AFRO war correspondents spanned globe in World War II

News of black fighting men on the front lines was reported by a few brave writers.

Selected stories by AFRO correspondents sent overseas from 1941 - 1945

Liberation of Paris

By Ollie Stewart

The first time I saw Paris her heart was old, and she was not very well fed, but oh, how gay! The heart of France, in fact was mad with joy because Americans had arrived.

I entered along Avenue de Fontainebleau in Sept. 1944 at eleven with Cecil Carnes of the Saturday Evening Post, Tom Henry of the Washington Star, and Dave Baylor of Radio Station WGAR, Cleveland, Ohio. Our jeep was driven by Pvt. Arthur Holton of Lee, MA.

Our arrival concluded three days and nights of camping on the outskirts of the city waiting the mopping up of the last pockets of German resistance.

Along the broad boulevards, we saw many vehicles overturned and sandbagged which the enemy had used as barricades in their last stand, but in a few places where road blocks had been, we saw workmen already making repairs.

Dummy Germans were hanged in effigy in two places, but all signs of organized resistance had disappeared. Americans in armored vehicles were in control of certain areas, in others FFI (Fighting French of the Interior) were in charge.

Beautiful women dashed into the streets to kiss dusty GI lads, to throw flowers and to offer wine and fruit.

I, Ollie Stewart, of sound mind and fairly sober character, do solemnly give my word that I have never been kissed so much in all my life. Almost every woman I meet on the street stops and kisses me on both cheeks. It is a beautiful custom.

The streets, houses and rooftops were line for miles along the route with happy people. General LeClerec also rode in triumph, but de Gaulle was the center of attraction. Returning to the hotel, we were waving, bowing and shaking hands as the throng surged into the street literally crazy with excitement.

As our jeep stopped, a stuttering machine gun on the roof sprayed the street, and on the opposite corner another opened up. We were caught in the middle of the intersection in a traffic jam as the bullets began screaming back and forth.

Pinned under a jeep for three minutes by machine gun fire, I crossed several open corners that were being criss-crossed by fire coming from the rooftops and windows.

I finally crawled under a tank at an intersection where a girl was bleeding and a baby crying as rifles, pistols and grenades took up the refrain that echoed through the city.

To contrast this with the scene an hour before was almost unbelievable. We scampered out and under and later saw a crowd with a German prisoner captured on the roof.

I met the first four black American soldiers to enter the city of Paris. They were members of a company of drivers who had been especially chosen on this occasion to drive General de Gaulle's party into the liberated French capital.

They are Cpl. Arthur Russell, NYC; Cpl. Lawrence Dixon, Detroit; Cpl. Leonard DeMary, Chicago, and 1-5 Freddie Brown, New Orleans.

Stories of heroic deeds by black troops have come to me from every angle since my arrival on a Normandy beachead exactly one month after departure from the U.S.A.

Leaving from England, black soldiers loaded us on a boat, others accompanied us over, and still others unloaded us and much equipment on the beach they helped win from the enemy during the first few days of the invasion.

I am writing this beneath an apple tree by the roadside, with fat cattle grazing nearby, unmindful of the trucks rushing to the front with men and supplies, of the incessant pounding of artillery not far up the road.

All last night, guns shook the ground on which I slept. Our Long Toms slugged it out with German 88's in a duel that has no end.

I am staying with a quartermaster outfit whose medical officer is Capt. Charles I. West of Washington, brother of Maj. John B. West. In the next tent is Warrant Officer Vincent Piedra of New York.

The outfit already has five purple hearts for wounds resulting from enemy action awarded to Staff Sergeant Leo Chenault, Indianapolis; Pfc. Clordie Caldwell, Kings Creek, NC; Pfc. Wilfert Fox, Jonesboro, NC; Pfc. Arlander Barker, Chicago, and Pfc. Austin Anderson, Wilmington, DE.

Another unit has among its personnel Cpl. John Hawkins of Pine Bluff, AR, who shot down a German plane on D-Day while landing under fire with a trucking company. Hawkins used a 50 calibre machine gun mounted on the truck to down the radier, which was attempting to strafe a troop concentration.

The Nazi pilot bailed out and was later captured.

Pvt. George McClain, 2263 E. 95th Street, Cleveland, Ohio helped capture a German on D-Day soon after landing. The same day he went to the front before he knew it driving a load of infantrymen up the road into a town still held by the Germans, but he made a quick turn and fled under fire by both sides.

Everywhere I go are ales of our lads who waded ashore in water up to their necks, with their trucks waterproofed, to take part in the assault that forced Jerry from his strong points.

Many are still saying, "I don't know how we did it, after seeing how Jerry was dug in." All along the beach were concrete pillboxes, barbed wire and gun emplacements.

We were about three miles from the German lines. Heavy gunfire was continuous and German eck-ack was spattering mushroom bursts of flak as our planes dived over their lines and our observation grasshopper planes sailed placidly along, spotting the German guns and radioing back their positions.

When a white colonel saw black troops in the midst of all this, he said: "This is the first time that I have ever seen quartermasters up so close to the front line."

S-Sgt. Eugene W. Jones, of 1611 W. Butler Street, Philadelphia, replied: "Sir, we are not quartermasters, we are field artillery and we have just been given a firing mission. Want to watch us lay one on the target?"

That was my introduction to the first colored 155 mm howitzer outfit in France, one of the best groups of artillerymen in the army, white or colored. Two battalions have been in action for weeks and had a big part in the taking of La Saye du Puits. Another unit operating 155 mm. Long Toms has just arrived.

These hard-working gunners will tell you frankly that they know they are good. Their officers told me that they are good. White infantrymen who won't budge unless these guys are laying down a barrage say that they are good and German prisoners ask to see our automatic artillery that comes so fast and so accurate.

Late in the afternoon, I was conducted to a cleverly concealed gun of one battery engaged in shelling a target miles away by First Sgt. John Clay, of Louise, MS.

As we arrived, S-Sgt. W. G. Gaiter, of Seaside Heights, N. J., had a field phone in his hand and said quietly "fire mission," and all 12 men jumped to alert. "Base deflection so and so," said Gaiter, and the men automatically twisted dials causing the big gun to swerve to the described position. "Load with charge so and so and fire," Gaiter snapped.

It happened so quickly that I had no time to put my fingers to my ears. Boom, went the gun, and you could hear the heavy projectile whispering on its way. "Cease firing, end of mission," said Gaiter, and the men had the gun open and clean even as he spoke. End of mission means that the target has been demolished, which usually comes after one shot from these boys.

Gunner at this post was baby-faced Donald Moore, 21, of New Brunswick, NJ. He was at Rutgers when drafted. The kid is known as one of the best gunners in the army. The boys tell a story of another outfit firing at a German observation post in the church steeple during the fight for LaSaye du Puits. They missed several rounds, but Moore and his gang blasted the steeple at first shot. I saw what was left of the church.

INTRODUCTION

The classic AFRO book on black fighters in World War II

"This Is Our War" is a compilation of news articles from the various war theaters by AFRO correspondents.

As such, it is priceless black history.

Ollie Stewart, who represented the AFRO-AMERICAN, was the first correspondent of any of our weeklies to reach the North African fighting front, August, 1942. He covered the campaign in which Rommelwas chased out of North Africa, also the invasion of Sicily, and followed our troops to Rome.

Art Carter relieved him in Italy in December, 1943. Subsequently, Max Johnson, who went over with the 366th Infantry in March, 1944, also was in Italy for a while before being assigned to enter Southern France with the American Invasion Forces.

Vincent Tubbs was assigned, April, 1943, to the staff of Gen. MacArthur in the Southwest Pacific, returning the following September. Francis Yancey succeeded him in December, 1944.

Returning to London from several months' leave, Ollie Stewart was in time, May, 1944, to cover the landing in Normandy, the breakthrough at San Lo, and to enter Paris with the first Americans.

Herbert M. Frisby made two excursions into the Far North, in the summers of 1943 and 1944. One carried him to Hudson Bay and the other to the Aleutians, within sight of the Russian frontier, and beyond the Arctic Circle to Kotzebue, Alaska.

Elizabeth Phillips Moss flew to London en route to Paris, November, 1944, but never arrived. She was taken ill and hospitalized in England and later brought home. She is the first black woman overseas war correspondent in the war, and the first, she says, to travel 3,000 miles to enter a hospital.

As part of the AFRO's black history month observance we are reprinting excerpts from a book, "This Is Our War", a paperback published by this newspaper just after the end of the second World War.

THIS IS OUR WAR IS STILL AVAILAB .E. READERS WHO WANT THIS COLLECTOR'S ITEM FOR THEIR BLACK HISTORY LIBRARY CAN ORDER THE BOOK.

Send two dollars ($2) check or money order to AFRO BOOKS: Post Office Box 1857, Baltimore, Md., 21203. Include your name, address and zip code.

Black History Month at the Cultural Arts Program

The Cultural Arts Program of the neighborhood Parents Club has a series of events scheduled for Afro-American History Month. The group is located at 1400 Orleans Street here in Baltimore.

On Feb. 14 at 5 p.m. the Urban Philharmonic of Washington, D.C. will perform music for jazz trio, string quartet and gospel quartet in a tribute to Afro-American Music from Africa to the Present Day.

A composite history of black music through lecture and performance is planned. Darrold Hunt, formerly Assistant Conductor of the Baltimore Symphony, will lecture.

A film series is scheduled for Feb. 15, 17 and 19 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. The African American Studies Department is sponsoring films and panel discussions on black labor.

The films "Union Maids," "Rosie, the Riveter," and "Jobs at Any Price" will be shown. Panelists involved in community affairs and union activities will speak.

The 19th Century Black Capital is the topic on Feb. 21 at 3 p.m. Leroy Graham, a researcher on Afro-American history in Maryland will present the topic, sponsored by the Maryland Commission on Afro-American History and Culture.

In Washington, D.C., the Corcoran Gallery of Art is featuring the exhibit "Black Folk Art in America."

The Cultural Arts Program has a tour scheduled Feb. 27 from 8:30 am until 4 pm providing transportation. Call to reserve a place for 5.

Music of the Harlem Renaissance will be performed Feb. 28th at 5 p.m.

Tenor Alburtt Rhodes will perform works of J. Rosamond Johnson, Margaret Bonds and others.

Dr. Dominique de Lerma of Morgan State University will present a brief talk on the life and times of the featured composers before the performance.

For more information call: 276-4646.

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More excerpts from 'This Is Our War'

Selected stories by AFRO correspondents sent overseas from 1941 - 1945

Jungle patrol clash

By Vincent Tubbs

More than 20 Japanese died in an attempt to annihilate a patrol of 93rd Division troops in three ambushes, Tuesday and Wednesday, but our men shot their way out, losing only three men.

The tactical advantages held by the enemy made the encounter one of the worst since the division's arrival on Bougainville. Superior machine gun and mortar fire-power against our two Browning automatic and Thompson sub machine guns, plus cunning and secure camouflage, gave the Nips the upper hand.

Our known dead are three non-coms. Missing are another non-com and an officer.

The patrol was assignmed to reconnoiter several thousand yards beyond the farthest perimeter outpost near the Saua River and on to the Reini River. On Monday night the men camped beyond the Saua and moved out Tuesday to complete their mission.

When the patrol hit a Japanese outpost guard of six men preparing breakfast, five escaped, but Sgt. Nehemiah Hodges of Chicago got one. The unit then pushed on 150 yards before running into the first machine gun ambush.

The patrol leader drew the troops back fighting a rear guard action during which Sgt. Rothchild Webb of Indianapolis stunned several Japanese with a grenade, and Pfc Merton Gilliam's automatic rifle fire accounted for three. The leader's report to rear headquarters stated the apparent strength and firepower of the enemy force, which was a remnant of the Japanese Sixth Division of ranking infamy.

Orders converted the reconnaissance patrol into a combat unit and ammunition was dropped by Lt. Darrell Bishop, pilot of an artillery liaison plane, who also directed artillery fire on enemy positions.

After the barrage, the men moved back down the trail, leaving an artillery forward observation group at the command post to keep contact with headquarters.

The crafty Japanese had deserted the shelled bivouac areas and taken to ridges on both sides of the trail into which the 93rd patrol was allowed to proceed almost to the Reini River before encountering frontal and cross machine gun fire from which the unit had its second miraculous escape without casualties.

The patrol leader deployed his men off the trail and skirted through the jungle to a point where they calculated to meet their rear guard. In the meantime, the rear guard was so far forward that it was now between the patrol body and the Japanese.

The patrol then hit an encircling ambush of snipers and machine guns. The lead men fell under the Japanese initial bursts, but Pvt. Deormy Raye of St. Paul, N. C., got three before going down.

Pinned down in the brush beside the trail, Pvt. Gilliam of Cincinnati, firing a Browning automatic rifle knocked off six, blasting one out of a tree and almost cutting him in half.

Pfc James Cofer of Washington, Ga., held the gun in position by its hot barrel with his bare hands, then, firing a Buck Rogers machine gun, crawled forward to cover Pfc. Ed Bradford of Hodge, La., whose machine gun had jammed.

Cofer fired a blinding blast of 75 rounds, accounting for two enemy soldiers and another probable. Pvt. Ernest Bailery, Bayonne, NJ silenced a Japanese machine gun nest. Pvt. William Tindall of New York got three snipers.

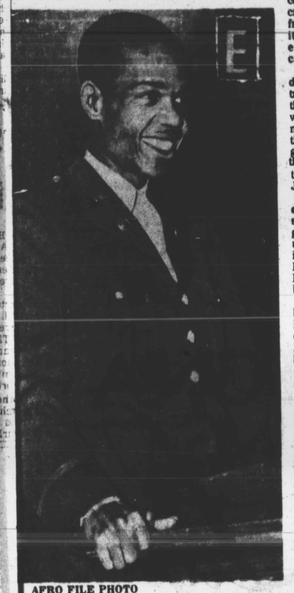
Pvt. Edward Rhodes, Richalds, N. C., killed three fleeing in crouched positions, while Pvt. Cleotha Simpson of Thormangee, Tex., got a ground sniper.

The patrol sneaked off the trail, took to nearby hills, climbing the sheer mountainside to establish a perimeter for a fight.

The rear guard sneaked off-trail through the jungle behind the patrol's ridge and returned to the command post at nightfall, but one man was separated from the guard and was left somewhere on the trail. He was Sgt. James Owens of Cleveland, who wiped out a motar crew setting up to lob shells on the retreating patrol.

The sergeant stayed pinned down by enemy fire until dusk, secreting himself under bushes and leaves, and spent the night, listening to the enemy troops stomping past, almost over him.

Next morning he bravely took to the trail, passed the dead Japanese and returned to the command post.



AFRO FILE PHOTO
Vincent Tubbs — A graduate of Morehouse College and a native of Dallas, TX, Mr. Tubbs was accredited a war correspondent in 1943.

With Colonel Davis flyers in Italy

By Art Carter

Pandemonium reigned supreme at the 99th Fighter Squadron's operations tent, in February, 1944, as crack pilots returned from their history - making air attacks against the Germans, running their scoreboard to 12 Nazi planes destroyed, two probably destroyed, and four damaged during two days of fighting— a record for the current invasion of Anzio and Nettuno Beaches, South of Rome.

Like football players bursting into a dining room after a triumph in the season's classic, war-weary pilots were jubilant in their description of victories over the Luftwaffe, giving vivid recollections of how they poured hot lead into enemy aircraft.

Capt. Rodney Custis, operations chief, declared, after the initial encounter on Thursday: "It was the roughest day of the campaign, out good hunting all the way." Maj. George S. Roberts, commanding officer, said:

"We've been looking forward to such happening, but this is the first time in five months that we have encountered enemy opposition. The whole show lasted little more than five minutes. It was a chasing battle, rather than a running battle, as the Germans were always on the move. We poured hell into them."

Capt. Custis, a Howard University graduate, was one pilot to gain victories, while Maj. Roberts scored a damage. He also wiped out a machine gun nest after being forced home, when flak knocked out his ship's electrical system, disabling its guns.

Custis emphasized: "I let loose a burst fire, chased an FW-190 seven miles toward Rome and saw tracers hit his tuseiage and the plane crash."

Lt. Erwin B. Lawrence of Cleveland and Alwayne Dunlap of Washington saw the plane hit by Custis crash. Lawrence gained a probable damage on another enemy plane which was observed diving for the ground smoking excessively.

Lt. Eagleson, flying his fifth sortie, destroyed one. He said: "I was on tail of an FW-190 that was firing at Lawrence when I lined him up, gave him a burst and continued to follow him. I saw him smoking 100 feet from the ground."

Lt. Clarence W. Allen said: "I sighted twelve FW-190s pulling out of a dive-bombing run and I closed on one, poured fire into it at 500 feet and saw it crash," while Lt. Edward L. Toppins declared: "Saw my tracers going into an FW-190 which finally disappeared behind some trees in a gully."

Lt. John L. Hamilton saw the plane hit by Coppins burst into grayish white smoke, confirming the former's destruction of the aircraft.

AFRO FILE PHOTO
Art Carter as he appeared in 1943.

Lt. Robert W. Deiz, former Oregon University sprint star, who was recording his second victory in two days, said of his initial triumph: "An FW-190 was sightly below me. I closed at 200 yards, firing continuously. A portion of the ship's cowling flew off and it went into a steep dive at about 700 feet. Later, I saw a big sheet of flame and black smoke in a yard below."

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