

Notes on African Americans Serving in the U.S. Army

American Revolution

[African Americans in the Revolutionary War](#) (accessed February 2021) asserts 9,000 Black with 5,000 as combat soldiers of the 200,000 to 250,000 that served see footnote Citing: Lanning, Michael. *African Americans in the Revolutionary War*. New York: Kensington Publishing, 2000.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans_in_the_Revolutionary_War

[American Battlefield Trust](#)

states that over the course of the war, about 231,000 men served in the Continental Army, though never more than 48,000 at any one time, and never more than 13,000 at any one place. About 7,000 African Americans served on the Continental side.

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/american-revolution-faqs#How%20many%20soldiers%20served%20in%20the%20war>

[7 Black Heroes of the American Revolution](#)

From the start, the British courted slaves by offering them freedom, although it was never an official government policy, but rather done by local commanders on their own. About 20,000 African Americans served with the British, knowing their status might not change if Americans won.

<https://www.history.com/news/black-heroes-american-revolution>

[Black Heroes Throughout US Military History](#)

Historians estimate that between 5,000 and 8,000 African-descended people participated in the Revolution on the Patriot side, and that upward of 20,000 served the crown.

<https://www.history.com/news/black-heroes-us-military-history>

[Africans in America](#)

5,000 black men served in the Continental Army, and hundreds more served on the sea.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2narr4.html>

Blacks in the US Army: Then and Now

In 1776, Congress passed legislation that allowed Black men to enlist in the Armed Services. In response to this Congressional Act, approximately 7,000 Black men joined the Army and defended America in the Revolutionary War.

War of 1812

[War of 1812](#)

African Americans fought on both sides during the War of 1812. Even when on opposing sides many were fighting for the same reason and that reason was freedom. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/warof1812/african-american-story.htm>

[War of 1812 Facts](#)

What roles did African Americans play in the War of 1812? African Americans were not officially allowed to join the U.S. Army during the War of 1812, although they served extensively in the U.S. Navy. Approximately one-quarter of the U.S. sailors at the Battle of Lake Erie were African American. Roughly 350 men of the “Battalion of Free Men of Color” fought at the Battle of New Orleans.

Only 7,000 men served in the United States military when the war broke out. By the end of the war, more than 35,000 American regulars and 458,000 militia—though many of these were only mustered in for local defense—were serving on land and sea.

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/war-of-1812-faqs>

Mexican War

[Military history of African Americans](#)

A number of African Americans in the Army during the Mexican American War were servants of the officers who received government compensation **for** the services of their servants or slaves. Also, soldiers from the Louisiana Battalion of Free Men of Color participated in this war.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans

The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Mexican War: The Occupation of Mexico, May 1846-July 1848.

The war was fought by regiments of regulars and various regiments, battalions, and companies of volunteers from the different states of the Union as well as Americans and some Mexicans in California and New Mexico.

Organized along European lines, the standing U.S. Army, designated the Regular Army, contained specialized corps of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineers. At the outbreak of the conflict, it numbered only 7,365 soldiers CMH brochure

During the Mexican War, some 73,260 volunteers enlisted, although fewer than 30,000 actually served in Mexico.

CMH Publication 73-3 (2006)

Civil War

[Military history of African Americans](#)

The history of African Americans in the U.S. Civil War is marked by 186,097 (7,122 officers, 178,975 enlisted) African-American men, comprising 163 units, who served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and many more African Americans served in the Union Navy. Both free African Americans and runaway slaves joined the fight.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans

[Black Soldiers in the U.S. Military During the Civil War](#)

By the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 black soldiers died over the course of the war—30,000 of infection or disease. Black soldiers served in artillery and infantry and performed all noncombat support functions that sustain an army, as well. Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters also contributed to the war cause. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers.

<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war>

[The Civil War By the Numbers](#)

2.1 million — Number of Northerners mobilized to fight for the Union army

180,000 — Number of African American soldiers that served in the Civil War

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/death-numbers/>

[Union Army](#)

Over the course of the war, 2,128,948 men enlisted in the Union Army, including 178,895 colored troops.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Army

Spanish-American War

[Black Americans in the US Military: From The American Revolution To The Korean War: The Spanish American War And The Philippine Insurgency](#)

The U.S. Army employed four Black regiments to serve in the Spanish-American War. ... These groups had formerly fought against the Native Americans as Buffalo Soldiers. The use of Black soldiers came under the assumption that Blacks were naturally adapted survive the tropical climate and diseases.

<https://museum.dmna.ny.gov/unit-history/conflict/spanish-american-war-1898/black-americans-us-military-american-revolution-korean-war-spanish-american-war-and-philippine-insurgency>

[Buffalo Soldiers and the Spanish-American War](#)

On February 15th, 1898, over 250 American sailors were killed when the battleship Maine blew up and sank in Havana harbor. The war with Spain began in April, 1898 when Major General William Shafter, a former commander of the 24th Infantry led an expeditionary force of over 17,000 men, including nearly 3,000 Black regulars, into

Cuba.

<https://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-and-the-spanish-american-war.htm>

[Jim Crow Stories: Spanish American War \(1898\)](#)

Out of America's 25,000-man standing army, 2,500 were experienced black veterans.

https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_spanish.html

[An Overview: Black Participation in The Spanish-American War](#)

[The Black "Immune" Regiments in the Spanish-American War](#)

World War I

[Fighting at Home and Abroad: Chronicle of the African American Soldier in World War I](#)

More than 350,000 African Americans served in segregated units during World War I, mostly as support troops. Several units saw action alongside French soldiers fighting against the Germans, and 171 African Americans were awarded the French Legion of Honor. In response to protests of discrimination and mistreatment from the black community, several hundred African American men received officers' training in Des Moines, Iowa. By October 1917, over six hundred African Americans were commissioned as captains and first and second lieutenants.

<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart7.html#07a>

[African American Participation during World War I](#)

After the declaration of war, more than 20,000 blacks enlisted in the military, and the numbers increased when the Selective Service Act was enacted in May 1917. It was documented on July 5, 1917 that over 700,000 African Americans had registered for military service. However, they were barred from the Marines and served only in menial roles in the Navy. Blacks were able to serve in all branches of the Army except for the aviation units.

The government made no provision for military training of black officers and soon created segregated training camps for that purpose. Disheartened, blacks protested against this discriminatory practice. Despite the outcry, Fort Des Moines in Iowa became one of the segregated camps and in October 1917 over 600 blacks were commissioned at the camp as captains and lieutenants.

<https://history.delaware.gov/african-americans-ww1/>

[African Americans in the Military during World War I](#)

Many African Americans served under the Services of Supply section of the American Expeditionary Forces. This section comprised of stevedore, labor, and engineers service battalions and companies. The main function of these companies was to support and provide materials to other companies along the front.

The notable exception were the soldiers who fought on the front lines in the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions. The 369th Infantry Regiment, known as the Harlem Hellfighters,

were assigned to the French Army in April 1918. In this post the Hellfighters saw much action, fighting in the Second Battle of the Marne, as well as the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. For his valiant and brave actions during World War I, Private Henry Johnson became the first American to receive the Croix de Guerre, and an additional 170 members of the 369th were also awarded the French medal.

The 370th Infantry Regiment, given the name "Black Devils" by Germans, were also assigned to the French Army. This was the only unit to be commanded by Black officers. Corporal Freddie Stowers was a standout soldier among the 371st Infantry. During the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, Stowers lead troops through a German line in spite of receiving mortal wounds. He was recommended for the Medal of Honor shortly after his death, but it was not processed and awarded until 1991.

<https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/wwi/war>

[Fighting for Respect: African American Soldiers in WW1](#)

When World War I broke out, there were four all-black regiments: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. The men in these units were considered heroes in their communities. Within one week of Wilson's declaration of war, the War Department had to stop accepting black volunteers because the quotas for African Americans were filled.

When it came to the draft, however, there was a reversal in usual discriminatory policy. Draft boards were comprised entirely of white men. Although there were no specific segregation provisions outlined in the draft legislation, blacks were told to tear off one corner of their registration cards so they could easily be identified and inducted separately. Now instead of turning blacks away, the draft boards were doing all they could to bring them into service, southern draft boards in particular. One Georgia county exemption board discharged forty-four percent of white registrants on physical grounds and exempted only three percent of black registrants based on the same requirements. It was fairly common for southern postal workers to deliberately withhold the registration cards of eligible black men and have them arrested for being draft dodgers. African American men who owned their own farms and had families were often drafted before single white employees of large planters. Although comprising just ten percent of the entire United States population, blacks supplied thirteen percent of inductees.

<https://armyhistory.org/fighting-for-respect-african-american-soldiers-in-wwi/>

[The United States World War One Centennial Commission](#)

More than 350,000 African Americans served during World War I. Many were assigned menial support roles, due to American society's deep fears and prejudices. Despite facing racism at home and in uniform, tens of thousands of black soldiers served courageously and capably in combat.

<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/edu-home/edu-topics/588-americans-at-war/4992-african-americans.html>

[Military History of African Americans](#)

The U.S. armed forces remained segregated through World War I. Still, many African Americans volunteered to join the military following America's entry into the war. By the

time of the armistice with Germany on November 11, 1918, over 200,000 African Americans had served with the American Expeditionary Force on the Western Front, while 170,000 remained in the United States

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans#World_War_I

Size of the U.S. Army, 1914-1920

2,395,742 in US army in 1918 nor does it reflect the total number of men (4,734,991 mobilized) who served at some time in the military (army, navy, marines) during the war.

<https://www.ctevans.net/WorldWar1/Data/Visuals/USArmy.html>

World War II

Military History of African Americans World War II

Many soldiers of color served their country with distinction during World War II. There were 125,000 African Americans who were overseas in World War II (6.25% of all abroad soldiers).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans#World_War_II

Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965* (2001)

When the Army began to mobilize in 1940 it proceeded to honor its pledge, and one year after Pearl Harbor there were 399,454 Negroes in the Army, 7.4 percent of the total and 7.95 percent of all enlisted troops. (page 24)

The quota calls for Negroes rose in 1944, and black strength stood at 701,678 men in September, approximately 9.6 percent of the whole Army. (page 33)

US Army Divisions

During World War II about 16,000,000 personnel served in the U.S. Military.

Approximately 11,200,000 or 70% served in the U.S. Army; 4,200,000 served in the Navy; and 660,000 served in the Marines.

<https://www.armydivs.com/>

Honoring Black History World War II Service to the Nation

During WWII, more than 2.5 million African American men registered for the draft, and African American women volunteered in large numbers. When combined with black women enlisted into Women's Army Corps, more than one million African Americans served the Army during the War.

https://www.army.mil/article/233117/honoring_black_history_world_war_ii_service_to_the_nation

The National WWII Museum, Research Starters: US Military by the Numbers

Korea

[Korean War Legacy Foundation, African-Americans in the Korean War](#)

"Of the more than **600,000 African Americans** who served in the armed forces during the Korean War, it is estimated that more than 5,000 died in combat.

<https://koreanwarlegacy.org/chapters/african-americans-in-the-korean-war/>

[The Beginnings of a New Era for African-Americans in the Armed Forces](#)

In June 1950, almost 100,000 African Americans were on active duty in the U.S. armed forces, equaling about 8 percent of total manpower.

<http://jackiewhiting.net/ushistory/coldwar/afamkorea.htm>

[Britannica](#)

The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 occasioned another expansion of the army, this time to 1,500,000 troops by 1951.

[Military history of African Americans](#)

[African Americans in the U.S. Army](#)

[The Korean War](#)

The number of American troops sent to aid South Korea: 5,720,000, citing Richard Whelan, *Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 15.

<https://www.shmoop.com/korean-war/citations.html#14>

Vietnam

[Military Health History Pocket Card: Vietnam](#)

Fighting resumed and South Vietnam eventually surrendered to the forces of North Vietnam in April 1975. Approximately **2,700,000** American men and women served in Vietnam. It was the first war in which the US failed to meet its objectives. It was also the first time America failed to welcome its veterans back as heroes.

<https://www.va.gov/OAA/pocketcard/m-vietnam.asp>

[Military History of African Americans in the Vietnam War](#)

A total of 300,000 African Americans served in Vietnam.

Citing *Lucks, Daniel (2017-07-03). "African American soldiers and the Vietnam War: no more Vietnams". The Sixties, 10 (2): 196–220.*

1967, only 29% of African American subjects were eligible for conscription, compared to 63% of white subjects. That same year the armed services drafted 64% of the eligible African American subjects in comparison to the 31% of eligible white subjects drafted.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans_in_the_Vietnam_War

[Vietnam Statistics](#)

1. 9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the Vietnam Era (Aug 5, 1964 – May 7, 1975).

2. 8,744,000 GIs were on active duty during the war (Aug 5, 1964 – March 28, 1973).
3. 2,709,918 Americans served in Vietnam; this number represents 9.7% of their generation.
1. 88.4% of the men who actually served in Vietnam were Caucasian; 10.6% (275,000) were black; 1% belonged to other races
<http://www.uswardogs.org/vietnam-statistics/>

GULF WAR (1990-1991) OPERATION DESERT STORM

[Remembering the Gulf War: Key Facts and Figures about the Conflict](#)

About 697,000 U.S. troops took part in the war, with 299 losing their lives. The US contributed the most in the way of resources, deploying 470,000 personnel.
<https://www.forces.net/news/remembering-gulf-war-key-facts-figures>

[U.S. Military Personnel 1954-2015](#)

[African Americans in the U.S. Army](#)

“Black Soldiers - making up about 22 percent of the total Army - followed a rich tradition of honorably serving in the U.S. forces.”
<https://www.army.mil/africanamericans/timeline.html>

[African Americans in the Military](#)

“Powell oversaw the Persian Gulf War of 1991, in which 24 percent of the 500,000 U.S. service people deployed to the Middle East (30 percent of the soldiers) were Americans of African descent.”
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/african-americans-military>

[Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm](#)

In FY 90 total active component ethnic group representation was as follows — white, 62.34 percent; black, 29.06 percent
<https://history.army.mil/books/DAHSUM/1990-91/ch03.htm#C3N6>

Current Army

Blacks in the US Army (2010) As of FY09, Blacks were 21% of the army (page 2); The Army population = 1,358K with approximately 243K Blacks >> 17.9% of the “Total” Army population (page 3)

Army Demographics FY20 (2020) Army Profile indicates 21% Black but no actual numbers. See also *Portrait of Black/African American Active Duty Service Members* (2020) gives a figure of 102,428

New York Times, [Is America’s Military Big Enough](#) (2017)

Council on Foreign Relations, [Demographics of the U.S. Military](#) (2020)