

# Black History Month

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AFRICAN AMERICANS IN TIMES OF WAR

February

# Black History Month Origin

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The annual celebration of achievements by Black Americans is associated with Dr. Carter G. Woodson. In 1915, Dr. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, now called the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

In 1926, Dr. Woodson initiated the celebration of Negro History Week, which encompassed the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976.

[Black History Month origin](#)

# African Americans Military History

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Those of African American descent have a long and distinguished history in the United States military. African Americans have defended our nation with loyalty, honor, and patriotism, during peace time and in every war fought by or within the United States.

On military installations around the world, the Department of Defense (DoD) joins in paying tribute to African Americans' contributions to protecting the nation and enriching our culture.

# Service Members Highlighted

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The following slides highlight Service Members featured on the poster: Private Cathay Williams, Private Howard P. Perry, Major Charity Adams, the Golden Thirteen, Fireman First Class Marvin Sanders, Second Lieutenant Marcella Hayes, General Colin Powell and Second Lieutenant Emily Perez.

# Private Cathay Williams

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In 1866, Cathay Williams enlisted in the Army using the name William Cathay. She told her recruiting officer that she was a 22-year-old cook. An Army surgeon examined her and determined the recruit was fit for duty.

Williams made her mark in history by becoming the first documented Black woman to enlist in the Army even though U.S. Army regulations forbade the enlistment of women.

[Cathay Williams](#)



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army

# Private Howard P. Perry

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Breaking a tradition of 167 years, the U.S. Marine Corps started enlisting African Americans in 1942.

The first man to enlist was Howard P. Perry. With 119 other recruits, he began the grueling process of becoming a Marine at Montford Point near Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The trainees were not allowed to enter the main base without a white escort.

After completing boot camp they were shipped to combat zones, in all-Black units.

[Howard P. Perry](#)

[Montford Point Marines](#)



Photo courtesy of the National Archives

# Major Charity Adams

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army

[Charity Adams](#)

Major Charity Adams served as the Battalion Commander of the only African-American Women's Army Corps (WAC) unit to be deployed overseas during World War II.

Commanding the 6888th Central Postal Battalion, Adams and her 800 troops were stationed in Birmingham, England.

Although faced with the hardships and inequalities of segregation in the United States Army, Adams and her battalion not only accomplished their mission but earned the respect of their fellow soldiers.



# Golden Thirteen



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Navy. Top row: John Walter Reagan, Jesse Walter Arbor, Dalton Louis Baugh, Frank Ellis Sublett. Middle row: Graham Edward Martin, Charles Byrd Lear, Phillip George Barnes, Reginald E. Goodwin. Bottom row: James Edward Hair, Samuel Edward Barnes, George Clinton Cooper, William Sylvester White, Dennis Denmark Nelson.

[Golden Thirteen](#)

In 1944, the Navy commissioned its first African-American officers. This historic action was a major step forward for African Americans in the Navy and in American society.

The 12 commissioned officers, and a warrant officer who received his rank at the same time, came to be known as the “*Golden Thirteen*.”

General Colin Powell said, “*...from the very beginning, they understood...that history had dealt them a stern obligation. They realized that in their hands rested the chance to help open the blind moral eye that America had turned on the question of race.*”



# Fireman First Class Marvin Sanders

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Fireman First Class Marvin Sanders served in the engine room of an Army repair ship manned by the Coast Guard. His ship helped to repair the invading U.S. fleet in the southwest Pacific.

The history of African American participation in the Coast Guard dates back to the very founding of the service in 1790. In over 225 years of Coast Guard history, African Americans have been the first minority group to serve, first to fight, and the first to sacrifice.

Photo courtesy of the National Archives

[Coast Guard history](#) [Marvin Sanders](#)

# Second Lieutenant Marcella Hayes

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army

[Marcella Hayes](#)

In 1979, at age 23, Second Lieutenant Marcella Hayes became the first Black female pilot in the U.S. Armed Forces when she completed Army helicopter flight training at the U.S. Army Aviation Center, Fort Rucker, Alabama.

Her helicopter flight training required she earn her paratrooper badge and pass the Flight Aptitude Selection Test as well as the flight physical. Hayes was the 55th woman to earn her pilot's wings.

# General Colin Powell

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Photo courtesy of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

[Colin Powell](#)

General Colin Powell made history by becoming the first black Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest military position in the Department of Defense, and served as chairman from Oct. 1, 1989, to Sept. 30, 1993.

At age 52, he was also the youngest officer to serve in this position. Powell made history again when he became the first appointed black Secretary of State, Jan. 20, 2001.

# Second Lieutenant Emily Perez

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Military Academy

[Emily Perez](#)

Emily J.T. Perez, born to a military family, held the second-highest rank in her senior class at West Point. As Brigade Command Sergeant Major, she held the distinction of being the highest-ranking minority woman in the history of the U.S. Military Academy.

After her commissioning, Perez, a platoon leader, was killed while patrolling southern Iraq near Najaf in 2006 when a roadside bomb exploded under her Humvee. She was 23 years old.

Perez was the first female graduate of West Point to die in Iraq and was buried at the academy.

# Conclusion

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Throughout America's history, Black Service Members have honorably answered the call of duty. From the Battle of Lexington to the Battle of Fallujah to present-day, Black Service Members have maintained this rich tradition and continue to serve in the United States Armed Forces with great valor and distinction.

# End

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