

# Black History Month

## Military Heroes Earn Command

Black soldiers break barriers to serve

BY RON WEBER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Throughout our nation's history, black soldiers have stood out for their achievements under great adversity.

Brilliant and heroic, the Tuskegee Airmen never lost a single bomber during World War II. The black fighter pilot escorts destroyed nearly 300 enemy aircraft and severely damaged another 148 enemy planes. Sixty-six of these brave soldiers gave their lives so that white bomber pilots could reach their targets.

On the ground, heroes such as Benjamin O. Davis and his son Benjamin Jr. both earned the rank of general, something unheard of for African Americans earlier. The senior Davis scored 91 percent on an officer's exam in 1901, thus becoming a first lieutenant in the Army. Later he would assume the rank of general in 1940, the first black man to achieve this prestigious honor.

While his father later would become the first African American to reach the rank of brigadier general, Benjamin Oliver Davis Jr. would become the second black American to achieve the same high command.

The younger Davis faced extreme racism when he began his military career at West Point in 1932. Other than direct commands and other military discussions he was not spoken to or allowed to speak back to anyone.

The horrible treatment almost crushed young Davis. However, with his father's support and direction he made it through. Years later he was quoted as saying, "I was able to develop mechanisms in my own mind of feeling sorry for these mis-



Sherian Grace Cadoria was the top black female general in the U.S. Armed Forces when she retired in 1990.

guided young men who represented the cream of the nation who were willing to force me out of West Point just because I was black."

Not only did Davis's perseverance bring him to graduate from the military college, but he graduated in at the top of his class (35th out of 276).

Davis Jr. led black pilots in vicious battles throughout Europe and North Africa in World War II. In one two day period, the squadron shot down 12 German fighter planes. This came as a surprise to many high-ranking military commanders who were led to believe, "the Negro type has not the proper reflexes to make a first-class fighter pilot."

Not only did black pilots throughout the war shoot down many enemy planes, but they also shot down this silly notion.

During the Korean War, Davis Jr. assumed command of the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing. Af-

ter nearly four decades in military service to his country, he retired in 1970, showing no bitterness about his treatment in the military. Rather, he used it as a tool to demonstrate the better side of human nature.

Another African American to reach top status in the military was General Daniel "Chappie" James. Born in 1920, he became the first black four-star general. He flew over 100 missions the Korean War and 78 combat missions in the Vietnam War. During one mission in Vietnam, James and his men destroyed a record seven enemy Mig

21's.

General Roscoe Robinson Jr. was an African American who achieved the rank of four-star general in most recent times, only to be exceeded by another great African-American, Colin L. Powell who would retire from the military as Chairman



Capt. Benjamin Oliver Davis Jr. climbs into an Advanced Trainer at Tuskegee, Ala.



Daniel "Chappie" James was America's first black four-star general.

of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Joining the ROTC "because he liked the uniform," Powell obtained straight A's in military college. In 1962, Lieutenant Powell was sent to Vietnam with a group of advisors, where he received a Purple Heart. He was sent back to Vietnam in 1968 and earned high honors for going to Korea after the Vietnam War, where he cleaned up the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Division, a unit besieged with racial and drug problems.

Women generals are extremely rare in the service. Brigadier General Clara Leach Adams-Ender rose to become the Chief of the Army Nursing Corps. As one of 10 children born to a tobacco farmer, she learned the value of hard work. One of her many military accomplishments was commanding 700 troops on a 100 mile march in Holland, where she walked every inch of

the way with her troops.

In 1992, Brigadier General Sherian Grace Cadoria was the highest-ranking black woman in the armed forces. She came up through the ranks of the Military Police Corps Combat Support Arms. She was the first African-American woman to command a criminal investigation brigade and was the first African-American woman director for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Because women were not allowed to have children in the Army until 1973, Cadoria never married. While this was a huge sacrifice, she never regretted it, knowing that her success in the military could open up many pathways for other African-American women who wanted to serve America.

Ron Weber is a regular speaker on African-American history and a frequent contributor to the Portland Observer.

*"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter."*

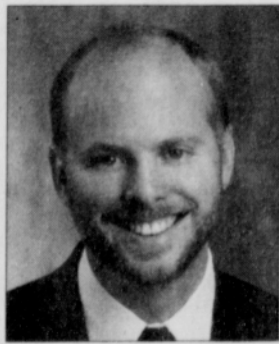
— Martin Luther King Jr.



Representative Steve March



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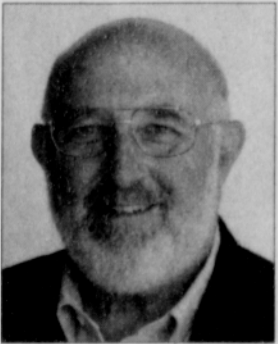
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Greeting from members of the Portland delegation to the State House of Representatives.

Celebrating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1963.

## Celebrating Black History Month



In February we recognize America's many great black pioneers and leaders.

Maggie Lena Walker (1867-1934)

Maggie Lena Walker was the first black woman to be a bank president. She founded the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank in Richmond, Virginia, in 1903. The bank began as an insurance society in which Walker became active at the time of her marriage in 1886. When she retired because of ill-health in 1933, the bank was strong enough to survive the Depression, and is still in existence.



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