

# Equal Opportunities for Sacrifice in World War II

## Guided Discussion Questions

### **“Sentence Four Negro WACS Who Protested Taking Menial Jobs”**

*Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 1945, page 3

<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1945/03/21>

*Fort Devens, Mass. March 20 (AP)—Four Negro WACs today were convicted by an army general court martial of violating the 64<sup>th</sup> article of war—refusal to obey orders of superior officers. They were sentenced to serve one year at hard labor and to be dishonorably discharged.*

*The four had contended that they were ordered to do menial work in Lovell general hospital “because of their color.”*

*They are Pvt. Alice D. Young, 23, of Washington, D.C., Pvt. Anna C. Morrison of Richmond, Ky, Pvt. Johnnie Murphy of Rankin, Pa., and Pvt. Mary Green of Conroe, Tex.*

*Pvt. Murphy became hysterical after being led from court by military police.*

*The army board which tried the four included two Negro officers.*

1. What is meant by the word “menial” as used in the reading?
2. What crime were the four women charged with? What was the punishment for this crime?
3. Why do you think the author included the last sentence of the article?
4. Do you think that this punishment was fair—why or why not?

## “Negroes Fight Beside Whites in Two U.S. Armies”

Chicago Tribune, March 20, 1945, page 1

<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1945/03/20>

*PARIS, March 19 (AP)—Negroes and whites are now fighting shoulder to shoulder in the same outfits in both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> armies, marking a break in the United States army’s traditional policy of segregation, Stars and Stripes reported today from the 1<sup>st</sup> Army front.*

Negro platoons have been assigned to rifle companies of Infantry divisions in both armies in response to repeated requests from the Negroes themselves for a chance to fight for their country as well as work for it, the army newspaper reported.

*They were chosen from thousands who answered a special appeal Dec. 26 by Lt. Gen John C.H. Lee, communications zone commander, to service troops in his command.*

*In one engineer company, 171 men of a total of 186 volunteered to fight. Four first sergeants accepted a reduction to privates to qualify for infantry training, the paper said. In one quartermaster laundry company 100 out of a total of 260 volunteered for the front line but only 36 were allowed to go. About 2,500 in all were accepted, Stars and Stripes reported.*

1. What are meant by the words “outfits” and “segregation” as used in the reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. According to the article, what caused African-American soldiers to serve in rifle companies of the Infantry divisions?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is meant by the phrase, “four first sergeants accepted a reduction to privates to qualify for infantry training”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What do you think motivated these African-Americans to volunteer to fight?

## **“U.S. Negroes Win 1st Test by Fire East of the Rhine”**

*Chicago Tribune*, March 22, 1945, page 7

<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1945/03/22>

WITH U.S. 1<sup>ST</sup> ARMY EAST OF THE RHINE, March 21 (AP)—Negro infantry men who left their jobs in rear echelons and volunteered for combat duty are fighting on the 1<sup>st</sup> army’s bridgehead east of the Rhine—the first time Negro troops have been used in combat on the western front.

The army is keeping close check on the Negro platoons, since this is the first time they have been placed in the same divisions with white soldiers on the fighting front. Weekly reports are to be made on their morale, fighting ability, casualties, and the number of Germans they capture.

“All our reports so far have been good,” said Capt. Edward Finnegan of New York City.

### **Win Wisconsin Man’s Praise.**

Praise for the Negroes came from Tech Sgt. Casper F. Koch of Beaver Dam, Wisc, who helped lead a Negro platoon into action four days ago against the town of Berghausen.

“We didn’t want to give them too tough a job in their first fight,” Koch said, “so our platoon went down a street where there were only about nine houses. We didn’t think there would be many Germans in them.

“In the first house the Negro boys captured 11 Jerries and killed two. By the time they’d gotten to the end of the street they had captured 53 prisoners and killed I don’t know how many.

“They worked perfectly. They are eager to learn and ask a lot of questions. When you tell ‘em to take an objective they want to know what to do after they get there.”

### **Asked Chance to Fight.**

These Negro doughboys asked for the chance to fight. Many of them voluntarily gave up their stripes as staff sergeants and technical sergeants to get into the fighting. They are fighting as platoons under white officers who have had combat experience.

The army has moved cautiously in breaking its long established tradition of keeping white and Negro units separated, and the Negro rifle platoons are being fed into divisions gradually, with one platoon to each regiment now in action.

When the Negro platoons arrived recently at one veteran division’s location, each member got a personal letter from the commanding general along with the divisional shoulder patches. They then were greeted personally by regimental commanders. This is the identical welcome given to all white reinforcements.

As yet the army has set up no replacement pool for the Negro platoons. When their fighting strength is reduced to such a level that they are unable to function as units, then remnants of two or more units will be reorganized into a full strength platoon.

1. What is meant by the word “echelons” in the first paragraph—and “stripes” in the eighth paragraph?
2. What is contained in the “weekly reports” on the soldiers—and why?
3. How did the African-American soldiers perform in their first action in the town of Berghausen?
4. How were the African-American soldiers brought into their new units?
5. What is the purpose of the last paragraph of the article? What main idea is it meant to convey?
6. Do you think the African-American soldiers could have fought as effectively under African-American officers—why or why not?