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# THE NEWSLETTER

BERKSHIRE MILITARY MUSEUM

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# THE STORY: 'THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS'

THE 369TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, KNOWN AS 'THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS' WAS A NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD UNIT DURING WWI. THEY SAW ACTION IN FRANCE, AND WERE THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN UNIT TO SERVE IN THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES. THEY EARNED THEIR NICKNAME FOR THEIR FIERCE FIGHTING STYLE, THE FACT THAT THEY NEVER LOST A MAN TO CAPTURE, AND NEVER LOST A TRENCH OR A FOOT OF GROUND TO AN ENEMY GROUND ASSAULT. UNDER THE COMMAND OF A WHITE OFFICER, COLONEL WILLIAM HAYWARD, THE 369TH WAS ATTACHED TO THE 16TH DIVISION OF THE FRENCH ARMY, WHERE THEY WENT ON TO BECOME THE MOST DECORATED AMERICAN UNIT IN THE ENTIRE WAR. WHEN THEY LEFT NEW YORK IN 1917, THE 369TH HAD NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO MARCH IN THE PARADE FOR THE REST OF THE 'RAINBOW DIVISION' AS THE NY NATIONAL GUARD WAS CALLED. THE REASON GIVEN TO COLONEL HAYWARD FOR THE EXCLUSION WAS THAT "BLACK IS NOT A COLOR IN THE RAINBOW." BY THE END OF THE WAR HOWEVER, THE EXPLOITS AND HEROICS OF THE 'HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS' IN FRANCE HAD BECOME LEGEND IN THE U.S. THE 369TH RECEIVED A MASSIVE WELCOME HOME WITH A PARADE AND DINNER WITH CITY OFFICIALS. THEIR RENOWN WAS NOT UNDUE, FOR MANY OF THEIR NUMBER PERFORMED INCREDIBLE FEATS IN THE FACE OF EXTREME DANGER. ONE SUCH SITUATION OCCURRED IN MAY, 1918 IN THE ARGONNE FOREST. TWO HELLFIGHTERS, PRIVATES HENRY JOHNSON AND NEEDHAM ROBERTS WERE STANDING WATCH WHEN THEY WERE ATTACKED BY A 12 MAN GERMAN RAIDING PARTY. INSTEAD OF RETREATING, JOHNSON AND ROBERTS FOUGHT OFF THE INITIAL ATTACK, ALTHOUGH ROBERTS WAS BADLY WOUNDED. STAYING BEHIND SO THAT HIS FELLOW SOLDIER WOULD NOT BECOME A PRISONER, JOHNSON ADVANCED ON THE ATTACKERS WITH ONLY A BOLO KNIFE. DESPITE HE HIMSELF BEING INJURED, HE MANAGED TO INFLICT SIGNIFICANT CASUALTIES ON THE RAIDING PARTY, KILLING ONE AND FORCING THE OTHERS TO RETREAT. FOR THEIR BRAVERY BOTH MEN RECEIVED THE CROIX DE GUERRE FOR VALOR BY THE FRENCH MILITARY. IN 2015 JOHNSON WAS POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR HIS BRAVERY. BY WAR'S END THE 'HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS' HAD SPENT 191 DAYS IN COMBAT, MORE THAN ANY OTHER AMERICAN UNIT AND 171 OF ITS SOLDIERS HAD RECEIVED INDIVIDUAL MEDALS. THE AMERICA THAT THESE BRAVE MEN RETURNED TO WAS NOT QUITE THE ONE THEY HAD HOPED FOR; NOT MUCH HAD CHANGED IN THE TREATMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS. DESPITE THEIR HEROICS IN DEFENSE OF THEIR

COUNTRY, THEY WERE STILL TREATED LIKE SECOND CLASS CITIZENS, AND IT WOULD REMAIN THAT WAY UNTIL THEIR COUNTRY CALLED UPON THEM AGAIN, LITTLE OVER 20 YEARS LATER.



PRIVATE HENRY JOHNSON



THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS RETURN TO NEW YORK

# IMPORTANT DATES: SEP. - NOV.

SEPTEMBER 7TH, 1901: THE BOXER REBELLION ENDS IN CHINA

SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1905: THE TREATY OF PORTSMOUTH ENDS THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

NOVEMBER 7TH, 1917: THE BOLSHEVIKS OVERTHROW THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, STARTING THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

NOVEMBER 11TH, 1918: AN ARMISTICE BETWEEN THE WARRING COUNTRIES ENDS THE FIRST WORLD WAR AT 11 AM

SEPTEMBER 1ST, 1939: GERMANY INVADES POLAND, BEGINNING WWII

SEPTEMBER 8TH, 1941: GERMAN FORCES BEGIN THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD, BUT FAIL TO CAPTURE THE CITY

OCTOBER 23RD, 1942: BRITISH FORCES BEGIN THE SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

NOVEMBER 8TH-10TH, 1942: US FORCES LAND IN NORTH AFRICA AS PART OF OPERATION TORCH

SEPTEMBER 3RD-9TH, 1943: US AND BRITISH FORCES LAND IN ITALY

SEPTEMBER 17TH, 1944: BRITISH AND US PARATROOPERS LAND IN HOLLAND AS PART OF OPERATION MARKET GARDEN.

SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1945: JAPAN SURRENDERS ABOARD THE *USS MISSOURI* ENDING THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC

SEPTEMBER 15, 1950: UNITED NATIONS TROOPS UNDER THE COMMAND OF GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR LAND AT INCHON, AND PUSH THE NORTH KOREAN TROOPS BACK TO THE YALU RIVER

NOVEMBER, 1950: CHINESE TROOPS ENTER INTO THE KOREAN WAR, AND DRIVE THE UN FORCES BACK OVER THE 38TH PARALLEL

NOVEMBER 14TH-18TH, 1965: US TROOPS FIGHT THE BATTLE OF IA DRANG IN VIETNAM

SEPTEMBER 22ND, 1980: IRAQ INVADES IRAN BEGINNING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR THAT WILL LAST 8 YEARS



THOUSANDS GATHER IN PHILADELPHIA TO  
CELEBRATE THE ARMISTICE THAT ENDED WWI.  
(11 NOVEMBER, 1918)



GERMAN SOLDIERS PARADE THROUGH WARSAW,  
AFTER THE SUCCESSFUL INVASION OF POLAND  
(UNKNOWN, SEPTEMBER, 1939)



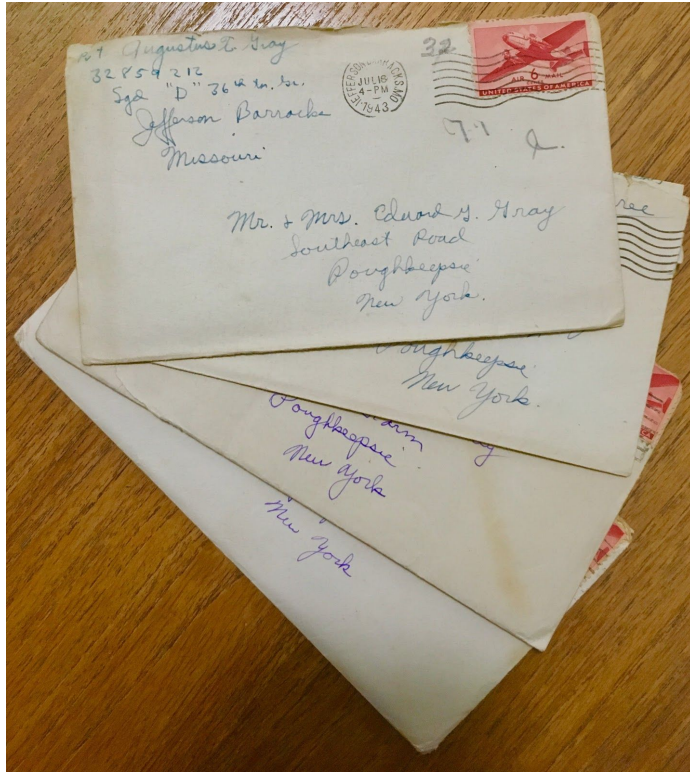
THE OFFICIAL JAPANESE  
SURRENDER ABOARD THE *USS MISSOURI*  
(ARMY SIGNAL CORPS, 2 SEPTEMBER, 1945)



US SOLDIERS ARE AIRLIFTED  
INTO THE IA DRANG VALLEY  
(US ARMY, NOVEMBER, 1965)

## NEW ITEM

ONE OF THE LATEST ACQUISITIONS OF THE BERKSHIRE MILITARY MUSEUM IS A SET OF LETTERS WRITTEN HOME DURING WWII BY FIRST LIEUTENANT AUGUSTUS GRAY. AUGUSTUS GRAY WAS BORN ON A FARM IN POUGHKEEPSIE, NY WHERE HE GREW UP ALONG WITH 4 OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS. AFTER GRADUATING FROM ARLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL IN 1942 HE JOINED THE USAAF WHERE HE BECAME A NAVIGATOR IN A B-29. HE WAS PART OF THE 505TH BOMB GROUP AND WAS STATIONED ON TINIAN ISLAND FOR THE DURATION OF THE WAR. THE 505TH WAS A HEAVY BOMB UNIT THAT FLEW MISSIONS FROM NORTH FIELD ON TINIAN, BOMBING IWO JIMA AND THE TRUK ISLANDS BEFORE CARRYING OUT RAIDS ON THE JAPANESE MAINLAND AND, AFTER VJ DAY DROPPING SUPPLIES TO LIBERATED ALLIED POWS. AFTER WWII GRAY REMAINED IN THE AIR FORCE RESERVES, AND WAS CALLED UP DURING THE KOREAN WAR. HE FLEW 50 MISSIONS OUT OF PUSAN, SOUTH KOREA, BETWEEN OCTOBER, 1951 AND MARCH, 1952. AFTER THE WAR HE ATTENDED ST LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY AND BECAME A TEACHER IN THE EAST GREENBUSH NEW YORK SCHOOL SYSTEM. HE PASSED AWAY IN 2012. LT. GRAY WAS A NAVIGATOR ON A BOEING B-29 SUPERFORTRESS, FLYING MISSIONS OUT OF TINIAN IN THE MARIANA ISLANDS TO BOMB JAPAN. AFTER THE WAR HE REMAINED IN THE AIR FORCE RESERVE, AND WAS AGAIN CALLED INTO ACTION AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE KOREAN WAR. AS PART OF THE 728TH BOMB SQUADRON, LT. GRAY FLEW 50 MISSIONS BETWEEN OCTOBER, 1951 AND MARCH, 1952. HE EMERGED UNSCATHED, AND BECAME A MATH TEACHER IN THE EAST GREENBUSH, NY SCHOOL SYSTEM UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN 1980. HE PASSED AWAY IN 2012 AT THE AGE OF 87. THE LETTERS ARE ALL FROM DIFFERENT AIR BASES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND PACIFIC, AND DETAIL GRAY'S BASIC TRAINING AND LIFE DURING THE WAR. LT. GRAY WROTE ABOUT THINGS AS SIMPLE AS DAILY LIFE, THROUGH POLITICS, AND THE WAR. THEY PROVIDE A UNIQUE INSIGHT INTO LIFE IN THE ARMY AIR FORCE DURING WWII.



# QUICK FACTS

REVOLUTIONARY WAR: BECAUSE THE U.S. HAD NO NAVY, THEY ENCOURAGED PRIVATEERS TO ATTACK BRITISH SHIPS, WITH THE PROMISE THAT THEY COULD SPLIT ANY LOOT WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: ROBERT E. LEE'S HOUSE WAS CONFISCATED BY THE US GOVERNMENT AND TURNED INTO A MILITARY CEMETERY DURING THE WAR. THIS WOULD BECOME ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY.

WWI: WORLD WAR 1 SAW MANY NEW TYPES OF MEDICINE AND TREATMENT PIONEER. BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS BECAME COMMON TO SAVE SOLDIERS LIVES, WITH THE FIRST BLOOD BANK BEING ESTABLISHED ON THE FRONTLINE IN 1917. AS WELL AS THIS, PLASTIC SURGERY WAS INTRODUCED FOR SOLDIERS WHOSE FACES HAD BEEN DAMAGED DURING THE WAR.

WWII: 4 OUT OF EVERY 5 GERMAN SOLDIERS THAT DIED DURING THE WAR DIED ON THE EASTERN FRONT

KOREAN WAR: THE KOREAN WAR NEVER REALLY ENDED. AN ARMISTICE WAS SIGNED TO STOP THE FIGHTING BUT THE WAR CONTINUES TO THIS DAY.

VIETNAM WAR: SLINKYS WERE SLUNG OVER TREE BRANCHES TO EXTEND THE RANGE OF RADIOS.



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY.  
THE LEE MANSION CAN BE SEEN  
IN THE BACKGROUND

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