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BLACK SOLDIERS, WHITE WARS

Africa's Role in WWI & WWI

Untold stories of African soldiers in European wars

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INTRODUCTION: Buried in Footnotes

For over a century, the stories of Africa's sons who marched, bled, and died in foreign wars have remained largely untold—buried not in the battlefields where they fell, but in the footnotes of history. This book seeks to exhume those voices, to give breath to men who were silenced not just by gunfire, but by the indifference of empire.

Why does this book matter now?
Because silence is no longer neutral. In a world increasingly aware of whose histories have been elevated and whose have been erased, the omission of African soldiers from the global narrative of World War I and World War II is not just a historical oversight—it is a deep injustice. These men, conscripted or coerced, volunteered or valiant, carried not just weapons but the weight of entire empires on their backs. They fought in battles they did not start, under flags they did not choose, for freedoms they themselves did not yet possess.
Their names rarely appear in schoolbooks. Their medals, if given, were few and often handed out begrudgingly. Their pain was undocumented. Their families received no glory, only graves and ghosts. They were called to serve, but never allowed to remember—let alone be remembered.

This book is a reckoning.
We are setting the record straight—not through anger, but through truth. Through the letters they wrote, the testimonies that survived, the scars they bore, and the legacy they left behind. From Senegal to Sudan, from Kenya to Cameroon, Black men were mobilized by colonial powers to fight Europe's wars—wars that had nothing to do with them but changed everything for them.

We owe them more than monuments.
We owe them memory.
In these pages, we restore what history tried to forget: the dignity, the duty, and the deep humanity of Africa's soldiers who gave everything for a war that gave them nothing in return. Their courage may have been invisible to the empires they served, but it will no longer be invisible to the world.
Let this be their war story.
Told at last.

PART I: WORLD WAR I – The Forgotten Front

Chapter 1: Colonies Called to Arms

The War That Wasn't Theirs

In 1914, a European political crisis erupted into full-blown war after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. But as bullets flew in Europe, the shockwaves reached the colonies. Africa, already dissected by European empires in the 1884 Berlin Conference, was pulled into a war it did not start and whose stakes it did not own. Yet its people would pay one of the highest prices.

European colonial powers — desperate for manpower — turned to Africa for soldiers, porters, and laborers. Millions were conscripted, coerced, or lured into service. They were made to fight and die for ideas like "freedom" and "civilization" — words that rang hollow under the boots of colonial rule.

The French Strategy: The Rise of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais

Among the most iconic African regiments in World War I were the Tirailleurs Sénégalais, a force of Black infantry soldiers recruited by the French from across West Africa. Despite their name, these soldiers were not exclusively Senegalese. France drew recruits from modern-day Mali, Guinea, Chad, Burkina Faso, and other territories.

Initially formed in the 1850s to suppress resistance within French colonies, the regiment evolved into a vital military arm by the time the Great War began. During World War I, France deployed nearly 200,000 African soldiers — many of whom saw action on the Western Front, in some of the most brutal European battles.

While propaganda painted service as an opportunity for glory, the truth was darker. Recruitment campaigns often masked coercion. Some men volunteered with hopes of better lives, but many were violently conscripted — rounded up from villages, shackled, and forced into military camps.

The British Approach: King's African Rifles and Reluctant Participation

Britain, more cautious about arming its African subjects, took a different path. The King's African Rifles (KAR) were created primarily for internal control and regional skirmishes in East Africa. Comprising soldiers from Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland (Malawi), and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), the KAR played a central role in the East African Campaign — a brutal war of attrition against German colonial forces in modern-day Tanzania.

Unlike France, Britain initially restricted its African forces to the African continent. But the intensity of war eventually forced them to rethink their strategy. African soldiers were used more widely, though never fully trusted with weapons or independence. Their loyalty was questioned even while their labor was exploited.

The Other Army: The African Carriers

While African soldiers fought, a far larger and often more invisible group — the carriers — bore the physical burden of war. In the East African theater alone, the British conscripted over one million African men to serve as porters, carrying everything from food and ammunition to wounded soldiers. These men walked for miles through sweltering heat, dangerous terrain, and disease-ridden jungles — *unarmed, underfed, and underpaid.*

It's estimated that tens of thousands of these carriers died — not from enemy bullets, but from hunger, exhaustion, malaria, dysentery, and sheer neglect. Many were buried in unmarked graves. Their deaths are still not properly accounted for in mainstream history.

Recruitment or Raiding? The Violent Conscription Process

While recruitment posters promised honor, pay, and adventure, the reality was often the opposite. Colonial administrators set strict quotas and pressured local chiefs to deliver young men by any means necessary. Entire villages were raided. Young men were dragged from their homes at night, chained, and marched for days to training camps.

Families protested. In some regions, revolts broke out — only to be crushed with force. The violence of conscription was not just physical but psychological. Communities lost generations of men. Families were left without providers. Social structures were upended by a war they neither asked for nor understood.

Unequal in Life, Discarded in Death

Once enlisted, African soldiers faced systemic racism within the military hierarchy. In both the French and British armies, they were paid less than white soldiers, fed poorly, housed in substandard conditions, and subjected to harsher punishments.

In the French army, the tirailleurs were often placed on the frontlines in the most dangerous operations — not because of their valor, but because their lives were deemed more expendable. African troops were frequently sent in ahead of white units to absorb enemy fire. The phrase "cannon fodder" was more than metaphor.

Even medical care was racially stratified. Wounded African soldiers were less likely to be treated. And when they died, they were often buried hastily in unnamed graves, while white soldiers received military honors and headstones.

Empty Promises and Forgotten Heroes

The end of the war in 1918 brought parades and memorials across Europe. But African soldiers returned home in silence. Promises made to them — of land, citizenship, education, and pensions — were rarely fulfilled.

In France, African regiments were deliberately excluded from victory celebrations. Historians have noted that colonial officials feared the image of Black soldiers marching through Paris would “offend public sensibilities” and “blur racial boundaries.” These men, who had died for liberty and fraternity, were now deemed a political embarrassment.

In the British Empire, pensions were given inconsistently, if at all. Most returning soldiers and carriers received nothing. Instead of being welcomed as heroes, many were viewed as threats — having been exposed to new ideas, alliances, and ways of thinking during their military service.

The Psychological Awakening: Seeds of Resistance

Ironically, the very system that oppressed African soldiers also awakened them. By fighting in European wars, many Africans were exposed to the hypocrisies of colonialism. They saw white soldiers frightened and vulnerable. They watched empires beg for their help, then deny them gratitude.

These experiences planted the earliest seeds of anti-colonial consciousness. Former soldiers began writing memoirs, leading political movements, and organizing protests. They had once fought for empire; now, they were ready to fight against it.

A History That Still Demands Justice

Today, the memory of Africa's role in World War I remains faint. In European textbooks, African soldiers are scarcely mentioned. In African classrooms, the stories are still trickling in — often through oral history, passed down by the grandchildren of the forgotten.
This chapter, and this book, is an act of restoration. The young men who were uprooted from their homelands to die in foreign fields were not statistics. They were brothers, fathers, dreamers, warriors. Their lives were not a footnote to Europe's war. They were central to it.

Their War, Our Memory

The colonial call to arms was built on lies and power. But African soldiers responded with humanity, courage, and sacrifice. Though stripped of dignity, they brought their own. Though denied justice, they fought with valor. Though erased from memory, they left behind a legacy of resistance, endurance, and awakening.
This is the story of the war behind the war. The frontline history buried under empire's silence.
It is time to remember.

Chapter 2: Marching Through Hell – African Campaigns in WWI

A War Zone Forgotten by Europe

While the trenches of France and Belgium became symbols of World War I's devastation, a different, equally brutal war raged in the heart of Africa — one rarely captured in Western textbooks or war memorials. This was the East African Campaign, a relentless and punishing war that pitted Allied forces — primarily British colonial troops — against a stubborn German colonial army. But behind the headlines of military maneuvers and battle strategies lay a deeper story: the suffering of hundreds of thousands of African soldiers and carriers, many of whom would not survive.

It was not just a war of bullets and bayonets. It was a war against disease, exhaustion, starvation, and the unforgiving African terrain. And for many Africans forced into service, it was a death march through hell.

The East African Front: War Without End

The East African Campaign began in 1914, shortly after war broke out in Europe, and it dragged on until 1918 — long after the European front had become static. The campaign stretched across German East Africa (present-day Tanzania), British East Africa (Kenya), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi), and parts of the Belgian Congo and Mozambique.

The German forces, led by the brilliant General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, used guerrilla tactics to harass the British and their allies. With a relatively small force — never more than 20,000 men, many of them African askaris — von Lettow-Vorbeck managed to tie down hundreds of thousands of Allied troops for four years. His strategy: to keep British forces occupied in Africa and away from Europe.

The campaign turned into a war of mobility and attrition. Roads were non-existent. The jungle was dense. Swamps, rivers, mountains, and tsetse fly-infested valleys made movement a nightmare. Conventional transport — trains and trucks — was useless. Supplies had to be carried on foot. And this is where the true cost of the campaign fell.

The Human Engine: Africa's "Ghost Army"

To move men, munitions, and medicine through impossible terrain, the British and their allies relied on porters and carriers — a colossal, mostly invisible workforce made up almost entirely of African civilians. These men were recruited, often at gunpoint, from villages across Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland, and beyond. They carried everything: tents, cooking pots, machine guns, food, water, ammunition — and sometimes wounded or dying soldiers.

Estimates suggest that over 1 million African porters were forced into service during the East African Campaign. Most were unarmed, barefoot, and barely clothed. They marched in chains of suffering, sometimes carrying loads of 50 kilograms or more through malaria-infested swamps, arid plains, and freezing highlands.

They were the literal backbone of the campaign, the ones who made every military movement possible — and yet their names were never recorded, their faces never photographed, their stories never told. Historians now refer to them as "The Ghost Army."

Marching Into Misery: Disease, Starvation, and Exhaustion

The enemy in East Africa was not just the Germans — it was nature itself. The region was a death trap for anyone not prepared to endure its extremes. European soldiers and officers were decimated by tropical diseases, particularly malaria, dysentery, and blackwater fever. But the African porters and askaris fared even worse.

Food was scarce and often rotten. Carriers were given meager rations — sometimes just a handful of maize meal per day — and had to keep marching. Water sources were often contaminated. Many drank from puddles and muddy rivers, contracting deadly infections. The death toll was staggering.

The British War Office eventually admitted that nearly 100,000 African porters died in British service during the campaign — but many scholars argue the number could be far higher, possibly over 200,000. Countless others returned to their villages crippled, malnourished, or mentally broken.

What makes their deaths even more tragic is the complete absence of proper records. Most porters were not officially enlisted, and their deaths went unmarked. In many cases, they were buried in shallow graves by the side of jungle paths — or not buried at all.

The Battle of Life and Logistics

The East African campaign has been called “a war of legs” — and rightly so. The success or failure of any military operation depended entirely on the endurance of the carrier corps. When porters collapsed, the entire army stalled. Ammunition didn’t reach the front. Food didn’t reach the soldiers. Wounded men died without help.
And yet, despite being indispensable, the carriers were seen as expendable. They were beaten for falling behind. Many marched for days without shoes, their feet blistered and bleeding. If a man collapsed, he was often left behind to die. Entire lines of carriers were known to drop dead in the bush without ever seeing a battle.

African soldiers — both in British and German service — were treated slightly better than porters, but not by much. Though they bore rifles and fought in skirmishes, they too faced racial discrimination, poor pay, and brutal conditions. White officers often used them as frontline shields — cannon fodder for a cause they neither understood nor chose.

Women in the Shadows

Though men made up the majority of those conscripted, African women also played a critical role in the East African war — as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and sometimes even porters. They followed armies, tended to the sick, and cared for wounded soldiers under impossible conditions. Their contribution, however, was doubly invisible: erased both by colonial racism and gender bias. Almost no official records exist of their names or deeds.

Psychological Impact: A Generation Scarred

The war left psychological scars that outlasted the campaign itself. Men who returned to their homes did so with broken bodies, weakened spirits, and little to show for their suffering. Some villages lost every able-bodied man. Families were ruined. Children grew up fatherless. Veterans received no pensions, no recognition, and no support. The colonial governments that had dragged them into war turned their backs once the conflict ended.

And yet, the trauma gave rise to something else — awareness. For the first time, large numbers of Africans saw the frailty of European power up close. They saw European officers cry. They saw empire bleed. They saw that colonial rule, though brutal, was not unshakeable. The seeds of resistance — nationalism, identity, and rebellion — began to grow from the ashes of suffering.

Chapter 3: Betrayed by the Uniform

The Uniform Was a Lie

For African soldiers in World War I, the military uniform was supposed to represent honor, purpose, and valor. It was supposed to equalize. To fight under the same flag as the colonizer was, at least in theory, to be on the same side. But in practice, that uniform was a mask — a disguise that cloaked brutal inequality beneath the illusion of military brotherhood.

African men who wore the colors of European powers — whether France, Britain, Germany, or Belgium — were not treated as soldiers in the full sense of the word. They were treated as tools. Disposable, replaceable, and ultimately forgettable. Their sacrifice was demanded. Their loyalty was tested. But their humanity? That was negotiable.

They marched in line, saluted the flag, and died like every other soldier — yet they were never considered equals. They were betrayed not by enemy bullets, but by the very armies they served.

Separate and Unequal: A Two-Tiered Army

From the moment African soldiers were enlisted, the color line was drawn deep into the ranks. The military mirrored the racial caste systems of colonial society: white officers led, Black troops followed. White soldiers received better food, cleaner uniforms, superior weapons, and dignified housing. African troops slept in overcrowded tents, wore mismatched or second-hand uniforms, and often marched barefoot.

Discipline, too, was racially skewed. African soldiers were subjected to harsher punishments for lesser offenses. While a white soldier might be reprimanded for desertion or insubordination, an African soldier could be whipped, imprisoned, or even executed for the same offense. In French forces, the tirailleurs sénégalais were routinely court-martialed for trivial infractions. In British forces, African soldiers who showed signs of dissent were labeled as untrustworthy or “rebellious natives.”
There was no margin for error, no leniency, and no justice — only command and obedience.

The Pay Gap That Killed
Nothing made the betrayal more glaring than the disparities in pay. African soldiers were paid far less than their white counterparts — even when performing the same tasks under the same conditions. In many cases, porters and laborers received no pay at all, only food and promises.

French African soldiers received a small fraction of what white soldiers earned, despite fighting in the same trenches and facing the same bullets. British colonial troops often waited months or years to be paid, and even then, deductions were made for uniforms and equipment — items white soldiers received for free.

The economic consequences were devastating. Many families of African soldiers relied on the hope of money being sent home — money that either never came or arrived too late. Some returned from war injured, traumatized, and penniless. Others never returned at all, leaving their loved ones in poverty with no compensation.

A Human Shield for Empire

On the battlefield, African soldiers were often used as shock troops — deployed to absorb enemy fire, clear minefields, or storm dangerous positions first. This wasn't strategy. It was racism in military form.

The French, in particular, exploited the perceived "fierceness" of African soldiers, pushing them into the most suicidal assaults in the trenches of the Western Front. In the Battle of Verdun and the Somme, entire African regiments were wiped out while white soldiers were held in reserve. These troops were not considered part of a tactical equation — they were bodies to be spent.

In the British forces, African troops were frequently assigned to the harshest terrains and given the most backbreaking tasks. Porters in the East African Campaign, despite their critical role, were treated as non-combatants, making them even more invisible in military accounting. Their deaths were not counted as military losses. They simply vanished.

Post-War Silence and Indifference

When the guns finally fell silent in 1918, African veterans returned home — not to cheers, but to silence. There were no welcome parades. No public gratitude. No systemic reintegration plans. Many were dumped back into colonial life, their military service forgotten, their sacrifices unacknowledged.

Worse, many who returned injured or traumatized found themselves shunned or even feared. In the eyes of colonial authorities, a trained African soldier was now a potential revolutionary. Surveillance, restriction, and marginalization followed. Veterans were stripped of their uniforms — and with them, any perceived authority or pride.

Even pensions were weaponized. Some African soldiers received reduced or delayed payments.

Resistance, Memory, and the Fight to Be Seen

Despite this betrayal, African veterans began to organize. Across French West Africa, early movements were formed to demand better treatment and recognition. Some veterans — like those in Senegal, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast — wrote letters, filed petitions, and held quiet protests.

Their service had awakened something. They had seen white fear, white failure, and white dependency. They knew the myth of European invincibility was a lie. And though the empire tried to silence them, the memory of their sacrifice — and the injustice of their treatment — burned quietly into the soil of colonial consciousness.
Their struggle would help shape the post-war generation of anti-colonial leaders and activists. In time, the betrayal they endured would fuel the fires of independence.

The Uniform Never Fit

The story of African soldiers in World War I is not one of camaraderie — it is one of contradiction. They wore the uniform, swore allegiance, fought with courage, and died with honor. Yet, they were never treated as equals. They were symbols when useful, shadows when inconvenient.

They were betrayed — by empire, by history, by the very ideals their uniforms claimed to defend.
But the truth cannot remain buried forever. The uniform may have lied, but the blood they spilled was real.
And now, so is their story.

Chapter 4: Echoes After the Guns Fell Silent

A Silence Louder Than Gunfire

When the guns finally stopped roaring in November 1918, Europe erupted in relief. Cities rang with victory bells, flags waved triumphantly, and the dead were buried with honor. But in Africa, the silence that followed was not peace — it was erasure. No parades, no medals, no ceremonies. For hundreds of thousands of African soldiers, carriers, and laborers who had risked everything in World War I, the end of the war marked the beginning of an even more painful chapter: being forgotten.

African veterans returned not to freedom, but to the very chains they had left behind — chains of colonial rule, exploitation, and second-class status. The promises made to them on the battlefield vanished like smoke. The European powers had asked for their sacrifice, their courage, their blood — but never intended to share the spoils of victory.

The Return Home: Broken Bodies, Shattered Illusions

For many African soldiers, the journey back from war was not just physical but psychological. They came home with injuries, diseases, and memories of horrors they could not speak about. Some were blind, others limbless, many suffering from what we now understand as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But there was no therapy waiting for them. No reintegration programs. No gratitude.

What they found instead was indifference. Their colonial governments had little interest in supporting them. The military uniforms they had once worn with pride now made them suspect. Their experience as trained, armed men unnerved their colonial masters, who feared they might challenge the established racial order. In many cases, returning veterans were actively monitored, marginalized, and suppressed.

And yet, these men had changed. They had seen the world beyond their villages. They had marched through Europe’s devastated cities. They had seen white men terrified, weak, and dying — just like them. The illusion of white superiority had cracked.

Promises Betrayed: The Pensions That Never Came

Before and during the war, African soldiers were lured into service with promises of land, pensions, citizenship, and opportunity. Recruiters often told families that their sons would return as heroes, respected by the colonial state. But most of these promises were nothing more than manipulation.

Only a fraction of African veterans received the pensions or benefits they were entitled to. Many never even knew they were owed anything. Colonial bureaucracies made the process of claiming benefits deliberately complex, with forms in French or English, inaccessible offices, and shifting eligibility criteria.
Some veterans spent decades pursuing compensation that never came. Others died in poverty, having given their youth to an empire that had no further use for them.
The betrayal was profound — and it burned into the collective memory of those communities.

A Return to Servitude
What made the post-war betrayal even more cruel was the return to colonial subjugation. African veterans had fought and died for principles like “freedom,” “civilization,” and “democracy” — words repeated endlessly by European leaders during wartime propaganda. But those ideals stopped at the edge of empire.

After fighting for France or Britain, many African veterans returned to find their communities under the same colonial policies of forced labor, taxation, and racial segregation. White settlers had more land than ever. Colonial police remained brutal. Local chiefs were still puppets of foreign administrators.
It was as if the war had never happened.
Except for the men who had fought it — who now knew the truth.

New Eyes: A Changed Perspective on Empire
The war changed African soldiers in a way that colonial governments could not predict or control. In the trenches of France and Belgium, in the forests of East Africa, in the desert heat of North Africa — Africans saw white men at their most vulnerable. They saw cowardice and incompetence. They saw human weakness.
They also experienced solidarity — with fellow African soldiers, with Indian troops, and even with white soldiers who defied the racism of the system. In short, they began to see themselves differently — not as subjects, but as equals. Not as tribal men, but as global participants.
This transformation did not result in immediate revolution. But it planted a dangerous idea: that the colonizer was not invincible.

Seeds of Resistance

In French West Africa, many veterans began to organize politically, forming mutual aid societies and veterans' associations. These groups often started as social clubs or support networks but soon evolved into platforms for political expression.
In Senegal, Blaise Diagne, the first Black African elected to the French National Assembly, used his position to push for veteran rights and limited reforms. Elsewhere, former soldiers began to challenge colonial policies — refusing to pay unjust taxes, resisting forced labor, and demanding educational opportunities.

Even in the British colonies, where political expression was more heavily suppressed, a quiet resistance began to build. Veterans became teachers, union organizers, and political agitators. They spoke to younger generations about what they had seen — about the hypocrisy of empire and the possibility of change.
The trenches of Europe had become classrooms of revolution.

From War to Revolution: The Long Arc of Memory

While the world tried to forget Africa's role in the war, Africans remembered. Their memory wasn't always written — it lived in songs, stories, scars, and silence. Families passed down tales of fathers and grandfathers who had fought in faraway lands. Communities built informal shrines. Names were whispered at funerals.
And these memories matured into movements.
By the 1930s and 1940s, many African nations saw the rise of nationalist leaders — many of whom were influenced directly or indirectly by veterans. These leaders began demanding not reform, but independence.
The war had not delivered freedom. But it had created freedom fighters.

The Echoes Still Speak
The First World War was supposed to be "the war to end all wars." But for African soldiers, it ended nothing. It only revealed more clearly the nature of the colonial system — a system built on lies, betrayal, and exploitation.
And yet, the war left behind something more powerful than bullets: consciousness. The quiet revolution that began in the minds of African veterans would, over the coming decades, erupt into full-scale movements for liberation.

They had marched under foreign flags. They had been treated as expendable. They had returned with broken bodies and empty hands. But their minds — their eyes — had been opened. The guns fell silent, but the fight for freedom was only beginning.
And the echoes still speak.

PART II: WORLD WAR II – Blood in Every Theater

Chapter 5: Drafted Again – Africa in the Shadow of Hitler

A Familiar Drumbeat of War

In 1939, just two decades after the First World War had drenched Europe in blood, the world was once again plunged into chaos. This time, the storm clouds gathered over the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime in Germany. The rhetoric was louder, the weapons deadlier, and the stakes higher. But for the African colonies under European control, one thing remained unchanged — the war was not theirs, but they would be made to fight it.

As Europe called its sons to arms, it once again turned to Africa — not with gratitude or dignity, but with expectation and command. The second call-up had begun. A new generation of African men, many of whose fathers had marched through the mud of the Great War, now faced their own summons — to serve, to suffer, and to sacrifice in a war that once again did not concern their own sovereignty, but that of the empires who ruled them.

This time, the scale was even greater. The global nature of World War II meant African troops would see combat in Europe, Asia, and Africa itself. From the deserts of North Africa to the jungles of Burma, Africa's blood would be spilled in every theater of war.

Mobilizing the Colonies: A Continental Roll Call

When war broke out, European colonial powers — Britain, France, Belgium, and Italy — wasted no time drafting plans to mobilize their African colonies. The continent was divided and ruled by different imperial powers, but the strategy was the same: raise African armies to defend the empire.

Britain

The British Empire drew heavily from its colonies in West, East, and Southern Africa. The King's African Rifles (KAR), West African Frontier Force (WAFF), and Rhodesian African Rifles were expanded and deployed far beyond the continent. African troops from Nigeria, Ghana (then the Gold Coast), Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi were sent to fight in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

France
France once again leaned on its tirailleurs sénégalais from French West Africa and recruited more from Equatorial Africa. Following France's defeat in 1940 and the rise of the Vichy regime, many colonies initially remained loyal to Vichy until they were gradually won over by Free French forces under Charles de Gaulle. African soldiers became vital in the campaigns in North Africa, Italy, and southern France.

Belgium
Though tiny, Belgium had an enormous colonial presence in the Belgian Congo, and it mobilized thousands of Congolese troops. The Force Publique, initially used for internal control, became an expeditionary force, playing a key role in the Allied campaigns in East Africa and even in Asia.

Italy
Italy, under Mussolini's fascist regime, ruled over Libya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (occupied in 1936). Italian colonial forces included askaris from East Africa, though many were coerced and fought under duress. When Allied forces began liberating these territories, many of these African soldiers switched sides or deserted.
The result was a continental draft, where over 2 million Africans were involved in World War II — either as soldiers, carriers, porters, or support workers.

Who Chose to Fight – And Who Had No Choice
The story of African participation in WWII is often simplified as voluntary. In reality, the line between volunteering and coercion was thin, blurry, and often nonexistent.

Volunteers
Yes, some Africans did volunteer. For a variety of reasons:

- Adventure and travel – many young men from rural areas were excited by the idea of leaving their villages and seeing the world.
- Economic incentive – in a time of extreme poverty, the army offered steady rations, some pay, and new clothes.
- Prestige – donning a uniform meant authority and respect back home.
- Family tradition – sons of veterans from WWI sometimes saw it as an inherited duty.
- Loyalty to specific local leaders – some joined out of allegiance to chiefs or tribal leaders who encouraged recruitment.

However, even among volunteers, the decision was rarely free from manipulation. Colonial officers used propaganda, exaggerated promises, and emotional pressure. "Serve the Empire and earn your rights" was a common refrain.

The Forced
The majority, however, were conscripted — forcibly. Quotas were handed down from colonial offices to local chiefs, who were then expected to deliver a set number of recruits. If villages refused, they were punished. Men were rounded up in marketplaces, taken from their homes, or ambushed in the bush and pressed into service. Those who resisted faced imprisonment, beatings, or worse.

In places like Madagascar, Nigeria, and Senegal, protests and riots erupted against conscription. Many Africans viewed the second call-up as a betrayal — a reopening of wounds from the first war. And this time, they would not go quietly.

The War Comes to Africa
Unlike World War I, where most fighting was far from the continent, World War II brought battles to African soil.

- In North Africa, massive battles raged between Axis and Allied powers — including El Alamein, Tobruk, and Kasserine Pass. African soldiers from all parts of the continent fought there.
- In East Africa, Allied African troops fought to liberate Ethiopia from Italian occupation.
- In West Africa, strategic bases and training camps were established, making cities like Accra and Lagos key nodes in the Allied supply chain.
- The Atlantic coast became vital for shipping, and the British garrisoned thousands of troops in Sierra Leone and Ghana.

Africa was no longer just a recruiting ground — it had become a theater of war.

The Cost of Déjà Vu

For African soldiers, World War II was not a new war — it was a continuation of betrayal. Another generation answered the call. Another generation fought for flags not their own. And another generation returned to find the doors of freedom still shut tight.

But this time, something had changed. The participation was larger, the exposure greater, and the cost higher. The African soldier had marched through Cairo, Casablanca, Rangoon, and Rome. He had seen the fragility of empire and the hypocrisy of power. And this time, he would not forget.

The second call-up awakened a deeper awareness. That the blood of Africa had been poured onto every battlefield — and still, it bought nothing but chains.
But consciousness had been sparked.
And fire was coming.

Chapter 6: Global War, African Boots

From Village Trails to Global Frontlines

World War II was not a regional war. It was a world war in every sense — a conflict that stretched across six continents, scorched the skies, split oceans, and demanded human sacrifice from every corner of the globe. And at its very heart — though history has tried to forget — stood Africa's soldiers.

From the desert sands of North Africa to the muddy hills of Italy, from the tangled jungles of Burma to the far reaches of the Pacific, African men in European uniforms were sent to fight battles in lands they had never heard of, against enemies they had never met, for empires that still considered them inferior.

They wore khaki in Cairo, steel helmets in Sicily, and rags in Rangoon. They dug trenches in Libya, hauled guns in Ceylon, and died nameless in Normandy. These were not isolated cases. This was Africa's global deployment. An empire's reach was only as long as the legs of the men who carried its guns — and Africa's legs marched everywhere.

North Africa: Baptism by Desert Fire

The North African Campaign became one of the earliest and most strategically significant theaters of WWII. Between 1940 and 1943, Allied forces clashed with German and Italian armies in a brutal tug-of-war across Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria.
In this vast desert war, African troops were everywhere.

The King's African Rifles, composed of soldiers from Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, and Tanganyika (Tanzania), fought alongside Indian and British units under the blinding sun. French colonial forces, especially the tirailleurs sénégalais, were key players in battles like Bir Hakeim and Gabès. Even the Force Publique from the Belgian Congo played a vital role in the Allied push against Italy's East African territories.

But perhaps the most pivotal moment came in 1942 at El Alamein, Egypt — a battle that turned the tide against Germany's famed General Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox." Here, African soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder with Commonwealth and Allied forces. They faced minefields, air raids, and tank charges. Many never returned. Their sacrifice helped break the Axis grip on Africa.
Yet few know their names.

Europe: Winter in a Foreign Hell

After North Africa, the war moved to Europe, and African troops moved with it. In 1943, Allied forces invaded Italy, opening a new front in the West. Thousands of African soldiers — most notably from French colonies — landed on European soil for the first time.
The most brutal of these battles was Monte Cassino — a monastery-topped mountain that became a fortress of Nazi resistance. The French army deployed the 1st Free French Division, which included thousands of African soldiers, especially from Morocco, Algeria, and West Africa.

They climbed frozen hills, braved German machine guns, and fought hand-to-hand in stone ruins. Their courage helped pave the road to Rome. But in many cases, when victory was at hand and photos were taken, African troops were pulled out of sight — replaced by white units for the sake of propaganda.

Still, their boots had conquered ground no one thought they could.
And many wrote home about the surreal experience of seeing Europe's ruins — the shattered homes, the starving children, the fleeing civilians — and realizing that the supposed "civilized world" could be just as broken as their own.

Burma and the Pacific: The Forgotten Jungle War

Far from Africa, in the wet, green hell of Burma (modern-day Myanmar), African troops were once again deployed — this time to fight the Japanese Empire alongside British and Indian forces.

These troops, especially from West Africa, were organized into the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions — soldiers from Nigeria, Ghana (Gold Coast), Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. Their mission: to move through some of the world's most inhospitable terrain — thick jungle, leech-infested rivers, and disease-ridden camps — to fight a well-entrenched and brutal enemy.

The soldiers faced not only Japanese bullets but malaria, dysentery, typhoid, and trench foot. Food spoiled in the heat. Ammunition was limited. Air support was erratic. But the African divisions pushed on, building their own bridges, hauling their own supplies, and proving to be among the most resilient troops on the front.
The jungle swallowed many of them whole — and the history books swallowed their stories.

Real Stories, Real Men

History, when told properly, isn't about numbers. It's about names, faces, and souls. The African war experience isn't just military — it's human. Here are just a few stories that slipped through history's cracks:

Lance Corporal Elisha Nana Asare – Ghana (Gold Coast)
Deployed to Burma in 1944, Elisha remembered fighting "not just the Japanese, but the jungle itself." He described carrying a 40kg pack for days through rain-soaked forests, watching friends drown in rivers, and seeing bodies rot in the humidity. "We slept on mud. We fought fever more than the enemy. But still we marched," he later said in an interview.

Private Ibrahim Diouf – Senegal
A member of the tirailleurs sénégalais, Ibrahim was sent to fight in France during the liberation. He recounted being celebrated by civilians when they freed villages, only to be later segregated from white troops at base camps. "They cheered me in the streets and insulted me in the tents," he wrote in a letter to his brother.

Sergeant Peter Wamalwa – Kenya
Serving in the King's African Rifles, Wamalwa fought in Ethiopia and later guarded German prisoners in North Africa. He recalled the shock of being better treated by captured Axis soldiers than by his own officers. "The Germans looked me in the eye. The British barked at me like a dog."

These are just a few voices — a handful among millions — each one a world of pain, pride, confusion, and resilience.

Victory Without Visibility
When the war finally ended in 1945, the world celebrated. Flags were raised. Parades marched. Victory medals were minted.
But once again, African soldiers were pushed out of the frame.

- In France, African troops were deliberately withdrawn from public celebrations to preserve the illusion of a white victory.
- In Britain, they were sent home quietly. No press. No speeches.
- In the Belgian Congo, they returned to forced labor and repression.

Some soldiers were even denied their pay or medals. Others, upon requesting better treatment, were met with violence — as in the Thiaroye Massacre of 1944, where French forces killed dozens of demobilized African soldiers demanding their overdue wages.
It was a bitter ending to a global journey.

Chapter 7: The Black Skin in a White Man's War

Fighting Beside, Yet Never Equal

World War II was a moment in history when the world seemed on the brink of collapse — when nations called on every able body, every ounce of courage, and every corner of their empires to defend against a rising tide of tyranny. But even in the trenches, foxholes, and death marches where soldiers bled side by side, one truth remained solid and unshaken: Black skin did not buy equality.

African soldiers may have fought under the same flags, eaten the same rations, and endured the same explosions as their white counterparts, but the line between them was never erased — it was often deepened. Racism persisted not despite the war, but because the very system that created the war — empire, power, supremacy — was built on it. Even in the face of shared danger, the color of a man's skin determined his worth in the eyes of the army he fought for.

Uniforms Couldn't Hide the Color Line

A uniform was meant to symbolize unity. It was the thread that bound soldier to soldier, a visual cue that they were part of the same cause. But for African troops, their uniforms could not hide what colonialism had already defined — their perceived inferiority

In the British, French, Belgian, and Italian armies, racial hierarchies were built directly into the military structure. White officers commanded; Black troops obeyed. African soldiers were rarely, if ever, promoted beyond non-commissioned ranks. In many units, a Black man could be a veteran of multiple campaigns and still be outranked by a white teenager with no combat experience.

Separate latrines, mess halls, sleeping quarters, and hospitals were not just common — they were enforced. In many bases, African soldiers were served inferior food, worn uniforms, and second-hand weapons. Orders were shouted louder. Punishments were harsher. Respect was optional.
Even in the face of bullets, equality was denied.

The Mental War Within the War

To be a soldier is to face fear. To be a Black soldier in a white man's war is to face fear and invisibility at the same time. African troops not only battled the enemy; they also battled the psychological toll of being treated as expendable — brave enough to die, but never enough to be honored.

Letters and oral histories from African veterans reveal an emotional wound that ran deeper than bullet scars. Many spoke of being referred to as “boys,” even when in their 30s or 40s. Others recalled watching white comrades get medical attention while they were left to wait or suffer. Some remembered marching for hours on broken feet, carrying the same burdens, but never hearing a word of gratitude.

They lived with the knowledge that their deaths would not make headlines. Their graves, if they had any, would be unmarked. Their families, waiting back home, would receive no medals — only silence.
This knowledge was a weight on the soul. It dehumanized the very act of service and left lasting damage that no pension or policy could heal.

When the Enemy Looked Friendlier Than the Ally

Ironically, some African soldiers found more humane treatment from the so-called "enemy" than from their own colonial officers. In North Africa and parts of Europe, African prisoners captured by the Germans reported being treated more fairly than in their own camps. While the Nazis were undeniably racist — especially towards Jews and Slavic peoples — some African POWs recalled that they were spoken to, not barked at, and occasionally allowed basic dignity.

In contrast, white Allied soldiers often refused to share tents, meals, or even photos with African troops. In one disturbing instance, African soldiers who helped liberate a French town were barred from entering cafés or homes that had opened their doors to white troops just days earlier.
They were allies on paper, but servants in practice.

Encounters with White Civilians: A Mirror of Empire

For many African soldiers deployed outside the continent — especially to France, Italy, and the UK — encounters with white civilians revealed another layer of complexity. Some were met with kindness and curiosity. In villages across Europe, African soldiers were embraced, fed, and welcomed as liberators. Children ran to them. Women offered thanks. These moments, though rare, were profound — not just because they broke racial barriers, but because they suggested the empire's propaganda wasn't absolute.
In contrast, many white civilians in colonial towns and British outposts treated African soldiers as an inconvenience. In India and Burma, African troops were sometimes harassed by European settlers and administrators for "not knowing their place." In the UK, African soldiers on shore leave were often followed by police, denied service in shops, or warned not to speak to white women.
In one noted case, a Nigerian soldier visiting a British pub was beaten by locals for sitting at the bar.
The war may have shaken the world, but the rules of race were still in place.

Racism in the Ranks: A Quiet Weapon
Racism during the war was not always loud. It didn't always come with slurs or whips. Sometimes, it whispered through missed promotions, overlooked injuries, and forgotten names on rosters.
When medals were awarded after major victories, African soldiers were often excluded. When memorials were built, their names were either left off or grouped anonymously under categories like "native battalion." In many cases, their contributions were rewritten as minor support roles — even when they had led the charge, carried the wounded, or captured enemy positions.
One Ghanaian veteran said it best in an interview:
"We were not fighting for Britain. We were fighting to prove that we were men."

The Strength to Endure
And yet — despite all this — African soldiers endured. They did not run. They did not break. In fact, many performed with a courage and stamina that stunned their European commanders.
In Burma, West African troops marched hundreds of kilometers through swamps and jungles, building their own bridges, carrying their own wounded, and fighting with distinction. In Italy, Moroccan and Algerian troops braved the snow-covered hills of Monte Cassino with nothing but thin uniforms and unshakable grit. In North Africa, Ethiopian and Somali fighters helped push back fascist invaders with fierce determination and ancestral pride.
They did not need medals to prove their worth. Their deeds spoke loud enough — even if the world refused to listen.

Chapter 8: Women in the Shadows

They Weren't on the Frontlines, But They Were Everywhere

History, as it is often told, places the soldier at the center of the war story. He marches, he shoots, he dies. Around him, the world seems to pause. Yet in truth, wars are never fought by soldiers alone — and never survived by them alone either. Behind every uniformed man is a web of labor, support, and sacrifice that holds the battlefield together.

And in that web — often unseen and unthanked — stood African women.
They didn't always carry rifles. They carried water, medicine, food, letters, secrets, and grief. They were nurses without training, cooks without rest, couriers without protection. They followed armies, served in camps, supported resistance movements, and rebuilt broken villages. Some were pressed into service, others volunteered. Many had no choice.
They were not soldiers by the empire's definition. But they, too, fought.

Mothers of the March: Labor in the Rear Lines

Throughout both World Wars, African women played an indispensable role in maintaining the machinery of war. When men were conscripted in massive numbers, women stepped in to support both the troops and the home front.
In British and French colonies, women were recruited as cooks, cleaners, launderers, and medical aides. They worked in military camps, tending to the daily needs of thousands of soldiers. Their hands fed the frontlines. Their cloth scrubbed the blood from bandages. Their feet walked miles to fetch water.

Many served in military hospitals as nurses and caregivers — though few were formally trained or officially recognized. In makeshift wards, they treated wounds with whatever supplies were available, comforted the dying, and buried the dead when no one else would.
In rural villages, women maintained farms, raised children alone, and endured the absence of husbands, sons, and brothers who had been conscripted. Some women were forced to give up their livestock and food to support the war effort. Others became temporary heads of households, managing entire families while the war stripped their communities of men.

The Silent Runners: Women as Couriers and Messengers

In several regions — especially those touched by resistance movements or local rebellions against colonial conscription — African women played a dangerous role as couriers and informants. In Ethiopia, during the Italian occupation, and in parts of North and West Africa where Vichy forces clashed with Free French loyalists, women acted as underground messengers, delivering news, weapons, and even medicine through enemy lines.
They moved unnoticed — often with children on their backs or baskets on their heads. They hid coded letters in headwraps, carried messages stitched into garments, and passed secret information using songs, riddles, or proverbs. Their anonymity became their armor.
Some paid the price with their lives. Others disappeared into history, unnamed and unrecorded.

The Comfort, The Care, The Cost

African women also bore the weight of emotional labor — holding together the fabric of families and communities torn apart by war. They waited, sometimes for years, for news that never came. They grieved, often without bodies to bury. And they endured, sometimes in silence, sometimes in song.
War turned women into widows, nurses, undertakers, and providers — all at once. Many were forced to watch as their sons were taken, their crops seized, their homes destroyed. Some were subjected to violence by soldiers — both enemy and ally. Sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse occurred in military camps, villages, and refugee settlements. But these stories were not documented. They were whispered, if spoken at all — and even then, rarely believed.
War did not spare them. It simply refused to acknowledge them.

The Unseen, the Unnamed
One of the greatest injustices of historical memory is how thoroughly African women's contributions have been erased. Military records list men. Monuments celebrate generals. Medals are pinned on uniforms that women never got to wear.
Even oral histories often focus on male bravery. The woman who cooked for 200 men each night, or the grandmother who hid resistance fighters in her hut, or the girl who delivered a message that saved a platoon — these stories were passed down in fragments, if at all.
Why were they forgotten? Because patriarchy writes history with a blind eye. Because empires never saw African women as active agents — only as bodies to be used, mouths to be fed, or burdens to be managed. And because war has always been masculinized, even when the weight of it fell squarely on women's backs.

Real Women, Real War

Though their names are few in textbooks, some stories survive:

Nana Yaa Asantewaa – Ghana (Ashanti Region)
Though she lived before the World Wars, Yaa Asantewaa's legacy as a female leader who took up arms against British colonialism inspired generations of women during the wars. Many women who supported the British and later resisted them invoked her memory. Her story became a quiet fire in the minds of those who cooked for soldiers but dreamed of freedom.

Mariam Zubair – Nigeria
In World War II, Mariam worked in a British army hospital in Lagos, where she treated wounded soldiers returned from Burma. Though not formally trained, she was known for "healing hands and iron will." She wrote letters for injured soldiers and was known to say, "Even if they forget you, I'll remember your face."

Desta Teklu – Ethiopia
During the Italian occupation, Desta served as a messenger for resistance fighters in the highlands. She smuggled ammunition hidden beneath her child's blankets. Arrested twice and beaten, she refused to speak. Her story was preserved through generations of women in her family — but never recorded officially.
These were not warriors with guns — they were warriors of survival, of dignity, of defiance in small, steady acts.

Legacy in the Margins
African women helped win two global wars. They cooked, carried, healed, cleaned, resisted, grieved, and endured. Yet their stories remain marginalized, often appearing only as footnotes — if at all.
But their impact lingers.

Many women who supported the war effort became leaders in post-war communities. Some founded clinics, became midwives, or led women's cooperatives. Others joined early nationalist movements, demanding better schools, fairer wages, and an end to colonial rule. Their war-time strength became a foundation for resistance.
And for those who were never recognized — their names lost, their stories untold — we write this chapter.

Chapter 9: Final Words: A Legacy Carved in Bone

They called them to fight.
To march.
To carry.
To bleed.
To die.
And Africa answered.

From the Sahel to the Serengeti, from the Congo to the Cape, Black men and women stood when empire beckoned. They crossed oceans and deserts, jungles and cities, fighting wars they did not start, for kings and republics that did not see them as equals. They followed orders shouted in foreign tongues. They wore uniforms stitched with symbols of power that was never meant for them. And they did it not because they were weak — but because they were strong.

Stronger than the silence that followed.

The Guns Are Silent, But the Memory Still Bleeds
World War I ended in 1918. World War II in 1945. But for many African families, the war never truly ended.
The wounds were not stitched shut, only buried.
The soldiers returned, but they didn't come back whole.
Their names weren't written in stone.
Their stories weren't carved in marble.
Their sacrifices were repaid with silence, poverty, and humiliation.

Many never got their pensions. Many never got their recognition. And far too many were never even acknowledged as soldiers — just "natives," "porters," or "laborers." History folded their pages before reading them aloud.
The wars are over, but the wounds remain — not just on bodies, but on memory.

History as a Weapon — and a Remedy

For over a century, the mainstream telling of both world wars has centered Europe. The trenches of France. The beaches of Normandy. The speeches of Churchill. The fall of Berlin. But Africa's war was just as real. Its blood just as red. Its pain just as deep. Its bravery just as fierce.

The problem was never that Africans didn't fight. It was that the world didn't care to remember.
And so, African memory was confined to footnotes, if mentioned at all.

- The carriers who died in East African forests? Forgotten.
- The soldiers who froze in Monte Cassino? Ignored.
- The nurses who held dying men in dim hospital tents? Unnamed.
- The women who smuggled messages beneath their headwraps? Erased.

But now, we choose to remember. Not just as an act of justice — but as an act of truth. Because no global history is complete without African blood in the ink.

The Final March

As the pages of this book close, the march continues — not on dusty roads with rifles and boots, but in our minds, our memory, and our collective conscience.
The Black soldiers of white wars were not side characters in someone else's story. They were protagonists in their own — and they still are. Their bones may lie in foreign lands. Their graves may be unknown. But their legacy is carved in the continent they left behind. A legacy of dignity, courage, and quiet defiance.
Let us never again allow history to forget them.
Let this be their memorial.
Let this be their monument.
Let this be the sound of silence, finally breaking.
This time, the world will remember.

Appendix

1. Timeline of African Involvement in World War I & World ar II

World War I (1914–1918)

1914
– Outbreak of WWI in Europe
– Britain mobilizes the King's African Rifles (KAR) in East Africa
– France begins large-scale recruitment of Tirailleurs Sénégalais

1915
– African troops fight in the Cameroon Campaign
– British and Belgian colonial troops enter German East Africa

1916
– East African Campaign intensifies; massive deployment of African carriers
– Battles in Lake Tanganyika region and Kilimanjaro foothills

1917
– High mortality rates among African porters due to exhaustion and disease
– Continued operations against German commander Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck

1918
– Armistice signed in Europe, but fighting in East Africa continues into November
– No formal recognition for most African troops post-war

World War II (1939–1945)

1939
– Outbreak of WWII; colonies across Africa begin mobilization
– British and French colonies initiate recruitment of African troops

1940
– Italy declares war; East African Campaign begins
– France falls; many African colonies initially side with Vichy France

1941
– Allied African forces retake Ethiopia from Italian occupation
– African soldiers participate in North African Campaign

1942
– Battle of El Alamein: major Allied victory with significant African troop presence
– African troops begin deployment to Burma and Southeast Asia

1943
– African troops fight in the Italian Campaign (e.g., Monte Cassino)
– West African divisions trained for jungle warfare

1944
– Tirailleurs Sénégalais liberate parts of Southern France
– Thiaroye Massacre: French West African veterans shot for demanding fair pay

1945
– WWII ends; African troops are demobilized
– Many return home to broken promises and colonial rule
2. Major African Regiments by Colonial Power
British Empire
- King's African Rifles (KAR) – East and Central Africa
- West African Frontier Force (WAFF) – Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia
- Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) – Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)
- Gold Coast Regiment – Ghana
- Nigerian Regiment – Nigeria

French Empire
- Tirailleurs Sénégalais – West Africa (Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, etc.)
- Tirailleurs Marocains / Algériens / Tunisiens – North African units
- Forces Coloniales Françaises Libres (Free French Colonial Forces) – across French Africa

Belgian Empire
- Force Publique – Belgian Congo (modern-day DRC)

Italian Empire
- Eritrean Askari Regiments – Eritrea
- Somali Colonial Troops – Somalia
- Libyan Infantry Units – Libya
- Dubat and Banda Fighters – irregular troops used in East African campaigns

3. Further Reading & Archival Resources

Books & Scholarly Works
- "The Great War in Africa, 1914–1918" by Byron Farwell
- "France's Colonial Legions: Military Recruitment in the French Empire" by Ruth Ginio
- "African Voices of the Global Past" by Trevor Getz
- "Soldiers of Empire" by Tarak Barkawi
- "Imperial Intimacies" by Hazel V. Carby
- "Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War" by David Killingray and Martin Plaut

Archives & Institutions
- The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)
- National Archives (UK) – Colonial and military records
- Service Historique de la Défense (France) – Archives on tirailleurs and colonial units
- National Archives of Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana
- African Studies Centre, University of Oxford
- Musée des Forces Armées Sénégalaises – Dakar, Senegal
- The Imperial War Museum (UK) – Oral histories of African soldiers
- UNESCO's General History of Africa Project

4. Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the millions of unnamed African men and women whose service, suffering, and sacrifice were erased from the margins of official history.
To the veterans whose voices were never recorded,
To the mothers and wives who waited without word,
To the daughters who carried stories in silence,
To the communities who remember in song what textbooks forgot —
This is for you.

Special thanks to:

- The elders and oral historians who preserved these truths across generations
- Scholars, archivists, and independent researchers who refuse to let memory die
- African veterans' families who continue to fight for recognition
- Everyone committed to decolonizing historical narratives

May this work not be the end, but the beginning of remembering them — properly, publicly, and permanently.