at the mouth of the Stono River,” Wise says. “Smalls passed on the news that this fort had been abandoned. The rear door to Charleston was open.” Union forces immediately sailed into the Stono. But incredibly, with victory at their fingertips, they then withdrew. “General David Hunter did not believe he had enough men to carry out the attack,” Wise explains. With that, the opportunity to take the heart of the Confederacy slipped away.

Meanwhile, Congress offered rewards to the former slaves. The *Planter* and its arms were appraised at $4,584, with $1,500 going to Smalls, who later petitioned for, and received, more money. However, Congress specified that the funds must be invested in U.S. securities in the names of the ex-slaves, who would collect interest until the secretary of the Navy saw fit to give them the principal. Perhaps it was assumed that the escapees did not know how to use their money responsibly.

Among abolitionists and antislavery advocates, Smalls quickly became a symbol of the vast but unrealized potential that slaves presented. Just three months after his escape, missionaries in Beaufort County asked him to travel to Washington, D.C., to speak with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and urge him to enlist blacks, including ex-slaves, in the U.S. military. Smalls was living proof that black Americans could not only serve but...
lead. Some historians believe that Abraham Lincoln met with Smalls when trying to decide whether to allow blacks to fight. In August 1862, after Stanton approved the request, Union officers in Beaufort County began enlisting African-Americans.

Although he still couldn’t read or write, Smalls was now a popular speaker. The New York Times and the Evening Post covered his address at Shiloh Church in New York, where he proclaimed his ambition to one day guide Union forces into Charleston. While awaiting that moment, he returned to Beaufort, opened a store, and worked on contract as a ship’s pilot.

Having failed to take Charleston the easy way, the Union attacked the harbor head-on in 1863. Smalls piloted the Keokuk, an ironclad, which met a disastrous end. “The captain had Smalls take her close to Fort Sumter,” Wise says. The Keokuk fired three shots and took 90 hits before withdrawing and sinking. Smalls resumed service as the Planter’s pilot. In December 1863, while on a mission to deliver supplies to Union troops on Morris Island, the ship was caught in a crossfire. The captain ordered her beached, then hid below deck, but Smalls sailed the Planter out of harm’s way, and for his initiative was named captain of the same vessel that had brought him to freedom a year and a half earlier; he was the first African-American in the Union to be so designated. When Charleston fell, on February 17, 1865, Smalls, who had taken part in 17 Civil War battles, realized his hope: He returned to Charleston with the victorious Union fleet.

By war’s end, with prize money from the Planter, captain’s wages, and contractor’s fees for piloting, Smalls had become a wealthy man. He went home to Beaufort and bought a comfortable two-story residence at 501 Prince Street, the McKees’ old house. His journey from the slave quarters out back to the rocking chair on the front porch had taken him 26 years.

The view from that rocking chair had changed considerably by the end of the war. Gone was an economy based on white ownership of blacks. Missionaries from the North, and the occupying Union Army, which would remain in the region for years, had turned the area into an experiment in self-government by ex-slaves, who composed more than 80 percent of the area’s population. In these circumstances Robert Smalls stepped forth as a natural leader.

In 1868 he traveled to Charleston to help draft South Carolina’s new constitution. It set up the state’s first public school system, promoted the rights of blacks to vote, and called for an end to segregation. A staunch Republican, he spent the next seven years in the state legislature. His exploits aboard the Planter, his easy manner, and his growing political savvy made him a hero to his constituents. “Smalls ain’t God,” folks liked to say, “but Smalls is young yet.” Old South Democrats, who had lost their power, grumbled about the new Republican government, which included many black leaders. State senator Robert Smalls, now also a major general in the National Guard, watched the growth of the Ku Klux Klan with alarm. “I think he knew darned well that if the old regime came back into power, it was going to be awfully tough to hold on to any advances he’d made,” Wise says.

Voters sent Smalls to Washington in 1875 as Representative of the Fifth District of South Carolina. His daughter Elizabeth served as secretary and Congressional Clerk for the man his people called the Gullah Statesman. In Congress he focused on education and other legislation that would directly benefit his constituents. Meanwhile, at Hannah’s urging, the rest of his family stayed in Beaufort.

In South Carolina the political situation steadily declined. “Ideologically, the [Southern] whites had set a clear objective—transfer of political power in the state to the Democratic party,” writes Smalls’s biographer, Edward A. Miller, Jr. “The difficulty was that the
Republicans had a majority consisting of 20,000 more blacks."

The Democrats set out to commit massive Election Day fraud and intimidate black voters. Their methods included murder. "Given the opportunity, I would imagine the Klan would have taken Smalls out," Wise says. They came close more than once. "He had some treacherous times down there, going from place to place, speaking and politicking for office," as Nash puts it. In 1876 the Red Shirts, another white supremacist group, surrounded him at a Republican rally in Edgefield and denounced him. The speakers' platform collapsed in the commotion, and Smalls escaped. At another rally, Red Shirts forced him into a building and opened fire, fleeing only when armed blacks rushed to his aid.

The Democratic party had other, more subtle political weapons at its disposal, and these finally brough Smalls down. In October 1877 he was arrested and charged with accepting a $5,000 bribe during his service as a state senator. He posted bond and took his place in the House, despite attempts by Congressmen to unseat him. "Of course we're saying it's not true," Dolly Nash says of the bribery charge. "But then if you want to know what I think, maybe it was true."

Wise agrees that Smalls took the money but also agrees with most historians that the charges were unusual. "It was standard practice at that time for anybody in his position," he says. "Today, say you take $10,000 from X industry for your campaign fund; then you turn around and award them a contract. Back then, when you gave somebody a contract, you took a cut right off the top. Smalls always maintained that he didn't do anything illegal. He never said, 'I didn't take the money.' He said, 'I didn't do anything illegal.'"

Despite flimsy evidence, a jury found him guilty and a judge sentenced him to three years' hard labor in the penitentiary. He appealed the decision and headed back to Washington. South Carolina's governor, Wade Hampton, a political enemy, pardoned Smalls before his appeal could be heard. With no chance to contest the bribery charges, Smalls faced the indignity of being a pardoned criminal. He would spend the rest of his career defending his character. His reputation lay in shreds, new black leaders were emerging, and, at the same time, South Carolina's African-American voters were being driven away from the polls in mounting numbers. He was on his way out of politics.

Robert Smalls died on February 23, 1915, after serving for nearly 20 years as Beaufort's collector of customs. Few newspapers did more than note the Gullah Statesman's death in passing. "His contribution is now being rediscovered," Wise says. "He was part of the great era that carried blacks through citizenship and voting rights. He fought for universal education. He emphasized nonviolence."

Dolly Nash, who hopes to turn her Beaufort home into a museum honoring Smalls, believes her great-grandfather's dedication to education is his greatest legacy. And like many people, she wishes she had paid more attention to her family history before a vital part of oral tradition was lost.

When she visits Charleston, she thinks of her great-grandfather, who walked along the waterfront first as an enslaved child, then as an escaped slave, and finally as a free man and a United States representative. She thinks of him when she strolls past his old house at 501 Priole Street, where he welcomed the widow Mrs. McKee back as his guest after the war, and where he spent his final year. Perhaps Nash thinks of him most when she drives past Robert Smalls Mid

HIS EXPLOITS ABOARD THE PLANTER, HIS EAS MANNER, AND HIS GROWING POLITICAL SAVV MADE HIM A HERO TO HIS CONSTITUENTS.

He lost his final congressional bid in 1886, three years after his wife's death, and once again came home to Beaufort. Over the next several years he tried and failed to block changes to the state constitution that eventually removed blacks from South Carolina's voting roles. The political and social reforms he had long championed came toppling down, one by one, as Jim Crow laws took their place.

Sheila Turnage's article on Bessie Colt appeared in the Spring 2000 issue.
First black officers in Navy honored

By Cliff Edwards
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORTH CHICAGO, Ill. — Fifty years ago, 16 men battled on the home front to win a place as the Navy's first black officers.

Even with World War II at its height, the Navy still considered black sailors suited only for cooking, cleaning and mechanical work.

But under pressure from civil rights leaders and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Navy to send its best black enlisted men to officer training school.

"We were men who did not aspire to lead because we never thought we'd be asked to," said George Cooper of Hamilton, Ohio.

But he and the 15 others were determined to make the most of the chance. Thirteen did, becoming the only black Navy officers until 1948, when President Truman ordered the military to desegregate.

Half-century later, seven surviving members of the "Golden Thirteen" — as the Navy dubbed them in 1971 — this week celebrated their accomplishments and reminisced about the challenges.

"We had no choice but to succeed," Cooper said, because failure would have meant a setback for civil rights.

They lived in cramped, segregated quarters, barred from training or socializing with whites. Yet all 16 passed the officers' exam with marks so high that suspicious Navy officials ordered them to take it again.

Their second grades were even higher, averaging 3.8 out of a possible 4.0, and were among the highest of any officers' class. Nonetheless, three of the men — for reasons lost to history — did not receive commissions.

The service still didn't welcome the 13 with open arms in 1944. On the day they received their ensign shoulder boards at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center here — with no graduation ceremony, unlike the white officers — it was clear that race overrode rank.

"Oh yeah, you still were refused service or told to ride the all-black ferry," said John Reagan of Chicago. "But you try to carry yourself in such a way that you're respected, whether you're in uniform or not."

None saw battle. Their public relations value over, most were assigned jobs that offered little hope of promotion, working as supply officers or in other desk positions.

None remained on active duty long after the war, though some entered the reserves.

"We knew what we were there for," said William White, who went on to become an Illinois appeals court judge. "We knew it. We didn't like it, but you suffered through it."

It wasn't until 1977 that the Navy, trying to highlight its commitment to integration, honored the group as pioneers in a service that now boasts 3,200 active-duty black officers.

At Wednesday's ceremony, the men were honored by Veterans Affairs Secretary Jesse Brown, the first African American to hold the title, and received plaques and medals.

But most said their greatest reward came in looking around the crowded auditorium.

"You look around and see a whole room full of black officers," Reagan said, "and they have all kinds of duties. That's amazing."
Massacre Survivors
To Be Compensated

They were victims of Florida mob’s rampage in 1923

By Adam Yeomans
Associated Press

Tallahassee, Fla.

The Florida Legislature agreed yesterday to pay up to $150,000 each to survivors of a weeklong rampage by a white mob that wiped out the black town of Rosewood 71 years ago.

The money is part of a $2.1 million claims bill the Senate sent to Governor Lawton Chiles, who supports compensation.

During hearings last month, survivors and witnesses told the story of how whites rampaged through the community of about 120 people after failing to find a black man accused of assaulting a white woman on New Year’s Day 1923.

At least eight people died, and nearly every house and building in the Gulf Coast community was burned. At least four people who fled the violence as children have been identified.

“There is justice, even in this country,” said Wilson Hall, 79. Hall was 8 when his family fled Rosewood. He said yesterday that he felt that the state finally has apologized after years of ignoring the destruction.

The bill, approved earlier by the state House, establishes a $1.5 million fund to pay anyone up to $150,000 if they can prove they lived in Rosewood and were evacuated during the violence. The state attorney general’s office will determine individual amounts.

The measure also creates a $500,000 fund for reimbursement of lost property and provides $100,000 a year for college scholarships for descendants of Rosewood families and for other minorities. Up to 25 students could receive up to $4,000 each a year.

Rosewood family members have received inquiries from movie producers, and a law firm is representing them in negotiations for a movie.
D-Day’s ‘invisible’ soldiers — unseen then, and now

By Barbara Reynolds

"Blacks weren’t there on D-Day," a 13-year-old asked me.

Considering the media coverage — 50 years ago and today — more sophisticated readers and viewers could be forgiven for asking the same question.

But black troops were there. At least 1,700 landed in Normandy on D-Day, says U.S. Army data. Thousands more served as allied troops swept through Europe.

All-black Tuskegee air units served in the European and North African theaters, shooting down more planes than they lost.

Black soldiers fought on three fronts: The Germans, Segregationists within their own ranks and Jim Crow when they returned home.

On D-Day, scores of blacks were radio dispatchers and medics. Others manned helium-filled balloons as shields against enemy air attacks. And they served in all-black service units that supplied the front lines with ammunition and food.

Byron J. Gough, an official at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, documented the participation of the black soldiers but also says, “Their history hasn’t been published.”

During the war, black units were ignored because the media thought their accomplishments weren’t important, says Col. William De Shields, president of the Black Military History Institute. “The same attitude explains the omission of blacks in D-Day coverage. The segregated media are still not playing fair.”

When black soldiers returned to the USA, German POWs — the enemy — were treated far better than Europe’s black GI liberators. In chow lines, German POWs were served before black soldiers. In movie theaters and on buses, black soldiers were forced to sit in the back, behind the Germans, historians say.

After the war, some blacks assigned to Germany said they were treated better there than at home, influencing their decisions to stay in the military.

“I was going to get out,” says De Shields, “but in Germany in 1956 was the first time I was treated as a human being. I brought my entire family to savor the feeling of freedom.”

Now, 50 years after D-Day, some can point with pride to a Gen. Colin Powell. But they also must listen to Art Fletcher, the Republican ex-chair of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, who traveled to Germany in 1991 to probe reports of racism in the modern military: “Conditions were so bad that most minorities and women have lost hope of ever being treated fairly.”

Hiding the truth about the military, then and now, is a sure way to undermine the fight for equality at home.
Hitler homelanders: Bitte forget the war

BRAUNAU, Austria — The seeds of World War II were sown when Adolf Hitler was born in this city of 26,000 across the Inn River from Germany on April 20, 1889.

First, nobody noticed. Just another baby boy. Later, he became a national hero. Now, everybody here wants the world to forget him.

D-Day ceremonies this week revived regrets about Hitler in his hometown. Here’s how quickly Braunau’s baby boy rocketed on and off the world stage as the biggest bad actor of all time:

► 1924: Hitler, at 35, wrote Mein Kampf (My Struggle). Clearly outlined plans to conquer Europe.
► 1933: Became chancellor, then dictator of Germany.
► 1939: Invaded Poland, starting World War II.
► 1945: Committed suicide, ending World War II.

My first visit to Hitler’s birthplace was 49 years ago. Our 86th Infantry Division, part of Gen. George S. Patton’s 3rd Army, ended up near here on V-E Day in May 1945.

Then, Adolf Hitler Strasse was the main street. His birth home a shrine.

Now, the street has been renamed. His birth home is a shrine. Not a hint of Hitler. No signs. No shrine. No mention.

Consider this universal plea: “Bitte vergessen Sie (forget the war). Don’t blame us. Just Hitler? Or the Germans who raised him, British, Americans and others?”

Forgive, yes. But don’t forget.

Hitler homelanders: Bitte forget the war.

D-Day’s ‘invisible’ soldiers — unseen then, and now

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Some were truck drivers who, as the war dragged on, joined the famed Red Ball Express, dodging bullets as they sped along feeding and fueling Allied forces.

Terrence J. Gough, an official at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, documented the participation of the black soldiers but also says, “Their history hasn’t been published.”

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Hiding the truth about the military, then and now, is a sure way to undermine the fight for equality at home.

PLAIN TALK
By Al Neuharth
USA TODAY FOUNDER

D-Day’s ‘invisible’ soldiers — unseen then, and now

By Barbara Reynolds

Terrence J. Gough, an official at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, documented the participation of the black soldiers but also says, “Their history hasn’t been published.”

During the war, black units were ignored because the media thought their accomplishments weren’t important, says Col. William De Shieds, president of the Black Military History Institute. “The same attitude explains the omission of blacks in D-Day coverage. The segregated media are still not playing fair.”

When black soldiers returned to the USA, German POWs — the enemy — were treated far better than Europe’s black GI liberators. In chow lines, German POWs often were served before black soldiers. In movie theaters and on buses, black soldiers were forced to sit in the back, behind the Germans, historians say.

After the war, some blacks assigned to Germany said they were treated better there than at home, influencing their decisions to stay in the military.

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Now, 50 years after D-Day, some can point with pride to a Gen. Colin Powell. But they also must listen to Art Fletcher, the Republican ex-chair of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, who traveled to Germany in 1991 to probe reports of racism in the modern military: “Conditions were so bad that most minorities and women have lost hope of ever being treated fairly.”

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When Black Soldiers Were Hanged: a War’s Footnote

BY FRANCIS X. CLINES

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, Ky., Feb. 1 — As the role of black soldiers is documented in the history of World War II, J. Robert Lilly is trying to focus on one more distinction of that American fighting man: the fact that almost four times as many black soldiers as whites were executed in Europe after military courts-martial, even though blacks made up less than 10 percent of the troops.

"This needs to be sorted out and made right," Professor Lilly said in a recent interview at Northern Kentucky University, where he teaches sociology and criminology. The professor, who is white, stumbled on to what he suspects is a little-known chapter of American racism in doing research in England on prison punishment.

First, he heard about Albert Pierrepoint, England's official hangman during the war, and some of the hangings he carried out for the American Army at Shepton Mallet prison near Somerset. American soldiers were executed for the murder and rape of English civilians.

This got Professor Lilly looking for official records. Eventually, with the help of Frederick M. Kaiser, a senior research associate at the Congressional Research Service, he uncovered a 1946 summary of court-martial discipline dispensed in the war's European theater. In this he found enough racial data to bolster what he had picked up anecdotally in England: Black soldiers paid for capital crimes disproportionately as the gallows in the segregated military of that time.

There were about 70,000 black soldiers in the United States forces in World War II out of a total of more than 10 million men and women who served. Mr. Lilly said about 100,000 black soldiers passed through England to the European theater, compared with several million whites.

"This is an American military story, but it is a part of the larger story of American racism, that is, of the treatment of blacks by the military," Mr. Lilly said. "We have a great deal of information about the treatment of blacks in the military, but we don't have much information about the crimes they committed and the punishment they meted out for them. This is a story that needs to be told, and it needs to be told accurately.

"There were about 500,000 soldiers who were convicted of capital crimes, and about 220 were executed. The majority of these were convicted of murder or rape. In Mr. Lilly's study, he found that about 20 percent of those convicted of murder were black, while about 90 percent of those convicted of rape were black. This is a disturbing finding, but it is a fact that needs to be acknowledged.

"We need to know more about the reasons for these disparities, and we need to know more about the treatment of these soldiers once they were convicted. We need to know more about the role of racism in the military, and we need to know more about the role of the military in perpetuating racism.

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A professor's startling finding about the military.
From Daphne
Finding a get on a free spirit

A young woman named Betty Corwin wrote a note from St. Petersburg, Fla., recounting that I was a friend of her late mother. "I have some questions that I can't even fill out myself," she wrote suitably, and suddenly I felt caught between laughter and tears.

Her mother has countless lifelong friends and was a close relative in Atlanta, and all of them are in touch with gladness and affection about her.

But Betty is right. I knew a side of Eugenia Wellock Corwin that maybe the others did not know. Just thinking about her lifts my spirits and makes my graying heart seat on the music and art advisor at the Constitution Hall in Atlanta.

Eugenia Wellock was a newspaper reporter, but she had returned to the village and, through her father's banking agency, the Atlanta Constitution. She knew every effort made by her late father's newspaper, her friends and the Atlanta Constitution.

But the memorable thing about Eugenia was her zest for living, her flow of energy and friendliness, and her total in vitro. All of her style.

And they arrived with false eyelashes and red-gloved hands.

Gala spaghetti supper as a go-between of condolence. It was typical of those people who lit up Atlanta's theater and singing one night. They were eating dinner, sipping the champagne they had in their mouths or the frigid steel would tear off part of the teeth off circular saws.

They were grateful for the ice that enabled them to wear their false eyelashes and transformed the kitchen into the warmest place in camp.

Shining the spotlight on everyday Americans to illustrate a problem long ignored, the story of Tommy Fletcher and of Inez, Ky., is a reminder that being showcased does not necessarily lead to being remembered.

But the story of Tommy Fletcher and of Inez, Ky., is a reminder that being showcased does not necessarily lead to being remembered.

Prospects remain bleak for poor areas targeted by LBJ's War on Poverty

By Doug J. Swanson

Inez, Ky. — Tommy Fletcher never sold the president to come around his front porch, never wanted his picture flashed across the country, never sought to be the recipient of poor protection from LBJ's War on Poverty.

Mr. Fletcher was an unemployed textile worker 28 years ago, and he didn't care if the news came to illustrate a problem that federal programs might remedy. Nor is he happy now, serving as a symbol of a program that didn't enjoy his role then as a symbol of hope.

Mr. Fletcher's struggle with a problem was a little trying both for the president and for the people he wanted to help. He was coming in the final days of his administration.

Mr. Fletcher and his wife face charges of murdering one child and trying to kill another to collect the burial insurance. "We showed that black solvency was flash across the country, never sought to be the recipient of poor protection from LBJ's War on Poverty."

"It didn't make the history books — even up here," says Rep. Bettye Davis of Anchorage, Alaska's only black state legislator.

To ensure that the soldiers are remembered during the highway's 50th anniversary year, Mrs. Davis invited a dozen veterans to Anchorage for a Fourth of July parade and reception.

"It's a little sad that black soldiers didn't have their day, but we'll take whatever they give us."

"I was a friend of her late mother, gentle, art editor at The Constitution and, through her father's banking agency, the Atlanta Constitution. She knew every effort made by her late father's newspaper, her friends and the Atlanta Constitution.

"We'll go to the Capital City neighborhood greasy spoons."

By Jim Archutey

"Never mind," said Eugenia. "I have some questions that I can't even fill out myself," she wrote suitably, and suddenly I felt caught between laughter and tears.

"We'll go to the Capital City neighborhood greasy spoons."
Woe to Po, a possible plagiarist...evermore

1852
Po was an obscure palaverizer. For a while, the Washington, Ga. native seemed to have great potential as a writer, but his career was to be short-lived. He's forgotten. He's remembered at all in the 1852 plagiarizer pantheon, which once was populated by the likes of Edgar Allan Poe or Henry David Thoreau. Better but not bad for a college golfer, he could be credited as a deathly serious person. But not bad either.

But Po still had a trick or two up his sleeve. One of his greatest gifts was his ability to take a line at a faster rate of pace than a typical plagiarist. He could make a case that his writing was his own, even if it wasn't. His words were his own, even if they weren't. The plagiarist's problem was that he couldn't keep up with Po's pace. He couldn't keep Po from stealing his ideas. He couldn't keep Po from taking his words. He couldn't keep Po from being Po.

Woe to Po, a possible plagiarist...evermore.
Alaskan road: Pride, prejudice and unsung black heroes

Highway every time I take a trip to Alaska, it's always 50 years ago. Prejudice of a Confederate general, was ar-cause them to remain and settle after the war, with the natural re-
ing on, and time and manpower al Buckner. There was a war go-

Vreni cheese for "The Cremation of Dawson Creek, Yukon. The Alcan is dedicated a month later as dignitaries shiver in October 1942: The last link in the highway is closed when a black Caterpil-

What action do you take? Your readers might enjoy seeing

Horoscope By Jacqueline Bigar

Woodworking

Jack Warner

More power to ‘Machines’ readers

Don’t forget your Man of the Day: Dad is hero on Earth and in heaven

BRIDGE

A father is a thing that growls

DEAR ANN LANDERS:

I’d like to check on him

DEAR STACY:

A father is a thing that

DEAR ANN LANDERS:

What action do you take?

DEAR ANN LANDERS:

... or secret. Tonight: Wherever you are, you’re a

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): ★ ★ ★

MEN AND MACHINES

With four spades and three

OTHER TIPS

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19):

With four spades and three

For Vicki, Mr. Duginske’s method of

DEAR ANN LANDERS:

Took me 30 minutes to

DEAR ANN LANDERS:

Took me 30 minutes to

Horoscope for Sunday

For Vicki, Mr. Duginske’s method of

For Vicki, Mr. Duginske’s method of
**Poverty: Chain unbroken decades later**

**DIXIE LIVING**

**The Atlanta Journal / The Atlanta Constitution**

**Talking AD**

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**Continued from M1**

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Segregation sharply restricted the role of the all-black 10th Cavalry Regiment in World War II.

Col. Waldemar Falck probably knew that his men would never see action as a unit in World War II, even though the Army considered the 10th Cavalry Regiment “disciplined, enthusiastic and combat ready.” Most theater commanders were opposed to using black troops in battle. And, although some African American combat units had been shipped overseas, many others were still at training centers around the country.

Colonel Falck may have been preparing his men for disappointment when he issued a memorandum in January 1944, two weeks before the regiment was scheduled to be shipped overseas to North Africa. He told the troops he hoped they might be given the opportunity to fight, to “play an effective part before the war is over.” But, he added, “The object and destiny of this unit are still very doubtful.” Nevertheless, he exhorted his troops to continue to take pride in their work. “This is your regiment, and it’s a good one.”

Indeed, the 10th Cavalry Regiment was destined not to fight as a combat unit during World War II. But its history is inextricably woven into the pattern of racism and segregation that long limited and obscured the contributions of blacks in American military service. Toward the end of World War II, the recurring need for manpower in America’s armed conflicts made integration of the armed forces a necessity.

The 10th Cavalry, which spent the early part of World War II at Camp Lockett in California, has a proud history. It was one of two black cavalry regiments organized in 1866. The 9th and 10th were created as part of an experiment following the Army’s success with black infantry units during the Civil War. Black soldiers, however, were prohibited from rising beyond the rank of sergeant, so the regiments were led by white officers, a practice that continued in most segregated units until the Korean War.

BY MEREDITH R. VEZINA

THE RETIRED OFFICER MAGAZINE/FEBRUARY 1994 29
Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the 9th and 10th Regiments were used to fight the Indians, first on the Great Plains and then in Arizona and Texas. They became known as Buffalo Soldiers, a name bestowed on them by their Indian adversaries, who found similarities between the troopers' hair and buffalo fur. The regiments would later play a prominent role in other campaigns. In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, black troopers fought alongside the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry as it charged up Kettle Hill in Cuba under the leadership of LCol Theodore Roosevelt. In 1916, the Buffalo Soldiers crossed the border into Mexico as part of the Mexican Punitive Expedition under Gen John J. Pershing, and during World War I, the regiments—in response to gunfire—again crossed the border and seized territory around Nogales in northwest Mexico.

Following World War I, the regiments spent the next 12 years performing routine training and garrison duty along the Arizona border. From 1931 to 1941, the regiments were detailed to various posts in Kansas, Virginia and New York. In 1941, they reassembled at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. And the following year, under the command of Colonel Falck, the 10th Cavalry was dispatched to Camp Lockett in Campo, California, a small border town located 60 miles southeast of San Diego.

Named in honor of Col James T. Lockett, who commanded the 11th Cavalry from 1913 to 1919, the facility was completed just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The all-white 11th Cavalry Regiment, stationed at the presidio of Monterey, California, was the first unit assigned to Lockett as part of the Army's overall defense plans to protect the nation against enemy attack. Some military strategists believed the Japanese might land an invasion force on Mexico's Baja Peninsula and attack the United States through the interior.

In June of 1942, the 11th was deployed overseas and replaced by the 4th Cavalry Brigade of the 2nd Cavalry Division. At the time, the 9th and 10th Cavalleries were part of the 4th Cavalry Brigade. When the 2nd Division became all black, the Army decided to break up the brigade by sending the 9th Cavalry to Ft. Clark, Texas, and the 10th to Lockett.

At Lockett, the 10th assumed the duties of its predecessors: patrolling the border, providing security for dams and power stations vital to San Diego's booming war industries and protecting the San Diego & Arizona Railway, the city's only direct link to manufacturing centers on the East Coast. In addition, Lockett became headquarters for the Southern Land Frontier Sector, composed primarily of white administrative personnel who were responsible for planning the defense of Southern California and Arizona.

Finding suitable camps for stationing black troops in the United States was a problem for the War Department. When stationing black soldiers, the Army had to consider the number of white troops at the facility, the proximity of civilian centers capable of providing "separate" facilities for troopers with passes and the reaction of the nearby civilian community to the presence of black soldiers.

Many communities strongly objected to black troops in their vicinity. In 1942, the War Department received numerous complaints from across the country. The people of Rapid City, South Dakota, for example, were concerned that the "town could not offer the proper entertainment facilities for Negro troops," and when the citizens of Morehead City, North Carolina, learned that an all-white unit of coastal artillery was being replaced with an all-black unit at nearby Ft. Mason, they asked their congressional representatives to intercede. In the spring of 1942, a meeting of Southern governors convened at Hot Springs, Arkansas. They offered the Army two recommendations: "That no Negro military police be used anywhere that might make it necessary for them to control white soldiers, and that Southern Negros be kept in the South and Northern Negros be kept North." Because Lockett was isolated from any white urban centers, the location offered obvious advantages.

In the fall of 1942, the Army decided to bring the 4th Brigade up to full strength by activating a second black regi-
ment, the 28th Cavalry, at Lockett. Under the command of Col Edwin M. Burnett, the 28th secured its manpower primarily from Eastern and Midwestern reception centers, and most draftees had never ridden a horse. To provide the troops with mounts, Burnett personally picked 369 horses at Ft. Bliss, Texas. An additional 1,080 horses came from the remount station at Ft. Robinson, Texas.

The cadre for the new regiment came from the 10th Cavalry. Presumably, the more experienced and better trained men who came over from the 10th would be able to help the new recruits coming in from the induction centers. But in actuality, the lifeblood of the old regiment was drained to help the new unit.

Cadres for new African American units often created more problems than they solved. There were not enough well-trained black soldiers to meet the Army's needs. Before the country began mobilizing for war, only four regular all-black regiments—two cavalry and two infantry—existed. Despite the fact that the regular units were supposed to be composed of older, well-disciplined troops, the regiments were in no position to give up their best men.

This situation was exacerbated at Lockett because a breakdown occurred in the chain of command. According to Charles Barrett of Los Angeles, who was then a white officer with the 28th Cavalry, significant problems arose in training the new regiment at Lockett. "There were some black agitators, and they were turning the privates against the cadre," says Barrett. "The situation was undermining everyone's morale."

Accordings to David Allen of Wichita, Kansas, who was a sergeant with the 10th and, until recently, was the historian for the 9th and 10th Cavalry Association, problems in command also occurred because some white officers resented being attached to black units. "They felt that being in a black regiment might hamper their careers," says Allen.

At the time, segregation was a way of life both inside the armed services and in society at large. Although only about 300 white soldiers were stationed at Lockett compared to some 3,500 black troops, segregation was strictly enforced, particularly when it came to leisure activities. Blacks and whites went to the same movie house on the base, but seating was separate. At the post hospital, white soldiers, regardless of their rank, were assigned to private rooms separate from the black troops. The base's hospitality house, where soldiers could meet visiting girlfriends or wives, was for whites only.

Some of the black women who visited the troops stayed on the nearby Campo Indian Reservation while others stayed in an improvised house just off the base. According to Fred Jones of Los Angeles, California, who was a corporal with the 28th Cavalry, "The house was built by black soldiers and made of discarded bulldozer crates. We tied them together, and the wives papered the inside and put up curtains."

Off the base, the rules of segregation also applied. "We always hung out in the Negro section of San Diego," says Jones. "We never thought about going anywhere else in the city. The USO [United Service Organizations] was off-limits to us." Jones also remembers how difficult transportation was to come by. "We tried to hitch a ride at the gate, and sometimes an Army truck would take us to town. But coming back to the base was a bigger problem. "We weren't allowed in the same [train] cars as the whites, so we'd congregate at the depot in San Diego until there were enough of us, and they [railroad officials] would put a separate car on the end of the train for us."

Jones says the men seldom, if ever, went to bars or restaurants in the Campo area. "You just knew not to go into places you weren't welcome."

The 28th Cavalry finished basic training at Lockett on June 26, 1943. After passing an inspection by a team from the 4th Cavalry Brigade, the regiment was allowed to proceed with the 10th Cavalry. On Saturday, July 24, 1943, BGen Thorbun K. Brown called for a full mounted review of the troops. This review was the first for the 28th Cavalry. It was also the first time that the brigade had acted as a single unit. Reportedly, the review was a success.

In 1943, the deployment of African American troops to overseas posts became an acute problem for the Army. In some areas, even though there were clear shortages of combat troops, commanders refused to take black soldiers. As a result, the percentage of black troops overseas was considerably smaller than their overall proportion in the Army.

The differences in the rate of deployment of black and white troops in overseas operations produced outrage in the Negro press. "Our men are not being trained to fight."

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argued The Crisis, a journal published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in New York City. The editors believed the Army was only going through the motions and that when the time came, black units would never be used in combat.

As for the two black regiments at Lockett, the black press was right. The Army decided to convert the 2nd Cavalry Division, of which the 4th Cavalry Brigade was a part, into service units. This decision came in spite of the fact that the Army considered the division combat ready.

Jones remembered the disappointment many men felt. "When we left Lockett, we thought that we were being shipped overseas to fight. None of the men—maybe with the exception of the older troopers—thought we would be put into service units."

With the war confined to the European and Pacific theaters, the Southern Land Frontier Sector had already been deactivated at Lockett. On February 10, 1944, the 28th Cavalry departed Lockett aboard three trains headed east for Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. The following day, the 10th Cavalry left Lockett. "At Patrick Henry, we still considered ourselves horse cavalry, but we didn’t know that our division [2nd Cavalry] had already been disbanded. They gave us new weapons and shipped us to North Africa," says Jones.

In North Africa, the 10th and 28th Regiments were disbanded. Jones’ troop was sent to Italy as an engineer company and was later reassigned as a quartermaster truck company. When they broke up the regiment, some of the men cried, says Jones. According to Barrett, "The Army was not being honest with these men, and the decision was just poor judgment on their part. They should have found a way to integrate them from the very beginning."

Officially, the Army denied that its decision to break up the regiments was racially motivated. But Judge William H. Hastie, formerly a federal district judge to the Virgin Islands who had been appointed by the Secretary of War as a liaison between black civilians and the military, was more straightforward. "The truth of the matter is that these original combat units have been the problem children of the Army for more than two years, not because they were incompetent but because no one wanted them."

Ultimately, many African American soldiers did see combat. In July 1944, advance units of the all-black 92nd Infantry Division began arriving in Italy. The 92nd’s arrival in the Mediterranean produced a lot of excitement among the black service troops, who felt betrayed by the Army’s decision to break up 2nd Cavalry units. They saw an opportunity to prove themselves. "They told us that if you wanted to fight, you could join the 92nd, and quite a few of us did," says Jones.

By December of 1944, shortages of infantry riflemen in the European theater became acute. And on the heels of the German counterattack in the Ardennes of western Europe, the Army decided to train African American volunteer soldiers as individual infantry replacements to fight alongside white soldiers. The call for African American troops came the day after Christmas in an announcement read to black troops. It said: "The Commanding General makes a special appeal to you. [The Army] plans to assign you without regard to color or race to the units where assistance is most needed and give you the opportunity to fight shoulder to shoulder to bring about victory. Your comrades at the front are anxious to share the glory of victory with you."

The sheer need for manpower finally gave some black soldiers the chance to serve in World War II’s combat infantry. Col Franklin Henderson, USA-Ret., president of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Association, points out that necessity ultimately brought about total integration of America’s armed forces. In 1948, President Harry Truman signed the executive order desegregating the services. Segregation in the military had been painful and wasteful, but African Americans had more than proved themselves. Though they were not always called to fight, they were ready to answer.

Historian and writer Meredith R. Vezina has researched and written about black cavalry regiments for eight years. She lives near San Diego, California.
The Long Road to Equality

Leisure activities for black soldiers were once segregated affairs, as reflected in this 1918 scene in Newark, New Jersey. Segregation in the military, which persisted into the Korean War, long limited and obscured the contributions of blacks in the armed forces. Yet they served with courage and valor, from the gallant “Buffalo Soldiers” fighting on the Western frontier to the black units serving in the Philippines, Cuba and France to the Tuskegee airmen of World War II.

During February, Black History Month, we salute those blacks who fought and won a dual battle—against America’s enemies and the scourge of racism.
First black officers in Navy honored

By Cliff Edwards

NORTH CHICAGO, Ill. — Fifty years ago, 16 men battled on the home front to win a place as the Navy's first black officers.

Even with World War II at its height, the Navy still considered black sailors suited only for cooking, cleaning and mechanical work.

But under pressure from civil rights leaders and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Navy to send its best black enlisted men to officer training school.

"We were men who did not aspire to lead because we never thought we'd be asked to," said George Cooper of Hamilton, Ohio.

But he and the 15 others were determined to make the most of the chance. Thirteen did, becoming the only black Navy officers until 1948, when President Truman ordered the military to desegregate.

Half-century later, seven surviving members of the "Golden Thirteen" — as the Navy dubbed them in 1971 — this week celebrated their accomplishments and reminisced about the challenges.

"We had no choice but to succeed," Cooper said, because failure would have meant a setback for civil rights.

They lived in cramped, segregated quarters, barred from training or socializing with whites. Yet all 16 passed the officers' exam with marks so high that suspicious Navy officials ordered them to take it again.

Their second grades were even higher, averaging 3.8 out of a possible 4.0, and were among the highest of any officer's class. Nonetheless, three of the men — for reasons lost to history — did not receive commissions.

The service still didn't welcome the 13 with open arms in 1944. On the day they received their ensign shoulder boards at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center here — with no graduation ceremony, unlike the white officers — it was clear that race overrode rank.

"Oh yeah, you still were refused service or told to ride the all-black ferry," said John Reagan of Chicago. "But you try to carry yourself in such a way that you're respected, whether you're in uniform or not."

None saw battle. Their public relations value over, most were assigned jobs that offered little hope of promotion, working as supply officers or in other desk positions.

None remained on active duty long after the war, though some entered the reserves. But most said their greatest reward came in looking around the crowded auditorium.

"We knew what we were there for," said William White, who went on to become an Illinois appeals court judge. "We knew it. We didn't like it, but you suffered through it."

It wasn't until 1977 that the Navy, trying to highlight its commitment to integration, honored the group as pioneers in a service that now boasts 3,200 active-duty black officers.

At Wednesday's ceremony, the men were honored by Veterans Affairs Secretary Jesse Brown, the first African American to hold the title, and received plaques and medals.

None said their greatest reward came in looking around the crowded auditorium.

"You look around and see a whole room full of black officers," Reagan said, "and they have all kinds of