



**COMMANDER NAVAL TRAINING CENTER  
GREAT LAKES, ILLINOIS**

28 February 2003

To the first United States Navy African American Musicians,


On the occasion of the reunion of members of the Great Lakes Experience, I thank you for your enduring contribution to the United States Navy and our nation. You were among 5,000 African Americans allowed to enlist outside of the Steward's Branch, serving our country as Navy Musicians between 1942 and 1945. We are profoundly grateful for your service.

Your outstanding accomplishments during challenging times had a significantly positive impact, leading to the eventual integration of the Navy and winning equal opportunity for all Sailors. As well, you were extraordinary contributors to the very American musical heritage of jazz - as form, as art, as experience. Our great Navy is recognizing each of you for these lasting contributions. Having been trained at Great Lakes, we take special pride in your achievements.

In 1942, the United States Navy changed its policies of the past and began the desegregation of the Armed Forces. Now your Navy is an institution with equal opportunity for all and with a deep appreciation for the richness of our diversity. This is due, in part, to your sacrifices and pioneering spirit. Above all else, in spite of these things and because of these things, your music inspired and delighted your shipmates and our nation.

I am very pleased to have you, your family and friends here with us today to celebrate this historic event. On behalf of a grateful Navy, I extend to you our deepest gratitude for your unselfish and dedicated service to our great country.

Sincerely,

  
A. E. RONDEAU  
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy