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Presidio Army Museum and National Park Service
Exhibit Opens Honoring Black Soldier

The Presidio Army Museum, in conjunction with the National Park Service and Fort Point National Historic Site, is proud and pleased to present an exhibit...the first of its kind...titled: "Ready and Forward" - the history of the Black soldier in the United States Army. This initial exhibit was designed to educate the public as to the forgotten and untold history of Black soldiers who have served in the United States Army from 1776 to the present.

Although few people realize it, nearly a million and a half black men have served this nation in times of war and peace. Books, information, photographs and personal memorabilia of black soldiers in the Army are extremely rare and the Presidio Army Museum spent over one year looking for artifacts and original photographic images to use for this exhibit.

It was indeed very fortunate that historian Anthony Powell had spent nearly 10 years of his life collecting both memorabilia and extremely rare photographs of Black soldiers. This collection, donated by the very soldiers themselves, is considered one of the finest in the world, far surpassing even the photograph holdings in the National Archives.

Few people realize or remember today that the United States Army was segregated and that our country maintained both a white and a black Army separated from each other from 1776 to 1953.

Black soldiers were among the most distinguished and decorated men in the history of the Army and received per capita more medals for bravery in the 19th Century than any other group of soldiers. Even though treated in many cases as second class citizens, Black soldiers earned the reputation for being the best soldiers in the United States Army during much of the history of this country.

The history of the Black soldier in America is a unique one...unique because this story has absolutely never been told before. Although Black soldiers have served in every American war with gallantry and dignity, proving both their loyalty and bravery, no tribute to their intrepidity has ever been mounted. This exhibit will serve as a permanent tribute and memorial to those million and a half men and women who served our nation in its time of need. This exhibit will also rectify a long deficiency in the history books of this country. Even now, this country still is served by Black men and women who are a majority in the United States Army. There is a tremendous need to teach those young men and women of their proud and dignified history, and that history is still being made. This exhibit will fulfill that goal.

Black soldiers charged up San Juan Hill followed by the Old Rough Rider himself, Teddy Roosevelt. Historians often cite Roosevelt as being the hero of San Juan Hill, but few historians realize that it was the all-Black 9th and 10th Cavalries and the 24th Infantry that won that famous battle. Roosevelt, then a Lieutenant Colonel, literally charged up San Juan Hill with the aid of those Black soldiers and established a reputation for himself which enabled him to become President of the United States. It can be said that Black soldiers helped elect a President.

The exhibit is comprized of 120 rare, unpublished photographs of Black soldiers. Included are uniforms, medals, personal photographs, rare books, and other priceless memorabilia never before seen. Much of this material was donated by the families of Black veterans such as the Distinguished Service Cross, medals, certificates, like the one worn by Ernest Stokes in the Philippines in 1899. Other items include the Medal of Honor and uniform worn by Lawrence Joel in Vietnam who saved 13 of his comrades' lives despite being wounded in both legs. This is an exhibit that all Americans may be proud of.

The exhibit is being displayed at Fort Point National Historic Site and is co-sponsored by the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area along with the Presidio of San Francisco. The exhibit will be housed in the newly restored rooms on the east side of the Old Fort Point. It will be on display at the Fort for one year when it is planned to go on a national traveling tour.

Fort Point lays beneath the southern anchorage of the Golden Gate Bridge and was built in 1861 to house cannons which would defend against an attack on San Francisco Bay during the Civil War.

This exhibit is the "First Ever" attempt to have a joint display by the United States Army and the National Park Service to interpret this long forgotten and neglected piece of American history.



Presidio Army Museum Presents:

"READY AND FORWARD"

The Untold History of the Black Soldier in the US Army

"Ready and Forward" is more than an exhibit. It is a true story that has spread over 200 years of American history and more. It began before that fateful year of 1776, and its story is still unfolding today in 1981.

With a few exceptions, the historical depiction of black history in America has been both scanty and unrepresentative with respect to historical fact. "Ready and Forward" is the first such exhibit to tell the true story of a forgotten part of American history.

We began the story with America's quest for freedom in 1776 from Britain. Most people don't realize that one of the first to shed his blood for American independence was a black man. As the war progressed, more blacks would join the ranks in the American effort for freedom. A total of 5,000 blacks would fight in that first war.

During those early years, black soldiers would serve side by side with their white counterparts in integrated units and would also serve in all black units with black officers. During the War of 1812, for the first time in American history, a black militia with its own black line officers had been authorized by state legislative enactment in Louisiana. Under General Andrew Jackson, the two all black militia battalions joined in defending front line positions in the Battle of New Orleans. Both battalions were commended highly by General Jackson. These, as other black troops, received the same pay and treatment as white soldiers and were among the last troops to be mustered out of federal service.

During the Civil War, on the Union side, there was a total of 186,000 black combat troops, 130 Infantry regiments, 7 Cavalry regiments, and 19 Artillery

regiments. These troops fought in 449 major and minor engagements. Sixteen black soldiers earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. Black officers for the short time they had their commissions were able to display extraordinary leadership on the battlefield.

After the Civil War, a bill was passed by Congress in 1866 that created two regular Cavalry units: the 9th and 10th, and two regular Infantry units: the 24th and 25th. These soldiers would serve on the American frontier for 30 years. During that time, 13 soldiers from these regiments would be recipients of the Medal of Honor.

In 1870, a unique unit was formed. It was known as the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts. It would never number more than 50 men at any one time. Four members of the unit, during the years 1870-1914, would be awarded the Medal of Honor.

In 1873, a tall, slim, young man, Henry Ossian Flipper, entered the United States Military Academy. His arrival caused a stir among the Cadet Corps. This son of a Georgian slave was to be the first black to graduate from West Point and the first to become an officer in the regular Army.

Almost unnoticed in Army history is John Hanks Alexander, the second black to become an officer in the regular Army. Charles Young became the third black regular Army line officer in 1889. An outstanding officer, he eventually would reach the grade of Colonel. In 1896, he set a new precedent by transferring to the famous 7th Cavalry, a white regiment, where he remained on the rolls for one year.

These were not the only blacks to live in officers' quarters. Five of the Chaplains appointed to the black regiments before the end of the 19th Century were blacks.

The first black troops mobilized for service in the Spanish-American War were the four black regiments of the regular Army. One reason that the black regiments were among the first called for duty in Cuba was the War Department's assumption that blacks possessed a "natural immunity" to the ravages of the climate and diseases of the tropics. Whatever the motives for mobilizing the black regulars, the soldiers themselves welcomed the assignment as an opportunity to demonstrate their "soldierly qualities" and to win respect for their race.

Despite the prejudice which they encountered in Florida, or perhaps because of it, the black troops accredited themselves with distinction on the battlefield of Cuba, particularly at Las Guasimas, El Caney, and San Juan Hill. Five black soldiers of the 10th Cavalry won the Medal of Honor and over 20 others won the Certificate of Merit during the Cuban Campaign of '98.

After the turn of the century, black regiments, like all those in the Army, had ceremonial duties, including acting as escorts and marching in parades. Two troops of the 9th Cavalry escorted President Roosevelt when he visited San Francisco in 1903. The occasion was, according to a newspaper account, "the first instance in the West where black soldiers have held the position of honor in a public procession". The same regiment also participated in the 1905 Presidential Inaugural Parade.

In 1916, the 10th Cavalry was part of the Punitive Expedition into Mexico. The reaction of military leaders to blacks' conduct during the expeditions indicated the respect they still had for black soldiers in combat.

During the first World War, over 200,000 blacks were in the Army. There were two fighting divisions: the 92nd and 93rd. The 369th Infantry spent 191 days at the front. They were also the first Americans to reach the Rhine. The 93rd Division fought most of the war under the command of the French. The rewards for

all the blood and sweat black troops left in France were few. They were not permitted to march in the great Allied Victory Parade in Paris, although the Parade included black troops of both England and France. After the Armistice, black soldiers became the objects of segregation, discrimination and humiliation. At the heart of most of the post-Armistice restrictions put upon black soldiers was the fear of them mingling with French people. Another reason for restrictions on blacks, besides fear they might have contact with French women, was uneasiness lest they become infected with a foreign, radical ideology which might lead them to demand equality when they got home. Would black soldiers still be "Ready and Forward?"

With the outbreak of World War II, the Army activated three combat units composed of black enlisted men and white and black officers...the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions and the 2nd Cavalry Division. In the same year of 1942, black troops, mostly engineer and quartermaster units, were among the first to be sent overseas. Also during the war, there was formed the all black 399th Pursuit Squadron of the Army Air Corps. They flew over 1,500 missions during the war.

Innumerable accounts report the difficulties experienced by black military personnel with segregation on the Jim Crow Railroad System, even when they were traveling under government orders. Station restaurants often refused them service leaving them hungry for hours. Most galling was the denial of the facilities and hospitality that were extended to German prisoners of war. In March 1945, the crisis declared: "Nothing so lower Negro morale as the frequent preferential treatment of Axis prisoners of war in contrast with deprecatory Army policy toward American troops who happened to be Negro."

On one occasion, a group of German prisoners of war traveling under guard to the West Coast ate with the white passengers in the main section of the dining car, but the black soldiers assigned to guard them were fed behind a curtain at

