Our Veterans: Sharing Their Stories

A Newspaper in Education Supplement to

The Washington Times
Who are Veterans?

They are men and women who, for many reasons, donned the uniform of our country to stand between freedom and tyranny; to take up the sword of justice in defense of the liberties we hold dear; to preserve peace and to calm the winds of war.

Your mothers and fathers, your grandparents, your aunts and uncles, your neighbors, the shop owners in your community, your teachers, your favorite athlete, a Hollywood star, and your political leaders... each one could be a veteran.

But as much as they may differ by gender, race, age, national origin, or profession, they share a common love for our great nation; a love great enough to put their very lives on the line, if need be, to guarantee the way of life we enjoy today, and to secure that way of life for tomorrow's generations.

The title "veteran" must be earned. It is a title endowed by a grateful nation on citizens whose shoulders were broad enough to carry the weight of our common defense.

It is a title that speaks of courage and sacrifice in the face of mortal danger.

It is a title that speaks of compassion and heartbreak in the wake of the terrible cost of war.

And it is a title that speaks of love of country, and of a belief in America's goodness, and our strength.

In each of America's struggles, heroes in uniform emerged to inspire and spur us on to victory. Our veterans' steadfast resolve to stand and fight for the American way of life is a constant reminder that the righteousness of our destiny overarches the anguish of our losses.

America's servicemen and women, who became our nation's veterans when they set their uniforms aside and resumed their civilian lives, distinguished themselves through their willingness to risk life and limb in defense of the freedoms we all cherish.

Those who have served our nation in uniform are the best people our society has to offer. We owe them our full support, and our sincerest thanks.

America's veterans did not shrink from battle; they did not yield to fear; they did not abandon their cause. All too often they paid the ultimate price.

By their example of courage under fire, they raised up a new nation, inspired by the dignity of the common man — a nation blessed with heroes and heroes' dreams.

Credit: Excerpt from 2003 speech at the National Young Leaders conference in Washington, DC.

VETERANS DAY HISTORY
Where does the term “veteran” come from?

Originally, the word veteran meant “a person of long experience” or skill. Derived from the Latin term veteranus, after the American Revolution the word veteran came to be associated specifically with former soldiers of old age who had fought for independence. As time went on, “veteran” was used to describe any former member of the armed forces or a person who had served in the military.

In the mid-19th century, this term was often shortened to the simple phrase “vets.” The term came to be used as a way to categorize and honor those who had served and sacrificed through their roles in the military.

History of Veterans Day

World War I, also known as the “Great War,” was officially concluded on the 11th hour of the 11th Day of November, at 11 A.M. in 1918. On November 11th of the following year, President Woodrow Wilson declared that day as “Armistice Day” in honor of the peace. (The term armistice means “truce” or the end of wartime hostilities.) This day was marked with public celebrations and a two-minute halt to business at 11 AM. In 1921, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated in Arlington Cemetery with a ceremony on November 11th. After this dedication, Armistice Day was adopted in many states and at the federal level as a day to honor veterans. This was made official in 1938 when an act of Congress made Armistice Day a national holiday.

If the idealistic hope had been realized that World War I was “the War to end all wars,” November 11 might still be called Armistice Day. But only a few years after the holiday was proclaimed, World War II broke out in Europe. Sixteen and one-half million Americans took part. Four hundred seven thousand of them died in service, more than 292,000 in battle.

The first celebration using the term Veterans Day occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1947. Raymond Weeks, a World War II veteran, organized “National Veterans Day,” which included a parade and other festivities, to honor all veterans. The event was held on November 11, still designated as Armistice Day. Later, U.S. Representative Edward Rees of Kansas proposed a bill that would change Armistice Day to Veterans Day. In 1954, Congress passed the bill that President Eisenhower signed proclaiming November 11 to be Veterans Day. Raymond Weeks received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Reagan in November 1982. Weeks' local parade and ceremonies have now become an annual event celebrated nationwide.

A law passed in 1968 changed the national commemoration of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. It soon became apparent, however, that November 11 was a date of historic significance to many Americans. Therefore, in 1978 Congress returned the observance to its traditional date.

Today, Veterans Day is still observed on November 11th as a national holiday to honor all veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Throughout the nation, Americans participate in parades, ceremonies, and observances to pay their respects to our former servicemen and women.

National Ceremonies Held at Arlington National Cemetery

The focal point for official, national ceremonies for Veterans Day continues to be the memorial amphitheater built around the Tomb of the Unknowns. At 11 a.m. on November 11, a combined color guard representing all military services executes “Present Arms” at the tomb. The nation’s tribute to its war dead is symbolized by the laying of a presidential wreath. The bugler plays “taps.” The rest of the ceremony takes place in the amphitheater.

The President's Veterans Day National Committee coordinates Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington and elsewhere. Chaired by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the committee represents national veterans organizations.

Governors of many states and U.S. territories appoint Veterans Day chairpersons who, in cooperation with the National Committee and the Department of Defense, arrange and promote local ceremonies.

Newspaper Activities:

Veterans have unselfishly made sacrifices for the sake of their country. Look in today's newspaper and find either a picture of or an article about a person or veteran who put someone else's needs above his or her own. What were the consequences of the unselfish act? What might have happened if the person had not acted?

Veterans exemplify good character qualities like loyalty, courage, responsibility, respect and other traits. Find stories in your newspaper about people that exhibit both good and bad character. What choice did they make? What was the outcome? What are the good or bad character traits that they exhibited? What can you learn from them?
African Americans: Honor Deferred

African Americans have always fought in this country’s wars, back to the American Revolution, and up through the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. But, they had not always been welcomed as full participants, and they were relegated to segregated units throughout these conflicts. Despite the discrimination they faced, African Americans continued to fight willingly in the U.S. armed forces even as they struggled to achieve citizenship rights in U.S. society.

When World War II came around there was a general hesitance to employ blacks to fight in combat. There was no hesitation in employing them to do manual work. Those roles were acceptable to the military establishment.

But with the Battle of the Bulge and the threat that represented to U.S. forces, suddenly there was a huge demand for reinforcements. Eisenhower was pushed to turn to the black troops who were ready and eager to fight against the Fascists. Thousands volunteered.

Under a segregated military, more than one million African Americans served during World War II. In the Pacific and in Europe, on the ground, on the seas, and in the air, black troops demonstrated courage and valor in the face of battle that earned them numerous medals. But when the war books closed at the end of World War II, not one black soldier had received the military’s highest award, the greatest symbol of selflessness, sacrifice and courage under fire: the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Fifty-seven African American soldiers had been awarded the Medal of Honor in previous wars. Why, after receiving many medals in these conflicts. Despite the discrimination they always been welcomed as full participants, and in World War I, and World War II. But, they had not been awarded the Medal of Honor. It was a ‘no, no’.

There was not an order. But within the ranks it seemed clear that no African Americans would be granted the Medal of Honor. Therefore, rather than see such soldiers get nothing, officers recommended them for the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest military honor, of which only five were officially awarded and five more had been recommended. This was a tragic injustice.

A thorough 15-month investigation by a team of seven researchers revealed that there were no unprocessed recommendations for Medals of Honor. During the course of interviews, a number of white commanders made it clear that they understood they should not recommend an African-American for the Medal of Honor. It was a ‘no, no’.

While eager to fight against the enemy, these soldiers lacked proper training for combat duty. They had been prepared for service jobs and manual labor. Training was hastily organized for them in Europe before they went into combat, but this training was not as good as it could have been, and certainly not of the same quality that would have been given to white troops. There were exceptions to this rule, such as the Tuskegee airmen, but for the most part black troops did not receive the same level of training or resources as white units. Despite the lack of training, the men of the 92nd were determined to contribute to the war effort once they were deployed to Italy.

December 26, 1944… A massive German assault was launched on the mountain village of Sommocolonia, Italy. Only two platoons from the poorly equipped and thinly supported 92nd Infantry division held out against an overwhelming German offensive. The German Fourteenth Army, following the official standards of the Nazi Party, was instructed to take no prisoners from the 92nd Division because its soldiers were black, therefore not fully “men”. A mere 6 miles south, the 5th Army Division refused the besieged soldiers of the 92nd either reinforcements or blood transfusions for the wounded. They were black, and by official U.S. Army standards in 1944, not a priority.

Some historians make the case that black soldiers as a first line of defense, served as open targets for the German army. Their role was to occupy German forces in the south of Italy, making it possible to send other forces to France and Germany. Often the testimony of the black soldiers of the 92nd Division was that they felt they didn’t receive the necessary support despite their dedication.

Newspaper Activity

Even today, individuals and groups are the targets of racism, stereotyping and discrimination. Watch your newspaper for stories about these issues. For each story create a web illustrating who is affected. Write an editorial or short essay about solutions to the issue.

Vernon Baker

At 77 years old, Vernon Baker was the only African American soldier still alive to receive Medal of Honor at the White House ceremony on January 13, 1997.

Baker recalls his own experience as a 24 year-old combat soldier in the high mountain Italian campaign.

“Our mission was to take Castle Aghanolfi — one of three high ground fortifications the Germans fall back and fight from — rules the mountainous passes into Northern Italy.

“The Germans knew we were there. The Germans knew every route that we could send the people up. They had to put Southern born officers in charge because they thought they knew how to handle African Americans.

“Captain John Runyon ordered, ‘I’m taking command of your troops. Get your men geared up and ready to move — today you’re gonna take this hill or your gonna die tryin.’ ”

“I knew that that day was gonna be a challenge. Because they kept sending us up the same old way. They didn’t know what else to do. They were moving in open formation, open ground, no cover. This is disastrous tactics. And when we got up to the top we spread out. Somebody behind us stepped on some mines back there which I thought was the artillery, which was supposed to be ahead of us. And when I heard the explosions behind me I just...”
And the radio… I had no communication. No
said, ‘Right, good.’ And he took off.
Captain we’ll be here when you get back.’ He
for reinforcements.’ A commissioned officer,
the best I can.’ And he says, “I’m going back
out there?’
parchment. And he had the nerve to ask me,
down. He was pale as hell. His face looked like
the commanding officer. He’s supposed to
blew it open.
nice and quiet. And I found these other, other
because I had never seen a German soldier
look at the soldier and see what he looked like
on this soldier’s back. And I shot him.
did. The ones that wore the black. And that
shot anybody in the back. But the black guys
stories, the good guy in the white hat never
was sticking in my mind when I put the sights
down in his mind when I put the sights
this soldier’s back. And I shot him.

And, the first thing I did I went down to
look at the soldier and see what he looked like
because I had never seen a German soldier
up close. I went down the path and it was
nice and quiet. And I found these other, other
dugouts. So I stuck a grenade in there and
blew it open.

I went back looking for Runyon. He’s
the commanding officer. He’s supposed to
tell me what to do. And, Runyon was sitting
down. He was pale as hell. His face looked like
parchment. And he had the nerve to ask me,
‘Baker can’t you get those soldiers together
out there?’

And my answer was to him, ‘I’m doing
the best I can.’ And he says, ‘I’m going backor reinforcements.’ A commissioned officer,
a captain in command of a company, going back
for reinforcements! So I’m not gonna tell
you what I was thinking then. I told him, ‘OK
Captain we’ll be here when you get back.’ He
said, ‘Right, good.’ And he took off.

I never saw Runyon again. We had three
or four wounded men he took along with them.
And the radio… I had no communication. No
communication at all. What troops I had up
there, I gathered together and we moved on
up. At one time one of the my soldiers looked
up and said, ‘Hey look there – a flock of birds
coming up over there.’ And I looked up and
said, ‘That’s not a flock of birds, that’s a bunch
of mortars. So move. Take cover!’

‘If they’ve got you pinpointed there isn’t
a heck of a lot you can do. And, they had us
pinpointed. The best word to describe it would
be ‘deadly.’ You can’t hear the shells coming
from a mortar…just a whoosh, then hit. After
every two barrages, the Germans would send
up a bunch of foot soldiers. They just kept
coming. I had seen so much blood spent, arms
and legs blown off.

And then our ammunition began to get
low. And, I would look at the soldiers and they
kept looking at me and nobody said a word. But
I knew what was what that look meant. Are we
gonna stay here and die or what are we gonna
do? We never did get any ‘reinforcements’. That
was our mission. To go up there and take
that ground, and we took it. I went up with
twenty-six. And when we got back I had six
men with me…six out of twenty-six.”

Staff Sergeant Edward A. Carter

He stood up with his trusted Tommygun,
firing on the Germans, killing all but two,
who he then captured and took back to the
American lines. American officers and everyone
were astonished to see him still alive. The two
prisoners knew where the German positions
were in the town of Speyer and gave valuable
information to the American forces, enabling
them to advance through Speyer.

There were some who said that the
officers actually considered recommending
Eddie Carter for the Medal of Honor, but then
decided not to, since they knew that he would
not be granted the medal.

His, son Edward A. Carter III, accepted the
Medal of Honor for SSGT Carter on January 13,
1997.

Staff Sergeant Rueben Rivers and
the 761st Tank Battalion

In March 1945 American forces pushed
into Germany, and into the Rhineland where
Hitler’s Nazi troops were making a last ditch
stand. The Rhine River was the barrier they
hoped would stop the American advance.

On March 13th, 29-year-old Infantry Staff
Sergeant Edward A Carter was among the
black combat soldiers of an armored group
making the push under Patton and his Third
Army.

As they advanced on route towards the
town of Speyer, German artillery guns opened
up on their position.

They were fired upon by German artillery
and mortar fire, which stopped the armored
column and forced them to disperse and
calculate what to do next. At this point, Sergeant
Carter stepped forward and volunteered to lead
a squad to mark the German positions and, if
possible, to initiate an attack against them.

They had to cross 150 acres of bare flat
land, making them easy targets. As soon as
Sergeant Carter and three men started out,
one of them was killed outright. There was
heavy fire from the Germans. Sergeant Carter,
seeing what was happening, ordered the other
two to return to the American lines. Before they
made it back, one of them was shot and killed,
the other was wounded. Carter himself was
running fast but he was wounded in the arm.

He advanced on. Catching one of the
German gun positions by surprise, he was able
to lob a hand grenade in and silence that gun
position. He was hit again and knocked into the
air. He crawled behind a berm, where he was
able to hide while figuring out what to do next.
Looking up, he saw a German squad advancing
towards his hiding place.

Eddie lay there. He had been shot, maybe
5, 6, 7 times. He waited for the Germans to
approach him. The Thompson machine gun
was his weapon of choice. He had mastered
it. He never shot from the shoulder. He always
shot from the hip. So he wouldn’t have to
really line you up in the sights. He could kill
you and not take his eyes off you.

On November 7th 1944 in France,
operating with General Patton’s Third Army, the
men of the 761st got their first taste of battle
and soon realized what kind of fight they were
up against.

A soldier said about the Germans, “They
were good. The only thing we could do is
outrun them. You couldn’t stand up there and
fight with them suckers. That German tank
was much more superior than ours. Even that
88mm gun — you could hear that sucker
coming. Weeeeew. Whooo, I said, ‘…how the
hell anybody gonna live through this?’

One tank commander emerged as a leader
among the men of the 761st. Staff Sergeant
Reuben Rivers’ unparalleled bravery in the
face of battle gained him the respect of both
his fellow tankers and his white commander.

On November 16th 1944, during an
advance toward the town of Guebling, France,
the vehicle Rivers was commanding hit an anti-
tank mine. A metal shard from the damaged
turret slashed his right leg, severely wounding
him. His thighbone was visible.

The medic joked, ‘…you got a million
dollar wound, you can go home now.’
Rivers replied, ‘I’m not goin’ anywhere.
Fix me up doc.’

‘Rube, this looks pretty bad. I’ve got to
get you out of here.’
Rivers again told the medic, ‘I said I’m not
going anywhere.’

“At least let me give you somethin’ for the
pain…”

“I don’t need it.”
Capt. Williams, the white commander of
the unit, asked, ‘What’s the situation here?’
And Rivers told him, “Ain’t no situation
Cap’n – it’s nothin’.”
The medic informed him, “Captain, this
soldier’s hurt pretty bad. We’ve got to get him
out of here.”

Rivers again confirmed, “It’s nothing.”
The Captain ordered, “Rivers you get your
butt back on that jeep and to that aid station!
That’s an order soldier!”

And Rivers calmly told him, “Can’t do that
Cap’n — You’re gonna be needing me around.”
And he refused to go even though he knew
the gravity of the situation. Reuben was a tough
man. He would not give up.
Rivers fought on, — even when his wound became infected and in danger of gangrene. He would not leave the men of Company A.

Three days later, on November 19th, Company A’s tanks advanced toward their next objective: the town of Bourgaltroff, France. Dug in — heavily armed and waiting for them — were elements of the crack German 11th Panzer Division.

Before the tanks could reach the town, an overwhelming enemy force confronted them. The Germans had anti-tank guns and tanks dug in.

Capt. Williams got on the radio frantically ordering his crews to fall back and take cover yelling, “Withdraw! Withdraw from your positions! Move back! Move back!” Rivers ignored the command. He and his crew spotted the German tank positions and in a daring maneuver advanced on them — covering the other tanker’s safe withdrawal. Rivers fired his cannon as he continued to move forward.

Capt. Williams ordered, “Rivers! Pull out! Pull out!”

Rivers replied, “NOOO!”

Rivers and his crew were killed instantly. A soldier commented, “He put himself out there. He saved a lot of lives by putting himself out there. And, he went down swinging.”

Two days after the battle, Captain Williams, though aware of the Army’s unwritten policy of denying black soldiers the highest award for courage under fire, recommended that Sergeant Reuben Rivers receive the Medal of Honor.

However, he recalled, “After I recommended, they just put it aside. Didn’t mean a thing.”

Though Rivers’ courage and sacrifice on November 14th, 1944 unquestionably demonstrated actions that went above and beyond the call of duty, he did not receive the recognition he deserved until much later.

By war’s end the all-black 761st had captured, destroyed or liberated more than 30 major towns, 34 tanks and 4 airfields. But their contributions to decisive battles were not widely known until 1978. The U.S. military officially acknowledged the unparalleled performance of the 761st with a Presidential Unit Citation. And almost two decades later, Reuben Rivers was honored with the Medal of Honor for being the hero that he was.

Newspaper Activity:
Over a period of time, through the newspaper and research at the library or online, locate articles about Veterans Day, an important veteran, or military unit in history (like Rivers and/or the 761st). Write a short essay or prepare a poster-board about that veteran or unit and include relevant dates and facts such as which branch of the military they represented, where the veteran or group was stationed and any honors or decorations they received.

Army Lt. John R. Fox

The outstanding record of black airmen in World War II was accomplished by men whose names will forever live in hallowed memory. Each one accepted the challenge, proudly displayed his skill and determination while suppressing internal rage from humiliation and indignation caused by frequent experiences of racism and bigotry, at home and overseas. These airmen fought two wars — one against a military force overseas and the other against racism at home and abroad.

Learn more at TuskegeeAirmen.org
(Credit: Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.)

Tuskegee Airmen

The Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated, determined young men who enlisted to become America’s first black military airmen, at a time when there were many people who thought that black men lacked intelligence, skill, courage and patriotism. Each one possessed a strong personal desire to serve the United States of America to the best of his ability. Those who possessed the physical and academic qualifications were accepted as aviation cadets to be trained initially as single-engine pilots and later to be twin-engine pilots, navigators or bombardiers.

No standards were lowered for the pilots or any of the others who trained in operations, meteorology, intelligence, engineering, medicine or any of the other officer fields. Enlisted members were trained to be aircraft and engine mechanics, armament specialists, radio repairmen, parachute riggers, control tower operators, policemen, administrative clerks and all of the other skills necessary to fully function as an Army Air Corps flying squadron or ground support unit.

From 1941 through 1946, nine hundred and ninety-six pilots graduated Tuskegee Army Airfield (TAAF) in Tuskegee Alabama, receiving commissions and pilot wings. Black navigators, bombardiers and gunnery crews were trained at selected military bases elsewhere in the United States. Mechanics were trained at Chanute Air Base in Rantoul, Illinois until facilities were in place in 1942 at TAAF.

Some 450 of the pilots who were trained at TAAF served overseas in either the 99th Pursuit Squadron (later the 99th Fighter Squadron) or the 332nd Fighter Group. The 99th Fighter Squadron trained in and flew P-40 Warhawk aircraft in combat in North Africa, Sicily and Italy from April 1943 until July 1944 when they were transferred to the 332nd Fighter Group in the 15th Air Force.

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Learn more at TuskegeeAirmen.org
(Credit: Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.)

Executive Order 9981
Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948)

The following is the executive order signed by President Harry Truman ending segregation in the armed services and calling for the complete integration of the military. This order was the culmination of efforts among members of the military and their supporters, and it is remembered as one of the initial victories for integration, which ushered in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s.

Executive Order

Establishing the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country’s defense:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy
Wednesday • September 15 • 2010

Respect for Hispanic Americans from many have been a path to a better life, and a way to earn that way of life. Service in the military has those most readily willing to serve and defend a result the young people who have come to prayer, which is the tradition of America. As service. Many Hispanic Americans immigrated above and beyond the call of duty, Hispanics of this select group, forty-two are Hispanic 3,440 Americans have received the medal. have been awarded our nation’s highest conflicts, and in return have gained the awards Hispanics for this country and the Medal of Honor and commitment of many Hispanic-American of Honor recipients who fought for this country while being the citizen of another.

Al was born in Chihuahua, Mexico in 1945. Soon after, he and his parents moved to the United States and settled as legal permanent residents in Oxnard, California, a coastal town north of Los Angeles.

“The primary reason why my parents came here was for a better life. But then also to try to contribute to this country.”

While growing up in Oxnard, Al came into contact with servicemen stationed at nearby military bases who were getting ready to fight in Korea.

“One of the particular things that I saw were jump wings for the paratroopers. And that’s what really got me into the military. When I was probably seven years of age, I ended up finding half of a sheet, putting a rope with it, and jumping from the roof of my house. Didn’t exactly make the best parachute in the world, but it did show interest.”

That boyhood fantasy of being a paratrooper became reality when Al graduated high school and enlisted in the army in 1963.

“I wanted to be something, and I felt the military offered me an opportunity not to look at me, what color I was, or the race. But to look at me for what I can do.”

After graduating from airborne school, Al was assigned to the first battalion of the 503rd paratroopers, 173rd airborne brigade. In 1965 he arrived in Vietnam and served as a medic in the battalion’s reconnaissance platoon.

“I carried an M-16 with three hundred rounds of ammunition. I was a grunt running out of rounds away, Larry Gibson, the platoon’s other machine gunner, was fast running out of ammunition.

“I hear Gibson yell, ‘I need ammo, I need ammo.’ I crawled up to him, and first thing that happened to Gibson, he, he’s shot. And he’s yelling, ‘I want ammo.’”

Gibson: “I told him to leave me alone, I wanted the ammo. If you can imagine just a quick staccato of crack-crack-crack, just all the time, right by your head. Al says, ‘We gotta get Thompson’s gun and his ammo.’ So he gets up and he goes back.”

“And I leave Gibson, another hand grenade goes off and all I remember was my head literally going around in circles like you see, you know, in a comic book. I thought I had lost my face. I told myself, ‘Gee, my good looks are gone’ and ‘Hell, I’m going to die right here.’ And then I ended up gathering my composure, until I said, ‘No, you gotta keep on going. You have to do what you have to do.’”

Gibson: “I couldn’t believe that he was still alive. Then he goes back, gets the spare barrel bag and another can of ammunition that was up there and brings it back. It was — it was incredible. Had Al not gotten me that ammunition, we probably would have been overrun and everyone up front killed. So you know, I’m here to tell ya that Al probably saved at least 11 of us. We all owe our lives to Al Rascon.”

Gibson laid down suppressive fire with the ammunition Al retrieved, giving the platoon relief from the enemy. Al, reverting to his role as medic, braved exploding grenades to give life-saving cover to Grenadier Neil Haffy and Squad Leader, Ray Compton.

Compton: “I felt this thump. And what had happened was, Al had jumped on me. Covered me with his body and protected me from you, know, the grenade. And his rucksack just went all to pieces. You know. And I thought Al was dead. But I think the first thing out of Al’s mouth was, ‘Are you okay?’”

After the enemy broke contact, Al barely able to walk and bleeding from his ear and nose, declined aid for himself and instead treated his wounded comrades and arranged for their evacuation.

Gibson: “The platoon sergeant, had to, to physically grab him and set him down and say, ‘Look, no more. You know, you need to treat yourself here. You know, we’ll get some help up here.’ Finally we were able to get him up and taken for medical aide by medevac. And quite frankly that was the last I was going to see of him. The chaplain had come over and given him last rites, right before he got in the helicopter. So we didn’t expect to see him again.

Al was then taken by medevac to Japan where he spent three months in an orthopedic ward, undergoing intensive physical therapy. Upon returning home from the war he became a U.S. citizen in 1967.

“I never knew that I was not a U.S. citizen. I had always felt in my heart that I was an American. American by choice, you know.”

Alfred Rascon exemplifies the loyalty
Though Al had resumed his military career, including volunteering for a second tour of duty in Vietnam, his buddies had never forgotten his extraordinary act of valor. Unbeknownst to him, they had filed the required eyewitness reports needed to award Al the Medal of Honor.

Gibson: “When I left Vietnam in, in June of ‘66, rotated back to the States Sergeant Compton and I sat on the, the steps of the barracks there at Fort Campbell and had a beer, talking about it. And one of the things we said was, ‘Yeah, hey, I’ll see you again at, you know, at Al’s, uh, at Doc’s, uh, Medal of Honor ceremony.’ Well, it never happened.”

Compton: “I think it just got lost in the shuffle. I don’t believe anybody intentionally did not turn that paperwork in because we were so disorganized about the administrative end.”

Determined to see Al get his medal, the recon platoon and their comrades from the 173rd airborne launched an eight-year campaign to, as one of them put it, “not change history but to correct it.”

They had many obstacles to overcome, including a statute of limitations restricting the time that could pass between an action taken and a Medal of Honor given. After countless letters and visits to congress, Al’s platoon succeeded.

Gibson: “Congress, because of, of our insistence on this, they changed the law; Al got his Medal of Honor, which he deserved, and there have been since then numerous other recipients of the Medal of Honor who have got their Medal of Honor that they deserve.”

In February 2000, 34 years after he acted above and beyond the call of duty, Alfred Rascon finally received the Medal of Honor at the White House, making him one of the fourteen Hispanic Medal of Honor recipients for extraordinary service performed during the Vietnam War.

“Place yourself in the White House with your family, in uniform, about to receive this nation’s highest award for valor. And most of all, to be given the opportunity to meet the President of the United States, to be there in his presence. It’s pretty humbling. Immediately, before the ceremony I looked around and I said, ‘Hmm, not bad for an immigrant.’”

Compton: “When President Clinton presented the Medal of Honor to Al Rascon, it was just like he was putting it around all of our necks.”

“Thank you very much. The honor is not really mine. It ends up being with those who were with me that day. Mr. President, thank you very much for giving me at least a couple of seconds to thank those who were with me that day. Would my recon platoon please stand up...(applause).”

“What you see before you is common valor that was done every day. And those of you served in the military and continue to serve in the military are very much aware of that. What you do everyday it is duty, honor, and country and I’m deeply grateful to be here. Thank you very much. (applause).”

“For me the war ended right there. It was the homecoming that, that I never got.”

“As far as being a, a recipient who happens to be Hispanic, it ends up being a great honor. And that makes me very proud. I’m able to accomplish something to show that we as Hispanics are able to do things in the military with dignity and honor also.”

(Alfred Rascon finished his distinguished military career with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.)

Lucian Adams

Lucian Adams embodies the strong family bonds that have given many Hispanic Americans the inner strength to achieve medal-worthy greatness on the battlefield.

Lucian was born in Port Arthur, Texas in 1922, one of twelve children in a lower income family. The scrappy and resourceful youth worked odd jobs to provide for and protect his siblings. “Since we were such a large number, it was just a struggle to exist. But, we did. I was a little tough when I was a youngster. I never allowed anyone to run over me. I was a leader. I was an achiever.”

That drive would distinguish Lucian when he entered the Army in December 1942. The twenty-year old Army Staff Sergeant was sent overseas where he joined the third infantry division, one of the first American units to see combat in Europe.

On October 28, 1944 near St. Die, France, German forces stopped Adams’ company in its effort to reopen a supply line to the isolated Third Battalion in the Montagne Forest.

“We advanced 10 yards when the machine guns opened up on us. So everybody start hollerin’ for the medics...”

Enemy guns killed three of Lucian’s buddies and wounded six more. In that bloody instant, he sprang into action.

Leaving his injured buddies behind, Lucian charged forward, moving from tree to tree, firing a borrowed Browning automatic rifle. According to an eyewitness, Lucian stalked the woods like a “wild man” in pursuit of the enemy. Despite intense machine gun fire directed at him and grenades which struck trees, showering him with splintered branches, Lucian made his way to within ten yards of the first enemy gun emplacement.

“So I shot that direction and used my hand grenades and demolished the first machine gun nest. Then, uh, just a few yards from that I discovered the second one and the second one was demolished and the third one. I knocked out the three machine guns and I told the company, you know, to advance. And we made a breakthrough.”

In ten minutes Lucian had killed nine enemy soldiers, forced the surrender of two more, and eliminated three machine guns, all without sustaining any injuries to himself despite the full force of enemy fire aimed at him.

“My buddies, they all said that I had done somethin’ outstandin’. That I was going to be rewarded, the highest medal, that the country can offer. And, uh, I was very happy to hear those sentiments from them that, uh, they thought that I was going to receive the Medal of Honor.”

In April 1945 Staff Sergeant Adams was due to receive his Medal of Honor at the White House, but when President Roosevelt took ill and died, Army officials changed the site of the presentation to dramatize the nation’s victory.

“I didn’t receive my Medal of Honor in Washington DC. I received it in Nuremberg, Germany, in a Zeppelin Stadium. It’s a stadium with a beautiful gold swastika in the background. And you could see that swastika for miles and miles away. And that is where I and four other Medal of Honor recipients received our medal on April 23rd 1945. That was an event that will forever live in my mind. It’s a feeling of amazement, surprise; just the little Texan from Port Arthur bein’ up there where Hitler used to make his speeches, being’ awarded the nation’s highest medal.”

Rodolfo “Rudy” Hernandez

Rudy Hernandez’s son had this to say about his father, “I feel that God spared him, spared his life, that he might be an example to other people here and help other people.”

Rudy still bears the scars and lives with the injuries he suffered in Korea more than fifty years ago. An enemy grenade blew off part of his head, severely damaging his brain, impairing his speech and causing him to lose control of his right arm.

see HERNANDEZ page 10
What We Can Learn from Our Veterans

“Take a Veteran to School Day”™
by Libby O’Connell, Ph.D., Chief Historian, SVP, Corporate Outreach, HISTORY

Four years ago, HISTORY® developed an outreach initiative called Take a Veteran to School Day™ as a national program to link veterans with students in our schools and communities. Schools and organizations invite veterans of all ages and backgrounds to share their stories and receive thanks for their years of service. This initiative has been warmly received, with hundreds of schools hosting veterans each year, and with participation from all fifty states. From a community picnic at Clear Creak Elementary near Ft. Hood, Texas to smaller one-class discussions, this program has connected young people and veterans in powerful ways.

There are many reasons Take a Veteran to School Day resonates so broadly. We can’t all agree about wars, but we can agree that our veterans deserve our support — from the greatest generation to the latest generation. Inviting veterans to share their stories helps illustrate our interest in their experiences while helping young people learn about our past. We designed the program so that participation doesn’t have to be complicated. Holding a Take a Veteran to School Day event can range from a small program in a library with one or two family members of students who have served in the military to a district-wide observance kicked off by all-school assemblies joined by many veterans and elected officials.

Many history and social studies classes have done an impressive job of linking students with veterans for powerful oral history projects. We have worked with the Library of Congress Veterans History project to help schools learn how to record these stories officially. You can find out more about this effort at www.loc.gov/vets.

There are also great ways to bring this program into the classroom for younger students. From their special veteran visitors, students can learn vocabulary (“What does the word veteran mean?), geography (“Where is Seoul? Where is Fallujah? Where is Ft. Benning?) as well as concepts such as service. Reading comprehension, always an important focus in classrooms, can be another key component. Even small school libraries include stories children find compelling, from the Revolutionary War onward.

As part of this program, students can create posters about the branches of service, and listen to music that was popular during wartime eras. To encourage these classroom connections, we have developed free activities and curriculum suggestions with links to all state standards. A short video about the history of Veterans Day is also offered free of charge via streaming video. You can find all of these resources and more online at www.veterans.com.

Take a Veteran to School Day gives your students the chance to meet and talk to men and women from many walks of life. For some children, this alone is an important learning opportunity, and can help them bridge generations. This program also serves as a reminder to all of us that veterans need our support all year round. We have identified several not-for-profit organizations and agencies that help veterans in a variety of ways. America’s Vet Dogs and the Wounded Warrior Project are just two of these organizations. To find out how you can give back to veterans, and start planning your own Take a Veteran to School Day event, please visit us online at www.veterans.com.

Thank a Veteran at Work

HISTORY invites businesses large and small to take time out of the day to thank the many veterans in our workplaces. HISTORY® has developed the Thank a Veteran at Work program to provide employers with easy ways to honor veterans. The days and weeks before Veterans Day, November 11th, is an ideal time for companies and organizations to participate in this program.

Through the Thank a Veteran at Work program, HISTORY® offers “Thank You Veterans” stickers to distribute and posters that can be downloaded and printed free of charge. You can find these materials at www.veterans.com. View our “How-To” guide on this site for ideas about how you can honor veterans in your workplace. Some companies have organized a lunch for all employees, and others have simply sent an email expressing their thanks on behalf of the company to their former servicemen and women. Whether it is a company-wide event or small gesture of thanks, Thank a Veteran at Work is a great way to acknowledge veterans and involve all employees in an important initiative.

Tips for how to participate in Thank a Veteran at Work:
1. Organize a morning get-together at your workplace with coffee, juice, and donuts. You may want to hang up a sign of thanks to veterans, or ask someone to say a few brief words of thanks at your gathering. Alternatively, you could host an informal buffet lunch or afternoon cookies or cake and coffee break in their honor.
2. In some workplaces, veterans have filled out info sheets about where and when they served, and in what branch, to have posted in the office so other employees can learn more about their service. This is optional since not all veterans wish to share their experiences.
3. HISTORY® has created Thank A Veteran at Work stickers. Visit www.veterans.com and look for the section on Thank A Veteran at Work to find out how to request them, while supplies last (we offer 100 per company free of charge).
4. Ask your CEO or senior staff member to send an email message thanking the veterans in your workplace and the vets who are family members of employees.
5. HISTORY® offers online flyers for employers to print – with the option of adding their logo or seal to personalize them and display them in offices, kitchens, or other public locations. Interested in getting more involved in this program or have additional questions? E-mail us at: veterans@aetn.com.
General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Order of the Day — D-Day, June 6, 1944

After the Nazis conquered France in 1940, the Allies immediately started preparing a plan to assault German forces there. Code-named Operation Overlord, this plan was years in the making. President Roosevelt named General Dwight D. Eisenhower to be Supreme Allied Commander, noting his rapport with troops and his effectiveness as a military strategist.

On the morning of “D-Day,” June 6, 1944, Eisenhower delivered the address below to troops. Over 150,000 soldiers participated in this unprecedented assault, which proved to be a major turning point in the liberation of Europe. Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.

“Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened.

He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.”

World War II: What Were We Fighting For?

Before the United States officially entered World War II after the Pearl Harbor bombing in December of 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt outlined four freedoms he felt were critical American values in an international world. The preservation of these freedoms later became a primary justification for the U.S. to become involved in World War II as the spread of fascism threatened these democratic ideals. Full speech is at: www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm

An Excerpt from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms Speech” Delivered to Congress on January 6, 1941

“In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way — everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want — which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants — everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear — which, translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor anywhere in the world.”

That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called “new order” of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.

To that new order we oppose the greater conception — the moral order. A good society is able to face schemes of world domination and foreign revolutions alike without fear.

Since the beginning of our American history we have been engaged in change, in a perpetual, peaceful revolution, a revolution which goes on steadily, quietly, adjusting itself to changing conditions without the concentration camp or the quicklime in the ditch. The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society.

This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women, and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights and keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose.

To that high concept there can be no end save victory.”
Native American Code Talking

The Code Talkers’ role in war required intelligence and bravery. They developed and memorized special codes. They endured some of the most dangerous battles and remained calm under fire. They served proudly, with honor and distinction. Their actions proved critical in several important campaigns, and they are credited with saving thousands of American and allies’ lives.

Creating Code

Many American Indian Code Talkers in World War II used their everyday tribal languages to convey messages. A message such as, “Send more ammunition to the front,” would be translated into the Native American language and sent over the radio. These became known as Type Two Codes.

However, the Navajos, Comanches, Hopis, and Meskwakis developed and used special codes based on their languages. These became known as Type One Codes.

To develop their Type One Code, the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers first came up with a Navajo word for each letter of the English alphabet. Since they had to memorize all the words, they used things that were familiar to them, such as kinds of animals.

So we start talking about different things, animals, sea creatures, birds, eagles, hawks, and all those domestic animals. Why don’t we use those names of different animals — from A to Z. So A, we took a red ant that we live with...
Here are some fo the words they used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Navajo word</th>
<th>English word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>MOASI</td>
<td>Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>LHA-CHA-EH</td>
<td>Dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>DZEH</td>
<td>Elk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>TKIN</td>
<td>Ice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>NE-AHS-JAH</td>
<td>Owl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>GAH</td>
<td>Rabbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>A-KEH-DI-GLINI</td>
<td>Victor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here’s how the message is decoded:
MOASI (C-Cat), NE-AHS-JAH (O-Owl), LHA-CHA-EH (D-Dog), DZEH (E-Elk), GAH (R-Rabbit), DZEH (E-Elk), MOASI (C-Cat), DZEH (E-Elk), TKIN (I-Ice), A-KEH-DI-GLINI (V-Victor), DZEH (E Elk), LHA-CHA-EH (D-Dog)

The Navajos, Comanches, Hopis, and others also had to develop special words for World War II military terms, such as types of planes, ships, or weapons. They were given picture charts that showed them the items. After looking at the pictures, they came up with words that seemed to fit the pictures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native word</th>
<th>Literal meaning</th>
<th>Code meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tushka chipota (Choctaw)</td>
<td>warrior soldier</td>
<td>soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atsá (Navajo)</td>
<td>eagle</td>
<td>transport plane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paaki (Hopi)</td>
<td>houses on water</td>
<td>ships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wakaree’ (Comanche)</td>
<td>turtle</td>
<td>tank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the battlefield, the work of sending coded messages was extremely serious. Being able to keep messages secret could make the difference between winning and losing a battle — or affect how many lives were saved or lost.

Code Talkers did more than speak into a hand-held radio or phone. They had to know how to operate both wire and radio equipment, and often had to carry it on their backs. They had to know how to set up and maintain the electronic communication wires, or lines. Sometimes their messages were broadcast over a wide area, helping to direct bigger operations. At other times, messages related to a smaller group, such as a platoon.

Code Talkers were given the messages in English. Without writing them down, they translated and sent them to another Code Talker. After the message was transmitted and received, it was written down in English and entered into a message logbook. The Code Talkers also sent messages in English. Messages were only coded when absolute security was needed.

The Navajo and Hopi were assigned to service in the Pacific in the war against Japan. The Comanches fought the Germans in Europe, and the Meskwakis fought them in North Africa. Code Talkers from other tribes fought at various locations in Europe, the Pacific, North Africa, and elsewhere.

Learn more about Native American Code Talkers at:
www.nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers
(Credit: National Museum of the American Indian, www.nmai.si.edu)

**Coding messages**

Use the Navajo Code Dictionary to code this realistic message.


Copy the message in English to your workbook. Then, write the Navajo code version: “Fierce action at forward position. Intense mortar attack. Request reinforcements immediately!”

Then, in your workbook, make up and write your own coded message to a friend.

**Newspaper Activity:**

During World War II and beyond, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, other ethnic groups, and women have experienced prejudice and/or racism in the military and society. Based on facts and information from local print and national online newspaper stories, write an editorial or essay on what you believe is the current status of racism and prejudice in America.

Be a Code Talker


That’s Navajo code for “code your own message?”

Navajo Code Talkers memorized 17 pages of code as part of their training. Imagine the pressure that was on the Code Talkers. First, they had to develop a code that the enemies would not be able to translate. Then they had to memorize it. In battle, they had to transmit their messages with the utmost care and accuracy under difficult circumstances. Their work saved lives and helped the United States achieve victories.

The Navajo Code Talkers developed their own code dictionary. This dictionary was kept secret for many years and was only made public in 1968. To find a copy of the Navajo Code Dictionary, go to this web page:
Merrill’s Marauders

Japanese American Nisei helped shorten World War II
by Col. Renita Foster

“The mission was deemed “dangerous and hazardous” from the start. The predicted casualty rate was a whopping 85 percent. Yet, nearly 3,000 volunteers eagerly began the quest on Feb. 21, 1944 that would take them over 700 miles of savage terrain through the jungles of Burma. A land cursed with blistering heat, poisonous snakes and spiders. Worst of all, a deadly, highly experienced, and well-equipped enemy force was waiting.

Accepting the challenge was the newly designated 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). Better known as Merrill’s Marauders for their commanding officer, then Brig. Gen. Frank Merrill, the task demanded the defeat of the Japanese 18th Division and capturing the town of Myitkyina, a strategic location with an all weather airfield and land route to China. Success meant World War II in the South Pacific was one step closer to victory.

The march began after extensive training operations in the jungles of Central India.

The unit had no tanks or heavy artillery; they would only fight with what they could carry on their backs and pack mules.

But the unit possessed a secret weapon that would make a huge difference.

Carefully chosen from 200 applicants were 14 Nisei (second generation Japanese American) Soldiers.

Called the “Marauder Samurai,” they served in both the infantry and intelligence, and provided the crucial edge in discerning enemy activities and tactics.

Tech Sgt. Grant Hirabayashi was one such Soldier. He had lived and attended school in Japan but he had volunteered because he was an American.

“Some of us had come from internment camps. Others had been in the service, but were removed from duty because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor,” said Hirabayashi. “Though we never spoke a lot about the situation, it was painful and confusing. I was confused because I said the Pledge of Allegiance every day in school which ends in ‘with liberty and justice for all’ and yet, my parent’s farm was confiscated and my parents and siblings were interned behind barbed wire without due process of law.”

To avoid detection by the Japanese, the Marauders simply went around them and through the jungle. Cutting through the bamboo and vegetation was exhausting work, and at times it required ten hours just to go one mile.

Cutting through elephant grass while they marched gave Hirabayashi a harrowing experience with insects. Leeches were rampant in the grass and one morning, Hirabayashi suddenly noticed his team leader covered in blood.

“I quickly woke him and we burned the leeches off with cigarette butts,” said Hirabayashi.

Hirabayashi’s duties included interrogating prisoners of war (POWs). One Japanese officer called him a traitor and refused to answer any questions. Stung by the POW’s accusation, Hirabayashi offered a resourceful reply.

“If we were to cut our veins open, I guess the same blood would flow,” he said calmly. “You’re fighting for your country and I for mine. So we do have our differences, but I’m the interrogator and you’re the POW.”

Hirabayashi then had the officer, who was wounded after an escape attempt, placed in the center of the stockade with enlisted soldiers.

A short while later, Hirabayashi felt the Japanese officer pulling on his pant leg as he walked by. Begging for a weapon to kill himself, Hirabayashi explained that bullets couldn’t be wasted like that. However, there was a sword if he wished to demonstrate the Japanese method of doing away with oneself. The prisoner declined. Within a few hours he asked to be moved and eventually talked.

“Because he was an officer, he had some valid and useful information,” said Hirabayashi.

Eighty-six days after they started, the Marauders completed their mission. The predicted survival rate proved accurate as only an estimated 200 of 3,000 could be counted fit to carry on for another couple of days or weeks.

Their ranks had been depleted by disease, physical and mental fatigue, and casualties. However, all 14 of the Nisei survived.

Thanks to the Marauder Samurai’s brilliant execution of interpreting and interpreting Japanese communications, captured documents, and plain old eavesdropping, potential disasters became successful operations.

Examples include a platoon changing its position in the direction of an enemy ambush and a Japanese ammunition dump located and destroyed by aircraft.

One radio interception saved an entire battalion that had fought for 36 hours and was without food and very little ammunition from a surprise enemy attack.

One Nisei bravely crawled out beyond his perimeter and overheard orders for an enemy attack at dawn. Thanks to the information, his platoon leader withdrew his men from their positions and “booby trapped” their foxholes.

Surprised to find the American Soldiers gone the next morning, the Japanese charged forward only to be met by a barrage of automatic weapons. The second enemy wave stopped their advance when they realized what had happened. Fearing they would retreat, the same Nisei boldly stood up in his foxhole and gave the command to “Charge!” in Japanese. Following what they thought was their officer’s order; the second set of enemy soldiers suffered the same fate as the first.

Some months later, while questioning a Japanese scientist, Hirabayashi was astonished to learn Japan was developing an atomic bomb.

While it was difficult understanding the technical language, Hirabayashi learned the weapon could destroy an entire city.

“I felt sure this was something my superior officers would be interested in but they dismissed the report,” said Hirabayashi.

When the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, both Hirabayashi and the scientist were stunned. The POW even guessed using the weapon meant the war was over. Hirabayashi said no, but he felt sure the atomic bomb would be instrumental in bringing the hostilities to a close.

Hirabayashi was thankful for the chance to exercise his rights and duty as a citizen to serve his country and fight for freedom and equality.

“We fought side by side, shoulder to shoulder, alongside fellow Americans of many cultures and proved that being an American has nothing to do with your ancestry or color of your skin, but everything to do with spirit and conviction and love of freedom.”

(Credit: Permission for use by the U.S. Army and JAVA: The Japanese American Veterans Association, www.javadc.org)
World War II: Women and the War

More than any other event in this century, World War II transformed the United States from an isolationist country with a small military establishment designed primarily for self-defense into a leading military power with forces stationed around the globe. In the process, the US Armed Forces were transformed from essentially all-male to mixed-gender forces.

Almost 400,000 women served in and with the armed forces — a number that exceeded total male troop strength in 1939. They enlisted “for the duration plus six months” to free male soldiers for combat by filling jobs that matched women’s “natural” abilities — clerical work and jobs requiring rote attention to detail and small motor skills. The Congressional debate that preceded their authorization also addressed the appropriateness of allowing women to exercise their rights and responsibilities as American citizens.

They served in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, Women’s Army Corps (WAC), and in the Navy (WAVES), Coast Guard (SPARs) and Marine Corps Women’s Reserve. Although not officially members of the armed forces, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) provided critical support for the war effort. Other women worked with the military through service with organizations such as the American Red Cross, the United Service Organizations (USO), and the Civil Air Patrol.

By the end of the war, there were few noncombatant jobs in which women did not serve, including positions that hadn’t even existed when the war began — positions brought about by scientific and technological advances to aid the war effort. They were in every service branch and were assigned to every combat theater. Nurses and WACs served overseas throughout the war. WAVES, SPARs, and Women Marines were restricted from overseas assignments until near the end of the war when they were sent to the territories of Hawaii and Alaska — then considered overseas duty because they were not yet states. Women earned Purple Hearts, Bronze Stars and Legions of Merit. Some were held as prisoners of war and some died in the service of their country.

Women’s participation in the US Armed Forces during World War II was a major turning point in the relationship of women to the military. The initial response to the idea of enlisting women met enormous resistance. As the war escalated and the national pool of qualified male draftees dwindled, it became clear that for every woman recruited, one less man had to be drafted. Women volunteers came to be viewed not just as a source of women’s skills, but as a valuable source of high-quality personnel to meet overall manpower requirements for the massive military buildup.

Commanders who had once stated that they would accept women “over my dead body” soon welcomed them and asked for more. Gen. Eisenhower told Congress after the war, that when the formation of women’s units was first proposed, “I was violently against it.” Then he added, “Every phase of the record they compiled during the war convinced me of the error of my first reaction.” Eisenhower went on to fight for a permanent place for women in the US Armed Forces.

After the war, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz told Congress that when the formation of the WAVES was first contemplated, “I was one of the doubters in the early days ... and I was definitely reluctant to see this woman’s program started. However after it [the WAVES] started and after I saw it work, I became a convert.”


Women’s Army Corps (WAC)

Beginning in Oct. 1940, men between 21 and 35 were drafted for military service. The United States declared war on Japan on Dec. 8, 1941, in retaliation for the attack on Pearl Harbor, HI, and on Dec. 11 the United States declared war on Japan’s allies, Germany and Italy. The draft was extended to include men aged 18-38, and in 1942 the upper age limit was extended to age 45. As their husbands, sons and brothers left home, many American women asked, “how about us?” Acting as their spokeswoman, Massachusetts Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers introduced a bill in May 1941 calling for the creation of an all-volunteer women’s corps in the Army.

Initially, members of Congress, the press and the military establishment joked about the notion of women serving in the Army, but as America increasingly realized the demands of a war on two fronts (Japan and Germany), leaders also faced an acute manpower shortage. In May 1942, the House and the Senate approved a bill creating the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and Oveta Culp Hobby, Chief of the Women’s Interest Section in the Public Relations Bureau at the War Department and a lobbyist for the WAAC bill, became its first director. Although the women who joined considered themselves in the Army, technically they were civilians working with the Army. By the spring of 1943, 60,000 women had volunteered and in July 1943, a new congressional bill transformed the WAAC to the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), giving Army women military status.

Women performed their duties like seasoned troopers — even amid unhealthy and uncomfortable conditions. One woman stationed in the Philippines explained:

“We were warned to keep our sleeves down, wear our wool socks ... watch out for wallabies (small rodent-like kangaroos that bumped under our cots at night), tarantulas (dumps boots every morning), and snakes. ... The tents were hot during the day and cold at night because we were sitting right on the Equator.”

Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Allied Commander, was among high-ranking officers praising the women. Gen. MacArthur praised the WACS highly, calling them ‘my best soldiers,’ and alleged that they worked harder than men, complained less and were better disciplined.”

The information in this article is excerpted from “Women’s Army Corps: WAAC and WAC” by Colonel Betty Morden, USA (Ret.). Colonel Morden’s essay appears in In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II, edited by Major General Jeanne M. Holm, USAF (Ret.) and Judith Bellafaire, Ph.D., Chief Historian of the Women’s Memorial Foundation (Arlington, Virginia: Vandamere Press, 1998).

Newspaper Activities

Find newspaper stories about veteran’s military service, but also people who chose to fulfill their civic responsibility by serving in other ways such as firefighters, police, teachers, volunteers, etc. What is it about their service that makes it stand out beyond being a regular job? What sacrifices may they have to make as part of their service? Discuss ways that you and/or your class can serve your school or community.
Air Force Pilot Lorraine Rodgers Shares Her Story

It was at the airstrip that Rodgers heard about the WASP program, she told oral historians in February 2008. “Someone at the airport told me Jacqueline Cochran was in town interviewing women pilots to fly military aircraft. “I said, ‘where is she?’ and called down at the hotel … and was interviewed by her. The only woman I had ever heard of flying airplanes was Jacqueline Cochran, and she’s the one that interviewed me so, needless to say, I was very inspired.”

Initially, there were more than 25,000 WASP hopefuls. Only Rodgers and 1,074 of her sister WASP earned their wings by meeting the previous flight-time experience requirements; passing mental and physical exams; and completing 23 weeks of practical training, military flying and ground school, math, physics, and Morse Code, radio, map reading, navigation, meteorology, engine repair and military regulation lessons.

Before the WASP were disbanded by Congress Dec. 20, 1944, Rodgers and her fellow WASP had flown 60 million miles in 60,000 hours across the country for the war effort. WASP tested new airplanes and tested planes after new or repaired parts were installed. They ferried and delivered planes, performed check flights on repaired planes, towed targets for antiaircraft gunnery practice, flew searchlight-tracking missions, simulated bombings and even instructed male cadets.

“We flew seven days a week,” she recalled. “I would get up in the morning and have breakfast and be at the squadron office at 7am. I would pick up my orders and say, ‘go to Kansas City and pick up a new plane and deliver it to California.’ I’d go over, pick up this new plane, take it up and test it (if it had just come off assembly), accept it for the Army Air Force and start my trip. You’re alone the whole time. I’d chart my course, take off and start flying … watch the gauges, figure out where the next closest field is and dog in and have them refuel, take off and keep going and going. … As the sun went down, behind the horizon, that’s when you went down and landed. We flew all day long, seven days a week.

While her time in the WASP was always both thrilling and exhausting, there were times it was dangerous as well. In all, 38 WASP died in service. Rodgers was very nearly one of them while completing basic school in Waco, TX.

After she’d gone on a practice run with her instructor he told her to, “take the plane up and practice” on her own. “I was half way out and suddenly my plane flipped upside down and went into a spin, an inverted spin,” she recalled. “I’m inverted upside down, going down and I worked with it. I did everything I had been taught, (and) things I hadn’t been taught. I did anything I could think of to get that plane (righted).

Her efforts were in vain. Nothing. The seasoned pilot tried seemed to have any effect on the plane. “Then, I looked out and saw how close I was to the ground. I knew I had to get out,” she said. “As I bailed out of the plane, you’re supposed to count to 10 (before pulling the ripcord),” so I said one, two, ten! and pulled the ripcord. I was too close to that ground.

Rodgers somehow survived and after a few bandages, she was called before a board of review. She assumed the worst; she would be kicked out of the WASP for crashing the plane. After repeating her story many times for the board, she was called to the flight line. “I thought, ‘uh, oh. This is where I get the word,’” she recalled. Instead, Rodgers was met by her instructor who gave her a more shocking announcement. “Your rudder cables had been cut,” he told her solemnly. “They never told me who did it (the saboteur).” But after all the BT’S (trainer aircraft) were checked for similar issues, Rodgers was back in the air.

Hers was not the only incident of sabotage on WASP planes. Though her case was never proven, others cases were proven to have been committed by male pilots or crew resentful of women flying military aircraft. Still, such incidents were rare. Much more frequently, WASP encountered men who either couldn’t believe women could be, and actually were, pilots or men who outright didn’t want them to be pilots.

Being a WASP — or a woman serving in a man’s military in World War II — wasn’t always easy but it was always rewarding, Rodgers stressed. “My time as a WASP was just another world to learn all these marvelous things and what these airplanes can do,” she said. “Oh! It was great! I really enjoyed it!”

Excerpts in this piece are taken from the Lorraine Rodgers interview by Ali Reed of the Connelly School of the Holy Child History Documentary Project, Feb. 12, 2008. The transcript; Women’s Memorial Foundation Oral History Collection. Material used for this piece is with the permission of the Women In Military Service For America Memorial Foundation, Inc., www.womensmemorial.org.

A Tale of Survival and Duty From the Wounded Warrior Project

“I remember the ground coming really quick and there was nothing I could do,” Claude Boushey said, reflecting on the helicopter crash in Iraq that broke his leg, shattered and compressed his vertebrae, and compromised 80 percent of his spinal canal.

It was June 13, 2004. The mission started as support reconnaissance, but he was soon called to assist troops in contact with insurgents. Claude was in the left seat operating the systems when the pilot warned him something was wrong. The fuel control operating the systems when the pilot warned him something was wrong. The fuel control

Claude’s second tour of duty lasted from July 2006 to October 2007. “It fulfilled me as a soldier, a pilot, and a person. I’m fortunate I made it back, because a lot of my friends didn’t. I think about them every day.”

Claude retired in December 2008. Today, he serves as a civilian pilot assigned to MEDEVAC missions for the Maryland State Police. He also works part time as a peer specialist with Virginia’s Wounded Warrior Program.

“My first priority is my family, but I make time to volunteer as a DAV driver for the DC VA Medical Center. It’s really fulfilling. I’m a fish back in the water and helping fellow veterans.”

Claude became involved with the Wounded Warrior Project as a peer mentor because he wanted to do something for injured veterans. “A combat veteran understands another combat veteran’s emotional and mental state. I had a lot of close calls. I appreciate what a soldier goes through.”

To learn more about the Wounded Warrior Project, visit them online at www.woundedwarrior.org

Newspaper Activities

In the days leading up to Veterans Day, November 11, read through your newspaper to discover celebrations that are planned in your area. Talk to your family about attending some of them.

Create a classroom Veterans Day bulletin board or poster by clipping newspaper articles and photographs of veterans and active duty military personnel.
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Teacher Resource Guide, Available Online now!

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Day National Committee are pleased to offer a Teacher Resource Guide for schools. Veterans Day, observed each year on November 11th, offers a chance to thank America’s Veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice.

There are nearly 24 million Veterans living among us, in every state and from every walk of life. Many students today are the sons, daughters, cousins, neighbors, or relatives of a Veteran or current service member. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Teacher Resource Guide provides information, activities, and reproducible handouts to assist schools in teaching their students about the history of Veterans Day. This guide also provides an array of suggestions for schools to organize events to honor and thank the Veterans in their communities. You can download the guide free or charge at www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday

The VA's Teacher Resource Guide includes:
• Background information on the history of Veterans Day
• Classroom and community activities for students in grades K-12
• Suggestions for planning Veterans Day events in your community
• A timeline of U.S. military engagements
• A “Kid’s Packet” with activities for younger students
• Instruction on civic skills like how to fold the American flag
• Links to Veterans Service Organizations, including scholarship information

Visit us online at www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday to download this guide and to find free downloadable Veterans Day posters. Teachers and parents can also learn about national and local Veterans Day events in their communities.

Join us this Veterans Day in remembering our veterans from all eras, and rewarding our veterans today with the honor they so richly deserve.

Learn more at: www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday
FROM THE GREATEST GENERATION TO THE LATEST GENERATION, LET’S SUPPORT OUR VETS!

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