University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications: School of Music | Music, School of

8-21-2012

Black US Army Bands and Their Bandmasters in World War I

Peter M. Lefferts
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, plefferts1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub

Part of the Music Commons

Lefferts, Peter M., "Black US Army Bands and Their Bandmasters in World War I" (2012). *Faculty Publications: School of Music.* Paper 25.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/25

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Music, School of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications: School of Music by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Version of 08/21/2012

This essay is a work in progress. It was uploaded for the first time in August 2012, and the present document is the first version. The author welcomes comments, additions, and corrections (plefferts1@unl.edu).

Black US Army bands and their bandmasters in World War I

Peter M. Lefferts

This essay sketches the story of the bands and bandmasters of the twenty seven new black army regiments which served in the U.S. Army in World War I. They underwent rapid mobilization and demobilization over 1917-1919, and were for the most part unconnected by personnel or traditions to the long-established bands of the four black regular U.S. Army regiments that preceded them and continued to serve after them. Pressed to find sufficient numbers of willing and able black band leaders, the army turned to schools and the entertainment industry for the necessary talent. The newly formed bands entertained servicemen and civilians in Europe and America not only with traditional military marches and concert band fare, but also with minstrel shows and revues, and with the latest flavor of ragtime music, which they called jazz.

The most important aspect of this story is that it provides a context---including colleagues and competitors---for the wartime and immediate post-war accomplishments of James Reese (Jim) Europe. The story of how Jim Europe and the "Harlem Hell Fighters Band" introduced jazz to Europeans during World War I is one of the most famous set pieces in American music history, and his murder shortly after their return to the states is one of its great tragedies. There is no denying his fame and accomplishments, but Jim Europe was not an isolated figure. Rather, he was first among equals. He was one of a number of freshly minted black U.S. Army bandmasters, some of whom who also had been famous civilian musicians in their own right, who took jazz to England and France. A small number of these new black bands, after the Armistice, toured the States to capitalize swiftly on their moment of fame and the surging popularity of the new jazz music.

MOBILIZATION FOR WAR

The U.S. Army's four regular black regiments, actively occupied elsewhere, did not see service in Europe during World War I.[1] Rather, twenty seven new regiments for African Americans were mobilized in 1917-1918, and there was not a great deal of crossing over from the older outfits to the newer. Eleven of the new units were U.S. Army combat regiments, comprising the 92nd Division (seven regiments, three of artillery and four of infantry) and the 93rd Division (four regiments of infantry), although in fact the 93rd ended up fighting with the French Army under French

[1] During the war, the Ninth Cavalry served in the Philippines, the Tenth Cavalry and Twenty-Fourth Infantry served in Arizona on the Mexican border, and the Twenty-fifth Infantry served in Hawaii.

command. The remainder were the sixteen so-called Pioneer Infantry Regiments 801-816, of which all but 810 and 812 served overseas. These non-combatant black troops worked as stevedores, dug trenches, graves, and latrines, and built hospitals, roads, bridges, and railroad lines.[2] All twenty-seven new regiments were eventually able to establish regimental bands,[3] and with one exception (James Riley Wheelock, a Native American), these new black bands were conducted by black conductors.

The Appendix of this paper presents the names of all the Band Leaders and Assistant Band Leaders for these units that I have been able to determine, along with the names of a few of the other individuals on the bands' leadership teams. To make sense of such a mass of mostly unfamiliar names, we must begin with the realization that the talent pool of black musicians eligible, available, and willing to enter the army as bandmasters was not large. Some of the units quickly were able to build distinguished bands under experienced leaders. But because the number of qualified conductors was so small, the army had to cast its net fairly wide, catching everyone from regular army men, national guard bandsmen, members of the educational community, and seasoned veterans of the entertainment industry, to neophytes just out of college.

Age was one significant factor that worked against a cohort of active senior, nationally prominent African-American musicians born from the later 1850s into the

---

[2] Other units in the army also had bands, and some of these were staffed by African American musicians. For example, there were at least eight Army Service Corps bands, and the Army Service Corps 1st Band was a colored band: see the Chicago Tribune, July 31, 1919, p. 9. Further, the New York Age, March 29, 1919, p. 2, reported that the 317th Labor Battalion was colored and had its own band, though their commentator remarked, "I do not believe there is another Labor Battalion in France with a band." An article for the New York Age on YMCA workers (June 7, 1919, p. 1) mentions a band of 50, all of whom worked on the docks until the armistice. The Seattle Daily Times, December 1, 1918, p. 27 ("French Go Supperless to Hear Yankee Bands") also mentions that "One of the most popular and best-known American bands in the "Service of Supplies" in France is composed of the negro stevedores." This may be the same band referred to in the Age, which may in turn be the band that Hunton and Johnson single out as the St. Nazaire band, "encouraged by the YMCA," that played under assistant Band Leader Sergeant Stevenson; Stevenson died at Chambery from a fall in 1919 (Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson, Two Colored Women With the American Expeditionary Forces (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Press, 1920; repr. NY: AMS Press, 1971; NY: G. K. Hall, 1997), p. 222, with a photo of the St. Nazaire band between pp. 222 and 223). St. Nazaire was a principal port for troops and supplies, and was home to many army units of white and black laborers, while Chambery was a furlough spot for African American soldiers from January to May 1919. Apparently the St. Nazaire band was visiting the Leave Area when Stevenson had his fatal accident.

[3] Not all the bands were able to be formed in the US. The band of the 805th was organized only in January 1919 in Europe (Paul S. Bliss, Victory: History of the 805th Pioneer Infantry, American Expeditionary Forces (St. Paul, Minn.: the author, 1919), pp. 207-209; see also Hunton and Johnson, Two Colored Women, p. 223). The St. Nazaire band also only got its instruments in Europe (Hunton and Johnson, p. 222-23).

early 1870s---thus already in their forties and fifties and above draft age---who did not serve as military musicians in this war.[4] Except for Elbert B. Williams (b.1864), George E. Dulf (b.1872), and James Riley Wheelock (b.1874), all the bandmasters of the newly activated regiments were relative youngsters, men in their twenties and thirties born from around 1880 to around 1895. The primary cohort of leaders of the greatest combat regiment bands were born around 1880-1885.[5] Less prestigious but still often mentioned were the bands of men born around 1885-1890.[6] The best of the hurriedly assembled and drilled bands of the Pioneer Infantry regiments were, naturally enough, those prepared by their two most senior bandmasters, who were the only two to make Lieutenant: James Riley Wheelock (b.1874) and Will Vodery (b.1885). Most of the pretty green Assistant Band Leaders in the Pioneer Infantry regiments were born between 1889 and 1895.[7]

The majority of bandmasters had worked previously in more than one professional arena. Those with prior army experience and who thus were familiar with military drill and other customs, were few. From the 10th Cavalry in Arizona, and of purely military background, came its bandmaster Alfred Jack Thomas (one of the original "quota of four" black bandmasters in the US army), his second-in-command Dorcy Rhodes, and Burnit McReynolds. E. E. Thompson, now a Clef Club and Tempo Club insider, was a ten-year veteran of British military bands from his Jamaican days, and had also served a US National Guard stint with the 15th N.Y. Elbert B. Williams, the first officially approved black army bandmaster of the original "quota of four," was a veteran with twenty nine years of service, while Frank L. Drye had served just one three-year term of enlistment with the 9th Cavalry. George E. Dulf (who had experienced some active duty) and James R. Europe (a rank novice) mustered into the regular army from the National Guard.

---

[4] Including Henderson Smith (b.1858), N. Clark Smith (b.1866), Will Marion Cook (b.1869), William H. Tyers (b.1870), Fred W. Simpson (b.1871), Walter H. Loving (b.1872), John Rosamond Johnson (b.1873), and W. C. Handy (b.1873).

[5] J. Tim Brymn (b.1879), F. Eugene Mikell (b.1880), James Reese Europe (b.1880), E. E. Thompson (b.1883) and A. Jack Thomas (b.1884). Of this generation, the principal figure not to direct a military band was Ford T. Dabney (1883-1958).

[6] Dorcy Rhodes (b.1887), Burnit McReynolds (b.1887), Norman Scott (b.1888), Frank L. Drye (b.1889), and Arthur T. Stewart (b.1891).

[7] Wesley I. Howard (b. 1889), Edward Bailey (b.1890), Ralph S. Redmond (b. 1890), Amos M. White (b. 1890), George L. Polk (b. 1890), Ralph W. E. Brown (b. 1893), Lawrence Denton (b. 1893), Louia Vaughn Jones (b. 1895).

Theater and society orchestras, and bands of the itinerant vaudeville, minstrel shows, medicine shows, and circus side-shows were the largest single source of new black bandmasters, even though few men from this sphere had had any prior military experience. What they did have, though, was a familiarity not only with popular music but with the performance of classical music in arrangements for band.[8] From New York's "Black Manhattan" came not only Europe and Thompson, but also Brymn, Vodery, Redmond, Kincaid and De Broite; from Chicago came Dulf, Bailey, and Stewart; from Minneapolis, Cason; from Kansas City, Denton, and from troupes on the road came George L. Polk and Amos M. White. Men just one step removed from the music business included Frank L. Drye, who once had been on the road as cornet soloist for W. C. Handy, and F. Eugene Mikell, who had run minstrel show and theatre orchestras for many years in Jacksonville, Florida and Chicago.

Black schools directly yielded Drye from Tuskegee; Mikell, a man who alsop had extensive prior educational experience in South Carolina and Florida, from the Bordentown, New Jersey Industrial School ("the Tuskegee of the North"); the veteran Elbert B. Williams from the new Columbia Conservatory of Music in Washington, D.C.; Ralph W. E. Brown from the Hungerford School in Eatonville, Fla.; Horace B. Wallace from Lane College in Jackson, Tenn.; and Norman Scott, a self-employed music teacher from Wilmington, Del. To this number can be added Native American conductor James Riley Wheelock from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Neophytes Louia Vaughn Jones and Wesley I. Howard were very young, recent graduates of the New England Conservatory, where both were violin majors.

*

A review of bands and bandmasters undertaken geographically provides the most insight into the army's strategy of musical recruitment. It is appropriate to start with Chicago, so many of whose local black musicians could play "genuine jazz music, such as is only found in Chicago."[9] It was Chicago rather than New York City, moreover, that had the greater heritage of military music. This requires some explaining. At the

---

[8] The larger minstrel show orchestras and bands often played classical music. In one week in 1911, for example, the band of Richard's & Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels rendered selections from William Tell, Bohemian Girl, Faust, Tannhauser, Pique Dame, Rigoletto, Il Trovatore, and Lucia di Lammermoor, and light classical band fare such as the fantasias on "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep" and "Old Folks at Home." See the Indianapolis Freeman, February 18, 1911, p. 6.

[9] Chicago Tribune, March 10, 1919, p. 7.

declaration of war in April 1917 there were two standing African-American regimental-level bands in addition to the four regular black Army regimental bands. These additional regimental bands belonged to the only two existing black National Guard regiments, the 8th Illinois of Chicago and the 15th New York.[10] The Eighth, considerably the senior of the two, had been around for quite a while, its roots dating back to the 1870s. It was formally designated as the Eighth Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment in 1898 when it was called into active duty with the regiment for the Spanish-American War, and it was recalled to active duty in the Mexican border war of 1916. Its nationally recognized band was a superlative outfit, skilled in popular as well as classical styles and an aspirational model for all the subsequent new bands.

The band of the Old Eighth was led by George Edmund Dulf, a prominent figure for decades in black minstrel shows who had been associated with it since 1898, conducting it ca. 1898-1901 and again ca. 1914-1917. Under his baton, it was involved with jazz from an early date. In 1916, the regiment swung into camp in Texas to "a tune that was freighted with homesickness for Chicago troops . . . . It was just the "Jaz band" of the Eighth Illinois infantry making light the steps to camp for the Negro doughboys."[11] The regiment was brought into war service in the fall of 1917 and redesignated as the 370th in December of that year.[12] It trained far from home, first at Camp Logan near Houston, in which city the band led the Great Parade of the Eighth Regiment on November 7, 1917, and then at Camp Stuart, near Newport News, where the band led the Washington Birthday parade of several thousand military personnel through Norfolk, Virginia in February, 1918. The 370th went to France in April 1918,

---

[10] There were also individual companies of African American soldiers within primarily white regiments in some state national guards, and some of these companies had bands. The 372nd, for example, was manned by men from several such black companies; it is likely that its regimental band drew on the personnel of a number of established company-level black guard bands.

[11] Chicago Broad Axe, July 8, 1916, p. 4 ("Eighth Troops Swing In Camp to "Jaz" Music"). This is an early appearance of the word "jaz," and, characteristically, it is associated with Chicago musicians. In fact, the earliest known application of the term to music is from the Chicago Tribune, July 11, 1915, p. E8 ("Blues is Jazz and Jazz is Blues"). New Orleans theatrical musicians in later 1916 were reported as irate that Chicago musicians were being credited with discovering the new form of music known as the "jaz band." See New Orleans States, November 12, 1916, p. 32 New Orleans States, November 14, 1916, p. 4, New Orleans States, November 22, 1916, p. 10, and New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 22, 1916, p. 6.

[12] Rosters of the army bands are extremely hard to come by. Fortunately, around the time of its return to the states, an earlier photo and roster for the band of the Eight Illinois from October 11, 1917 were printed in the Chicago Broad Axe, February 15, 1919, p. 5.

and, after ten months away, was welcomed home to Chicago in a great celebration on February 17, 1919.[13]

The second great African-American regiment formed in the Chicago area was the 365th Infantry, a unit of draftees which was organized in October 1917 at Camp Grant, just south of Rockford, Il. To be regimental bandmaster of the 365th, a young outsider, Frank L. Drye, a former military bandsman and then the cornet soloist for W. C. Handy, came north from his current position as bandmaster at the Tuskegee Institute, via the Des Moines training camp for black officers, where he earned his officer's stripe. At Camp Grant, Lieutenant Drye organized some very successful large shows for which he was musical director, conductor, and cornet soloist. Drye, a commissioned line officer, later fought at the front in Europe and was individually decorated for valor. The unit's officially appointed Band Leader, who handled most of its day-to-day conducting duties, was a prominent local Chicago musician and colleague of Dulf, sergeant (later Lieutenant) Arthur T. Stewart. While still in Rockford, a sixteen-man subset of their ensemble "established a reputation for 'jazz stuff'."[14] The 365th went to France in June 1918 and returned to its own great welcome celebration in Chicago on March 10, 1919.

In July 1918 a third major Chicago area regiment of black draftees, the 803rd Pioneer Infantry regiment, was organized at Camp Grant. Its band played under Edward W. Bailey, who had been the leader of the orchestra at one of the nation's most important African-American theatrical venues, the States Theater on Chicago's South Side. Many of the men of the 803rd were Rockford area locals, especially employees of the Rockford Malleable Iron Works, and thus it was appropriate that Bailey's assistant band leader was Alfred J. Taylor, a Tuskegee graduate and talented musician who had toured with the Tuskegee Singers and discovered the Rockford area; settling there, he took a day job at the iron works. When Taylor returned to Rockford after the war, he formed an American Legion band drawing not only on men from the 803rd but also including local veterans who had played with the band of the 365th.[15]

---

[13] Frank E. Roberts, The American Foreign Legion: Black Soldiers of the 93rd in World War I (Annapolis, MD.: Naval Institute Press, 2004), p. 25 for the march in Norfolk; Chicago Tribune, Tuesday, Feb. 18, 1919, p. 1.

[14] Rockford Republic, February 1, 1918, p. 5.

[15] Rockford Morning Star, December 23, 1919, p. 4. And as another example of how the Chicago area veteran bandsmen kept in contact, "a band composed of the best talent of the 365th Infantry Band, the 8th Regiment Band, and the 803rd Pioneer Infantry Band" headed the parade that kicked off the first

From the New York area, the black entertainment industry yielded up some of its finest talent to the army, staffing five bands, four of which were widely celebrated. As in Chicago, the story must begin with the National Guard. The second of the nations's two black National Guard regiments, the 15th N.Y., had only recently been established, on July 1, 1916. The history of the band of the 15th N.Y. is an elaborate story, and one that has been distorted somewhat by the celebrity of James Reese Europe. Its first Chief Musician was E. E. (Egbert E.) Thompson, hands down the most obvious candidate for the job working in New York City at the time. Thompson, "the black Sousa," was a veteran of the British military band world who, because he could never rise to bandmaster in the British Army, had left the Caribbean and military life in 1907 for what became a highly successful career in the New York entertainment industry.[16] As he was becoming established in New York City, he also polished his musical skills as a student for three years, 1908 to 1911, at the Institute of Musical Art, earning the deep respect of its director, Frank Damrosch.[17] Thompson had been leading a professional concert and dance ensemble of forty men, "Thompson's Military Band," in New York for several years when the call came to build a band for the guard regiment. He led the band of the 15th N.Y. in its first full season, from late summer 1916 to mid April 1917.

Thompson's National Guard band was a unit made up of a mixture of unpaid, enlisted guardsmen, some of whom owned no instruments and had no prior musical experience, and also ringers who were paid New York professional musicians drawn from his own commercial outfit. He worked diligently all fall and winter to alter this mix and staff the band entirely with musically-experienced volunteer guardsmen, but he was never able to pull this off. Nonetheless his accomplishments with the band were praised, and its core was strong. The 15th N.Y. marched in a great New York City parade to get its regimental colors on October 1, 1916 to the tune of the band under Thompson.[18] Shortly thereafter, the band made its first concert appearance, playing for a

---

American Legion recruitment drive among African American veterans in the Chicago area at the 8th Regiment Armory on October 12, 1919 (Chicago Broad Axe, October 11, 1919, p. 2).

[16] Morten Clausen, "Egberth E. Thompson: He Introduced Copenhageners to Real Jazz Music," The Black Perspective in Music 16/2 (1988): 151-76 at p. 161.

[17] Frank Damrosch's strong letter of recommendation for E. E. Thompson is printed in the New York Age, April 5, 1919, pp. 6-7.

[18] New York Age, October 5, 1916, p. 1, on the parade, mentions that the regimental band had 65 members. New York Age, October 5, 1916, p. 4, in an editorial discussing last Sunday's parade and getting the unit's

benefit at the Manhattan Casino on October 20.[19] Meanwhile, the professional Thompson's Military Band played at Tempo Club concerts under the sponsorship of Jim Europe in 1916-17 and continued to play on their own and for Jim Europe after Thompson stepped down from the 15th N.Y in April 1917.[20]

Colonel William Hayward, commander of the 15th N.Y., was jealous of the band of the more senior black National Guard regiment, the 8th Illinois. In December 1916, on account of his concern for the quality, irregular staffing, and continual out-of-pocket expense of the band under Thompson, Hayward began to put pressure on one of his newly-commissioned officers, Jim Europe, to help with the situation.[21] Europe, one of the best known black musicians in New York City, had enthusiastically enrolled in the National Guard in September 1916 as a private, though not as a bandman, and as just mentioned, he had been employing Thompson's band in his civilian business. He was rapidly promoted to sergeant that fall and then given an officer's commission in December as a first lieutenant. In early 1917, with the help of fellow Clef Clubber Noble Sissle, who had also joined the 15th N.Y. in the fall of 1916, Jim Europe mounted a vigorous funding and recruitment campaign for the band. Their goals were to get more professional musicians to enlist as guardsmen, and to establish an endowment to pay them an acceptable wage, since guardsmen earned no money for their service.

Nine months after the regiment was established, and just after the US declaration of war in April 1917, the 15th N.Y. passed inspection and was federalized. Thompson took this moment to step aside from the regiment's band.[22] Hayward and his fellow

---

colors, "Col. Hayward and his officers deserve much credit for what they have accomplished in so short a time. And special mention must be made of Chief Musician Thompson and his band." A short article in the New York Age, October 5, 1916, p. 6, offers compliments to the 15th regiment band under Chief Musician Thompson.

[19] New York Age, October 26, 1916, p. 6, in a review of the band concert on October 20, mentions that Thompson was working with "untrained material," and that many of its instrumentalists had been just assigned their instruments and were learning them. A columnist in the Indianapolis Freeman (November 4, 1916, p. 4) said that this concert proved that Thompson "is the peer of all the colored bandmasters and can be compared without much exaggeration with the best of the white."

[20] New York Age, September 28, 1916, p. 1; New York Age, April 5, 1917, p. 6.

[21] For the story of Jim Europe and the 369th, see above all Reid Badger, A Life in Ragtime: A Biography of James Reese Europe (New York: Oxford, 1995); the most important older accounts of the activities of the band are Noble Sissle Sissle, "Memoirs of Lieutenant "Jim" Europe" (unpublished carbon of typescript ca. 1942, now housed at the LIbrary of Congress and available online through the American Memory Collection at the Library of Congress website) and Arthur W. Little, From Harlem to the Rhine: The Story of New York's Colored Volunteers (NY: Covici Friede, 1936).

[22] New York Age, April 19, 1917, p. 1. Col. Hayward's statement about the band situation included the following: "It may not be generally known that although Mr. Thompson who has resigned as

senior white officers had shaken down their rich friends for contributions, and Europe, with a $10,000 band fund now at his disposal,[23] immediately sailed for Puerto Rico to recruit some musicians, especially reed players. Curiously, despite all he was doing and would do for the band, Europe could not be its official Band Leader. An appointment for First Lieutenant Europe as Band Leader would have required an unacceptable demotion to non-commissioned officer status. Instead, F. Eugene Mikell enlisted and received the appointment as sergeant Band Leader.[24] Europe was nonetheless ex officio the renovated band's primary conductor and musical director. For the next two years it was referred to as Europe's band, and at its head he became a major international celebrity. With the band fund already seriously depleted, their first public appearance under Jim Europe was at a benefit at the Manhattan Casino on June 22, 1917.[25] The regiment served the longest overseas of any of the black regiments; the first to leave, it sailed for France on December 12, 1917 and returned to the US on February 12, 1919. It was renamed the 369th in France. When the regiment returned its colors back in New York on February 17, 1919 in a giant parade through Manhattan, it was headed up by the band, which was directed by Europe and led by drum major Gillard Thompson.[26]

The second great African American combat infantry regiment from New York City, the 367th, was formed from draftees at Camp Upton, on Long Island, in early November 1917. Thus the 369th and 367th of New York City were a guardsmen/draftees pair just like 370th and 365th of Chicago. The band of the 367th was put into the hands of none other than E. E. Thompson, who had been the first bandmaster of the 15th N.Y. After less than two months of rehearsal, he had his latest

---

bandmaster, worked hard, he was unable to get the members of his band to enlist. The band that the public has seen and heard was composed only in part of enlisted men. The others being civilians whose services were paid for from time to time, and on every occasion, including recruiting duty, excepting three. Of course, the non-enlisted men were of no use to us when the regiment went into service. I do not think that the failure to secure enlisted men for the band was through lack of diligent and earnest efforts on Mr. Thompson's part. He had a difficult task. I felt, however, that progress would be made by making a new start from the beginning."

[23] The personal subsidy of $10,000 given by New York banker Daniel G. Reid is reported in almost every story about Jim Europe's band, but the regiment's officers and other prominent New Yorkers among Hayward's friends gave lesser amounts to the band fund, which was for instruments as well as salaries (Trenton Evening Times, September 7, 1917, p. 3; New York Herald, April 17, 1918; Flint Journal, April 22, 1919, p. 3; Little, From Harlem to the Rhine, p. 122).

[24] Thus Jim Europe and Eugene Mikell stood in the same relationship in the 369th as Lieut. Frank L. Drye, a line officer, and Lieut. Arthur T. Stewart, Band Leader, had in the 365th.

[25] Sissle, "Memoirs," p. 63; see also Badger, A Life in Ragtime, p. 150.

[26] Not Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

regimental band ready to play at a Grand Military Ball on New Year's Eve at the 71st Regiment Armory at 34th and Park in Manhattan. It was reported at the time that Thompson wanted to make his group one of the best in the army, and that they "made a most favorable impression."[27] The 367th and its band participated with all the other Camp Upton regiments in the Washington Birthday Parade in NYC on February 22, 1918, winning great applause. The regiment got its colors after a major parade through Manhattan on March 23, 1918, and upon their arrival in Harlem, the band had enough pep left to entertained the crowd with ragtime.[28] At the end of March the band appeared in concert at the Manhattan Opera House with guests including Abbie Mitchell and Will Marion Cook.[29] Enduring seven months of stateside preparation, the 367th finally went overseas in June 1918. It continued to be the subject of attention in New York papers while abroad, and a Monster Benefit was held for the regiment in Manhattan in October, with a huge, racially integrated, all-star roster.[30] Back by late February 1919, the 367th returned its colors in its home city after another spectacular parade through town led by the band on March 14, 1919.

At the same time as the 367th was being formed on Long Island, but a short train ride out of Manhattan in the opposite direction, the 349th and 350th Field Artillery regiments, composed of draftees primarily from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, were being assembled at Camp Dix near Trenton, NJ. The exploits of these units were followed with care by the press of three cities: New York City, Trenton, and Philadelphia. The more prominent band to emerge from this pair was that of the 350th under Manhattan Clef Club stalwart and long-time colleague of Jim Europe, J.

---

[27] New York Age, December 29, 1917, p. 6; New York Age, January 5, 1918, p. 6.

[28] For a general account of the parade, see the New York Times, Feb 22, 1918, p. 11, and New York Times, February 23, 1918, pp. 1, 3. The Crisis 15/6 (April, 1918), p. 294, reports that "An attempt was made to leave the colored soldiers out of the Washington Birthday Parade down Fifth Avenue. The Governor interfered and the battalion of the 367th colored regiment, which paraded, received the most attention and applause among the 10,000 marchers."

[29] New York Age, March 30, 1918, p. 6 ("367th in Dance and Song").

[30] The benefit was held Sunday, October 27, 1918. See advertisements in the New York Age, October 19, 1918, p. 6 and New York Age, October 26, 1918, p. 6; the same paper printed a review on November 2, 1919, p. 6. Participants included white stars Belle Baker, Irving Berlin, David Bispham, Eddie Cantor, Eddie Leonard, and Marilyn Miller, as well as black stars including Bert Williams, Wilbur Sweatman, Abbie Mitchell, Ford Dabney's Syncopated Orchestra, and Will Marion Cook's Clef Club Orchestra and Singers.

Tim Brymn.[31] His regimental colonel wanted the band to be the best in the service, and its white officers worked hard to raise a band fund that would support an ensemble of 100 men. The great contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink, the "Mother of the Army," sang at a concert with the band in New Jersey on May 15, 1918, and became its chief sponsor.[32] In terms of drumming up private money to fund a large band, Brymn's 350th regiment was evidently even more successful than Europe's 369th. He took an ensemble of 70 overseas and continued to add men to it. Brymn wrote columnist Lester A. Walton of the New York Age from France in October 1918 and said, "My band is now increased to one hundred musicians, as we are considered A-1 in the army."[33] Indeed, it was widely reported to be the single largest musical unit serving in World War I. One of Brymn's men, who became the unit's sergeant Drum Major, was William H. (Willie the Lion) Smith, the great Harlem stride pianist.

When President Wilson opened a nationwide Red Cross Campaign in May 1918, the kickoff was a huge parade in Manhattan on Saturday, May 18, led by Brymn's 350th regiment band (with Thompson's 367th considerably further back in the line of march). Famously, the president could not resist moving to its music and got out of his limousine to walk the route.[34] Brymn's band stayed in town to participate in Sunday morning services on May 19, and gave a concert on the Central Park Mall for the Red Cross that afternoon, playing for an audience of 50,000.[35] Shortly hereafter, in June 1918, it went overseas, returning in early March 1919.

A little later in the year, at the end of July 1918, a fifth African American regiment that included men from the New York area, the 807th Pioneer Infantry Regiment, was formed at Camp Dix with draftees from New York and New Jersey, along with men from Delaware, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Its band became the fourth and final great New York area black army band, alongside those of Europe,

---

[31] Emmett J. Scott says Brymn also helped prepare the band of the 349th for an extended period, which makes sense since it was at Camp Dix at the same time. See Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919; repr. NY: Arno Press, 1969), p. 310.

[32] New York Age, May 17, 1918, p. 6; see also Scott, Official History, p. 311.

[33] By contrast, Jim Europe's band on the continent, though second to none in the American Army, was an ensemble of just 44 or 45; Badger says 44 went overseas. See Reid Badger, "Performance Practice Techniques in the James Reese Europe Band," In Howard T. Weiner, ed., Early Twentieth-Century Brass Idioms, Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies, Studies in Jazz, no. 58 (Scarecrow Press, 2009), Chapter 7, pp. 64-72.

[34] New York Age, May 25, 1918, p. 1 ("He Heard Music and Just Had to Walk"); see also the New York Age, May 17, 1919, p. 6: "I simply must march to that music; it is irresistible."

Thompson, and Brymn. The Band Leader was Clef Club insider Will Vodery, with experienced trombonist Ralph S. Redmond as Assistant Band Leader, and tenor soloist and jazz instrumentalist Opal D. Cooper as drum major. Within just three months this ensemble reached a noteworthy level of excellence. In fact, a front page 1929 obituary in the New York Age for one of its performers says "their band won fame, second only to that of Lieut. Jim Europe's Fifteenth Hellfighters."[36] And "at least one commanding officer pronounced them 'the best band in the A.E.F.'."[37]

Such reknown indicates that Vodery had found amongst the regiment's draftees (or brought with him into the band as volunteer enlistees) many East Coast professionals. By one later description a band of 52 players, one photo shows a conductor and 47 instrumentalists.[38] For theatrical shows they broke out a smaller group. There is a roster of Vodery's minstrel show and pit orchestra totalling 30 names, comprising about 10 actor-singers and 20 instrumentalists.[39] More than half of these individuals can be traced as active professional actors and musicians in civilian life. One particularly prominent subset of men who played together in the 807th---Opal Cooper, Sammy Richardson, Louia V. Jones, and Earl Granstaff---returned to France after the war and played together on-and-off for most of the 1920s.

Moving down the East Coast, the Baltimore-Washington area also yielded a pair of African American combat regiments, the 368th Infantry and the 351st Artillery, which both were formed from draftees and established in October 1917. These units were organized at Camp Meade, which lies roughly half way between the two cities, and they drew their recruits from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the South. Two regular army bandsmen whose careers had long been joined came east together from the 10th Cavalry in Arizona---Band Leader Alfred Jack Thomas and Assistant Band Leader Dorcy Rhodes---to conduct the bands of these new units. Thomas and Rhodes had each taken time off from their duties with the 10th Cavalry to go the the Governor's Island

---

[35] New York Times, May 20, 1918, p. 11; Jersey City Journal, May 20, 1918, p. 5.

[36] New York Age, January 26, 1929, p. 1, in an obituary of Charles L. Thorpe.

[37] According to Mark Tucker, quoting from a 1926 Pittsburg Courier article. See Mark Tucker, "In Search of Will Vodery," Black Music Research Journal 16/1 (Spring, 1996): 123-82, at p. 134.

[38] A photo of the band taken when they were at Souilly was first published in the New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6.

[39] New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6 ("Making Music for the Army").

Army Bandmasters School, in 1912-14 and 1914-1916, respectively. Maintaining a striking parallelism, they would both muster out after the war and return to the Capitol area to work in academia, Thomas to Baltimore to establish the Aeolian Conservatory and Rhodes to Washington, DC to run the Howard University ROTC Band.

Thomas's band was by far the more important of the pair, if assessed by documented activities and contemporary newspaper references. He made a big effort to staff it with experienced musicians. In an advertisement for players placed in the Washington Bee, Thomas promised "No Trench digging, guard duty or other laborious duties to perform. Special privileges accorded to bandsmen."[40] Jim Europe, in fact, thought the 368th of A. J. Thomas was the best band in the A.E.F. By this he probably meant that it was the best of the bands at serious music, and we know that "the men say they prefer to play classical pieces." [41] But we also know it could split off a terrific freestanding jazz band led by its colorful drum major, Edgar A. Landin. An imposing 6' 4" former Philadelphia policeman, Landin was hailed as "The Ragtime Baton-Twirler," "The Great Cake-Walking Bandleader and His Jazz Band," and "The Sultan of Syncopation and His Gallavantin' Jazz Band." The band of the 368th was especially active in the states in the spring of 1918 in the Liberty Loan Drive. To open this effort, President Woodrow Wilson attended a Baltimore troop review and parade on Saturday, April 6, 1918 where Drum Major Landin's antics were a hit with the dour president. Landin immediately became a significant national celebrity, "The Dusky Drum Major That Made the President Laugh."[42]

Later that summer, in July 1918, a third important Baltimore-Washington area band was formed at Camp Meade as part of the 808th Pioneer Infantry regiment, a unit which drew almost half its men from Maryland. Its Band Leader was a Native American (Oneida), James Riley Wheelock, a well known musical figure in the Baltimore-Washington area. Wheelock, "the red rival of Sousa,"[43] was one of the most senior of the new bandmasters at age 44. He had made a prominent public bid in the spring of 1917 to become bandmaster of a regiment in one of Theodore Roosevelt's proposed volunteer divisions, and then took a post at his alma mater, the Carlisle

---

[40] Washington Bee, December 8, 1917, p. 8.

[41] New York Age, February 22, 1919, p. 6; see also Badger, p. 308.

[42] Baltimore Sun, April 12, 1918, p. 16; Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, April 19, 1918, p. 8; Baltimore Sun, May 12, 1918, p. 14.

Indian Industrial School, when President Wilson quashed Roosevelt's plans.[44] With the closing of the Carlisle School a year later by the government, Wheelock was an obvious choice to lead the band of a locally-staffed regiment, and he was able to attract talented musicians. In the racial politics of the Army, Wheelock was effectively white, which we can infer from the fact that a younger Native American (Chippewa) and Carlisle graduate, Gus Welch, was a commissioned officer in the 808th (second lieutenant, rising quickly to captain), whose officer corps always was described as all-white.

One additional African American population center outside of the Deep South with a strong musical history, Kansas City, deserves mention for the two Pioneer Infantry regiments, the 805th and 806th, that were organized at nearby Camp Funston in Manhattan, Kansas, in the summer of 1918. They were staffed mostly with recruits from the Kansas-Missouri and broader Great Plains region, but as was true of many of the other Pioneer Infantry units, they also drew on a wider, even national population for their manpower. The men of the band of the 805th, for example, were not just from Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma, but also from Texas, Ohio, Louisiana, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York City. They were led by George L. Polk of Smyrna, Delaware, who at the time he filled out his draft registration had been playing with J. C. O'Brien's Georgia Minstrels.[45] Lawrence Denton from Kansas City, who led the band of the 806th for a time, remembered that it had men "from all over, Louisiana, Mississippi, Los Angeles."[46] Nonetheless, for both units, their principal identity lay with Kansas City.

SERVICE IN FRANCE

Overseas, most of the bands stayed close to their regiments, playing for the troops in the trenches under fire and the men at rest just to the rear.[47] Away from the

---

[43] Albany Evening Journal, September 22, 1905, p. 10.

[44] Gettysburg Times, March 24, 1917, p. 3; Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, March 27,1917, p. 5. The New York Age, June 7, 1917, p. 1 reports that Roosevelt had wanted to raise two black regiments. Could Wheelock have known this, and might there be a relationship to his appointment with the 808th?

[45] Bliss, History of the 805th, pp. 65-67, 208, gives a full roster for the band, including photos and hometowns; George L. Polk was just a private when he was pulled out of the ranks to lead the band.

[46] Nathan W. Pearson, Goin' To Kansas City (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 18.

[47] For diary accounts of two (white) bandsmen (both of whom ended up in Pershing's post-armistice All-Star AEF GHQ band), which are insightful about forming bands, fashioning soldiers into musicians, and the bandsman's daily life, see Royce Boyer, "The World War I Army Bandsman: A Diary Account by

combat zone, they performed at military ceremonies, at public open-air concerts for civilians, at private soirees for generals and politicians and royalty, in music halls and hospitals. The larger bands were really entertainment troupes; they could break up into smaller groups including jazz bands and vaudeville theatre orchestras, and bandsmen could put down their horns to pick up banjos and violins, or to sing in quartets, double quartets, and chorusses. Not just purveyors of concert music, the bands carried actors and singers on their roster and could mount and accompany staged minstrel and variety shows that included skits, solo and quartet singing, and virtuoso dancing.

The bands varied considerably in size, quality, and capabilities. A photo of the band of the 372nd shows scarcely two dozen men, while Dulf in the 370th and Bailey in the 805th had around 30-35, Europe had a group of 45, Vodery of 50, and Brymn of 70-100. Pinning down the number of instrumentalists in the larger groups is hard to do without photos or rosters, and these are surprisingly hard to come by; cited numbers need to be interpreted with caution, since they may include only the instrumentalists or also include the actors and singers.[48] Those ensembles built from draftees might be small and weak---barely able to scratch out a march or accompany military drills---while better bands might work from a playbook of mainly standard light classical and middlebrow popular fare.[49] Intensive recruiting by an ambitious colonel with a band fund and an able conductor might coax a significant number of voluntary enlistments and result in a flexible, professional-quality ensemble, an entertainment troupe whose numbers included singers, actors, and dancers in addition to bandsmen. An ability to play the newest hot ragtime idiom called jazz often garnered the most attention. Not all band leaders had an affinity for jazz, though, and in at least two demonstrable instances (in the 368th and the 809th), jazz band duties were delegated to the Assistant Band Leader or the drum major.

Philip James," American Music 14/2 (1996): 185-204, and see the diary of bandsman Robert R. Gustafson, online at www.worldwar1.com/dbc/rgustafson.htm (accessed 6/7/2011).

[48] Europe's overseas band is consistently described as a group of 44 or 45, but two officers and 56 enlisted men were detailed to travel to Aix-les-Bains (see below). The additional enlisted men were likely the actors and singers in the troupe.

[49] Not all draftee bandsmen were already musicians, or if they had come into the army with some training, for example as a pianist or singer, then they were not always proficient on a band instrument. Bands needed instruments, and funds for this purpose could be hard to locate. Bands were mostly blends of professionals and capable amateurs with rank beginners. Conductors might be pulled from the ranks of privates.

Although Europe's band unquestionably had the highest visibility and reknown of any U.S. Army band in France, each of the other black regimental bands serving in England or on the continent deserves further attention than it has received to date. Except when the bands were away from the front, however, particularly at the leave areas at Aix-les-Bains and nearby Chambery, or in Paris, much of their wartime activity is extremely hard to trace. In the combat zone, when they were playing at all rather than ducking artillery shells and helping the wounded, they were not going to get much if any press due to a news blackout on account of the need for secrecy about unit whereabouts "Somewhere in France." Such accounts as do turn up in the US press could be printed months after the fact due to censorship and transportation delays for mail. An article in the New York Herald (Paris ed.), quoted in a New Jersey paper after the Armistice, reveals how band activities could be sensitive news: "The appearance of the band of the 350th Field Artillery Regiment in Nancy for a concert was the first notice here that the only brigade of negro artillery every organized had been defending Nancy by holding the Marbache sector, south of Metz."[50]

By the time of the Armistice on November 11, 1918 the regiments had been abroad for anywhere from one to eleven months, and in some cases their bands had never left the side of the troops. After the Armistice, the majority of bandsmen faced an additional three months or more of camp life in mud and rain alongside all the other doughboys, with boredom, pneumonia, and the flu epidemic as unpleasant companions, before transport home. At this moment, to their relief, bands other than Jim Europe's began to be summoned away from their regiments for more ceremonial duties, in special assignments that were a welcome diversion.

*

The following quick review of band activities first will summarize the activities of the two most celebrated bands, those of Jim Europe and Will Vodery. Next to be sketched will be what we know about the more prominent remaining bands, moving from division to division rather than following the stateside geographical path that was taken above in the account of their initial formation. Mentioned here are the principle wartime anecdotes about the bands of the black combat regiments that can be gleaned from later accounts, especially US newspapers articles and concert advertisements.

---

[50] Woodbury (N.J.) Daily Times, December 24, 1918, p. 1.

The 15th N.Y. spent the longest time abroad of any black regiment---a total of thirteen months---for ten of which the band was under Mikell's baton. He had substantially more podium time with the band than did Jim Europe. However, it was the three months of concertizing away from the front before the Armistice by Europe and the "Hell Fighters' Band" that drew extensive attention at the time and has been remarked on at length by so many since. These three months began with a month in the rest area at Aix-les-Bains from mid February to mid March 1918, including elaborate concert tours by train to and from that town.[51] Jim Europe had to have special permission to step out of his company to conduct the band at Aix-les-Bains.

The regiment was formally re-designated the 369th on March 12, 1918, and was sent to the front under French command. Europe went with the fighters. He was away from the band for almost six months, from mid March to August 1918, to lead his machine gun company in combat, during which experience he got gassed and was hospitalized in July. He rejoined the band in time for two months of concerts in Paris from mid August to mid October 1918. There the band's initial appearance was at the final meeting of the Allied Peace Conference in Paris, held in the Théatre des Champs-Elysées on August 18, and this signal event was followed by eight weeks of appearances at hospitals and rest camps around the city.

Europe's group is remembered principally for its instrumental performances and the singing of Noble Sissle, but it mounted stage shows as well. For instance, during its first month away from the regiment, "The fine Army band of American Negro musicians came over from Aix-les-Bains and put Chambéry in a whirl of excitement. A concert was given in the theater under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A., and the house was crowded to the doors and every seat in the orchestra occupied by American soldiers. A minstrel show was part of the programme, and the two end men, in traditional minstrel togs, cracked jokes, danced, and sang songs, with a chorus and band to support them. The wild applause of the audience worked the actors into a perfect frenzy of cake

[51] Aix-les-Bains is less than 400 miles south of Paris and the front, but the band was said to have travelled several thousand miles to get there and back. The rest area had just opened, and Europe's band entertained the first soldiers to be pulled off the front. See The Crisis 15/6 (April 1918), p. 294, which reports that "An American Negro band led the American soldiers who returned from their first experiences in the trenches in a parade at Aix-les-Bains, France."

walks, hand-springs, and grotesque gestures, and the curtain dropped on a roar of excitement from soldiers and actors alike."[52]

The record of the band under Mikell is less easy to trace, and in that respect its history is quite similar to those of the other bands in the 92nd and 93rd divisions. Nonetheless, though he tends to get snubbed in later accounts that focus on Jim Europe, Mikell did valuable service. Indeed, in June, 1918 he was honored in his own right at a ceremony where he received a baton presented by a French regimental bandmaster.[53] On July 4, 1918, in one of its most prestigious engagements under his leadership, Mikell led the band in a concert at General Gouraud's headquarters in Chalons-sur-Marne. In mid 1918 Mikell enjoyed the army's boost in rank to Second Lieutenant, and he remained with the band, and Europe came back to it, when all the regiment's other black officers were removed later that summer.[54] The band was returned to its regiment and pulled back from public engagements after its stint in Paris, keeping a low profile for its last three and a half months overseas while other bands took the spotlight.

The other preeminent black regimental band of World War I, Will Vodery's 807th Pioneer Infantry Band, began its overseas service with a taste of combat: "when we arrived in a certain part of France we were carrying ammunition to the front under fire." Its "climactic success" really began, though, when it was detached from its regiment to be the First Army Headquarters Battalion Post Band, the most distinguished and lengthiest assignment undertaken by any of the black regimental bands, in which capacity it played all over France. This opportunity was created when on October 16, 1918, General John J. Pershing turned over personal command of the million-man US First Army to General Hunter Liggett, who commanded it until April 20, 1919. Naturally, Liggett then needed his own headquarters band, independent of Pershing's, and a competition was set up for the position, which was won when Vodery's band beat out four other (white) regimental bands.[55] The band transferred to

---

[52] Outlook, v.118/16 (April 17, 1918), p. 621, from an article by correspondent Pauline Sands Lee, who wrote from from Chambéry on February 24, 1918.

[53] New York Age, June 15, 1918, p. 6 ("Bandmaster Mikell is Presented With Baton").

[54] Noble Sissle, who held the rank of sergeant and drum major, while primarily performing as a singer, had to leave the 369th to become a staff officer with the 370th when he received his officer's commission in the fall of 1918 in France. He performed again with the 369th back in the US in early 1919 before Europe's death. The modern secondary literature sometimes credits Sissle with actually conducting the band, thereby mis-identifying him with Mikell.

[55] Letter from Sgt. Charles L. Thorpe, printed in the New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6. General Pershing also determined to have a new band, a large, all-star AEF GHQ [General Headquarters] Band

the First Army on November 13, 1918. Based first at Souilly near Verdun and then at Bar-sur-Aube in the countryside southeast of Paris, close by to Pershing's own headquarters at Chaumont, Vodery's men served as First Army Headquarters Band for five months until the First Army was dissolved in April. In early 1919, Vodery stepped away for two months to do the Bandmasters course at nearby Chaumont, and a Vodery letter shows that after the course he expected to return to the US with First Army Headquarters. Instead, in late April, he and the band were sent back to their regiment, which had missed them sorely.

A few references indicate the calibre of event for which Vodery's band provided entertainment in this assignment.[56] It represented the American Army at a reception for French President M. Poincaré and Mme. Poincaré at Verdun on November 20, 1918, when Poincaré was travelling to join Marshalls Foch and Petain for the ceremonial entries into the liberated towns of Alsace-Lorraine. Poincaré "said it was the first colored band he had ever heard and its music was astounding."[57] On December 5, the band played while General Liggett decorated eight aviator aces at Souilly. On January 8 it played at the services in honor of Colonel Roosevelt at which General Liggett and General Drum and staff were present (Theodore Roosevelt had died on January 6). Further, during January the band played at one of the Catholic Cathedrals, and it also played privately on January 19 for the Prince of Monaco at his Chateau. "The Prince expressed particular pleasure in Negro music."[58] And on March 21, they played for Gen. Pershing, his staff and guests, the king and queen of Belgium, at Lignoi, the chateau that was Lieut. Gen. Hunter Liggett's headquarters, near Bar-sur-Aube."[59] On April 6 they played for General Pershing at Bar-sur-Aube. And they also made tours of base hospitals, of course.[60]

Vodery's outfit was very much a theater troupe as well as a concert band, and could mount at least two different shows. A description of one of the shows performed

---

recruited from the various regiments. Simple racism rearing its head again, no members of any black regimental band were taken for this group.

[56] All material in this paragraph taken from the Chicago Defender, May 24, 1919, p. 4, except where noted.

[57] Vodery letter of Nov. 22, 1918, printed in the New York Age, December 21, 1918, p. 6; New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6.

[58] The Crisis 17/6 (April, 1919), p. 294.

[59] Cleveland Gazette, April 26, 1919, p. 3; see also New York Times, March 22, 1919, p. 3.

[60] The Crisis 17/4 (February 1919), p. 194.

in Bar-sur-Aube in January mentions comedy sketches, a saxophone quartet, a comedian, and a song-and-dance routine.[61]

What of the other bands in the combat divisions? The regiments of the 93nd Division, beginning with the 15th N.Y., were the first to go "over there," embarking between December 1917 and April 1918, and all served at the front under French command. With the exception of Jim Europe's, their bands stayed close by the trenches. George Dulf's great Chicago band of the Old Eighth Illinois, now the 370th, was particularly famed for its experience close to the action; it was the only band to go over the top (at Metz), and "played 'Illinois' in the very teeth of German guns." Another often-told anecdote recounts how they held a concert in what was supposed to be a quiet sector, at Bar-le-Duc, near Verdun, while an unexpected airplane battle raged overhead between French and German aviators and rained down shrapnel. Also, probably in later November, in ceremonies after the Armistice, they played at the special request of Marshalls Foch and Petain and General Pershing.[62]

The bands of the 371st and 372nd did not leave significant anecdotes concerning their overseas record.

The seven regiments of the 92rd Division all sailed later than those of the 93rd, embarking for the war in June 1918, and all served under U.S. command, spending on average about nine months overseas, only the first five of which came before the Armistice. Of the bands of the three Field Artillery regiments, those of the 349th and 351st seem to have made little widespread impact, but Tim Brymn's 350th Field Artillery Band achieved significant recognition. Staying close to its regiment, the band was at hand in the bloody Argonne and Metz drives in fall 1918, and by Brymns's account, at one point they had to put down their instruments to fight.[63] After the Armistice, Pershing ordered Brymn's 350th to make a tour of the entire front, winning recognition as "the only colored aggregation of musicians to appear before President Wilson and General Pershing by special request during the tour of the battle front by

---

[61] New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6; New York Herald (Paris ed.), January 29, 1919, p. 2 ("Headquarters Band of First Army Gives Show"), as cited in Mark Miller, Some Hustling This! Taking Jazz to the World, 1914-1929 (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2005), p. 54.

[62] Chicago Tribune, February 15, 1919, p. 10; Grand Forks Herald, December 24, 1919, p. 10; Cheyenne State Leader, January 7, 1921, p. 5.

[63] Binghampton Press, January 26, 1922.

the country's Chief Executive prior to the opening of the peace conference."[64] Away from the front, in concert, they played special engagements in Nancy, Marseilles, Bordeaux, Brest, and other cities. In addition, we know that Brymn's band played for three weeks at a base hospital in Paris and at General Pershing's great review of the 92nd Division on January 28 at Le Mans. Further, the memoirs of drum major Willie "the Lion" Smith mention a visit of the band to the rest area at Aix-les-Bains.[65]

Chicago's 365th has left fewer traces of its experiences abroad, but a late summer 1918 letter from France to the Indianapolis Freeman from drummer Jasper Taylor, writing shortly after his arrival overseas, speaks about playing popular music---love songs and jazz numbers---and standard band selections for the boys.[66] The band of the 366th seems to have kept a low profile, and neither the bands of the 367th under E. E. Thompson nor of the 368th under A. Jack Thomas generated many references to their activities abroad. We do have a photo of the band of the 367th serenading Generals Pershing and Gouraud in the summer of 1918.[67] And we know that the band of the 368th played concerts "in Toul, Saizerais, Nancy, Brest, Le Mans and other places," but also had to put down their instruments to become stretcher bearers in the Argonne fighting in September.[68]

The African American Pioneer Infantry regiments sailed from August through October 1918, in time for only just five (802, 805, 806, 807, 808) to assist in the final bloody assaults on German positions. Arriving so much later than the combat regiments, they also stayed on the continent much later---deep into the summer months of 1919---to work on the debris and scars of war. As the entire 92nd and 93rd Divisions pulled back to the port areas and returned to the states in February and March 1919, demands on the Pioneer Infantry regimental bands increased both to entertain the remaining troops and to serve on ceremonial occasions. These bands, too, varied widely

---

[64] Philadelphia Inquirer, March 19, 1919, p. 3. Wilson arrived on December 13, so this would have been at some point between mid December 1918 and early January 1919.

[65] Trenton Evening Times, March 23, 1919, p. 25; Binghampton Press, January 26, 1922; Amiri Baraka, The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), pp. 535-536.

[66] Freeman, September 28, 1918, p. 2 ("A Black Hun Chaser Writes From France"), cited in Miller, Some Hustling, p. 52.

[67] New York Age, September 14, 1918, p. 6; Sweeney reprints it between pp. 112-113. The publication date suggests that this was an event of July/August/earliest Sept.

[68] New York Age, Feb 22, 1919, p. 6. Toul, Saizerais, and Nancy are near each other in the Lorraine, close to the front. Le Mans is in the west on the way to or from Brest and St. Nazaire.

in talent and accomplishment. Vodery's great band of the 807th was discussed above; I will just mention a few more below that have left some significant trace of overseas activity.

The band of the 803rd was "eventually detached from their regiment and sent touring . . . . entertaining everybody from Alsace-Lorraince to the Mediterranean." It played, for example, at a reception for the civilian population of Challes-les-Eux on March 12, 1919, and it was photographed with Addie Hunton in Chambery on March 18, 1919 while on special duty in the leave area. They were a tremendous hit. "These men gave us so much joy and entertainment in their playing that not only did the Y make efforts to have them retained permanently in the Leave Area, but the French people were quite as eager to have them, and showered praises and flowers on them when at last they were ordered back to their regiment."[69] Its extensive tours throughout France made this band one of the most popular in the A.E.F. and allowed it to claim the mantle of "the best band in France."[70]

The band of the 805th had to have been among the very last to have been formed in the wartime US army, since it only received instruments on January 1, 1919 at Chateau de Chehery, Chatel Chehery, where the regiment was in residence from November 25, 1918 to May 2, 1919. The 805th had enrolled a large number of skilled musicians and minstrel/vaudeville actors, and they now went to work immediately to put together some concert repertoire and a vaudeville show. Lieutenant Leonce R. Legendre (white) was in charge of the show and the band, with George L. Polk as Assistant Band Leader and conductor. The regiment "became famous overnight" for the Bear Cat Entertainers show and for a section of the band that was spun off as a Jazz Orchestra. Their Colonel Humphrey later boasted that his Bear Cats had "the best Jazz band in France," "the best vaudeville show in the A. E. F.," and the best baseball team of any outfit in France. From February to May 1919 they entertained many distinguished visitors at Chatel Chehery and went on the road to many French villages around the

---

[69] Hunton and Johnson, Two Colored Women, pp. 171, 220-21, with a photo of the band taken at Chambery between pp. 222 and 223; another image from that photo-session at Chambery, made into a postcard, was formerly visible on the internet at www.usmilitaryforum.com (accessed 12/15/2010). A third often-reproduced photo of the band shows them in Brest on board the troop transport U.S.S. Philippines just prior to their return to the United States; see, for example, the image as preserved in the Library of Congress, Gladstone Collection (www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/07/0705001r.jpg, accessed 12/15/2010).

[70] Chicago Defender, June 14, 1919, p. 9; Chicago Defender, June 21, 1919, p. 20.

Argonne-Meuse area, with famous Kansas City professional comedian, actor and singer Billy Higgins, promoted from private to color sergeant, as their principal soloist.[71]

The band of the other Kansas City area Pioneer Infantry regiment, the 806th, got off to a start that was almost as slow. It was not organized until after the Armstice in November, and started with borrowed instruments until the men of the regiment could purchase some for their band; they played music composed by their Assistant Band Leader, the well-known trombonist Ashford Hardee, until sheet music could be ordered from home. Of course, it too, was "now the best band in France."[72] Stationed with the regiment in early 1919 at Montrichard, just east of Tours, the band was sent to Paris in March or April of 1919 and stayed there until their return to the states in August. An ensemble of 32 pieces, it was remembered by its Lawrence Denton, the other of its conductors, as playing light classical selections like the two famous overtures by Franz von Suppe, "Morning, Noon, and Night" and "Poet and Peasant." In May and June, the men of the 806th regiment helped to build Pershing Stadium, and then "the 806th Pioneer Infantry Band played at the Columbus Stadium in Paris, giving daily concerts during the A.E.F. try-outs for the Inter-Allied Meet."[73]

Baltimore's 808th Pioneer Infantry band under Native American "Chief" Wheelock was proclaimed for bringing "the real America Jazz, as it should be played, over here," to France,[74] and was celebrated for staying close to the troops: "This band of colored musicians has indeed upheld the tradition of its race, for their music contributes much to make the name of the 808th Pioneer Infantry popular at the front. To begin with, they are right at the front being only a few kilometers behind the line, and although in danger of attracting the attention of hostile forces, they realize that the spirit of the boys must be kept cheerful and refreshed. So, often they assemble in a well protected spot and play for the constant line of khaki as it moves along the road toward

---

[71] See Bliss, History of the 805th, op. cit.; Hunton and Johnson, Two Colored Women, p. 223; Emporia Gazette, July 11, 1919, p. 3; Kansas City Sun, May 3, 1919, p. 8.

[72] Kansas City Plaindealer, April 18, 1919, p. 4, in an anonymous letter of March 6, 1919 from a bandmember.

[73] Charles H. Williams, Sidelights on Negro Soldiers (Boston, 1923), p. 155; see also Thisted, p. 43. The Inter-Allied Games were 22 June to 6 July, 1919, at Pershing Stadium, but one of the sponsors was the Knights of Columbus, hence also "Columbus" stadium. Units of the 806th helped construct/renovate the stadium and site. See Williams, p. 154, H&J, p. 154, and The Inter-Allied Games, Paris, 22nd June to 6th July, 1919, ed. George Wythe and Joseph Mills Hanson (Paris: published for the Games Committee by Société anonyme de publications périodiques, 1919). The black bands did not directly participate in the festivities and ceremonies of the Inter-Allied Games themselves.

[74] Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, November 29, 1918, p. 4.

the enemy."[75] After the Armistice, when the bands of the black combat regiments had embarked for home, Wheelock's unit remained in camp and garnered all the prizes: the band of the 808th was judged the best infantry band in the A.E.F., white or black, in a contest held at Camp Pontanezen, Brest, France, on June 2, 1919. Additionally, it won the signal honor of playing for President Wilson's departure for home from Brest on June 29, 1919.[76]

The 814th Pioneer Infantry regiment was one of the very last US army regiments to go overseas and one of the first to return, leaving the states in the first week of October 1918 and returning just two months later.[77] While abroad, the regiment was split, going partly to England to build a railroad, and partly to France to do stevedore work (NYT). The band and the companies that went to England were housed in Winchester. By one report, during their two months in England, "the band visited London several times. On one of their trips they played in the Palace Theatre in the act of Miss Elsie Janis. They also played in Winchester Cathedral, at the request of the caretaker, to the guests at that time in the building."[78]

According to Time magazine, the most conspicuous wartime service of the 814th was rendered by its regimental band, "a collection of superb musicians and entertainers who took London by storm. Its most famous members were Drum-Major Julius ("Slim") Williams and Corporal Charles ("Egg Shell") Fleming, both expert buck-&-wing dancers. The high point of their visit was a command performance at Buckingham Palace, which brought a letter of commendation from King George."[79] A widely disseminated AP wire-service anecdote dated London, Saturday, November 16 and first printed in many US papers on November 18 must also be about them: "when another

---

[75] Hunton and Johnson, Two Colored Women, pp. 223-224.

[76] Hunton and Johnson, Two Colored Women, pp. 223; Genoa Indian News, October 1919, p. 6.

[77] There is a famous Western Union photo of the band of the 814th taken upon its return, immediately after disembarking onto the docks on December 18, 1918. Incidentally, the "Black Devils" soubriquet, given to all the U.S. black combat troups by the Germans, first turns up in June 1918 in reference to the entire 92nd Division. While still in training camp in Kentucky in late summer of 1918, the 814th want to claim it as their nickname, and they used it as such even though they never received formal authorization. Both the 370th and the 350th appropriated it upon their return to the US in spring 1919, as will be mentioned below. Time: The Weekly Newsmagazine, Letters Supplement (a.k.a. Letters: Published Fortnightly by Time, Inc.) I/17 (September 17, 1934), p. 2.

[78] Southern Workman 48/8 (August 1919), p. 417. Elsie Janis (1889-1956) was "the Sweetheart of the AEF".

[79] Writing so long after the fact, Time's 1934 account (see note 64 above) possibly may confuse the performance of the band of the 814th with the royal command performances of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band at Buckingham Palace in the second half of 1919.

colored band from The States went to London to head a parade of American and English soldiers, and halted at Buckingham Palace, it is said that King George V and Queen Mary heard the lively airs with undisguised enthusiasm and were loath to have the players depart for the park where they were scheduled for a concert, with a dance engagement, under British military control, to follow."[80]

Hunton and Johnson remembered the bands of the 815th and 816th for playing in the rest areas and at the dedication of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romagne, France by General Pershing on Memorial Day, May 30, 1919: "Then came the 815th with their fine Western pride and spirit playing their way, too, into the heart of the Area. We met them again at Romagne when, with the band of the 816th Pioneer Regiment, they were playing daily to counteract the depressing influences of their surroundings. We stood near them and watched with tear-filled eyes as they paid their humble homage on that memorable thirtieth of May when General Pershing had come to dedicate that largest military cemetery. We were with them again at the Port of Brest where, with their wonderfully stirring music they, too, fought in that battle for morale."[81]

RANK AND QUALIFICATIONS

Two additional issues concerning rank and qualifications of bandmasters are of significance in the story of the black U.S. Army bands in World War I. A first point has to do with designated rank. Before WWI, army bandmasters were enlisted men---effectively, sergeants. In 1916 the position of Chief Musician was officially renamed Band Leader, with an Assistant Band Leader serving immediately under. Following a suggestion of General Pershing, military orders issued on June 1, 1918 required that the U.S. Army's Band Leaders receive temporary officers' commissions. Those with over five years of service as leader were made first lieutenants, and those with less, including all new appointments, were made second lieutenants. Thus all the Band Leaders in the 92nd and 93rd Divisions became Lieutenants, a small but noteworthy addition to the

---

[80] Chicago Tribune, Nov. 18, p. 5 and dozens of other papers around the country over the next four weeks; see also Scott, Official History, p. 303. The Cleveland Gazette, November 23, 1918, p. 1, prints a paraphrase of the news item with the additional claim that the band was in fact that of Jim Europe and the 369th Infantry, a unique embellishment for which there is no further corroboration.

[81] Hunton and Johnson, Two Colored Women, pp. 221-22. Bandmember of the 816th Vernon L. Page also mentioned playing for the dedication of the cemetery on Memorial Day 1919 (Kansas City Sun, July 5, 1919, p. 8).

number of black officers.[82] Drye and Europe had won previous appointments as line officers, not as musicians, so each of their bands also had a sergeant (later Lieutenant) Band Leader.

Recall that the Pioneer Infantry regiments were organized from June to September 1918, thus after implementation of Pershing's new orders. They all had white officers, so with the sole exception of Vodery and Wheelock (and remember, Wheelock was white in the army's eyes), their conductors were left at the rank of sergeant in the position of Assistant Band Leader, answerable to a white lieutenant from Headquarters Company who was not necessarily a musician at all; no commissioned black Band Leader was ever appointed.[83] Moreover, in July 1918 the American Expeditionary Force adopted a policy whereby segregated black units had to have either all white or all black officers; no units were to have a mix of races among their officers.[84] This policy was relaxed for black band leader Lieutenants in units with otherwise all white officers, as in the case of Mikell in the 369th, and of Jim Europe upon his return to the band of the 369th in August 1918, and for Vodery with the 807th.

A second point about the bandmasters and army bands in Europe concerns bandmaster qualifications and education. General Pershing, despite all the demands on his attention, found time to review the condition of the military bands under his command in the spring of 1918 and found many in need of improvement. First steps were taken by the orders of June 1, 1918, which not only called for the promotion of band leaders to officer rank but also for the enlargement of regimental bands from 28 to 48 men, and the addition of a drum and bugle corps. The general level of mediocrity amongst conductors was not so easily dealt with; black or white, able bandmasters were in desperately short supply, and the knowledge and abilities of those brought into the

---

[82]After the war, all bandleaders who did not muster out reverted to enlisted rank. The present day ranks of Warrant Officer (from 1920) and Chief Warrant Officer (from 1941) were created later. William C. White, A History of Military Music in America (NY: Exposition Press, 1944; repr. Greenwood Press, 1974), p. 98-101.

[83] These white lieutenants apparently did not hold formal Band Leader appointments; they were on the regimental headquarters staff and oversaw the band but did not get closely involved with the musicians. To date I have found the names of only two (Legendre with the 805th and Maxom with the 814th). Lawrence Denton's comments about his time in the 806th capture the situation clearly: "I made assistant bandleader and the bandleader was a white fella, lieutenant . . . We only saw him about once a month. He left everything to us" (Pearson, Goin' To Kansas City, p. 18). Hunton and Johnson (p. 28) tell an anecdote about an otherwise unidentified black band with a white leader, and they describe the St. Nazaire band as led by its black Assistant Band Leader.

[84] Badger, A Life in Ragtime, p. 190.

army varied considerably. By coincidence, it was precisely at this juncture that famed American conductor Walter Damrosch came to France in June 1918 to engage a French orchestra for concerts at the soldiers' rest camps. Pershing, learning of his presence on the continent, summoned him to his headquarters in Chaumont to consult. One immediate result of their discussion was the decision that bandsmen would no longer have to be pressed into service as stretcher-bearers.[85] More consequentially for bandmasters, Damrosch agreed to examine all of them to evaluate their competency.

A. Jack Thomas and E. E. Thompson were among the 200-odd bandmasters (by one report 240, of whom 229 were white and 11 non-white) who took Walter Damrosch's examination for army musicians in Paris over several weeks in July 1918. Only eight whites and Thomas and Thompson passed.[86] Damrosch explained the chastening results to Pershing and subsequently took the leading role in establishing an army bandmasters school in Chaumont that operated from November 1, 1918 to June 1, 1919. The course of study lasted eight weeks.[87] It was attended by A. Jack Thomas and Will Vodery in late 1918 and early 1919, not both at the same time, before they returned with their units to the US. Most probably, Thomas attended in November and December; Vodery attended from February through early April. Vodery recalled being the only African American among the 40 in his class, who were drawn by competitive examination from a pool of 162 applicants. Both Thomas and Vodery did outstanding work there.[88]

POST WAR RETURN AND THE LURE OF TOURING

After mustering out back in the U.S., most of the doughboys, including bandsmen, dispersed immediately back to homes, families, and jobs. Of the regimental

---

[85] After Pershing and Damrosch consulted, bands were officially relieved of litter work by General Order 139, A. E. F., but bandsmen continued to serve in this capacity anyway right through the last great offensives. See the experiences of the bandsmen of the 368th cited above and see also the Gustafson diary on-line, and the Savannah (GA) Tribune, March 1, 1919, p. 1 for the experiences of the bandsmen of the 371st as first aid men and stretcher bearers.

[86] Baltimore Afro-American, March 10, 1928, p. 9 ("Members of 368th Infantry Band Back 9 Years Friday"), with details probably contributed by Baltimore resident A. Jack Thomas. The number of eleven non-whites fits the eleven black combat regiments. At the time of Damrosch's examination, the Pioneer Infantry regiments and their bands were just in the initial stages of formation in the states.

[87] Damrosch's own detailed account can be read in The Etude 38/3 (March 1920), pp. 151-52: "The Musical Aftermath of the Great War: An interview secured especially for The Etude with the distinguished conductor Dr. Walter Damrosch."

bandmasters, Norman Scott had died in France of pneumonia, and his replacement, Burnit McReynolds, returned to the 10th Cavalry. All the other bandleaders mustered out of the army. Of them, only Dorcy Rhodes later re-entered active duty, in 1926, as bandmaster of the 9th Cavalry. About equal numbers took up civilian careers in education and in the entertainment industry. A. Jack Thomas retired from his lengthy military career and immediately founded a symphony orchestra and the Aeolian Conservatory in Baltimore. Drye returned to Tuskegee and Mikell to the Bordentown School, Rhodes took over the Howard University band, Wheelock went out to the Genoa, NE Indian Industrial School, Brown returned home to Kentucky to teach in a career that eventually took him to Harlem's famous PS 186, and Polk accepted a position at the St. Joseph Industrial School. Wesley I. Howard returned to Europe for a year of study and then began a career at Howard University. Louia Vaughn Jones opened a private studio in Boston for two years, then went to Europe; he came back to the US in 1930 to teach at Howard. Thompson, Vodery, Cason, White, and Stewart were among the many who picked up the threads of their individual careers in entertainment.

The greatest of the black regimental bands hoped for stateside work in early 1919 based on their wartime reputations. Expectation was building (at least in the East Coast press, which paid little heed to Chicago) about those led by Europe, Brymn, Thomas, and Thompson. An article entitled "Colored Military Bands To Delight American Audiences" proclaimed that "With the return of colored regiments from France we are soon to have in our midst race military bands galore. Of course, each regiment will claim honors of having the best band."[89] With pride at stake, getting out ahead of the field was going to be important from the moment the transports docked. Without a guarantee of immediate work, though, bands were sure to evaporate after demobilization, especially if the bandsmen were of geographically diverse backgrounds. An anecdote is telling here: in the case of Brymn's band, it was reported

---

[88] Vodery letter to Alex Rogers in the New York Age, June 7, 1919, p. 6 ("Vodery Makes Highest Mark of the Bandleaders"); reprinted by Mark Tucker, "Vodery," pp. 181-82.

[89] New York Age, February 22, 1919, p. 6. The article proposed that "This mooted question [of who is the number one black military band] might be decided by staging a big band contest some Sunday evening at the Hippodrome."

that the men got a signal from shore before they even disembarked that confirmed they would have work.[90]

The most exciting prospect for turning fame into fortune was through touring, presenting black music and musicians to white audiences in large concert halls and theaters patronized by whites, for a middle class who wanted to hear what had gotten the foreigners so worked up overseas. Touring in the states was virtually terra incognita for the bands, though. There was exactly one model for such a large enterprise and it was of remarkably recent vintage. Hoping to build a "movement to exploit Negro music," Will Marion Cook announced in September 1918 a proposed tour by sixty instrumentalists and singers of the New York Clef Club in November that would take them to ten of the nation's largest cities.[91] This tour never got off the ground. In all likelihood the logistics were beyond Cook's ability and experience to manage at the time. Meanwhile, for the grand benefit for the 367th Infantry at the Century Theatre on October 27, 1918, Cook, the musical director, had to work closely with George W. Lattimore, the general director of the event. Cook had found his professional manager. By later November or early December the two of them had contracted to run a new organization, the New York Syncopated Orchestra (NYSO), which went out on the road for ninety days between January 30 and April 30, 1919, completing two circuits out to Chicago and back. Rather than move at the pace of a vaudeville show or Broadway road company, the NYSO travelled to the rhythm and tempo of a Sousa band-style tour, that is, on the move daily, with daily matinee and evening concerts at each stop, hitting many small towns as well as the biggest halls in the largest cities. Entertainer Tom Fletcher, who was a member of the company, recalled that the NYSO tour was “the first time an orchestra of this kind had ever toured the country,” and he reported that Cook’s ambition was for it to be “the greatest thing ever done by colored people.”[92]

Cook's initially thwarted notion and its realization under Lattimore's management shows us how important it was that an investment be made in

---

[90] Harrisburg Patriot, April 5, 1919, p. 7: "When the Black Devil Band neared the dock in New York City they espied the figure of Captain Carl Helm, their white friend and mentor, standing upon the string piece of the wharf. They let out a yell which could be heard a mile or more, for they knew that he was on the job, and that their American tour was assured."

[91] New York Age, September 21, 1918, p. 5; Washington Bee, September 21, 1918, p. 8; The Crisis 17/1 (November 1918), p. 32 (repr. in Caxton's Weekly (Seattle), November 23, 1918, p. 3).

[92] Tom Fletcher, 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business (New York: Burdge, 1954; repr. Da Capo. 1984), pp. 187, 277.

professional planning for ambitious and complicated tours; further, it shows that the planning process needed to have begun well before the bands landed. As far as major US tours, only three bands---those of Dulf and Europe from the 93rd Division and Brymn from the 92nd Division---were able to arrange to make extensive, immediate tours for profit as private citizens, and as we will see, only Dulf and Brymn were able to keep their bands more-or-less intact thereafter for an extended period. The other two great bands of the 92nd Division---those of the 367th and 368th---came up in the conversation about touring but did not take the plunge. The Pioneer Infantry bands, returning so much later in 1919, never became a part of this enterprise---not even Vodery's 807th, the band that some thought surpassed any other band that ever went to France.[93]

Anticipating that E. E. Thompson would tour with the band of the 367th, one observer speculated that "there should be some interesting musical moments the next few days when the "Buffalo" musicians return and find the organizations of the 368th and 369th already on the field."The 367th, however, running a few weeks behind the others in the process of demobilization, and apparently without strong stateside sponsorship, opted out of touring. Instead, Thompson and his "Buffaloes" played at the Manhattan Casino on April 9 and then at Carnegie Hall for a benefit on May 3, but never again re-assembled.[94] In the fall, Thompson went to work for Will Marion Cook and George Lattimore. A rejuvenated version of Cook's New York Syncopated Orchestra, re-named the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, had sailed for England in May and June 1919 and had been playing in London since July. Thompson joined the orchestra in England as conductor in place of Cook in October 1919, and he remained with it for most of two-and-a-half seasons, leading it---often in uniform---into late 1921.[95]

---

[93] Chicago Defender, June 21, 1919, p. 4. At the least, Vodery's band was expected to make a grand parade up Lenox Avenue when it got home (Chicago Defender, May 24, 1919, p. 4), but homecoming, once anticipated for May, ended up being in late July, and there was no parade, much less any touring.

[94] There is a long article on the Buffaloes and Thompson, with a photo of Thompson, in the New York Age, April 5, p. 6-7, in anticipation of concert of April 9; the May 3 concert was reviewed in the New York Age, May 10, 1919, p. 6.

[95] On the complicated and sometimes dramatic history of the SSO and its personnel, the essential starting point is now Howard Rye, "The Southern Syncopated Orchestra," Black Music Research Journal 29 (2009): 153-228, with substantial additional information on its roster, itinerary, and more addenda by the same author in Black Music Reserch Journal 30 (2010).

A. Jack Thomas of the 368th was said to be "planning to organize a concert band from the best musical talent in the 92nd Division," [96] but that notion also never came to fruition. Instead of wrestling to hold his men together and organize a tour after they mustered out on March 9, he opted to settle down in Baltimore by early April. Thomas announced the opening of the Aeolian Conservatory on April 23, and he also organized a symphony orchestra there by April 27.[97] Drum Major Landin and the Jazz Band made a few prominent appearances, however, culminating in a farewell in Baltimore on the nights of April 21, 22, and 23,[98] and "a section of the regimental band of the 368th Infantry" played in Washington, DC, at Howard University's commencement in June, a major event which incorporated a celebration of that institution's fiftieth anniversary.[99]

What of the three bands that did tour? These seasoned ensembles were indeed out of the gate in a hurry. By coincidence, Dulf's and Europe's regiments were not only celebrated in monster parades led by their respective bands in Chicago and New York on the very same day, February 17, but the bands were out on tour one month later, again on the same day, March 16. Brymn, not far behind, began touring on March 19. Dulf did not wrap up until at least May 22, while Jim Europe's tour was to end on May 10, and Brymn's on May 18. As the New York Clipper reported it, "the end of the war has brought into booking offices a large number of musical soldier shows, vaudeville acts and jazz bands that are making records almost everywhere when it comes to getting money."[100] And the New York Age boasted of "Colored Attactions Winning O.K. of Broadway Audiences."[101]

Taking up first the continuing story of the "Old 8th Illinois," Dulf took his "Black Devils" of the 370th on the road for over two months from mid March through late May 1919, expecting to hit as many as 50 major cities. From New Orleans they headed north, then swung east through Columbus, Toledo, and Cleveland into Pennsylvania, and then down the East Coast from Baltimore and Wilmington at least as far south as Greensboro and Richmond. The band was assisted by another Chicagoan, the

---

[96] New York Age, February 22, 1919, p. 6; see also Badger, A Life in Ragtime, p. 204 and p. 308, n. 9.

[97] Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, April 23, 1919, p. 2, Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, May 16, 1919, p. 10; The Crisis 18/2 (June, 1919), p. 101.

[98] Baltimore Sun, April 20, 1919, p. 11.

[99] Washington Bee, June 16, 1919, p. 4.

[100] New York Clipper, March 26, 1919, p. 5.

[101] New York Age, March 22, 1919, p. 6.

nationally-famed African American coloratura soprano Anita Patti Brown (1881-1950), along with Frank A. Dennie, tenor soloist, and Charles A. Brady, cornet virtuoso. Their show also featured the decorated war hero Lieut. Samuel S. Gordon, himself awarded the Croix de Guerre, who narrated stories of the exploits of the regiment and its band. On their stop in Cleveland, "Selections from grand opera were appreciated by the audience . . . . but when the boys played the popular jazz music the audience became so excited that, had it not been Sunday, there might have been dancing. Many encores were demanded. They were always answered with more jazz."[102] Staying together after the tour either as the "Black Devils" or as the "Famous Eighth Illinois Band," they continued to take engagements that summer, playing, for example, in St. Louis on Friday, August 15 for the annual meeting of the National Negro Business League, and then playing at the Lexington, KY, Colored Fair for a week beginning August 17. (They were to return to this Lexington venue in August 1920.)

Most important to the survival of Dulf's long-standing band, though, is that in September 1919 a second spinoff of the former New York Syncopated Orchestra was created in the United States by Will Marion Cook, which he called the American Syncopated Orchestra [ASO].[103] The ASO absorbed Dulf and most of Dulf's men, was based in Chicago, and was represented in newspaper stories as a direct continuation of the 370th. It played privately for President Wilson in Wichita on September 29, 1919 to kick off its first extended tour. Cook returned from Europe so that he and Dulf could share conducting duties with it from October 1919 to February 1920, after which he returned to Europe. Dulf kept the ASO going for a second winter season over 1920-1921, touring nationally at least into February 1921.[104] In both seasons it essentially traced the same general route as the Western vaudeville circuits of the Orpheum and Pantages organizations, which ran from Chicago north through the Twin Cities into Canada, then west to the Pacific Coast and south from Vancouver and Seattle to Los Angeles and San Diego. Of all the black regimental bands back from Europe, Dulf's travelled the farthest and enjoyed the most geographically diverse audience.

---

[102] Cleveland Gazette, April 12, 1919, p. 3.

[103] Confusingly, the New York Syncopated Orchestra's first offshoot, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, was occasionally called the American Syncopated Orchestra by British papers (sometimes as a title, and sometimes meaning simply the Syncopated Orchestra from America).

[104] The Ogden (UT) Examiner, January 11, 1921, p. 4; etc., etc., to San Jose, Cal. Evening News, Feb. 9, 1921, p. 7 and Feb. 17, 1921, p. 2; San Jose Mercury News, Feb. 6, 1921, p. 14 and Feb. 17, 1921, p. 8.

Tim Brymn, who had led the biggest, wealthiest band overseas, mounted a major publicity campaign for his tour back in the States. In the newspaper ads, Brymn was "Mr. Jazz Himself," his band was "The Overseas Jazz Sensation" or "Europe's Jazz Sensation," and his concerts were "A Military Symphony Engaged in a Battle of Jazz." He also favored the "Black Devils" moniker, but Dulf and the 370th having claimed it first, Brymn distinguished his ensemble by calling it the "70 Black Devils." He and a band of seventy made a two month eastern and midwestern tour from mid March to mid May featuring vocal soloist Josephine Dean and several soloists from the band, including saxophonist Nelson Kinkaid. They began with a homecoming debut on March 19 in Philadelphia and an appearance shortly thereafter in Trenton, then swung west through Pennsylvania into Ohio and east again for a triumphant grand finale on May 18 at the Casino on Broadway at 39th Street in New York City. For this event the papers called them "The Band All New York Has Been Waiting to Hear." Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heinck herself was on hand that evening at the Casino Theatre to welcome them.[105]

After the spring tour, Brymn kept going for at least three years an ever-shrinking "Black Devils" band of first 70, then 50, then 20, or even just a half dozen men, mostly playing at clubs and hotels in the New York area. Just three days after their tour ended, on Wednesday, May 21, they were a headline act in the huge national Salvation Army Doughnut Day Drive, playing a noontime concert at New York's Pennsylvania Station. Most significant for their wallets, though, were two three-month, high-profile residencies to accompany stage shows and dancing at a famed nearby resort, the Hotel Shelbourne at Brighton Beach on Coney Island in the summers of 1919 and 1920. (Noble Sissle recalls that this booking was initially to have been filled by Jim Europe's band).[106] Brymn claimed that only the flattering offer of the Brighton Beach contract kept the band from embarking on a world tour in concert.[107] Between summers at the Shelbourne, they kept busy with stints opposite Sophie Tucker at Reisenweber's Cafe at Columbus Circle in September and October 1919, and at Proctor's 125th Street Theatre in February 1920. Brymn's band was also a headline attraction in an extravaganza in

---

[105] New York Tribune, May 13, 1919, p. 11; New York Tribune, May 16, 1919, p. 11; New York Tribune, May 17, 1919, p. 11.

[106] Sissle, "Memoirs," p. 224.

[107] New York Age, October 9, 1920, p. 5 ("Lieutenant J. Tim Brymn's Interesting Musical Career").

Madison Square Garden in September 1920 as one of the live acts on a bill featuring the world premiere of the silent film biopic of Babe Ruth, Headin' Home. The Sherbourne then renewed their contract for an additional six months from October 1920 into April 1921. In the spring of 1921, Brymn took a small group of Black Devils into an Okeh Records recording session, marched with a larger group at President Harding's inaugural parade (March 4, 1921), and later served as composer and musical director, with a pit orchestra of 20 Black Devils, for the Broadway colored review Put and Take (August 23-September 23, 1921). In January 1922, Brymn was one of a group of six Black Devils who played the Binghamton, NY auto show. By November 1922, however, he had stopped using the name Black Devils for his bands and orchestras, although he held on proudly to his uniform and to the title "Lieutenant" for the rest of his career.

Lieut. Jim Europe took on the road the most famous band of them all, the "369th Infantry Hell Fighters' Band," in what was planned to be a nine-week tour of more than two dozen cities lasting from March 16 to May 10, 1919. It was expected that this would be followed by trips to all the major cities of the US and Canada, and then across the Atlantic. Just who and how many Hell Fighters bandsmen there were that spring is a question with no one firm answer. Immediately before the tour, Europe took a group of about twenty men into the recording studio for Pathé, while for the Manhattan concerts he led an "augmented regimental band"of eighty or more, almost double the size of the overseas ensemble of forty five, and the travelling ensemble was advertised as a band of sixty five.[108] The Hell Fighters Band travelled west from Boston as far as Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Chicago before retracing its path back to Boston, with the anticipation of a grand finale in New York City. Its itinerary regularly crisscrossed with the paths of the Dulf and Brymn bands and Will Marion Cook's New York Syncopated Orchestra.

After Europe was murdered in Boston on May 9, the group was immediately disbanded and its musicians thrown out of work.[109] Noble Sissle turned down a suggestion that he take over the band and lead a reduced ensemble of fifteen on a

---

[108] On the numbers of personnel, see Reid Badger, "Performance Practice," and see also Tim Brooks, Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 280-92. In any event, moreover, neither the touring band of Jim Europe nor those of Dulf or Brymn were manned exclusively by their own veterans.

[109] New York Tribune, May 25, 1919, p. 7.

vaudeville tour on the Keith circuit.[110] Instead, Mikell stepped in at this juncture. He assumed formal leadership in June[111] and kept the Hell Fighters Band going on and off for a total of six more years in conjunction with his teaching career. Mikell had hoped to tour in the fall with the band, but that plan never came to fruition. Rather, he began with individual concerts in New York City on July 11, July 26-27, August 14, and September 26, 1919,[112] followed by a concert on January 25, 1920 in Providence, Rhode Island,[113] and one on May 11, 1920 in New York.[114] The group then went on hiatus for two years, as Mikell became more and more involved with teaching.[115]

Complicating the history and legacy of the Hell Fighters' Band is a situation that was partly national, partly local in significance. For at least six months in 1917-1918 there were two 15th N.Y. National Guard regiments and two bands, the "old" and the "new." The new 15th N.Y. was re-established for local home service in the fall of 1917 before the old 15th had even left the states. A band for it was quickly formed and began to concertize under Frederick Ward Simpson, who earned a National Guard commission as Lieutenant. Upon the return of New York area veterans in early 1919, a vigorous effort was made to sign them up for the new guard and the new band. Furthermore, with the "old" 15th/369th regiment demobilized, the new 15th N.Y. was now the official service band for events memorializing that combat unit. Simpson's group soon was able to advertise that "among the musicians were a number of overseas veterans." It represented itself as "The Colored Band of War Fame," "The Famous New York Fifteenth Infantry Band of 45 Musicians 'From Harlem to the Rhine'," "the band that won all the jazz prizes in England, France and Italy," and "the successor to the famous 15th Infantry Band which served overseas."

On January 5, 1921 a veteran officer of the old 15th and 369th, Col. Arthur W. Little, was appointed commander of the new 15th and began vigorously to increase the

---

[110] Robert Kimball and William Bolcolm, Reminiscing with Sissle and Blake (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 80. Sissle and Blake went out on the vaudeville circuit as a duo instead.

[111] The New York Age, June 21, 1919, p. 6 ("Mikell Now Leader of "Hellfighters" Band").

[112] New York Age, October, 11, 1919, p. 5

[113] Providence News, January 26, 1920, p. 4

[114] New York Age, May 3, 1920, p. 6; New York Age, May 8, 1920, p. 6.

[115] After the 1920-1921 school year, Mikell, who had been commuting out from Manhattan, left the Bordentown School altogether and concentrated on his professional school teaching and Clef Club duties in New York City. He had been made conductor of the Clef Club Orchestra, and he led it at the Lt. Europe Memorial on May 15, 1921; in January 1922 he led it in a concert at Carnegie Hall.

size and resources of the regiment. His initiatives included a major campaign for a new armory,[116] the renaming of the new 15th as the 369th, and a new direction for the the band (for which he had a special place in his heart, because as regimental adjutant with the 369th in France he had accompanied it on its February-March 1918 tour). For most of his first year he kept Fred Simpson as bandmaster, so that, for example, Simpson led the regimental band in the new 15th's first major parade march since the war, a huge event up 5th Avenue in May 1921. In December 1921, however, Lieut. Simpson was succeeded by Lieut. Will Vodery as band director, with Lieut. Noble Sissle as band manager. Simpson's ensemble then took on different sponsorship, immediately affiliating in a body with Monarch Lodge No. 45 of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World (colored) and becoming the Monarch Band.[117] For the gala affair of January 20, 1922 that marked the renaming of the regiment as the ("new") 369th, the band was led by Will Vodery. Just how many of the performers that night were veterans, or were simultaneously members of the Elks band, is not known.

Memories were long and and loyalties were strong, however. It was never forgotten that the Monarch Band was formerly the band of the 15th, and it held on to some of Jim Europe's veteran bandsmen. Over the better part of the next two decades it concertized extensively, frequently participated in VFW events in Harlem, and enjoyed a national reputation as Elkdom's Champion Band. In the second half of 1940, when National Guard soldiers were called up across the nation and Harlem's 369th regiment

---

[116] The historic armory of the 369th Regiment still stands at 142nd Street and Fifth Avenue. The site for the armory, and initial funding, were announced in July (New York Age, July 16, 1921, p. 1); a parade and cornerstone-laying ceremony took place on May 27, 1923 (New York Times, May 28, 1923, p. 7; New York Age, June 2, 1923, p. 1).

[117] As the nation's premiere black Elks band, also known as the Monarch Symphonic Band or the Mitee Monarch Band, it was for two subsequent decades a large, popular, and active ensemble that came together fairly frequently for concerts, especially in the summer months on the Central Park Mall, and in a monthly winter concert series. New York Age, February 28, 1939, p. 7, etc.

The Elks band's long-time drum major was Gillard Thompson, who previously had succeeded Noble Sissle in this position with the band of the 369th during the war. Gillard Thompson later served as President of the Monarch Band, Exalted Ruler of the Monarch Elks Lodge, and Commander of the Dorrence Brooks Post of the V.F.W., while also becoming the first ten-year veteran of the new 369th National Guard regiment. Modern secondary sources sometimes confuse Gill Thompson with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and attribute Thompson's service record to the great tap dancer who became Harlem's honorary mayor. (Thompson began with the 15th as a sergeant in Headquarters Company, then took a demotion to private so that he could serve in combat as a rifleman from from May to November 1918, then returned to the rank of sergeant in Headquarters Company to succeed Sissle as drum major. In March 1919 it was Thompson who led the entire 369th regiment up Fifth Avenue in the homecoming parade. Bill Robinson never joined the army or left the states and can be continuously traced on the vaudeville stage during the war years.) The "identity theft" may go back to Charters and Kunstadt.

became the 369th Coastal Artillery, the New York Home Guard was formed for stateside service with a new African-American 15th Regiment as one of eight New York City regiments. Simpson and the Monarchs immediately became its official band.

Meanwhile, Colonel Little, concerned for the welfare of the veteran bandsmen, began in the spring of 1922 to pursue the idea that a smaller ensemble, consisting just of veterans, might be able to find full-time work. This evidently did not mesh with the professional schedules of Vodery and Sissle, who stepped out of the picture, and it was to Mikell that Colonel Little turned to see if the band could again be a professional operation that could provide significant, steady income to its players. The Hell Fighters Band started full-time work in late June 1922 with three weeks of daily afternoon concerts in the Park Avenue Hotel. In July it began a vaudeville try-out with the B. F. Keith organization, playing first at a theatre in the Bronx, then at one in Harlem, and then on to a Broadway debut at B. S. Moss's Broadway Theatre, playing "several of the newest jazz songs as well as a stirring march and a classical operatic selection." It finished out August at Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre. In September, Mikell brought thirty men to Chicago for a four-week engagement playing with the new Creamer and Layton show Strut Miss Lizzie. This was followed by a stint on the regional vaudeville circuit from October 1922 through January 1923 with the Keith organization that took the band from New York to New Jersey and Philadelphia, and then north to Proctor's theatres in Amsterdam, Albany and Schenectady.[118] Full-time work could not be sustained beyond these seven months, but the unit continued to play prominent individual engagements, most memorably when it provided the music for a grand ceremony in Manhattan on August 13, 1923 paying tribute to French general Henri Gouraud. In 1923 the band also played at an international polo match out on Long Island, and took a vaudeville engagement for a week at the Loew's Theatre at 9th Avenue and 110th.[119]

After Mikell's effort to sustain the Hell Fighters Band as a commercial concern came to an end, he continued to lead it as a National Guard band for two more years, through most of 1925, until he retired from the guard shortly after Colonel Little. Late that fall the band was put into the hands of Mikell's current second in command, Warrant Officer Jacob W. Porter, who led it for eight years, until late 1933. It was then

---

[118] All 1922 references. New York Times, June 22, 1922, p. 8; etc.

conducted for a short while by Arthur W. Phillips. Russell Wooding (1891-1959), the well-known bandleader and arranger, appointed to direct it in 1936, revitalized the ensemble. After the call to active duty in 1940, it boasted of being "the greatest military swing unit organized in any United States Army camp," and laid claim to "a colorful and interesting history . . . . following and upholding" the tradition of Jim Europe.[120]

SUMMING UP

Making a longitudinal study across of all the new black US Army regimental bands in World War I has not dislodged James Reese Europe and the Hell Fighters Band from their pre-eminent position. But it allows us to see better how all of the new bands were essentially the progeny of George Edmund Dulf and the band of the Old Eighth Illinois, and how those ensembles which toured the states after their return were following the very recent model of Will Marion Cook's NYSO tour, as scheduled and booked by George W. Lattimore. There will surely be profit in digging deeper into newspapers, memoirs, and archives both in America and abroad to establish more detailed itineraries for every band that went abroad. Nonetheless, the extended, cumulative contributions of the Pioneer Infantry regimental bands especially emerge now in greater clarity than heretofore, as do the individual roles of some of the less well known bandmasters.

The new jazz was the special thing most distinguishing these bands musically, and everyone claimed it as their own. It was not just Jim Europe's band that brought jazz to the continent; rather, it was something on the order of two dozen bands. Moreover, they played the jazz of Kansas City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington as well as of New York City. Upon the return of the bands from the war, touring back in the States brought the new jazz music to dozens of smaller cities and towns, and to white audiences who had never before heard these exotic, lively sounds.[121] The response was strong and positive. By one report, "Since the return of

---

[119] New York Age, October 13, 1923, p. 6.

[120] Baltimore Afro American, October 11, 1941, p. 13, and Time Magazine, March 17, 1941.

[121] An impromtu concert by the regimental jazz band of the 809th during a one-hour layover in a Harrisburg, Pa., railroad yard, for instance, drew a big front page headline and favorable comment in the local paper. See the Harrisburg Patriot, July 21, 1919, p. 1.

colored military bands from France to these shores the country simply has gone wild about jazz music."[122] By another report,

> 'There's music in the air,' and it has been placed there by the members of the race: their orchestras and bands, military, civilian, and jazz. There are three aggregations, however, that are making history in the way of happy feeling; they are: the old Eighth Regiment band, Chicago; the old 15th Regiment band, New York; and the New York Syncopated Orchestra. These are under the direction of George Dulf, James Reese Europe, and Will Marion Cook, respectively. These organizations, of more than fifty men each, have been touring the country in recent months and 'setting the people wild' by their rare entertainment and music. The white people have fallen in line and are hurrahing everywhere for race music, instrumental and vocal. [123]

Far from having exhausted the market after their initial burst of touring from March into May 1919, the ensembles built by Dulf, Brymn, Europe, and Cook continued to perform, and hold onto their reputations, and their military and racial identities, for several additional years. Will Marion Cook's American Syncopated Orchestra (a.k.a. the Eighth Chicago or the Old Eighth) under Lieut. George Dulf toured nationally into early 1921, while Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra under Lieut. E. E. Thompson toured internationally until late 1921. Lieut. J. Tim Brymn led an aggregation of Black Devils into mid 1922, and Lieut. F. Eugene Mikell led the veterans of the Hell Fighters' Band on tour into early 1923. Only after these terminal dates did the activities of the Chicago and New York National Guard regimental bands again become of exclusively local significance.

Something on the order of a thousand African American bandsmen mustered in and out of the twenty-seven new black regiments of the US Army between 1917 and 1919. Proud of their service, they held fast to rank and title, performed in National Guard and VFW bands in later life, and arranged to be buried, together with their wives, in US veterans cemeteries. Among the bandmasters and bandsmen, a significant

---

[122] New York Age, May 3, 1919, p. 6 ("Jazz Music is Now All the Rage Throughout United States").
[123] Baltimore Afro-American, Friday, May 2, 1919, p. 4; the by-line on the article is Associated Negro Press, Chicago, May 1.

few, familiarized during wartime with life among foreigners, went back abroad as civilians to enjoy the enthusiasm for their music and the relative lack of racism that they had experienced as soldiers. Not undertaken above, but certainly worthwhile to canvas, on account of how tenaciously the military holds onto its traditions, would be the story of the revival of bands in black regiments with important World War I musical traditions as part of the army's mobilization for participation in World War II---a story seen in microcosm in the later history of the band of the 369th. Time and circumstance have conspired to canonize James Reese Europe and his 369th, but in his day the nation’s black and white communities, and the U.S. Army, followed the exploits and honored the memory of their peers as well.

APPENDIX

92nd Division	Band Leaders (Lieuts.), Assistant Band Leader (Sgts.), and etc.
349th Field Artillery Reg.	BL Lieut. Norman D. Scott (1888 - 1918) BL Lieut. Burnit McReynolds (1887 - 1959) ABL ---
350th Field Artillery Reg. "Black Devils"	BL Lieut. J. Tim Brymn (1879 - 1946) ABL Sgt. Nelson L. Kincaid (1888 - 1956) Drum Major William H. Smith
351st Field Artillery Reg.	BL Lieut. Dorcy Rhodes (1887 - 1951) ABL Sgt. Berry A. Claytor (1893-1967) Bnd Sgt. Horace B. Wallace (1889-1962) Bnd Sgt. Leon J. Carter
---	
365th Infantry Reg. "Black Hawks"	Lieut. Frank L. Drye (1889 - 1957) BL Lieut. Arthur T. Stewart (b. 1891) ABL Sgt. Jones
366th Infantry Reg.	BL --- ABL --- Bnd Sgt. Earl C. Cason (1893 - 1970)
367th Infantry Reg. "Buffaloes" "	BL Lieut. Egbert E. Thompson (1883 - 1927) ABL ---
368th Infantry Reg.	BL Lieut. A. Jack Thomas (1884 - 1962) ABL --- Drum Major Edgar A. Landin

93rd Division	Band Leader, etc.
369th Infantry Reg. = 15th NY "Harlem Hellfighters"	Lieut. James Reese Europe (1880 - 1919) BL Lieut. F. Eugene Mikell (1880 - 1932) ABL Sgt. Frank De Broite (b. 1874) Drum Major Noble Sissle Drum Major Gillard Thompson
370th Infantry Reg. = 8th Illinois "Black Devils"	BL Lieut. George E. Dulf (1872 - 1943) ABL Sgt. Charles Dorsey Drum Major Sgt. F. Blue (acc. EJ Scott) Bnd Sgt. Charles Alexander (in 1917) Bnd Sgt. Oliver E. Perry (in 1917)
371st Infantry Reg. "Black Tigers"	BL Lieut. Elbert B. Williams (1864 - 1920s) ABL ---
372nd Infantry Reg.	BL --- ABL ---

****

Pioneer Infantry Regiments 801-816	Supervisors, Band Leaders, Assistant Band Leaders
801st Pioneer Infantry	--- one Bnd Sgt may be Ralph N. Dunn (1891 - 1954)
802nd Pioneer Infantry	--- ---
803rd Pioneer Infantry	--- ABL Sgt. Major Edward W. Bailey (b. 1890) Bnd Sgt. Alfred J. Taylor (b. 1892)
804th Pioneer Infantry	--- Bnd Sgt. Major Robert H. Craig (1895-1960) Bnd Sgt. Major Byron H. Williams (1895-1959)
805th Pioneer Infantry "Bear Cats"	Lieut. Leonce R. Legendre (white; 1895 - 1951) ABL Sgt. George L. Polk (b. 1890) Drum Major Middleton B. Polk Bnd Sgt. Robert J. Hill Bnd Sgt. Cesco H. Johnson Bnd Sgt. John P. Rathman Bnd Sgt. Ulric L. Washington
806th Pioneer Infantry	--- ABL Sgt. Ashford H. Hardee (1889-1956) ABL Sgt. Lawrence Denton (1893 - 1986)
807th Pioneer Infantry "Pioneers"	BL Lieut. Will H. Vodery (1885 - 1951) ABL Sgt. Ralph S. Redmond (1890 - 1960) ABL Sgt. Louia Vaughn Jones (1895 - 1965) Drum Major Opal D. Cooper (1889-1974)
808th Pioneer Infantry	BL Lieut. James Riley Wheelock (1874 - 1941) ABL ---
809th Pioneer Infantry	--- ABL Sgt. Eugene D. Freels (1891-1967) ABL/Bnd Sgt. Wesley I. Howard (1889-1962) Bnd Sgt. Lucion Ramseur (1886/88-1969) Bnd Sgt. Earl D. Washington (1892/93-1973)
810th Pioneer Infantry	(no service in Europe) Bnd Sgt. Major Ira D. Oliver
811th Pioneer Infantry	--- Bnd Sgt. John W. Brown Bnd Sgt. Edwin H. Hopper
812th Pioneer Infantry	(no service in Europe)
813th Pioneer Infantry	--- ---
814th Pioneer Infantry "Black Devils"	Lieut. Maxom (white) ABL Sgt. Ralph W. E. Brown (1893 - 1989)

815th Pioneer Infantry	---
	ABL Sgt. Oliver Mead
	Bnd Sgt. Ulysses S. Everly (1889 - 1938)
816th Pioneer Infantry	---
	Bnd Sgt. Major Joseph L. Bartlett
	Sgt. Amos M. White (1889 - 1980)
	Chief Trumpeter Vernon L. Page

Commentary:

The appendix provides a complete list of the black combat and Pioneer Infantry regiments, with as many of their their identifiable Band Leaders and Assistant Band Leaders as I have located to date in publications by contemporaries---such as Emmett Scott, Maud Cuney-Hare, or Hunton and Johnson---and in other primary and secondary sources. The largest single source of information that I know about but have not yet explored is the documentation ion NARA.

H&J give William Bailey for 803rd when it is Edward Walter Bailey.

Kincaid and Redmond are definitely Asst. Band Leaders. Kinkaid's dates of service and return and so forth line up with Brymn, and he plays with Brymn on tour at at Hotel Shelbourne, so this seems firm.

Wallace and Cason are assigned correctly but were both possibly just Band Sgts.

Redmond is interesting case. He is said to be ABL with 807 and Vodery in New York Age, when Louia V. Jones is simply violin and saxophone. At some point, Redmond must move to another band or steps aside, and Jones gets late promotion, I guess. Demob in May, if that is correct, is odd to my mind.

Wesley Howard is referred to as ABL in 809th, but Freels seems to have been the first (?) one.

Anthony Pendleton Taylor (1894-1957) is an African American ABL, according to genealogy and US Veterans Gravesites data, but I have not pinned him to a unit. Dates of service, given as July 3 to December 7, 1918, point to a Pioneer Infantry unit, perhaps the 810th, which never went overseas.

It was announced that Charles Harris (b.1875), leader of the Commonwealth Band of Baltimore and a central figure in the African American musical community of that city, was "appointed assistant band leader and will soon go to France with one of the colored organizations. After six months he will be made a second lieutenant" (NY Age, October 5, 1918, p. 2) but I have seen no additional evidence that this was ever followed through, and in all likelihood this is because of the Armistice and the return of troops.

Band Sergeant Major (BSM) is, I believe, essentially equivalent to Assistant Band Leader. I think the way it works is that the ABL is always some kind of sergeant, and the highest ranking sergeant the ABL could be is BSM.