

An AAHGS National Collaboration

WWII Black Liberators Project

Final Status Report

Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society (AAHGS)
Metro Atlanta Chapter



Johnette Brooks, Embassy of the Netherlands WWII 75th Anniversary Celebration
February 2019

Image Courtesy: HOLLA at ya ANCESTORS.ORG

Created by Johnette Brooks, Military Focus Group Lead, AAHGS Metro Atlanta
Presented to Tammy Ozier, President - AAHGS Metro Atlanta

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Executive Summary

As a national African American (AA) genealogy organization, this was a historic opportunity to lead this unique international genealogical experience. It was an honor to serve as leaders in the Embassy of the Netherlands WWII Black Liberators - AAHGS Research Project. This project has been deemed a success by all involved.

Project Description & Objective

In WWII, the 784th and 761st Tank Battalions were AA servicemen instrumental in the battles that captured 20 Belgium and the Netherlands' small towns from the Germans and claimed by the Europeans. In the American Cemetery at Margraten, 172 black heroes served and are buried there. The town folk of Margraten adopted the 172 soldiers' gravesites to be responsible for cleaning and maintaining while celebrating them as a community twice each year on the anniversary of WWII and Christmas. There is a community waiting list to adopt one of the gravesites if the maintainer moves or passes away.

The Embassy of the Netherlands approached the AAHGS Vice President at our 2019 Annual Conference for assistance in identifying any of the descendants/relatives of the 172 AA fallen soldiers buried in Margraten. The plan was to encourage the descendants' attendance at the 75th Anniversary of the Belgium/Netherlands battles.

AAHGS National & International Project Engagement

The project request from the Embassy of the Netherlands to AAHGS was to identify and locate any descendants/relatives of the 172 servicemen buried in the American Cemetery of Margraten. It was AAHGS' first project as a national collaboration of our chapters. Additionally, it was AAHGS' first international project. Twenty-two (22) AAHGS chapters consisting of an average of three (3) researchers per chapter, participated across the United States of America.

Marilyn Campbell, our AAHGS National Special Projects Coordinator conducted weekly and methodical Sunday evening conference calls to distribute soldiers assignments to research by state; provide clarity of the assignment; encourage researchers to share useful and fruitful sources; to determine the current make-up of research found; and answer questions regarding the process and submission of findings.

AAHGS Metro Atlanta Chapter Project Engagement

AAHGS Metro Atlanta had one of the most active chapters with:

- 15 active researchers;
- 250 hours contributed (research/zoom meetings);
- 13 AA Georgia servicemen;
- 7 AA Alabama servicemen.

We retrieved birth certificates; census records; marriage licenses; obituaries; researched cemetery/funeral home records; and created family trees. We verified the reliability of sources and captured well-documented, detailed citations. In my opinion, we should feel very proud of ourselves as one of the leading chapters in providing and sharing resources and delivering high quality packets for each descendant found. I am exceptionally proud of the AAHGS Metro Atlanta Chapter results.

We had six researchers who completed and submitted packets of Narratives, Indices and Documents. They are Monique Bentley, Johnette Brooks, Johnnie Brown, Jackie Herring, Tammy Ozier, Doris Posey and Doris Thomas. Additional contributors were Nefertiti Hawthorne, Linda Holder, Catherine Holder, E. Faye Wine, Warren Dakota (Morehouse Student), Beverly Watson and Katrina Dawkins. There were several other members who were heavily involved in research.

I have sent emails and left messages but have not received a response, which I assume is due to the Covid-19 virus. Following the instructions from the conference call, I returned those as "unresearched" to Marilyn. Jackie has finished her work on all five (5) of her Alabama individuals and will be forwarding her research to Marilyn today. The names of the (13) Georgia and (7) Alabama heroes are listed below:

- a. Acey, Henry Jr.
- b. Anderson, Edward C.
- c. Anderson, Ralph W.
- d. Clark, James
- e. Devine, Samuel A. Jr.
- f. Dewberry, Curtis
- g. Green, Lonnie Jr.
- h. Mitchell, John C.
- i. Partridge, Albert
- j. Souders, Eddie B.
- k. Sgt. Williams, Willie F.
- l. Worthy, Willie J.

Project Obstacles

As the AAHGS Metro Atlanta Chapter's Military Focus Group Lead, I cautioned our Military Focus Group that our success would likely be limited since most soldiers who are drafted/enlisted into WWII were unmarried between the ages of 18-24. Most died prior to marriage, having children or taking a photograph. Hence, it would not be possible to have direct descendants. The project research results could result in elderly nieces/nephews at best. As the Military Focus Group Lead for the AAHGS Metro Atlanta Chapter, I advised the group that finding direct descendants for their project would be difficult because most WWII draftees and enlistees (ages 18-24) died before marrying or having children. Therefore, the research is more likely to find only elderly nieces or nephews, rather than direct descendants.

Ric Murphy, AAHGS National VP and Black Liberation Project Leader, advised we were not to contact the potential descendant when found. This made it somewhat difficult to confirm we had actual descendants. Honoring that limitation, we submitted all of the documentation that proves our question of each soldier's living descendants and their "best" contact information. These packets were emailed to Marilyn Campbell for packet legitimacy and later we were directed to upload them to the Netherland Embassy Dropbox location originally provided.

Future National Collaborations

Marilyn Campbell, our AAHGS Special Projects Coordinator has been teasing that we (AAHGS National) have been approached about us accepting another international project. No further details are known at the completion of this report. The Atlanta Chapter is ready.

Black Liberators Project Websites

Main Project Reference Pages:

- Netherland Project Dropbox.
- Fields of Honor Database, Margraten. Margraten, Netherlands.

Additional Project Related Sources:

- Gresik, Dylan. "Seventy-five years later, the Netherlands honors the 'Black Liberators' who helped end the Nazi occupation", Military Times. 13 Feb 2020
- Netherlands American Cemetery. Margraten, Netherlands.
- Bundy, Carla and Nienhuis, Jacqueliën. Royal Embassy of the Netherlands. The Search for the 172 African-American Soldiers Memorialized at Margraten. [BusinessWire.com](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20180524005242/en/Black-Liberators-Project-Website-Now-Online). 24 May 2018 02:42 PM EST