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As we honor Black History Month and the contributions of Black service members, veterans, and their families, we also take a moment to acknowledge the recent tragic loss involving the U.S. Army helicopter and American Airlines plane collision in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday, January 29. This heartbreaking incident impacted the military and veteran community, especially those who have served in aviation and those with loved ones in uniform. Safety remains a top priority, and we are grateful for the swift comprehensive response of emergency responders across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, including Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, among others.

During times like these, we will support each other and reflect on the sacrifices made by our service members. We encourage anyone struggling with grief or emotional distress to reach out for support, whether through a trusted peer, a mental health professional, or one of the many organizations dedicated to helping military families navigate difficult times.

This month, as we highlight historical Black figures in military service, we do so with a deep respect for those who have come before us and those who continue to serve today. We'll always remember, learn, and uplift one another as we move forward together.

If you or someone you know needs support, please see the resources at the end of this newsletter. We are here for you.



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
AND HUMAN SERVICES

Community Events

- ✓ Thursday, February 13, 12 - 3 p.m. : Veteran Cultural Competency Training. [Register](#)
- ✓ Thursday, February 13, 1 - 3 p.m. : Military Cultural Competency and Transition Awareness. [Register](#)
- ✓ Saturday, February 15 : The Japanese American Veterans Association Topgolf Event. [Register](#)
- ✓ Thursday, February 20, 1 - 3 p.m. : Championing Health Equity in Meeting the Behavioral Health Needs of Minority Veterans. [Register](#)
- ✓ Thursday, February 20, 3:30 p.m. : Military Voices- Creative Writing Workshop for Active Duty, Veterans and Military Families (Every first and third Thursday). [Register](#)

- ✓ Tuesday, February 25 to Thursday, February 27 : VIP START - Three-day, 27-hour veteran entrepreneurship training program that is offered at NO COST to Veterans nationwide. [Register](#)
- ✓ Wednesday, February 26 to Thursday, February 27, 12 - 7 p.m. : Military Cultural Awareness and Suicide Prevention Training (Two-day Training, 12 CEUs). [Register](#)
- ✓ Thursday, February 27, 12 - 1:30 p.m. : Center for Deployment Psychology: Clinical Approaches to Working with Guilt in Patients with PTSD. [Register](#)
- ✓ Friday, February 21, 12 - 3 p.m. : Defense Department Survivor Symposium: [Register](#)

Learning about Military Culture at your Leisure (Free & Rolling):

- ✓ The Basics of Military Culture: [Register](#)
- ✓ 15 Things Veterans Want You to Know: [Register](#)

Special Observances & Resources

- ✓ **February: American Heart Month**
- ✓ **Monday, February 3: Four Chaplains Day**
- ✓ **Tuesday, February 4: USO (United Service Organizations) Birthday**
- ✓ **Sunday, February 9 to Saturday February 15: National Salute to Veteran Patients**
- ✓ **Monday, February 17: Random Acts of Kindness Day**
- ✓ **Wednesday, February 19: Coast Guard Reserve Birthday**
- ✓ **Friday, February 21: National Caregivers Day**
- ✓ **Sunday, February 23: Iwo Jima Flag Raising Anniversary**
- ✓ **Friday, February 28 to Saturday, March 29: Ramadan**



[SMVF WEBSITE & RESOURCES](#)

“What’s Going On” and “What’s Happening Brother” by Washington, D.C. Native, Marvin Gaye: Songs of Protest and Reflection

Released in 1971, “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye, born and raised in Washington, D.C., remains one of the most powerful and socially conscious songs in American music history. More than just a hit record, the song became an anthem of protest, compassion, and awareness during a time of great turmoil in the United States. It was born out of frustration with war, civil rights struggles, and societal unrest, giving voice to people affected by injustice, particularly the soldiers who fought in Vietnam.

Marvin Gaye wrote “What’s Going On” as a response to the stories he heard from his brother, Frankie Gaye, also born and raised in Washington, D.C., who served in the United States Army, where he was stationed in Vietnam during the war. Frankie’s firsthand accounts of the horrors of war, the struggles of returning home, and the disconnect between soldiers and the country they fought for deeply impacted Marvin. Inspired by these conversations, Marvin crafted a song that asked urgent questions about the state of the world, which still resonates today. “What’s Going On” is a timeless reminder of the human cost of war and the need for compassion and understanding.



Watch a brief exploration of Marvin Gaye's song "What's Happening Brother." It delves into how the song reflects the experiences of soldiers returning from Vietnam, including Marvin's brother, Frankie, highlighting the challenges faced during reintegration into civilian life.

The Tuskegee Airmen: Trailblazers in Military Aviation

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps, the precursor to the U.S. Air Force. Trained at Tuskegee Army Airfield in Alabama, these pilots and their support personnel overcame significant racial barriers to serving their country during World War II. Their formation was a pivotal step toward integrating the U.S. Armed Forces and challenging discriminatory policies within the military.



During World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen flew over 15,000 sorties in Europe and North Africa, providing crucial escort services to bombers. Their aircraft were distinguished by red-painted tails, earning them the nickname "Red Tails." Despite facing segregation and discrimination, they achieved an impressive combat record, which played a significant role in the eventual desegregation of the U.S. military.

Reference:
Tuskegee Airmen. (n.d). National Air & Space Museum. [Link](#)

Photo Attribution

The legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen endures as a testament to their courage, skill, and determination. Their success challenged prevailing stereotypes and paved the way for future generations of African American service members. Their story continues to inspire and is a significant chapter in both military and civil rights history. Their success played a crucial role in the eventual desegregation of the U.S. military, culminating in President Truman's Executive Order 9981 (1948), which abolished racial segregation in the Armed Forces.



Earlier this month, Lt. Col. Harry Stewart Jr., one of the last surviving Tuskegee Airmen, passed away at the age of 100, on February 2, 2025. His life and service exemplify the extraordinary contributions of these pioneering aviators. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism. After the war, he earned a mechanical engineering degree and had a successful career in the natural gas industry while continuing to advocate for the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen.

The Story of David Fagen: A Buffalo Soldier and Defector

David Fagen was born in 1875 in Tampa, Florida, the son of formerly enslaved parents. Growing up in the post-Reconstruction South, he faced the harsh realities of systemic racism and segregation, which limited opportunities for Black men. Seeking a better future, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment, one of the all-Black units known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

Fagen's military career took him far from home, first to Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and later to the Philippines, where he would make a fateful decision that would define his legacy.

Fighting in Cuba: Exposed to Deadly Disease

Before his service in the Philippines, David Fagen fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War (1898). Assigned to a quarantine hospital in Siboney, Fagen and his fellow Black soldiers were exposed to deadly diseases like yellow fever due to the racist assumption that African Americans were immune to tropical illnesses. Despite contracting yellow fever himself, Fagen recovered and returned to the United States. Yet his loyalty to the military remained steadfast—when the opportunity to reenlist arose, he signed up again, this time joining the fight in the Philippines.



Fagen's time in the Philippines ultimately defined his legacy. On November 17, 1899, Fagen made a bold decision: he deserted the U.S. Army and joined the Filipino revolutionary forces under General Emilio Aguinaldo. He quickly rose through the ranks, becoming a captain in the Filipino army and leading guerrilla attacks against U.S. troops. His knowledge of American military tactics made him an asset, and his ability to outmaneuver his former comrades made him one of the most wanted men in the Philippines.

The U.S. government offered a \$600 bounty for Fagen's capture, branding him a traitor. However, to many Filipinos, he was a hero, a symbol of their resistance against imperialism.

As the war in the Philippines ended, the search for Fagen intensified. His fate, however, remains a mystery.

Some might call him a "rebel", but Fagen's decision to side with Filipino Freedom fighters wasn't an act of rebellion, it was a natural human response to the racism and injustice he witnessed both abroad and at home. Maybe the reason Fagen's name doesn't appear in the mainstream narratives of military history is because his story challenges a system that has long sought to suppress the truth about America's treatment of marginalized communities- THEN AND NOW. His story is not one of treason, it's the one of conscience, courage and human decency, a reminder that loyalty to justice often requires defying the status quo.



The Six Triple Eight: A Netflix Movie Spotlight

In December 2024, Netflix released *The Six Triple Eight*, a war drama directed by Tyler Perry that brings to light the remarkable story of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion- the only all-Black, all-female unit deployed to Europe during World War II.



Photo Attribution

The Mission: Delivering Hope, One Letter at a Time

Led by Major Charity Adams, portrayed by Kerry Washington in the film, the 6888th Battalion was tasked with an immense challenge: clearing a backlog of over 17 million undelivered letters and packages intended for American soldiers stationed across Europe. Facing both racial and gender discrimination, these 855 women worked in grueling conditions, processing approximately 65,000 pieces of mail per shift. Their dedication facilitated soldiers receiving long-awaited correspondence from loved ones, significantly boosting morale on the front lines.



Despite their critical contributions, the achievements of the Six Triple Eight went largely unrecognized for decades. It wasn't until March 2022 that the battalion was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, acknowledging their invaluable service.

The Six Triple Eight not only honors these unsung heroes but also serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and determination displayed by these women in the face of adversity. The film features a stellar cast, including Oprah Winfrey and Susan Sarandon, and has been praised for shedding light on this pivotal yet overlooked chapter in history.

Reference: The Women of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. (n.d.). Women of the 6888th. womenofthe6888th.org.

Watch The Six Triple Eight Trailer:



Friendly reminder from Same Day Access: While these women sorted millions of letters, we know some of you might be tempted to "sort out" a Netflix login from a friend or cousin. We fully support you watching this powerful film, and sharing is caring, although we do not endorse sharing Netflix passwords- those days are over as snail mail. Support the arts and history by logging in with your own household account information! (Just kidding- sort of!) All jokes aside, check with your cell phone or internet provider to see if they offer free Netflix or military discounts, such as T-Mobile's "Netflix on Us" or Go5G Military Plan.



For a deeper insight into the legacy of the 6888th Battalion, you can watch the [video here](#).

Honoring History: Notable Military Landmarks and Legacies in the City of Alexandria

Alexandria, Virginia, has a rich tapestry of Black history intertwined with military heritage. Notable connections include:

United States Colored Troops (USCT):

During the Civil War, the City of Alexandria served as a significant Union stronghold and a hub for the United States Colored Troops. Many Black soldiers were stationed, trained, or received medical care in the City. Notably, injured members of the 28th and 29th U.S.C.T. were transported to Alexandria area hospitals for treatment. The city also became a final resting place for numerous Black soldiers in the Alexandria National Cemetery, located on 1450 Wilkes St, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Fort Ward Museum & Historic Site, 4301 W. Braddock Rd.



Fort Ward is one of the best-preserved Civil War era forts in the Washington, D.C. area. Built in 1861, it was part of the ring of Union forts that defended the nation's capital. Some formerly enslaved African Americans who sought refuge in Alexandria, were later recruited into the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT), some of whom served at Fort Ward. After the war, a Black community developed around the fort, known as "The Fort," where descendants of freedmen lived for generations.

Photo Attribution

Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery, 1001 S. Washington St.

The Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery is a sacred burial ground for formerly enslaved African Americans who sought freedom in Union-occupied Alexandria during the Civil War. Many of those buried here were men who later enlisted in the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT), made up of Black soldiers who fought for the Union.



Established in 1864, the cemetery became the final resting place for over 1,800 freedmen, including Black Union soldiers and their families. However, for decades, the site was neglected and even paved over. It wasn't until 2007 that the City of Alexandria restored it as a memorial to honor those who fought for their freedom.

Today, the Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial stands as a reminder of the courage and sacrifices of African Americans during the Civil War and their fight for justice and recognition.

Photo Attribution

Torpedo Factory Art Center:

Originally the U.S. Naval Torpedo Station, constructed beginning on November 12, 1918, the day after World War I ended, the facility produced torpedoes during both World Wars. Historical photographs indicate that African Americans were part of the workforce, reflecting the gradual desegregation of federal employment during that era.



Photo Attribution

Final Reflections

Closing this month's newsletter honoring Black History Month, we reflect on the profound contributions of Black service members throughout history. From Marvin Gaye's powerful songs inspired by his brother's service in Vietnam to the bravery of the Tuskegee Airmen, David Fagen's defiance in the Philippines, and the incredible legacy of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, their sacrifices have shaped our nation's military history. We also look at historical ties between the City of Alexandria and the military, underscoring the lasting impact of Black veterans in our own community.

In Remembrance and Support

Considering the recent tragedy at the Washington National airport involving the Army helicopter and American Airlines plane, we recognize the emotional toll such events can have on service members, veterans, and their families. If you or someone you know needs support, there are mental health resources available in the DC Metro region to provide guidance, counseling, and crisis assistance. Your well-being matters, and help is always within reach.

Resources:

Wendt Center for Loss & Healing :

The Wendt Center offers counseling and support groups for children and adults dealing with grief and trauma. Their services aim to help individuals rebuild emotional strength after loss.

Capital Caring Health Grief Support :

Capital Caring provides community-based support groups and workshops in Washington, D.C. Their grief counselors assist individuals in navigating the complex emotions associated with loss.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS):

TAPS offers compassionate care to those grieving the death of a military loved one. They provide peer-based emotional support, crisis response, and grief resources.

A figure skating event named **"Legacy on Ice"** is scheduled for March 2, at Capital One Arena in Washington, D.C. This event aims to honor and support the victims of the recent midair collision near Ronald Reagan International Airport. Proceeds will benefit the affected families and first responders.

Community Mental Health Agencies

Virginia

City of Alexandria, Department of Community & Human Services :

Adult Same Day Access: 703.746.3535
Youth Same Day Access: 571.213.7963
Alexandria 24/7 Emergency Services: 703.746.3401

Fairfax County Community Services Board

Same Day Access: 703.383.8500
Fairfax 24/7 Emergency Services: 703.573.5679

Prince William County Community Services Board

Manassas Same Day Access: 703.792.5241
24/7 Emergency Services Manassas: 703.792.7800
Woodbridge Same Day Access: 703.792.7373
24/7 Emergency Services Woodbridge: 703.792.4900

Arlington County Community Services Board :

Adult Same Day Access: 703.228.5150
Youth Same Day Access: 703.228.1560
Arlington 24/7 Emergency Services: 703.228.5160

Loudoun County Community Services Board

Loudoun Same Day Access: 703.771.5155
Loudoun 24/7 Emergency Services: 703.777.0320

Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. Department of Behavioral Health

Access Helpline: 1.888.7WE-HELP or 1.888.793.4357
24/7 Crisis & Emergency Services: 202.673.9319
24/7 The Children and Adolescent Mobile Psychiatric Service (ChAMPS): 202.481.1440

Maryland

Montgomery County Department of Health & Human Services

Referral ACCESS: 240.777.1770
24/7 Crisis Services: 240.777.4000

Prince George's County Behavioral Health Authority

Assessment Appointment: 301.856.9500 or 301.583.5920
24/7 Crisis & Emergency Services: 988

CONTACT US!

SAME DAY ACCESS TEAM

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