

[Lavenia Breaux] When I enlisted, I was in first group of black women to leave the state of Louisiana. And that night, it was a night ride.

They took-- We boarded the train at the Union Station, and there were only about 36 of us, or something. I know they just had enough of us to fill, take care of the sleeping accommodations in that one coach. So that tells you how many women they was getting in because the women were not interested enough.

And most of them, they went in the Army and they were depressed, because they had taken their husband, or their boyfriend, away from them. And that's what made them want to be in the Army.

But then again, like I said, It was a new thing for people. And most soldiers that were in there when they saw us, they got mad with us. They told us they didn't want us in there. Didn't need us in there.

And sometimes they-- Officers had to come and reprimand those old men to leave us alone, not to mess with us. Told us that they didn't need us in there. Go home where you belong.

[Historian] How did that make you feel when you had joined up and to serve your country and you had people within your own service...

[Lavenia Breaux] And the men? They gave us a bad name, some of them. They gave us a bad name about what kind of women we are and all that. They didn't want us in there. And they said that we were being misused to come in there because there was-- They're doing that to relieve them, to push them out there on the field.

And that made you feel guilty somewhat. That you were relieving them from active duty to go on a field to fight. But we didn't, learn how to not pay any attention to that.

[Lavenia Breaux] The first barracks I was in after basic training. They had about 29 or 30 of us in that barracks. And they bought in a company that had just come in from basic training. And bless goodness, the women was white and they spread the sheet, the blankets and a rope across the middle of the barrack.

And then the black women laying in the back got up. And one of them said, oh, we don't like this. We don't appreciate this kind of carrying on. And others got up and they start pulling the blankets off that line that was separating us from each other.

And pulled them down, and said, We don't want this. We were like, we are not going to have, and no separation. You don't want to sleep with us in here, then go out there and get under the tree.

And the girl that was supposed to be our company-- That shows you how raw our existence was. She was to be our First Sergeant, and she didn't even have a uniform. But she got up and went somewhere. I don't know where she went, but she went and got the company commander and she came back, came in there.

And, and she and the man or guy came with her, but it wasn't a fellow that had the whip all the time. He came with her. And he told the white girls, he said, we won't. We don't want this. We don't want this. And you're not supposed to do this. And they were. And he took the lines down.

And told them, no, don't do nothing like that. And the black women were satisfied when he took that line down. I believe really and truly I believe that was really the beginning of integration.

Because those black women raised a lot of noise over that, and over putting that segregated line in that camp, in that barracks. And, do you know, that next morning we went to breakfast and came back and all them women was gone. Their barracks were cleaned.

And that's when this man, who had the whip all the time, he was in the office of our officer, and we went in to find out where the women went. And he said, that was the worst thing they could have done, was to cater to their whims about that separation. They should not have let them go. Should have made them stay in there with it. And put up with it.

You understand what I'm saying?

[Historian] Yes, ma'am.

[Lavenia Breaux] He said that was wrong for them to take them women out. He should have made them stay and live with it. Because that's what we are all about, is breaking up segregation. And that was really the first thing, first time I had ever had that kind of respect of being in the Army. That was the first time that I could really say that it made you feel like you were fighting for a good reason, that you had that kind of respect.