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Army Bases That Honor Confederate Traitors Could Soon Be Renamed for These Heroes

The names “embody the best of the United States Army and America,” a commission established by Congress wrote in announcing its choices.



Fort Bragg in North Carolina would be renamed Fort Liberty if the recommendations are approved by Congress.

Credit...Kenny Holston for The New York Times



By [Chris Cameron](#)

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WASHINGTON — During the Jim Crow era, nine Southern Army bases were named for treasonous Confederate generals who fought to preserve slavery and white supremacy. Now a commission established by Congress has suggested [new names](#) for the bases that “embody the best of the United States Army and America.”

Fort Bragg in North Carolina would be renamed [Fort Liberty](#), if the recommendations are approved by Congress. The other bases would honor some of the Army’s most distinguished heroes. These are their stories:



Fort Johnson (Fort Polk, La.)

Sgt. Henry Johnson

Pvt. Henry Johnson deployed to Europe during World War I in a storied Black regiment [known as the Harlem Hellfighters](#). The U.S. armed forces were segregated, and the Hellfighters were [not allowed to fight on the front lines](#) with other American troops. Instead, the Black soldiers fought under the command of their French allies.

That put Private Johnson and his unit at the front lines, “against all odds — Black Americans wearing French uniforms,” in the predawn hours of May 15, 1918, as German troops swarmed his sentry post at the edge of the [Argonne Forest](#), according to [a biography](#) provided by the naming commission.

Credit...Getty Images

Private Johnson threw grenades until he had no more left to throw. Then he fired his rifle until it jammed. Then he clubbed enemy

soldiers with the butt of his rifle until it split apart. Then he hacked away at the enemy with [his bolo knife](#).

After the Germans retreated, daylight revealed that Private Johnson had [killed four enemy soldiers](#) and wounded an estimated 10 to 20. He suffered 21 wounds in combat.

For their actions, Private Johnson and his sentry-mate on duty that night were the first Americans to be awarded the [Croix du Guerre](#), one of France's highest military honors. Almost a century later, President Barack Obama [posthumously awarded](#) Sergeant Johnson the Medal of Honor.



Fort Walker (Fort A.P. Hill, Va.)

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker is the [only woman](#) ever awarded a Medal of Honor. A skilled surgeon, she volunteered during the Civil War because the Army [refused to commission a woman as a medical officer](#).

She served near the front lines at [Fredericksburg](#) and [Chattanooga](#), and routinely crossed battle lines to treat civilians. She was arrested by Confederate forces in 1864 and exchanged for a Confederate surgeon four months later. After she was denied an honorary military rank at the end of the war, Union generals [successfully petitioned](#) for her to receive the [Medal of Honor](#) for “patriotic zeal to the sick and wounded.”

Credit...Elliot & Fry, via Getty Images

Throughout her life, Dr. Walker proudly presented herself as a feminist who did not conform to gender norms. She refused to agree to “obey” her husband in her wedding vows and kept her last name, according to the National Park Service. She wore men's clothing during the war, arguing that doing so made her job easier. After the war, she [posed for photographs](#) in suits and [a signature top hat](#), often with her [Medal of Honor pinned to her lapel](#).

Image



Credit...Scott Olson/Getty Images

Fort Barfoot (Fort Pickett, Va.)

Col. Van Barfoot

On May 23, 1944, in the foothills of the Italian Alps, Sgt. Van Barfoot single-handedly silenced three machine-gun nests, disabled a German tank with a bazooka, blew up an artillery cannon with a demolition charge and took 17 enemy soldiers prisoner.

In addition to everything else that day, he rescued two grievously wounded American soldiers, leading them about a mile to safety.

“Any single one of these actions could merit a high award for valor,” [the naming commission wrote](#) of Colonel Barfoot, [a Choctaw soldier](#) who was awarded the Medal of Honor and [extolled in the news media as a “one-man army”](#) for his actions that day. Back home in Mississippi after the war, he publicly embarrassed the U.S. senators from his state by rejecting their [racist remarks](#) about Black soldiers, according to a [biography of James Eastland](#), one of the [two Mississippi senators](#).

He served 34 years in the Army, including tours in Korea and Vietnam. Later in life he [again drew national attention](#) for successfully fighting his homeowners association to keep an American flag flying in his front yard.

Image



Credit...Getty Images

Fort Gregg-Adams (Fort Lee, Va.)

Lt. Gen. Arthur J. Gregg & Lt. Col. Charity Adams Earley

Fort Gregg-Adams would honor two trailblazing African-American support officers, Lt. Gen. Arthur J. Gregg and [Lt. Col. Charity Adams Earley](#). The naming commission noted the “too-often-unheralded excellence” of logistics and support units, many of which are to this day [staffed primarily with Black troops](#).

Colonel Adams commanded the [6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion](#), a segregated [Women’s Army Corps](#) unit responsible for [delivering mail to American soldiers](#) during World War II. In 1945, the

6888th was sent to England and then France — becoming the first large unit of Black servicewomen to be deployed overseas — where it [processed nearly two million pieces of mail each month](#).

At the end of the war, Colonel Adams was the [highest-ranking Black woman](#) in the Army, according to a National Park Service biography.

At the height of his career, an article in The Washington Post said, General Gregg was the [highest-ranking Black officer](#) in the military, serving as logistics director for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and as deputy chief of staff for logistics for the Army in the late 1970s and early ’80s. He also participated in the desegregation of the military installation that would partially bear his name and was one of the first Black officers to join its officers’ club.



Fort Cavazos (Fort Hood, Texas)

Gen. Richard E. Cavazos

Richard E. Cavazos was the first Hispanic American [to become a brigadier general](#) and the [first Hispanic American to become a four-star general](#). He received three major military decorations for valor in combat: a Silver Star and a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in Korea, and a second Distinguished Service Cross for an episode in Vietnam.

In February 1953 during the Korean War, Lieutenant Cavazos charged through enemy mortar and gunfire, with “[complete disregard for his personal safety](#),” to retrieve a wounded enemy soldier, earning the young officer a Silver Star. Three months later, Lieutenant Cavazos [led three separate charges on enemy positions](#) and returned to the field five times to rescue his wounded men — earning him his first Distinguished Service Cross.

In Vietnam in 1967, Colonel Cavazos again “[completely disregarded his own safety](#)” and led a charge “with such force and aggressiveness” that the enemy fighters fled their positions, earning his second Distinguished Service Cross. Throughout his career, General Cavazos also earned other awards and citations, including two Legions of Merit, five Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart.



Credit...AP Photo

Fort Eisenhower (Fort Gordon, Ga.)

Dwight D. Eisenhower, general of the Army

Dwight D. Eisenhower served as the supreme commander of allied forces in Africa and Europe during World War II — leading the [liberation of North Africa](#), the [invasion of Italy](#) and the [D-Day landings](#). After the war, he was elected the [34th president of the United States](#), serving from 1953 to 1961.

Eisenhower soared through the Army ranks during the war, going from lieutenant colonel at the beginning of 1941 to a four-star general by February 1943. A year later, he became one of only five officers ever appointed as a five-star “[general of the Army](#).”

As president, Eisenhower oversaw the [end of the Korean War](#), created the [interstate highway system](#), led efforts to [form the International Atomic Energy Agency](#) and enforced school desegregation with the [deployment of federal troops](#).
Image



Fort Novosel (Fort Rucker, Ala.)

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Novosel Sr.

In two tours of duty in Vietnam, Michael Novosel Sr. rescued more than 5,500 wounded soldiers as a medevac pilot, earning the Medal of Honor for [one particularly heroic episode](#). One of those rescued soldiers was his own son, Michael Novosel Jr., an Army aviator whose helicopter was shot down in 1970. (A week later, Michael Jr. returned the favor, rescuing his father from a disabled helicopter.)

Mr. Novosel, the [son of Croatian immigrants](#), joined the Army Air Corps in 1941 and rose to the rank of captain by 1945, flying [B-29 strategic bombers](#). He then transferred to the [newly created Air Force](#) and remained in the reserves until the 1960s. When Mr.

Credit...via Congressional Medal of Honor Society

Novosel was denied an active-duty assignment to serve in Vietnam, he [gave up his rank as a lieutenant colonel](#) and joined the Army as a warrant officer and helicopter pilot.

In one rescue mission in 1969, Mr. Novosel rescued 29 South Vietnamese soldiers under heavy enemy fire. He and his crew were forced out of the landing zone six times and had to “circle and return from another direction to land and extract additional troops,” according to [his Medal of Honor citation](#).

By the end of the day, his [helicopter had been riddled with bullets](#). In his own retelling of the episode during an interview with the Library of Congress, Mr. Novosel said he [was shot](#) in his right hand and leg during his last rescue of the day — momentarily causing him to lose control of the helicopter — but escaped along with his crew and the last of his evacuees.

Image



Credit...Associated Press

Fort Moore (Fort Benning, Ga.)

Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore and Julia Moore

Many Americans know [Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore](#) as the stern and resolute Colonel Moore played by Mel Gibson in “[We Were Soldiers](#),” the gritty and somber war film that dramatized the 1965 [Battle of Ia Drang](#) in Vietnam. The general’s wife, Julia, played by [Madeleine Stowe](#) in the movie, had a significant role on the home front during that battle.

On Nov. 14, 1965, Colonel Moore led his 450 troops to the infamous [Landing Zone X-Ray](#), where they were ambushed by North Vietnamese soldiers who outnumbered the Americans 12 to 1. Bloody hand-to-hand combat ensued, but Colonel Moore and his men held their

positions for three days. Colonel Moore had vowed that he would leave no one behind. He kept his promise, and his actions earned him the [Distinguished Service Cross](#).

At the same time, Ms. Moore offered emotional support to the families of the dead and wounded at Fort Benning. Death and injury notices were sent by telegram at the time, delivered by taxi drivers. Ms. Moore began accompanying the drivers and offering her condolences to the families. Her complaints and concerns led to the creation of the Army’s [casualty notification teams](#), and [uniformed soldiers now deliver](#) the news of death or injury to families.