

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Arthur Betts

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VR2-A-L-2008-074

Arthur Betts, a World War II veteran serving in the European theater, and one of 2,221 blacks who served with white infantry units during and after the Battle of the Bulge, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: October 27, 2008 Location: Betts residence in Chicago, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): N/A

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Rozanne Flatt, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Volunteer

Total Pages: 32 pgs Total Time: 2:13 / 2.22 hrs

Accessioned into the ALPL Archives on December 1, 2008.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Arthur Betts, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2008-074

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Arthur Betts, Sr. was born on April 29th, 1918 in Marianna, Arkansas to a farm family. His family moved to East Chicago, Indiana when Arthur was an infant. His father found work in a steel mill, and eventually moved the family to Chicago where Arthur grew up and attended school. Arthur graduated from high school in 1936, and, with very few options, joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, working on road and other conservation projects in Illinois. In March of 1941 he enlisted in the United States Army, taking his Basic Training at Ft. Custer, Michigan. He was assigned to the 94th Engineer Regiment, a construction engineer unit, and participated in Army maneuvers in Louisiana and Tennessee. While enroute to Louisiana, his unit experienced racial discrimination first-hand near Little Rock, Arkansas.

The 94th Engineer Battalion deployed to Oran, Algeria in 1943, building roads and bridges across North Africa, then were shipped to Naples, Italy. From there, the 94th served in southern France. On December 26th, 1944, in the midst of the Battle of the Bulge, General Dwight D. Eisenhower made an appeal for blacks to volunteer for duty in the seriously depleted white infantry units. Over five thousand volunteered and 2,221 were selected, among them Sergeant Betts. He was reduced to the rank of private and joined the 393rd Infantry Regiment, part of the 99th “Checkerboard” Infantry Division. Betts soon saw action during the Battle of the Bulge, and stayed with the 99th for the remainder of the war. Following the war and his return to the states, Arthur worked in the U.S. Postal Service for 38 years.

[See *The Invisible Soldier*, by Mary Penick Molley for a discussion of the 94th EN in Arkansas, and *Once Upon a Time in War: The 99th Division in WW II* by Robert Humphrey.]

Subject Headings/Key Words: Civilian Conservation Corps; 369th Infantry in WWI; 94th Engineer Regiment; service in a segregated Army; Louisiana Maneuvers; engineer service in North Africa; engineer service in Italy (Naples area); southern France; Operation Dragoon, 2,221 Negro Volunteers; Dwight D. Eisenhower; General John H.C. Lee; service with integrated infantry units; 99th “Checkerboard” Infantry Division; 353rd Infantry Regiment; Battle of the Bulge; Croix de Guerre; Colin Powell.

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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