# African Americans in Military Service
## *World War II to Vietnam*

National cemeteries were created in the 1860s to honor the service of America's armed forces, a mission that continues today. The NCA system and its memorial features have expanded over more than 150 years to reflect the diversity and demographics of who answered the call. At many locales, segregation in life meant segregation in death. But the U.S. Army was insistent that white or black, its soldiers and sailors deserved burial in a national cemetery. The struggles and injustice endured by black service members in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries echoed the social and political climate of civilian life. Blacks served in all U.S. conflicts, but the years between the Civil War and the Korean conflict were the most contentious. Desegregation was mandated in 1948. The fight for racial quality is evidenced through the recognition of veteran activists, pilots, heroes, artists, journalists and, sadly, victims. Their stories inspired and helped propel civil rights in America. Here are some accounts of African-American service from World War II to Vietnam as reflected in VA national cemeteries.

## World War II

*World War II had been underway in Europe for more than two years before the United States joined the fight in December 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, HI.*

*Marines were composed of all white men until 1942 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt opened it up to African Americans. Other military branches remained segregated. At the beginning of World War II, approximately 4,000 blacks served in the military. As a result of massive black recruitment starting in late 1941, the army reactivated its 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions. The 92nd was the only black division to fight as a division, seeing action in Italy in 1944 and receiving the Cross of Merit from future King Umberto II. By war's end in 1945, the numbers of African-American uniformed men and women topped 1.2 million.*

Clockwise from top left: U.S. Army field office in the Greek Temple of Neptune built 700 BC, September 1943 (NARA); Army nurses arrive in Scotland, August 1944 (NARA); 761st Tank Battalion in Germany, April 1945, was the first African-American tank battalion to fight, earning 4 campaign medals, 11 Silver Stars, 69 Bronze Stars, about 300 Purple Hearts, and one Medal of Honor and Presidential Citation. (Army)

Private First Class **William Blair Jr.** was born in 1921 in Dallas. He served in the army, and it is said he was the youngest African American to serve as first sergeant in World War II. In 1946 he pitched on Negro League baseball teams the Indianapolis Clowns and Detroit Stars. In 1949, he founded *Southwest Sports News,* which published college athletics nationwide. Later it was reformatted to become *Elite News*, with a focus on political, social and economic topics important to the North Texas black community. For his athletic, journalistic, and civil rights accomplishments, the City of Dallas renamed Rochester Park "William 'Bill' Blair Jr. Park" in 2011. Blair donated his business papers and Negro League memorabilia to the University of Texas at Arlington. He died April 20, 2014, and is buried at Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery (Section 91, Grave 585).

Branch receives his 2nd lt. bars from wife Camilla in November 1945.

In 1945, Second Lieutenant **Frederick Branch** became the first African- American officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. Born in North Carolina, in 1922, he graduated from Temple University in 1947 with a degree in physics. Branch developed the science program for Philadelphia's Murrell Dobbins High School and taught for 35 years, but World War II interrupted his education. Branch fought in the South Pacific in 1943, followed by officer training. He served in Korea but resigned in 1955 due to the limited opportunities for advancement. Captain Branch was recognized for his role in desegregation of the armed forces. The U.S. Senate passed a resolution honoring his landmark commission in 1995, he received an NAACP award, and a building at Quantico's Officer Candidate School is named for him. Branch died April 10, 2005, and is buried at Quantico National Cemetery (Section 17, Grave 472).

Major **Joseph Raymond Giesel**, who was white, was among the first officers to train African-American marines. He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2012 for his role at Montford Point, the segregated North Carolina facility where an estimated 20,000 black men trained from 1942-1949. The Marine Corps was white-only until 1942, when President Roosevelt directed that black soldiers be trained at Montford Point. Giesel served 21 years in the marines, in the Pacific Theater during World War II, and in Korea in 1953. He died June 20, 2014, and is buried at Roseburg National Cemetery (Section 6, Grave 131).

Montford Point Marines in dress uniform, 1943. (NARA)

Hollowell, above and left, directing the 371st Army Band. (Army)

**Harry H. Hollowell** was born in 1914 in Arkansas. His family moved to Kansas when he was child, and there he learned to play the violin and trombone. Hollowell enlisted in the army in 1936 and served in the all-black 10th cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, becoming one of the Buffalo Soldiers. In 1942 his musical talent earned him a place in the Army Music School, and he became one of the first African Americans to train there as a bandleader. Warrant Officer Hollowell then led army bands and directed music programs until his retirement in 1964. At that time, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Hollowell was the first black soldier to hold that rank. He continued to be active in the Leavenworth community, and Hollowell Drive was named for him in 2009. Hollowell died February 14, 2005, and is buried at Leavenworth National Cemetery (Section 57, Row 4, Grave 46).

**Will "Dub" J. Jones** was born in Louisiana in 1928. Private First Class Jones served in the U.S. Air Force from 1946 until May 1949. As a civilian he moved to Los Angeles, CA, and sang gospel before his music group switched to the rhythm-and-blues sound. In the late 1950s he joined the Coasters. Jones' bass vocals are best remembered for lines in the popular hits "Yakety Yak" ("Don't Talk Back") and "Charlie Brown" ("Why's Everybody Always Picking on me?"). Jones and other Coasters were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. He died January 16, 2000, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 50, Grave 4458).

Born in New Orleans' Treme district to a club singer, **Earl C. Palmer Sr.** began drumming at an early age. After serving as an army technician in World War II, Palmer returned to New Orleans where he became a sought-after jazz drummer. Palmer moved to Los Angeles in 1957 and became a session drummer for major artists including the Beach Boys, Elvis Costello, Fats Domino, Bonnie Raitt, the Righteous Brothers ("You've Lost that Lovin' Feeling"), and Tina Turner ("River Deep, Mountain High"). Little Richard called him, "probably the greatest session drummer of all time." Palmer was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000. He died September 19, 2008, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 61, Grave 2256).

**Woodrow "Woody" Strode,** born in Los Angeles, was an athlete and actor. Private Strode served in the Pacific and played football for the Army Air Corps. In 1946 he was one of the first African-American players in the National Football League (Rams). His acting career encompassed more than 80 films over nearly 55 years. He played Buffalo soldier Braxton Rutledge in *Sergeant Rutledge,* 1960, and in 1961 was nominated for a Golden Globe as Draba in *Spartacus*. *Jet* magazine called him "the Jackie Robinson of cinema." He died on December 31, 1994, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 46, Grave 283).

Inspired to act as a child after watching a film about the 369th Colored Regiment in World War I, **Lorenzo Tucker** began his career on Vaudeville and Broadway stages alongside performers Bessie Smith and Mae West. Known as the “black Valentino,” he starred in eleven films made from 1927-1936 directed by African-American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux. Sergeant Tucker served as a tail gunner in the Army Air Corps during World War II, and then returned to Hollywood. In the 1950s, Tucker established the Negro Drama Players, a troupe that toured the Jim Crow South performing Broadway shows with an all-black cast.  He received an Audelco Recognition Award for stimulating the arts in black communities in 1981. Tucker died August 19, 1986, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 19, Grave 2661).

Medical treatment by the 92nd Division in Italy, February 1945, left, and below, U.S. and French soldiers, February 1945. (NARA)

Tuskegee Airmen, 1939-1949: Soaring Beyond a Color Barrier

War bonds poster, 1943. (NARA)

The Tuskegee Airmen served in the African-American flying units of the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II, credited with 1,491 missions. They served as pilots, navigators, bombardiers, engineers, quartermasters, warrant officers, support and medical personnel, and instructors. However, until 1940, the U.S. military denied them the opportunity to fly. Thus the flight school at Tuskegee, AL, began as a civilian pilot-training program under the Civilian Aeronautics Administration. Engineering professors from Auburn University introduced the men to aviation; flight instruction took place at a municipal airport.

In 1940, civilian pilot training at Tuskegee expanded. Noted black aviator Charles Anderson joined the program, which attracted more students. Their successes led the military to open aviation duty to black servicemen and to erode discriminatory practices. The War Department established one all-black flying unit in March 1941, the Army Air Corps' 99th Pursuit (Fighter) Squadron, based at a new air field near the Tuskegee Institute. Between 1941 and 1946, more than 1,000 military pilots learned to fly single- and twin-engine planes at Tuskegee.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt took a now-famous ride with Anderson at Tuskegee's Kennedy Field in 1941. Not long after that flight, the first class of aviation cadets began training. Five completed the program in March 1942 and the 99th Fighter Group was at full strength by August. The following year, the 99th saw combat as part of the 332nd Fighter Group, along with the 100th, 301st, and 302nd groups. At the same time, Tuskegee trainees began to fly twin-engine planes, and bomber crews flew B-25s. The latter, among the 477th Bombardment Group, prepared for battle in the Pacific but the war ended before they were deployed.

Flight Instructor Charles Anderson and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, 1941. (Airforce Historical Research Agency)

Tuskegee Airmen performed a variety of operations in the Mediterranean, then overland from Sicily to Berlin. Between June 1944 and April 1945, the 332nd Fighter Group flew their red-tailed P-51 Mustangs on 179 bomber-escort missions; they lost only seven bombers by outmaneuvering the more responsive German jet aircraft. The Tuskegee Airmen were rewarded with a Distinguished Unit citation.

After the war, many Tuskegee Airmen remained in the newly formed U.S. Air Force. In May 1949, for example, members of the 332nd Fighter Group excelled at the air force gunnery meet. In July 26 of that year, the air force integrated troops in accordance with Executive Order 9981 issued by President Harry Truman. Black personnel were reassigned to previously all-white units. The Tuskegee Airmen as a distinct group were inactivated at this time.

Tuskegee's Civil Rights Legacy

The achievements of Tuskegee Airmen advanced integrated practices and civil rights in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Their World War II accomplishments laid siege to entrenched prejudice in American society and in military policy. Aided by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' call to end hiring discrimination in the defense industry, the Tuskegee Airmen's quest also benefited from an active black press, work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and segregation test cases such as a civilian pilot's application to be a cadet in 1940. The push to fly was one front in a multi-faceted campaign for equal opportunities within the military and beyond.

It is significant that the Tuskegee Airmen's orderly and peaceful protest during the Indiana Freeman Field "Mutiny," when attempting to integrate an officers' club in 1945, was in step with non-violent disobedience used by Mahatma Gandhi in India when he pressed for human rights in the 1920s to 1940s. Gandhi influenced Martin Luther King, Jr., in his leadership for civil rights in 1960s America. The Tuskegee Airmen challenged the status quo in World War II combat and afterward in civilian life provided a powerful home-front illustration of what could be.

Honoring Tuskegee Airmen

For their accomplishments on land and in the sky, advancing and protecting our unalienable rights, the Tuskegee Airmen collectively received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2006. Several of these heroes have shared their experiences through the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

1943 "United We Win" war poster. (GPO, NARA)

Born in Florida in 1929, **John Edward Allen** joined the U.S. Army Air Corps after graduating from high school. Allen served from 1945-1946 and trained at Tuskegee with the 332nd Fighter Wing. Master Sergeant Allen reenlisted in 1946 and remained in the air force during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts until retiring in 1982. He received the Air Force Commendation Medal for helping de-arm two dozen 500-pound bombs dropped from the wing of a B-52 bomber being prepared for a mission. As a civilian, Allen worked until 2000 in the Weapons Services Division at Kirtland Air Force Base, NM. A recognized community leader, he helped found the General Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen. Allen received the Congressional Gold Medal for service as a Tuskegee Airman. He died July 30, 2013, and is buried at Santa Fe National Cemetery (Section 24, Grave 560).

Left: Tuskegee Airmen at a briefing in Ramitelli, Italy; Golden is pictured in the center. Right: Golden and Gaines, center, with other Tuskegee flyers. Photographer Toni Frissell made these images in March 1945. (Library of Congress)

**Thurston Lynwood Gaines** was born in New York on March 20, 1922. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, graduated from the Tuskegee pilot training program in August 1944, and served with the 99th Fighter Group in Europe. In April 1945, Second Lieutenant Gaines' aircraft was shot down and he was imprisoned at Moosburg until Allied forces liberated the camp. He received the Purple Heart. After the war Gaines returned to school. He graduated from New York University in 1948 and Meharry Medical College in 1953. He was a surgeon for many years before pursuing administrative medicine. At the end of his medical career, Dr. Gaines was the medical director for a veterans hospital in Massachusetts. He died December 31, 2016, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 55A, Grave 94).

**Newman Camay Golden** was born in Cincinnati, OH, on October 12, 1919. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, graduated from the Tuskegee pilot training program in 1944, and served with the 99th Fighter Group in Italy. On March 20, 1945, during a bomber escort mission over Austria, Golden parachuted from his damaged aircraft. He was imprisoned at Moosburg until Allied forces liberated the camp. Golden then enlisted to serve in Korea. On October 17, 1951, First Lieutenant Golden's aircraft was hit, burst into flames and crashed. Golden was missing in action until March 31, 1954, when his status was changed to killed in action. Golden received the Purple Heart and, in July 2014, a memorial for him took place at Sacramento Valley National Cemetery (Section MW, Row A, Site 01-A).

Mississippian **John L. Hamilton** was born in 1919. He enlisted on July 15, 1942, and graduated from the U.S. Army Air Corps' Tuskegee Flight School in May 1943 with the rank of second lieutenant. Hamilton quickly saw action in World War II. First Lieutenant Hamilton received the Purple Heart after sustaining leg injuries in a dive-bombing mission at the Allied invasion of Italy in 1944. He died November 21, 1982, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 6, Grave 270).

**Alfonso L. Harris** was born in Dallas, TX, in 1926, and attended Booker T. Washington High School. He graduated at 15, and moved to Utah where he inspected aircraft engines before enlisting in July 1944. Harris attended the U.S. Army Air Corps training program at Tuskegee, graduating in 1945 as a flight officer. Aviation Cadet Harris served through June 1946 and was

discharged at Camp Beale. He remained in California to study and earned a degree in physics from the University of California, Los Angeles. Harris pursued a career in engineering and, upon retirement in 1992, tutored students in mathematics. He contributed to the Tuskegee Airmen Archive at UC-Riverside and wrote *In Lincoln's Shadow* (2004). Aviation Cadet Alfonso Harris died April 19, 2016, and is interred in Riverside National Cemetery (Section 61A, Grave 3207).

California native **Kenneth Hawkins** was born in 1918 and graduated from San Bernardino High School in 1937. He enlisted in the army and joined the U.S. Air Corps at Tuskegee in February 1943. Hawkins graduated from the flight training program with the rank of second lieutenant within a year. He saw action in World War II as a member of the 332nd fighter group and was promoted to first lieutenant. His brother, Donald, graduated from Tuskegee as a flight officer in November 1944; Kenneth initially served as chief mechanic to his brother's squadron and later as a flight instructor. Both participated in the "Freeman Field Mutiny," trying to integrate an officers' club in 1945. Hawkins died June 15, 2003, and is interred in Riverside National Cemetery (Section 57A, Grave 2204).

**Charles F. Jamerson** was born in Louisiana in 1917 but grew up in southern California. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in April 1941. Jamerson graduated from the Tuskegee flight training program in March 1943 with a rank of second lieutenant. He saw action in World War II flying missions over Germany with the 99th. Major Jamerson retired from the Air Force in 1977. He died June 4, 1996, and is interred in Riverside National Cemetery (Section 56A, Grave 668).

**Buford Johnson** was born in Texas in 1927, and after high school he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps. Master Sergeant Johnson served from 1945-1966 as a mechanic and crew chief. Initially assigned to Tuskegee Airmen's 99th Fighter Squadron, he served there until the military integrated. Johnson received the Congressional Gold Medal for his service as Tuskegee Airman in a ceremony at the March Field Museum in Riverside, CA. The local chapter of Tuskegee Airmen is named for Johnson, who frequently spoke at school and community events about his experiences. Johnson died April 15, 2017, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 53B, Grave 2808).

Review of officers during the Freeman Field Mutiny of 1945, Freeman Field, Indiana. (Library of Congress)

**Charles W. Ledbetter** was born in April 1922 in Tennessee and entered military service in October 1942. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Master Sergeant Ledbetter trained at Tuskegee. During the Korean conflict he was a top turret gunner. As a civilian, Ledbetter taught disabled children at Perris Union High School and became president of the Moreno Valley School Board. In that position, he advocated for minority populations in the community. Ledbetter's advocacy also was felt in his work as a columnist for *Black Voice News*. Ledbetter died July 23, 2003, and is interred in Riverside National Cemetery (Section 26, Grave 1426).

**Perry Willis Lindsey** was born in New Albany, IN, in 1922. He was studying at Indiana State Teachers College in November 1942 when he enlisted in the Army in nearby Louisville, KY. As a warrant officer, Private Lindsey trained as a navigator, bombardier and pilot. He reenlisted in 1944. During the two-year tour he graduated from flight school at Tuskegee with the rank of second lieutenant. Lindsey fought in Korea, 1951-1953, with the U.S. Air Force. As a civilian, Lindsey earned a commercial pilot license but was unemployable due to airline-industry practices. Lindsey returned to teaching, and in 1969 became the first African-American principal and administrator in the Unified School District at Long Beach, CA. He retired in 1987 and the city's Perry Lindsey International Studies Magnet school is named for him. First Lieutenant Perry died January 30, 2004, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 52B, Grave 274).

**Fitzroy Newsum** was born in New York in 1918 and spent his childhood in Trinidad where he was fascinated with flight. When Newsum returned to the United States he was denied entrance to the U.S. Army Air Corps because he was black. As a result, in February 1939, he enlisted in the New York National Guard and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He chose to attend the Tuskegee pilot-training program rather than pursue officer candidacy. He graduated in 1943 and First Lieutenant Newsum flew with the 477th Bombardment Group. After 1947, with the Air Force, he rose to the rank of colonel and vice commander of the 381st Strategic Missile Wing. Newsum retired in 1970 and was inducted into the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame in 1991. He died January 5, 2013, and is buried at Fort Logan National Cemetery (Section 35, Grave 501).

**John Allen Pulliams** was born in Texas in 1919 and enlisted in the army as a warrant officer in 1942. Warrant Officer Pulliams served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II and likely was stationed in Germany afterward. He remained in the military, transferring to the Air Force and reenlisting during the Korean conflict. He retired after 30 years as a chief warrant officer. Pulliams died July 2, 2002, and is interred at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 47, Grave 1603).

Life-long Pittsburgh, PA, resident **Charles William Tate** was born in 1922, and he left Oliver High School in December 1942 to join the U.S. Army Air Corps. He attended the pilot-training program at Tuskegee and graduated in 1943. Second Lieutenant Tate served overseas during World War II, 1944-1945. He achieved the rank of first lieutenant in the Air Corps, and reenlisted during the Korean conflict. Tate returned to Pittsburgh and civilian service as a postmaster and manager. Captain Tate received the Distinguished Flying Cross, among other honors, and was recognized posthumously with the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to the Tuskegee Airmen in 2006. Tate died November 18, 2005, and is buried at National Cemetery of the Alleghenies (Section 1, Grave 1118).

**Arthur W. Ward** was born in Missouri on July 31, 1922. During World War II, Ward left college to enlist in the army and he spent five months in Tuskegee with the U.S. Army Air Corps in the

training program for African-American servicemen. Aviation Cadet Ward then served in the Philippines. He returned to school after the war to earn graduate degrees from Kansas State Teachers College and Indiana University in industrial education. Ward taught at Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA, until 1990. He died January 11, 2017, and is buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (Section 1T, Grave 139).

**Hackley Woodford** was born in 1914 at Kalamazoo, MI. He graduated from Western Michigan University in 1936 and Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1940 with a degree in medicine. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, black medical personnel were sought to attend to the Tuskegee Airmen training in Alabama. Woodford's internship at Chicago's Provident Hospital was interrupted in September 1942 when he joined the Army Medical Corps. Captain Woodford served until May 21, 1945. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Woodford practiced medicine in the area around Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, MI, and integrated the hospital there before moving to California and joining Kaiser Permanente. Woodford died January 28, 2005, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section 49A, Grave 1149).

Members of the 99th Fighter Squadron, Tuskegee Airmen, February 1944. (NARA)

## Korean Conflict

*President Harry S. Truman issued* Executive Order 9981 *on July 26, 1948, to end segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces. The war in Korea, 1950-1953, was the first conflict to be shaped by the new policy – and it was met with resistance. Full integration took years to achieve, despite prior steps in this direction.*

Machine gun division, 25th Infantry, in Korea in February 1951. (Center for Military History)

*After the Port Chicago, CA, disaster in 1944, calls for the desegregation of naval forces led the army to deactivate its two all-black cavalry units. The 25th Infantry folded in 1947, but the 24th infantry continued in service. This regiment was among the first deployed after North Korea invaded the southern republic. The U.S. Army disbanded the 24th in 1951, ironically, because of white prejudice that criticized the regiment's performance. The critique was formally rescinded in 1996.*

*The regiment fought bravely in exceptional circumstances. Courage came in many forms. The regiment's one black officer was sentenced to death for refusing his white commander's order to return to front-line positions his men had just been forced to leave (later Truman commuted the sentence after public protest), and two others received the Medal of Honor posthumously.*

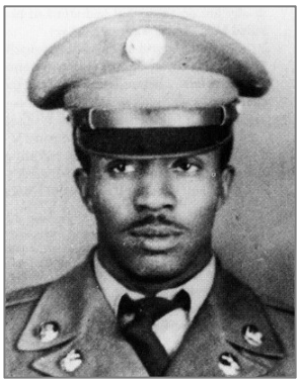
PFC Johnson (Army)

Born in Florida in 1933, **Rosamond Johnson, Jr.,** joined the army at 15. He was the first African American from Escambia County to die in Korea. Johnson served in the 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Division. Private First Class Johnson was killed in action on July 26, 1950, after carrying two wounded men to safety, for which he received the Purple Heart posthumously. The county named a blacks-only beach for him in the 1950s. Today Johnson Beach is part of Gulf Islands National Seashore, where a monument in his honor was placed in 1996. Johnson was buried at Barrancas National Cemetery on April 23, 1952 (Section 8, Grave 65).

**Matthew Leonard** was born in Alabama in 1929. He enlisted in the army in Birmingham about 1949, and served in Korea and Vietnam. He was killed in action on February 28, 1967. Sergeant Leonard organized the defense of his

platoon, protected the wounded, and charged the enemy. Although injured, he continued to fight until he died. For this he received the Medal of Honor. Initially interred in Birmingham's Shadow Lawn Cemetery, his remains were moved to Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in 2000 (Section 14, Grave 27).

Sgt. Leonard (Army), above; Cpl. Townsend (Marines), below.



W**illiam Thompson** is one of two black soldiers to receive the Medal of Honor for service in the Korean conflict. He was born in August 1927 in New York City. He enlisted in the army in 1945 and completed one tour. Private First Class Thompson reenlisted in January 1948, and served with the 24th Infantry in 1949-1950. In August 1950, near Haman in South Korea, Thompson provided cover for comrades as they withdrew from a surprise enemy attack. His courage was recognized posthumously. Thompson is interred in Long Island National Cemetery (Section DSS, Grave 19).

**Edward Benjamin Townsend** was born in 1929 and as a child sang in his father's African Methodist Episcopal church. He graduated from Arkansas State College before enlisting in the Marines in 1951. Corporal Townsend served for two years in Korea, where he was discovered by bandleader Horace Heidt. With Heidt, Townsend toured Asia before he settled in Los Angeles, where he would write more than 200 songs – most notably, "Let's Get It On" with Marvin Gaye. Townsend died August 13, 2003, and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery (Section BA, Grave C-213).

Cpl. William R. Davidson of the 114th Graves Registration Company, Quartermaster Corps, fills out a Form 52B, with information about a deceased American soldier at the United Nations Cemetery at Taegu, Korea, January 1951.

Objects shown, from left: cross-shaped grave marker, triangular unidentified-soldier marker, and small bottle to contain a Form 1042 that is buried with the soldier. (Army)

"Engaging the Enemy," 1969. (NARA)

## Vietnam Era

*The war in Vietnam, 1961-1975, unfolded against the backdrop of the civil rights movement and it became the U.S. military's first integrated combat operation. As years passed it became a very unpopular war marked by domestic protests. Discriminatory draft practices meant a high percentage of draftees were poor and black. Project 100,000, a* Great Society *program initiated in 1966, reinforced that trend by offering opportunities to the young and poor through military service. African-American participants accounted for 41 percent of enrollees, and 40 percent were assigned to combat positions. At the time, black Americans made up about 9 percent of the armed forces but represented 20 percent of combat-related deaths in Vietnam. By the end of the decade, the number of combat-related deaths decreased to about 12 percent even if front-line tours of duty did not. By the mid-1970s, African Americans represented 15 percent of the armed forces and a number received the Medal of Honor and other commendations for their service.*

**William Maud Bryant** was born in February 1933 and enlisted in the army in 1955. Sergeant First Class Bryant served in Vietnam with Company A, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces. He reenlisted as late as April 1968. Bryant was killed in action at Long Khanh Province on March 24, 1969, and he was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for courage in combat. Bryant is buried at Raleigh National Cemetery (Section 15, Grave 1227).

**Ralph H. Johnson** was born in Charleston, SC, on January 11, 1949. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves in Oakland, CA, in March 1967; thereafter he joined the regular USMC. On March 5, 1968, Private First Class Johnson and his patrol were attacked near the Quan Duc Valley, Vietnam. He threw himself on a grenade to halt the enemy and save the life of a fellow marine. Johnson received the Medal of Honor posthumously. The Charleston VA Medical Center was renamed for him in September 1991, as was the navy destroyer USS *Ralph Johnson* DDG 114 in 2015. His remains were interred at Beaufort National Cemetery in March 1970 (Section 3, Grave 21).

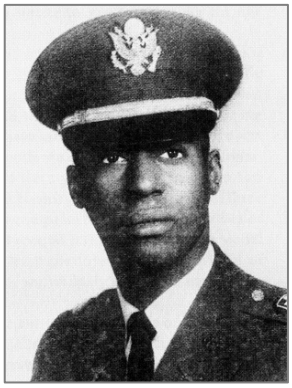
PFC Johnson (USMC)

**Ruppert L. Sargent** became the first black officer posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Born in Hampton, VA, in 1938, he attended Virginia State University and Hampton Institute before enlisting in the army in 1959. He graduated from officers training in 1965, and the next year, First Lieutenant Sargent joined Company B, 9th Infantry, in Vietnam. On March 15, 1967, Sargent was leading a platoon when two grenades fell into the group, and he threw himself on them to protect his comrades. The appreciative company, still in Vietnam, sent $230 to the City of Hampton to provide a wreath for Sargent's funeral and funds for his widow. Hampton named its administration building for him in 2002. Sargent is buried at Hampton National Cemetery (Section FI, Grave 7596).

**Clifford Sims** was born in Florida on June 18, 1942. He enlisted in the army in 1961 and five years later Staff Sergeant Sims was fighting in Vietnam with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. Sims' company was near the city of Hue when the Tet Offensive began. On February 21, 1968, under heavy fire, Sims threw himself over a tripped booby trap. Sims was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. He is buried at Barrancas National Cemetery (Section 29, Grave 546).

Vice President Spiro Agnew presents the Medal of Honor to Sims' family in 1969. (NARA)

**John Earl Warren, Jr.,** was born November 16, 1946, in Brooklyn, NY. Army First Lieutenant Warren's tour in Vietnam started in September 1968, as a platoon leader for Company C, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, 25th Infantry Division. On January 14, 1969, his platoon was ambushed as it moved to reinforce another unit, and Warren fell on a grenade that landed in their group. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, which was presented to his family in April 1970. He is buried at Long Island National Cemetery (Section O, Grave 33144).


1st Lt. Warren. (Army)