



**CALIFORNIA CONTENT  
STANDARD 11.7.3**

## *American Soldiers in World War II*

**Specific Objective:** Identify the roles and sacrifices of individual American soldiers, as well as the unique contributions of the special fighting forces.

**Read the summary to answer questions on the next page.**

### **Volunteers and the Draft**

- 5 million Americans volunteered for service but more were needed. They gave up jobs, families, and homes to serve.
- 10 million were drafted through the Selective Service system.
- Most received eight weeks of basic training before service.

### **Daily Life for Soldiers**

- Life for combat soldiers was hard—food was often canned and cold, sleep might be on the ground or a cot, uniforms went unwashed, little communication with loved ones at home, constant danger of attack or sudden death.
- Support troops were needed for thousands of tasks, from driving supply trucks to typing reports; work often involved hard work, long hours, and monotonous jobs.

### **Decorated Heroes**

- Millions earned a Purple Heart, awarded when a soldier is killed or injured in action.
- Officers like General Eisenhower and General MacArthur were honored for their planning and leadership.
- Soldiers like Audie Murphy were decorated for bravery; Murphy was given 24 medals by the United States and others from France and Belgium.

### **Special Fighting Forces**

The U.S. Army was segregated during the war and kept some groups from combat. However, the following groups won many honors for their service.

- African Americans—about 1 million served, most limited to noncombat roles. Tuskegee Airmen (trained near Tuskegee, Alabama) became the first group of African-American pilots and won honors for service in Europe.
- Mexican Americans—more than 300,000 served, most in segregated units; Company E of 141st Regiment, 36th Division received a large number of medals
- Asian Americans—almost 50,000 served; the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team became the most decorated unit in U.S. history.
- Native Americans—about 25,000 served; Navajo language served as an unbreakable code for U.S. troops fighting the Japanese. The Navajo Codetalkers were honored in 1969 for special contributions to the war effort.

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Directions: Choose the letter of the *best* answer.

- 1 Which statement *best* describes how Americans felt about serving in the military during World War II?**
  - A There were few volunteers because unemployment was low.
  - B Large numbers volunteered in spite of the hardships they would face.
  - C Most Americans were opposed to the war, and the entire army was drafted.
  - D There was strong support for an all-volunteer army at that time.
- 2 Combat soldiers in World War II often had**
  - A little communication with loved ones at home.
  - B fresh food that helped them stay healthy and ready to fight.
  - C short tours of duty, generally limited to one year.
  - D the best health care because so many doctors had enlisted.
- 3 During World War II, millions received a Purple Heart, a medal which signifies that a soldier**
  - A was a member of an elite special force.
  - B has shown extreme bravery.
  - C was injured or killed in action.
  - D served in the Army Medical Corps.
- 4 Which statement *best* describes integration in the U.S. military during World War II?**
  - A There were few minorities in service because few volunteered.
  - B Under Roosevelt's orders, it was the first army in history to be fully integrated.
  - C Races were segregated, and minorities were often kept from combat roles.
  - D Minorities served in the military but were not allowed outside the United States.
- 5 African Americans during World War II**
  - A were decorated as skilled pilots and soldiers.
  - B made up almost half of all U.S. soldiers.
  - C were only allowed to serve in the Navy.
  - D refused to serve in support roles in the army.
- 6 Thousands of Navajos distinguished themselves during World War II**
  - A as scouts because of their excellent hunting and tracking skills.
  - B in support roles as cooks because of their skills in cooking outdoors.
  - C as aircraft gunners because of their excellent marksmanship.
  - D by using their language as a code the Japanese could not break.