

Resource Packet

And Still, They Served:
Black Servicewomen in World War II



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Resource Packet

And Still, They Served: Black Servicewomen in World War II

Selected Primary Sources

- Excerpt from WAC CPT Dovey Johnson Roundtree's 2015 memoir about recruiting Black women to join the Army
- Photos of Black women training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, 1942
- Oral history excerpt from WAC PVT Henrietta Stevenson Ingram

COVER PHOTO:

WAC Major Charity Adams Earley inspecting servicewomen of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. Birmingham, England, 1945. (National Archives)



Document 1



“

I'd chosen the WAAC, knowing —albeit incompletely—of its segregation policy. And I would have chosen it again, because despite all I'd endured at Fort Des Moines, I still believed in everything the WAAC stood for. I believed in the war effort, in the critical role of women in that effort, and in the right of blacks to fight alongside whites—not later, not at some distant future date when America and the Army walked out into the light and abandoned Jim Crow, but now.

”

CPT Dovey Johnson Roundtree
2015

In Her Own Words:

Dovey Johnson Roundtree, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps,
World War II on Recruiting for the Jim Crow Army

1. What reasons does Roundtree give for her decision to join the segregated WAAC?

2. What common causes for both Black and white Americans could Roundtree use to motivate eligible Black servicewomen to fight in World War II?

3. How could Black women help to end discrimination in the United States by enlisting in the Army in large numbers?

Text Source:

Justice Older Than the Law: The Life of Dovey Johnson Roundtree
(2015) by Dovey Johnson Roundtree and Katie McCabe, page 63.

Document 2

Seeing History:
Public Relations/Recruitment
Photographs of Women’s Army
Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) Soldiers
Training at Fort Des Moines,
Iowa, 1942.

Harriet West Waddy Collection
U.S. Army Women’s Museum • Fort Lee • Virginia



Caption:
Fort Des Moines, Iowa
November 1942

“
Truck tire trouble is investigated promptly by auxiliaries in the motor transport specialist school at the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps Training Center at Fort Des Moines. In the school, trainees are taught all details of maintenance as well as operation, in order that when they complete the course they may be immediately sent to duty driving Army vehicles, thereby releasing men from non-combat driving jobs.

Negro and white auxiliaries work together in the practical problems of this course. Changing the truck tire above in a garage at the Des Moines WAAC Training Center are, left, Thelma Roush, Carson, Iowa, and right, Mildred L. Epps, Chicago, Illinois. Auxiliary Roush helped run her family’s transport business before entering the WAAC, and Auxiliary Epps, former nursery supervisor, hope to work in the supply section of motor transport.

Public Relations Office,
WAAC Training Center,
Fort Des Moines, Iowa

”

Photo Observation Chart:

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES
Who is in this photograph?	What is in this photograph?	What is happening in this photograph?

- When was this photo taken? Who took this photo?
.....
- Why did they take this photo? What is its purpose?
.....
.....
- What information or perspectives does this photo show that a written text could not do as well?
.....
.....
.....
- Why does the caption make a point of adding that both “Negro and white auxiliaries have equal opportunity to qualify for the training?”
.....
.....
.....

Document 2

Seeing History:
Public Relations/Recruitment
Photographs of Women’s Army Auxiliary
Corps (WAAC) Soldiers Training at Fort
Des Moines, Iowa, 1942.

Harriet West Waddy Collection
U.S. Army Women’s Museum • Fort Lee • Virginia



Caption:

Fort Des Moines, Iowa
November 1942

“

A practical exercise in supply record keeping for the Army is the subject of a personalized classroom discussion between two auxiliaries in the administrative specialist course at the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps Training Center at Fort Des Moines.

After completing the intensive course, administrative specialists go to duty in record keeping sections and supply depots and offices, releasing men from such non-combat jobs for more active duty. Negro and white auxiliaries have equal opportunity to qualify for the training. In the classroom discussion above, is, left, Auxiliary Claire Beecher, New York City, former dress designer, comparing notes with Auxiliary Nancie E. Ellison, former beautician of Indianapolis, Indiana, at right. ”

Public Relations Office,
WAAC Training Center,
Fort Des Moines, Iowa

Photo Observation Chart:

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Document 3



Henrietta Stevenson Ingram
Douglas Air Base • Arizona • 1944

Henrietta Stevenson Ingram (1925–2015) was born in Statesville, North Carolina. At 17 years old, she lied about her age and enlisted in the segregated Women's Army Corps (WAC) and was inducted in Charlotte, North Carolina. Ingram attended basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, and then assigned to Douglas Army Air Base in Arizona with other Black WACs. She first worked as a mimeograph operator in the print shop and then later served as a nurse's aid in the base clinic. In December 1944, Ingram left the Army due to her marriage and pregnancy. Her husband remained in the Navy and was stationed in New York following World War II. In the oral history excerpts below, Ingram discusses the racism she experienced while serving in the Women's Army Corps.

Oral History:

Private Henrietta Stevenson Ingram,
Women's Army Corps, World War II.

Women Veterans Historical Project – Oral History
Collection – University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Interviewee: Henrietta Stevenson Ingram (HI)

Interviewer: Hermann J. Trojanowski (HT)

Date: February 3, 1999

Pages 8–9 and 14–15

<http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/WVHP/id/4206/rec/4>

Questions to think about while reading the excerpt of Henrietta Stevenson Ingram.

Write your answers in the space below.

- Based on your reading of these excerpts, what is oral history and what do you think the benefits are to examining and reading it?
.....
.....
.....
- In paragraph 2 of the excerpt, Henrietta Stevenson Ingram recounted that her supervisor, Lieutenant Clark, confronted their commanding (white, male) officer, Colonel McGuire, and said that her WACs (including Ingram) "would not work as maids or on permanent KP (Kitchen Police)." Why did Colonel McGuire expect Ingram's unit of all-Black WAC soldiers that were stationed under him to work as maids or kitchen help?
.....
.....
.....
- Ingram told her interviewer that she felt her service not only contributed to the war effort during World War II, but that "we made a contribution to civil rights." About which incident from her service at Douglas Army Air Base is Ingram describing? How did the local community in Arizona treat the Black WAC soldiers?
.....
.....
.....



Interviewer: Hermann J. Trojanowski (HT)

HT: Well, I was going to ask you if you ever received any special treatment because you were a WAC or a woman?

Interviewee: Henrietta Stevenson Ingram (HI)

HI: Well, no I don't think so. We were refused service in the Service Club because we were black. And, also, some of the other WACs were assigned to permanent KP duty in the hospital mess hall. One of the girls got word to Lieutenant Clark about the KP. When she heard—well, let's backtrack a little—actually, quite a bit!

After we arrived at Douglas, we heard that the commanding officer—I believe his name was Colonel McGuire—said that he had called Washington, or someone, and asked for “them” to send him WACs, but they sent him Negroes. That is what he called us. Lieutenant Clark went to Colonel McGuire's office and laid her bars on the table. She told him that he could take her bars, but her WACs would not work as maids or on permanent KP.

By this time, there were a lot of girls at Douglas, not just our basic group. That Colonel probably asked for clerical people, secretaries and such. Some of the WACs at Douglas were from Washington, New York and Philadelphia. They had gone to school and had worked. Of course, we southern black women had not, for the most part. But you have some people who may not have any special training, but they are able to learn new things. I had never worked in a print shop, but I did a good job.

Now to get back on track. Douglas is right on the border of Mexico. You can walk across the border to Agua Prieta, Mexico, from Douglas, Arizona. We had a lot of Mexicans working on the post. I think all of the employees in the Service Club were Mexican. We went up there even though no blacks were allowed. When you have a bunch of young, black females, they're kind of tough. The men in the black company were docile. They would not have dared gone to the Service Club. Lieutenant Clark said, “We're

going to the Service Club. Have some change in your pockets.” So we marched in there, and this little Mexican girl said, “We don't serve ‘Nigs’ in here.” Her English wasn't very good. “We don't serve ‘Nigs.’” [laughs] So Lieutenant Clark asks if anyone in our group had experience working at a soda fountain—they were called soda jerks then. There were two sisters from Chicago—half-sisters really, another person from Pennsylvania, and Lettie Williams from Washington. They had all done this type of work. Lieutenant Clark told them to go behind the counter and fix anything we wanted. She then told us to lay down the exact money on the counter. So we did. Everyone else began leaving the club.

There was another problem with the movie theater. The theater had regular seats, except in the back there were about two or three benches—just legs with a board across them. The black soldiers, male and female, were expected to sit on these benches. Lieutenant Clark said, “You are not going to go up there and sit on those benches.” She told us, “Get your money and pay at the window.” After we paid, we went inside to the regular seats. Lieutenant Clark told us to spread out all over the theater. She did not want to see any two of us sitting together. The Mexicans, who were working in the theater, told us that “Nigs” were not allowed in the regular seats and called the manager. The manager called the MPs [military police].

They turned on the lights and stopped the movie. It was a big to-do. We just sat there. At that time, they did not have any female MPs and the male MPs were not supposed to handle any females. So they could only ask us to go, but we didn't go. The southerners in the theater were talking about it. The ones from other states were yelling out, “Turn off the lights and run the movie. What difference is it going to make?” Others were yelling out some funny things. “It won't come off. Now, don't you think, if it would come off, they would have washed it off a long time ago so we wouldn't have to go through this?” [laughs] It was really hilarious.

After this, they quickly built a little Service Club for the black military. The group of black soldiers on the base, who were mainly manual laborers, built the club. From then on we sat where we wanted in the theater. We went back the next night, the next night and the next night. Lieutenant Clark was called to the commander's office because of these incidents. We also wrote a petition to Mrs. Roosevelt about our problems.

HT: Do you feel you made a contribution to the war effort?

HI: Yes, I do. I really feel that I made contribution to the war effort, and, also, I feel that we made a contribution to civil rights. It was small and the authorities at Douglas did not let the news out. But we certainly changed a lot of things while we were there.

HT: So, Douglas was a much better place to live and work after you were there?

HI: Yes.

HT: Do you recall what the general mood or climate of the country was during World War II?

HI: [pauses]

HT: Was it patriotic or was there a lot of fear?

HI: It was very patriotic. Because of the climate, you would have thought that they would have dropped segregation automatically, but they held onto that. If you were off the post in uniform, everybody, white or black, gave you that extra consideration.

HT: Just because you were in uniform?

HI: Yes. But I don't know what would have happened in a restaurant or at a water fountain that had “white only” and “colored” signs. I don't know what would have happened to a military person who was not used to watching for that type of sign and they used the wrong facility. But if it was giving you a ride or giving you directions, most anybody would do that for you, regardless of race. The uniform automatically got you that kindness. But still the prejudice and segregation stayed.





Student Activity

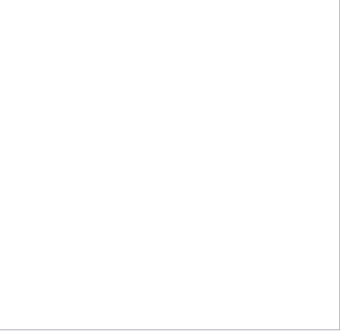
Post-Program Activity

Activity: Profiles of Courage

Profiles of Courage Baseball Cards

Notable Black Servicewomen of World War II

- ☐ 1 CPT Della Raney (Army Nurse Corps)
- ☐ 2 MAJ Charity Adams Earley (Women's Army Corps)
- ☐ 3 LTJG Harriet Ida Pickens (WAVES)
- ☐ 4 2LT Elinor Powell (Army Nurse Corps)
- ☐ 5 CPT Dovey Johnson Roundtree (Women's Army Corps)
- ☐ 6 Ensign Frances Wills (WAVES)

	Name:
	Date of birth:
	Hometown:
	Branch of Service:
	Years of Service:
<p>Summarize her service during World War II:</p>	
<p>What did she do after World War II and/or leaving the service?</p>	
<p>What is one thing that surprised or impressed you about this servicewoman?</p>	

Notes:



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