



Harlem's Hell Fighters: The African-American 369th Infantry in World War I

Stephen Harris

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When the United States entered World War I in 1917, thousands of African-American men volunteered to fight for a country that granted them only limited civil rights. Many from New York City joined the 15th N.Y. Infantry, a National Guard regiment later designated the 369th U.S. Infantry. Led by mostly inexperienced white and black officers, these men not only received little instruction at their training camp in South Carolina but were frequent victims of racial harassment from both civilians and their white comrades. Once in France, they initially served as laborers, all while chafing to prove their worth as American soldiers.

Then they got their chance. The 369th became one of the few U.S. units that American commanding general John J. Pershing agreed to let serve under French command. Donning French uniforms and taking up French rifles, the men of the 369th fought valiantly alongside French Moroccans and held one of the widest sectors on the Western Front. The entire regiment was awarded the Croix de Guerre, the French government's highest military honor. Stephen L. Harris's accounts of the valor of a number of individual soldiers make for exciting reading, especially that of Henry Johnson, who defended himself against an entire German squad with a large knife. After reading this book, you will know why the Germans feared the black men of the 369th and why the French called them "hell fighters."

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