

The Unknown X-Platoon of the Ninth Infantry Regiment in WWII

Al Castillo 2015

Not too many people have heard of the X-Platoons or the important role they played in winning the war during World War Two. In fact most military historians have never heard or know what the X-Platoons were. This was not some scientific experiment from a comic book, but ordinary men who were called to do their duty and did it proudly. The X-Platoons were Platoons consisting of all African Americans whom were attached to several different Army Divisions in World War Two.

In July of 1944, after the invasion of Normandy, casualties among riflemen had been higher than expected. The U.S. Army came up with the plan to use African American troops as replacements in front line companies. The idea was to assign on an individual basis African American soldiers to regular army units. General Dwight D. Eisenhower revised the directive in favor of the use of all African American platoons. Although the idea was not too popular and highly radical, it would shatter many myths about African American soldiers in WWII.

The Army up until this point was a segregated Army. Although integration had been considered since 1942, most African Americans who came in the Army were assigned into Quartermaster or Service Companies. There were two all-African American Divisions the 92nd and the 93rd, and the famous Tuskegee airmen. Still, most found themselves in rear echelon duties.

The call went out for volunteers from the African American units for soldiers who were willing to become riflemen. There were 4562 African American volunteers, with half being assigned to the experimental platoons, the others to all African American tank units or Field Artillery units. Many of the men who volunteered took a reduction in rank and pay to join. There was a lot of concern as to how they would do in combat.

After the heavy losses in the Bugle, the training went into a much faster pace. The men were formed into 37 platoons, and attached to the following Infantry Divisions: the 1st, 2nd, 8th, 9th, 69th, 78th, 99th, 104th, and the 12th and 14th Armored Divisions. The Commanders of each unit were to furnish the Platoons with Officers and Platoon Sergeants.

In the 2nd Division, each of the Regiments was assigned one Platoon. The men got issued Indainhead patches and given the equipment needed. They were also given more training before joining their outfits and giving the designation X for experimental.

In the 9th Infantry, the X-Platoon was assigned to Company C of the 1st Battalion. The man picked to lead the Platoon was Lt. Stanley Sorrell. In mid-February Lt. Sorrell was told to get all his belongings and report to Colonel Phillip D. Ginder at the Regimental CP. Lt. Sorrell's first thoughts were, "I thought I was in trouble for being too stern with the men and would be transferred out." Lt. Sorrell walked in and saluted the Colonel. The Colonel felt that Lt. Sorrell was the best-qualified man to handle this assignment. Colonel Ginder said, "I am giving you a platoon of blacks...an experimental platoon to find out what they are going to do and can do. Hell! If they can't follow you, they can't follow anyone so I am giving them a fair chance."

Lt. Sorrell went down near Rheims, France to pick up the platoon bring them back in trucks to the Regiment. On March 13, 1945, the X-Platoon joined the 9th Infantry, becoming the fifth Rifle Platoon in Company C, but it was to be used where needed by the Regiment.

When one old veteran from the 9th, a Sgt., saw them unloading from the trucks he was heard to say, "Well, I guess the old 9th is going to turn into a N_____ outfit". In a few weeks the X-Platoon would help shatter the age-old myth that "Negroes can't and will not fight" and the old Sgt. would be one of their biggest supporters. Their bravery under fire was without question, and when it was all over, many of the men from the 9th, had found a new respect for the Black Manchu warriors.

Their first assignment was to cross the Rhine River in boats and protect the left flank of the Remagen Bridgehead. The Platoon made the crossing in small assault boats, twelve men per boat, with few casualties. To celebrate the on the eastside, they drank some wine from a church and had yearling calf-riding competition.

The men of the X-Platoon were always cooking up something that they had rounded up, chickens or some other animal. They would often invite Sgt. T. William Bossidy to join them in their meals. Sgt. Bossidy was a Medic in the 1st Battalion and spent a lot of time with the men from the X-Platoon, and got to know them well. Often the men would ask him to stay around and treated him like a member of the platoon.

The X-Platoon did a fine job, and many of the men who served with the Platoon had nothing but high praises for it. Lt. Sorrell had the highest praise for the black men he led. "They did everything they were asked to do. They did not have the chance to get combat experience slowly and when an assignment was tough, the black X-Platoon got it."

Sgt. T. William Bossidy praised the men from the X-Platoon saying, "They would always ask to take the point, these men wanted to fight, if a BAR gunner got hit, they would rush to pick up his rifle. Everyone of them wanted an automatic weapon." When in camp, you would see them honing their bayonets to a sharp point-they intended to use them. Sgt. Bossidy went on to say, "The men of the X-Platoon were some of the best fighters in the Regiment. They were as good as the white troops."



One soldier who joined was Pvt. George Allen from Ohio. The Army went to the 4184 Quartermaster Service Company looking for volunteers for the Infantry, 27 men from the unit volunteered. They were taken to the 29th Infantry Division where they trained. After training some of men went to the 69th Infantry Division and some to the 2nd Division. Pvt. Allen ended up in the 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, he joined the X-Platoon on March 13, 1945. He was one of the original members of the 40-man Platoon who joined the Regiment that day. He would fight with the Regiment through Germany into Czechoslovakia, but did not get to come home with them. At the end of hostilities he was transferred to Company B, 393rd Infantry Regiment, 99th Infantry Division.

Photo of George Allen, taken Sept. 1943 at Camp Miles Standish, Mass.

Perhaps one of the bravest men in the Ninth Infantry was Lt. Stanley Sorrell. He was the type of commander that would not ask his men to do anything he wouldn't do. When there was a hard assignment that needed to be done in Company C, Lt. Sorrell was the man they called. In early 1945, Lt. Sorrell was the officer put in charge of the X-Platoon and led it in battle. In his service with the Ninth, Lt. Sorrell received a battlefield commission: the Silver Star w/1 OLC, the Bronze Star w/4 OLC's, the Purple Heart w/2 OLC's.



Photo from Stanley Sorrell

Below are the names of some of the men who were in with the X-Platoon during combat 1945 this is not a complete list.

George E. Allen
George N. Bailey
Thomas E. Robinson
Raymond Smith
Eugene B. Howell
James A. Duncan
James E. Edwards
Nate Montgomery
Alonzo Davis
Lloyd Haul
Herschel Parker
Nathaniel Johnson
Charles B. Reese
James B. Etchison
Julian H. Bailey
George Thomas
Lenton Spears
James T. Austin
Edgar Richardson
Jimmie Gurr
Ormond Griffith Jr.
Fred Harley
Andrew Quire
Legaron Franklin
Eugene Moorner
Herbert Hatchett
Clarence Johnson
Jefferson Banks Jr.
J.C. Mims
Alferd F. Brown
Robert T. Collier
Elory Gibson
James F. Strider
Herman Hanson
Rufus Ivery
Clinton Mahone Jr.
James A. Jones
Lesile D. King
Robert L. Burke
Edward Artim
Felix Johnson
Taylor Reed