

VSC NAACP VETERANS NEWSLETTER Issue 10 October 2021

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Exclusive: Fallen Iraq War Soldier on Track to Be First Black Medal of Honor Recipient since Vietnam

A U.S. soldier who sacrificed his life to save his comrades from their burning vehicle after it was struck by roadside bomb in Iraq is soon set to become the first Black servicemember to receive the U.S. government's most prestigious award for valor since the Vietnam War after a years-long battle for recognition, *Newsweek* has learned.

Two sources familiar with the process have confirmed to *Newsweek* that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who is the first Black Pentagon chief, has signed off on Army Sergeant 1st Class Alwyn C. Cashe receiving the Medal of Honor. A third source aware of the proceedings has confirmed that the White House is working to set a date for the award ceremony and that Cashe's family has been notified. [Read more](#)

Two soldiers killed in 2017 Niger ambush named honorary Green Berets



Sgt. La David Johnson



Sgt. 1st Class Jeremiah Johnson (U.S. Army)

Two American soldiers who died in 2017 fighting off Islamic State-affiliated attackers in Niger alongside Special Forces troops have been named honorary Green Berets, Army officials said.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Jeremiah Johnson and Sgt. La David Johnson received the rare honor during a small, private ceremony for their families on July 20 at Fort Bragg, N.C., an Army Special Operations Command spokesperson said in a statement. Both Johnsons, who are not related, had been deployed to Niger on a counterterrorism mission as support personnel with the Fort Bragg-based 3rd Special Forces group when their unit was ambushed near the West African country's border with Mali on Oct. 4, 2017.

The Army will now consider them Green Berets and members of the Special Forces regiment. [Read More](#)

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN INC. AND REDTAIL FLIGHT ACADEMY PARTNER TO SUPPORT UNDERSERVED, ASPIRING AVIATORS



The RedTail Flight Academy (RFA) is striving to “increase the percentage of minority aviators. The RFA will help develop a pipeline of diverse aviators through a 10-month Part 141 flight training curriculum

Imagine a time when young men eagerly met the challenge of becoming “America’s first Black military airmen” by volunteering to do it, although the odds were stacked against them.

According to the MIT Black History Project’s website, history unfolded when the “66th Air Force Flying School was opened at the historically Black college Tuskegee Institute, now known as Tuskegee University in Alabama.

The need for more pilots led Tuskegee Airmen Inc. and RedTail Flight Academy to partner to support aspiring aviation professionals from underserved communities.

Tuskegee Airmen Inc. is investing in the next generation of aviators, with the RedTail Flight Academy, by providing six inaugural scholarships for a program. [Read More](#)

VMI names Wins new superintendent



Retired U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins was named Virginia Military Institute's new superintendent by the VMI Board of Visitors on April 15. Wins, who has served as interim superintendent at VMI since November 2020, is a 1985 graduate of the state-supported military college in Lexington. He is the Institute's 15th superintendent, the first African American to hold the position in the Institute's 181-year old history.

Wins' appointment to the post comes after Gov. Ralph Northam announced an independent investigation into allegations of racism at VMI last October, following exposés in The Washington Post and The Roanoke Times. VMI's then-superintendent, retired U.S. Army Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III, resigned following the announced state probe. He had served in the position for 17 years.

According to a news release, Wins spent much of his first three months as interim superintendent assessing VMI's culture, policies and procedures. [Read More](#)

West Point unveiled a statue honoring a group of Black soldiers



The Buffalo Soldier bronze statue by artist Eddie Dixon was installed at West Point on August 31 and was unveiled in a ceremony on September 10.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point installed a 2,000-pound bronze statue of Staff Sgt. Sanders H. Matthews Sr., the first outdoor statue of a Black man on the West Point campus, to honor the Buffalo Soldiers who taught horsemanship to white cadets 114 years ago. Matthews founded the Buffalo Soldiers Association of West Point in 2008.

Retired Army Maj. Gen. Fred Gorden, the first Black commandant of cadets at West Point, led the effort to fundraise for the new statue. He told The Washington Post that most people don't know that Buffalo Soldiers served at West Point—much less that they professionalized horsemanship training at the academy immediately upon taking over from an undisciplined, poorly performing white cavalry outfit. “They served ... quietly, confidently, skillfully,” he said. “They were standard-bearers.”

Watch the unveiling on Youtube at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypZnmBkze0k&ab_channel=WestPoint-TheU.S.MilitaryAcademy . [Read More](#)

VA requires health workers to get vaccinated

President Joe Biden's administration on July 26 made vaccines mandatory for certain federal workers, a significant shift toward requiring shots as the country endures another surge in Covid-19 cases.

Biden said physicians working for the Department of Veterans Affairs would be required to receive vaccinations. The agency said the list of workers who will be required to get shots also includes dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, registered nurses and physician assistants. At the time, it applied to about 115,000 medical workers who have until Sept. 20 to show their proof of vaccination.

While more employees are getting vaccinated, the department is working out a process to discipline and ultimately terminate workers who refuse the vaccines or fail to get an approved exemption. About 380,000 employees are subject to the mandate, and many face a deadline of Oct. 8 to show proof of vaccination. [Read More](#) And [Read More](#)

US military branches set deadline for members to be vaccinated against Covid-19

The US Army will require all active-duty military members to be vaccinated by December 15, 2021, and all National Guard soldiers will be required to be vaccinated by June 30, 2022.

The Army said soldiers who do not comply and do not have a request for exemption pending or approved could face "suspension and relief," could be removed from lists of potential promotions within the Army or could receive reprimands, which can be "career ending," the Army statement said. The punishment for not receiving a vaccine by the deadline varies by a soldier's rank in the Army.

Commanders, command sergeants major, first sergeants and officers, all considered leadership positions in the army, who don't get vaccinated and do not have a request for exemption will "face suspension and relief if they refuse to comply," the statement said.

The US Air Force has also set deadlines for when their personnel will need to be vaccinated. The Air Force will require active-duty military members to be fully vaccinated by November 2, 2021. Air Force National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel will need to be vaccinated by December 2, 2021, a release from the Air Force said on September 3.

The US Navy will require all active-duty service members to be fully vaccinated by November 28, 2021 and all Navy Reserve service members to be vaccinated by December 28, 2021, the Navy said in a release on August 21.

The US Marine Corps active-duty members also must be vaccinated by November 28 and reservists must be vaccinated by December 28, a release from the US Marine Corps said.

[Read More](#)

ALSO - All federal employees must be fully vaccinated by **Nov. 22**, which the Biden administration announced in September.



LT. COL. Christina Hopper the first African-American fighter pilot to face combat in a major war – representing our country in Iraq.

Her military service includes flying over 50 combat missions during the Iraq conflict. She received four Air Medals and the Aerial Achievement Medal for her bravery. The veteran Air Force fighter pilot later

entered into the reserves and became a T-38 flight instructor.

Oldest US veteran of WWII celebrates his 112th birthday



New Orleans resident, Lawrence Brooks the oldest living World War II veteran, celebrated his 112th birthday recently on Sept. 12.

Born in Norwood, Louisiana, on Sep. 12, 1909, Brooks has lived in New Orleans since 1929. Drafted in 1940, he was a private in the Army's mostly Black 91st Engineer Battalion, a unit that was stationed in New Guinea and the Philippines and built infrastructure such as bridges, roads and airstrips. He rose to the rank of private first class during the war.

The birthday event was organized by the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

Additionally, the City of New Orleans issued an official proclamation recognizing Brooks' milestone birthday, the museum said.

[Read More](#)

Newport News Shipbuilding made first cut of steel for carrier USS Doris Miller



Newport News (Va.) Shipbuilding made its first cut of steel on August 25 for the Navy's newest nuclear aircraft carrier, the first carrier to be named for an African American.

The USS Doris Miller will honor the World War II Navy cook who heroically jumped into action during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Miller helped carry several wounded soldiers and later took control of a .50-caliber anti-aircraft machine gun, firing it until it ran out of bullets despite never having been trained to fire one.

[Read More](#)

Renaming of the Army Bases honoring Confederate Generals...



Colonel Charles Young, Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, General Roscoe Robinson, Sr, Brigadier General Hazel W. Johnson, Major General Charles C. Rogers.

The latest National Defense Authorization Act mandated the creation of an eight-member naming commission to determine which bases, ships, buildings, and other Defense Department assets commemorate the Confederate States of America and those who willingly fought against the Union.

The commission, which includes Michelle Howard, the highest-ranking African

American and woman to command a U.S. Navy ship, has until Oct. 1, 2022 to provide Congress with its recommendations on how to change those names and the defense secretary must implement the commission's plan by Jan. 1, 2024.



Charles Blatcher, III, Chairman, National Coalition of Black Veteran Organizations, states " We welcomed the announcement that the decision was made to change the names of the ten U.S. Army bases currently honoring Confederate Generals. The Coalition being involved since 2017 shares the joy and success of the legislative

accomplishment.

We selected names for five of the bases to be renamed. The number was derived because the Black contribution spans the longest period of our nation's history. Black participation also constitutes the largest minority presence in American Military History.

The recommendation we sent forward were the following with the brief histories supporting the choices. Our choices represent the first in United States Army Military History, all are deceased. The latter point is a prerequisite for consideration.

- Colonel Charles Young, First Black Colonel in Army History. Highest ranking Black Officer in the Armed Forces from 1894 to his death in 1922.

- Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr, First Black General in US Military History- 1941

- General Roscoe Robinson, First Black Army Four Star General in US Army History – 1984

- Brigadier General Hazel W. Johnson, First Black Woman General – 1979
- Major General Charles C. Rogers. Only Black General recipient of the Medal of Honor – 1968

A Base named after Brigadier General Hazel Johnson would be especially historic. There has never been a base named neither for a woman nor a Black Soldier.” [Read More](#) And [Read More](#)

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Black Military History

**Coast Guard honors Black veteran, NFL great
Emlen Tunnell**



This undated photo provided by United States Coast Guard shows Emlen Tunnell, the first Black player inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. (United States Coast Guard via AP)

Before he became the first Black player inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Emlen Tunnell served in the Coast Guard during and after World War II, where he was credited with saving the lives of two shipmates in separate incidents.

Now, a Coast Guard cutter and an athletic building on the Coast Guard Academy campus are being named in honor of the former NFL defensive back, who died in 1975, as the service aims to highlight his little-known story and its own efforts to do better when it comes to race and celebrating diversity.

“I think it’s important, because you have a teachable moment with young people when you talk about a guy like Emlen Tunnell,” Coast Guard Academy football coach C.C. Grant said. “They need to understand what he did, what he went through and what kind of a person he was.”

Tunnell was the first Black player signed by the New York Giants and later played for the Green Bay Packers. But not much was known about his Coast Guard service until 2008, when Cmdr. Bill McKinstry recognized Tunnell's name on the back of photograph showing a Coast Guard basketball team from the late 1940s.

In April 1944, Tunnell was unloading fuel and explosives from a cargo ship in Papua New Guinea when it was hit by a Japanese torpedo. Tunnell used his bare hands to beat out flames that had engulfed a shipmate, suffering burns in the process. Two years later, while stationed in Newfoundland, Tunnell jumped into 32-degree Fahrenheit water to save another man who had fallen from the USS Tampa.

Given the context of what a Black steward's mate was expected or even allowed to do during that time in American history — largely restricted to duties like keeping the dishes on the ship clean — his accomplishments are all the more remarkable, McKinstry said.

In 2011, the Coast Guard posthumously awarded Tunnell the Silver Lifesaving Medal. The cutter, currently under construction in Louisiana, is tentatively scheduled to be commissioned in October. The Coast Guard Academy plans to open the \$3.5 million Emlen Tunnell Strength and Conditioning Center in September.

He died of a heart attack at the age of somewhere between 50 and 53 — his birth records were not clear.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/wireStory/coast-guard-honors-black-veteran-nfl-great-emlen-75725200>

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