

February Newsletter 2008

Remembering our History

African Americans in the Military

The War of Independence played a significant role in creating the American Nation and thus instilled the highest respect on those who served. Many African Americans risked their lives for a nation who had so easily removed their claim to citizenship and freedom. In a way - many African Americans believed that in fighting for their country they were in fact fighting for their rights of freedom as well.

Many American leaders were weary of using blacks in the military thinking that they would in turn demand equal rights or worse that they would turn their weapons on the very people who had denied them so much for so long. In addition to their profound patriotism, African Americans threw themselves into the defense of their nation and in many respects pioneered desegregation among many American Institutions.

Many colonies rejected the use of African Americans in the military and even though African Americans had served the Continental Army and assisted in securing American Independence, the Enlistment Act of 1792 limited the right to serve in the national militia. "Each and every free able-bodied white male citizen of the respective States, resident therein, who is or shall be of the age or 18 years, and under the age of 45" was given priority above African Americans.

The US Army didn't enlist African Americans after the Revolutionary War but the US Navy did - they had a shortage of able white men. In September of 1814, General Andrew Jackson issued a proclamation that blacks were deprived of participation in defending their beautiful nation and thus called upon all Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana to come forth. However, the free African Americans were to be placed in separate regiment and commanded by white officers - supposedly free from white prejudice. Shortly after the war was won and everyone returned home General Jackson reneged on his promise and all blacks were ordered to go home to their "Masters".

The US Army returned to its "no African Americans" policy after the war of 1812 but they still employed them as cooks and seamen. When the Civil War began in 1861 blacks rushed forward but were turned away.

On June 28, 1861 - Tennessee was the first state to pass a law for the enlistment of "all male free persons of color between the ages of 15 and 50 years".

On July 17, 1862, Congress amended the Enlistment Act of 1795 giving the president authority to enlist African Americans - but Lincoln still refused to act on Congress's recommendation.

August 4, 1862 - General Sprague of Rhode Island asked for Black men to enlist as soldiers in the state militia. Other appeals followed. By the wars end approximately 186,000 Blacks had served in the Union Army with 30, 000 casualties. President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 which included a provision for including African Americans to enlist. The War Department began to aggressively recruit African Americans.

During the war black troops were paid less than white troops. On July 14, 1864 the Attorney General declared he was in favor of equal pay for Black Soldiers.

During the Civil War, approximately 16 African Americans were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

African American women played an important role in World War I. They organized camps for the men about to leave for Europe and many served as nurses in the Field Medical Supply Depot in Washington, D.C.

On September 17th 1940 - the NAACP's executive secretary, Walter White, and acting secretary of the National Urban League met with President Franklin Roosevelt to present a 7 Point Program for military mobilization. It demanded that Blacks be trained as Army Air Corps pilots and Black women be admitted to the Red Cross and to army and navy nurse units.

The first American Hero of World War II was an African American. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941 - Dorie Miller, a messman on the USS Arizona rose to the occasion by coming up from the ship's galley and taking over an anti-aircraft gun on his own he shot down 4 Japanese airplanes before the Arizona sank. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroism. That was not enough to make him a navy gunner. He later died during World War II during Japanese attacks on the Liscome Bay where he still worked as a messman.

July 19, 1941 - Black pilots were trained at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama where they received flying instructions at the Booker T. Washington campus. On March 7, 1942 the first cadets received their wings. The Tuskegee Airmen flew their first combat mission in North Africa on June 2, 1942 and broke barriers for blacks in aerial combat. The flight school was not limited to men - Willa Brown; trained pilots and Janet Waterford Brogs was a registered nurse - both women graduated from the program.



During the Martin Luther King holiday, the chipmunks and owl's classes were celebrating by doing several different projects.





**The Chipmunk class is showing the finishing products of their hard work
In making birthday cards for Dr. Martin L. King JR.**



Up coming events

March 13th 2008 Smithsonian Discovery Theater, Class Acts Arts. The group will perform “going the distance “. The show starts at 10:30 am in the Angels class.

March 24th 2008 Joe Pipik’s Back Pack Puppets. This will be in the multipurpose room. This show starts at 10:00 am.

