

BLACKS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Black Soldiers. on Duty in Every War

To the men of Color - Soldiers! I expected much from you. But you surpassed my hopes. I have found in you that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds.

Although most history books do not record it, black Minutemen fought in the first two battles for America's independence, at Lexington and Concord. A Negro named Prince Estabrook fought the British at Lexington, and nine blacks were at Concord: Peter Salem, Cato Stedman, Lemuel Haynes, Cuff Whittemore, Cato Wood, Pomp Blackman, Cato Bordman and two men known only as Pompey and "Joshua Boylston's Prince," a slave. Blacks also fought at Bunker Hill, and two crossed the Delaware with General Washington to attack Trenton, New Jersey, on Christmas Day, 1776. Negro troops fought with Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. They served throughout most of the Civil War. And they went on to take part in every major military action from the Indian wars in the West through two world wars to the bloody battles of Vietnam.

In all of these conflicts, black soldiers had to struggle for the privilege of fighting at all; and often they received little or no lasting recognition for their deeds. It was a common belief among whites that blacks were cowardly under fire, and deeply ingrained in the American tradition was a reluctance to allow Negroes to handle firearms. Until the Korean war, blacks had almost always fought in segregated units. And throughout U.S. military history it was generally taken for granted that only whites possessed the necessary qualities to serve as commanding officers. The first Negro to graduate from West Point spent four lonely years during which his fellow cadets ostracized him.

Despite these attitudes, black Americans continued to prove their valor in combat. General John J. Pershing, who commanded all U.S. units in Europe during World War I, had earlier won his nickname "Blackjack" as a young lieutenant in command of the 10th Cavalry Regiment. Pershing led his Negro troops up San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War and during the punitive expeditions into Mexico in 1916. His men fought so bravely that Pershing once said, "We officers could have taken our black heroes in our arms."



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