

albeit segregated ones. As an experiment, the destroyer escort USS *Mason* (DE-529) and the submarine chaser USS *PC 1264* became vessels manned by solely by Africans Americans enlisted Sailors.



## Cold War

After the war, President Harry S Truman began to openly discuss ending all segregation throughout the Armed Forces. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948 stating “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.” Unfortunately, it took years for equal opportunity to be established in practice.

It was during this time period that Samuel Lee Gravely became the first African American to command a ship. In 1971, the Navy promoted him to be the first African American admiral. Gravely’s milestone was followed by Admiral Paul Reason, who became the first African American four star admiral with his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet. In 2014, Admiral Michelle Howard became the first female African American four star admiral with the appointment as Vice Chief of Naval Operations and Master Chief April D. Beldo was appointed the first African American women to be fleet master chief. Today, among the enlisted ranks, African Americans make up seventeen percent of the Navy’s total force.



NATIONAL MUSEUM *of the*  
UNITED STATES NAVY

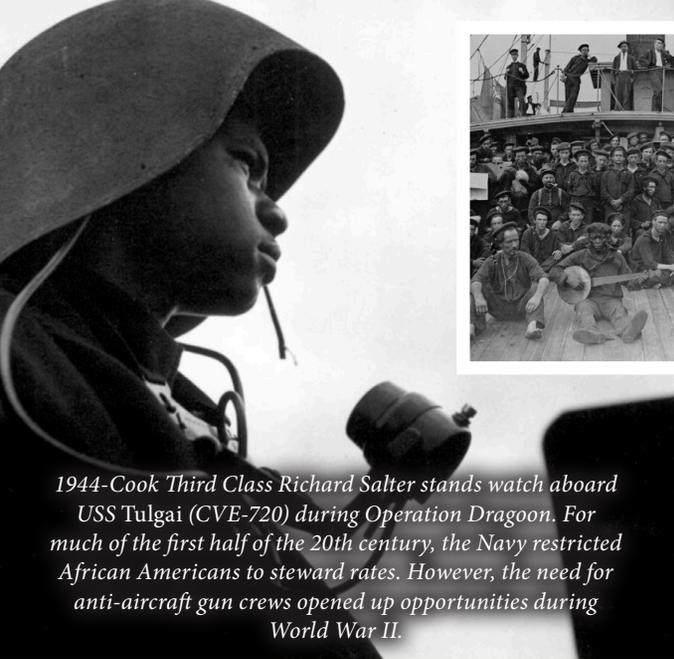
*(Cover) 1950-Ensign Jesse Brown was the first African American Naval Aviator. He died in action while providing air support to U.S. Marines during the 1950 Battle of Chosin Reservoir.*



U.S. NAVY EXPERIENCE

# AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE U.S. NAVY





1944-Cook Third Class Richard Salter stands watch aboard USS Tulgai (CVE-720) during Operation Dragoon. For much of the first half of the 20th century, the Navy restricted African Americans to steward rates. However, the need for anti-aircraft gun crews opened up opportunities during World War II.



1863-Shown here is the ship's company of USS Hunchback of the James River, 1863. For much of the 18th and 19th century, the Navy did not discriminate on who could enlist based on race.

### Civil War

Unfortunately, there was some retrenchment among some politicians in the recruitment of African Americans in the years after the War of 1812. As a means to limit opportunities, various Secretaries of the Navy placed a limit that only five percent of all new recruits could be African American. However, a tradition of service had been established. With the onset of the American Civil War, the Navy's need for manpower greatly increased and African Americans helped fill the ranks. While there was some resistance to the idea, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles concluded that "the wants of the service" ended the five percent rule. However, African American Sailors were still restricted to certain rates. While many were cooks and ship's stewards, others were pilots, quartermasters, and gun captains.

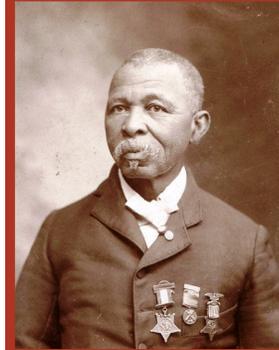
### Post-Civil War

There was a second period of retrenchment after the Civil War. Sailors with engineering skills were needed with the new Navy, but African Americans were not allowed in those rates. As a result, half of African American Sailors were clerks, stewards, and messmen. By World War I, only two percent of all Sailors were African American. A notable group, however, were

fourteen African American women who enlisted as yeomen (F).

### World War II

But world crises of the 1930s once again pressed the need for manpower and the Navy actively recruited African Americans. At first, African Americans were



1864-Seaman John Lawson received the Medal of Honor for bravery in combat during the Battle of Mobile Bay while serving on USS Hartford.

still restricted to messmen ranks. However, a combination of political pressure and war time necessities pushed the Navy to open up all rates to African Americans in 1942. Among the war time necessities were manning anti-aircraft guns. As a result, many messmens' battle stations were in not the galley, but as a member of anti-aircraft gun team.

Navy not only opened up enlisted rating, it also, opened up the officer corps to African Americans. In 1944, the V-12 officer training program on

college campuses opened for the first time. Additionally, the Navy selected sixteen enlisted African Americans to enter officer training. Later known as the "Golden Thirteen," the Navy commissioned twelve of the sixteen and gave one a warrant commission.

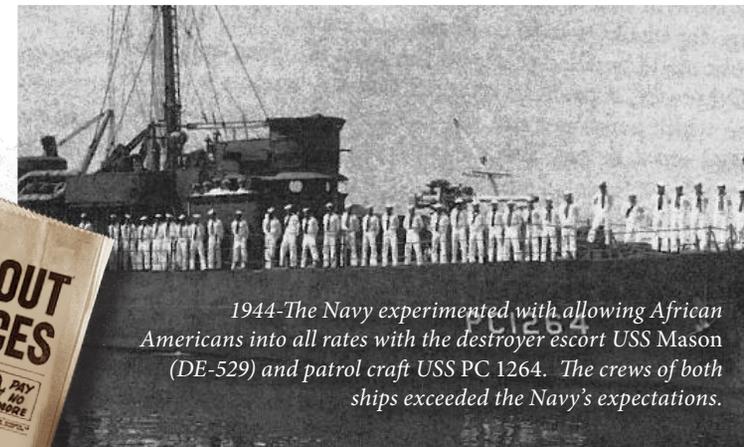
By 1944, enough African American Sailors had qualified in non-messmen ratings that leadership believed African Americans could operate ocean going combat ships,

Since America first deployed warships to sea during the American Revolution, African American sailors have been an important part of the Fleet. Even in the face of national segregation and discrimination, African American Sailors have distinguished themselves in combat and proven themselves to be equal to any.

### Age of Sail

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the U.S. Navy's ships required tremendous manpower to operate. Strict discipline, bad food, and even worse pay made the Navy's recruitment job difficult. The Fleet found willing recruits among African American Sailors. Commodore Issac Chancy, commanding officer of Naval forces on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812, set aside all opposition when he stated "I have yet to learn that the color of the skin can affect a man's qualifications or usefulness."

1948-The African American newspaper Chicago Defender proudly proclaims President Harry S. Truman's historic executive order to desegregate the Armed Forces.



1944-The Navy experimented with allowing African Americans into all rates with the destroyer escort USS Mason (DE-529) and patrol craft USS PC 1264. The crews of both ships exceeded the Navy's expectations.