

MILITARY SERVICE & ACHIEVEMENTS

57th Ordnance Ammunition Company

From Camp Blanding to the Battlefields of Europe

African American Historical Society of Clay County, Florida (AAHSCCFL)

A downloadable history guide with active links for further exploration

A Camp Blanding Connection

The 57th Ordnance Company was activated with African American personnel at Savanna Ordnance Depot, Illinois, on February 6, 1941, under a white officer. In June 1941, the unit relocated to Camp Blanding, Florida, where it became part of the story of Black military service at the rapidly expanding World War II training installation. The company also participated in maneuvers and training in Louisiana and South Carolina. On April 1, 1942, it was redesignated the 57th Ordnance Ammunition Company.

CAMP BLANDING CONNECTION

Relocated to Camp Blanding, Florida • June 1941

Across the Atlantic

The company sailed from New York on November 12, 1943, aboard the troopship Andes and arrived in England on November 20. After months in England, it moved toward the invasion area and entered France on June 12, 1944, only six days after D-Day. That evening, the 57th established an ammunition supply point near Balleroy while under light German artillery fire. Its mission was to receive, safeguard, move, and issue ammunition to combat forces.

Combat at Drancourt, France

On September 4, 1944, near Drancourt in the Somme region of France, the 57th encountered German troops and became the only Allied unit in the immediate vicinity. The company fought the enemy with small arms. Army records report that 39 or 50 German soldiers were killed; the figure varies among historical reports—and approximately 15 were captured. Private Allan Johnson was killed in action, and Private Howard Ellison Jr. was wounded. Both received Purple Hearts.

Private William A. Wheatley received the Silver Star and the French Croix de Guerre for his actions, while Technical Sergeant Harold F. Jackson received the Bronze Star and a Croix de Guerre. First Lieutenant Donald Aitken also received a Croix de Guerre. Their actions illustrate that the 57th's logistics mission could place its soldiers directly in combat.

Battle of the Bulge

During the German Ardennes offensive in December 1944, the 57th operated Ammunition Supply Point 126 near Waimes, Belgium. As German forces approached, members of the company prepared ammunition and demolition materials that could not fall into enemy hands. Army history records that men of the 57th continued issuing ammunition even while the supply area was threatened by artillery, machine-gun fire, and enemy troops.

Supporting the Advance into Germany

The 57th continued establishing and operating ammunition supply points as American forces advanced. In early 1945, it supported operations from Belgium into Germany, moving thousands of tons of ammunition under difficult winter and combat conditions. By the end of the European campaign, the company had established or operated at least fourteen ammunition supply points on the European mainland.

Service and Legacy

The 57th earned campaign participation credit for Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe. It remained in Germany until December 10, 1946, when it was inactivated. The unit's World War II record demonstrates the courage and professionalism of African American soldiers who performed essential military work while serving in a segregated Army.

Quick Historical Timeline

DATE	MILESTONE
February 6, 1941	Activated at Savanna Ordnance Depot, Illinois, with African American personnel.
June 1941	Relocated to Camp Blanding, Florida.
April 1, 1942	Redesignated the 57th Ordnance Ammunition Company.
November 1943	Sailed to England aboard the troopship Andes.
June 12, 1944	Arrived in France and established an ammunition supply point near Balleroy.
September 4, 1944	Fought German troops near Drancourt, France; soldiers received valor awards and Purple Hearts.
December 1944	Operated ASP 126 near Waimes during the Battle of the Bulge.
March-April 1945	Supported the advance across Germany with rapidly moving ammunition supply points.
December 10, 1946	Inactivated in Germany.

People to Remember

Private Allan Johnson — Killed in action during the September 4, 1944 engagement near Drancourt, France; awarded the Purple Heart.

Private Howard Ellison Jr. — Wounded during the Drancourt engagement; awarded the Purple Heart.

Private William A. Wheatley — Awarded the Silver Star and French Croix de Guerre; contemporary reporting described his evacuation of wounded comrades under fire.

Technical Sergeant Harold F. Jackson — Awarded the Bronze Star and French Croix de Guerre for actions against German troops.

Captain Jack Carstarphen — Company commander during the Battle of the Bulge; participated in reconnaissance near the threatened Waimes ammunition supply point.

Explore the History

[U.S. Army Center of Military History — 57th Ordnance Ammunition Company](#)

The strongest starting point for the unit's World War II history. Includes photographs, individual soldiers, awards, Camp Blanding, combat actions, campaign credits, and extensive source notes.

[U.S. Army Center of Military History — African Americans in the U.S. Army](#)

Army collection placing the 57th within the broader history of African American military service.

[U.S. Government Publishing Office — The Ordnance Department: On Beachhead and Battlefront](#)

Official Army history containing detailed discussion of ammunition operations at Waimes during the Battle of the Bulge.

[New York Public Library, Schomburg Center — Charles E. Harris World War II Memorabilia Collection](#)

Archival collection of a 57th Ordnance Ammunition Company veteran, including company histories, wartime documents, maps, letters, and related memorabilia.

Historical Photographs & Archival Material

The U.S. Army Center of Military History's 57th Ordnance Ammunition Company page includes historical images connected directly to the unit, including a photograph of Private Allan Johnson's headstone and other unit-related imagery. The Schomburg Center also holds photographs and wartime materials from veteran Charles E. Harris; access and reproduction conditions should be confirmed with the repository before publishing archival images.

[View Army photographs and unit history.](#)

[Explore the Charles E. Harris archival collection.](#)

Research Note

This guide uses the U.S. Army Center of Military History as the principal source for unit dates, locations, combat actions, awards, and campaign participation. Where historical reports give different figures—for example, the number of German soldiers killed during the September 1944 engagement—both figures are acknowledged rather than silently reconciled.

Historical Context

The 57th served during an era when the U.S. Army was segregated. Historical sources may contain racial terminology that is outdated and offensive today. Such wording should be understood within its original historical context.

Principal Sources

- U.S. Army Center of Military History, "57th Ordnance Ammunition Company," prepared by Kathleen Fargey.
- Lida Mayo, The Ordnance Department: On Beachhead and Battlefront, U.S. Army in World War II.
- 100th Ordnance Battalion (Ammunition) unit history, cited by the U.S. Army Center of Military History.
- Charles E. Harris World War II Memorabilia Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

Preserving the stories of service, sacrifice, achievement, and legacy.

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