



African American Warrant Officers and the Vietnam War

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AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

The period from May 25, 2012 to November 11, 2025 has been designated by the President of the United States as the "Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War."

Background

The total number of U.S. Soldiers deployed to Vietnam was 536,100. More than 58,000 Americans were killed in the war. The Vietnam War death toll among all Warrant Officers was 1,276.

The Vietnam War had the highest proportion of African Americans ever to serve in an American war. During the height of the U.S. involvement, 1965-69, African Americans, who were 11% of the American population, made up 12.6% of the soldiers in Vietnam. According to the Vietnam Conflict Extract Data File of the Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) Extract File, 7,243 African Americans were killed in the war.

In the introduction to his book, "Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Americans," Wallace Terry, African American journalist and oral historian, stated that the Black Soldier "fought at a time when his sisters and brothers were fighting and dying at home for equal rights and greater opportunities, for a color-blind nation promised to him in the Constitution he swore to defend. He fought at a time when some of his leaders chastised him for waging war against a people of color, and when his Communist foe appealed to him to take up arms instead against the forces of racism in America. The loyalty of the black Vietnam War veteran stood a greater test on the battleground than did the loyalty of any other American; his patriotism begs a special salute at home. Above all, his experience requires the special notice of history, as it judges and continues to judge the Vietnam saga."

In this article, I would like to share the stories of several African American Warrant Officers who served in Vietnam. Hopefully their stories will serve as an inspiration to others and show the significant contributions, achievements, and sacrifices of the African American Warrant Officer.

CW3 (Ret) Doris Allen

Doris Allen was born on 19 May 1927 in El Paso, TX. She joined the Army in October 1950.

Doris "Lucki" Allen, a Specialist Seven (SP7) in the Women's Army Corps (WAC), volunteered for Vietnam at the age of 40 in 1967. She served as the Senior Intelligence Analyst, Army Operations Center, Headquarters, U.S. Army at Long Binh, Vietnam. She later served in the position of Supervisor, Security Division, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Security, Plans, and Operations, Headquarters, 1st Logistical Command, Vietnam. She was appointed as a Warrant Officer in the spring of 1970. At the time of her appointment, she was one of only nine female Warrant Officers in Military

Intelligence and one of only 23 in the entire Army at the time.

At the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) in Saigon, she was OIC of the Translation Branch, Combined Documents Exploitation Center (CDEC), where all captured enemy documents were translated and analyzed. CW3 (Ret) Allen saw documents naming her on a list of human targets – intelligence personnel – to be eliminated. She decided at that time to end her third Vietnam tour.

CW3 (Ret) Allen's assignments after Vietnam included tours at the Army Intelligence Center and School at Fort Holabird, MD and Fort Huachuca, AZ; a student at the Defense Language Institute, completing the French and German courses; with the intelligence unit at the Presidio of San Francisco, CA; as a Special Agent with a MI Brigade in Germany, and as the Senior CI Agent and Security Manager at the Presidio of San Francisco, CA. She was the first female graduate of the Interrogation of Prisoners of War (IPW) Course at Fort Holabird and later served as an instructor for the course.



CW3 (Ret) Allen was promoted to CW3 in 1978. She retired in 1980 after a distinguished 30-year career.

CW3 (Ret) Allen's awards and decorations include the Bronze Star (2 OLCs), Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal (6th award), Army of the Occupation Medal (Japan), National Defense Service Medal (1 OLC), Vietnam Service Medal (10 campaigns), United Nations Service Medal, the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, the Korean Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Meritorious Unit Commendation, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm.

CW3 (Ret) Allen received her bachelor's degree from Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama. She also holds a PhD in psychology from

the Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA. CW3 (Ret) Allen was inducted in the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame at Fort Huachuca, AZ in 2009. She is the first and, thus far, only African American woman elected in the MI Hall of Fame. She currently resides in Oakland, CA.

CW3 (Ret) Hazel Lewis, Jr.

Hazel Lewis was born on 1 February 1942 in Darlington, SC. He volunteered for the Army in 1957 and completed basic training at Fort Dix, NJ. CW3 (Ret) Lewis served stateside in Special Forces units at Fort Bragg, NC and Fort Campbell, KY. His first tour of Vietnam was in 1967 in Special Forces. He returned from Vietnam and spent six months at Fort Wolters, TX, and six months at Fort Rucker, AL to attend flight training. He was one of five African Americans in his class, and he was the only one to graduate. CW3 (Ret) Lewis' second tour in Vietnam was with the 101st Airborne as an aviator. While in country, he was credited with more than 1,000 hours of flight time on the Chinook helicopter. He was stationed in Phu Bai, South Vietnam.

CW3 (Ret) Hazel Lewis retired from the U.S. Army in November 1980. While serving his country, he held various positions all over the world to include combat tours in Vietnam and three tours in Germany. He was awarded numerous awards and accommodations to include The Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star with Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart, Air Medal with two Silver Leaf Clusters, Army Commendation Medal with two Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters, Good Conduct Medal with Bronze clasp with three loops, Presidential Unit Emblem, Meritorious Unit Emblem, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with Silver Star, Combat Infantryman Badge, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon with Device, Master Parachutist Badge, Senior Army Aviator Badge, and the 45 cal. Expert Pistol Badge. CW3 (Ret) Lewis was also an original Green Beret (Special Forces) and served on Project OMEGA, Vietnam.

CW3 (Ret) Lewis received an Associate Degree from Central Texas College in Killeen, TX and a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management from Cameron University in Lawton, TX. He briefly taught at Central Texas College. Lewis also obtained graduate degree credits in Business Management.

CW3 (Ret) Lewis was employed at Cameron University (Lawton, OK) as the Men's Residence Hall Director beginning in 1989 and retired in 2012. He was affectionally called "Pops" by the students. Lewis additionally served double duty as a reserve police officer and as president of Chapter 32 of the Special Forces Association in Lawton.

CW3 (Ret) Lewis is currently enjoying retirement.

CW3 (Ret) Donald J. Rander

Donald Rander was born on 4 June 1938 in the Bronx, NY. He was drafted into the Army in November 1961. He completed basic training at Fort Dix, NJ and advanced training as a Military Policeman at

Fort Gordon, GA. In July 1965, he entered the Army Intelligence School, then located at Fort Holabird, MD, and served there as an instructor in the Department of Counterintelligence.

CW3 (Ret) Rander volunteered for Vietnam in 1967. He was assigned to the Hue Field Office as the Assistant Special Agent in Charge. During the Tet offensive in February 1968, Rander was captured and spent five years and two months in North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camps. He was held in isolation for most of his years as a prisoner. Rander was beaten, his legs were in sticks and he was forced to stand or kneel for hours on end. He was usually the only African American in the POW camps. According to a report, CW3 (Ret) Rander was not supposed to be in Vietnam on the day he was captured. He had just finished a four-year enlistment and had reenlisted, which merited him a free month back in the United States. He delayed his leave until February, to be home for four family birthdays that month. He was captured the day before he was scheduled to leave. On 27 March 1973, CW3 (Ret) Rander was released from captivity and was reunited with his family three days later.

CW3 (Ret) Donald Rander served 10 more years in the military, retiring in 1983. Upon his retirement from the military, he remained as a civilian with the Army's Foreign Counterintelligence Agency in Maryland and Hawaii, and with the Army's Intelligence and Security Command headquartered in Virginia. He retired as a civilian in 2003.

CW3 (Ret) Rander died at age 66 on 21 April 2005, due to complications of lung cancer. He is buried in Section 60, Site 1709, at Arlington National Cemetery.

BG (Ret) Ezell Ware, Jr.

Ezell Ware, Jr. was born on 6 February 1941 in Mobile, AL, and raised in McAlester, OK. He initially joined the Marines as a private, but later joined the Army and by 1967, he had advanced to the rank of Warrant Officer, completing Warrant Officer pilot training and graduating with Class 67-7.

On 9 September 1968, the 40th ARVN Regiment was battling an enemy force of unknown size near Bong Son. The ARVN unit was hampered during a battle by approaching darkness. Then CW2 Ware's unit, the 61st Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) in Binh Dinh Province, South Vietnam, was called in. A combination of the 61st, heavy artillery, and the United States Air Force blasted away at the enemy. After five NVA had been killed, a wounded NVA threw his hands in the air and surrendered. Then CW2 Ware's gunship guided the enemy to the nearest friendly troops. He and First Lieutenant Robert McElhose were credited with obtaining the 61st AHC's first detainee while still in the air. During his tour in Vietnam, as an Army Cobra helicopter gunship pilot, he was shot down and evaded capture

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from the enemy for three weeks. During those three weeks of evasion, he protected and saved his fellow crewmember, who was severely wounded, from capture and death.

BG (Ret) Ezell Ware is the author of a book titled, "By Duty Bound – Survival and Redemption in a Time of War," his autobiography recounting his Vietnam experiences.

He later joined the California National Guard, where he rose to the rank of Brigadier General (CA). He retired from the military in 2003 after 42 years of service. BG (Ret) Ware became President of Ezell Ware and Associates, a business development and public relations firm in Austin, TX.

BG (Ret) Ezell Ware died in Austin, TX, at the age of 68, of cancer on 30 June 2009.

Fallen Comrades

WO1 Sylvester Davis was killed from a hostile fire incident on 23 January 1969, while performing duty as a helicopter pilot with the 283rd Medical Detachment in Pleiku Province, South Vietnam. WO1 Davis was born on 30 May 1940 in Akron, OH, and was 28 years old. He graduated in Flight Class 68-7 with a Military Occupational Specialty of 062B (Helicopter Pilot, Utility and Light Cargo Single Ro-

tor). WO1 Davis started his Vietnam tour on August 23, 1968 and his total military service was eight years.

WO1 Donald Harrison was killed in action during an incident on 2 December 1966, while performing duty as a pilot. His age at death was 21 years old. He was born on 9 June 1945, in New York, NY. WO1 Harrison was a graduate of Class 66-13 with a Military Occupational Specialty of 062B (Helicopter Pilot, Utility and Light Cargo Single Rotor). He started his Vietnam tour on 7 October 1966 and was assigned to the 281st AHC, 17th Combat Aviation Group (CAG) under the 1st Aviation Brigade. His helicopter was hit by ground fire and crashed while attempting to extract a Special Forces recon team in Laos.

Conclusion

As we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War over the next 12 years, let's not forget that African Americans participated and played important roles in the war. Some were draftees, some were volunteers. Some were enlisted and others were officers. They all served our country. African American Warrant Officers were there too. ■

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