Barrage Balloons

These balloons, known as barrage balloons, may seem, at first glance, out of place in a major military invasion.

They were, however, vital to the operation and were brought ashore in the D-Day invasion’s first wave by the brave men of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, the only unit comprised entirely of African-American soldiers to storm the beach.

They provided critical protection to the ships and soldiers below from attacks by enemy aircraft.
The Department of Defense is commemorating the 75th Anniversary of World War II by recognizing the contributions and sacrifices made by Service members as well as those who served on the home front.

During the anniversary, we pay tribute to those Americans who undauntedly and courageously contributed to the defense of our nation. This month we honor the valiant efforts of African Americans.

Dear World War II Service Member,


With great respect,

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Over 2.5 million African-American men registered for the draft. The wartime emergency opened a wide range of employment opportunities for women, both in defense industries and the military.

In shipyards and factories devoted to the war effort, women built Liberty ships, bombers, and tanks, as well as manufacturing munitions and other war supplies. Others ran streetcars and buses, piloted airplanes, and did men’s jobs on the farm and in offices.
The “Six Triple Eight” had a specific mission: to sort and clear a two-year backlog of mail for Americans stationed in Europe. Between the Army, Navy, Air Force, Red Cross, and uniformed civilian specialists, that amounted to seven million people awaiting their mail!

Women’s Army Corps 6888 Central Postal Directory Battalion
First all African-American, all female unit to serve overseas in World War II

NO MAIL, LOW MORAL

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They kept track of seven million identification cards with serial numbers to distinguish between soldiers with the same names (there were 7,500 soldiers named Robert Smith in the European Theater of Operations!).

These women did far more than distribute letters and packages. As the largest contingent of Black women to ever serve overseas, they dispelled stereotypes and represented a change in racial and gender roles in the military.

The 6888 had the daunting challenge of sorting the 90 billion pieces of mail! Divided into three, separate, 8-hour shifts, the women worked around the clock, seven days a week.