

# NNOA

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manpower shortage forced the Navy to actively solicit the enlistment of Blacks, both free and slave. This situation also probably accounts for the relatively favorable and segregation-free conditions that they encountered.

Black men comprised about 25 percent of the total personnel of the Union Navy and held all ranks below petty officer. Several Blacks held the technical position of ship's pilot, which is equivalent, in many respects, to that of a commissioned officer. Captain Robert Smalls, a Black pilot, guided the *Planter* into Charleston harbor when that city fell in February 1865. He also piloted the ship into the same harbor when the flag of the United States was hoisted above Fort Sumter on April 15, 1865, the same day that President Abraham Lincoln died.

Seven Black sailors received the Congressional Medal of Honor, this country's highest award, for deeds of valor "above and beyond the call of duty" during the Civil War. They were Aaron Anderson, Robert Blake, William Brown, Wilson Brown, John Lawson, James Mifflin and Joachim Pease.

The decisive role of the United States Navy in determining the outcome of the Civil War has long been recognized by military historians and others. The role of Blacks in determining this outcome was of primary importance, but recognition has been grudgingly given them, if indeed at all.

The Navy reflected the reaction and discrimination that characterized post-World War I social patterns. The national social climate further evidenced a trend toward race consciousness and the subordination of Blacks. For the first time, the Navy adopted a definite policy of segregation that limited Black personnel to a specific division of labor. Of 10,000 Black volunteers, all but a few were assigned to the steward and messman branches.

At the beginning of World War I, the Navy still permitted integrated crews and Blacks were eligible for all ratings below commissioned officers. But all of this would soon change. In the general disarmament movement that followed at the conclusion of the war, the enlistment of Blacks was virtually discontinued.

The enlistment of Blacks as messmen and stewards was continued in theory, but in actual practice only Filipinos were recruited for these branches from 1919-1932. As far as Blacks were concerned, a long and honorable history of bravery and heroism had come to an abrupt end.

By 1932, the Phillipines seemed to be

moving toward independence and the supply of messmen from that source was getting lower. As in the past, the Navy looked to Black men to solve its manpower problems. Once again, the active recruiting of Blacks as messmen and stewards became Navy policy.

Limiting Blacks to the ranks of stewards and messmen (cooks, waiters, bus and cabin boys)—those who served the personal needs of commissioned officers—was in keeping with the national mood of Black subordination. Messmen were called "chambermaids of the Braid." One Black critic said Black sailors were "waiters and bellhops going to sea."

In a 1940 policy directive, the Navy clarified its position on the enlistment of Blacks. That statement said, in part, that "The enlistment of Negroes (other than as mess attendants) leads to disruptive and undermining conditions..." The statement concluded that "The policy...was adopted to meet the best interests of general ship efficiency.... This policy not only serves the best interests of the Navy and the country, but serves as well the best interests of [Negroes] themselves."

The September 1940 issue of *Crisis* magazine, the official organ of the NAACP, challenged the Navy's position. The lead editorial stated:

We hope American Negro citizens appreciate fully what this policy means to them. There is more to this than standing on the deck of a warship in a white uniform. To be stigmatized by being denied the opportunity of serving one's country in full combat service in the Navy is humiliating enough. But the real danger and greater injustice is to deny a tenth of the citizens of this country any benefit whatsoever from the billions of dollars spent on our Navy.

Our taxes help keep up the Naval Academy at Annapolis where our boys may not attend. They help to maintain the numerous naval bases, Navy Yards, and naval air bases from which we are excluded. Of the great sums that go for wages and salaries we get but a few pennies. The training in numerous trades and skills which thousands of whites receive and use later in civilian life is not for us! The health care, the character building, the training in efficiency, the travel and education—all at the expense of the taxpayers—are for whites only!



Surviving members of the "Golden 13", the first Black Navy Officers to receive their commissions in 1944, shared their many experiences with the Conference body. Dalton L. Baugh, Graham Martin, James E. Hair, Jesse W. Arbor, John W. Reagan, George Cooper, William S. White, Frank E. Sublett, and Samuel E. Barnes received a standing ovation for their historical achievement and contributions.

This is the price we pay for being classified as a race, as mess attendants only! At the same time we are supposed to be able to appreciate what our white fellow citizens declare to be the "vast difference" between American Democracy and Hitlerism!

## The Advent of Black Officers

AS WE HAVE SEEN, in the pre-Civil War period, Black naval personnel held all ranks below petty officer. There were no Black commissioned officers, although several served as captains in the Coast Guard (then known as the Revenue Service) and on auxiliary ships. John Henry Turpin, survivor of the battleship *Maine* when it was blown up in Havana harbor, was listed as "bosun." A boatswain is a warrant officer or petty officer in charge of a ship's deck crew.

Three Black men were appointed to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland during the Reconstruction period. None of these graduated—two resigned and the third was dismissed.

After 1875 there were no Blacks at Annapolis until 1936 when James Leo Johnson entered. He was followed the next year by George Trivers. Both of these candidates also resigned—Trivers because of health reasons; Johnson because of deficiencies in English and conduct. Blacks protested the latter resignation, believing that Johnson had been discriminated against. He later served with credit in the 99th Pursuit Squadron of the United States Air Force during World War II.

On April 7, 1942, the Navy announced a new policy which it called an "experiment." As of June 1st, Black volunteers would be accepted in the Navy, Coast

Guard and Marine Corps as seamen and in other capacities. The volunteers would receive basic and advanced (technical) training in segregated units. Non-commissioned White petty officers would be in command until Black petty officers could be trained. However, Black recruits would be limited to duty on shore installations and harbor craft.

Two Black men were accepted into Harvard Medical School under the Navy's officer training program. On June 18, 1942, Ensign Bernard W. Robinson became the first Black to win a commission in the United States Naval Reserve.

In 1943, the Navy announced its intention of commissioning Black officers. Sixteen men were selected from the enlisted ranks of 160,000 to be indoctrinated into officer ranks. The 16 selected included lawyers, teachers, businessmen and researchers. The officer indoctrination program began at Great Lakes on January 1, 1944.

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LCDR Roosevelt 'Rick' Wright (L) and Capt. Bobby Wilks, USCG (R).