

Liliana Feyk

Sage Creek High School

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The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion: African American Women in World War II

“A Women’s Army Corps Unit composed of Negro WACs is being formed for overseas duty. The unit, which will form a Postal Battalion, will be commanded by Negro WAC officers. The unit will go abroad on completion of field training.”¹

A small press release from the United States War Department on January 16, 1945 changed the country forever as plans for the only all-African American, all-female battalion to be sent overseas during World War II were cemented into the public mind. At the time, the women were training at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia with no knowledge of what they were training for nor where they would be sent. These 855 women would soon become the 6888th Central Postal ² Directory Battalion, commonly referred to as the Six Triple Eight. Facing both sexism and ³ racism, they often had to “fight the war on three fronts:” racism, misogyny, and the actual war.⁴

Like most people during World War II, the women of the 6888th interrupted their lives to help in the war effort. But these women were hoping for something more when they joined the battalion. They were hoping for adventure, for a new life, and for a change in their country. They did not disappoint in their effort, but the United States certainly disappointed them. Against all odds, these women completed their training and task, returning to their normal lives

¹ 6th Cavalry Museum, "The Fight for Overseas Service," *YouTube*, April 23, 2021, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=NBynxJUFQRg&feature=youtu.be>.

² Charity. A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 125

³ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," U.S. Army Center of Military History, last modified February 2014, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 4 ⁴ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 154; Brenda L. Moore, *To Serve My Country, to Serve My Race: The Story of the Only African-American WACS Stationed Overseas During World War II* (New York: NYU Press, 1997)

as stronger people and leaving a message behind of the power of dignity and strength. They serve as a reminder to all women in the military today and stand as a pillar of inspiration by proving that they were indeed just as capable as any white service member.

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps

At the beginning of World War II, U.S. Representative Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts attempted to introduce a bill in May 1941 which would create a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Her bill was quickly denied and was not considered again until the attack on ⁵ Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Congress approved the bill on May 14, 1942, and President ⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt signed it into law the next day. With the creation of a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), women were allowed to support the war effort directly by being trained to replace men as they went overseas. However, there were no plans to allow African American women into the WAAC due to the prevalence of segregation.

After learning that African Americans were not going to be considered as recruits for the WAAC, civil rights leader and advisor to the president on African American issues, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, discussed the need for African Americans to be allowed to train as officers in the WAAC with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Using her influence, Eleanor Roosevelt was able ⁷ to discuss the matter with the director of the WAAC, Oveta Culp Hobby, and convince the ⁸

⁵ "Creation of the Women's Army Corps," The Official of the United States Army, <https://www.army.mil/women/history/wac.html>. par. 1

⁶Ibid. 2

⁷ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," U.S. Army Center of Military History, last modified February 2014, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 3 ⁸ Leonard C. Schlup and Donald W. Whisenhunt, eds., *It Seems to Me: Selected Letters of Eleanor Roosevelt* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2021), p. 42, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232564979.pdf>.

leaders of the War Department to agree. However, the Department only agreed to a 10 percent⁹ enlistment of African Americans, which was supposed to represent the demographics of the civilian population. The first WAAC Officer Candidate School and training center was located¹⁰ at Fort Des Moines in Iowa. 440 women were selected from thousands of applicants, and just¹¹ 40 of them were African American. These women eventually became known as the Ten¹² Percenters. One of those 440 women of the first graduating class from Fort Des Moines in¹³ 1942 would go on to become the commander of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion: Major Charity Adams.¹⁴

The Fight to be Sent Overseas

The WAAC officially became the Women's Army Corps (WAC) on July 1, 1943. This¹⁵ meant that members would now be considered active duty military, and that women could be sent overseas and receive all the "rank, privileges, and benefits of their male counterparts."¹⁶ However, only white women were eligible to be sent to Europe for war-related work. After finishing Officer Training school, the women were given jobs around the country and in Europe to free up more men to fight. The African American women who trained in the same way as the

⁹ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 16-17

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 17

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Creation of the Women's Army Corps," The Official of the United States Army, <https://www.army.mil/women/history/wac.html>. par. 4

¹³ Jonathan Sutherland, *African Americans at War: An Encyclopedia, Volume 1* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), p. 10

¹⁴ Kevin M. Hymel, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," National Museum of the United States Army, <https://armyhistory.org/6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/>. par. 4

¹⁵ "Women's Army Corps (WAC)." Atomic Heritage Foundation. Last modified April 27, 2018. <https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/womens-army-corps-wac#:~:text=WAAC%20was%20established%20%22for%20the,active%20duty%20status%2C%20becoming%20WAC>. par. 1

¹⁶ "Creation of the Women's Army Corps," The Official of the United States Army, <https://www.army.mil/women/history/wac.html>. par. 9

white women had far fewer options. White WACs, such as Anne Bosanko Green, were often sent to training school after finishing basic training, which resulted in them getting better jobs.¹⁷

When Green finished training at Fort Des Moines, she was immediately shipped out to Fort Bliss at the William Beaumont General Hospital to train to be a nurse. The story was similar for¹⁸ almost every white WAC. White women were continually being sent to work for the European Theater of Operations while African American women were expected to sit and wait. As women were “filling every conceivable assignment” such as “driv[ing] Army vehicles...plot[ting] emergency landings for lost and damaged aircraft,” and operating switchboards, Charity Adams and hundreds of other African American women were stuck with few options as cooks, truck drivers, and laundry washers.¹⁹

Many stayed at the fort where they completed basic training since most military bases did not have room for segregated barracks, bathrooms, and drinking fountains. African American WAC Ernestine Woods recalls how upset she was “to think that nobody wanted us [Black WACs].” The only forts in the country who were ready to receive African American WACs²⁰ were Fort Huachuca and the Douglas Army Air Field in Arizona, Fort Riley in Kansas, Walla Walla Army Air Base in Washington, and Fort Des Moines in Iowa.²¹

¹⁷ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 43

¹⁸ Anne B. Green, *One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Women's Army Corps, 1944-1946* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), p. 54

¹⁹ *The Story of the WAC in the ETO*. Paris: Stars and Stripes, 1945. Record Group 319 - Records of the Army Staff, "G-3, Plans & Operations Division, Decimal Files, Secret General Correspondence" (Entry NM-3 153-A); Box 219; Folder "Study of the Women's Army Corps in the European Theater of Operations, Volume II," National Archives Building, Washington, DC p. 28

²⁰ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 46

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 51-57



The overcrowding due to the need to uphold segregation even in the midst of war was exacerbated by newspaper articles such as this one from the *Apache Sentinel* depicting African American WACS who had recently joined. This was done to get more recruits from the ²² African American community. Although this provided a small spotlight for the women brave enough to join, the glaring flaw with the approach is that more African American women joined the WAC, and were sent to forts across the country that were sorely equipped to handle such an influx while still upholding segregation.

When news that the WAC was segregated reached African American women across the country, enlistment numbers decreased exponentially. This was made worse by the fact that ²³ many WAC applications from African American women were being denied before being thoroughly reviewed, resulting in a huge problem for recruitment numbers. In short, there were ²⁴ too many trained officers and not enough enlisted WACs to be commanded.

There were so few places for the African American WACs that, by mid-July in 1943, “the number of African American [WACs] waiting for assignment at the Fort Des Moines Training

²² Hughes, (WAC). "Highlights on the WACs." *The Apache Sentinel*, December 3, 1943, 7. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn95060813/1943-12-03/ed-1/seq-7/#date1=1777&sort=relevance&rows=20&words=WAC+WACs+WACS&searchType=basic&sequence=0&index=18&state=&date2=1944&proxtext=WAC&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=2>.

²³ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 38

²⁴Ibid; J. Chamberlain, "African American Women in the Military During WWII," National Archives: The Unwritten Record, last modified January 22, 2021, <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2020/03/12/african-american-women-in-the-military-during-wwii/>.

Center neared nine hundred.” During her time stuck at Fort Des Moines, Charity Adams began ²⁵ writing small notes and stories that would go on to be a first draft of her autobiography in 1946.²⁶ Adams was later assigned command of Company 8, which trained civilian women as soldiers. The problem with being assigned command was that African American officers were ²⁷ not allowed to command white soldiers according to army policy. Adams’s frustration was ²⁸ palpable during this time period in her book as she was often left in command of very few women with no instructions from her superiors.

Meanwhile, many African American organizations had been fighting with the War Department for African American WACs to be sent overseas to no avail. Finally, a year and a ²⁹ half after the WAC was formed, the War Department began considering the idea and its implications for patriotism and recruitment as a whole. Just a year after her promotion to major ³⁰ in September 1943, Adams recalls being asked the question: ³¹

“How would you like to go overseas?”³²

²⁵ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 70

²⁶ "Charity Adams Earley Papers, 1928-2002," Library of Congress, https://findingaids.loc.gov/db/search/xq/searchMferDsc04.xq?_id=loc.mss.eadmss.ms009089&_faSection=contentsList&_faSubsection=dsc&_dmdid=d460698e20&_start=1&_lines=125.

²⁷ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 84

²⁸ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 37

²⁹ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 3 ³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 96

³² Ibid. p. 121

The Formation of a Battalion

“The truth was that I had been involved in so many firsts that I did not want to be left out of any new venture.”³³

Adams had thought that the question was surely rhetorical. She could not have been ³⁴ more wrong as African American women across the country were being screened for physical and psychological fitness to join the only African American WAC battalion to work in the European Theater of Operations. Along with screening, the women were given the choice of leaving the country. Those who would form the battalion came from several other forts including Fort Des Moines in Iowa and Fort Huachuca in Arizona. Others, still, had not yet gone through any form of training. Many chose to join the battalion because of a sense of adventure, such as Mary Ragland who found out about it in the newspaper just after graduating high school. Others, like Anna Mae Robertson chose to go in order to support their families and “maintain ³⁵ order in their lives.” Most of the women were very young and eager to represent their country ³⁶ while travelling to somewhere new. Whatever their reasons for joining, they were the first and only African American woman to go to Europe during World War II.

The newly formed battalion, composed of 31 officers and 824 enlisted women, was sent ³⁷ to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, where they underwent basic training to “identify enemy aircraft, ships, and weapons; to climb ropes; to board and evacuate ships; and to do long marches with

³³ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 122

³⁴ Ibid. p. 121

³⁵ "Mary Ragland: Member of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," United States Army, <https://www.army.mil/blackamericans/profiles/ragland.html>. par. 1

³⁶ Chris Bucher, "Wisconsin Women Veterans: Anna Mae Robertson," Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs, last modified February 27, 2019, https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/_files/ugd/7b98b6_2ffbb485b6fc4a2789c843ecd2ccae38.pdf. https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/_files/ugd/7b98b6_2ffbb485b6fc4a2789c843ecd2ccae38.pdf. par. 1

³⁷ Jonathan Sutherland, *African Americans at War: An Encyclopedia*, Volume 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), p. 363

rucksacks” without any knowledge of what they would be doing in Europe nor how long they would be out of the country. All they knew is that they were the first. ³⁸

Adams had to take into account that her battalion would have to be completely self-sufficient due to segregation preventing her soldiers from receiving support services such as meals and guard duty. This meant that many women recruited into the battalion had to be ³⁹trained in cooking, driving, and even judo since they were not allowed to carry weapons.⁴⁰

After completing training with her battalion, Major Adams and second-in-command Captain Abbie Noel Campbell, were sent to the capital, the Pentagon, and later to Europe on Priority II Clearance, just below Priority I reserved for the president. Adams and Campbell ⁴¹ were often lost at this point in the journey as neither had ever flown in a plane and they were often shunned by fellow military officers due to their race and sex. Finally, after arguing with many white male officers, the two received a sealed envelope with secret orders that could only be opened after they were on their way to Europe.⁴²

Uncertainty and secrets were common to the military, but Adams and Campbell had never been granted such authority. They were extremely nervous and Adams joked that “never have two dumber people set out for world travel.” After a struggle with several different chains ⁴³ of command, Adams and Campbell finally made it onto the plane to Europe with their orders.

³⁸ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion." U.S. Army Center of Military History. <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 4

³⁹ Kate Kelly, "The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," *America Comes Alive*, last modified March 16, 2021, <https://americacomesalive.com/the-6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/>. par. 10 ⁴⁰ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 142

⁴¹ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 129

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 131

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 127

Experience Overseas

The two officers met with half their battalion in Glasgow, Scotland. The women had travelled on the *Ile de France* on a harrowing zigzag course due to being chased by a German U-boat loaded with torpedoes. The other half of the 6888th arrived safely fifty days later.⁴⁴ Transported by train to Birmingham, the Six Triple Eights were housed in King Edward School, an old boarding school for boys. The women were surprised by the welcome they received in England and, although racism and sexism were rampant in the Army, the English civilians were mostly driven by curiosity. The women were often invited to civilian homes for tea and celebrations. They were somewhat overwhelmed with the idea that “they represented every black person in America, and they were determined to prove themselves.”⁴⁶

It was only after the women had settled into their new quarters at the boarding school that Adams and Campbell received their first fully detailed orders. The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was tasked with redirecting mail to all U.S. personnel in the European Theater of Operations, estimated to be about seven million people. Mail was extremely important to maintaining the morale of an army composed of young men, with most between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Many had never left home before and expected weekly mail from their families. The problem was that battalions moved so much that it was difficult to keep track of the locations of so many soldiers.

⁴⁴ Mary C. Farrell, *Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII* (New York: Abrams, 2019), p. 105-108

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 117

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 111

⁴⁷ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 148

⁴⁸ Ibid.

A daunting task, Adams organized the battalion into five different companies that began working in February 1945 to complete an assignment which was projected to take about six months. The women worked seven days a week in three eight-hour shifts. The warehouses ⁴⁹ where the 6888th worked were cold, dark, and filled to the brim with undelivered mail. They ⁵⁰ had to come up with a system of delivering an estimated 90 billion packages and letters to the intended recipients. This was difficult for many reasons. Soldiers were supposed to submit a ⁵¹ change-of-address every time they moved, but it became exceedingly difficult towards the end of the war due to battalions moving so much. If they were injured, they may have been sent to a hospital or back to the U.S. or if they were killed, the mail had to be sent back to the sender. In addition, many soldiers had the same exact names or the letters were addressed incorrectly. Paired with improperly packaged items and constant infestations of rodents, the 6888th had to maintain order.

Each member was assigned a specific part of redirecting mail, whether it was fixing damaged packages, locating the addressed individual's serial number, or cooking for 855 people, they all worked together despite verbal attacks from their white superiors and published attacks from African American newspapers back home. Adams was never really sure why newspapers from their own community were so unkind to the members of the 6888th, though she suspected it was because they were women. She said that the authors created completely untrue stories

⁴⁹ Kate Kelly, "The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," *America Comes Alive*, last modified March 16, 2021, <https://americacomesalive.com/the-6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/>. par. 16⁵⁰ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 6⁵¹ Paul Courson, "African-American Women's Battalion from WWII Honored," CNN, last modified February 25, 2009, <https://edition.cnn.com/2009/US/02/25/postal.battalion/>. par. 17

intended to bring the Battalion down, which actually resulted in “add[ing] to the cohesion of an already topnotch unit.”⁵²

These constant acts of racism and misogyny spurred some journalists from Europe to ask the women of the Battalion if they would consider staying in Europe after the war was over. Though, according to Mary Ragland, “[The locals] treated us better than we were back home,”⁵³ all of the women were insistent upon returning to the United States after the completion of their service.⁵⁴

While the women of the 6888th were working to maintain the morale of the soldiers on the front lines, Adams and Campbell had to figure out how to maintain the morale of their own soldiers in such dreary conditions. They created a weekly newspaper known as *Special Delivery* to spread information about developments in the war and stories from back home. The Six⁵⁵ Triple Eight also created the motto “No mail, low morale” to remind themselves why they were in Europe and of the importance of their job.⁵⁶

Still, the problem with being stationed in Birmingham was that there were no places for the African American women to buy cosmetics or get their hair done correctly. So, Adams put in several requests in the form of Special Services. She was able to get enough equipment to create a makeshift beauty parlor that drew Black women stationed across Europe as nurses or Red Cross workers. This resulted in a important cultural shift for some time in Birmingham.

⁵² Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 152

⁵³ "Mary Ragland: Member of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," United States Army, <https://www.army.mil/blackamericans/profiles/ragland.html>. par. 4

⁵⁴ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 183-184

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 185

⁵⁶ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 9

Adams was afforded a small amount of freedom when it came to how she organized the Battalion as long as they followed their orders from Washington and succeeded. By May 1945, the 6888th had successfully rerouted every piece of mail in the warehouses in just three months. With the war over, many expected to be sent home. But, without any time to revel in victory, they were quickly transferred to Rouen, France where the same thing needed to be done all over again.

Sent to France

The mail in Rouen had been sitting for almost three years and Adams was given six months to organize everything. The 6888th again beat the projection and completed the project in three months.⁵⁷

However well the battalion did, they continued to face the scrutiny of male soldiers. All of them learned to hold onto their dignity and to “[do] the job well” while ignoring the resentment of all the male soldiers, including those who were African American. Adams and ⁵⁸ Campbell were often questioned as to where they were going and made to show their orders or proof of command before being left alone. The members of the 6888th also experienced rude questions and backlash because, as Adams put it, “the presence of successfully performing Negro women...increased their resentment.”⁵⁹

After staying in Rouen for five months, members of the 6888th began being released to go back home according to the point system. This system awarded service members points for

⁵⁷ Kevin M. Hymel, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," National Museum of the United States Army, <https://armyhistory.org/6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/>. par. 12

⁵⁸ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 186-187

⁵⁹ Ibid.

length of service, children, awards, etc. The Battalion began getting smaller as more women⁶⁰ embarked on the long journey home.

The remaining members of the 6888th were sent to Paris for one last job. This was the only time the women were treated with real respect during their service. They were housed in lavish hotels and it was the first time many of the women had ever had “maid service and meals prepared by the hotels’ cooks.”⁶¹

The 6888th quickly finished their work in Paris as their Battalion continued getting smaller and smaller. Eventually, even their commander, Charity Adams and second-in-command Abbie Noel Campbell were told they were no longer needed in Europe. So, Adams, Campbell, and the rest of the members of the 6888th returned to the United States.

On the return trip by sea, Adams was the Group Commander for the ““colored troops’ until arrival in the United States.” This would not have been a problem except the ship’s⁶² captain then placed Adams in charge of all women on the ship due to her seniority of rank. The change resulted in many white nurses refusing to leave and delaying the ship’s journey home. Adams gave the nurses an ultimatum and remembers that she felt surprisingly dejected by the exchange.

“After three and one-half years I was leaving the service facing the same kind of prejudice I had encountered when I entered.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Tyler Bamford, "The Points Were All That Mattered: The US Army's Demobilization After World War II," The National WWII Museum, last modified August 27, 2020, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/points-system-us-armys-demobilization>.⁶¹ Kevin M. Hymel, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," National Museum of the United States Army, <https://armyhistory.org/6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/>. par. 13

⁶² Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 205

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 206

Eventually, the ship made it back home with the last of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion aboard.

The Silent Welcome Home

“During the time I have had WACs under my command, they have met every test and task assigned them...their contributions in efficiency, skill, spirit, and determination is immeasurable...”⁶⁴

Despite the high praise the WACs received from the likes of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 6888th Battalion was, for the most part, ignored. In a pamphlet distributed across the WAC stations in the European Theater and at home in America, the WACs were lauded for their accomplishments, yet a year of efforts of the 6888th was distilled into just four sentences:

“The 6888th Central Postal Directory Bn., first Negro WACs to be sent overseas, was assigned to the First Base Post office in February 1945. The unit broke all records for re-directing mail. Each of the two eight-hour shifts averaged more than 65,000 pieces of mail. Long-delayed letters and packages reached battle casualties who had been moving too frequently for mail to catch up with them.”⁶⁵

Though this detailed a tiny glimpse of all the Battalion had done, it did not mention any of the racism, sexism, and other challenges the women faced while serving their country in Europe and identified none of the officers or enlisted by name.

When the women returned home, they were met with no fanfare, parades, or awards, which was unfortunately a stark contrast to the reaction to the returning male soldiers and white

⁶⁴ *The Story of the WAC in the ETO*. Paris: Stars and Stripes, 1945. Record Group 319 - Records of the Army Staff, "G-3, Plans & Operations Division, Decimal Files, Secret General Correspondence" (Entry NM-3 153-A); Box 219; Folder "Study of the Women's Army Corps in the European Theater of Operations, Volume II;" National Archives Building, Washington, DC p. 30-31

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 27-28

WACs. Mary Ragland remembers that “they sent us straight to Fort Dix and then home.”⁶⁶

Besides Charity Adams being promoted to lieutenant colonel in December 1945, no member of the 6888th was recognized for their service. The country had relied on the Six Triple Eights to bring morale to the men overseas, yet never spared the time to give them any praise or the respect they deserved

Now, over 70 years later, the story of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion has been shared at several memorials, such as one in 2009 when the surviving members received certificates of appreciation. Recently, they have received the Congressional Gold Medal,⁶⁷ although it was granted posthumously. Yet, their story remains widely unknown and their⁶⁸ contributions go unsung in history classrooms and military museums across the country. The service of 855 African American women in the military has gone unnoticed among the majority of the United States population.

Perhaps one of the greatest indications of the 855 members’ effect on the United States lies in the amount of African American women in the military today. Nearly a quarter of women officers in the United States military is African American and they now serve alongside their white counterparts as equals. 6888th Battalion member Gladys Shuster Carter said it best when⁶⁹ she told women serving in the military that “You are standing on our shoulders.” Adams also⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Mary Ragland: Member of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," United States Army, <https://www.army.mil/blackamericans/profiles/ragland.html>. par. 7

⁶⁷ Paul Courson, "African-American Women's Battalion from WWII Honored," CNN, last modified February 25, 2009, <https://edition.cnn.com/2009/US/02/25/postal.battalion/>.

⁶⁸ Deborah Bailey, "6888th: Black Women WWII Heroes Finally Get Congressional Gold Medal," AFRO American Newspapers, last modified March 3, 2022, <https://afro.com/6888th-black-women-wwii-heroes-finally-get-congressional-gold-medal/>. ⁶⁹ "History of Black Women In the Military," National Association of Black Military Women, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.nabmw.org/history-of-black-women-in-the-milit>.

⁷⁰ Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion," U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>. par. 18

took pride in the fact that she had “opened a few doors, broken a few barriers, and...smoothed the way to some degree for the next generation.” The 6888th Central Postal Directory ⁷¹

Battalion serves as an inspiration for the power of standing up against preconceived notions of racism and inferiority.

⁷¹ Charity A. Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 214

Appendix A

The majority of the first-person accounts in this paper came from Charity Adams Earley's autobiography titled *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC*. Below is the last chapter, which is where the bulk of the information I used is located, specifically in support of my thesis.

Earley,
Charity
One

After

A.



For the next few weeks I indulged myself in the comforts of home and relationships with members of my family, immediate and extended. After that, I began responding to the many invitations directed to me, some to speak and some to just visit. Many of the invitations were from church groups that expressed pride in my accomplishments, and they felt that by telling my story I would provide motivation for young Negroes looking forward to the future. I had given little thought to this aspect of my life, but I now had to face it; there is no pleasure in achievement if it is not shared.

I began a round of speaking engagements and social visits. My military experiences had been interesting, at times exciting, but, more importantly, I had developed a strong sense of responsibility and personal dignity. These were the things I talked about as I related my story to interested audiences. In February I made my first trip to Florida with my parents. We spent the night in Tampa at the home of an aunt. What was memorable about this trip was that I felt the cold second only to Prestwick, Scotland. The homes had been built for semitropical weather and my visit was made during the worst cold spell on record.

Later that month I went to Tuskegee, Alabama, to visit Noel and her family. I had to change trains in Atlanta and, aboard the second train, I prepared to settle down for the trip by putting my suitcase in the overhead luggage rack. As I raised the suitcase, a young Negro corporal moved forward to help me put the bag on the rack. As he reached me, he happened to notice my rank. (I wore my uniform until my discharge the fol-

Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC. College Station: Texas A&M

University Press, 1989.

Feyk 18
Feyk 19
Feyk 20

I returned to the field of education, serving as dean of Student Personnel Services at Tennessee A&I College (now University) and Georgia State College (now Savannah State College). At both colleges my special concern was for freshman students, who, having spent those years all the way through high school in protected situations, were suddenly thrust into independence. I remembered my own freshman year in college and tried to keep my door open, to be a resource for the young and uncertain.

After a year and a half at Georgia State College, on 24 August 1949, I was married. My husband was a medical student at the University of Zurich, in Switzerland. After a brief honeymoon and all the required Swiss permits, we moved to Zurich for the completion of his medical training. To survive in the German-speaking section of Switzerland, I had to learn the language, so I enrolled in the Minerva Institute (an educational institution above our high school level and more closely related to the American junior or technical college) for the senior year, with all classes conducted in high German.

After ten months it was determined that my skill in the German language was sufficient to enable me to enroll in the university. For the next two years I took courses at the University of Zurich and, during the second year, at the Jungian Institute of Analytical Psychology.

By the time my husband finished his training and it was time for us to return to the States, I was expecting our first child. He returned home by ship, accompanied by our belongings, while I flew home by Swissair, accompanied by, I found out later, a sterile delivery kit—just in case.

After my second child was born, I began to be involved in community affairs. I have served, and am serving, on committees, task forces, and boards, encompassing the areas of human and social services, education, civic affairs, and, in recent years, corporate business. From each area I have increased my knowledge of the state of our society and hope that, along the way, I have made some valuable contributions.

The trailblazing by the women who served in the military during World War II has been virtually ignored and forgotten. That is why I have written my story. In truth, I have accomplished much since my military service. I have opened a few doors, broken a few barriers, and, I hope, smoothed the way to some degree for the next generation. The problems that were my concern during my service, and to which I have devoted my energies, are still with us—but I keep trying.

Appendix B

Although this source only mentions the 6888th Battalion once (on pages 27-28), which makes it a true testament to its time, the account of information was important to much of my research when it came to the women of the WAC and their efforts as a whole.

The Story of the WAC in the ETO. Paris: Stars and Stripes, 1945. Record Group 319 - Records of the Army Staff, "G-3, Plans & Operations Division, Decimal Files, Secret General Correspondence" (Entry NM-3 153-A); Box 219; Folder "Study of the Women's Army Corps in the European Theater of Operations, Volume II;" National Archives Building, Washington, DC



Feyk 22
Feyk 23
Feyk 24
Feyk 25
Feyk 26

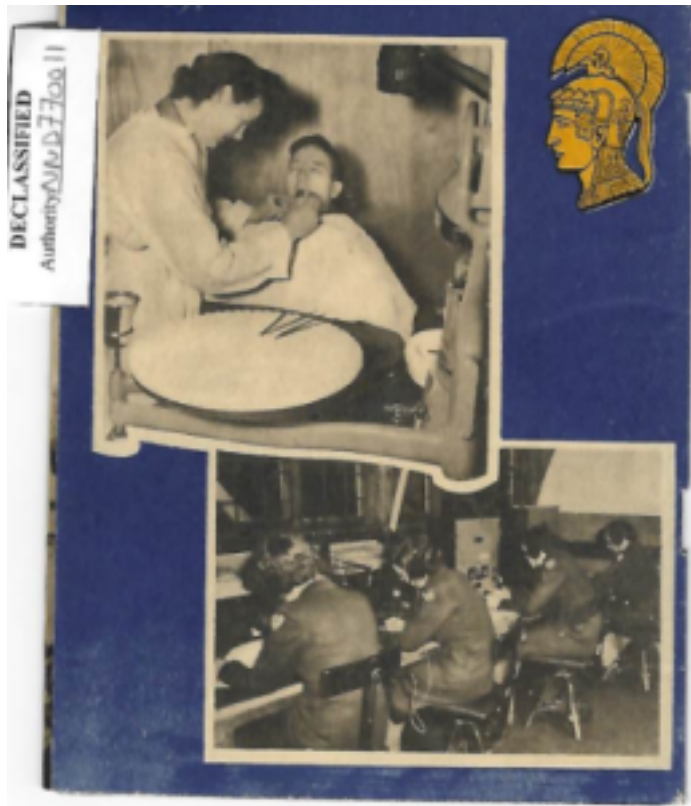
Feyk 27

Feyk 28

Feyk 29

Feyk 30

Feyk 31



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