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Jacksonville's Greatest Generation: The Contribution of African American Veterans to the Civil Rights Movement 1945-1960

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JACKSONVILLE'S GREATEST GENERATION:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VETERANS TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS
MOVEMENT 1945-1960

by

Bryan Arch Wayne Higham

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Dedication

My Fellow Veterans- the transition to civilian life is difficult, but once we make it, we are capable of great things

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	vi
Thesis.....	1
References.....	35
Vita.....	42

Abstract

This research explores the role of returning African American veterans in the Civil Rights Movement in Jacksonville from 1945-1960. Black World War II veterans not only faced the typical challenges of returning to civilian life, but took up the fight for equality as well. While this work acknowledges existing arguments about black veterans in the Civil Rights Movement, it emphasizes and analyzes the importance of their military benefits and experience. African American soldiers received training in various fields like combat, supply, and intelligence. This training translated into useful skills in the postwar period. The experiences of black soldiers while overseas also played a pivotal role, especially their interaction with foreign cultures. Often foreigners referred to black soldiers as "American" leaving off any racial distinction. Additionally, black veterans were able to attend college in unprecedented numbers because of their GI Bill benefits. Ernest Jackson earned undergraduate and legal degrees, and led the attack on segregation in Jacksonville. Elcee Lucas also went to school after exiting the service but used his military skills to orchestrate voter registration drives, and organize political campaigns. With their new skills and education, these men were not only able to organize and lead others but were equipped with the tools necessary to challenge the institutions that subverted their equality, greatly influencing the path of the Civil Rights Movement.

In reference to allowing black men to serve as soldiers Frederick Douglass said, "Once let the black man get upon his person brass letters US, let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States."¹ This notion still rang true well into the twentieth century when African Americans took up arms against their country's enemies in World War II. One of history's greatest ironies is that while America pushed democratic ideals abroad in the fight against fascism, it denied a substantial body of its own citizenry equal rights. As historian Christopher Parker explains, "Fighting *on behalf* of democracy ultimately resulted in black veterans fighting *for* democracy," when they returned home.² However, these men do not fit into the traditional peaceful protest narrative of the Civil Rights Movement of the nineteen sixties. Some scholars argue that the Civil Rights Movement was not merely a ten or twenty year phenomenon, but actually a much longer process, reaching back at least to the first decades of the twentieth century. Returning black World War II veterans fit into this class of individuals as grassroots activists of an early era of the Civil Rights Movement.³

Hundreds of thousands of African Americans that deployed overseas interacted with and experienced various foreign cultures. For many black soldiers this life altering experience changed the way they perceived race relations could and should be. In addition, African Americans gained invaluable training and skills during their tenure as service members. Whether it was technical, combat, or even organizational training, these abilities translated to

¹ Frederick Douglass, "Should the Negro Enlist in the Union Army?" speech, National Hall Philadelphia, July 06, 1863.

² Christopher S. Parker, *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 6.

³ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 2-4.

valuable skills relevant to the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, returning African American service members had access to benefits and opportunities because of their veteran status. All of these factors enhanced African American veterans' ability to challenge and alter the racial status quo.

Jacksonvillians like Elcee Lucas, Ernest Jackson, and Samuel Bruce embodied this broader, national trend, returning from war to play a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement in Northeast Florida. Elcee Lucas served in the U.S. Army as reconnaissance officer in the European Theater of Operations.⁴ After his homecoming, he orchestrated a pivotal voters' registration drive, and acted as a campaign manager for African American political candidates. Ernest Jackson also served in the Army in both the European and Pacific Theaters, where he received wounds that left him permanently disabled.⁵ He then returned home to earn a law degree and challenge segregation and inequality in the judicial system. Samuel Bruce spent World War II in the U.S. Marine Corps and came back to Jacksonville to advance African American conditions by running for political office, a role that Ernest Jackson also embraced.⁶

Using these three veterans as case studies, this thesis investigates the connection between African Americans veterans and the Civil Rights Movement nationally and applies these patterns to explain the progress of the Civil Rights Movement in Jacksonville, Florida, in the fifteen years immediately following the end of World War II. The broader purpose of the project is to, first,

⁴ Abel A. Bartley, *Keeping the Faith: Race, Politics, and Social Development in Jacksonville, Florida, 1940-1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

Narrowing down Ernest Jackson's specific role in the military has been extremely difficult. There are four black Ernest Jacksons from the Jacksonville area that served in the Army during World War II. Some of these records were destroyed in the 1973 fire at the National Personal Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Furthermore, the records that I have received do not appear to be the same Jackson, and I have therefore excluded them from this work.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

illuminate Jacksonville's place in this story, as an incredibly underexplored area on this subject matter. Second, there have also been broad claims from scholars about the importance of returning black veterans' importance in the postwar landscape that need substantiation. In order to help address these issues, this work will engage a body of scholarship about how World War II changed African Americans and their grassroots role in the broader Civil Rights Movement, as well as provide a unique breakdown and analysis of relevant military skills and training.

On the eve of World War II, Jacksonville was a prominent port city in the Southeast. In 1940, the city boasted a population of 173,065 people and tens of thousands more just outside the city limits.⁷ Of that number, approximately 35.7% were African American, a substantial portion of the population.⁸ In fact, Jacksonville had the highest concentration of African Americans in the entire state of Florida.⁹ This large African American population lived in a somewhat harmonious existence with their white counterparts.¹⁰ Because they were over a third of the population, African Americans made it necessary for the white community to enter into a give and take relationship with them.

This was most evident in the first election that an African American—Wilson Armstrong—ran as a democrat after the elimination of the all white primary in 1947. Despite running in a black majority district, the local African American population chose not to endorse Armstrong, who was a high school dropout and a construction worker who many thought would

⁷ Survey Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, *Jacksonville Looks at its Negro Community: A Survey of Conditions Affecting the Negro Population in Jacksonville and Duval County, Florida* (Jacksonville, FL: Published under the auspices of the Council of Jacksonville, 1946), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 43.

¹⁰ Alphonso Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years. A Political History of the African American Community in Jacksonville, Florida, 1940-1978" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1994), 9-10.

not have a palatable image for the white community.¹¹ The district five community recognized that the first black elected official could not just be any person, they had to be the best possible candidate. Some individuals even feared repercussions from the white community if they elected someone like Armstrong.¹² In this election and in deference to the existing, less confrontational style of improvement, the African American community chose to endorse a white candidate to get the end product that they desired—a community pool.¹³ The black community in Jacksonville knew that they may not have the strength to topple the system at hand, but they could negotiate for things they wanted.

In this respect, Jacksonville was similar to other major urban centers across the South. Atlanta was another city that saw coalitions form between blacks and whites for political purpose.¹⁴ Just as in Jacksonville, the elite members of the black community in Atlanta were responsible for this partnership and controlled its endeavors.¹⁵ The racial situation in Atlanta immediately after World War II was very similar to that in Jacksonville. The fact that both cities had such substantial black populations allowed them to enter into a quid pro quo relationship with the white community. The leadership in both cities was organized and very competitive, ensuring the most capable people rose to prominent positions. Both cities also saw a conflict between the older generation's conservative approach, and the more militant and aggressive approach of the younger generation.¹⁶

¹¹ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 30,47.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 29-33.

¹⁴ Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2005),20,32-41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-30,37.

¹⁶ Gerald A. McWorter and Robert L. Crain, "Subcommunity Gladitorial Competition: Civil Rights Leadership as a Competative Process," *Social Forces* 46, no.1 (September 1967):13-14.

Like many cities and communities across the South in the interwar years, the Civil Rights fight for African Americans had lost momentum in Jacksonville after the end of Federal Reconstruction. Through decades of political and societal domination, white southerners accomplished the most damaging thing they could, a sense of apathy in the African American community. Many African Americans reached the point where they saw fighting the system head on as potentially more harmful than just living with the status quo.¹⁷ Actively resisting segregation and other Southern social mores could often result in violent retaliation. Despite the presence of Civil Rights organizations in cities like Jacksonville, they lacked the popular support necessary to make dramatic headway. The older generation, those who suffered the post Reconstruction era, were especially tired of fighting after suffering decades of disappointment and defeat.¹⁸ Many African Americans were willing to live with the status quo rather than risk any retrogression of their condition. After all, instead of endorsing a black candidate that could have won an election given the voting system in place, the community chose to leverage their advantage for something they desired rather than aggravate the political status quo.¹⁹ While this compromise was completed shortly after the end of World War II, it was indicative of the more complacent tactics used by Jacksonville's African American community before the returning veterans made their mark on the local civil rights movement.

Before this generation of leaders could transform the movement, they needed to be transformed by the war first. After the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States' declaration of war, men (and women) flocked to answer their nations' call. Unfortunately for many African Americans, their eagerness was futile since the government capped how many African

¹⁷ Parker, *Fighting for Democracy*, 145.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

¹⁹ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 32-33.

Americans were allowed to serve. Because of this policy "[t]wice the number of men were on the availability registry than were accepted into the armed forces."²⁰ It also prevented the United States armed forces from capitalizing on the true manpower potential that America had to offer. Instead, the fear of a mass armed uprising of African American soldiers triumphed, dictating policy. Despite this, by the end of the conflict over seven thousand African Americans from the Jacksonville area served in the Army.²¹

Just as in civilian society, the armed forces abided by a strict segregation policy. Historian Andrew Myers points out that "[i]n no other part of American Society did racism permeate so deeply into the organizational fabric or with such a bold stamp of federal government approval."²² Jim Crow had one foot in military society as well as civilian. One of the most interesting aspects about the military's segregation policy is how incredibly inefficient it was. Segregation hindered all aspects of military life, transportation, training, and maintaining facilities.²³ Contrary to modern perceptions of defense spending, World War II military officials did not structure their budgets to maximize their combat potential and effectiveness. In the segregated military, post commanders were forced to construct not only twice the facilities, but also staff them with obvious redundancies.²⁴ Commanders were obligated to adhere to these standards regardless of the number of black soldiers present on their post. Commanders had to spend money and devote resources to building and maintaining segregation, instead of focusing

²⁰ Maggie M. Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army: Black Men and Women Remember World War II* (Lanham, MD; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 19.

²¹ Army Enlistment Records, Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 - 1946, <http://aad.archives.gov>, accessed May 24, 2012.

²² Andrew H. Myers, *Black White & Olive Drab: Racial Integration at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Charlottesville, VA; University of Virginia Press, 2006), 26.

²³ Lt. Col. Michael Lee Lanning, *The African-American Soldier: From Crispus Attucks to Colin Powell* (Secaucus, NJ; Birch Lane Press, 1997), 172.

²⁴ Myers, *Black White & Olive Drab*, 15.

all their efforts on moving soldiers forward. Not only were the racial policies of the time depriving the United States of its true manpower, but they were also slowing the American war machine down. Without the hindrance of segregation, it is easy to imagine that those resources could have better been spent on training and equipment. Racism and segregation were so deeply engrained in American society that white America was willing to sacrifice the greater good of military efficiency in order to maintain the social practices of the time.

Interestingly, many African Americans' non-confrontational attitude about their social status carried over from civilian life into their initial service. The average African American soldier did not actively oppose segregation, and in fact, in a survey conducted by the Army the majority of black soldiers favored segregation over integration.²⁵ While African American soldiers may have shown a passive mentality when they entered the service, by the time they exited many attitudes had changed.

Despite their eagerness to serve, black soldiers were not immediately sent into combat.²⁶ Military officials were happy to allow African Americans to fill support positions and conduct physical labor throughout the conflict. African Americans were incredibly misrepresented in the combat arms sections of the military, especially the Army.²⁷ However, after months of lobbying, all black combat units started to find their way overseas in 1944.²⁸ Combat was not the only thing waiting for black service members overseas, foreign cultures and customs were waiting to shake their concepts of racial relations.

²⁵ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁶ Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes & Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 56-57.

²⁷ Memorandum to the Under Secretary of War, *Percentage Breakdown of Arms and Services as Proposed for June 30, 1941*, February 7, 1941, 3; Records to the Adjutant's Office 1905-1981; Adjutant General Central Decimal File, 1940-45, Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, MD.

²⁸ Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army*, 130-131.

Many of the African American soldiers had not experienced life outside of America, let alone the American South. Approximately seven hundred thousand African Americans from the South served in some capacity in the Army alone.²⁹ The military destination of most African Americans was the European Theater of Operation. Since the Army was the largest branch of the armed forces, it contained the largest number of African Americans, and the Army's primary area of focus was Europe. This is due to the fact that there was pressure from other governments to keep black soldiers out of colonies held by Axis powers, so as not to influence the local nationals.³⁰ The last thing any western powers wanted to have to do after defeating the Axis powers was face a native uprising. However, one of the all black combat divisions, the 93rd, did go to the Pacific where there was more physical labor than combat waiting for them.³¹

Once they made their way overseas, African Americans experienced a very foreign concept among European people: acceptance. For example, African American soldiers in England experienced a certain level of equality that many never had before. The local English, both civilians and soldiers, treated African Americans as equals despite white soldiers' insinuations to the contrary.³² Englishmen identified black soldiers simply as American, leaving off any racial distinction. Additionally, black soldiers were free to associate with English women, without fear of repercussions.³³ For the first time in many black soldiers' lives, white

²⁹ Army Enlistment Records, Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 - 1946, <http://aad.archives.gov>, accessed July 18, 2012.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

³¹ Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army.*, 138.

³² Report to the G-2 Censorship Branch, European T of Opns, APO 887, US Army, *Inter-Racial Relations 16-31 August 1944*, September 1, 1944, 1-2; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

³³ Report to the G-2 Censorship Branch, European T of Opns, APO 887, US Army, *Inter-Racial Relations, 16-31 August 1944*, September 1, 1944, 1-4; Report to the G-2 Censorship Branch, European T of Opns, APO 640, US Army, *Inter-Racial Relations, 16-31 August 1944*, September 1, 1944, 1-4; Records to the Office of the Secretary of

men across all socio-economic levels treated them as equals. One anonymous black soldier wrote home in reference to the English, "These people over here hate them [white American soldiers] and the people mix with us more than them."³⁴ This was the first time many black soldiers realized that white men were capable of accepting them.³⁵ This level of acceptance must have been very appealing because many African Americans chose to stay or return to Europe at the end of the conflict. Elcee Lucas, to name a particular instance, chose to spend time in England after the war, attending Oxford University.³⁶

The black soldiers' acceptance was not limited to England. As American forces advanced across Europe, African American service members continued to have positive interactions with foreign nationals. James McGill, a black soldier from Florida, was a member of the 1330 Combat Engineer Corp who travelled across Europe. McGill spent a significant amount of time in England and also passed through France, Belgium and Germany. During his travels, he noted that several of the countries he passed through had markedly better race relations than home. McGill noted that English women were both eager and willing to date black Americans. When asked about how French people treated African Americans, McGill responded, "Well, when I was in France, they treated them alright." McGill also noted that the French were happy to associate and trade with the black soldiers.³⁷

War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

³⁴ Anonymous PFC, Report to the G-2 Censorship Branch, European T of Opns, APO 887, US Army, *Inter-Racial Relations, 16-31 August 1944*, September 1, 1944, 1; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

³⁵ Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army*, 202.

³⁶ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 56.

³⁷ James McGill, interview by Lawrence Gordon, May 5, 1981, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

However just as in England, wherever African American soldiers and local nationals interacted, controversy followed. Materials from the U.S. Censor's office provide a fascinating look into soldiers' attitudes at the time. These letters are full of general reports complaining about the overall ineffectiveness of African Americans as soldiers, citing the stereotypical racist views of the time.³⁸ For example a white lieutenant reported, "In general, the colored soldier is lazy, dishonest, untrustworthy, and more animal than human."³⁹ While the racist mentality prevailed among many white service members, African American soldiers' interactions with locals, especially civilian women, only exacerbated the situation. After his return from European battlefields, one white officer submitted a report on the inefficiency of a black transportation unit. The officer claimed the black soldiers intentionally stalled during their duties in order to have relations with white French women.⁴⁰ Whether this officer's report is entirely accurate or not is difficult to tell; however, it is no surprise that the lieutenant linked interracial mingling with a negative report.

Despite segregation and consistently racist attitudes championed by white officers, African Americans still served with honor and distinction. While the incidents are few and far between, some white officers actually praised the contributions of black service members. One

³⁸ Report from anonymous Lieutenant, *Technical and Tactical Information*, Virginia, Army Service Forces Office of Commanding General Washington, DC, January 10, 1945, 2; Captain Robert H. Hutchinson, *Intelligence Report* to Colonel B.C. Jones, December 4, 1944; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

³⁹ Report from Lieutenant R.H. Fletcher, *Technical Intelligence Report*, "White Officer Comments on Colored Troops," Army Service Forces Office of Commanding General Washington, DC, March 1, 1945, 2; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁴⁰ Report from Lieutenant Philip Winiman, *Inefficiency of Colored Troops in Transportation Corps: Potential Danger of Incidents Between White and Colored Soldiers*, Virginia, Army Service Forces Office of Commanding General Washington, DC, February 16, 1945, 1; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

lieutenant provides an objective evaluation of some black troops from the 92nd Infantry Division, an all black combat unit, during the Italian Campaign, "This is the first time any of these men had been under fire; their reaction was quite favorable. They kept cool, followed orders and instructions and there was no sign of panic among them."⁴¹ Coming under fire for the first time is a traumatic experience for any soldier regardless of race, and such a controlled and efficient response is rare even by today's standards. The 92nd Infantry Division even earned praise from other branches of the armed force when they encountered them.⁴²

The black soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division did so well in combat that they earned numerous awards and decorations. One of which was a decoration from the Italian government called the "Croce al Merito di Guerra," that the Italians gave to numerous members of the 92nd Infantry Division.⁴³ Despite the honor and prestige of such decorations, the United States Army was hesitant to allow the individuals to receive the awards. They cited several reasons why the division should not accept the awards, among them was the fact that Italy and the United States were not allies, that the division did not have an exceptional record, and the division was an all black unit.⁴⁴ The only legitimate concern was that the awards were coming from a government that the United States was not allied with, and was classified as a belligerent party in the conflict.

⁴¹ Report from Lieutenant Roy H. Patterson, *Negro Troops*, Virginia, Army Service Forces Office of Commanding General Washington, DC, February 13, 1945,1; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁴² Report from Lieutenant Norton C. Gartenberg, *92nd (Negro) Division*, Virginia, Army Service Forces Office of Commanding General Washington, DC, January 11, 1945; Records to the Adjutant's Office 1905-1981; Adjutant General Central Decimal File, 1940-45, Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁴³ Letter to Commanding General, MTOUSA APO 512, US Army, from Major W.A. Dobbs, *Italian Decorations*, October 22, 1945, 1-4; Records to the Adjutant's Office 1905-1981; Adjutant General Central Decimal File, 1940-45, Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁴⁴ W.S. Paul, Major General, *Proposed Award of Italian " Croce al Merito di Guerra" to the 92nd Infantry Division*, January 28, 1946,1-4; Records to the Adjutant's Office 1905-1981; Adjutant General Central Decimal File, 1940-45, Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, MD.

The other concerns about the award only show how racism even permeated the upper echelons of the United States Military. Just like back home in America, racism was a problem that existed in all levels of the military.

One of the most important aspects about African Americans' foreign interactions is that they had something new to gauge their own culture and way of life against. Black service members now had something that they could compare the American racial system to and deem it inadequate.⁴⁵ Previously, most of the African American soldiers only had an ideological concept of what equality would be, but now they had experienced it firsthand. Once these men had a concrete example of equality, the idea of achieving it became that much more concrete. When these soldiers returned home, they would no longer have the passive mindset that equality was not possible. Their experiences taught them otherwise. The widespread acceptance of African Americans by Europeans was instrumental in transforming their mindset to one of action.

The shift in mindset was not only clear in retrospect. Records show that white soldiers were attuned to the complications that these black soldiers would cause when they returned to the South. In a letter home about a visit to waterhole, one white lieutenant wrote, "The only thing that made it bad was the fact a nigger was swimming... This nigger problem is going to be bad in the states when they get all these 'English' jig-a-boos back in the states... The American army sure did make a mistake by sending all these American Niggers over here."⁴⁶ White soldiers interfered in any way they could while overseas, attempting to intimidate black soldiers,

⁴⁵ Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army*, 198-199.

⁴⁶ Report to the G-2 APO 887, *Inter-Racial Relations, 16-31 August 1944*, 3; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

and even trying to force local nationals to implement means of segregation.⁴⁷ Despite their efforts, American racism was not an idea that white service members could export into their allies' countries. This meant that white American society would have to deal with this issue when black soldiers returned home.

While African Americans were serving overseas, they were not only fighting America's enemies and interacting with locals to change their attitudes about the possibilities for equality, but they were also mastering the skills that the United States military assigned them. When every soldier joins the military, he or she is assigned or chooses (depending on the circumstances of their entry) a MOS, or military occupational specialty. This is essentially the service member's job during his time in the military.⁴⁸ These positions range from rear support (cooks and truck drivers), to direct support (supply and reconnaissance), to combat (infantry and tank crewmembers). As mentioned earlier, it took time for all black combat units to make their way overseas; however, black soldiers were serving in different capacities since the beginning of the war. While these jobs may seem unique to the military war machine, many of these positions have transferable skills that are relevant to civilian life.

Even infantry training, the most combat oriented, provides a unique set of skills. These skills were particularly useful to returning African American veterans when they were faced with violence perpetrated by whites. While lynching transcended regional borders, the thousands of racially motivated incidents in the American South were a scourge on black communities. In the decades leading up to World War II, thousands of African Americans fell victim to the vigilante

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1-4; Report to the G-2 APO 640, *Inter-Racial Relations, 16-31 August 1944*, 1-4; Records to the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948; Racial Situation in the Army, 1940-46, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁴⁸ Harold Wool, *The Military Specialist: Skilled Manpower for the Armed Forces* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 19-20.

mob justice.⁴⁹ These mobs ranged in size from dozens to thousands, and executed unspeakable horrors on African Americans.⁵⁰ In part because of their training and experiences during the war, white southerners were eager to lynch black veterans, especially those in uniform.⁵¹ One incident that caught national attention was the blinding of Isaac Woodard. Woodward was black veteran travelling through the South in uniform that confronted a bus driver who refused to let him use a restroom. At the next stop, Woodward was dragged off the bus and was beat nearly to death, and a police officer "ground out his eyes."⁵² John Gunther a journalist who travelled the South realizing "[t]he effect of World War II is one point worth noting. Almost every victim of lynching since the war has been a veteran."⁵³ Veterans were obviously the cause of this new militancy and resistance, and lynching a black veteran in uniform sent a powerful message.

Despite the somewhat harmonious existence of the two races in Jacksonville, violence was not unheard of, and it only rose with increased activism. When Lucas, Jackson, and Bruce increased their political activism, white extremists acted out to intimidate and discourage political participation. In one instance, Porcher L. Taylor, an editor of a black newspaper that printed articles encouraging African Americans to vote, received several threatening phone calls about what might happen to him if he continued pushing the black community to vote.⁵⁴ In

⁴⁹ James W. Clarke, "Without Fear or Shame: Lynching, Capital Punishment and the Subculture of Violence in the American South," *British Journal of Political Science* 28, no.2 (April 1998): 270-274.

⁵⁰ Katherine Stovel, "Local Sequential Patterns: The Structure of Lynching in the Deep South, 1882-1930," *Social Forces* 79, no. 3 (March 2001):843-845.

⁵¹ Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army*, 202.

⁵² John Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.* (New York: The New Press, 1997)(1947), 686.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 687.

⁵⁴ "Believe Klan in Jax Behind Vote Threats: Registration List Mounts Daily in County," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 20, 1946.

subsequent elections, as the stakes got higher, white extremists escalated their tactics from just threats, attempting to bomb two separate locations where African Americans would go to vote.⁵⁵

After receiving their wartime training, African American veterans had new skills to employ against the violent reception they received from whites. Returning infantry soldiers were proficient in their combat training, especially setting up defensive positions. For instance Field Manual 7-5 (one of the infantry manuals), teaches that one of the keys to defending is "[t]he great stopping power of the infantry weapons, which is increased by the organization of ground, permits wide fronts to be guarded by relatively weak holding elements."⁵⁶ Knowing how to maximize their manpower in order to effectively deter hostile mobs was imperative for returning veterans, through this they were able to provide physical security to their communities. These veterans were able to set up the necessary defensive networks through their understanding of rifle drills, small unit formations, and constructing individual defensive positions.⁵⁷ The beauty of the military system is that every service member received an adequate amount of combat training, and weapons familiarization. This base level training allowed veterans with more combat experience to take command of these other service members and create an effective defensive network.

While these measures may seem a bit extreme (and there are no recorded examples of Jacksonvillians taking these kinds of defensive measures), organized armed resistance to white vigilantes was fairly common in the post-war South.⁵⁸ In some instances, it seemed as if

⁵⁵ "Crudely Made Bomb Thrown at Polling Place in Florida," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 31, 1952.

⁵⁶ *Infantry Field Manual: Organization and Tactics of Infantry; The Rifle Battalion*, FM 7-5 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 72, 99-102, 161-169.

⁵⁸ Parker, *Fighting for Democracy*, 2-3;

returning veterans had left European battlefields only to enter battlefields on the Southern home front. One community in North Carolina is a great example. Ku Klux Klan motorcades often drove through and harassed the black community of Monroe. The veterans put their training combat training to use and "greeted the night riders with sandbag fortifications and a hail of disciplined gunfire."⁵⁹ A similar incident transpired in Columbia, Tennessee. The black community caught wind of a white mob moving on their community and the veterans took action. In fact, "[a]s they heard of the assault and arrests, black veterans pulled out their guns to defend their neighborhood...When other men asked to participate in the community's defense, the veterans showed them how to use weapons and build barricades."⁶⁰ Veterans' combat experience provided African American communities the ability to defend themselves from vigilante white extremists.

In an entirely different skill set, World War II veterans also learned how to function within a large bureaucracy gaining skills coveted in the civilian world, training and education that may have been hard for some individuals to come by if not for their military service. Up until World War II, the structure of the United States military revolved around ground combat with minimal support roles. The technological strides made in the interwar period forced the United States military to reconfigure their whole scheme, placing more men in support roles less

In terms of local conditions, after World War I a group of African American veterans formed the League for Democracy in Jacksonville. One of the primary goals of this organization was to provide defense against lynching and other forms of white violence. Veterans of subsequent wars remained active in the organization. See, Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 161.

⁵⁹ Timothy Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power,' and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle," *The Journal of American History* 85, no.2 (September 1998): 551.

⁶⁰ Kimberly L. Philips, *War! What is it Good for? Black Freedom Struggles & the U.S. Military: From World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 93.

associated with direct combat.⁶¹ Equipment like tanks, airplanes, and anti-artillery pieces needed whole teams of men with extensive training to understand the intricacies of their operation.⁶² The American war effort needed a lot more than beans and bullets to keep it on the move; and as a result, a large support network developed to ensure supplies and resources made it to where they needed to go. This resulted in a massive growth in the noncombat sections of the military, and by the end of the war only 24.1 percent of the entire Department of Defense were individuals associated with ground combat. Even the Army, the branch with the largest proportion of ground combat forces, was only comprised of 39.3 percent combat arms.⁶³ This new military structure equipped its service members with valuable skills. The military was giving this training away in unprecedented numbers, even to African Americans.

An excellent illustration of the kind of real-world applicable skills provided in the military is supply and clerical positions, otherwise known as quartermaster. While it is easy to overlook the importance of support roles, the bottom line is that "[t]he mission of the Quartermaster Corps is to assure the successful operation of the Army of the United States by accomplishing efficiently and economically the general function of providing food, clothing, equipment, housing, transportation, and similar services assigned to the corps by law or regulation."⁶⁴ Working within the quartermaster capacity necessitated the individuals learned how to keep books, facilitate transactions, manage money, and meet a deadline.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Wool, *The Military Specialist*, 19-20.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁴ *Quartermaster Field Manual: Quartermaster Operations*, FM 10-5 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

These skills are extremely valuable in the civilian market, especially in the professional environment and were also central to skills needed by civil rights organizations. This phenomena is best illustrated by the experiences of a quartermaster named Aaron Henry, who rose to a prominent national leadership position in the NAACP. Henry was one of the founding members of his local NAACP chapter.⁶⁶ Henry's organizational and administrative skills from his time as a quartermaster came in handy in establishing and running the organization. In fact, other NAACP officials recognized Henry's work and competency, earning him higher and higher positions over the years.⁶⁷ Henry also utilized his clerical and organizational skills to establish and help a run a democratic organization called the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.⁶⁸ Henry stuck with the organization and remained a pivotal leader in Mississippi. He was even elected as a state representative in Mississippi. While organization and supply skills were not the focal point of the war, they were the skills that carried over into the civilian world, and drove the Civil Rights Movement.

Another military occupational specialty that helped veterans in the post war period is reconnaissance. While there are different forms of reconnaissance across the different branches of the armed forces, the ultimate goal is "to secure details of hostile organization, strength, and dispositions, the characterizations of terrain, and other information upon which to base a plan of action."⁶⁹ An individual in this position would conduct missions to acquire information via ground scouts, or even other assets like aerial photography. They would then assess this

⁶⁶ Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 73, 101-102.

⁶⁸ Parker, *Fighting for Democracy*. 112-113.

⁶⁹ *Cavalry: Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop Mechanized*, FM 2-20 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1944), 2.

information, and determine the overall strength and weaknesses of the enemy. A member of the reconnaissance branch would then take that information and compare it against his own unit's assets to help develop a plan of action. The ultimate goal is to find a way to pit your strengths against their weaknesses. Essentially reconnaissance is the process of gathering and collating information in order to understand the conditions you are facing, form a strategy based on those findings, and accomplish a goal.

In Jacksonville, Elcee Lucas turned his experience as a reconnaissance officer into an extremely successful voter registration drive. Increasing voter registration was a vital strategy to increase African American political action and representation. African Americans needed to utilize their demographic power and vote in order to produce any form of substantial change. What made convincing African Americans to vote difficult was the element of danger involved. Voting was a very visible action, which required African Americans to be in a specific place at a specific time—a risky endeavor.⁷⁰ Nationally, the years between 1940 and 1950 saw monumental increases in African American voter registration.⁷¹ In Jacksonville, Lucas "registered over 18,000 African-American voters" in just a nine-month period.⁷² Considering the African American population was approximately 67,000 in 1945, that means Lucas registered over a quarter of the target population, an amazing feat.⁷³

Lucas was able to accomplish his fast paced efficient registration drive because of his training and experience as an Army reconnaissance officer in World War II.⁷⁴ Running a registration drive required Lucas to identify areas with substantial numbers of unregistered voters

⁷⁰ Parker, *Fighting for Democracy*, 182, 192.

⁷¹ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 18; Parker, *Fighting for Democracy*, 179.

⁷² Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 36.

⁷³ Survey Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, *Jacksonville Looks at its Negro Community*, 1.

⁷⁴ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 37.

who were likely to support his political goals. Additionally, Lucas would have to organize a canvassing effort in order to cover the identified area.⁷⁵ While in combat, Lucas would have had to collect data like photographs of enemy encampments, and reports from patrols. He would then have to assemble this information, and help determine the most economical use of force to accomplish the mission. In the registration drive, Lucas had to collect relevant information like census data and voter registration records. Once he obtained these documents, Lucas could then analyze them and determine which neighborhoods would yield the best results. From there he could formulate a strategy and disperse his manpower in the most efficient manner. Without his military training and experience, it is difficult to imagine Elcee Lucas accomplishing this task. After all, Lucas himself attributed the military for the development of the relevant skills.⁷⁶

More generally, the military drilled a certain mentality and mindset into its soldiers. In the Basic Field Manual for Military Training, it lists several qualities to be developed. Some of the more notable traits are discipline, initiative, adaptability, and leadership.⁷⁷ While veterans may not have realized it, the development of these qualities was instrumental to their postwar ambitions. Men like Ernest Jackson and Elcee Lucas embodied these characteristics in nearly all of their actions. Generally, when people think of discipline and the military they picture soldiers standing motionless in formation, or their ability to take verbal abuse from superiors. In actuality, discipline has another meaning, it is the ability to stick to a task despite the distractions and see it through until completion.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Daniel M. Gaby and Merle H. Treusch, *Election Campaign Handbook* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 213-220.

⁷⁶ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 37.

⁷⁷ *Basic Field Manual: Military Training*, FM 21-5 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

Initiative is simply defined as "an introductory step."⁷⁹ In the military, this means acting without requiring specific instruction, and doing what is required. The emphasis of this characteristic by the military ensured that individuals were always proactively looking for the next step. The ability to adapt despite obstacles and accomplish a task is another trait that was ingrained in every service member. There is never an excuse for any soldier not to accomplish his mission, they are expected to adapt and overcome. A great example would be a supply sergeant preparing for his unit to enter combat. The sergeant may have enough rations for his company for two days, but they are expected to be on the line for five days. The supply sergeant does not simply concede defeat or throw up his arms, but finds a way to acquire the supplies his unit needs to complete their assignment.

Additionally, leadership is another important trait that the military instilled in its members regardless of rank. Leadership is not only the mastery of these other skills, but also the ability to delegate appropriately and inspire others.⁸⁰ Elcee Lucas, Ernest Jackson, and Samuel Bruce were all men that embodied this trait in Jacksonville during the postwar period. Elcee Lucas led a voter registration drive, and used his leadership abilities to orchestrate political campaigns. Ernest Jackson led a legally based national movement attacking the disparity in sentencing. Furthermore, Jackson and Samuel Bruce stepped in front of their communities to run for political office, accepting the potential repercussions, in order to lead them through political representation. Dr. Abel Bartley, the leading scholar on Jacksonville in this era points out that "[t]he most important difference in Jacksonville when compared with other Southern African

⁷⁹ *Merriam-Webster*, online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/initiative> (accessed June 9, 2102).

⁸⁰ *Basic Field Manual*, 7,10.

American communities is the quality of the African American leadership."⁸¹ Leadership is essential for any movement that seeks to unify a community in order to accomplish a common goal.

While the list of transferable skills that service members acquired could be expanded here, it was not the only benefit they gained from their service. Returning soldiers, both black and white had access to a government-funded college education in the form of the G.I. Bill. "The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944" (the G.I. Bill's official name) provided a multitude of benefits to all veterans including unemployment compensation, educational funding, and aid in purchasing homes.⁸² One scholar explains that this legislation "was indeed a landmark in the public policy of this nation. It grew out of a crisis situation and provided an answer to the immediate challenge—demobilization, but it also assisted the country in finding solutions to many other challenges, and its influence continues to be felt today."⁸³

Veterans flocked to receive their higher education in unprecedented numbers. By 1947, nearly half of matriculating college students were World War II veterans.⁸⁴ The education benefits permitted many individuals to attend college who otherwise would have been unable to, especially African Americans.⁸⁵ By 1950 African American veterans brought black enrollment to twice the rate it was in the prewar period in the South alone.⁸⁶ Access to college education was monumental in a society where completing grammar or high school was an exception in

⁸¹ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 5.

⁸² Milton Greenberg, *The GI Bill: The Law That Changed America* (New York: Lickle Publishing, 1997), 9.

⁸³ Theodore R. Mosch, *The G.I. Bill: A Breakthrough in Educational and Social Policy in the United States* (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1975), 2.

⁸⁴ Altschuler and Blumin, *A New Deal for Veterans*, 86.

⁸⁵ Greenberg, *The Law that Changed America*, 36.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 98,102.

itself.⁸⁷ In order to gain the equality that they desired, African Americans worked to capitalize on any education opportunities that they could.

Statistically a greater proportion of black veterans used their education benefits than their white counterparts. While the number of African Americans attending college greatly increased, it was still a small portion of the population. Those who managed to find their way into universities were generally from the upper echelons of black society, otherwise known as the talented tenth. A large proportion of African Americans used their education benefits in programs classified as below the college level.⁸⁸ Black veterans frequently attended trade schools, and basic education programs. These education benefits ensured that returning veterans could compete in the job market, and even join the growing American middle class.⁸⁹

Unintentionally, the G.I. Bill helped buttress the careers of people central to the Civil Rights Movement. Elcee Lucas capitalized on the G.I. Bill in order to finish his education after exiting the service in January of 1946.⁹⁰ He graduated from Florida A&M in 1946, and later studied journalism at Oxford and Northwestern Universities.⁹¹ Lucas not only had a college education, but spent time at prestigious institutions. This experience would prove vital in Lucas' later endeavors, especially with his ability to identify with the established and influential portion of the African American community.⁹² After all, Armstrong failed to win the 1947 city council election because of his inability to secure the support of the affluent portion of the African

⁸⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁸ Altschuler and Blumin, *A New Deal for Veterans*, 129.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Elcee Lucas Final Payment Worksheet, *War Department Form 372 A*, January 13, 1946.

⁹¹ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 56.

⁹² Ibid.

American community.⁹³ Since Lucas had a quality higher education, he was someone that the elite members of his community could listen to and get behind.

Those who were members of the talented tenth already also utilized their G.I. Bill benefits and elevated themselves even further, going on to graduate level programs. Many veterans who sought to make a difference in their community and the Civil Rights Movement earned law degrees, including Ernest Jackson. Jackson utilized his education benefits to attend Howard University, earning his bachelors degree in 1950, and his juris doctor in 1953.⁹⁴ Jackson was admitted to the Florida bar later in 1953.⁹⁵

Almost immediately after his admission, Jackson started taking on Civil Rights cases, seeking to expose the disparity in the treatment of blacks and whites by the local court system. In order to do this Jackson helped black men convicted of rape appeal their convictions.⁹⁶ However, Jackson's ultimate goal was never to overturn any of their convictions. Through his argument, Jackson hoped to expose the fact that the juries discriminated against African Americans by consistently sentencing them with the harshest penalty possible—the death penalty. Citing variations of the same statistics from year to year, Jackson argued that over a twenty-year period, the state executed approximately twenty African American males for rape, while only executing one white male in the same period for the same crime.⁹⁷ This disparity in sentencing showed that African Americans were not receiving equal protection under the law.

⁹³ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 29-30.

⁹⁴ Tewodros Adebbe, Howard University Archive assistant office, contacted May 31, 2012.

⁹⁵ Florida Bar Association, Member Directory, www.floridabar.org, accessed May 25, 2012.

⁹⁶ *State of Florida v. Jimmie Lee Thomas* 92 So. 2d 621 (Sup Ct Fla 1957); *State of Florida ex rel. Johnson v. Mayo* 69 So. 2d 307 (Sup Ct Fla 1954); *State of Florida ex rel. Charlie Copeland Jr. v. Mayo* 87 So. 2d 501 (Sup Ct Fla 1956).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Jackson pioneered this tactic and became a leader in the national arena. One legal historian, Eric Rise explains that "[e]qual protection challenges to capital punishment persisted through the 1950s. The most comprehensive effort was undertaken by Ernest D. Jackson, a Jacksonville lawyer and graduate of Howard law school who advanced the argument twice before the Supreme Court of Florida and once in federal appeals court."⁹⁸ Ernest Jackson's legal work transcended the entire country, acting as a leader and influencing lawyers across the country. Unfortunately, the Florida courts failed to address the larger issue and chose to make their decisions based on the individual cases' facts and merits, rather than a more holistic remedy.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, Jackson managed to create a united front that drew attention to the judicial inadequacies in American society.

Additionally, Ernest Jackson not only sought to reveal the disparities in the judicial system, but also attacked segregation in Jacksonville. In 1958 black golfers were allowed to play on the municipal golf courses only on designated days; however, when a group of African Americans' round was cancelled due to inclement weather they were denied access on a subsequent day.¹⁰⁰ The golfers were attempting to qualify for a tournament and now that opportunity was denied to them. Jackson used this example of unequal treatment to try to force the city to open the courses up to black golfers on a daily basis.¹⁰¹ In order to avoid the issue, the city sought an alternate course of action. In essence, the city colluded with private individuals to purchase the facilities, thus turning a public course private and restricting access for African

⁹⁸ Eric W. Rise, *The Martinsville Seven: Race, Rape, and Capital Punishment* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 156.

⁹⁹ *State of Florida v. Thomas*; *State of Florida ex rel. Johnson v. Mayo*; *State of Florida ex rel. Charlie Copeland Jr. v. Mayo*.

¹⁰⁰ "4 Negro Golfers Refused Tickets on Two Courses," *Atlanta Daily World*, June 25, 1958.

¹⁰¹ "Daily Golf Course Use Sought," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 5, 1958.

Americans. When the city of Jacksonville started taking bids to sell the public golf courses in order to avoid integration, Ernest Jackson threatened legal action.¹⁰²

Jackson took the case to the appellate level where the court decided in his favor. As the decision stated, "The inclusion of a restrictive covenant with a reversionary clause if the properties were not continued as golf courses rendered the purchasers state agents and the operation of the golf courses state action."¹⁰³ Essentially, when the private individuals purchased the golf courses, they did so under the condition that they had to operate them for the well-being of the public. Thus, they became agents of the state and gave up certain privileges that private business owners might have had. Through Jackson's tenacious efforts, he not only opened up golf courses for African Americans but help set a powerful precedent. This ruling ensured that Jacksonville's white politicians could not simply privatize facilities in order to avoid integration. This victory against segregation and his nationally recognized efforts to fight unequal treatment were all facilitated by Jackson's military service: the G.I. Bill provided Jackson with fiscal support to earn his degrees and jump into activism.

Both Ernest Jackson and Elcee Lucas lists of accomplishments are very impressive individually; however when they worked in concert they changed Jacksonville, forever. Both men recognized the importance of attaining political representation for the African American community. Even white politicians in the region were starting to recognize the importance and difference that black votes could make. In fact, Senator Claude Pepper a more liberal senator "became the first White political leader on the state level to campaign openly for African-

¹⁰² "Jacksonville May Get Suit Attacking Recreational Bias," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 24, 1959.

¹⁰³ *City of Jacksonville, Florida v. Frank Hampton et al.* 304 F.2d 320 (US App 1962).

American support."¹⁰⁴ When faced with criticism from his opponents, Senator Pepper did not dodge the issue of campaigning for black votes. Additionally Senator Pepper was a big supporter of increased veterans' benefits.¹⁰⁵ These aspects must have made the senator a very attractive candidate for politically involved veterans like Lucas and Jackson. After all, the African American community had earlier success aligning themselves with willing democrats.

African Americans in Jacksonville were enthusiastic to support Senator Pepper. In fact, Pepper's 1950 campaign prompted Elcee Lucas' massive voter registration drive.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, Senator Pepper was defeated in the 1950 election. One of the primary reasons for Pepper's loss was his policy on race relations. His opposition labeled him a communist because of his stance on integration and other issues, a common tactic at the time.¹⁰⁷ For Jacksonville, the Pepper campaign was important because it provided the unity that the African American community needed in the political arena. While the campaign did not win, it created a black political machine with experience that was prepared to keep fighting.

Pepper's loss did not deter Jacksonville activists; in fact, it seemed to invigorate them. With new black voter numbers to back them, two African Americans ran for city council in 1951.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, in order to mitigate the strength of the new black voting numbers, the city of Jacksonville switched from a ward based voting system to an at large system. Before the change individual wards elected their city council representatives, now the entire city could vote for every city council position, eliminating the advantage of African American majorities in

¹⁰⁴ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Senator Claude Pepper, Campaign Speech, May 24, 1950.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Douglas Price, *The Negro and Southern Politics: A Chapter of Florida History* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957), 60; Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Claude Denson Pepper and Hays Gorey, *Pepper: Eyewitness to a Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1987), 197-214.

¹⁰⁸ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 36.

certain districts.¹⁰⁹ The statement that African Americans needed representation outweighed the inevitable defeat. Knowing that he had the image the African American community would embrace, Elcee Lucas took up the challenge of running for office.¹¹⁰

Lucas was right about being a candidate that the black community could get behind. His education, military service, and experience made him an attractive prospect. He did well enough in the primary to force a runoff with the incumbent. In fact, his numbers suggest that Lucas managed to secure a portion of the white vote.¹¹¹ Despite his eventual loss, Lucas succeeded in setting the example that the African American community was both willing and able to get behind a candidate of their own. After his defeat, Lucas redirected his efforts, putting his military training to use once again, investigating various government offices and attempting to identify the most vulnerable to an African American assault, just as he would against the German line on a French battlefield.¹¹²

Eventually, Elcee Lucas identified a position most likely to succumb to their efforts. Justice of the Peace was a less visible position, and occupied by Sarah Bryan, a woman.¹¹³ Now that African American activists had identified the position, they needed to select the strongest candidate. Ernest Jackson was selected and announced his candidacy for the 1956 second district Justice of the Peace election.¹¹⁴ Jackson's status as a lawyer surely aided in his marketability as a political candidate because of his understanding of the legal system. However,

¹⁰⁹ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 60.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56, 59.

¹¹¹ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 38.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹³ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 108.

¹¹⁴ "Ernest D. Jackson in Race for Justice of the Peace Post," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, March 31, 1956.

Ernest Jackson was not alone, "Lucas agreed to serve as Jackson's campaign manager and helped devise strategy."¹¹⁵ Once again, Lucas' strategic and organizational skills proved invaluable.

When these two veterans finally paired together, they broke through a barrier that African Americans had not been able to since Reconstruction. Jackson won the primary, securing his position as a democrat in the general election. The first person that he thanked was his invaluable campaign manager—Elcee Lucas.¹¹⁶ They managed this victory through a calculated and proven technique. Jackson's team borrowed a page from the Lucas playbook, and pushed another voter registration drive, getting more African Americans involved. Additionally, Lucas recognized that what the Jackson effort needed was publicity, and capital to get it. Once again Lucas found a deficiency and fixed it, securing funding from several local businessmen.¹¹⁷ Now they were able to secure the attention that they needed to mobilize the community to vote.¹¹⁸ When these two veterans combined their skills and experience, they were able to accomplish what no other black citizen had been able to in Jacksonville for several decades.

Unfortunately, even the justice of the peace position was too valuable for the white community to let go. The white democrat community used this instance to challenge the legality of the districts lines, despite the fact that they were unchanged in Bryan's twenty-two years in that position.¹¹⁹ No position was too small, and no cost was too high to prevent African Americans from participating in local government. The discrepancy worked its way to the

¹¹⁵ Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 49.

¹¹⁶ "Jackson is the First Negro Nominated in Forty Years," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, May 12, 1956.

¹¹⁷ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 111-112.

¹¹⁸ Jay Jay, "Chips Off the Blocks," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, May 5, 1956.

¹¹⁹ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 112-113.

Florida Supreme Court, where the election results were discarded, leaving the Democratic Party to choose the candidate.¹²⁰ The party chose Sarah Bryan, and not Ernest Jackson.

However, this slap in the face did not deter Jackson and Lucas, who continued their efforts, campaigning as a write in candidate, after a failed petition to add his name to the ballot.¹²¹ While Jackson suffered defeat during the general election, his numbers were admirable. Historian Abel Bartley notes, "Despite the difficulty in voting for write-in candidates Jackson garnered significant support. Some Whites had voted for him as well, signifying they too realized that an injustice had been perpetrated."¹²² Jackson's and Lucas' military mentality ensured they did not accept defeat, but continued the fight by whatever means that they could.

After their defeat, Jackson and Lucas did not skip a beat, reorienting their sights on the next target—the 1959 city council elections.¹²³ However, Jackson and Lucas would not be the only veterans active in this election. Samuel Bruce, a marine veteran, entered into the city council election in a different district.¹²⁴ Jackson's previous primary victory apparently resonated with other veterans, inspiring them to run for elected office. Jackson proved that African American veterans had the image and experience necessary to earn not only the black, but also the white vote. It was not until after Jackson's victory that Bruce decided to throw his hat into the ring for a city council position. While this was Bruce's first run for public office, he was a successful local businessman that had been active in civil affairs. Bruce resided in and was going to represent a different portion of the city than Jackson and his team.¹²⁵ Bruce

¹²⁰ Ibid., 112-114.

¹²¹ "Jackson Will Run as 'Write in,'" *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, October 6, 1956.

¹²² Bartley, *Keeping the Faith*, 51.

¹²³ Bartley, "Jacksonville: The Critical Years," 114-115.

¹²⁴ "Vote for Fair Representation," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, April 11, 1959.

¹²⁵ "Samuel Bruce Gains Support for Council," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, April 11, 1959.

provided a unique opportunity in that now he brought another section of Jacksonville's African Americans into the political arena. With the at large voting system, Bruce's introduction to politics aided the black community in that it brought more voters to the polls. With the at large voting system, those who went to the polls to support Bruce could vote for Jackson and vice versa. Now African Americans had unprecedented voting strength.¹²⁶

The African American community was developing a political conscience, and veterans were the leaders.¹²⁷ Nothing illustrates this idea better than the 1959 election results. Both Jackson and Bruce did so well in the primary elections that they both had to go into run-off elections.¹²⁸ Once again, veterans proved themselves the most viable and attractive candidates. Bruce was already a prominent leader in his community. Not only was he president of the Eastside Civic Club, and previous president of the Long Branch PTA, but also a Scout Master for the local boy scouts.¹²⁹ He also took a rather cordial tone toward his opponent, the incumbent James Peeler. In one article Bruce expresses his feelings towards Peeler, the incumbent, "I only hope I can do as good a job for all the people as he did...I think the people owe it to Mr. Peeler to let him take a rest now after more than 20 years of service."¹³⁰ Instead of focusing on the issue of a need for African American representation, Bruce shifted the focus on wanting to do the job well. Tactics like this helped him come across as less confrontational, and as someone who was committed to civil service. Once again, black veterans proved palatable enough for some of

¹²⁶ "Fears of Negro Domination of City Government Sounded," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, April 12, 1959.

¹²⁷ Chuck Payne, "Black 'Bloc' White Worry," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, May 2, 1959.

¹²⁸ Eric O. Simpson, "Politics as Usual," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, May 2, 1959.

¹²⁹ "Samuel Bruce Gains Support for Council," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, April 11, 1959.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

the white community to vote for. Bruce was such an appealing option that he even managed to capture a portion of the white vote during the primary.¹³¹

The beginning of the 1960s saw a shift in the Civil Rights Movement, especially in Jacksonville. While the veterans and their generation focused on legal attacks and political representation, new tactics emerged with the younger generation. Many youths adapted the tactics of non-violent protest, sitting at counters in segregated facilities.¹³² Nineteen-sixty also saw an increase in tension in Jacksonville as a result of increased activism. Violence emerged between African American activists and the white community.¹³³ The worst and most notorious of these events was axe-handle Saturday. A riot broke out in downtown Jacksonville after a demonstration, and disgruntled white men armed themselves with baseball bats and axe-handles to suppress and punish the black people present.¹³⁴ The Civil Rights Movement was clearly moving in a new direction, which was bringing mass attention to the indignities that the African American community suffered.

While non-violent protests and racial violence are the highlights of the Civil Rights Movement that most people are familiar with, there is a reason they did not transpire until 1960. A foundation needed to be laid for these events to take place. African American World War II veterans fulfilled this grassroots portion of the process. For fifteen years, veterans put the skills and benefits they acquired in the military to not only help organize the movement but also test the existing racial system. While Ernest Jackson, Elcee Lucas, and Samuel Bruce, were just a

¹³¹ "Samuel Bruce Pays Tribute to Peeler," *Florida Star* insert of the *Florida Times Union*, May 2, 1959.

¹³² "Demonstrations Made at Counters in Jacksonville," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 19, 1960; "Students Stage Demonstration in Jacksonville," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 16, 1960.

¹³³ "Racial Incidents Flare Up, Bring Jacksonville Woe," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 27, 1960; "Boy Claims Beating in Jacksonville, Fl.," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 9, 1960.

¹³⁴ "Throngs Mill and Crash in Jacksonville Disorder," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 18, 1960; "FBI Watching Jacksonville," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 31, 1960.

few of the big players in the Jacksonville scene, thousands of other veterans contributed in numerous fashions.

Regardless of branch of service or military occupation specialty, veterans were forever changed by their military service. While many of these men may have been discontent with the racial situation at home, their service gave them the means to act on it. The basic military lifestyle engrained values and practices in these men that taught them to confront problems, and overcome difficulty and obstacles. The military continued its influence on these men when it sent them overseas. Men honed their individual military skills and experienced foreign cultures. For the first time, many of these men saw and felt what living in equality with white people was like. When black service members returned home they were invigorated with their experience and skills, and immediately set to work. While the period between 1945 and 1960 did not see the end of segregation and discrimination in Jacksonville, it did see monumental strides in allowing that time to come. These men were part of the much broader Civil Rights Movement. Without the actions and contributions of returning African American veterans it is difficult to imagine the explosive results that followed in the 1960s and 1970s.

Understanding the full range of any historically significant event is a difficult task. Continued investigation and interrogation of events is essential to have the most complete understanding possible. Often it is easy for society to forget the more humble narratives, or allow the titans of history to overshadow them. The veterans' stories are often in the category that is eclipsed, sometimes even by their own military achievements. Wartime efforts are not the end of the story for those involved, but only the beginning. It is important to keep this in mind as America has created yet another generation of young veterans. With the War on Terror drawing

to a close, we must remember that these young men and women have been irrevocably changed, and are yet to leave their true mark on society.

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