

# Hidden Heroes: Finding the Forgotten

St. Augustine  
National Cemetery

**VA**



**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**

National Cemetery  
Administration



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**Department  
of History**



## Tour Stops

1- William  
Hewlin: A185

2- Thomas  
Hanandos: A190

3- Wilbur  
Forward: A206

4- Jason  
Waitman: A212

5- George  
Downings: D57

6- Fred  
Wimbush: E25

7- Flagstaff





# Our Purpose

- It is important to study these Hidden Heroes because Black soldiers played an essential role in our country's military history.
- African American servicemen and women served both in combat and labor support roles.
- Black soldiers faced discrimination and segregation while in the military as well as when they took off their uniform.



Children wait to cheer the Soldiers of the 369th Infantry  
February 17, 1919  
Image Credit: US Army

# American Civil War (1861-1865)

- Decades of friction over the issue of slavery led to the secession of eleven southern states including Florida in late 1860 and early 1861 to form the Confederate States of America.
- The war between the Confederacy and the Union began on April 12, 1861 when Confederate soldiers attacked the Union-controlled Fort Sumter, South Carolina.
- By 1862, General Robert E. Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia and secured several major victories such as the Battle of Chancellorsville in April and May 1863.
- The turning point of the war for Union forces came in mid-1863 with General Lee's defeat at the Battle of Gettysburg and the Confederate surrender at the Battle of Vicksburg to Union General Ulysses S. Grant.
- General Lee's forces surrendered to General Grant on April 6, 1865 and by June 2, 1865, the port of Galveston, Texas yielded to the Union, ending the deadliest military conflict in American history.

# African Americans During CW

- At the beginning of the war, thousands of enslaved African Americans escaped to Union lines where they worked as laborers to support the Union war effort.
- On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation declared all slaves within Confederate territory to be free, shifted the direction of war into a war to end slavery, and allowed the Union to recruit African Americans as soldiers.
  - About 180,000 African Americans served in the Union Army with another 19,000 serving in the Navy in both combat and labor roles.
- Black soldiers experienced racial prejudice in the military such as unequal pay.
  - Black soldiers initially received \$10 per month with a \$3 deduction for clothes; white soldiers receive \$13 with no clothing allowance deducted
  - By 1864, Congress granted equal pay to Black soldiers and made the action retroactive.

# Civil War



***STOP AND TALK: Why do you think African American soldiers decided to fight?***



# Stop 1 (A185)- William Hewlin

## Early Life:

- Born around 1833 in St. Augustine, FL
- Enslaved as of April 19, 1861. He ran away to South Carolina where he became a laborer before joining the military.

## Military Service:

- Hewlin enlisted in the Army on January 12, 1863, eventually serving as part of the 33rd US Colored Infantry.
- Hewlin experienced pay discrimination before Congress equalized pay for Black soldiers in 1864.



# Stop 1- William Hewlin

## Military Service cont.:

- On January 19, 1864, Hewlin received an official absence (furlough) to return to Saint Augustine where he married his wife Victoria on February 7, 1864.
- Hewlin served until January 31, 1866.

## Post-War:

- William and his wife settled in St. Augustine, where they had four children: George, John, Cato, and Julia.
- He worked as a drayman, transporting goods using horses or mules with a flat-bed cart.
- With no official death record, we believe he died in 1890.





# Stop 2 (A190)- Thomas Hanandos

## Early Life:

- Born around 1842 in Saint Augustine, FL
- Enslaved as of April 19, 1861, Hanandos ran away to South Carolina where he became a blacksmith before joining the military.

## Military:

- Hanandos enlisted in the Army the same day as Hewlin on January 12, 1863 and both served together in what would become the 33rd US Colored Infantry.
- Like Hewlin, Hanandos also experienced pay discrimination.
- Likely as a result of unfair treatment, on October 21, 1863, Hanandos briefly deserted his post at Camp Shaw in South Carolina before returning three days later.



# Stop 2- Thomas Hanandos

## Military cont.:

- Hanandos would be arrested and detained until his trial on November 4, 1863 where the Army released him and allowed to return to service.
- Hanandos served until January 31, 1866.

## Life After the Military:

- Little is known about Hanandos's life after the war, though he legally changed his name to Hernandez at some point.
- He received an acquittal of the charge of desertion on November 14, 1889 with the charge changed to absent without leave.
- Hanandos died on November 24, 1915.



# Escape Room: Civil War Edition

Fill-in-the-Blank Directions: Use the clues below to figure out the word so you can move on to the next location.

## Clues:

- Definitions of the word:
  - enlist in the Armed Forces
  - persuade someone to do or assist in doing something
  - enroll someone as a member or worker in an organization
- Sentence with the word missing
  - The Navy can \_\_\_\_\_ men and women who are over 18 years old.
  - Harvard College will \_\_\_\_\_ new students.



*District of Columbia  
Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, at Fort Lincoln  
c.1863-1866*

Image Credit: Library of Congress



# World War I (1914-1918)

- Decades of tensions in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century would explode into full-scale war in 1914 after the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.
  - Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman-Empire)
  - Allied Powers (France, United Kingdom, Russia, Italy, Japan, US)
- With warfare primarily in Europe and away from American soil, the US remained neutral from the conflict until actions by Germany in 1917 such as unrestricted submarine warfare led to US entry against the Central Powers.
- Over 4 million Americans from all backgrounds entered military service and through providing fresh troops for the Allied Powers, the US played a key role in helping push back the German advance in 1918, ultimately leading to Germany signing an armistice that would end the war.

# African Americans During WWI

- African Americans commonly experienced racial discrimination such as being denied the right to vote and having unequal or no access to public institutions and facilities.
- The Great Migration would see over a million African Americans migrate from the South to the North between 1910 and 1930 for better economic opportunities and quality of life.
- African Americans hoped World War I would serve as an opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism and achieve true equality in American society.
- Yet, African Americans continued to be discriminated during their military service including segregated units and being limited to non-combative roles
- Over 380,000 Black soldiers served in the Army during the war with 40,000 who served in combat.

# World War I



***STOP AND TALK: What does segregation mean?***



# Stop 3 (A206)- Wilbur Forward

## Early Life:

- Born on November 24, 1888 and raised in St. Augustine, FL
- Worked as a barber in St. Augustine in 1910
- Moved to Manhattan, NY and married Emma R. Lewis on February 6, 1915
- Worked as a porter in greeting, providing maintenance and cleaning at the Philip Morris Building in Manhattan's Fifth Avenue.



# Stop 3- Wilbur Forward

## Military Service:

- On October 30, 1917, the Army drafted Forward.
- He served with the 367th Infantry Regiment of the 92nd Infantry Division
- Forward took part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in France.
- He received an honorable discharge on March 8, 1919.

## Life After the Military:

- Forward and his wife lived in St. Augustine where he worked various jobs including as a clerk for a pharmacy and soda shop called The Iceberg.
- Wilbur died on November 22, 1934.



# Stop 3- Emma Forward: Wilbur's Wife

- Born in the late 1880s or 1890s
- After Wilbur's death, Emma worked as a live-in maid for an elderly white resident of St. Augustine.
- Emma passed away on April 22, 1945.
- Soldiers' wives are allowed to be buried with their spouse in a National Cemetery.
- Emma is buried with Wilbur in the St. Augustine National Cemetery.
- Her name is on the back of Wilbur's headstone.





# Military Spouses



***STOP AND TALK: What role did soldiers' spouses, particularly wives, play during wartime?***

# Stop 4 (A212)- Jason Waitman

## Early Life:

- Born on February 27, 1895 in Columbia County, FL, the ninth child of eleven children.
- His father owned his own farm and when Jason came of age, he helped his father on the farm while attending school.
- By 1917, Jason worked as a driver (iceman) for the St. Augustine Ice Company.

## Military Service:

- The Army drafted Waitman on August 4, 1918



# Stop 4- Jason Waitman

## Military Service cont.:

- He served with the 547th Engineer Service who arrived in France a day before the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918.
  - The 547th battalion provided labor support to the American Expeditionary Forces including providing wood to build structures and keep warm in the winter.
- Waitman remained in France until July 5, 1919 before returning to the US.
- He received an honorable discharge on July 25, 1919 at Camp Gordon, GA.





# Stop 4- Jason Waitman

## Post-War:

- Waitman returned to his work as an iceman for the St. Augustine Ice Company.
- He married Elmira Tunsil on September 16, 1921.
- Waitman died on December 9, 1936 in St. Augustine.
- A photo of Waitman in his World War I uniform, along with the canteen from which he drank water, are on display in the Lincolnvile Museum in St. Augustine located further west of the cemetery.



Lincolnvile Museum  
St. Augustine, FL

# Escape Room: World War I Edition

Fill-in-the-Blank Directions: Use the clues below to figure out the word so you can move on to the next location.

## Clues:

- Definitions of the word:
  - A fight or contest between an individual or a group
  - To fight with or struggle against
  - Active fighting in war
- Sentence with the word missing
  - The soldiers fight in \_\_\_\_\_ against each other.
  - Many soldiers have died in \_\_\_\_\_ throughout the different wars.
  - The soldier must wear his \_\_\_\_\_ boots.



New York's 369th Infantry Returns Home on  
USS Stockholm  
February 12, 1919  
Image Credit: National Archives

# World War II (1939-1945)

- World War II began in 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland though long term causes include the rise of fascism and militarism in Europe and Asia and the inability to maintain international peace.
- Similar to World War I, the United States initially remained neutral but joined the war after the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor in 1941.
  - Axis Powers (Italy, Germany, Japan)
  - Allied Powers (United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, France, China)
- Over 16 million Americans served during the war as the US and the Allies pushed back the Axis advance in Europe and Asia leading to the surrender of Italy in 1943 and Germany and Japan in 1945.



# African Americans During WWII

- The Double Victory campaign became a rallying cry for African Americans in defeating tyranny abroad and racism at home.
- Over a million African American men and women served collectively in every branch of the military, continuing to serve in segregated combat and labor units.
- Black units like the 33rd Fighter Group (Tuskegee Airmen) and the 761st Tank Battalion gained notoriety for their service.



*Administrator of Bethune-Cookman College with  
WWII Veterans and students  
c. 1940s*

Image Credit: Florida Memory

# World War II



***STOP AND TALK: What kind of day-to-day things do you think African Americans in the 1940s would want equality in?***

# Stop 5 (D57)- George Downings Jr.

## Early Life:

- Born on June 3, 1925 in Hastings, FL.
- His father George Sr. worked as a farm laborer on a potato farm.
- Before joining the military, Downings moved to Saint Augustine.

## Military Service:

- Downings registered for the draft in December 1942, lying about his age to make himself old enough to serve.
- On March 4, 1943, Downings enlisted in the US Naval Reserve in Jacksonville, Florida.
- Downings dealt with discrimination in the Navy that limited Black sailors to menial labor as messmen





# Stop 5- George Downings Jr.

## Military Service cont.:

- Downings's service took him across the Atlantic including off the coast of the US, the Caribbean and North Africa.
  - He served aboard the *USS Harding*, the *USS O'Brien*, the *USS Moale*, and the *USS LSM-152*.
  - By March 1944, he achieved the rank of Steward's Mate First Class.
- Downings served until his honorable discharge on December 25, 1945.

## Post-War:

- Shortly after returning to the US, Downings passed away on July 5, 1946.



## Stop 5- Blue Discharges



***STOP AND TALK:*** At the conclusion of World War II, African Americans disproportionately received “blue discharges,” given to soldiers who had “undesirable habits and traits of character.” In addition to dishonorable discharges, blue discharges carried a stigma that impacted their post-military life including employment and Veteran benefits. Why do you think many African Americans received these types of discharges?

# Stop 6 (E25)- Fred Wimbush

## Early Life:

- Born on April 25, 1920 in Emanuel County, GA
- Wimbush has at least four brothers and two sisters
- Wimbush lived in St. Augustine by 1935 where he worked odd jobs in the waning days of the Great Depression.

## Military Service:

- On July 14, 1943, Wimbush enlisted in the Army and reported to Camp Blanding, FL.
- Wimbush served with the 25th Infantry of the 93rd Division in both a labor and combat role.





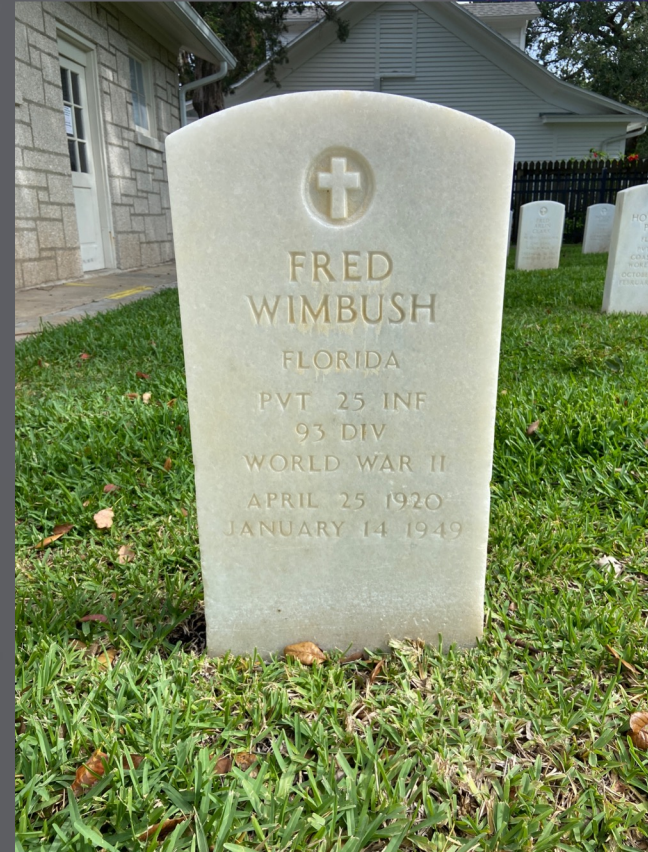
# Stop 6- Fred Wimbush

## Military Service cont.:

- The 25th Infantry served in the Pacific Theater in Solomon Islands and New Guinea islands.
- After the war ended, the regiment served in the Philippines before returning to the US in 1946.
- Wimbush received an honorable discharge on November 29, 1946.

## Legacy:

- Wimbush returned to St. Augustine where he lived until his death on January 14, 1949.

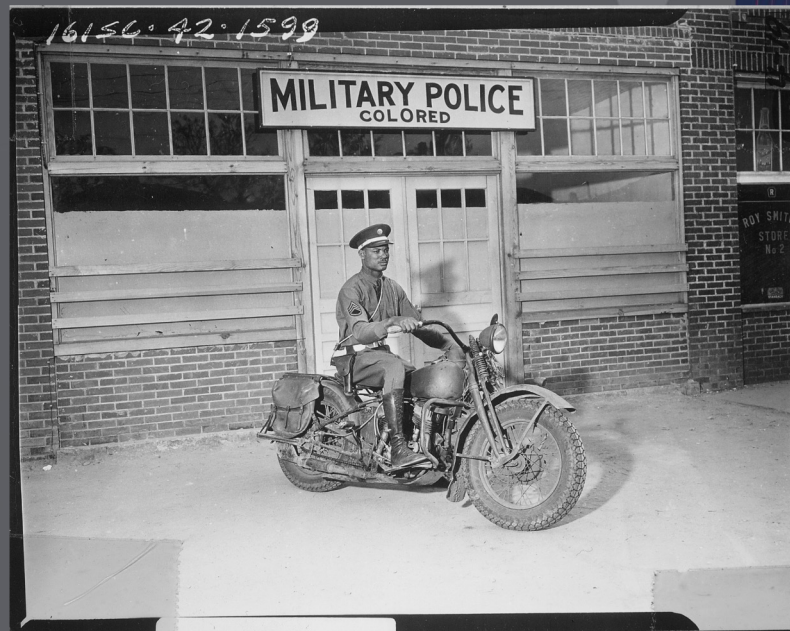


# Escape Room: World War II Edition

Wordle Directions: Use the clues below to figure out the word so you can move on to the next location.

## Clues:

- Definitions of the word:
  - To separate or set apart from others
  - To cause or force the separation based on race, religion or national origin
  - Discriminate against
- Sentence with the word missing
  - The South's schools \_\_\_\_\_  
\_ the students based on the color of their skin.
  - Schools should never \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_ children who have a disability.



*An MP on motorcycle stands ready to answer all calls around his area. Columbus, Georgia.*

April 13, 1943

Image Credit: National Archives

# Stop 7 (Flagstaff)- Conclusion: Hidden Heroes

- Have students surround the flagstaff for the conclusion of the tour.
- Discuss what they learned on the tour.
- Review the Veterans from each war.





# Conclusion

- African Americans soldiers throughout time are true hidden heroes. Due to the color of their skin, their lives and their service have been neglected and treated as invisible.
- It is important to REMEMBER these Hidden Heroes because they played essential roles in our country's military. African American servicemen and women served both in combat and service roles while facing discrimination.
- This concludes the African American St. Augustine National Cemetery tour.



*Sgt. Henry Johnson, of Albany N.Y., the outstanding hero...  
1919*

Image Credit: New York Public Library