



(February 1, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY- Black History Month 2016**

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On January 27, the Nation and the VA family lost Corporal Alyce Dixon, a courageous Veteran, member of the Greatest Generation, and—I can tell you from having met her at the Fisher House here in Washington, D.C.—a remarkable, generous, and good-humored lady. Corporal Dixon was 108 years old when she passed away at our D.C. VA Community Living Center—deeply respected and much loved by those privileged to know her.

It is fitting to remember Alyce’s life of service as we observe Black History Month. She was one of the first African American women to join the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) and, later, the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). She served in World War II as a member of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion—the “Six Triple Eight”—from 1942 to 1946, and she deployed with the 6888th to Europe in 1945. The innovative women of the 6888th were famous for their extraordinary diligence in getting service members the mountains of backlogged mail from home that was often misdirected or cryptically addressed. They persevered, and they succeeded against tremendous odds.

Thanks to visionary leaders like First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and civil rights activist Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, African American women first won the right to defend the Nation in the WAAC and, then, the right to join their white WAC counterparts overseas. Under the command of Major Charity Edna Adams, Corporal Dixon's "Six Triple Eight" Battalion was the only all black WAC unit deployed to Europe in WWII, though other African American women served as nurses in Africa, in Australia, and in England.

Three of Corporal Dixon's fellow-WACs—Sergeant Dolores M. Browne, Private First Class Mary J. Barlow, and Private First Class Mary H. Bankston—died while serving in France. They rest today with other heroes at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer.

While Alyce and the WACs of the 6888th helped save the world from fascism, they faced discrimination and segregation in Europe, and here at home. Returning to the United States after the war, there were no parades to greet them and no recognition of their service for many decades. But because of their examples of duty and courage, President Harry S. Truman ordered, on July 26, 1948, that "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." Still, the fight for equality would continue.

After the war, Alyce continued to serving her country at the Pentagon, her fellow Veterans by volunteering at the VA Washington Hospital Center, and her community by volunteering at the Howard University Hospital—a wonderful example of selfless service.

African Americans of every generation have given their lives in defense of freedom, even when they did not enjoy the full measure of liberty themselves. They fought during the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the Mexican Expedition, and World War I, to name a few. They are members of the legendary Buffalo Soldiers, the Tuskegee Airmen, the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the Marines of Montford Point, and the "Red Ball Express." And they are Medal of Honor recipients like Sergeant Cornelius H. Charlton in Korea and Marine Corps Sergeant Rodney M. Davis in Vietnam.

During this year's Black History Month, let us honor and celebrate all African American Veterans who have risked, and often sacrificed, their lives in service to this great Nation and follow Corporal Alyce Dixon's wise advice to live by caring, sharing, and giving.

Robert A. McDonald

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