


THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS

Remembering the 369th Infantry Regiment

Education Guide



For many soldiers and citizens, participation in World War I was a chance to contribute to the fight for democracy. The 369th Infantry Regiment, also known as the “Harlem Hellfighters” or “Rattlers” distinguished themselves during the Great War. This African American regiment, originally the 15th New York National Guard, was organized as the 369th Infantry Regiment during World War I. The 369th trained in New York and at Camp Wadsworth in Spartanburg, South Carolina. In South Carolina the regiment experienced racism and discrimination from local communities, yet they remained determined to contribute to the war effort.

In April 1918 the soldiers of the 369th were assigned by General John Pershing to serve in the American Expeditionary Forces and then to the 16th Division of the French Army. The 369th served with excellence. The first American unit to reach the Rhine, they spent 191 days in combat, more than any other American unit in the war. Sergeant Henry Johnson and Private Needham Roberts were among the most distinguished of the 369th, awarded the Croix de Guerre (French Cross of War) for overcoming a German unit while vastly outnumbered in May 1918. Another notable member of the 369th was jazz bandleader James Reese Europe who helped expand the popularity of jazz music in Europe. Today, the Hellfighters are remembered for answering the call of duty even as they faced discrimination and segregation on the homefront.

Short Video Resource:

HISTORY® has produced a short video about the Harlem Hellfighters to introduce students to their accomplishments and legacy. This guide offers ways to incorporate the video and discussions of the 369th Infantry Regiment into classroom activities and discussions related to World War I and 20th-century U.S. history.

View the Harlem Hellfighters video on [History.com](http://histv.co/1ArjOBS)
[Direct link: <http://histv.co/1ArjOBS>]

Terms to Define:

Before or after watching this video, ask students to define the terms below to build context for understanding the 369th Infantry Regiment.

Citizenship	Paradox
Ethereal	Prejudice
Infantry	Reinforcements
Jim Crow	Valor
Mustered	

369th Infantry Regiment: Brief Timeline

Ask students to review the timeline below. They can also add additional key dates to the timeline as they research the Harlem Hellfighters and World War I.

- **June 2 1913** - Parent unit constituted in the New York National Guard as of the 15th Infantry Regiment (colored).
- **June 29, 1916** - 15th New York National Guard in New York City is organized.
- **July 25, 1917** - The 15th mustered into federal service at Camp Whitman, New York where they undergo training in basic military practices, and is drafted into Federal service August 5, 1917.
- **October 8, 1917** - The 15th travels to Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina where they receive combat training.
- **December 1917** - The 15th commanded by Col. William Hayward, embarks from New York to France.
- **March 1, 1918** - Reorganized and redesignated as the 369th Infantry
- **March 14, 1918** - The 369th is assigned to the French Army.
- **March 1918 - December 1918** - The 369th serves with the French 16th Division and the French 161st Division.
- **May 1918** - Private Henry Johnson and Private Needom Roberts fight off a German patrol unit near Saint Meneshoul, France. Both are severely wounded.
- **July 1918 - December 1918** - The regiment fought at the Second Battle of the Marne and at Meuse-Argonne. They captured the village of Sechault.
- **December 1918** - Over 170 members of the 369th awarded with the Croix de Guerre.
- **February 1919** - The 369th returns to New York and to the New York Army National Guard. The unit leads a parade in New York City in which World War I soldiers are honored.
- **June 2015** - Henry Johnson receives a Medal of Honor for his valor while serving with the 369th Infantry Regiment.



Photo and caption courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry/>



Discussion Questions:

1. Why was the 369th Infantry Regiment assigned to serve with the French Army during World War I?
2. What were some of the obstacles the members of the 369th faced, both in the United States and once they were fighting in Europe?
3. Who were Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts and why are they still remembered today?
4. In the video Max Brooks talks about the goal of World War I to "make the world safe for democracy." Why would this goal have been important to the soldiers of the 369th? What might be some of the reasons the members of the 369th wanted to fight during World War I?
5. Why do you think the accomplishments of the 369th were not fully acknowledged during World War I? What are some of the ways they have been honored today?
6. Why do you think we should remember the service of the 369th?



Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry/>



Did You Know?

- Approximately 380,000 African Americans served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I.
- Nearly 200,000 African Americans who served during World War I played roles in Europe as support troops and over 40,000 served in combat.
- Many members of the 369th were from Harlem, New York; the nickname "Hellfighters" is said to have been coined by German troops, or more likely, the American press.
- When they returned from the war in February 1919, over one million people lined the streets of New York City's Fifth Avenue. The 369th marched first in the parade, led by legendary bandleader James Reese Europe.
- The 369th was one of the few units to have black officers in addition to black soldiers.

Activities:

1. The 369th Infantry Regiment: Explorations

Students can choose one soldier who fought with the 369th who served during World War I to research. (Examples might include: James Reese Europe, Henry Johnson, Needham Roberts and Spottswood Poles.) Students can research one Harlem Hellfighter and create a one-sheet with bullet points about their life or a short visual presentation.

2. The 369th Infantry Regiment: Legacy

After watching the short video and doing their own research, ask students to write a short op-ed or article about the legacy of the 369th Infantry Regiment. What was their contribution to U.S. history, and why should they be remembered today?

3. Henry Johnson:

In 2015, Henry Johnson was awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in World War I. After researching Johnson's story and watching the video, ask students to create a short biography, PowerPoint presentation, article or short story about Johnson's service and accomplishments. (Students can share these stories with younger grades or fellow students.)

4. The Harlem Hellfighters: Photo Analysis

Students can visit the National Archives' website to view images of the 369th, and educators can find tools to help students analyze these photographs. Visit this page at: www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry to find these photos and resources.

Websites:

More background information and short videos about World War I:
www.History.com/wwi

The United States World War I Centennial Commission:
www.worldwar1centennial.org

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture: African Americans and World War I: <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-world-war-i.html>

Books:

Brooks, Max (Author) and Canaan White (Illustrator). *The Harlem Hellfighters*. (Broadway Books, 2014).

Myers, Walter Dean and Bill Miles. *The Harlem Hellfighters: When Pride Met Courage*. (Amistad, 2005). (For Readers Ages 8-12).

Sammons, Jeffrey T. and John H. Morrow, Jr. *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War: The Undaunted 369th Regiment and the African American Quest for Equality*. (University Press of Kansas, 2014).



©2015 A&E Television Networks, LLC. All rights reserved. 0557.