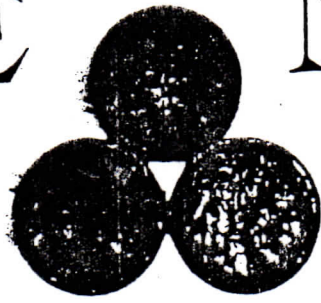


# TRIPLE NICKLE



555 PARACHUTE INFANTRY ASSOC. INC.



555TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY ASSOCIATION, INC.  
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS  
TRIPLE NICKLE





## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 555TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION



It all began in 1944 with just 17 Brave Black Pioneers. The skepticism they encountered upon arrival at Jump School, Ft. Benning Georgia was about as subtle as a punch in the mouth. "Who ever heard of a Black Paratrooper?" some scoffed in amazement. Others bet that they lacked the "guts" to exit from an airplane in flight, but the 17 soon made a believer out of the doubters. In February 1944 they became the first Blacks in the United States Army to wear the silver wings of a "PARATROOPER". These 17 became the cadre for the 555th Parachute Infantry Company forming at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. They presented a challenge to all blacks who followed, a challenge no other outfit matched. Legend holds that whatever was required of others, they would demand more of themselves.

Before you could become a member of this elite organization there were certain requirements to be met. You had to volunteer, be between 18 and 32 years of age, not over 72" in height, not over 185 pounds and you needed an IQ of 90 or better. After meeting the requirements you were lectured. The training was rigid and tough. The first four weeks included physical training chute packing and controlled jumps from a 34' tower. The next four weeks included loading and unloading fliders and making one glider flight. You entered a wind tunnel to learn chute control and how to collaspe a chute; you spent time getting adjusted to your chutes and equipment. You recieved extensive classes in jump technology, made jumps from the 250' towers and finally you jumped out of planes.

Now that the door was opened, so many Blacks were completing jump school that by November 1944 the Company of 10 Officers and 140 Enlisted Men had mushroomed into a Battalion under the command of Captain James M. Porter of New York City. This finely trained combat unit set to go overseas, but, the war began to wind down as the Nazi machine began to disintegrate and the "THREE NICKLE" Unit as they called themselves had to cover themselves with another kind of glory.

Captain Porter and his Troopers were bitterly disappointed when they were assigned to a forest fighting mission on the West Coast instead of a combat mission in an Overseas Theater of Operations. The 555th went through an altogether different kind of training as they were transferred to the Pendleton AFB in Oregon to fight forest fires. They earned the title "SMOKE JUMPERS" and had learned to leap into smoke filled clearings and smack into the trees. They fought violent forest fires from California to Arizona that totaled 36 missions between July and October, made over 1,000 individual jumps as they fought fires started by Japanese incendiary balloons. People living in these areas spoke with reverence and admiration of the siill and courage of the "TRIPLE NICKEL", as the Battalion was affectionately called.

The atomic bomb over Japan snuffed out any further need for combat duty. Although the unit never went overseas, these fire fighting "SMOKE JUMPERS", wrote a new chapters as to what brave PARATROOPERS in baggy pants could do. The Battalion motto became "ANYPLACE, ANYTIME!". After successfully completing the smoke jumping mission the Battalion, now officially know as the "Black Panthers", was transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina in December 1945 and attached to the 82d Airborne Division. Captain Porter retained command of the Battalion until Captain Joseph "Jette" Gates, of New York City assumed command. Captain Porter and Captain Gates later retired from the United States army as Lt. Colonels.

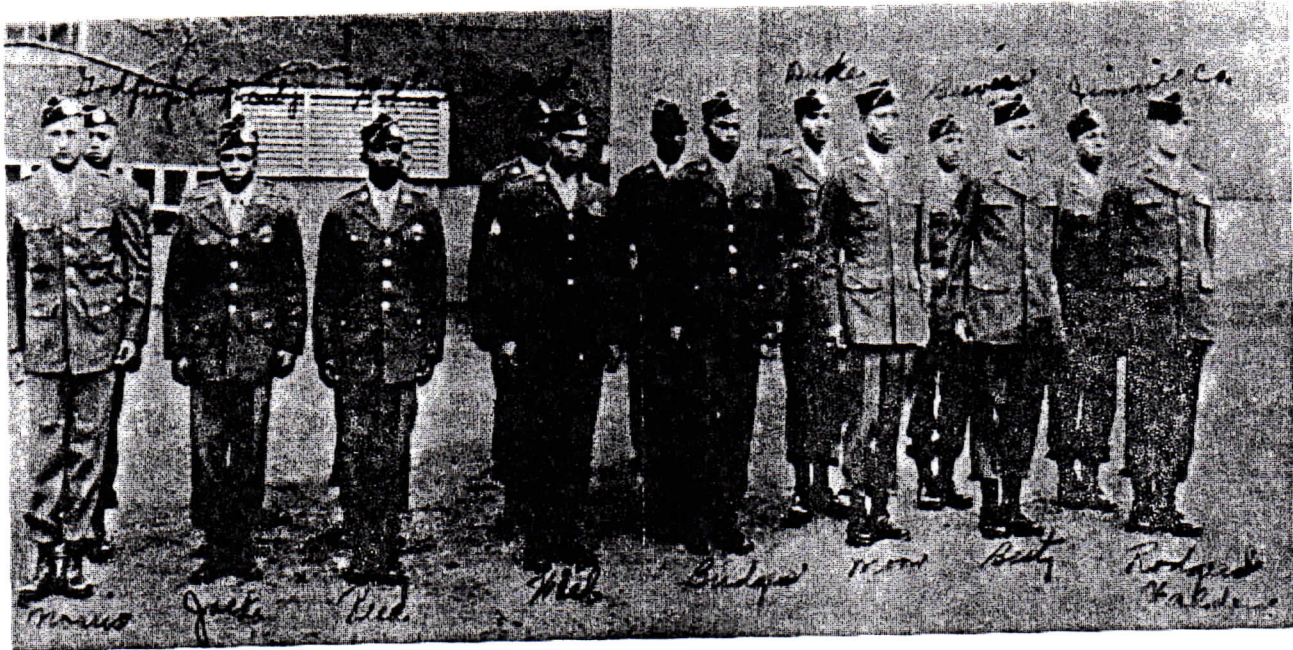
The 555th Parachute Battalion was redesignated the 3rd Battalion of the 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment and became an integral part of the 82nd Airborne Division. Lt. Colonel Garrett, a white officer, assumed command of the 3rd Battalion, 505 from Captain Gates. A short time after the redesignation some black troopers were transferred out of the Battalion, being replaced by white troopers, thus marking the end of segregation of Black Soldiers in the United States Army. Later, Blacks became members of all of the Army's Airborne units.

The first Black Paratroopers to see combat, as a unit, were former members of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the 503rd Abn Anti-aircraft Battalion, and the 80th Airborne Anti-aircraft Battalion that volunteered to form the 2d Airborne Ranger Company at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. An all black unit under the command of 1st Lt. Warren E. Allen. This unit was in action with the 7th Infantry Division in Korea. They were later attached to the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team and made one of the two combat jumps in Korea. The valiant Troopers of this Company distinguished themselves in combat earning many Sivler Stars, Bronze Stars, and numerous decorations for valor in combat. Many of it's men were killed in action and numerous others wounded. It is to be noted that before assignment to the 555th Parachute Infantry many of its members had already received decorations for heroic action under fire.

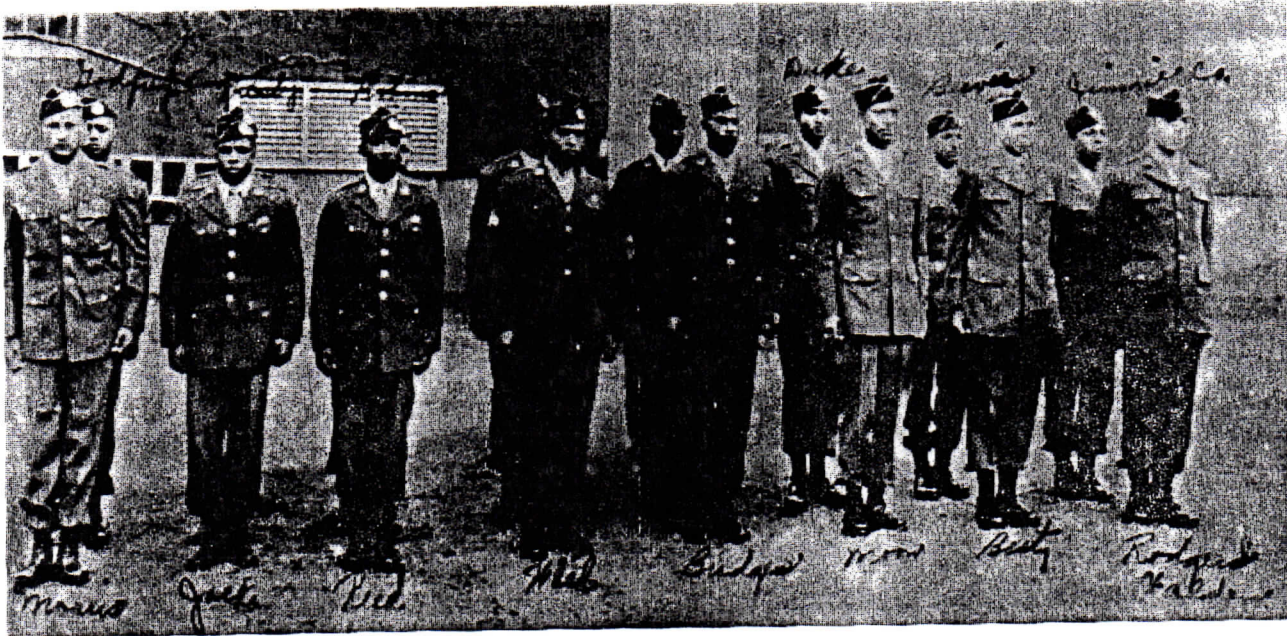
The 555th was composed of many outstanding personal and by that fact an unusually high amount of the former members later attained high Officer and Non-Commissioned Officer ranks in the United States Army. We can count Generals, Colonels, Lt. Colonels and Majors. Approximately 30 advanced from Pvt. to Captain, over 100 advanced through the ranks to Master Sergeants, Sergeant Majors, and 1st Sergeants., the achievements, along with others are a testimonial to the 555th and the strenuous efforts put out by retired Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, who was the Commanding General of the 82d Airborne Division, was the foremost sponser and believer in the potenal of the Black Paratrooper from its conception.

Who was to know that one day a Black Paratrooper would command the 82nd Airborne Division, some 33 years after the formation of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion. A Black Officer, Major General Roscoe Robinson became the Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division, the most sought after command in the United States Army. General Robinson was a Private in the United States Army at the birth of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion.

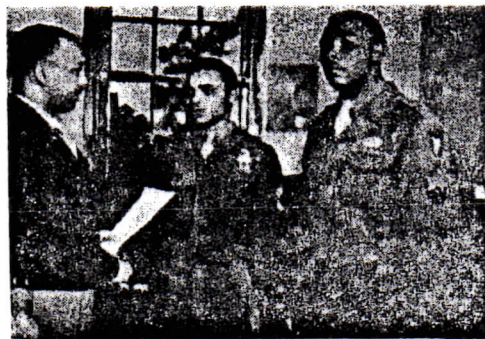
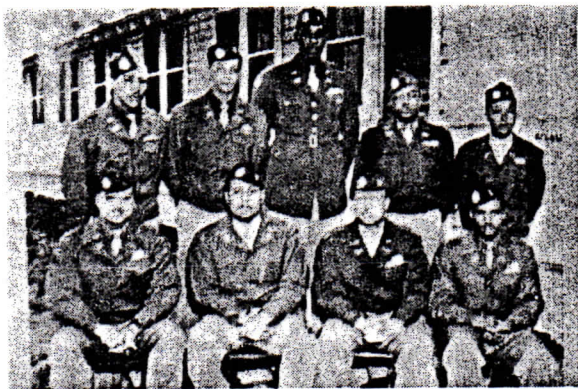
Today there are many Black Paratroopers, men and women in all airborne units. It all started with 17 men who paved the way and proved that BLACKS were equal to the task.



Enlisted men of the test platoon. *Front Row, from left to right:* • First Sgt. Walter Morris, Spokane, Wash.: first black enlisted man accepted for airborne duty; volunteered while serving as First Sgt., Service Company, The Parachute School, Ft. Benning, Ga. • Sgt. Jack D. Tillis; enlisted 21 November 1942; served with Company A, 371st Infantry, 92d Division before coming to airborne. • Sgt. Leo D. Reed; enlisted 31 October, 1942; came to airborne from Company H, 365th Infantry, 92d Division. • Sgt. Daniel C. Weil; • S. Sgt. Hubert Bridges; enlisted in Army 13 August 1940; volunteered for airborne from Company C, 365th Infantry, 92d Division, Ft. Huachuca, Ariz. • Tech. Grade IV Alvin L. Moon; enlisted 20 September 1941; transferred to airborne from Service Company, 370th Infantry, 92d Division. • Sgt. Ned D. Bess; enlisted 27th November 1942; came to airborne from Company H, 371st Infantry, 92d Division. • Sgt. Roger S. Walden; enlisted on Pearl Harbor Day, 7 December, 1941; came to airborne from Company C, 365th Infantry, 92d Division. *Back Row:* • Cpl. McKinley Godfrey, Jr.; enlisted 2 March, 1943; came to airborne from Company I, 370th Infantry, 92d Division. • Sgt. Elijah Wesby; enlisted 18 October, 1941; came to airborne from Service Company, The Parachute School. • Sgt. Daniel W. Robinson; enlisted 5 March, 1942; volunteered for airborne from Anti-Tank Company, 365th Infantry, 92d Division. • S. Sgt. Calvin R. Beal; enlisted 21 February, 1941; came to airborne from 371st Infantry, 92d Division. • S. Sgt. Robert F. Greene; enlisted 12 August 1941; came to airborne from Company H, 371st Infantry, 92d Division. • S. Sgt. Lonnie M. Duke; enlisted in Army 1 September, 1942; served as staff sergeant Company C, 371st Infantry, 92d Division, Ft. Huachuca, Ariz. • Sgt. Clarence H. Beavers; enlisted service 13 March, 1941; came to airborne from a post maint. unit, Indiantown, Gap, Pa. • Sgt. James E. Kornegay; enlisted 3 March, 1941; volunteered for airborne duty from Cannon Company, 370th Infantry, 92d Division.



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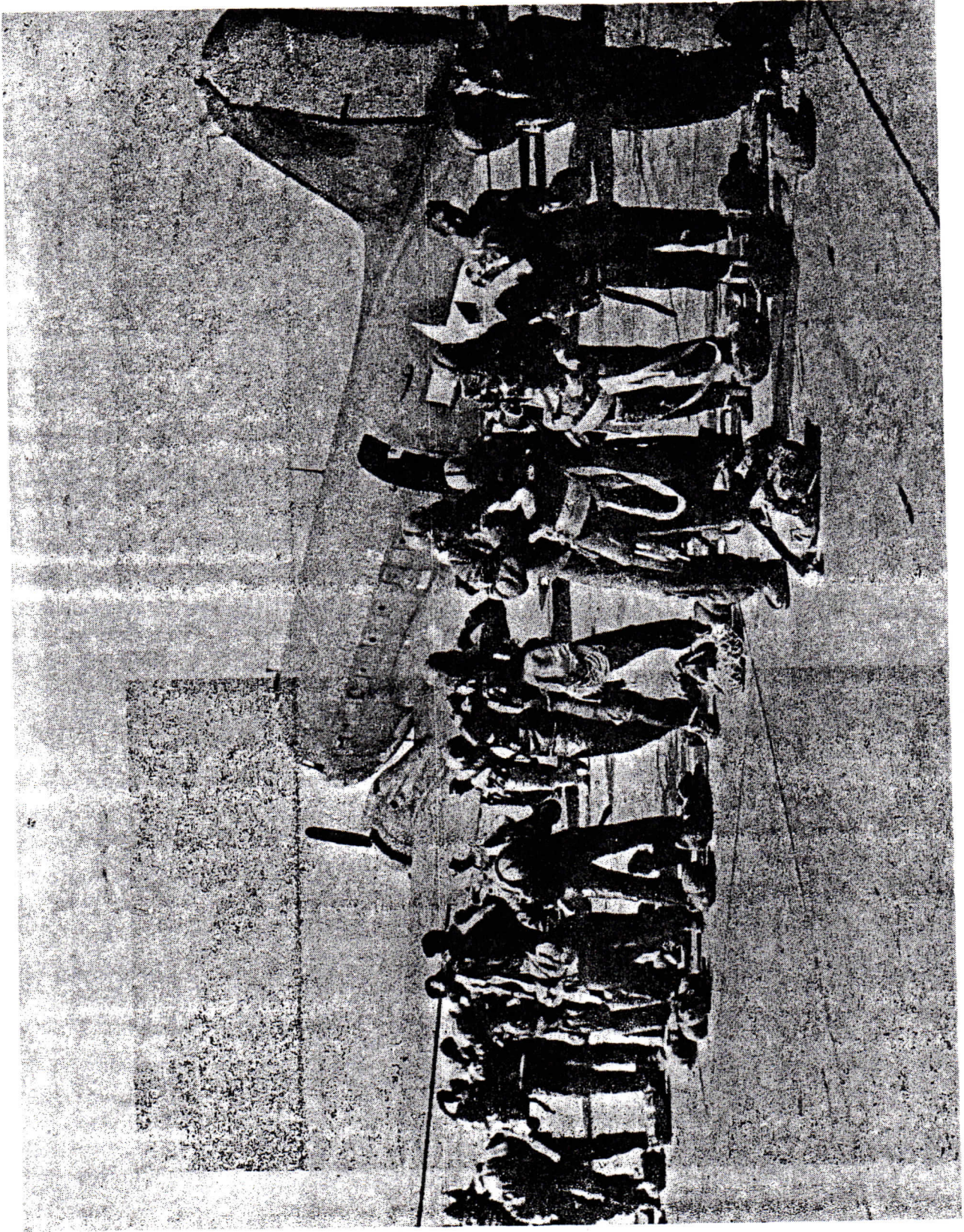


*Cool, Calm and Ready*





PARATROOPERS OF THE 555th INFANTRY BATTALION



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