



# The Six Triple Eight

## HIDDEN HEROES OF HISTORY

Listen to the story: <https://jonincharacter.com/six-triple-eight/>

The **Six Triple Eight** was the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion of the United States Army. Serving during World War II, the Six Triple Eight included 855 Black female soldiers, and was led by Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams.

A **battalion** is a term the military uses for a small group of 300 to 1,000 soldiers. The Six Triple Eight was a battalion from the **Women's Army Corps**.

When the original Women's Army Corps was created, Black women were not permitted to serve as part of the army. Activists like **Mary McLeod Bethune**, as well as civil rights newspapers and organizations, fought for Black women's rights to serve. They even appealed to **Eleanor Roosevelt**, who was the First Lady of the United States at the time. After pushing for the right to serve, the battalion of 855 Black women were sent to Europe for an important mission: Take charge of delivering warehouses and warehouses of lost letters and packages to soldiers.

### Why was this such an important mission?

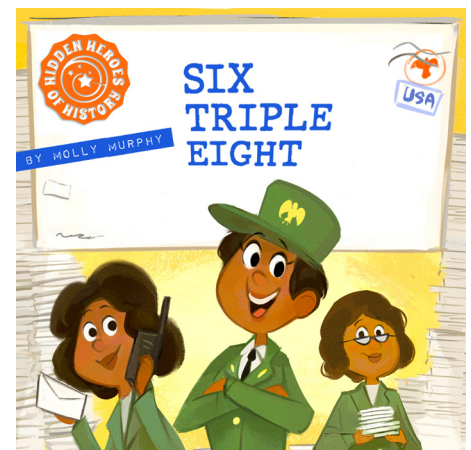
Imagine for a moment that you're fighting in a dangerous and uncertain war. You're really far from your family and friends, and you're not sure how long you will be away from home. Imagine that somewhere out there, the people you love most are trying to get you a message, a present for the holidays, or some other bit of cheer. However, since there aren't enough military personnel to deliver those letters and packages to you, you may never see those messages of encouragement.

This was a time before there was texting, email or social media, so the mail was the only way to hear from your loved ones. When mail wasn't being delivered, the soldiers' **morale** declined and they felt lonely, upset and discouraged.

### Six Triple Eight's Official Motto: "No Mail, Low Morale"

The Six Triple Eight held themselves to very high standards and were determined to exceed expectations. When they arrived in Europe, they faced a huge challenge. It would be their job to sort and deliver over 17 million letters and packages addressed to military personnel scattered across the continent.

This took an enormous amount of work and planning. The battalion was split into four companies, which is an army term for groups. The groups of women worked all day, seven days a week, in rotating eight-hour shifts.





Each group sorted and processed approximately 65,000 pieces of mail per shift, or 135 pieces of mail per minute!

In many cases, it took a tremendous amount of research and effort to match a letter or package with the right soldier. Some addresses were missing last names and many soldiers shared the same name. For example, there were more than 7,500 Robert Smith's serving in Europe at the time.

The Six Triple Eight were committed to their mission. Most in the military thought the project was a lost cause, but gave them six months to try. They worked day and night as a dedicated team and completed their assignment in just three months!

## Under the Leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams

The Six Triple Eight was led by Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams, the first Black woman to become a commanding officer of her own battalion. By the end of the war, she was the highest-ranking African-American woman in the army.

There was a lot of pressure for the Six Triple Eight to succeed. Many who opposed their inclusion in the army looked at this mission as a test of their capabilities. They also treated it as a test of whether or not Black individuals, especially women, should be allowed to serve. They were faced with **racism** throughout their service.

Lieutenant Colonel Adams fought many battles for her troops. Early in their mission, a general went to inspect their work, telling Lieutenant Colonel Adams that he was going to send someone to show them how to do the job right. She replied: "Over my dead body, sir."

She also spoke up for her troops when the Red Cross arranged for them to stay in **segregated** hotels, personally making sure her officers only stayed in integrated hotels.

## Coming Home to No Fanfare

The Six Triple Eight returned home in 1946 with no recognition of their accomplishments or a "thank you for your service."

In 2019, the Army awarded the 6888th the **Meritorious Unit Commendation**. In 2021, Congress is taking steps to finally honor their remarkable record of wartime service with the **Congressional Gold Medal**.

Today, The National Archives for Black Women's History, the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum, Arlington National Cemetery, and the Library of Congress are preserving the legacy and heroism of the Six Triple Eight.

**Discover more about the Women of the Six Triple Eight:** <https://www.womenofthe6888th.org/>

## Glossary

**Battalion** – a large body of troops consisting of four to six companies (or groups) and can include up to 1,000 soldiers. Battalions are typically commanded by a lieutenant colonel.

**Women's Army Corps** – The Women's Army Corps (WAC) was the women's branch of the U.S. Army and was established "for the purpose of making available to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of women of the nation."

**Mary McLeod Bethune** – The daughter of formerly enslaved individuals, Mary Jane McLeod Bethune became one of the most important Black educators, civil and women's rights leaders and government officials of the twentieth century.

**Eleanor Roosevelt** – Eleanor Roosevelt was an American political figure, diplomat and activist. She served as the first lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945, during her husband President Franklin D. Roosevelt's four terms in office, making her the longest-serving first lady of the United States.

**Morale** – the mental and emotional condition of an individual or group.

**Racism** – Racism, at its most basic definition, is when people think that one color or race is better than another, and they treat or mistreat people based on that belief.

**Segregation** was forced separation where Black people were not allowed to go to the same places as white people. This included schools, stores, hotels, lunch counters, jobs, churches, parks and more.

**Meritorious Unit Commendation** – Awarded to units for outstanding performance of services during military operations.

**Congressional Gold Medal** – The Congressional Gold Medal is an award bestowed by the United States Congress. It is Congress's highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions by individuals or institutions



The 6888th  
Central Postal  
Directory  
Battalion of the  
United States Army

## Give it Some Thought

- Why would clearing up the warehouses and getting mail delivered to the soldiers be thought by some in the military as a lost cause?
- What character traits do you believe helped the women of the Six Triple Eight achieve their mission in only three months?
- How do you think it made the soldiers feel when their mail finally arrived?

## Use Your Imagination

In this episode, Mr. Redge is inspired by the “Six Triple Eight” battalion who helped get lost mail to military personnel who were so far from their homes during World War II.

He tells Jonathan: *“I’m just thinking about how sending my letters feels even more meaningful now. The story of these brave women is something to write home about. And, it’s a good reminder about how powerful it is to take the time to connect with others.”*

Now it’s your turn to take inspiration from the Six Triple Eight! Think of a friend or family member and send them a letter. Use one of these prompts to help you write it:

- What reminded you of them lately?
- Tell them about your favorite shared memory.
- Name five things you admire or love about them.
- What do you appreciate the most about them?
- What makes you so grateful that they are your friend or family member?
- Draw a picture to go with your note.

*(Some prompts are from Grammarly)*