

Unsung World War II Black Heroes of Dallas, Texas

By RL Canady, November 2020

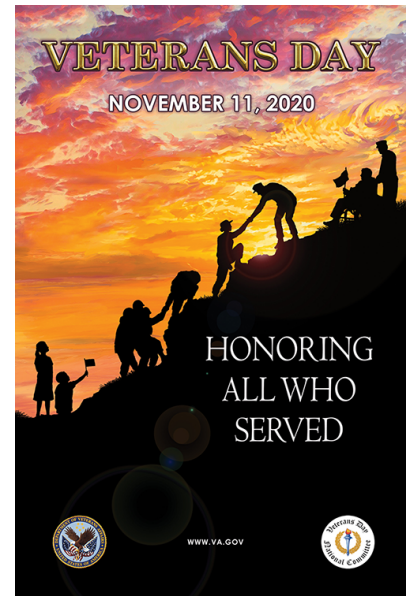
On the 11th of November each year, our nation celebrates Veterans Day, which honors all veterans of the U. S. Armed Forces. Veteran's Day started out of Armistice Day, designated by President Woodrow Wilson to commemorate the ending World War I in 1918.¹ Congress made Armistice Day a legal holiday in 1938, and in 1954, amended the act to honor veterans of all wars. On October 8, 1954, President Eisenhower issued the first Veterans Day Proclamation changing Armistice Day to Veterans Day as *"A celebration to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good."*²

At the end of World War II, Black veterans who had fought for freedom around the world, returned home to be greeted by harsh acts of hostility and discrimination. While both law and social custom declared *"separate but equal"*, the reality was separate but hardly equal.

Many Black veterans became leaders in their local communities, and later in the Civil Rights movement, especially the southern states.⁴ Racism, inequality, and segregation were pervasive not only in civilian life, but in the military. Sadly, the generation with personal memories and experience of these events is now passing away.

Today, we acknowledge and honor all veterans for their achievements and service. This article makes a special tribute to a few of the unsung heroes who lived in Dallas, Texas. Their brave deeds were silenced by the darkness of the racial prejudice that was prevalent in the 1940s. They were not acknowledged for their service to their country, which they gave despite laws that restricted and separated them by the color of their skin.

Records from the McGowan Funeral Home Collection provide numerous examples of Blacks who served in the military. Research into these files produced amazing information about WWII veterans.



Veterans Day Poster / U. S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs³

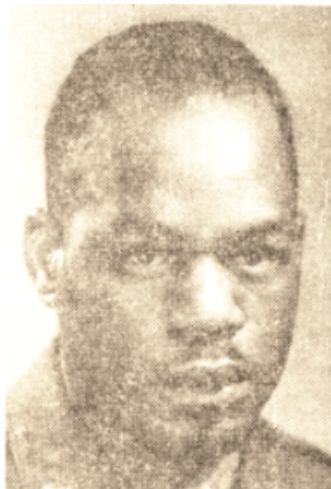


Pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group, "Tuskegee Airmen" ⁵

14% of the individuals buried by McGowan were veterans, who served in WWI, WWII, Korea, or Vietnam. The majority served in WWII. Several of these veterans were discharged with high honors of awards. Their participation records help us to separate myths from facts.

Here is a small sampling of the WWII Black veterans that was taken from the McGowan Funeral Home Collection.

Walter Boswell



Walter Boswell was born on February 4, 1911 in Dallas, Texas. Walter was 29 when he registered for the draft at the Dallas Selective Service Local board on October 16, 1940 He lived with his mother, Beatrice Boswell, at 2617 Guillot Street in a section of Dallas known as Thomas and Hall district. Previously known as Freedman's Town North, it is today known as Uptown Dallas.⁶

Walter Boswell enlisted into the U.S. Army on November 4, 1942 and was shipped to Fort Sam Houston near San Antonio for basic military training (BMT). Because of his civilian occupation as an automobile mechanic, he was selected for further training as mechanic on trucks and construction equipment and tanks.



Red Ball Express⁷

He was attached to the 951st Quartermaster service company as a duty soldier, meaning he delivered to the frontline or battlefield. The 951st Quartermaster company was one of the companies that formed the famous Redball Express transportation system. Drivers loaded supplies from ships docked in the Normandy beach landing and moved the supplies more than 300 miles inland to the forward moving army front line.

Private Walter Boswell willingly served his country and performed his duties in the face of hostile enemy forces. Private Boswell served in the successful Normandy Campaign, Northern France Campaign, and finally in September of 1944 in the Rhineland Campaign.

Pvt. Walter Boswell Jr. was honored for his service and sacrifices in war against armed enemies of the United States, He was recipient of the following medals:

- The American Campaign Medal
- The European-African-Middle Eastern Medal with 3 Bronze Stars
- The Victory Medal
- 3 Overseas Bars
- Marksman Rifleman award
- Good Conduct award
- The Army Lapel button

Private Walter Boswell Jr. received an honorable discharge from the U. S. Army on December 6, 1945 and returned home to Dallas where he worked as a mechanic and caddy. Walter suffered

from a heart condition (cardio-respiratory arrest) and died at the Dallas Veteran's Hospital on September 26, 1976 at age 67.⁸ He is buried at Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in Dallas Texas.⁹

Fred S. Anderson



Headstone photo by RL Canady

Fred S. Anderson was born in Okolona, Arkansas on August 2, 1914. His family moved to Dallas for greater opportunities when Fred was a teenager. Fred enlisted in the U. S. Army on March 3, 1941 and trained at Fort Walton near Dallas. Private Anderson was assigned to the 25th infantry Regiment. He completed combat training and was transferred to the Pacific. He entered battle as a ground infantryman in the Northern Solomon Island campaign and was later sent to the New Guinea campaign theater for duty.¹⁰

Both campaigns produced great losses for the Japanese. Fred Anderson received a promotion from private to private first class (PFC). Fred Anderson's participation in combat against armed enemies of the United States earned him the honor of the following awards:¹¹

- American Defense Service Medal
- Asiatic- Pacific Campaign Medal with 2 Bronze Stars
- Expert Rifleman
- Good Conduct

Fred Anderson was released from military duty with an Honorable discharge on August 20, 1945. The war in the Pacific ended officially on September 2, 1945. Fred Anderson took work at the Stove Hospital in Dallas and joined St. Mark's Baptist Church. Fred developed carcinoma of the lung and died at age 61 on June 3, 1976 at the Veterans Hospital in Dallas.¹² He left in

mourning his wife, Ella Mai Lewis Anderson, three daughters: Angela L. Anderson, Joyce Marie Williams, Etta Marie Anderson; two sons: Roy V. Anderson and James E. Vaughn.¹³ Fred S. Anderson is buried at Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in Dallas.¹⁴

Jessie Buford

Jessie Buford was born on April 7, 1913 to Albert and Lillian Buford. The couple lived in a Black community north of downtown Dallas, Texas. Jessie was the second of three boys. His brother Arthur was 2 years older and brother Phillip was 3 years younger. The sibling children were born on Trinidad Street, where the family lived.¹⁵

In 1913, Dallas was on its way to humanity and civility. At the same time, the city continued to exhibit sporadic outbursts of violence that characterized the “Separate but Equal” laws.¹⁶ Dallas’ Black population was scattered in various communities located across county. Some of the communities were Elm Thickets, Deep Ellum on Elm Street, 10th Street, Freedman’s Town (The Bottom), Joppa, Frogtown, String Town, and Freedman’s Town North. Freedman’s Town North was renamed to State-Thomas District and is now known as Uptown Dallas. The area was flourishing with more than 150 Black-owned businesses, including a newspaper, union hall, numerous businesses providing for the needs of the community.¹⁷

Jessie dropped out of school for employment opportunities in the trucking industry and for night work as a dispatcher for State Taxi Company.

On October 16, 1940, Jessie registered for the draft in Dallas. At the time of his draft registration, Jessie lived at 2703 Halls Villa and was married to Lossie Williams.

He enlisted in the U. S. Army on July 1, 1942 at the Dallas induction center and was transferred to Fort Sam Houston for basic military training. After BMT, Jessie was assigned to the 679th Tank Destroyer Battalion (AA), Company “B” for training at Camp Hood in Killeen (now called Fort Hood). The 679th’s motto was “*Deeds Not Words.*” Jessie became a tank driver and gunman on M10 and, M4 tanks, as well as on half-tracks, all of which was designed to outmaneuver the German’s Panzer tanks. The 679th tank destroyer battalion was attached to the 92nd Infantry Division. Jessie’s civilian experience with maps and trucks worked out well for his military assignment.



*“Deeds not Words” – Emblem of the 679th Tank Destroyer Battalion*¹⁸

After training at Camp Hood, Private Buford was deployed in North Africa. The 679th converted to a towed battalion on 14 July, 1943. Disembarked at Le Havre, France, on 21 January, 1945, then re-embarked at Marseilles on 1 March for transfer to Italy. The 679th entered the line in IV Corps sector on 17 March 1944.¹⁹ The assault on the axis forces in Italy deployed the 679th as a detachment unit of the 92nd Infantry where the Unit received citations for their combat efforts. Pvt. Jessie Buford participated in the following campaigns:

- Tunisian Campaign
- Naples-Foggia Campaign
- Rome-Arno Campaign
- Northern Apennines Campaign
- Po Valley Campaign

Private Jessie Buford was awarded the following medals for his dedicated duty:²⁰

- European-African-Middle Eastern Medal /with 5 Bronze Stars
- Victory Medal
- 1 service medal (unreadable)
- Overseas Bars
- Lapel Button

With more than two years of combat activity to his credit, Pvt Buford received some injury in battle and was treated at a field hospital. His injury was not disabling, but battle fatigue (now called PTSD) required some rest and recuperation. After about 30 days of treatment, Pvt. Buford was able to return to his company for duty. In November 1, 1945 Private sailed for return to the U. S. and discharge. On November 8, 1945 Jessie Buford was discharged with an honorable discharge.²¹

Jessie Buford returned to Dallas and his old neighborhood at 3113 Thomas Street. He continued to suffer from battle fatigue and was not able to sustain full-time employment. Jessie started working on his own account, doing yard work in the neighborhood.²²

In about 1969, Jessie Buford's health had deteriorated and on October 27, 1970, Jessie Buford died from hepatorenal failure due to cirrhosis of the liver at the Dallas VA hospital. He was 57 years old.²³

Pvt. Jessie Buford was buried at Lincoln Memorial Park in Dallas, in Block 10, Lot 30, Space 6.²⁴

Henry Charles Crawford



Headstone photo by RL Canady

Henry was born on November 8, 1907 in West Point Mississippi. He relocated to Dallas where he lived with his mother on 3633 Southwest Blvd in what is known today as University Park. Henry registered for the U. S. Selective Service Draft on October 16, 1940 at age 32. In 1941, Henry enlisted into the U. S. Army Air Corps. After flight training, Henry was transferred to the 1866th Headquarters unit of the 8th Army Command. He was shipped to the European war.

Henry was a participant in the North Africa and Southern Italy Campaigns. He suffered severe medical problems in 1943. Henry was given a medical discharge while suffering from diseases contracted in field conditions while in Italy. Henry Crawford's honors and awards are not available due to lost separation papers.

Henry C. Crawford returned to the United States in July 1944 and was convicted of petty theft just a few months after his return to Dallas. He was sent to Huntsville State Penitentiary for two years from 1944 to 1946 for a petty theft conviction. After his release, Henry worked at laboring jobs and yard work. Henry developed a clientele and grew his business into a flourishing landscaping company serving the greater Dallas area. He became a Mason with membership in #335 A.M. & F.M. Pride of Honor Lodge. He was a longtime member of Bell Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Henry received medical treatment for heart disease at the Dallas Veterans Hospital. Henry died on December 7, 1974 at age 67.²⁵

Pvt Henry Charles Crawford is buried at Restland Memorial Park Cemetery, Veterans Garden plot, in Dallas.²⁶

Denson Edwards Jr.

Denson Edwards Jr. was born on December 18, 1922. His family lived in Nacogdoches, Texas when he enlisted for the U. S. Army on May 21, 1941 and entered the army at the Houston Induction Center in Harris Co., Texas. Private Denson Edwards was transferred to Fort Sam Houston for BMT and upon completion, he was assigned to the 44th Engineers, Headquarters and Service Company. Private Denson received a promotion to Tec5 when orders came for his reassignment to the war in the Pacific Theater. Under normal conditions, bombing and shelling were everyday experiences. The Japanese forces controlled the Burma road leading to the northern route to China. The 45th, along with Allies, were able to build bridges, and complete the Ledo road as an alternate route. The U. S. and southeast Asian allies were successful in the campaign against the Axis in the Pacific.

Tec5 Denson Edwards spent 4 years, 10 months, and 3 days in service of the U. S. Army. About 3 years of that time was in southeast Asia. He served in the India-Burma Campaign.

Tec5 Denson Edwards Jr. was recipient of the following medals:

- The American Defense Medal
- The Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with 1 Bronze Star
- Expert Rifleman Award
- The Lapel Button

Tec5 Denson Edwards died in the Dallas Veterans Hospital on May 30, 1976. He had a long history of treatment for a heart condition. Denson Edwards was married to Elsie Faye Rubies. He worked as a mail handler for the postal system in Dallas.²⁷

Denson Edwards Jr. is buried at Laurel Land Cemetery in Dallas.²⁸



Headstone photo by Debbie Hancock, used with permission

Conclusion



*The Chicago Defender announces Executive Order 9981, 26 July 1948*²⁹

On July 26th, 1948 President Harry S. Truman desegregated the United States military with Executive Order 9981.³⁰

His successor, President Eisenhower, signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which offered new voting rights protections for Black citizens in states where they had been legally disenfranchised.³¹

African American separate units remained segregated for a short period of time as did the United States society for the most part. Societal values towards segregation eventually was torn down and the battle was diverted to other human rights. Events like the Lower Alabama-Selma Campaign and the Bloody Sunday Bridge Battle are examples of the likeness of military to civilian tactics in fighting for Democracy. Veterans after WWII did experience some hostilities, however their resilience to indifferences helped move our society towards fulfilling the meaning of democracy and freedom.

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