

This Day in History... October 25, 1940

Benjamin Davis Becomes First African American General In The U.S. Army

On October 25, 1940, Benjamin O. Davis Sr. was appointed the first African American general in US Army. He was a driving force behind the desegregation of the Army, which was finally achieved just days after his retirement.

Davis was reportedly born on July 1, 1877, in Washington, DC. That's the date of birth he gave the Army when he enlisted, and it appears on his gravestone. However, biographer Marvin Fletcher cites a June 1880 census that he believes shows Davis was born on May 28, 1880. Fletcher has suggested that Davis lied about his birthdate so he could enlist in the Army without getting his parents' permission.

While in high school, Davis participated in a cadet program that included military drills and ceremonies, ultimately reaching the rank of captain. When he was a senior in high school, Davis took courses at Howard University. His parents wanted him to go to college, but Davis wanted to join the military.



Davis served in one of the first Buffalo Soldier regiments.

After the Spanish-American War broke out, Davis joined the Army on July 13, 1898. He was made a temporary first lieutenant with the 8th Volunteer Infantry. During the war he also served with the 1st Separate Battalion of the Washington, DC, National Guard. Mustered out in March 1899, Davis enlisted as a private with the 9th Cavalry Regiment, one of the first Buffalo Soldier regiments. In 1900, he served under Lieutenant Charles Young, the only African American officer in the military at the time. Young encouraged Davis to become an officer and tutored him on all the information that was on the officer candidate test. Davis passed and was commissioned a second lieutenant on February 2, 1901.

Davis served as a professor of Military Science and Tactics at Wilberforce College for four years. In 1909, he was sent to Liberia to work as a military attaché reporting on their military forces. In 1913, he served with the 9th Cavalry patrolling the US-Mexico border. Davis returned to teaching at Wilberforce in 1915 and then reported to the Philippines where he was a supply officer and commander. Davis spent much of the 1920s and 30s teaching at the Tuskegee Institute and Wilberforce and instructing the Ohio National Guard. He spent his summers between 1930 and 1933 assisting Gold Star mothers and widows on their visits to the graves of their fallen loved ones in Europe.

Davis made history on October 25, 1940, when he was promoted to brigadier general – making him the first African American general in the US Army. The following January, he was made commanding general of the 4th Cavalry Brigade, 2nd Cavalry Division. Later that year, he was made an assistant in the Office of the Inspector General. Throughout the war, Davis traveled to Europe to inspect African American units. As an adviser on race relations, he championed the idea of an all-inclusive armed services.



Truman's Executive Order 9981 called for the end of discrimination and segregation in the US armed forces.

On July 26, 1948, six days after Davis retired, President Truman issued the order ending racial discrimination in the military. Davis's awards during his 50-year military career include the Bronze Star, Distinguished Service Medal, French Croix de Guerre, and the Liberian Star of Africa.

In retirement, Davis worked with the American Battle Monuments Commission before his death on November 26, 1970.



Stamp pictures Davis on an inspection tour of the American front in France in 1944.



Davis escorted Gold Star mothers to World War I gravesites in Europe.

This Day in History... October 25, 1940

Benjamin Davis Becomes First African American General In The U.S. Army

On October 25, 1940, Benjamin O. Davis Sr. was appointed the first African American general in US Army. He was a driving force behind the desegregation of the Army, which was finally achieved just days after his retirement.

Davis was reportedly born on July 1, 1877, in Washington, DC. That's the date of birth he gave the Army when he enlisted, and it appears on his gravestone. However, biographer Marvin Fletcher cites a June 1880 census that he believes shows Davis was born on May 28, 1880. Fletcher has suggested that Davis lied about his birthdate so he could enlist in the Army without getting his parents' permission.

While in high school, Davis participated in a cadet program that included military drills and ceremonies, ultimately reaching the rank of captain. When he was a senior in high school, Davis took courses at Howard University. His parents wanted him to go to college, but Davis wanted to join the military.



Davis served in one of the first Buffalo Soldier regiments.

After the Spanish-American War broke out, Davis joined the Army on July 13, 1898. He was made a temporary first lieutenant with the 8th Volunteer Infantry. During the war he also served with the 1st Separate Battalion of the Washington, DC, National Guard. Mustered out in March 1899, Davis enlisted as a private with the 9th Cavalry Regiment, one of the first Buffalo Soldier regiments. In 1900, he served under Lieutenant Charles Young, the only African American officer in the military at the time. Young encouraged Davis to become an officer and tutored him on all the information that was on the officer candidate test. Davis passed and was

commissioned a second lieutenant on February 2, 1901.

Davis served as a professor of Military Science and Tactics at Wilberforce College for four years. In 1909, he was sent to Liberia to work as a military attaché reporting on their military forces. In 1913, he served with the 9th Cavalry patrolling the US-Mexico border. Davis returned to teaching at Wilberforce in 1915 and then reported to the Philippines where he was a supply officer and commander. Davis spent much of the 1920s and 30s teaching at the Tuskegee Institute and Wilberforce and instructing the Ohio National Guard. He spent his summers between 1930 and 1933 assisting Gold Star mothers and widows on their visits to the graves of their fallen loved ones in Europe.

Davis made history on October 25, 1940, when he was promoted to brigadier general – making him the first African American general in the US Army. The following January, he was made commanding general of the 4th Cavalry Brigade, 2nd Cavalry Division. Later that year, he was made an assistant



Truman's Executive Order 9981 called for the end of discrimination and segregation in the US armed forces.

in the Office of the Inspector General. Throughout the war, Davis traveled to Europe to inspect African American units. As an adviser on race relations, he championed the idea of an all-inclusive armed services. On July 26, 1948, six days after Davis retired, President Truman issued the order ending racial discrimination in the military. Davis's awards during his 50-year military career include the Bronze Star, Distinguished Service Medal, French Croix de Guerre, and the Liberian Star of Africa.

In retirement, Davis worked with the American Battle Monuments Commission before his death on November 26, 1970.



Stamp pictures Davis on an inspection tour of the American front in France in 1944.



Davis escorted Gold Star mothers to World War I gravesites in Europe.