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African American Pioneers Sharing Their Story



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Message from the Editor

In this issue, we include excerpts from four interviews conducted by CW3 Patrick Jacob at the Public Affairs Office on Camp Robinson. CW4 Gregory Settles, COL Burthel Thomas, Maj Magnolia Winkler, and COL Nathaniel McGee are African Pioneers in the Arkansas National Guard and are four of many who are featured in our new book, *Arkansas National Guard African American Pioneers: Untold Stories*. The project began in August 2022 to identify the first African Americans in significant positions in the Arkansas Guard. After seven months, not only was a book produced, but an ARNG Museum exhibit is displayed. In February 2023, the Museum hosted a program for the project in which more than 200 attended, including many of the Pioneers and their families. We hope you enjoy!

Dr. Raymond Screws

Editor/Arkansas National Guard Museum Director
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Please take the time to visit our website for the full interviews of our Pioneers along with the speakers from the Black History Program held on February 23, 2023.

www.arngmuseum.com



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CW4 Gregory Settles



Birthplace: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Enlisted in ARNG: March 1978

African American Pioneers Achievements:

- First African American First Sergeant, D Company, 212th Signal Battalion
- First African American Command Sergeant Major, 212th Signal Battalion

Retirement: August 17, 2011

When I got drafted, I decided that I wanted to have a choice where I served, so I went to the Air Force test and passed it. And the day I was supposed to swear in in Army I was being sworn in in the United States Air Force. I was sent to Germany and one of my comrades, went to Hawaii.

So, I thought I got the short end of the stick at the time. But Germany was a great learning experience for me. I learned a lot in Germany. I was an industrial refrigeration and heating technician at the time, and spent three years in Wiesbaden, Germany until my long tour of three years was over then I came back to Rickenbacker Air Force Base in Ohio.

Wasn't there very long, maybe 11 months when I got orders to go to Austin, Texas, but never made it to Austin. There was someone with a very high need to go with a higher rank who decided they wanted to go to Austin and retire instead of me going on tour there. So, they sent me to Little Rock Air Force Base in the Titan II Missile program.

I was there working in three silos. We had 18 silos in Arkansas, but I worked in a silo at Greenwell, past Searcy that I worked as a heating and air conditioning refrigeration specialist. This is where I became master team chief and wore a missile badge as an award for my leadership.

We came to Arkansas in 1973 and stayed at the little Rock Air Force Base for about three years. Then they decided that the missile program was going away in 1977, and they had decided that those members who had other skill levels would be going to other assignments as they downgraded and removed the silos from Arkansas. I decided that I wanted to take a break and could not see moving somewhere else. I was a Buck Sergeant E4 that's what the

grade was in the Army. I decided to take a break in 1977 and go to the Arkansas College of Technology to get a degree in electronics and communications.

The Arkansas National Guard back in the seventies was the best kept secret. I did not know off guard that there was such a military entity till I got here. When me and the wife came across the Mississippi Bridge and saw the land of opportunity on the side... I said, "Oh, we can work with that. We can work with opportunity." We were beginning to thrive. We had one son, Gregory who was born in Germany. So, as we started to get roots in Arkansas, I graduated from the Arkansas College of Technology and one of my neighbors was in the Guard and he suggested that I should join the Guard. I knew he was in the Guard, but I didn't know what it took to get into the Guard.

Then one day my wife came home on a Saturday, and she had a recruiter card in her purse from the beauty salon. Back in the day that's where recruiters went to get their men from. They went to the beauty salon and gave the business card to the wife. So, my wife came home with a card.

And its history from there because she said, "Check this out." Normally when she says, check this out, there is no room for discussion after. So, I joined the National Guard, which at that time was a training site, where I was assigned to as a young E-4 Airman Buck Sergeant.

I went to a specialist right off the bat and was trying to get acclimated to the army culture. You know it was a little tough, but I had to learn how to respect a Sergeant Major, a First Sergeant to Platoon Sergeant, which all those grade levels back when I was the Air Force, they were just in the drill instruction and drill sergeant area. You know, never, in the senior leadership, didn't have an opportunity to greet those guys until I got into the Army National Guard.

I was impressed with that kind of leadership, and I decided I'd like to become a First Sergeant. So, I quickly became a Staff Sergeant. I guess I did well as a Sergeant that they asked me to go down to Benton, Arkansas, to the 212 Signal Battalion and see what I can do to help them out.

I said, well, they already got a Platoon Sergeant down there. They said, "Well, that's okay. You just go down and do the job." That's the way it was when they send you, you go do it. They never promised a promotion, but you just have to do the job well enough that after doing it you would get paid for doing a job. So, I got promoted and that was part of a 3-to-5-year plan that I created as a Staff Sergeant. My plan was to work the first three years and then I would go and try to get all the military education I could to prepare myself for the next grade.

I would even go and get the next rank and sew it on my uniform. This was my reminder of why I'm going to school. But, believing in God, I knew that He had His hand in it. When I got through school training for the next grade in the third year, there was a door open, and I was eligible to be promoted to First Sergeant.

Then the pattern started all over again. I go off to school, work hard for three years, and then when an opportunity comes open, I'll be ready. Well, when the opportunity came for Command Sergeant Major... I would say today probably is one of the best jobs I had. This position gave me the opportunity to help lead people and help them get to where they want to be in the process. I was hired on as a full-time employee at MOS6. It was all mash shop that took care of the equipment for the 212 Signal Battalion. I was an electronic technician there, and the next step up was to go to CSMS. So, I went to CSMS as a CSM and the CSM had a life span of about three years, you may stay an extra year if you got TAG approval.

It was getting too close where my four years were running and if my time ran out, I would have to find another Sargent Major position. I ended up going Desert Storm as a CSM for the 212 Signal Battalion. After Desert Storm, it was time to come home. We often refer to it as the 100-day war because it was a quick war.

Growing up in Philadelphia

Philadelphia was a great experience for me. It was basically like the foundation for who I am and who I became to be. When it was time to leave, we had integrated school, we had integrated communities for the most part, but we still had Caucasians areas and the Italian areas were territorial. Don't walk in my territory, don't cross the street. You have boundaries. Even going to school, you just took the side streets when you walked to school. The elementary school was walking distance from where I lived. I was able to at lunchtime, walk back home and eat lunch with my great grandmother.

I enjoyed the history, I learned the history early through our field trips at school, Franklin Institute. We would go to Washington, D.C. on the train. I really do enjoy remembering those places that we went to. The trip to DC was also special because my wife was there with me on that trip. So, it kind of shaped me with different people, and allowed me to see how different people lived.

I used to shine shoes on Market Street in Philadelphia. I had these gentlemen whose shoes I would shine. Most of them were businessmen who would be in a suit and tie going to work. So, here I was ten years old shining shoes, looking at the guys saying, "I sure like to go where they go going one day." Then just like I'd see an airplane go overhead and I'd think to myself, I wonder where they were going or how long do they have to be on the airplane? One day I'd like to fly somewhere. So, when I got in the Air Force, I was able to make that dream come true. It was an adventure for me.

My Parents Response When Joining the Military

I think that my parents and grandparents focused on training me for when I left home. They made sure I knew how to look after myself, how to cook for myself and the things that a man needs to survive such as getting a job, having a driver's license, my Social Security card, and those old documents that you need to venture out. They prepared me to venture out regardless of where I went.

I did not know what my parents did. Sometimes children don't know what their parents do, until they start their own careers. I found out that my mom liked the men in uniform. So, it was really refreshing, and a shock to me to find out that my mom made dress greens. When I went home on annual leave to surprise her, she surprised me. Her boss gave me a brand spanking new uniform and that was the uniform I wore when I got promoted to Warrant Officer.

Just those fond memories still make me go back and think about the roots of a man's life starts with family.

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Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob: *So, you joined Air Force. You get out so you eventually joined the Arkansas Army National Guard. What year exactly was it that when you joined the Guard?*

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ARNG Culture - 1978

I joined the Arkansas National Guard in 1978 and started working full-time in 1982. I knew Correna Taylor and I knew she worked for the recruiters. I know that she was looking for equal representation and that she thought there was discrimination. The representation of black service members was very low compared to the whole of Guard force. So, it just turned out that we were not represented and that was a long battle. The court got involved and what the outcome was is that of the Arkansas National Guard was tasked to higher up to an 18% black leadership pull back representation in full-time force. They had come [up with] the black only applications and that was a good thing, and it was a bad thing.

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Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob: *So, you mentioned the black only application. The outcome from the Correna Taylor Trial basically stated that for every two white individuals hired, one job announcement would say, this job is only for black applicants. Obviously, it was court order, but that was a big deal. But you say it was good and bad, can you explain that?*

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I think the good part of it was the opportunity that a person that was putting in the application for years had an opportunity for them to be recognized if they were qualified for the job. Some of my friends had gotten hired because of that. Then on the other hand, you had [some] who were not qualified, and I just thought that there was a way that they got set up for failure because they weren't qualified.

They didn't have the skill level. They didn't go to a particular school or the school they were trying to attend did not support the job they were applying for, and it may not have aligned with their career goals. So, this was a new thing for them.

So, what was happening was they were just dropped into a new field and didn't get the training.

I never put in for any of those. I just thought that my application could be amongst [those] who were putting in applications. I believed my skills and training could stand for itself and be put in the same batch of applications as my white counterparts.

There were several jobs that opened that I could have put in for, but I just didn't. These jobs were in electronics, and I just didn't put in for it because it was just against what I believed. So, one day a Colonel Myers came to me and said, "Greg, we got an application that don't say black only on it, and you better take this job." So, I said, "Yes, sir." He used some other words, but I understood what he was saying and accepted the position.

So, I worked as an Electronics Technician and that actually helped me to get my next job at the CSMS. It just helped me to help my other technicians because it was about me being a strong supervisor that believed that the employee handbook was like the Bible and that was to take care of your soldiers and your technicians. I used that and I might have been tough, but it was the way that I thought that supervisors were taking care of their people had a no-nonsense leadership. You obey, you went to work, and you got rewarded. It wasn't about making friends that was not why I was there.

I was doing the job that I was paid for. And those men and females that followed me, they knew that I was going to reward them. They didn't like me when I first got there. But when it came down to superior performance awards, employee of the month, or employee of the quarter, etc.; HRO, had that money out there so I could use [it] to encourage people and boost the morale of the men.

When you have men and women that knows you are going to take care of them, and reward them for good effort, you don't have to worry about getting the job done. You know if you ask somebody to stay overtime, they'll stay overtime. There would be times when we offered special duty, special assignments or special training and they would gladly do [it] with no questions asked. There were times when I wouldn't be there and I would need to leave people in charge, and it was not about favoritism it was about training that providing opportunities to teach them how to be a supervisor. It was governing your comrades and I would tell them the only thing you can't do is fire them. It was good training. So, I found out as a Sergeant Major that it's kind of hard to inspire people to be Sergeant Major, because it was just a small group of people, and the A list was just so short. When I became a Warrant Officer I started recruiting immediately.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *Some people go their whole career just trying to make Sergeant Major, and like you said, there's only a few that make it and you made it. What encouraged you to want to start back over? You went basically from the lower enlisted to the very top only to start back over again as a Warrant Officer 1 and work your way back up. Where did that come from?*

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I loved that, being a Sergeant Major. Actually, my goal was to be State Sergeant Major. I applied for that a couple of times. When I was the First Sergeant, I got involved in the and NCO Association and I went from second vice to first vice, then to president. I got acquainted to Stanley Hicks, who was the Arkansas National Guard Command Sergeant Major senior enlisted advisor who I wanted to be one day. He had a great influence on me to be that, but with me being on a schedule of how long I can serve as a CSM, I decided that I have to look at going to where my friends were. My friends were Warrant Officers and at the time you [could] be direct commissioned into the Warrant Officer corps at least E7/E8. But in 1985, they said you had to go off to Warrant Officer Candidate School. In 1985, I was a First Sergeant and I decided it was time for me to be Warrant Officer, but they kind of changed rules and I couldn't go off to school at that time. But when it's time for me to relinquish... as a Sergeant Major, I had to make a decision. My commander gave me a position to be his communications Warrant right after Desert Storm, and I said that I would. My motivation is that I didn't have any place else to go.

I was about to run out of time as Sergeant Major and here it is, I'll have to go back to school. I was 42 years old when I went back to Warrant Officer School. Back to basic at 42.

And that was the experience I had prepared myself for. I ran four miles every day to prepare for the long run. I was heading to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. I said, "Well, I'm going to go in the cold, and they will have to shut down training." Well, I was surprised they didn't shut down training until it got down to -21 degrees. So, the last test that we took before graduation was the PT test. I worked hard and thought I had won the PTA award, but they I missed the PT award by one point.

I'm 42 and there was another guy there that was 46. I prepared for it because I couldn't go back to my Sergeant Major position. It was gone the day that I left the state to go to Fort McCoy, they had already selected someone so that was a motivation to do the best I can.

The Cadre knew that I was coming, and I was told that they were waiting for you Sergeant Major, they already know your name. So, it was a challenge and I made sure that regardless of what they did, the goal was to pass. There are some things, you go through and the game that they play, but I never did want to sharp shoot any cadet or shoot them a regulation that would make it hard on myself. If there were any demerits given, they gave it to me. I probably left there with 5000 demerits.

My most challenging situations in the Arkansas National Guard

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *So, 1969. Let's take a look at your whole career. What were some of your most challenging duties? Did you ever find yourself in any situation where you felt something happened because of racial tensions or anything like that or did you experience any setbacks because of race or animosity?*

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I don't think that I can recall being set back because of the color of my skin. I applied for officer candidate school and took the test, and I failed that test by one point. And so that meant I had to study a little bit harder.

They said come back in 30 days and take the test. Well, I didn't. I was a senior NCO at the time and realized that it was not for me. And through my whole career I [stayed] with my plan. The plan

worked, and if I failed, it was on me, it was not someone else's fault. I can sit there and go and blame somebody for me not passing grade. So, God opened the doors for me every three years, until I made Warrant.

I believe there are certain things that when you get older that you find out when you experience it, that things change. They change when it's time for you to benefit. During my time in Iraq, I thought that I was going to try and be a CW5 and when I got back home, I found out that they had changed rules, by moving the goalposts, so to speak, that you have to have five years on your contract and I had two years left on my contract.

That's the only thing I can think of for me personally. I never had any problems going before all the promotion boards and fulfilling all the commander's expectations so never really any negativity in those areas. I'm not bragging, just speaking my truth and experiences.

To me it's just taking care of your people and being ready for the assignment that you have. I believe that a man or woman can achieve great responsibility when it is time to go to war. That is the time you were able to show that those skill levels that you achieve work. So, when the brigade went to the first Iraqi War, I didn't get a chance to go because I had to volunteer and as a military technician, I couldn't volunteer. But when the second time came around, I was an AGR. I had retired at the age of 55, then next day I became an AGR Communications Security Network Manager for the brigade. So, I was selected to go. And it was a great experience to put all of that training together and make it work in a real-life situation. Those achievements when they come, come full circle, to see and understand that this is why we went to school.

This is why you – those things you went through in your career, the sacrifices, the challenges, etc. happened to you, in order to build you to be able to lead and help you beat the challenges right at this particular time of your life and career.

What do you feel like your legacy is? What do you want people to remember about you when you?

The accomplishments. For sure that, you don't have to be stuck in in your field. Just be happy in what you are. I was happy in in my jobs. So those things helped me to want to stay longer, retiring at the age of 62 and training folks to take your job. I was a quiet guy.

Really, that this one started out as one. I left Philadelphia and knew change you know, for a position to get things done to get people's attention and know there's a role for you and my role was to lead the personnel that I had. And so, a man that believed in God, family and country and that would treat people the way I would want to be treated.

Those were basically to the foundations. Not seek after the money. As you move through your training, those things would come. So, I want to be able to look back on my career and say to myself that I did well, I didn't leave anybody down. I did the task they had for me, the grades were high, and when the bar set or the goalposts has moved, you can move with the goalposts. There's no time to quit. Always look forward. Your dreams are there and so accomplishing my dreams. I feel good about that. I built me a museum of those things that I have accomplished that I could reflect on, and the people that I served with. Be thankful for the moment that you have, and it will go well.

Colonel Burthel Thomas



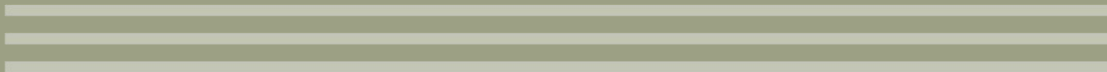
Birthplace: Dumas, Arkansas

Enlisted in ARNG: 1978

African American Pioneers Achievements:

- First African American Battalion Commander 39th Infantry Brigade (Sep) Arkansas Army National Guard

Retirement: 2014



About Correna Taylor Case

I didn't come to the Guard until '74. That event, I remember people talking about it. It was a significant event in the Guard. When I came back in '78 from active duty and I came back to Warren as a platoon leader, my first experience there, I was a first lieutenant when I got off active duty and was a little bit disappointed. I was a senior lieutenant in the company, and I thought I would get the XO position, but it went to someone else, and that was kind of disappointing. But I didn't let that stop me from what I wanted to do.... And there were some people, as a matter of fact, they came down from the civil rights section to talk to me about that and that was encouraging because I was getting a little bit disenchanted to say, well, I'm going to leave. This is not what I signed up to do or to be treated like that. So, I was going to leave. And I think his name was Massanelli.... And he came down and talked to me just unexpected.... And sometimes when people talk to you and give you a different perspective on things and they give you some insight and some encouragement that you still can go forward and be and be successful it's up to me what I wanted to do with it. But that was encouraging.

Family's Reaction to Joining the Military

They were not happy.... By the time I got in in '74, the Vietnam War was coming to an end pretty quickly. And my parents in particular, and I remember my grandmother was just hysterical about it. And I can remember her crying about it, and about me going to the military. I took the attitude that if other people can be in the military and be successful, I can too. And I looked at the military as my college days. If it's an institution, what have you

put into it, you get out of it. And It's always moving, is always changing and you have to be adaptable. Those are some of the things that I took away from that. So, you can get killed or killing people in Vietnam. Vietnam was almost coming to an end, and I could do that. I could get killed in Dumas or anywhere else I go. So, I just took it and then [didn't] let that bother me. And I kept moving forward with what I wanted to do. It was my goals and try to minimize the negative things or the negative impacts or things that could happen to me. I try to make sure that I stay clear of things of that nature.

When did things start to look a little better for you [in the Guard]?

I'm not sure. It didn't look any better to me in the National Guard as far as equal opportunity. It didn't look better, although I got promoted through the ranks -- captain major, lieutenant colonel, colonel. But it didn't really look better for me until I got promoted to colonel. That was the first event that I had an opportunity to share with my family and my relatives that I had gotten promoted in the military.

When I got promoted to captain, major, as lieutenant colonel, I didn't know I'd been promoted. My orders came through the mail. And I'll never forget the incident or the look on people's faces, soldier faces. I'm a lieutenant today, and tomorrow I'm a captain. There was no opportunity to my family or the troops that that I was serving with, to see me get promoted in any capacity except for O6. Everything came through the mail for me. My orders came through the mail. I never had an opportunity for them [family] to see me promoted and the young men that I served with, and they never got an opportunity to see that. It's just something that just showed up.

Was that by design?

I think it was something that happened that they didn't want to show that or promote that. Or giving any credence to an officer, a minority officer, getting promoted, it just — it just didn't happen. It seemed to me that was...happening [more] to prevent that from happening. And it dawned on me from when I got promoted to major, I was in a brigade. I was a brigade finance officer. I came in, and before my federal recognition came in, and of course I was already serving in that capacity, and I didn't know I was promoted until a general, the brigade commander was coming up stairs and said, "You out of uniform." So, I'm out of uniform? And I go home [the] next couple of days and hear my orders came in. I'm a major.... The Guard missed out on an opportunity to say we were recognizing someone that has made it through this. He's done all the requirements in terms of education, in terms of duty, in terms of assignment to get promoted. But nobody saw that, and they missed out on, I think, some recruitment opportunities [were missed] because if they don't see it, then it's nonexistent.

And then when I come back and talk to people about my experience, then you missed a generation of people that could have served in the National Guard, because they're not willing to go through that kind of mistreatment or the lack of attention or recognition.

It was my intention never become full time with the National Guard because I was — I saw what happened with some of my friends that were full time. I spent my time with the US Department of Agriculture. And I was recruited to come to the Second Battalion as a training officer and it was a GS9 position. And with the USDA, I was already GS11, so I wasn't going to take a down grade. And after I saw what was happening to my friends, I didn't want any part of being full time with the National Guard. I just didn't. I just stayed away from it.

Has there been progress made in the Arkansas National Guard for minorities since you retired?

I saw progress in terms [that] we had our first minority officer, as general officer – General [William] Johnson. And I saw Nathaniel McGee get promoted to full colonel. And I think that was another one. Avery, Bob Avery, was promoted to colonel. And then there was a lull there for a while.... And I see now that we have another minority general officer here. But if I look back and look down at the National Guard, back down the ranks, I don't see much progress being made at all. And I think there's some missed opportunities there. I think when I looked at the troops that were coming in from deployment and the families there.... But I didn't see that many minority families. And I think if you're going to get more people to serve in the Guard, you got to sort of recruit their families, too. You got to make them feel part of it, too. If you don't do that, then you're looking at a one generation family member serving in the military that he has something to offer. But people that he's associated with and that he knows and that he can recommend to the military, it will happen because invariably he doesn't want that to happen to the folks that are behind him, and particularly his kids and relatives and people in the community that, you know, he wouldn't want that kind of treatment for them.

Major Magnolia Winkler



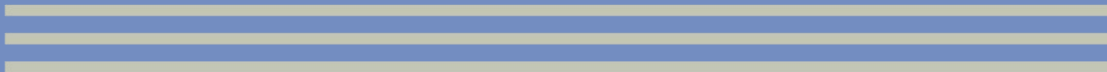
Birthplace: Wrightsville, Arkansas

Enlisted in ARNG: August 12, 1978

African American Pioneers Achievements:

- First African American Female Officer Arkansas Air National Guard

Retirement: August 2008



What inspired me to enlist was I knew I wanted to go to college and my dad couldn't afford it and I couldn't afford it. My mother died when I was five going on six just before going into kindergarten. So, my dad, who was a Navy veteran he raised the last three girls, a family of five. That's why I took on a full-time job, immediately before I graduated. I met a friend who told me about the Arkansas National Guard, which I never knew. I only knew about active duty, so, I turned to the Guard... for tuition assistance. That's what motivated me to join.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *You mentioned your dad was Navy, what did he think about your joining the Air Guard?*

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My dad was a Navy veteran on an aircraft carrier and basically did janitorial work. He was a cook, cleaned the ship and the only thing that I remember him saying to me when I joined is, "Don't let them put you in a kitchen."

So, when, I meet with the recruiter, I basically made that request, and he told me that [the] ASVAB test had actually awarded me a clerical position and we were good. And that was it.

So, my dad didn't really push me to join. It was just that being out in the workforce, being

exposed to different people and actually listening and figuring out, you know, what I could do to better develop myself.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *But he was pretty supportive?*

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Oh, he was very, supportive. My dad, when I told him about [the] Air Guard career opportunity, he was basically easygoing, just saying, hey, just do it. [As a] matter of fact, you know, I told him that we should have patented, the Nike logo, it wasn't even out at that time, but he said, "Just do it!"

I'm proud of what he did, what he said, but he didn't push any of us to join.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *So, you enlisted what in what year? You go to basic training. How was the experience for you?*

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I joined in 1978 and it was actually a great experience because it was my first airplane ride and my first time actually going outside Arkansas, which was in San Antonio, Texas at Lackland Air Force Base. And once my feet hit the ground at that point I thought, well, you know what? This is where I'm going to make my home. I didn't know exactly where I was, but I just fell in love with Texas.

So, I finished up there and I came back home, and my dad asked me, how did [it] go? I said, "Well, I think I should go. I think I'm going to stay." So, I went off to tech school and came back and my first assignment was at the Little Rock Air Force base with the 189th, air refueling group. Our mission was the KC-135s. I didn't see anybody that looked like me when I joined in that section. But it worked for me.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *So, how was that experience as your first duty station? Were there any kind of tensions or conflicts you had to cope with?*

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You know, I was, I was excited about the career opportunity, and it was kind of challenging because I didn't see anybody like me, the young man that went to basic training with me, had connections from his dad being in the military out there, but I didn't know anybody at that point.

It was kind of challenging because I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that I was to be trained into whatever it was that they did. I did experience a little disparity there. Shortly after my assignment where I was not exposed to the overall workings of that section, I was assigned to the library to update publications, so I would come in and we had career development courses that we would do the first part of the day, but my assignment was to report and after

that go to the library and update all the regulations. So that's where I spent most of my time.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *Okay, so how long was that?*

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I stayed there about four years.

Down the hall I would see a black officer and he was the first black commander of security forces. And so, I would often just kind of walk down here and just kind of take a peek, you know, just to see that and eventually I would speak, and we got to talking. Eventually, Chief Robert O'Connell had an opening and they approached me, and I told him that I would be happy to transfer down there. So, by doing that, I developed a more appreciation of the position that I had, which was administrative specialist. I got involved with a lot of what I was selected for in the training. Chief Arnold helped me a whole lot. Being exposed to the black commander, he gave me a lot of guidance. So, I had a lot of guidance from those guys that made me really appreciate the hard work that I was putting into that worthy job offer. I stayed there from 1980 to 1986.

I believe we got our first excellence when they would do inspections on your files and your publication updates. So, we got our first excellence when I moved down there. In 1986, I was working for Southwestern Bell, and I got laid off and the Guard paid off because I got a full-time position because they were changing the missions to C-130s. This is when I came on active duty with the National Guard.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *So, let's go back to 1976, you weren't in yet but, there was the well-known lawsuit with SSG Correna Taylor [in which] she sued the Arkansas National Guard because of the disparities of the hiring practices among African Americans.*

*She realized that a lot of African Americans weren't being hired or be in positions that were not being promoted. So, you say in 1986 you were hired full-time, did you see any kind of those disparities in the hiring practices or any kind of issues similar to that.*

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Yes, I did. During that time there was a lot of disparity. I mean, you would hear it. I did see more hiring of a few more minorities in positions, but not very many. But it appeared that everybody that was enlisting would either be assigned to the kitchen even after I was in. So maybe my demand to request my dad's advice paid off.

They were either being assigned to the kitchen or to what we call, the engineer section where you did trash pickup and maintenance type jobs. Few to none being hired for clerical or higher-level positions. In 1984 or 1985, I did see a few black girls hired that were put into clerical positions, but not many. I probably could count them on my hand, maybe five or six. I don't know how many others were in other areas.

When I actually was hired full time with the Air National Guard, having a state and federal

mission, I got to see a whole lot more. I was exposed to a whole lot more. When I was assigned to the scheduling and current operations position, which was mostly brass, I was floored by us not speaking to each other. And by me being the curious one, not understanding and being exposed to the private sector and comparing the two, I just started asking a lot of questions. I would talk [to] Staff Sergeant Harold Terry and I made friends with him, and others and we became friends. There were two other black guys that were hired with me and of course, they had been out there in different sections. One, in the motor pool or supply. I would just ask the question, "Why are we not speaking to each other?" We see each other every day. I was basically told; "we don't say much to each other because we're in fear of our jobs." They felt that if we just kind of start unifying or gathering or even were given the appearance of forming some type of close-knit gathering, jobs would be in jeopardy. So, they mostly just kind of kept to themselves.

Now, I worked in the hangar and there were a few technicians.

And I just started asking questions. I would go down [to the] parachute shop and talk to people and go across the motor pool and start talking to people and say, hey, you know, folks, we have to start talking to each other, I don't know what's going to happen here. I just want to know, what sort of people we have out here. I like to see people that look like me. It was shortly after that that we started meeting. You know what they say, "you get to know people when you talk." So, we started going to lunch together. Shortly after that, the topic of not being promoted came up. I knew one guy who was still a staff sergeant, and he was in the motor pool for many years, and it just didn't make sense to me that he had not been promoted. We needed to figure out what was going on. What we did learn after we started talking and meeting, during unofficial times, which was primarily after drill weekends, and we would all meet afterwards to just kind of talk about that particular subject.

Once I knew what it was, of course, I would call the gatherings and the commander and security forces who gave me guidance as to what we needed to do. And we just kind of started an unofficial organization where we can just talk and try to try to nail down why the people who had been out there for years, for many, ten to twelve years, still were three stripers or staff sergeants. We were blessed to take that to the commander at that time and he gave us our blessing to formalize EEOC Social Actions. To just try to identify why – that was my primary question. Why are these people all out here who are black and don't have the rank? I mean, I see other people doing the same job, which are not like us. Surely, they've been there a short amount of time and you're still being promoting?

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Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob: *Now, are you an officer at this point?*

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No, I'm just a staff sergeant. Just asking questions and helping people to understand what my issue was, because I think total quality management came out two years after I was hired. I went to the training, and it was about the total force and the team. I saw us, thinking we're part of the team. We should still have the same career opportunities, the same personal development as everybody else. But other people around us were being promoted, but we

weren't moving.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *You stated that your commander had given you his blessing, but was he really supportive? Did you see that he was actually concerned about the issue?*

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Once we addressed the concern with him, he was very supportive. He wanted us to dig into it. He kind of grouped us with the recruiters because we didn't have that many black people out here. So, working through social actions, the recruiters were part of it, and we joined with the recruiter in going out to the different recruiting places, i.e., high school, fairs or something that's going on in these different towns. They would grab one or two of the black personnel to go with them in the minority communities. The only thing that we requested is if they scored high on their tests, don't put them in the kitchen, in a motor pool or maintenance. You know we wanted the jobs everybody else was doing and we wanted to get promoted like everyone else. But Col. Bryant was very supportive in doing that.

Our job in this organization was to nail down exactly what was going on so we had a list of objectives that was presented to a Lieutenant Colonel that transferred [from] the Army. So, we and the Lieutenant Colonel who guided us all along to these objectives to identify why the blacks weren't moving both on the technician side in the Air Guard side part-time weekend warriors.

What we eventually learned is that on the career development side, we had courses that we had to take, okay, in order to be promoted, the slot had to be available, and you had to meet the career development courses and then have the slot available for you to move into. A lot of those issues that we found, even me... experienced was that somebody was already identified who was going to be. You could apply, but you would hear the name who was going to get the job. Nine times out of ten, you had it happen. So of course, there was also a downside for us too, because we were exposed to that. We were kind of lacking in not completing their career development courses. You have to do it, that's just part of the criteria.

We found that we had to identify people who were not doing that through working with social actions. We were able to identify those who were behind on their critical courses and invite them to the now official meetings. We would push them by telling them about the next opening that comes up and explained the importance of preparing themselves for that position,

It was our goal to help as many of us to be in the running for being promoted. Some of us still didn't get the jobs, but a few more did. That's the impact of that organization, we identified the problems and focused on the career development courses that were not being taken advantage of or not completed. But then we also identify career opportunities, which were lacking. I know there's a difference in the selection process for Air and Army. In Air, a slot has to be available. I think in the Army you test, and you promote a few that make the cut. That's not what happens in the Air Guard. In the Air Guard, the slot has to be available and there's only allotted so many in that organization. So, you have a constant fight for those positions.


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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *So, with your organization you say you saw more people get promoted getting jobs, so it was successful?*

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It was very, very successful during the years. And I don't know whether Ms. Taylor's lawsuit had an impact because you didn't hear about it. I didn't hear about it. I do know that there was a flux of black people that came probably around, 1981, which was about the same time I transferred to security forces. But I am unsure if that was part of a quota being met or not.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *It was because with that case after they ruled in her favor or for a time being, for every two white hired, they had to hire an African American as well in the next position. So that case was a milestone. So, we did open a door and a lot to fill.*

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And that may be why I saw a few more females being promoted to more administrative slots than when I came on in 1978. When I came on active duty in 1986, I saw more, which exposed me, like I said, to a lot of stuff that I didn't see just coming out there one weekend a month, that organization, and Minority Affairs Subcommittee, which was officially under the realms of social actions.

We were working hand-in-hand, and we got to see the reports of and total quality management in identifying demographics of years on down the road what it's going to look like. That had an impact. and eventually it paid off.

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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *Do you eventually you go off to Officer Training Services?*

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Yes, here's how it happened. I'm working at scheduling and current operations. In 1986, maybe two years later, we're hiring young ladies who looks like me, as technicians or even Air Guard and I'm going to school part time at night at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. So, I go up the hill to do the mail and I ran into these two black girls around lunchtime. They were much younger than me.... And we find that they were attending University of Arkansas Little Rock part time altogether. And they had aspirations of being black officers, they were asking, are there any black officers out here?

And I said, I haven't seen many. I've been out here. I'm out here every day, I know that I've seen some on the active-duty side, up on the base. I hadn't seen anybody around here; so, you know, that conversation led me to my supervisor, Major Fred Smith, whereas he and I were really working hand-in-hand. He couldn't type and I could type, but he had the brains to develop the flowcharts. We automated flow charts, databases and everything for the scheduling. He and I got really close, and he was kind of like my mentor and I felt comfortable with him. He was supportive of me in going to college, especially since I was a wife and I'm a mom and probably older than one of the other girls that were in our office. I just came back and said, "Hey, Fred," because we went [on] a first

name basis. "Do you know of any black females out here? I've got a couple of friends that are asking, and they have aspirations to be officers."

He just said, "Maggie I really don't think we have any out here. Why don't you go check with personnel." I did just that and sat down [to] talk with [the] lady asking many questions. She confirmed that there weren't any black females, then proceeded to tell me that you had to have a degree to become an officer. I went back and I ran that across Fred, and he said, "Well, Maggie, I need you to go and get AFI/AFR 36 Regulation... and let's research that." He was a very intelligent and humble man.

And he says, you know, I'm just going to tell you, we don't have any black female officers in the Arkansas National Guard at all, and he said, if I recall, I don't think you have to have your college degree. You have to have some college, but we are going to read this regulation and see. We read it and he said, you don't have to have a college education.

So, he asked, have you ever thought about it for yourself? You catch on to things quick and I don't even do this work, you do it, I just sign my name. He said, "You need to think about it." And I said, "Oh shoot Fred, I'm just old I'm just trying to find information." He encouraged me to do that in 1988-89, and I'm still in school at UALR. I started the school journey from 1979 and I didn't graduate with my full degree until May of 1994. So that was a long journey, but I made it my goal and I told the two girls we're all going to make this our goal, and we did. It just so happened I worked up to qualify by going to school to acquire the number of hours needed before I could even take the test. That was in 1991. So that's another three years later.

Of course, obstacles came. I got pregnant when I initially set the goal. I had pregnancy problems, and I was out maybe five or six months bedridden, which I couldn't attend college. At that point when I came back, I just kept pressing on, just kept pressing on because this time I'm determined.

I've got to do something now; I've got two kids and I'm still a staff sergeant. I got to make some moves. So, I resigned from my job because of the age restriction during this time, I learned 35 was a cut off period for [to make] officer and I am 31 years old, so I've got to do something. I either got to get promoted or I've got to give up this job and go do something else. That's – that was just it, those were my two choices. Go back to being a part-time and find a better job. Because even when I wasn't applying for the jobs, it was still going on.

You'd hear she's going to a job; he's going to get the job and we're doing everything we can, but people were still being hired, but the promotion aspects of it just wasn't going fast because of the slot restrictions.

I did eventually take the AFOQT Test, Air Force Officer Qualified Test in 1991. By this time, I made it known that I was going to resign to pursue an officer slot, even though an officer slot was not opened; so, it was a big risk for me. Fred worked with me, the Post Commander worked with me, Colonel Bryant worked with me, plus I had the backing of the two black commanders and a few other officers. A part-time position in the Command-and-Control area came open in that slot which enabled me to be promoted to a tech.

So, I resigned my position, and I was now a part-timer, but we had a training day that I could work part-time while going to school. I went to school full-time.

I didn't pass the AFOQT the first time, I missed it by one. You only have two tries, so I couldn't work full-time, go to school part-time and study for something else and be a wife and a mom. I had to

juggle all of these things because bills still had to be paid. That was the risk I took, because at that point [I was] determined to do it. I did eventually take that slot and attend school full-time and worked for my last two years in 1992. It says that I didn't actually resign until February of 1992, and that was because I had so much time built up from never taking off, just coming in and just working, I was a workaholic.

In 1993, I was working part-time as a take-in-command post and it's time for me to retake that AFOQT exam again. My last time, I believe, was January 1993 and I go, and I take it but before I do it, I confirm with the testing officer by asking are these the correct scores that I need to meet? My objective is to pass this thing, not miss it by one because I'm hearing everybody's missing it by one that looks like me. Okay, that's what I'm hearing. So, I'm going for the gusto on this one. Are these correct scores? Yes.

I go in, I take the test. I don't know if it was the end of the day, they could grade it right there. I passed. Now, I just got to find a slot. Okay, I got to find a slot. And this is from January and February, but the slots were either out of my city or somewhere where it required more training that I just didn't have the time allotted myself, given restrictions, to go in and be able to assume that position.

So, they either weren't there, or they were not accommodating to what I could do. I remember distinctly it was the spring of 1993. Remember, I'm turning 35 October 1993, and I don't know if I'm going to make it or not. I'm just praying. I'm doing everything I can. I just don't know. And I walking home from school one day and I had a message on the phone, and it was Colonel Wilkerson, and she says, Maggie, I need you to call me right away. I called and she said, I need you to sit down. And I said, okay. She says, "Your scores no longer qualify you for the officer candidate program." And I said, "But when I took it in January, I confirmed the needed scores prior to taking the exam, these are the scores your test officer told me I needed.

What's going on?" She said, "Well, that's all I know. We got an error message changed that we've got an error and that the scores were elevated so your score is no longer qualified." And I said, "That's just unbelievable." I'm trying to maintain my composure and be respectful. I said, "Okay, let me – let me think about this. I'll have to call you back." I slammed the phone down and went into my bedroom and I just cried so uncontrollably. I didn't know what to do. I had quit my job. I've taken a big risk to do this, and a lot of people still supported it, but nobody told me about the massive changes. Someone knew about but just did not tell me. So, it didn't quite make sense. So again, I gained my composure because I heard a voice and I know it was the good Lord said, "You need to make a call to that base right now."

I got myself together and I made a call to Colonel Bryant's office and Sergeant Clay answered. She was a black female. I told her and I started crying again because I was so upset. And I said, I really need to talk to Colonel Bryant. I need to get in there today.

I just got some disturbing news about the officer candidate program, and I need to talk to him. She said, "Well, he's flying right now, but he should be here. Why don't you come on out?" I went in there and I talked to him, and he said, "Maggie, I'm so sorry. We will get the bottom of this. I don't know what's going on. I don't know that section of personnel, so I had no idea. He thought everything was going well and he had heard that I passed the class. We tried every avenue to see if I could get my degree or something to qualify for. At one point we thought maybe I could apply for an Army position or something. We were just trying every avenue to see if I could qualify for some

position right quick.

My 35th birthday was fast approaching and not meeting that, that age requirement was a big factor. It would take an act of Congress to change that. We did talk and he said, well, just give me some time. I'm going to find out what's going on.

Long story short, it turned out that the error message changed, that elevated the scores actually came in maybe six months prior to me taking the test, and somehow it never got changed in our regulations. But by this time, everybody had heard that I was no longer qualified for the officer candidate program. I go in, I'm working [with] a couple of commanders who knew about my situation [and] told me that they were behind me on this. We don't understand that either.

What I ended up doing was doing a timeline from the time of my beginnings in the military up until the time that I had actually taken the Air Force Qualifying Test. I didn't know that they were talking to Colonel Bryant, but Colonel Bryant figured out that I could get a waiver of those AFOQT scores, and they explained it all to me. They put it all together and they were working as a team to assist me through this process. This team assembled everything needed for my case and shot it up to the National Guard Bureau. SSG Correna Taylor's lawsuit was in play with some other type of diversity and inclusion measures being met. It may not have been called diversity and inclusion in the 90's, probably more like Affirmative action.

The results came back and what was highlighted is that I would be the first black female officer in the Arkansas Air National Guard. The two generals it was sent to were vacationing out of the country and it was sent to them, and they approved it.

Now it was approved, but there still [wasn't] a slot available. It's about May/June of 1993 and I still don't have a slot, so still, the odds were against me. I got a call in July of 1993 from the Personnel Sergeant, he said, "Maggie, can you give me a copy of your transcript? We got to move on this fast." I said, "What? What's going on?" He said, "I need your college transcript." He went on and listed the other things he needed as well as asked if I had a 2.5 GPA in college. "I responded by saying, oh yeah, I got that." He told me we found a slot for you, there's a Public Affairs Officer who is retiring we're going to double slot you there until he retires so we can work this thing. Just get out here. Can [you] get out here tomorrow? I said, "Yes!" They were all working on my behalf behind the scenes, and I, I really have to credit, Major Craig Smith who basically took me by the hand and guided me through the process. He was a Caucasian man, but a real low-key guy, and very intelligent. He kind of became my mentor and was overseeing everything behind the scenes. He knew people who knew people and it happened. I was actually commissioned September 1993, which was approximately 25 days before my 35th birthday.

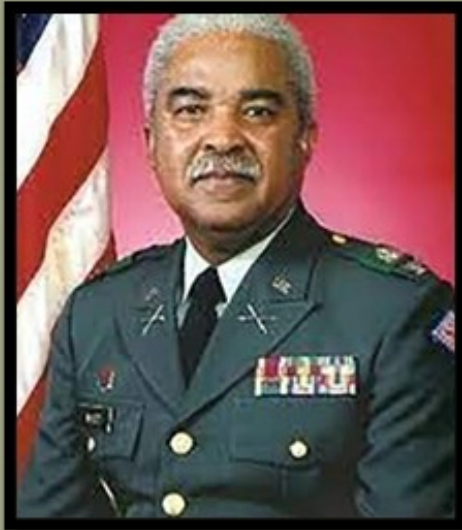
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**Question from CW3 Patrick Jacob:** *So, I am curious. Were the other two black females able to commission as well?*

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One didn't but the other one did. She is the Commander of Marksmanship Training Unit, and she is now a very good friend of mine. She is Lieutenant Colonel Phylinthia Givens. She was actually the second female commissioned in the Arkansas Air Guard and she is still part-time after about 35 years.

Colonel Nathaniel McGee



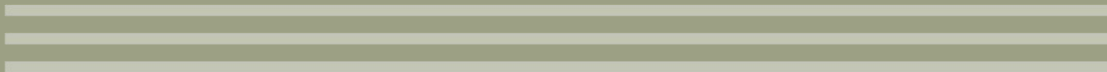
Birthplace: Turrell, Arkansas

Enlisted in ARNG: July 1971

African American Pioneers Achievements:

- First African American Colonel
- First African American to Command Camp Robinson Maneuver Training Area of the Arkansas Army National Guard

Retirement: July 30, 2005



Several blacks I knew had been killed in Vietnam. And I didn't want to be a part of that. I never had any reservations necessarily about serving my country. It was more of a fact that in my mind I didn't have a fighting chance to do anything else and while at the same time I noticed that white individuals my age and a little older...worked at their father's service station or grocery store, never had a problem not only getting in the Guard, but even being drafted to the point where they even felt a need. That was the, I guess, the environment that I grew up in, in Terrell. But I always knew that there had to be something better. And as a consequence, after finally being admitted to...the armory at Brinkley [he had attempted a dozen times before] and subsequently given the test, the ASVAB, I was quickly told, well, you qualify for entry, but we only have truck drivers and cooks here at this unit, and we don't have any vacant trucks for you to drive, so, you're going to have to go to cook school. But before then, they finally got ahold of the detachment commander to swear me in, and he quickly put me in a back office, closed two doors, and started administering the oath of enlistment to me through those two doors, because the very word was that he didn't want to see [n-word] get in his National Guard unit. That was my enlistment.

I was enlisted in July [but] I didn't go to basic training until September. But upon my arrival at basic training, the unit commander, I guess, saw something in me and he took me under his wings and made me his unit clerk. And during that time, I was at basic, and before I went to AIT, the Advanced Infantry Training, he promoted me two or three times. When I came back to Brinkley after basic training, I was an E4, and they promptly administratively demoted me [laughing]. But that was the way things were at that time. And you couldn't [pause], you couldn't do very much about things like that, because in those units, whatever went on in those units stayed in those units. And at the same time,

you are so new to the organization you don't know who to contact outside of those organizations until you read a little bit more and have more contact with people. And then you start learning the organization.

About the Arkansas Military Academy (AMA)

(COL Magee drilled in Brinkley a few times and was then transferred to West Helena. After about a year he became interested in AMA. He never did attend cook school).

...I started inquiring about AMA and never will forget. I'm not gonna call his name, but he became the task commander at Brinkley, and he told me that I couldn't go to AMA because they already had a black in AMA and they had a state law saying that only one black could attend AMA at a time.

(COL Magee finally was admitted to AMA in 1974. There were two African Americans in his class. He said he "quickly learned that law was a lie").

[There was at AMA], and this was like the second or third drill that I had over here [Camp Robinson]. Some of the TAK officers decided to play a joke, supposedly, and summoned me to the Tax Shack... [there] was three of them there that had sheets over their heads. Well...I filed a complaint that.... I'll put up with the verbal bullsh..., but, you know, you're going too far now. And they insisted that they were acting as ghost rather than Klansmen. But once he got relieved of his duty [the commandant] there, I had no more problems with I AMA.

Being Promoted

'95 was when I was promoted to O6, and that's probably [pause], that's probably one of the worst times in my career because after being promoted to O6 – you got to understand that, all, from the time I was a senior captain up until that, the kind of excuses I would run into for various things, you know, never would they say anything about race. It was always either my age or my seniority, and after getting promoted O6 and would still attend staff meetings that I knew things were being withheld, that was the first time, and it's embarrassing for me to say this after 25 years. That's when I finally came to the realization that it's not me and other blacks that they are passing over, and in certain cases screwing around -- it ain't like they don't know any better. And it ain't like I hadn't pointed these things out before one-on-one and in in staff meetings. These people don't intend to do right. That was when I came to the realization, I had been in the Guard 25 years believing that all I had to do was work a little harder, do a little bit more, talk to a few more people. And it all became crapped.



ARKANSAS NATIONAL GUARD

AFRICAN AMERICAN PIONEERS

UNTOLD STORIES

For much of the military history of the United States, African Americans were discouraged from joining the military or relegated to segregated units. The Arkansas Militia/ National Guard was no different. In 1948, President Truman officially desegregated the Armed Forces, but it took several years before the process was complete. In 1964, the Arkansas National Guard allowed its first African American to enlist.

Gradually, more African Americans joined the Arkansas Army and Air Guard. However, African Americans in the Arkansas Guard faced many obstacles. Discrimination was rampant and slowed their advancement in the organization. This book investigates the issues of discrimination experienced by the African American pioneers in the Arkansas National Guard. In addition, a large portion of this book is dedicated to the first African Americans to achieve ranks, command, and other achievements in the Arkansas National Guard.



Also available at the Museum & MWR

Paperback—\$10.00 / Hardcover—\$20.00

Black History Committee Members

Active Guard Members

BG Leland Tony Shepherd
CW2 Darrell Daniels
CW4 Cornelius Charles
MAJ Krystal Browning
CW3 Patrick Jacob
LTC William Phillips II

Retired Volunteers

BG (Ret) William Johnson
CCM (Ret) Normal Gilchrest
COL (Ret) Damon Cluck
CW4 (Ret) Gregory Settles

Museum Staff

Dr. Raymond Screws
Erica McGraw

AMA Award

In March, the Arkansas National Guard Museum received the Outstanding Achievement in Media award from the Arkansas Museums Association for the Arkansas National Guard Museum's African American Pioneers project.

According to the AMA website, the AMA "was founded in 1966 as an organization of museums and museum personnel dedicated to the promotion of professional standards in Arkansas museums, the encouragement of interaction between members, and the development of public support for and interest in Arkansas museums."

Pictured from left to right are Erica McGraw, Arkansas National Guard Museum curator; Gloria Sanders, AMA president; and Dr. Raymond Screws, Arkansas National Guard Museum director and AMA vice president.

The 2023 conference was held in Little Rock with its awards banquet hosted by the Old Statehouse Museum.



Timeline of African American Pioneers in the Arkansas National Guard

1960s

1964 (July): MSgt Willie Tyiska
First African American to Enlist in the Air Guard

1965: MSgt Robert Bell
First African American to Enlist in the 188th Tactical Fighter Wing

1964 (December): 1SG Jeff Hayes
First African American to Enlist in the Army Guard

1970s

1973: TSgt Julia Green
First AA female to Enlist in the 189th Tactical Airlift Group and first AA female hired as a full-time employee with the 189th Fighter Group as a supply technician.

1974: Lt. Col. Lester Piggee
First AA Commander, 189th Security Police Squadron

1976: MSgt Willie Tyiska
First AA Hired into the National Guard Technician Program

1980s

1980: Lt. Col. Lester Piggee—
First African American Officer to Serve as Flight Commander

1980: CW4 Paul Williams
First African American First Sergeant 39th Infantry Brigade

1982: LTC Danny Johnson
First African American Instructor Pilot

1984: LTC Claudell Woods
First African American Judge Advocate General

1985: CW4 Gregory Settles
First African American First Sergeant, D Company, 212th Signal Battalion

1988: CW4 Gregory Settles
First African American Command Sergeant Major, 212th Signal Battalion



Blue = Air Guard
Green = Army Guard

1971: CW4 Marcellus Person
First African American Full-Time Military Technician Hired in a Supervisory Capacity

1971: SSG John C. Watson
First African American Male Hired as a Full-Time Employee

1972: SSG John Parker
First African American Hired Combined Support Maintenance Shop

1973: LTC Alice Taylor
First African American Nurse

1974: SSG Correna Taylor
First African American Female Recruiter

1974: SSG John Parker
First African American to get promoted to the grade of WG-12 and first African American to be hired in the Quality Assurance Section

1974: MAJ Eddie Brown
First African American to Complete Arkansas Military Academy's (AMA) and Officer Candidate School (OCS)

1974: SSG Lillie M. Carter
First African American Female Hired Full-Time Employee

1975: CW5 Arthur Montgomery
First African American Warrant Officer

1976: LTC Danny Johnson
First African American Helicopter Pilot

1978: CW4 Paul Williams
First African American Unit Administrator

1990s

1990: Col. James L. Abernathy
First African American and First
Arkansas Air National Guard
Commander of the newly formed
National Guard Marksmanship
Training Unit

1991: SMSgt Harold Terry
189th Air Wing's Minority Affairs Sub-
Committee

1992: CCM Normal Gilchrest
First African American Human
Resource Advisor

1994: Maj. Magnolia Winkler
First African American Female Officer

1996: MSgt Kenneth R. Esaw
First African American Recruiter

1999: CCM Normal Gilchrest
First African American Command Chief
Master Sergeant

2000s

2000: Col. James L. Abernathy
First African American Colonel

2009: Col. Ronald W. McDaniel
First African American Colonel in the
189th Airlift Wing

2001: SGM Danny J. Fletcher
First African American First Sergeant
for the 106th Army Band

2002: COL Walter L. Jones
First African American Commander
2nd Battalion, 233rd Regiment,
Regional Training Institute

2008: BG William Johnson Jr.
First African American General and
First African American Deputy
Adjutant General

2009: CW4 Cornelius Charles
First African American S1/XO for the
Recruit Sustainment Program

2010s

2011: Lt. Col. Phylinthia Givens
First African American Female
Lieutenant Colonel and First African
American Female Inspector General of
Dispute Resolutions, 189th Airlift Wing

2012: Lt. Col. Anderson Neal, Jr.
First African American Group
Commander 188th Fighter Wing

2017: Lt. Col. Phylinthia Givens
First African American Female Inspector
General Officer 188th Air Wing

2010: CW5 Pamela Huff
First African American Female Chief
Warrant Officer Five

2011: CW4 Cornelius Charles
First African American First Company
Commander of B Company, Recruiting and
Retention Battalion and the First and First
African American Warrant Officer to serve
as Aide-de-Camp

2012: SGM Ester L. Crockett
First African American Female Sergeant
Major

2014: COL Erica L. Johnson Ingram
First African American Female Battalion
Commander

2015: COL Anthony Sanders
First African American Legislative Liaison

2015: CW3 Ife Caldwell
First African American Female Pilot

2016: COL Alex Finger
First African American to Command the
233rd Regiment Regional Training
Institute

2017: LTC William B. Phillips, II
First African American Public Affairs Officer

2018: CW5 Kenneth D. Brown
First African American State Command
Chief Warrant Officer

2018: COL Erica L. Johnson Ingram
First African American Female Colonel



2020s

None documented at this time.

2020: COL Erica L. Johnson
Ingram
First African American Female
Installation Commander

2022: BG Leland Tony Shepherd
First African American General Officer to
Command

1990: LTC (CH) J. Dawson Williams
First African American Chaplain in the 212th
Signal Battalion

1992: 1SG Eugene Fultz
First African American First Sergeant of
Company B, 212th Signal Battalion

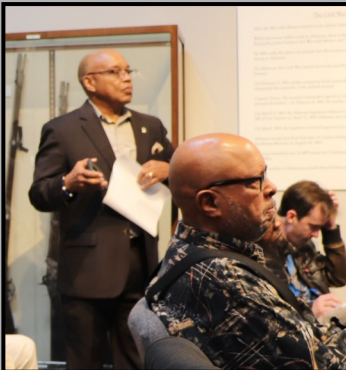
1992: COL Burthel Thomas
First African American Battalion Commander

1992: CW3 Kenneth R. Franklin
First African American AH-1 Cobra
Helicopter Pilot

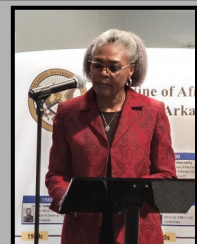
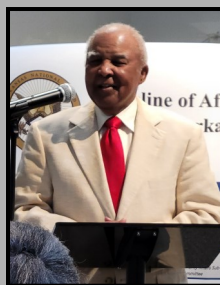
1995: COL Nathaniel McGee
First African American Promoted to Colonel

1996: LTC (CH) J. Dawson Williams
First Full-Time African American Chaplain in
the National Guard US and First African
American Chaplain in the Arkansas National
Guard

1997: COL Nathaniel McGee
First African American to Command
Installation Site Command



Photos from the Arkansas National Guard Museum's Black History Program held on February 23, 2023.



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