



# HOW TO USE CELEBRATED UNITS

*Middle and High School (6-12)*

## OVERVIEW:

ANC's Celebrated Units series provides materials teachers can use to increase student understanding of particularly famous or noteworthy military units. Focusing on these units and their individual members helps students understand both the wide variety of contributions Americans have made during wartime and the personal price paid by many varied individuals.

Some units faced discrimination and unequal treatment. Some units had particularly distinguished records. All units highlighted in this series served their country admirably and made a lasting impact on the U.S.

**Estimated time:** 15-20 minutes per unit

## STANDARDS & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

These are found in individual unit lesson plans.

## IDEAS FOR USING MATERIALS:

### Whole Class Use:

- PowerPoint Lecture: Each Celebrated Unit includes a recommended lesson plan with instructions for presenting the material in a whole class lecture format. Students are provided an accompanying worksheet to fill out during the mini lesson.
- Celebrated Units Journal: Generic journal pages can be printed and used for each Celebrated Unit. These can be cut out and glued into students' interactive journals or multiple units could be compiled as student mini books.

### Small Group or Individual Use:

Celebrated units can be grouped in different ways: Segregated Units, Units that Served in World War II, etc. Using multiple units with a common theme introduces students to a larger number of units than they might otherwise be exposed to.

If using multiple units, it's recommended that you print the slides with notes. Students will focus on individual units either independently or in small groups. For these activities, it's recommended that you print at least one copy per group. You may also choose to print the accompanying worksheet for individuals or small groups to fill out or have them fill put notes in a Celebrated Units Journal Page.

- Stations: Printed slides are organized at stations around the room. Students move from station to station (working independently or in groups) to fill in notes, unit worksheets, or unit journal pages.



- **Jigsaw:** Working individually or as a group, students review the information in their assigned PowerPoint and complete the unit worksheet, fill out the journal page, or take notes. After time to discuss their answers or notes with those in their group, students are sorted into a second group. This second group has at least one person who studied each unit. Students then share with each other the information they found out about each unit, filling in their own notes or journal pages as applicable. This activity allows students to complete a larger quantity of notes more quickly as a group than they could individually.
- **Extension Activities:** Materials can also be used by students who finish work quickly and would benefit from additional content to explore. Students could also use the PowerPoints as a jumping off point for conducting their own research about one of the Celebrated Units or notable members of the unit.



## LESSON PLAN:

### 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion

*Middle School (6-8) or High School (9-12)*

## OVERVIEW:

Students learn about the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion (World War II) and make connections to their prior knowledge in order to explore the significance of this military unit in historical and cultural context.

The 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion, popularly known as the “Six Triple Eight,” was an African American unit of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). The 6888<sup>th</sup> was charged with sorting the massive backlog of undelivered mail to and from U.S. soldiers in both England and France during World War II. The WAC was initially restricted to white women, but in November 1944, the Army permitted African American women to join. The 6888<sup>th</sup> became the only non-medical African American women’s unit to serve overseas during World War II.

Resources include a PowerPoint slide deck and handout. Students use the handout to answer questions before, during, and after the PowerPoint presentation.

**Estimated time:** 1 class period, 15-20 minutes total

## STANDARDS:

### National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D2.His.1.9-12: Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- NCSS.D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will describe challenges faced by the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion.
- Students will explain connections between the story of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion and other topics discussed in class.



## RESOURCES NEEDED:

- 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion PowerPoint presentation
- Copies of “6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion” student worksheet (one per student)

## LESSON BACKGROUND:

*This information will provide students with a general background on the history of segregation within U.S. society and the U.S. military. Share this information as needed to fill gaps in student understanding of these concepts and prepare them for the lesson content.*

### Segregation in America

The American Civil War (1861-1865) began as a war to preserve the Union of the United States of America. By its end, enslaved African Americans were freed and the practice of slavery in this nation was abolished. Following the Civil War, there was promise of racial equality. The United States ratified three constitutional amendments—the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments—that guaranteed African Americans’ legal status as United States citizens, and Congress passed civil rights legislation intended to provide them with educational and economic opportunities. However, state and local governments, largely but not entirely in the South, passed laws that restricted these newly granted freedoms. These laws included the racial segregation of public facilities (so-called “Jim Crow” laws), as well as poll taxes and literacy requirements that limited African Americans’ ability to vote.

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court made racial segregation legal, ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that the principle of “**separate but equal**” did not violate the 14th Amendment. After this ruling, America embraced segregation. Blacks and whites were kept separate in schools, restaurants, public transportation and even bathrooms; however, they were not equal.

Almost 60 years later, on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously reversed the Plessy ruling, deciding in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate schools were not equal and therefore the segregation of public schools was unlawful. This was a major victory for African Americans and civil rights activists; however, desegregation was neither immediate nor easy. Some white Americans opposed and even violently protested the integration of schools, restaurants and other public facilities.

After *Brown v. Board*, which only applied to public schools, it took African American activists and their allies another 10 years to secure passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which barred racial discrimination in the workplace and public spaces. Additional civil rights legislation included the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which gave the federal government oversight in state and local elections to protect African Americans’ right to vote, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which provided equal housing opportunities regardless of race, creed, or national origin and made it a federal crime to injure or intimidate anyone because of their race, color, religion, or national origin.

### Segregation in the U.S. Military

The history of segregation within the U.S. military is similar to that of segregation in U.S. society at large: a slow march toward progress with many steps backward along the way. Approximately 5,000 African



Americans served alongside whites in Continental Army regiments during the Revolutionary War, and some served with American forces during the War of 1812. After 1815, state and federal laws and regulations gradually restricted or prohibited African Americans serving in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or state militias.

In July 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, Congress authorized the recruitment of Black soldiers, and after the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 the Army established the Bureau of Colored Troops to supervise the units of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Through World War II (1941-1945), most African Americans who wished to serve in the U.S. armed forces were assigned to segregated, all-Black units, often overseen by white officers. Although these segregated units served with valor and distinction, they received less support than white units and regularly had to deal with discrimination, unequal benefits and assignment to difficult duties such as building fortifications and occupying southern states during the years after the war.

On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981, mandating equality of treatment and opportunity in the U.S. military, to include burial at national cemeteries such as Arlington, regardless of race. Over the next few years, each of the military service branches (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard) implemented the executive order in different ways until the U.S. military was fully racially integrated by late 1954.

For more information on this topic, please see “African Americans in the Army” by the U.S. Army Center on Military History, found at <https://history.army.mil/html/faq/diversity.html>

### **Segregation at Arlington National Cemetery**

Following the segregation practices of the U.S. military, for many decades Arlington National Cemetery required African American service members to be interred in segregated sections. Prior to World War II, African American service members were buried in Section 27 (from the Civil War through 1899), Section 23 (from 1900 through the 1920s), Section 19 (repatriations from World War I (1917-1918)), and Section 25 (from the late 1920s until 1948). It is important to consider how segregation affected not only the location of gravesites, but also the experience of African American mourners who may have experienced racism when attending funerals or visiting graves in segregated sections.


Desegregation for new burials began immediately following President Truman’s Executive Order in 1948, and Arlington National Cemetery has been fully integrated ever since.

## **LESSON ACTIVITIES**

- Introduction/Anticipatory Set: 2 mins
  - Display PowerPoint Slide 1
  - Lead a class discussion on non-combat roles in the military and postal units
- PowerPoint Presentation: 10-15 mins



*Students should answer the questions on their worksheet while the teacher presents the information in the PowerPoint.*

Slide:	Notes For Presentation
<p>Slide 1: 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion</p> 	<p>People in the military do a wide variety of jobs. Some are combat-related, while others are not.</p> <p>Ask: What are some responsibilities of the military or jobs that people in the military may have that are not combat-related?  <i>Answers may include:</i> Medical, room and board, training and education, building infrastructure (forts, roads, cemeteries), postal</p> <p>Ask: Why might the military need an entire unit dedicated to mail?  <i>Answers may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Friends and family send letters and packages to service members</li> <li>● Letters were especially integral when they were the only form of communication available between service members and their loved ones</li> <li>● Letters from home boosted morale during wartime, reminding service members what and who they were fighting for</li> </ul> <p>Class brainstorm: When do you think the most mail was sent to service members, and why? What time period might we be discussing today?  <i>Answers may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● During a war</li> <li>● Before the internet and phones existed/were common/inexpensive</li> </ul>
<p>Slide 2: The Problem</p>	<p>For U.S. military personnel deployed in Europe during World War II, few things mattered more than receiving word from home. From care packages to letters from their mother, correspondence from family meant the world to servicemen and -women. This vital service faced a crisis in February 1945, however. U.S. military postal warehouses</p>



**THE PROBLEM**

- February 1945—warehouses in Birmingham, England were filled with millions of pieces of undelivered mail, some of which had been there 2+ years
- Servicemembers noticed they weren't getting mail, which hurt morale

in Birmingham, England had reached a bursting point. Literally millions of pieces of postal material sat undelivered, with no relief in sight. Compounding the problem, much of the mail lay mismarked, bearing addresses such as “Junior, U.S. Army.”

Ask: Why was the mail backed up?

Answers may include:

- Ever-changing locations of service members and units
- Common names (7,500 service members were named Robert Smith)
- Mail addressed too simply (i.e. “Junior, U.S. Army” or “Buster, U.S. Army”)
- Constant stream of incoming mail

Slide 3: The Six Triple Eights

**THE SIX TRIPLE EIGHTS**

What can you tell about the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion from these photographs?

Ask: What can you tell about the 6888<sup>th</sup> from these photographs?

Answers may include:

- All women
- All African American
- Segregated working/living conditions (students might infer this based on previous knowledge)

The 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion, popularly known as the “Six Triple Eights,” was an African American unit of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). The unit was charged with sorting the massive backlog of undelivered mail in both England and France during World War II. The WAC was initially restricted to white women, but in November 1944, the Army permitted African American women to join. The 6888<sup>th</sup> was the only non-medical African American women’s unit to serve overseas during WWII. The first contingent of women sailed for England on February 3, 1945.

Slide 4: Who Were the Six Triple Eights?

Who were the Six Triple Eights:

- Battalion describes a military unit typically consisting of 300-800 soldiers
- The 6888<sup>th</sup> was a unit of The Women’s Army Corps (WAC), created in 1943. Members of the WAC were the first women to serve in the Army in non-medical capacities.



**WHO WERE THE SIX TRIPLE EIGHTS?**

**Battalion:** a military unit typically consisting of 300 to 800 soldiers (6888<sup>th</sup> had 824 enlisted personnel and 31 officers)

**WACs:** The Women's Army Corps (WAC) was created in 1943. Other than nurses, the WAC were the first women to serve in the U.S. Army.

**African American Women:** The 6888<sup>th</sup> was the only all-African American, all-female unit that served overseas during WWII.

- The 6888<sup>th</sup> was an African American unit. It was the only African American women's unit to serve overseas during World War II.

When Congress passed the bill creating the WAC in July 1943, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was converted into the Women's Army Corps. The key difference between the WAAC and the WAC is that members of the WAC were officially part of the Army, and therefore eligible for Army benefits such as protection if captured and veterans' medical coverage, while WAAC members were not. They were auxiliaries serving alongside the Army.

### Slide 5: The Work: Birmingham, England

**THE WORK: Birmingham, England**

- Responsible for delivering mail to nearly 7 million American troops stationed across Europe
- Worked in dimly-lit warehouses without heat—windows were painted over for blackout conditions
- Worked eight-hour rotating shifts, seven days a week
- Completed what was predicted to take six months in three

In addressing the problem of undelivered Army mail, WAC units had to work through warehouses stuffed to overflowing. In many cases, the 6888<sup>th</sup> worked in dimly lit and cold buildings. Rats proved a constant problem, as the rodents sought out packages containing foodstuffs.

The 6888<sup>th</sup> used around seven million information cards with names and serial numbers to distinguish individuals with the same name. "Undeliverable" mail was sent to the 6888<sup>th</sup> to determine the intended recipient. The unit was also responsible for returning mail addressed to service members who had died while serving in the war.

The unit's motto: "No mail, low morale."

### Slide 6: The Work: France

**THE WORK: France**

- In May 1945, with the war in Europe officially over, the 6888<sup>th</sup> transferred to Rouen, France to sort the two- to three-year mail backup in France
- Once again, completed a six-month job in three months
- In October 1945, they transferred to Paris where they continued their work sorting and distributing mail until they finished in March 1946

In May 1945, with the war in Europe officially over, the 6888<sup>th</sup> transferred to Rouen, France to sort the two- to three-year mail backup in France. The unit completed a six-month job in three months. In October 1945, the 6888<sup>th</sup> transferred to Paris, continuing to sort and distribute mail until finishing in March 1946. French civilians (male and female) and German prisoners of war assisted the unit in sorting the mail.

The 6888<sup>th</sup> encountered mail theft while in France. France was devastated by the war and its populace suffered tremendously from shortages, death, and destruction. At times, the 6888<sup>th</sup> women were forced to search the French





Slide 7: Experiencing Racism

**EXPERIENCING RACISM**

- Slept in segregated barracks and ate in segregated dining halls; all recreational activities were also segregated
- Often had a better relationship with Birmingham locals than with white American military units or American organizations
- Received a better reception in France—recreational activities were less segregated and the 6888 women were cheered for during a parade in Rouen



civilians they worked with to recover small packages or items from packages.

The 6888<sup>th</sup> experienced a great deal of racism while serving in Europe. While in England, all of its activities – social and professional – were segregated. Facilities designated for the 6888<sup>th</sup> were not only segregated by race but also by gender.

Members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> often had better relationships with locals in Birmingham, England than with white American military units or American organizations. The American Red Cross ran clubs and hotels for American service members during World War II. Both African American and white male service members and personnel were permitted in these clubs and hotels, but African American WACs were not. The American Red Cross offered alternative, segregated facilities for the 6888<sup>th</sup> women, but Major Charity Adams in the spring of 1945 led a boycott of those facilities to protest segregation. While stationed in England, the 6888<sup>th</sup> ran its own mess hall, hair salon, refreshment bar and other recreational facilities. The 6888<sup>th</sup> was entirely self-sufficient because it had to be: no white personnel would perform service jobs for African American women.

Despite U.S. Army segregation policies, duty in France proved enjoyable for the members of the 6888<sup>th</sup>. They were welcomed by the newly liberated French, who cheered them during a victory parade in Rouen. They participated in and won a number of sporting events, riding under special orders in a custom first-class train car after having been earlier denied access to segregated U.S. Army trains. In Paris, they even had maid service and chef-cooked meals, luxuries they had never enjoyed elsewhere.

Slide 8: Legacy

After the 6888<sup>th</sup> completed its work in Paris, the Army disbanded the unit. When members returned home to the United States, they received little acclaim or recognition for their service. Following the disbandment of the unit, most members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> left the military.



### LEGACY

- After the 6888<sup>th</sup> completed their work in Paris, the unit was disbanded
- When they returned home to the United States, it was to no acclaim or recognition for their service
- Following the disbandment of the unit, most members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> retired from the military
- Forced the U.S. Army to recognize that African American women were capable of serving in the military




The Six Triple Eights' service forced the U.S. Army to recognize that African American women were capable of serving in the military. A government report on the Women's Army Corps, issued in December 1945, concluded that "the national security program is the joint responsibility of all Americans irrespective of color or sex... the continued use of colored, along with white, female military personnel is required in such strength as is proportionately appropriate to the relative population distribution between colored and white races."

In recent years, the service of the 6888<sup>th</sup> has received more recognition. On February 25, 2009, the U.S. Army Freedom Team Salute held a commendation ceremony for the unit at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. In November 2018, a monument featuring the names of the battalion members and a bust of its leader, Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams Earley, was unveiled at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Living members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> were able to attend both of those events.

### Slide 9: Notable Member

#### NOTABLE MEMBER



**Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams Earley**  
*First African American woman to receive an Army commission*  
*At the end of the war, she was a lieutenant colonel and the highest ranking African American woman in the Army*

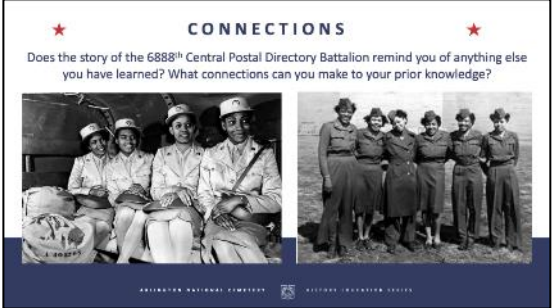
- Born December 5, 1918; graduated from Wilberforce University in 1938 with a degree in math and physics
- Joined the WAAC (later WAC) in 1942, becoming its first African American officer
- Chosen to lead the 6888<sup>th</sup>—the only African American female unit to serve overseas
- Fought against racism and segregation during her time in the military

Charity Adams Earley was the commanding officer of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion.

Born December 5, 1918, to parents who always emphasized the importance of education, Adams graduated as her high school's valedictorian and attended Wilberforce University in Ohio, receiving a degree in math and physics in 1938. When the U.S. Army's Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was created in 1942, Adams applied to join. She quickly became one of the first African American officers in the WAAC and, later, the WAC.

In December 1944, Adams was chosen as the commanding officer of the Six Triple Eights. In this position, Adams not only led the 6888<sup>th</sup> as it efficiently sorted and delivered mail to over seven million soldiers, but she also fought for racial and gender equality. She consistently protested against any form of segregation, and she worked to create camaraderie between white and Black enlisted personnel



	<p>and officers. At the end of the war, Adams was promoted to lieutenant colonel for her work in the WAC and commanding the 6888<sup>th</sup>.</p>
<p>Slide 10: Connections</p> 	<p>Now that you've learned about the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion, what connections can you make to other things you have learned in class?</p>

- Conclusion: 3 mins
  - Display PowerPoint Slide 10
  - Instruct students to complete their worksheets by writing a few sentences about connections they can make between the story of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion and other topics you have covered in class. Encourage students to share as time allows.

**LESSON EXTENSIONS:**

- Watch two short videos of the 6888<sup>th</sup> sorting mail in England and marching in uniform: <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/6888th-photo-videos>
- The National Women's History Museum has additional articles and classroom discussion questions about women's service during World War II: <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/topics/world-war-ii>

★ **Planning a Visit to Arlington National Cemetery?** ★

Arlington National Cemetery uniquely represents our nation's history, with graves of service members from every major conflict. If you are interested in more information and discussion questions to use with your class during a visit to the cemetery, detailed walking tours are available on the ANC website.



## SOURCES

Fargey, Kathleen. "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion." U.S. Army Center of Military History. Last updated February 14, 2014. <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>

Hymel, Kevin M. "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion." National Museum of the United States Army. Last updated February 1, 2018. <https://armyhistory.org/6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/>

Warrington, Beth A. "New monument honors all-female, African-American battalion." U.S. Army. Last updated February 1, 2019. [https://www.army.mil/article/216907/new\\_monument\\_honors\\_all\\_female\\_african\\_american\\_battalion](https://www.army.mil/article/216907/new_monument_honors_all_female_african_american_battalion)

Goldstein, Richard. "Charity Adams Earley, Black Pioneer in Wacs, dies at 83." New York Times. Last updated January 22, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/22/us/charity-adams-earley-black-pioneer-in-wacs-dies-at-83.html>

## IMAGES

Slide 2: *One of two similar buildings in France, which house the vast quantities of Christmas Mail en route to American soldiers.* Photograph. December 1944. Buffalo Soldier Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4crj26>

Slide 3: *"Members of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion take part in a parade ceremony in honor of Joan d'Arc at the marketplace where she was burned at the stake."* Photograph. May 27, 1945. National Archives. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/531431>

Slide 3: *Maj Adams. Photograph.* Buffalo Soldier Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4crj26>

Slide 4: *Somewhere in England, Maj. Charity E. Adams,...and Capt. Abbie N. Campbell,...inspect the first contingent of Negro members of the Women's Army Corps assigned to overseas service.* Photograph. February 15, 1945. National Archives. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/531249>

Slide 4: *Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) Captain Charity Adams of Columbia, NC Drilling Her Company at the First WAAC Train.* Photograph. Buffalo Soldier Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4crj3>



Slide 4: *Four Unit Members with Jeep from Defense.* Photograph. Buffalo Soldiers Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4criy5>

Slide 5: *Speeding overseas Christmas parcels to American troops in the ETO, WACS at this large U.S. Army base post office in England trace correct units and postal addresses through locator cards, representing every American serviceman and woman in the theater.* Photograph. December 9, 1944. Buffalo Soldiers Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4crix1>

Slide 6: *Members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> work with French civilians to sort the mail.* Photograph. U.S. Army Women's Museum, VA. U.S. Army Center of Military History. <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>

Slide 7: *Major Charity Adams at Opening of WAC snack bar.* Photograph. Buffalo Soldiers Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4criz2>

Slide 8: *Women's army corps military women.* Photograph. Buffalo Soldiers Education and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4crj04>

Slide 9: *Charity Earley. LTC Charity Adams Earley.* Photograph. Buffalo Soldiers Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4criy7>

Slide 10: *Members of the 6888th sorting mail.* Photograph. National Archives. U.S. Army Center of Military History. <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>

Slide 10: *6888th Battalion Parade in England.* Photograph. Buffalo Soldiers Educational and Historical Committee. <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/photo-gallery?lightbox=datatem-jfe4criy6>