

# Chipping Away at the Bedrock of Racial Intolerance: Fort Des Moines and Black Officer Training, 1917–1918

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A CHILLY OCTOBER wind was blowing as the soldiers marched on the Fort Des Moines parade ground in close formation. Their buffed boots made a distinctly heavy sound in cadence on the soft grass. Spectators lining the sides of the field waved and yelled support as they craned their necks to glimpse the soldiers as they passed by. The 639 cadets moved with the precision only months of training could produce and executed each formation maneuver with confidence and determination. These cadets were to be sworn in as commissioned officers in the U.S. Army on October 15, 1917, to fight in World War I. The United States had declared war on Germany just six months earlier, and what had seemed like an impossibility then was about to become a reality.<sup>1</sup>

This article examines the lives, education, and training of these African American civilians and former noncommissioned officers who answered the War Department's call for the first mass commissioning of black officers into the U.S. Army. Upon graduation, these officers would assume command of thousands of future black draftees who would fill the ranks of the newly formed 92nd and 93rd Divisions and chip away at the bedrock of racial intolerance in America.

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1. Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago, 1919), 90.

TO UNDERSTAND the lives of these future officers, one must comprehend the depth of the bedrock of racial intolerance in America in 1917. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court case of 1896 had established the constitutionality of state-imposed “separate but equal” Jim Crow laws in America. That ruling allowed segregated spaces for passengers on trains and buses and for patrons of public businesses, such as hotels, schools, and theaters. The Supreme Court would not reverse its ruling until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which, coincidentally, was orchestrated by Charles Houston, one of the 639 graduating cadets at Fort Des Moines.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the indignities of state-sanctioned segregation, African Americans also had to endure white mob violence, voting intimidation, lynching, and the cruel system of convict leasing, which allowed railroad and mining companies to lease hundreds of convicts they could literally work to death without fear of legal interference. All of these practices contributed to the migration of African Americans from southern states to the North. The manpower drain, especially among black farm labor, caused the state of Georgia to ask for federal government assistance in stemming the flood of migration; and some southern whites suggested that black military draftees should be put to work on farms instead of enrolled in military service.<sup>3</sup>

One racial incident involving the U.S. Army had ramifications for the future officers commissioned at Fort Des Moines and for the soldiers they would command. On August 23, 1917, soldiers from the 24th Infantry Regiment stationed near the city of Houston, Texas, mutinied. *The Crisis*, a periodical edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, reported that disputes between the black soldiers of the 24th and the local population had gained momentum over time. The situation reached the breaking point when the soldiers heard a rumor that one of their fellow soldiers had

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2. “Topics in Chronicling America—Plessy v. Ferguson (Jim Crow Laws),” Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/plessy.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/plessy.html); “Plessy v. Ferguson (1896),” Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/plessy.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/plessy.html).

3. Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of African Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York, 2008), 53–56; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Editorial,” *The Crisis*, July 1917.

Form 1 <b>2935</b> REGISTRATION CARD <b>8</b> No. <b>3369</b>	
1	Name in full <i>Charles Hamilton Houston</i> <small>(Given name) (Family name)</small> Age, in yrs. <i>21</i>
2	Home address <i>1314 T. H. W.</i> <i>Washington, D. C.</i> <small>(No.) (Street) (City) (State)</small>
3	Date of birth <i>Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> 1895</i> <small>(Month) (Day) (Year)</small>
4	Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? <i>Natural Born.</i>
5	Where were you born? <i>Washington D.C.</i> <i>U.S.</i> <small>(Town) (State) (Nation)</small>
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject? <i>28</i>
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office? <i>Teacher.</i>
8	By whom employed? <i>Howard University</i> Where employed? <i>Washington D.C.</i>
9	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? <i>No</i>
10	Married or single (which)? <i>Single</i> Race (specify which)? <i>Negro</i>
11	What military service have you had? Rank <i>No</i> ; branch <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> years <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ; Nation or State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? <i>No</i>
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.	
<i>Charles Houston</i> <small>(Signature or mark)</small>	

This image of Charles Hamilton Houston's military draft registration card is from the National Archives. Houston graduated from the Fort Des Moines Officer Training Camp, survived World War I, became a lawyer, and led the legal fight to overturn segregation in American schools that culminated in the successful U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*.

been killed by a local civilian. As a result, some of the soldiers disobeyed orders to remain in camp and instead headed into the city with their military weapons seeking revenge.<sup>4</sup> That act of disobedience resulted in the death of 17 people and swift military disciplinary action against all the soldiers involved.<sup>5</sup> It also added to southern fears that any concentration of black soldiers

4. Martha Gruening, "Houston: An N.A.A.C.P. Investigation," *The Crisis*, November 1917, 14-19.

5. "Colored Troops—Largest Murder Trial in the History of the United States," National Archives, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/26431266>.



*On November 1, 1917, 64 soldiers from the 24th Infantry Regiment stood trial for their actions in Houston, Texas, on the evening of August 23, 1917. Unrestricted image from National Archives.*

in large numbers would be a menace to peace and order.<sup>6</sup> As a concession to those fears, the 92nd Division was later scattered across seven camps in the North and was not allowed to concentrate on one post in the United States as other white divisions could until they reached France.<sup>7</sup>

IN APRIL 1917 the United States declared war on Germany and entered World War I. Congress, recognizing the need to strengthen the army, passed the Selective Service Act on May 18, 1917, to draft the necessary manpower for the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). The act's intent was to fill existing manpower shortages in the army's existing three components: the Regular Army, the National Guard, and the National Army. The Regular Army was composed of established federal units; the National Guard consisted of individual state organizations; the newest formations would be called the National Army and would be filled with recently drafted manpower. The Regular Army divisions would be numbered 1-25; the National Guard divisions would be numbered 26-75; and the National Army divisions would be numbered 76 and upward. The 92nd and 93rd

6. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 75.

7. W. Douglas Fisher and Joann H. Buckley, *African American Doctors of World War I: The Lives of 104 Volunteers* (Jefferson, NC, 2016), 8.

Divisions would be National Army units filled with black draftees led by senior grade white officers and junior grade black officers. By mid-1918, the War Department would eliminate the three components of the army and instead designate all land forces as the United States Army.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the war, the War Department and many white Americans believed that blacks could not be trained to be officers. Black army units had been commanded by white officers since the Civil War. The plan to call up more than 83,000 black men in the draft and the pressing need for hundreds of officers to command them made this an important concern for the War Department.<sup>9</sup>

Anticipating the War Department's concern, in February 1917 Dr. Joel Spingarn, a white former Columbia University professor and chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), began lobbying for the commissioning of black officers.<sup>10</sup> The president of Howard University, Dr. Stephen M. Newman, another white advocate for black rights, soon joined Spingarn, and, together with teachers and students, increased the pressure on the War Department to establish training camps to commission black officers. Another prominent figure, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, the senior black West Point graduate Regular Army officer at the time, joined the effort. Young was assisted by the Central Committee of Negro College Men and more than 300 senators and government representatives. They began a campaign of meetings and telephone calls to the War Department to push for integrated officer training camps. Embracing the growing momentum, Spingarn solicited additional support from General Leonard Wood, the commanding general of the army's Eastern Department. General Wood agreed to help, but

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8. Brian F. Neumann, ed., *The U.S. Army in the World War I Era* (Washington, DC, 2017), 29-30; Jim Garamone, "World War I: Building the American Military," *DoD News*, 3/29/2017, [www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1134509/world-war-i-building-the-american-military/](http://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1134509/world-war-i-building-the-american-military/).

9. Charles H. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers* (Boston, 1923), 38; Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 86.

10. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, vol. 1, *Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York, 1993), 528.

only if 200 black male college graduates signed up to undergo the training to become officers. Wood's support was important because he had helped establish the famous Plattsburg camps held months earlier in New York to train and educate young men to be officers; those camps, however, were exclusively for white men.<sup>11</sup>

A search for black male college graduates soon became the priority for Spingarn and his supporters. The Central Committee of Negro College Men employed newspaper advertisements, personal friendships, and college alumni associations to encourage young professional college men to sign up.<sup>12</sup> The *Nashville Tennessean* was one of many publications that published instructions for how black male civilians could apply to the officer training camp. Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Mississippi also issued letters of recommendation for its graduates to attend the officer training camp.<sup>13</sup> Each civilian candidate needed at least three prominent citizens in his community to write letters of recommendation to testify to his moral character and ability to command respect.<sup>14</sup> Black churches and local chapters of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) served as recruiting stations, and Howard University students held meetings and concerts to raise money for the recruiting effort. The YMCA in Nashville, Tennessee, was one of the locations selected to examine the physical and mental capabilities of potential cadets who wished to attend the officer training camp.<sup>15</sup>

As recruiting was taking place, the War Department finalized its plans to establish 14 officer training camps for white cadets throughout the country and announced that it was impractical to assign black officer cadets to those camps.<sup>16</sup> Spingarn, the

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11. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 82–87.

12. Adam P. Wilson, *African American Army Officers of World War I: A Vanguard of Equality in War and Beyond* (Jefferson, NC, 2015), 49.

13. David M. Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee of Beale Street* (Nashville, 1971), 11, 27.

14. Atty. S. Joe Brown, "Official Notes of the Colored Officers: Training Camp Opens," *The Bystander*, 6/15/1917.

15. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 85; Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee*, 27–28.

16. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 86. These white training camps would admit candidates between the age of 20 years and 9 months and age 44. Richard S. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces* (College Station, TX, 2012), 32.

tireless advocate, faced this new hurdle by lobbying the War Department for a separate training camp for black officer cadets.<sup>17</sup> Many in the black community, including black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, strongly opposed forming a separate black officer training camp because it would signal compliance with Jim Crow segregation laws.<sup>18</sup> An article in the *Baltimore Afro-American* stated that a “serious mistake is being made by the Doctor when he thinks that the people are taking his segregation ideas seriously. . . . Of course it is a joke. It would be serious if anybody liked segregation that much.”<sup>19</sup> Spingarn replied to his critics by claiming that “the army officials want the camp to fail. . . . Colored men in a camp by themselves would all get a fair chance at promotion.”<sup>20</sup> Not all black newspapers opposed a separate training camp; the *Atlanta Independent* and the *Savannah Tribune*, as well as white newspapers like the *El Paso Herald*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *St. Louis Dispatch*, supported a separate camp.<sup>21</sup>

By May 7, 1917, the War Department had received more than 1,000 names of motivated male black college graduate volunteers who agreed to attend a separate officer training camp. This positive demonstration of interest persuaded the War Department to establish a separate black training camp on May 12, 1917.<sup>22</sup> However, by raising the minimum age limit for officer training camp volunteers from 20 for whites to 25 for blacks, the army rendered ineligible most younger, more recent black college graduates, who had developed a higher sense of self-worth from the recent northern migration, better northern schools, and more opportunities. The higher minimum age limit allowed older black men, many of whom had attended poor southern schools and experienced fewer life opportunities, to serve. Later, some claimed that the army did this intentionally to ensure that

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17. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 37–38.

18. Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee*, 26.

19. “Spingarn Camp Taken Over by the War Department,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 4/28/1917, <https://newspaperarchive.com/baltimore-afro-american-apr-28-1917-p-4/>.

20. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers*, 37.

21. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 46.

22. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 86, 87

black officers and black divisions would fail.<sup>23</sup> At the time the camp was established, however, emotions were running high. In the June issue of *The Crisis*, W. E. B. Du Bois proclaimed, "We have won! The camp is granted: we shall have 1,000 Negro officers in the United States Army."<sup>24</sup>

ONCE THE WAR DEPARTMENT decided to open a separate camp, the question turned to where the camp would be located. Howard University near Washington, D.C., was one of the first locations suggested for the new camp, but the War Department rejected it in favor of Fort Des Moines.<sup>25</sup> The state of Iowa was known to be progressive in its race relations, and the city of Des Moines had a robust black civilian population of 5,762. It would be incorrect to conclude that segregation did not exist in Des Moines, but many blacks maintained a good standard of living; some were business owners, doctors, and lawyers.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Des Moines community had already successfully garrisoned the black Regular Army 25th Infantry Regiment in 1903 without incident.<sup>27</sup>

One major racial incident did occur in the city after the camp was established that highlighted underlying racial tensions in the community. On July 1, 1917, two cadets in full uniform were illegally detained at the Empress Theater in Des Moines. In order to control tensions, on July 22, 1917, the entire infantry cadet class put on a singing concert, called the White Sparrow Ceremony, at the Drake University Stadium as a show of goodwill for the white residents of the city of Des Moines.<sup>28</sup>

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23. Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (New York, 1996), 60.

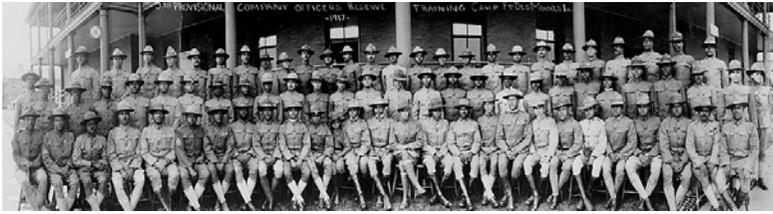
24. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Editorial: Officers," *The Crisis*, June 1917.

25. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 87.

26. John L. Thompson, *History and Views of Colored Officers Training Camp: For 1917 at Fort Des Moines, Iowa* (Des Moines, 1917), 120.

27. National Park Service, *Fort Des Moines Historic Complex: Drawings, Photographs, Written Historical and Descriptive Data* (Denver, 1987), 9.

28. Ira W. Anderson, "Grand Army Denounces Jim Crowing of Negro Soldiers," *The Bystander*, 7/20/1917 (all *Bystander* articles accessed via [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)); Robert V. Morris, *Tradition and Valor: A Family Journey* (Manhattan, KS, 1999), 28-30.



*The 5th Company of the 17th Provisional Training Regiment (PTR) at Fort Des Moines poses in 1917. This company, and nearly a dozen more, embodied the U.S. Army's wartime challenge to educate and train African American college graduate civilians and seasoned noncommissioned officers in the fine art of military science. Charles Houston, the future lawyer credited with the successful U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, is standing in the middle row, fifth from the right. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Fort Des Moines proved to be a good site for the officer training camp. Located in Polk County, it covered over 640 acres, with buildings, a parade field, and a training area. Each of the future black training companies in the camp would be assigned to a two-story building with a second-floor balcony. The second floor of each company building was living quarters; the first floor was a combination mess hall and classroom for instruction; and the basements had showers and washtubs for laundry. The post was in good repair and well established to receive troops because it had been recently occupied by the 1st Infantry Regiment of the Iowa National Guard, which had been moved to several other camps to make room for the new training camp personnel. Only one battalion and the regimental band remained at Fort Des Moines when the cadets arrived, and they moved into tents on the east side of the fort.<sup>29</sup>

With letters of acceptance in their hands, many future cadets were accompanied by family and well-wishers to train stations around the country. The War Department arranged for some

29. National Park Service, *Fort Des Moines Historic Complex*, 4, 7; Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 52; John L. Thompson, "Form Regiments at Ft. Des Moines: Twelve Hundred Men Have Been Accepted for Training in Negros Camp," *The Bystander*, 6/15/1917. For multiple images of Fort Des Moines, see Penelope A. LeFevre-Blake, *Fort Des Moines, Images of America Series* (Mount Pleasant, SC, 2006), 7.

cadets to ride in segregated Pullman rail cars for the trip to camp. For many, this was their first experience on a train. The cadets came from Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, and many other states. These college graduate civilians would be joined by Regular Army Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) who were also accepted into the infantry officer training camp. Many of the NCOs had combat experience. For example, Regular Army Sergeant Harry Houston of Troop K, 10th Cavalry, who would serve as acting provisional first lieutenant for Company 5 at Fort Des Moines, was a combat veteran of the Battle of Carrizal in Mexico against Pancho Villa in 1916. Regular Army Sergeant William Stitch of Troop M, 10th Cavalry, a four-year veteran, had also participated in the Battle of Carrizal. The NCOs arrived at Fort Des Moines on June 15, 1917; the remaining civilian cadets arrived two days later.<sup>30</sup>

WHY did these African American civilian college graduates volunteer to leave their homes and professional lives to try to become officers in the U.S. Army? To answer that question, we must examine how Americans felt about the war in Europe. The year 1917 was a time of hyper-patriotism in the United States, and many looked on the war as a crusade to protect civilization. This hyper-patriotism was acute among the middle- and upper-middle-class men who would become the wartime officer corps for the AEF in Europe. Such men were the college graduates of their generation and were highly motivated to serve and ideologically committed to the cause of the Allies and opposed to Germany. The army wanted college-educated men to be officers because it was believed that education conditioned the mind to absorb and process knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Black college graduates shared this high degree of patriotic motivation, with many coming from prominent black colleges around the country, such as Tuskegee Institute and Howard University. Seventy to 80 percent of the civilian cadets possessed college degrees; the rest had military

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30. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers*, 41; Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 51; Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 471-81; John L. Thompson, "Three Regular Soldiers," *The Bystander*, 7/13/1917.

31. Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks*, 33, 35.

experience or business training.<sup>32</sup> Earl Dickerson, a college-educated future officer candidate at Fort Des Moines, declared, "It lifted me to the skies, close to my dreams. Here was an opportunity for me to take a direct part in the struggle to bring freedom and equality to the world—a world in which blacks could take their rightful place as a result of this magnificent triumph."<sup>33</sup>

When the cadets arrived at Fort Des Moines, they were received by cadre faculty and assigned to training companies. The new cadets received \$75 per month and, upon commissioning, at least \$145 per month. The pay made the cadets popular with the local merchants in Des Moines. To give an idea of the economic buying power of \$75 in 1917, a cadet could purchase a U.S. Army regulation tailored officer's uniform for \$35 in Des Moines.<sup>34</sup>

The question of who would command the first officer training camp for African Americans surfaced shortly after the War Department decided to establish the camp. For many, the logical choice was Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young. Young was the senior African American officer in the U.S. military at the time, having made the 1917 promotion list to colonel and was on the army rolls as a promotable lieutenant colonel just waiting to pin on the new rank. However, numerous government officials, including President Woodrow Wilson, pressured Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to keep Young from attaining the rank of colonel and commanding black troops and, more importantly, possibly commanding junior white officers in the upcoming struggle in Europe. Colonel Young was forced to take a medical retirement from active duty on July 30, 1917, after a mandatory physical diagnosed him with high blood pressure.<sup>35</sup>

Command of the training camp went to Colonel Charles C. Ballou, a white Regular Army officer who had previously com-

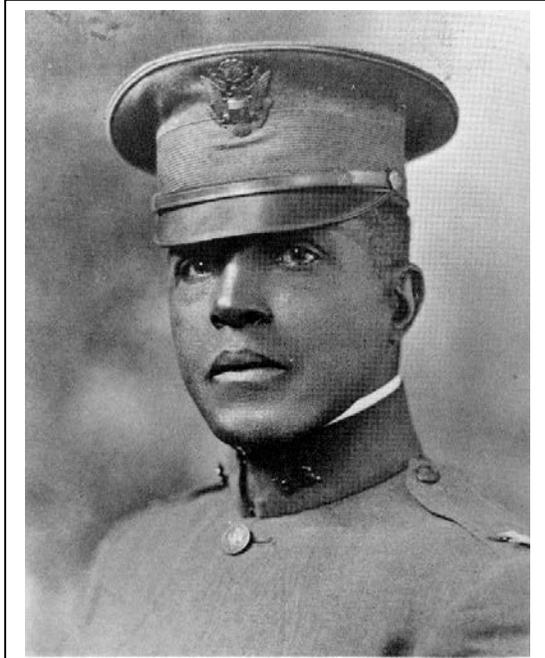
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32. Thompson, *History and Views*, 41, 115; "Assigned to Quarters," *The Bystander*, 6/15/1917.

33. Robert J. Blakely, *Earl B. Dickerson: A Voice for Freedom and Equality* (Evanston, IL, 2006), 25.

34. Thompson, *History and Views*, 24–35; Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 89; Morris, *Tradition and Valor*, 28; John L. Thompson, Special Des Moines Edition, *The Bystander*, 8/3/1917. According to the Inflation Calculator at <https://westegg.com/inflation/>, \$45 in 1917 is roughly equivalent to \$875 in 2017.

35. Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 67–68; Wilson, *African American Officers*, 48.



*Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young was forced to take a medical retirement as part of a successful attempt to keep him from commanding the 17th PTR. Numerous appeals for a review of the medical findings were ignored. Young even protested his retirement by riding his horse from Chillicothe, Ohio, to Washington, D.C., to prove his fitness, but he was not reinstated to active duty until just days before the war ended. Photo courtesy of Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS.*

manded black troops in the 24th Infantry Regiment. The army would officially call the officer training camp under Colonel Ballou the 17th Provisional Training Regiment (PTR).<sup>36</sup> Colonel Ballou was replaced after a few months by another white officer, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Hunt, a former instructor with the South Carolina National Guard, who would be promoted to

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36. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 51; Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 90, 91.

colonel in August 1917 and remain in command of the 17th PTR until graduation and the closure of the camp in October 1917.<sup>37</sup> Colonel Ballou was promoted to brigadier general and reassigned to the Camp Dodge training camp in Johnston, Iowa. Later he was promoted to major general and assumed command of the 92nd Division, leading it to war with the AEF in France. While serving at Fort Des Moines, Ballou employed 12 West Point graduate assistant officer instructors. He also used black military personnel as instructors. These included Eighth Illinois National Guard Major Albert W. Ford and Captain Joseph Phillips, along with 10th Cavalry Sergeant Major Eugene Frierson, a 29-year veteran with combat experience in Mexico.<sup>38</sup>

On June 17, 1917, thousands of people witnessed the oath of enlistment given by Colonel Ballou to the cadets of the 17th PTR. The *Bystander* quoted Ballou telling his new cadets, "This is a momentous hour. . . . Your race will be on trial with you as its representatives during the existence of this camp, and to succeed there will be required of you strong bodies, keen intelligence, absolute obedience to orders, unflagging industry, exemplary conduct and character of the highest order." The *Bystander* announced that the 17th PTR marked a new era in the history of the black race.<sup>39</sup>

WITH A LOCATION ESTABLISHED and the necessary manpower assembled, the army wrestled with how these volunteers would be educated and trained to be U.S. Army officers. Although the army operated separate officer training camps—one for black officer cadets at Fort Des Moines and 14 camps for white cadets across the country—it decided to run all of them under a single set of operational regulations modeled on the West Point system of discipline, training, and education. The War Department insisted that all officer cadets be trained and

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37. *Official Army Register* (Washington, DC, 1918), 568; "Col. Hunt Relieves Ballou," *Richmond Planet*, 10/6/1917.

38. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 99; Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee*, 28; John L. Thompson, "Nine Officers to Aid," *The Bystander*, 6/15/1917.

39. "Colonel C. C. Ballou, Oath of Office," *The Bystander*, 6/29/1917; John L. Thompson, "How Training Camp for Colored Men Happened to be Established," *The Bystander*, 8/31/1917.

educated to be three things: instructors, managers, and leaders. For example, officers needed to be experts in military drill so they could instruct their future soldiers in the same drills. They needed to be managers who understood the proper methods of supply and administering discipline. They also needed to care for the health, comfort, and sanitation of their soldiers, and they should live in a way that would instill respect in their men. Finally, officers needed to be leaders who understood the tactical employment of troops.<sup>40</sup>

The army needed junior leaders who could think on their feet in any situation—someone who could assess the situation rapidly, recall the correct battle drills, take into consideration the terrain, the enemy, the troops available, and the overall mission, and then issue orders to their subordinates to accomplish the mission. Many in the army thought that three months was not enough time to create this type of junior officer from raw civilians. But the short amount of time available and the huge demand for junior officers convinced even the skeptics that the objective of the work of the officer training camps was not to make experts but to produce practical fighting men.<sup>41</sup> With that philosophy in mind, Colonel Ballou's instructors began the process of turning black noncommissioned officers and civilians into practical junior leaders.

Following the War Department's guidelines, the education and training activities were divided into two parts for the three-month course. The first month, called common core, consisted of personal soldier skills, such as physical training, bayonet training, and lectures (see table 1). The second half of the course in months two and three involved field exercises and company and battalion-level education and training, including lessons in trench warfare, patrolling, and overnight camping (see table 2). The weekly conference lectures for both the first-month core courses and the second- and third-month courses were in theoretical education in which the instructor guided the cadets through military tactics, skills, and concepts.<sup>42</sup>

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40. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 87; Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks*, 29, 36.

41. Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks*, 57, 37.

42. *Ibid.*, 37–39.

The core courses' conference lectures specifically centered on the *Infantry Drill Regulations (IDR)* and the *Manual of Interior Guard Duty*. The *IDR* emphasized leadership, teamwork, and how orders should be developed. The *Manual of Interior Guard Duty* stressed the importance of the commanding officer, commander of the guard, sergeant of the guard, and privates of the guard as they related to guarding a position. The second and third months' lectures came from documents such as the *Regulations for the Army of the United States* and emphasized military discipline, appointment, and promotion of officers and subjects dealing with noncommissioned officers and enlisted men. The instructors lectured to the cadets, who took copious notes and attempted to memorize the material.<sup>43</sup>

A typical common core daily training schedule consisted of the following:

- 5:30 a.m.: reveille and flag raising
- 7:30–8:30 a.m.: infantry drills without arms
- 8:30–9:00 a.m.: physical training
- 9:15–10:15 a.m.: infantry drill
- 10:45–11:45 a.m.: practice hike without arms
- 1:30–2:30 p.m.: musketry arms
- 2:30–3 p.m.: semaphore (flag) signaling
- 3:00–4:30 p.m.: conferences on care of equipment
- 7:00–8:00 p.m.: evening study on the organization of the regiment

The *Bystander* noted a few additional items on the daily schedule, such as sick call at 4:45 p.m. every day and a call to quarters at 9:30 p.m., followed closely by a bugle call playing taps and lights out at 9:45 p.m. Many cadets stayed up well past 9:45 studying or cleaning equipment for inspection the next day. First Lieutenant Sylvanus Brown remembered "studying 14 kinds of books and making scores of maps."<sup>44</sup>

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43. *Ibid.*, 37–38; War Department, *Infantry Drill Regulations United States Army 1911* (Washington, DC, 1911), 93–98; War Department, *Manual of Interior Guard Duty: U. S. Army 1914*, correction to 1917 (Washington, DC, 1917), 12–33; War Department, *Regulations for the Army of the United States*, correction to 1917 (Washington, DC, 1917), 7; Thompson, *History and Views*, 113.

44. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers*, 41–42; John L. Thompson, "Daily Program for Army Camp," *The Bystander*, 6/22/1917; Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks*, 39; Thompson, *History and Views*, 128.

Unfortunately, some of the lessons learned in common core training proved to be dangerous on the actual battlefield. For example, the army taught the cadets how to use signal flags during signal training to pass messages across the battlefield, but once on the French battlefields the use of signal flags was found to attract the deadly attention of watchful German troops, and the practice was discontinued. Unrealistic training resulted in graduates with an unrealistic view of war in general and specifically warfare on the Western Front.<sup>45</sup>

The Infantry cadets conducted their first road march on July 6, 1917, completing five miles in an hour from Fort Des Moines, resting a half hour, and then marching another hour back to the camp. The next day, the cadets marched three miles out to the rifle range, where they used axes and scythes to clear the range of vegetation and prepare it for operation. They also enjoyed their first dinner in the field, using their field mess kits. A few days later the City of Des Moines Chamber of Commerce came out to Fort Des Moines along with thousands of other civilian visitors to watch the first formal cadet regimental review consisting of marching and manual of arms with rifles.<sup>46</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young slipped into camp unannounced the evening of July 17, 1917, just weeks before the army announced his unexpected medical retirement, to spend time with some of the former NCOs who had served with him in the Philippines and Mexico. Word spread quickly that Young was in camp. Soon other cadets arrived and accompanied him to the YMCA tent, where he gave an impromptu speech of encouragement. Young passed inconspicuously around camp the next day talking to cadets. At lunch with Company 5 he gave another impromptu speech to encourage the cadets before leaving Fort Des Moines later that evening.<sup>47</sup>

Colonel Ballou wanted to create a learning environment that encouraged the cadets to help each other. To encourage this, he directed that no written evaluations be returned to the students,

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45. Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks*, 42, 55.

46. John L. Thompson, "Training Camp Cadets Make Long March," *The Bystander*, 7/13/1917.

47. John L. Thompson, "What Our Army Boys Say about COL Young," *The Bystander*, 7/20/1917.

so no one could compare themselves to anyone else. Ballou enacted this policy because some of the former noncommissioned officer cadets had little education past eighth grade, and he did not want them to feel alienated among the college graduates, who needed the coaching of noncommissioned officers (known to the younger civilian cadets as the "old timers"). Tension nonetheless existed between cadets because they were competing for the highest commissioned rank of captain. The former NCOs feared that they would be passed over for captain bars by college graduates with less military experience. As a result, many of the younger cadets tried to avoid confrontations with the older cadets. Of course, the possibility of failure also created tension. All of the cadets had to take individual oral examinations; those found deficient were dismissed from the training camp. On one such occasion, approximately 80 cadets failed in their studies and were released from camp.<sup>48</sup>

The War Department's original plan was to integrate one black unit into each of the 16 original divisions of the AEF. However, political pressure from politicians in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Kansas forced the War Department to change its plans and instead create one black infantry division known as the 92nd Division. Later, a second black infantry division, the 93rd Division [Provisional], was formed. Thus, Colonel Ballou would only need to train the cadets as infantry officers and not expose them to other skills such as artillery training in their second and third months. This change to the training schedule hurt the morale of the cadets who wanted to learn the more specialized skills. George S. Schuyler, a former 25th Infantry Regiment noncommissioned officer now serving as a cadet in the 17th PTR, voiced his frustration. "The noncoms became suspicious when none of the rest of the prescribed courses of study given other camps were given to the colored candidates. . . . Nor were they ever given. . . . I personally lost interest after the first month when I saw the trend as did many of the other noncoms."<sup>49</sup>

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48. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 58, 59; Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers*, 45; Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee*, 29; John L. Thompson, "More Recruits at the Fort: Prospective Negro Medical Officers Arrive Today," *The Bystander*, 7/27/1917.

49. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 54-56, 64-65.

FORT DES MOINES actually hosted two training camps during the summer of 1917: the 17th PTR and a second new organization just as special, the first black medical officer training camp. The medical camp, officially known as the Medical Officers Training Camp—Colored (MOTC), opened in late July. The MOTC offered another opportunity to chip away at the bedrock of racial intolerance, because this experiment was the first time a separate training camp was set up to train black doctors and dentists.

Ranging in age from 23 to 47 years old, the doctors had already graduated from medical schools, such as Meharry Medical College, Leonard Medical School, and Howard University Medical School in Washington, D.C., between 1898 and 1916. A vast range of experience separated these volunteer physicians, many of whom had been practicing medicine for years, from those who had just completed internships. The entire camp consisted of more than 1,000 enlisted men training as medical orderlies and more than 100 officers.<sup>50</sup>

The medical camp commander, Lieutenant Colonel E. G. Bingham, a Medical Corps officer, found only three white medical instructors on duty when he arrived. He requested and received three additional white Medical Reserve Corps officer instructors. Bingham also took advantage of an authorization by the Army Surgeon General to make up for his instructor shortfall by using students he found qualified to teach specific subjects. As a result, he added four assistant black instructors from the cadets in the class. Those four assistant instructors—Julian Dawson, Raymond Jackson, George Lythcott, and Louis Wright—would all be among the 12 candidates Bingham would recommend for promotion to captain for their superior abilities and qualifications. Bingham was also authorized to allow his cadets to give classes in hygiene and first aid to the 17th PTR cadets.<sup>51</sup>

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50. Fisher and Buckley, *African American Doctors*, 4, 5, 11, 12. The average age of the medical cadets who reported to camp was 32.8 years, with an average medical practice time of 6 years. By the end of the medical training camp the average age was 32, as some of the older doctors were found unfit for military service for an assortment of reasons. Maj. Gen. M. W. Ireland, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in The World War* (Washington, DC, 1927), 269.

51. Fisher and Buckley, *African American Doctors*, 9; Ireland, *The Medical Department*, 263.

Medical cadets attended lectures and were quizzed via oral recitation, just as their infantry counterparts did. Instruction was to be as practical as possible, with cadets observing and then being allowed to do medical procedures. Dental officers received the same education and training as the rest of the medical officers but also received dental-specific training. The MOTC cadets' education and training was broken into three periods: (1) pre-instruction period, July 26–31; (2) part-time instruction period, August 1–26; and (3) active and intensive instruction period beginning on August 27 and lasting until the camp closed on November 13, 1917. (For the first six-day schedule of this intensive instruction, see table 3.)<sup>52</sup>

In addition to attending classes, all MOTC personnel participated in a 10-mile march to the state fairgrounds and camped under field conditions on October 3–6, 1917. Mess facility space at Fort Des Moines was limited, with the 17th and the MOTC camps running at the same time from August through October 1917, so the doctors ate meals almost entirely under field conditions outside in a tent, partly because the requested \$7,500 to build a proper mess facility failed to arrive before the medical camp closed. Times were also allocated to share the main shower facilities between both camps.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the conditions, no major illnesses broke out in the medical camp during its operation, and only 34 men came down with the measles. Measles was a major challenge in 1917 and was listed as an epidemic-type disease with an unknown cause in the medical regulation, "Elements of Military Hygiene." Measles was considered more contagious than smallpox and scarlet fever.<sup>54</sup>

As the infantry cadets improved their skills during the training camp period, especially on the parade field, many were given the opportunity to take charge and lead the formation in maneuvers.<sup>55</sup> The medical cadets were given even more opportunities to lead in training because, once they graduated and joined a

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52. Ireland, *The Medical Department*, 263, 265, 266, 271.

53. Fisher and Buckley, *African American Doctors*, 10, 11.

54. *Ibid.*, 11; Ireland, *The Medical Department*, 256, 266.

55. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 59.

unit, they would not have superior officers looking closely over their shoulders, as the infantry officers would.<sup>56</sup> The shortage of medical officers across the army almost guaranteed that they would have little supervision in organizing mobile medical hospitals and infirmaries, supervising medics, submitting regular reports, and tracking and ordering supplies. The medical cadets knew that their ultimate test was the combat readiness of their units through the health of their men.<sup>57</sup>

A FEW DAYS before their scheduled September graduation the infantry cadets faced one last hurdle before becoming officers. During the week of September 14, 1917, the War Department decided that the infantry cadets' training would continue until October 15, 1917. No reason was given to the cadets, according to the *Bystander*, which speculated that the extension could be because of opposition to commissioning the cadets or a test by the War Department to see if the cadets were serious about getting commissioned.<sup>58</sup> Graduation appears to have been delayed because the War Department had not fully developed its plans for how to handle the thousands of black draftees these future officers would command in the newly raised 92nd and later 93rd Divisions.<sup>59</sup>

The sudden postponement of graduation forced a reassessment of farewell banquets planned for the cadets. Because extensive arrangements had already been made, planners decided to proceed with the farewell banquets and receptions. The cadet companies all held their events with large crowds of invited friends and families.<sup>60</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, both prominent figures in the NAACP, sent telegrams to the 17th PTR cadets to encourage them to stick out the extra month of training.<sup>61</sup> The cadets continued to train for the next few

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56. Fisher and Buckley, *African American Doctors*, 11.

57. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

58. John L. Thompson, "Training Camp Here Longer," *The Bystander*, 9/14/1917.

59. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 66.

60. John L. Thompson, "Night of Receptions," *The Bystander*, 9/14/1917.

61. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 67. Du Bois and Johnson were not the only prominent people to offer support and encouragement to the cadets. As major attractions in the black community in 1917, the infantry and medi-

weeks and were finally rewarded with real farewell dinners and banquets October 10–14.<sup>62</sup>

Graduation occurred on October 15, 1917, with the commissioning of 204 second lieutenants, 329 first lieutenants, and 106 captains, for a total of 639 line infantry officers.<sup>63</sup> The MOTC graduation was not delayed; commissioning was held on November 13, 1917. Of the 118 medical officers who attended the camp, 104 graduated and were commissioned. All 12 of the dental cadets graduated.<sup>64</sup>

There was no second graduating class at Fort Des Moines once the infantry officers and medical officers graduated, even though only half of the officers needed for a typical division were commissioned in comparison to other (white) officer training camps. After Fort Des Moines closed, the War Department stated that future black officer candidates would be trained at one of the 14 white officer training camps, but no large numbers of black officer candidates ever attended those other camps.<sup>65</sup>

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cal training camps attracted numerous visitors throughout the summer to observe preparations for the camps and, more importantly, to show support and encourage the cadets to succeed. The visitors included Mary B. Talbert, president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. The YMCA sponsored visitors such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers; William P. Carter, professor and principal of the Topeka Industrial and Educational Institute; Dr. Jesse Edward Moorland, senior secretary of the YMCA; Major J. W. Washington, a professor from Hampton Industrial and Normal Institute; and Professor Kelly Miller of Howard University. Besides guest speakers, the YMCA also provided the assistance of Dr. George W. Cabaniss, a physician from Washington, D.C., who left his medical practice to assist with the YMCA tent at Fort Des Moines. Cabaniss had worked closely with Dr. Joel Spingarn to make the separate camp idea a reality earlier in 1917. Providing another connection to the outside world, the YMCA sold the *Bystander* from its tent every Friday starting on July 6, 1917. John L. Thompson, "Mrs. Talbert Given Royal Reception by Des Moines Citizens," *The Bystander*, 6/1/1917; Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 57–58; John L. Thompson, "Officers Training Camp Notes," *The Bystander*, 7/6/1917.

62. John L. Thompson, "Soldiers Farewell Banquet," *The Bystander*, 10/19/1917.

63. Wilson, *African American Army Officers*, 67. One of the primary guest speakers at graduation was Emmett J. Scott, the black Special Assistant to the Secretary of War. Thompson, "Soldiers Farewell Banquet."

64. Ireland, *The Medical Department*, 266–67.

65. Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 62.

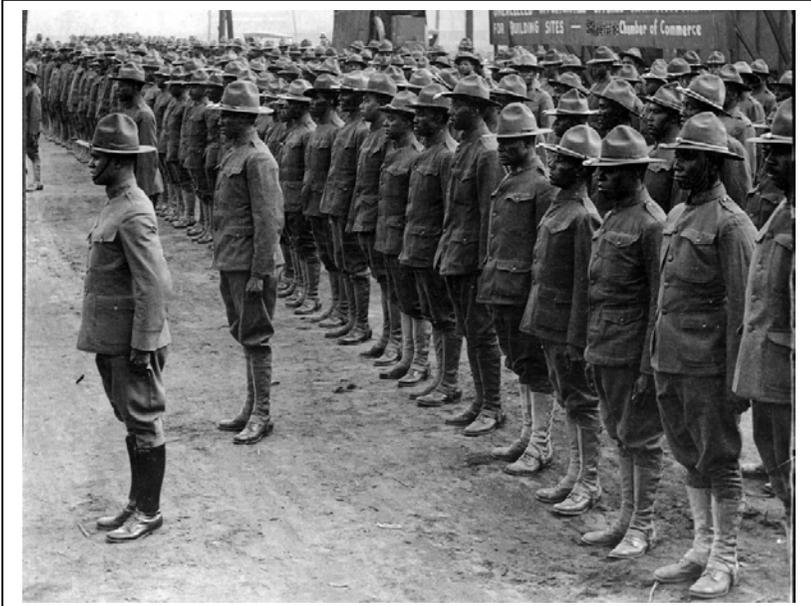


*First Lieutenant Cleve Abbott (on the far left) served with the 366th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division. He posed with fellow soldiers upon his return to the United States from combat in France. Photo courtesy National Archives.*

THE NEWLY COMMISSIONED OFFICERS of the 17th PTR were given 15 days leave to enjoy with family and friends, with orders to report to their follow-on assignments with the 92nd and 93rd Divisions on November 1, 1917.<sup>66</sup> Some men took full advantage of their leave to create families. On October 19, 1917, the *Bystander* reported a double wedding for two local Des Moines women and two newly commissioned lieutenants: Charles Howard to Maud Lewis and Cleve Abbott to Jessie Scott. Lieutenants Abbott and Howard would later report to Camp Dodge north of Des Moines to train new draftees for the 92nd Division.<sup>67</sup> The rest of the 17th PTR officers would have to travel a little farther to join their units not only at Camp Dodge, but also at six other locations: Camp Funston, Kansas; Camp Grant, Illinois; Camp Sherman, Ohio; Camp Meade, Maryland;

66. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 91.

67. John L. Thompson, "Double Wedding," *The Bystander*, 10/19/1917.



*This image portrays a typical black junior officer with his Montana hat chin strap pulled under his chin and wearing his black boots and black gaiters in front of his selective service men. As the 17th PTR graduates assumed their leadership roles in the U.S. Army, scenes such as this occurred within all seven camps to which the men of the 92nd Division were assigned before being shipped overseas. One of these young officers, Second Lieutenant James B. Morris, was quoted as saying, "I had finally gotten what I wanted – the chance to become a 'bad ass' Army officer." Photo courtesy of National World War I Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, Missouri.*

Camp Dix, New Jersey; and Camp Upton, Long Island, New York.<sup>68</sup> The division was officially organized in November 1917 and consisted of black selective service men from all over the United States.<sup>69</sup>

The 92nd Division was known as the Buffalo Division. It was organized with divisional logistical, engineer, signal, artillery, and mortar units, with two primary infantry combat units: the

68. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 91.

69. American Battle Monuments Commission, *92nd Division: Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, DC, 1944), 1.

183rd Infantry Brigade consisting of the 365th and 366th Infantry Regiments and the 184th Infantry Brigade consisting of the 367th and 368th Infantry Regiments. The division was assigned 24 155-mm howitzers, 48 75-mm guns, 12 6-inch trench mortars, 260 machine guns, and 16,193 rifles. Officers trained in these skills were expected to effectively employ these weapons on the battlefield. That posed a challenge for the 17th PTR officers, who had not received prior training on these weapons at Fort Des Moines. When some of the 92nd Division (formerly 17th PTR) officers were eventually sent to stateside schools prior to deployment to learn how to be artillery officers, they could not acquire the skills quickly enough. As a result, many received poor efficiency reports and ended up back in their 92nd Division infantry units or, worse, a Depot Brigade and were not allowed to sail overseas with the division. The former 17th PTR officers assigned to the 92nd Division, who attended machine gun school after arriving in France, fared better, despite the lack of machine gun training at Fort Des Moines.<sup>70</sup>

The division would start the war with 82 percent junior black officers, the majority of whom came from the 17th PTR, but through involuntary transfers, such as the artillery school non-graduate reassignments to depots or later wartime casualties, ended the war with 58 percent junior black officers. The shortages were filled by white officer replacements.<sup>71</sup>

In France the 92nd Division, 368th Infantry Regiment, took part in combat operations with American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, September 26–October 5, 1918. The entire division later assumed command of the Marbache Sector and Woivre Plain Operations for the AEF and actively patrolled and conducted local attacks against German positions from October 8 through November 11, 1918. From August 31 through November 30, the 92nd Division maintained a combat strength of 26,011 to 24,354 men and suffered 1,294 casualties.<sup>72</sup>

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70. Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee*, 34; Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 131–32; American Battle Monuments, *92nd Division*, 4; Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers*, 47–50, 54–55.

71. Blakely, *Earl B. Dickerson*, 31.

72. American Battle Monuments, *92nd Division*, 6, 27, 36.

The 93rd Division [Provisional] was organized at Camp Stuart, Virginia, in December 1917. The division was composed of National Guard units from the states of New York, Illinois, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia, with a few black selective service men from South Carolina. Once federalized, the National Guard units were reorganized into two infantry brigades: the 185th Infantry Brigade, consisting of the 369th and 370th Infantry Regiments; and the 186th Infantry Brigade, consisting of the 371st and 372nd Infantry Regiments.<sup>73</sup>

Upon arrival in France beginning in December 1917 through April 1918, the four regiments of the 93rd Division were released from the AEF to serve under French command as individual regimental replacements. Despite initial plans for this to be a temporary arrangement, it was later made permanent for the duration of the war. The 369th adopted the rattlesnake insignia and would become known to history as the Harlem Hellfighters. It was assigned to the French 161st Division and participated in the Champagne-Marne Defensive and later the Meuse-Argonne (Champagne) Offensive. The regiment advanced into Germany with the French 161st Division as part of the French Army of Occupation at the end of the war. From November 5 until the armistice, the 370th, known as the Black Devils, served under no separate front-line command, but its battalions were attached to various French regiments, participating in the Oise-Aisne Offensive and the Allied general pursuit of withdrawing German troops near the end of the war. The 371st, which adopted the red hand insignia, served under the French 157th and 68th Divisions and participated in the Meuse-Argonne (Champagne) Offensive. The 372nd also adopted the red hand insignia, which was the original insignia of the 93rd Division [Provisional]. It served under the French 63rd and 35th Divisions and finally joined the 371st Infantry Regiment under the French 157th Division in the Meuse-Argonne (Champagne) Offensive. From August 31 through November 30, 1918, the 93rd Division's four regiments maintained a combined combat strength of 11,487 to

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73. American Battle Monuments Commission, *93rd Division: Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, D.C., 1944), 1.

10,007 men, and the division's regiments suffered a combined 3,167 casualties during the war.<sup>74</sup>

THE PERSONAL WARTIME SERVICE of some of these 17th PTR and MOTC officers illustrates how these men used their training and education to contribute to the war effort overseas. Earl Dickerson was a second-year law school student when he was commissioned as a second lieutenant at Fort Des Moines and assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 365th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division stationed at Camp Grant. Because of his fluency in French, he was assigned as an interpreter in the division's advanced party heading to France. On the way, the Germans torpedoed and sank several ships in his convoy. In France he found the French initially curious about or fearful of black Americans based on what white Americans had told them. Fortunately, he found that after the French became acquainted with blacks, they would treat them magnificently. From September through November 1918 Dickerson assumed his duties as an infantry platoon leader in Company E and experienced the horrors of trench warfare, with artillery and mortar barrages, gas attacks, and German snipers only a hundred yards away from his position. He learned the random nature of death and survival on the battlefield as one exploding artillery shell could vaporize one man and leave another untouched. He survived to return home, and in 1920 he received the first law degree awarded by the University of Chicago to an African American.<sup>75</sup>

George Washington Lee was commissioned a second lieutenant and assigned to Company C, 368th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division. He served under Captain Elijah Reynolds, a former noncommissioned officer promoted to captain upon graduation from Fort Des Moines. Shortly after Lee arrived in France with the rest of his division he was sent to Lafayette liaison school to learn how to signal aircraft from the ground with colored panels.

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74. *Ibid.*, 4–6, 23, 36; Robert J. Dalessandro and Gerald Torrence, *Men of Color in the First World War* (Atglen, PA, 209, 106–9); Library of Congress, "Photographs of the 369th Infantry and African Americans during World War I," [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry).

75. Blakely, *Earl B. Dickerson*, 29–31, 39.

While stationed in the St. Die sector, Lee was placed in charge of turning off the electrified wire in front of his sector of the Allied trench lines. Each night, when a friendly patrol headed toward the German lines, one of his men would go to the powerhouse and turn off the electric wire. On September 20, 1918, Lee's regiment moved north from St. Die to participate in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. During an attack as part of that offensive, his battalion advanced six miles but then received orders to withdraw. Some of the battalion's black officers, including Captain Elijah Reynolds, were later charged with cowardice and shipped back to the states. Many of the soldiers, including Lee, felt that prejudice played a role in the order to withdraw and in the subsequent charges of cowardice. Lee went on to serve in the Marbache Offensive, but he considered the Argonne Offensive his own personal triumph in the war because African Americans had overcome their psychological reluctance to fight white men and proven their bravery in combat. After the war ended, Lee received a citation for bravery in a successful action against a German sniper during the war.<sup>76</sup>

James B. Morris graduated from Howard University Law School in 1915. During training at Fort Des Moines, he quickly made friends with Dr. Urbane Bass, who had graduated from medical school in 1906 and was attending the medical officer training camp. Morris found that it required his maximum effort to succeed in the academic curriculum and physical fitness training at Fort Des Moines. Upon graduation, he was assigned to Camp Dodge with the 366th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division, which was composed of young black men from Alabama. Morris married Georgine Crow on April 6, 1918, and shipped out for France in June 1918. He would later describe life in the trenches as not very glorious and would complain about how many of his men were sick. He would also grumble that the smell of the trenches from decay, blood, and rotting bodies was so bad that he often regurgitated his morning breakfast. In addition, he noted becoming half deaf in one ear from the constant artillery fire from both sides. Morris's first injury – burns on his head – resulted from high concentrations of mustard gas from a

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76. Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee*, 34–40.

German gas attack. After a short hospital stay, he returned to the front and assumed new duties as a forward scout operating in no-man's land between the combatant trenches. On November 8, 1918, he was wounded a second time, more severely, from a gunshot wound to his leg while conducting a scouting mission. He was evacuated to a French hospital and underwent numerous operations to regain the use of his leg. While recovering, Morris learned that he was going to be a father. His son was born February 19, 1919. Later he learned that his friend First Lieutenant Dr. Bass, who had been assigned to the 93rd Division, had been killed by German artillery fire while administering medical aid to other wounded soldiers. Morris would survive the war and return to Des Moines to practice law.<sup>77</sup>

Almost all of the doctors from the MOTC were assigned to the 92nd Division, with most assigned to the 92nd Division headquarters at Camp Funston, Fort Riley, Kansas, but eight doctors, including Bass, were assigned to the 93rd Division. Of all the MOTC graduates who served in France, Bass was the only one to die in combat. The rest returned to resume their civilian practices.<sup>78</sup>

Dr. Louis Wright was one of the 92nd Division MOTC graduates. Lieutenant Colonel Bingham, the MOTC commander, recommended him for the rank of captain, but he was commissioned a first lieutenant. Wright was assigned to the 367th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division, then stationed at Camp Upton, New York, prior to the division's deployment to Europe. Wright found the medical work monotonous at Camp Upton, so he decided to experiment with the army's smallpox vaccination inoculation techniques. His successful research led to the virtual elimination of the unsuccessful vaccinations used previously. The army quickly adopted his technique, and his findings were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1918. On the Western Front with the 92nd Division near St. Die, France, on September 4, 1918, Wright was incapacitated while treating wounded soldiers at his aid station during a German phosgene gas attack. He later recalled, "I was taking care of a

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77. Morris, *Tradition and Valor*, 33, 36-37, 39-40, 44, 46-51, 53, 57.

78. Fisher and Buckley, *African American Doctors*, 12.

soldier who could not breathe when suddenly I found that I couldn't get my breath either." After a three-week hospitalization, Wright returned to the front. He was later awarded the Purple Heart, but permanent lung damage plagued him for the rest of his life. While serving in the army, Wright always fought discriminatory treatment against himself and his soldiers even if other African Americans told him to stay in line. This contributed to his unpopularity among his white commanding officers and his subsequent failure to be promoted to captain until the last day of the war, November 11, 1918. Wright would return to the states and practice medicine in Harlem, New York.<sup>79</sup>

THIS EXAMINATION of the lives, education, and training of the first large-scale commissioning of African American officers in American history shows how the idea of a separate training camp for African Americans was born and pursued to a successful conclusion at Fort Des Moines during World War I. From a larger perspective, this history of Fort Des Moines illustrates the harm of institutional racism that was the bedrock of American race relations in 1917 and shows how African Americans overcame that challenge and provided positive benefits to future generations. These officers successfully participated in the struggle to win the war in Europe, and, upon their return, continued the struggle for equality in the United States. Fort Des Moines played a crucial role in this two-front war. In 1917 the U.S. Army was segregated, but the efforts of these men contributed to its official desegregation by President Harry Truman on July 26, 1948. Today's U.S. Army demonstrates how all ethnic and racial groups can work together for the common good. Iowa helped chip away the bedrock of racial intolerance.<sup>80</sup>

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79. Robert C. Hayden, *"Mr. Harlem Hospital": Dr. Louis T. Wright, A Biography* (Littleton, MA, 2003), 52, 53, 57, 59.

80. Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, "This Day in Truman History July 26, 1948," [www.trumanlibrary.org/anniversaries/desegblurb.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/anniversaries/desegblurb.htm).

TABLE 1  
FIRST MONTH OF COMMON CORE COURSES FOR ALL CADETS

Subject/Activity	Hours of Training	% of Total Training
In-processing	8	4
Conference (lecture)	64	29.4
Evening study	46	21
Physical training	11	5
Practice marches	9.5	4.3
School of soldier and squad	7.5	3.4
School of the company (half close order, half extended order)	17.5	8
School of the battalion	2.5	1.1
Bayonet training	4.5	2
Saber training	1	0.5
Signaling	20.5	9.3
Musketry sighting practice	7.5	3.4
Gallery range practice	9	4.1
Interior guard duty	2.5	1.1
Field craft and patrolling	7.5	3.4
Total training hours	218.5	100

TABLE 2  
SECOND AND THIRD MONTHS OF TRAINING FOR INFANTRY CADETS

Subject / Activity	Hours of Training	% of Total Training
Conference (lecture)	102	25
Evening study	64	16
Physical training	10.5	2.5
Company drill	21	5
Battalion drill	10.5	2.5
Pistol training	2.5	0.6
Tent pitching	2	0.5
Bayonet training	5	1.2
Range firing practice	38	9.3
Field training: Patrolling and scouting	10.5	2.5
Field training: Battalion in attack and defense	12	3.1
Field training: Battalion overnight camping	12.5	3.2

Field training:		
Battalion in trench defense	5	1.2
Field training: Company on outpost, advance and rear guard	5	1.2
Field training:		
Company in attack and defense	5	1.2
Machine gun drill	4.5	1.1
Platoon combat firing	4	1
Company combat firing	4	1
Battalion combat firing	2	0.5
Trench warfare (include grenades, gas and trench attack and defense)	19	4.8
Three-day maneuvers	60	14.7
Lectures on infantry, cavalry, and artillery	8	1.9
<hr/>		
Total training hours	407	100

TABLE 3  
FIRST SIX-DAY INTENSIVE INSTRUCTION PERIOD FOR MEDICAL CADETS

**First Day (August 27, 1917)**

5:45-6 a.m. Setting-up exercises  
 7:30-8:25 a.m. Drill and School of the Soldier  
 8:30-9:25 a.m. Litter-bearer drill  
 9:30-10:25 a.m. Lecture, personal equipment  
 10:30-11:25 a.m. First aid, using soldier equipment, lecture and demonstration  
 1:00-2:25 p.m. Practical first aid  
 2:30-4:30 p.m. Litter-bearer work with and without litter

**Second Day (August 28, 1917)**

5:45-6 a.m. Setting-up exercises  
 7:30-8:25 a.m. School of the Soldier  
 8:30-9:25 a.m. Litter-bearer drill  
 9:30-10:25 a.m. Field and surplus kits, equipment, medical officers  
 10:30-11:25 a.m. First aid, using soldier equipment, lecture and demonstration  
 1:00-2:25 p.m. Practical first aid  
 2:30-4:30 p.m. Litter-bearer work with and without litter  
 7-9 p.m. Reports, returns, etc., pertaining to regimental detachment

**Third Day (August 29, 1917)**

5:45-6 a.m. Setting-up exercises  
 7:30-8:25 a.m. School of the Soldier  
 8:30-9:25 a.m. Litter-bearer drill  
 9:30-10:25 a.m. Care and maintenance of soldier equipment  
 10:30-11:25 a.m. Duties of a soldier; lecture and quiz  
 1:00-2:25 p.m. Practical first aid  
 2:30-4:30 p.m. Litter-bearer work with and without litter

**Fourth Day (August 30, 1917)**

5:45-6 a.m. Setting-up exercises  
7:30-8:25 a.m. School of the Soldier  
8:30-9:25 a.m. Litter-bearer drill  
9:30-10:25 a.m. Care and maintenance of soldier equipment  
10:30-11:25 a.m. Duties of a soldier; lecture and quiz  
1:00-2:25 p.m. Practical first aid  
2:30-4:30 p.m. Litter-bearer work with and without litter

**Fifth Day (August 31, 1917)**

5:45-6 a.m. Setting-up exercises  
7:30-8:25 a.m. School of the Soldier  
8:30-9:25 a.m. Litter-bearer drill  
9:30-10:25 a.m. General Organization of military forces  
10:30-11:25 a.m. Duties of a soldier; lecture and quiz  
1:00-2:25 p.m. Practical first aid  
2:30-4:30 p.m. Litter-bearer work with and without litter  
7-9 p.m. Reports, returns pertaining to regimental detachment

**Sixth Day (September 1, 1917)**

5:45-6 a.m. Setting-up exercises  
7:30-8:25 a.m. Inspection  
8:30-9:25 a.m. Demonstration and familiarization with Medical Department  
equipment  
9:30-10:25 a.m. Duties of a soldier; lecture and quiz  
10:30-11:25 a.m. Articles of War; Manual for Courts-Martial; lecture and quiz