

AFRICAN-AMERICAN WARRANT OFFICERS DURING WORLD WAR II

**By CW4 Farrell J. Chiles
United States Army
July 2006**

African American Warrant Officers During World War II

By CW4 Farrell J. Chiles

There is very little known about African American warrant officers during World War II. In a Department of Defense Report in December 1940, there were 13 African American warrant officers, which I call the "Army 13", inspired by the "Golden Thirteen" – who were the Navy's original thirteen black officers that included one warrant officer – Charles B. Lear. I have not identified the "Army 13", but my quest continues. Hopefully, this article will bring my project to the attention of others who have knowledge or information of the "Army 13" and other African American warrant officers who served during World War II.

The Department of the Army either did not keep records or didn't believe that African Americans were worthy of its efforts to maintain the history of an important segment of the American heritage.

History of the Warrant Officer

In the United States Army, the Warrant Officer can be traced back to 1896, specifically to the headquarters clerk.

The official birthday of the Army Warrant Officer Corps is July 9, 1918. During this time Warrant Officers were not commissioned officers; but in reality were considered civilians. The Judge Advocate General later determined that Warrant Officers held military status.

In 1936, the Army held competitive examinations to replenish lists of eligibles for Regular Army appointment. The Army appointed Warrant Officers against vacancies from this 1936 list until the beginning of World War II.

In 1939, Warrant Officers who were qualified pilots were declared eligible for direct appointment to lieutenants in the Army Air Corps. This action caused a serious decline in the Warrant Officer corps. As of 30 June 1939 there were 775 Warrant Officers serving on active duty. Also in 1939 a memorandum from the Army G-1 to the Chief of Staff stated "... The Warrant Officer grade continues to be used as a reward to enlisted men of long service and special qualifications rather than to fill essential military requirements ".

In 1940, Warrant Officers began serving as disbursing agents. Warrant Officer appointments began to occur in larger numbers for the first time since 1922. However, overall strength declined due to a significant number were transferred to active duty as regular commissioned officers.

In 1941, Public Law 230 authorized appointments up to one percent of the total Regular Army enlisted strength. This law also established two pay rates for warrant officers - Warrant Officer Junior Grade (W-1) and Chief Warrant Officer (W-2).

Black Units in World War II

On the eve of World War II, there were at least twelve black units and several small detachments in the Regular Army. They were: the 24th Infantry Division; 25th Infantry Division; 9th Cavalry Regiment; 10th Cavalry Regiment; 349th Field Artillery Regiment; 41st Engineers; 31st Quartermaster Regiment; 47th Quartermaster Regiment; 38th Quartermaster Regiment; 76th Coast Artillery; 77th Coast Artillery; and the 1st Chemical Company (Decon.).

In the National Guard, the 369th Infantry Regiment, 372nd Infantry Regiment, and the 84th Infantry existed.

Did the 9th & 10th Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers) have warrant officers during World War II? Were there warrant officers in the "Hell Fighters" a National Guard unit out of New York, who performed admirably during World War I? Were there African warrant officers in the 92nd Infantry Division and the 369th Infantry Regiment?

History of Black Warrant Officers in World War II

During World War II, African American soldiers were given battle-field and direct appointments to the rank of warrant officer. Many had progressed through the enlisted ranks to Sergeant First Class, First Sergeant, Master Sergeant, or Sergeant Major, and based on their outstanding service to the Army, they were rewarded with the rank of warrant officer. They served in segregated units. There is no record that they received any officer training. Many African American Commissioned officers during the 40s' went to Officer Candidate Training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. There is no mention of warrant officers at that installation.

In December 1940, there were thirteen African American Warrant Officers in the United States Army. Throughout the European Theatre, African American soldiers made their mark and by December 1945, there were 306 African American Warrant Officers. That number decreased to 130 by May 1946.

African American Warrant Officers

Let me share with you some of the soldiers who served in World War II. Many of them were warrant officers during the war. Others received their warrant officer appointments after the war. However, they all served during the war and their contributions to the National Defense should not go unnoticed.

761st Tank Battalion

In an article published in the January 1992 Army Magazine entitled "When the Black Panthers Prowled", Lt. Col Philip W. Latimer, U.S. Army Reserve (Retired) who served

during World War II as a Captain and battalion Supply Officer with 761st Tank Battalion, stated,

“By this time, I was a captain and the battalion supply officer. I began to realize what a big job it was to supply ammunition, gasoline and rations to a battalion of more than 700 men with 54 medium tanks and 17 light tanks. My job was made much easier because my warrant officer and my enlisted men were as fine a group as any that ever put on an Army uniform. WO Mark Henderson, Sgt. Herman Waterford, Sgt. James Williams, Cpl. Milton Dorsey and Cpl. Billy Thompson were very loyal to me, and they also had a burning desire to see the battalion succeed.”

Warrant Officers serving with the 761st Tank Battalion during World War II included Warrant Officer Junior Grade Mark Henderson Jr. and Chief Warrant Officer James E. Williams.

Army Air Corps

Edward Jones joined the Army Air Corps in 1940. He was instrumental in putting in place the administration of the 99th Pursuit Squadron (Tuskegee Airmen). He was promoted to the rank of Warrant Officer Junior Grade before leaving the military in 1945. After serving his country in the military, Jones graduated from Temple University and became the first Black Internal Revenue Service agent for the eastern district of Pennsylvania. He later became the first Black salesman for Atlantic Richfield and the first Black in management for Acme Markets. Edward Jones died on April 22, 2002.

Richard Rutledge enlisted in 1941 and was assigned to Tuskegee Airfield with the 332nd Fighter Group. He also served in North Africa. Rutledge became one of the first African Americans to get a commission in the U.S. Army Air Corps as a warrant officer. After the war, he went to New York University and Brooklyn Law School. After a 34-year career in private practice, Rutledge was elected to the courts and eventually served as a judge on the New York Supreme Court.

John Allen Pulliams, Jr. served during World War II in the Army Air Corps and went on to serve 30 years in the U.S. Air Force and retired as a Chief Warrant Officer.

Buffalo Soldiers

Frank Richard Steele enlisted as a private in the 10th Cavalry in February 1940. In 1942, he was awarded the Shipp Memorial Trophy as the Outstanding Soldier in the 10th Cavalry. In January 1944, he was appointed as a Warrant Officer and assigned to Headquarters, 10th Cavalry at Camp Lockett, California. Steele was discharged in December 1945 after serving in North Africa, Italy, France, Germany, Austria and Belgium. He later reenlisted in the Army in July 1948 and served until 1965.

Royal Carter enlisted in the Ninth Cavalry on March 7, 1941. He received timely promotions and was promoted to Master Sergeant. On June 19, 1943, he was discharged

as a Master Sergeant and sworn in on June 20, 1943 as a Warrant Officer Junior Grade. From June 1944 to November 1945 Carter served with the 525th Port Battalion in Algeria, Italy, France, and Germany. He separated from the military on January 27, 1946 at Fort McArthur, California.

Harry H. Hollowell enlisted as a private in the 10th Calvary at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in January 1936. He served in A Troop as a troop clerk, recruiting sergeant and squadron sergeant major. Hollowell graduated from the Army Music School as a bandleader in 1942 and served as a bandmaster until his retirement as a Chief Warrant Officer in August 1964 after twenty-eight years of military service.

Normandy Invasion

William Calbert landed on Utah Beach at Normandy on D-plus 26, as a supply officer, Warrant Officer, Junior Grade, for a quartermaster battalion. He spent three years in the Army during the war, went to college on the GI Bill, and returned to active duty in 1952 as a chaplain.

Johnnie Jones, Jr., was a student at Southern University when World War II started. He was drafted into the Army in 1943, promoted to warrant officer, and took part in the invasion of Normandy. Jones returned to the States, enrolled in Southern University's law school and finished in 1953. He became a civil rights attorney in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and successfully argued several cases before the United States Supreme Court. In 1972, Jones was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives for one term.

Pacific Theatre

Earl M. Carter, Sr. served in the Army during World War II. He participated in the Battles and Campaigns of New Guinea, Southern Philippines and Luzon. Carter received the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre campaign ribbon, the Philippine Liberation ribbon with bronze Silver Star, the Good Conduct Medal, and the World War II Victory medal. In 1977, he retired as a Chief Warrant Officer Four.

Samuel J. Smith was drafted into the Army in 1942 and stationed for a year at Camp Jordan in Seattle, Washington. He was promoted to the rank of warrant officer and sent to serve in the Philippines. Smith returned to Seattle with an honorable discharge after two years of service. In 1958, Smith was elected to the Washington state House of Representatives and served five consecutive terms. He left the Legislature in 1967 to begin a twenty-four year career on the Seattle City Council. In 1973, Smith was elected Seattle City Council president and remained president of the council for the next eight years. Smith passed away in his sleep in November 1995.

Garland Ellis Sanders "Mitch" served from 1935-1941 with the 25th Infantry Regiment at Fort Huachuca, Arizona and with the 93rd Infantry Division from 1942-1945 at Fort Huachuca and Solomon Islands in the Philippines during World War II. He later joined the Air Force and retired with the rank of Chief Warrant Officer Two.

European Theatre

Will Roberts served during World War II in North Africa and in the combat zone in Napoli, Pisa, Anzio Beachhead, Florence, and in Rome. He completed 38 years of active and reserve service in the United States Army and retired as a Chief Warrant Officer Four. Roberts received his Doctorate Degree in Education Administration and Leadership from the University of San Francisco. Dr. Roberts became the first Director of Affirmative Action/Staff Diversity for the San Bernardino California Community College District.

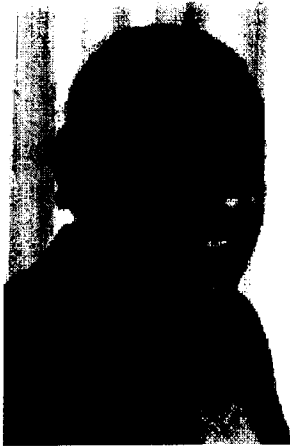
Benjamin Washington Johnson, known as the "Columbia Comet", was once the world's fastest human. While a student at Columbia University, he defeated such world record holders as Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe. He enlisted in the Army in December 1942 and quickly became a warrant officer in April 1943. Johnson then attended anti-aircraft officer school and was given command of a company in Germany that worked with the famed "Red Ball Express". At the end of the war, he remained in the service, becoming a deputy chief of the Freight Traffic Division at the Brooklyn Army Terminal and rose to become one of the nation's first black colonels. He left the Army in 1968. He passed away in December 1992 at the age of 68. Johnson was inducted into the Columbia University Hall of Fame on February 18, 2006.

George Boggess was born in Waco, Texas on February 17, 1912. Boggess was drafted into the United States Army after Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941. Assigned to the segregated 578th Field Artillery Battalion, Boggess was in Europe for the duration of World War II, returning in late 1945 with the rank of Warrant Officer.

William K. Morgan was born on August 25, 1920 in Chicago, Illinois and moved to Sacramento, California in 1922. He served in World War II as a Warrant Officer. After military duty, he attended the San Francisco College of Mortuary Science and established the first Black owned funeral home in Sacramento. He later attended McGeorge School of Law and in 1975 was appointed the first African American judge to the Sacramento Superior Court. Morgan died at the age of 84.

Conclusion

African American Warrant Officers have made significant contributions to our country - both in uniform and out of uniform. Their dedication and commitment to service is unquestionable. They made their mark fighting to preserve our liberties and freedom. They put an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence with their continued achievements in the civilian and public service sectors.



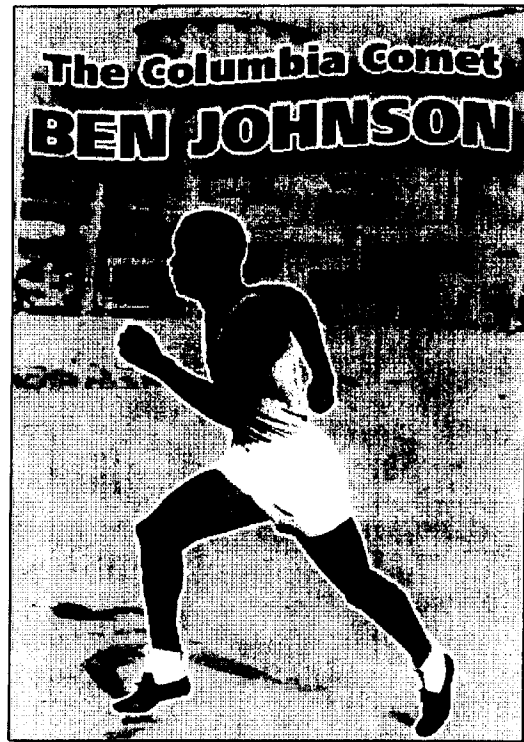
Edward Jones



Royal Carter



Samuel J. Smith



Benjamin Washington Johnson