

Joan Cummins: Hi everybody - This is Joan and Callie from Q & Abe, a podcast by President Lincoln's Cottage.

Callie Hawkins: While we're looking for answers to the questions in the show, we sometimes run across things that don't fit within the main episode, but are too fascinating not to share.

JC: This bonus episode accompanies Episode 3, "Why are there no pictures of Lincoln in his military uniform?," so if you have not yet listened to that episode, that might be a good place to start.

CH: In our conversation with the residents of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, Retired Staff Sergeant Jim Diamond told us a couple of incredible stories about his experiences serving in the army, including while he was working as part of the detail serving Arlington Cemetery.

Jim Diamond: I marched in Kennedy's inauguration parade, and at the time that that happened, it was so funny – well, it wasn't funny – funny now. But at the time I had been there say about three hours or so, and a guy over in the barracks, because my wife hadn't got there yet, he said "What squad did they give you?" And I said, "Squad?" I said "They didn't give me no squad." And he said "What'd you mean they didn't give you no squad?" I say "I got the first platoon." And he said "What's your rank?" and I said "I'm a PSG." The E-8s and E-9s were just starting to come out, and a PSG was the same rank as a Sergeant First Class, if you wore the stripes, three up and two down, but the title changed. When you say PSG, I was an E-7. So he say "Ain't never been no E-7s here." I said, "What're you talking about?" and he said "Black E-7s. Ain't never been none here." I said "What're you talking about?" I thought he'd been drinking. I really did, I thought - this fool's crazy, what he's talking about, you know. So I didn't talk to him no more. So about three months later, I'd been there about three months, I got called over to the S3. And the S3 says, "I got a job for you Sergeant Diamond," he says, "there's a guy here from Ebony magazine," he said, "and I'd like for you to take him down, show him the caissons, go over to Fort McNair, show him the company we got over there, go out to the cemetery, show him a burial, go here, there, the flag when they have a retreat that night and everything." And I said, "Yessir, it's not a problem." Soon as we walked out that door the guy turned to me and says "How many black officers you got?" I said "Sir, that's way above my pay grade, you just left the man can tell you how many we got." Cause I just knew there was... we went all around, we came back, as soon as we stepped in the door he says "How many black officers you got here?" He says, "We don't have any." [taps table] I'm about this big, sweat broke out... the guy said "Well, who's the rankingest Negro?" He says "You been with him all day." [laughter] I got the [Ebony magazine](#) upstairs. I do, they mailed it to me. I got a copy...

CH: That's amazing.

JC: That's really cool.

JD: But I, I didn't – who knew that? You know? I mean, this was, like I said, Kennedy –

John Baker: 1963.

JD: Yea, and, and that was before Kennedy was killed, I mean we talking about the parade, when I marched in the – I marched in the staff! That's when I knew something was wrong too. I mean, I was a platoon sergeant, what am I doing marching with the staff, with the officers in the front? But what they did – see, we wore them long coats we used to call horse blankets, you know, no stripes or nothing on them. So when you marched up there, there were three officers in the front, there was a CO in the middle, three officers in the front, and three enlisted men in the back. And I was on the right side of the enlisted.

JB: Is that right?

Frank Lawrence: Oh for God's sakes...

JD: And that was to throw everybody off that they – most people thought I was an officer! I didn't have no rank on, and so they figured that there was at least one black officer in there.

FL: I'll be darned!

JD: They did that intentionally, cause – they shouldn't've took me out of my company, my company was B Company, I shouldn't have been marching with the staff. I realized that later, when I found out what was going on.

JC: Mr. Diamond also told us about how he came to join the infantry in the first place.

JD: I got the strangest story probably in this place. And I say that because of the fact that, uh, it was never my intention to be a soldier. Never. My intention was to learn to drive trucks, after my four years to get out, get me some driver's license, and to drive trucks. And somebody up there, hah, said, that ain't what's gonna happen with you. I had no business being in the infantry! I never wanted to hurt people! I never had any bad intentions about that. And the point of being in the army, and that's what I told the recruiter when I went, I said "I just wanna be a truck driver," and he said "I'll see that you get there," and I thought, right, and he gave it to me. It wasn't til I come back and went to Fort Belvoir, the guy told me, he said "I don't know nobody," and they come up with what they call a levy, and they said I couldn't get out the service, and they were gonna send me to Korea. And I still didn't think that was so bad, because I figured I was still gonna be a truck driver, but I wasn't.

JB: They made him a BAR man, which is an automatic rifle, and that's what the enemy is trying to get to!

JD: See, he knows that part of the story. [laughter] So, my first Purple Heart was carrying coffee and donuts. I was a flunky. I was black man, had a white lieutenant, who was an F4 – I didn't know what an F4 was, the first thing the guy - when the guy called me an F4 I said "Man, you ain't gotta talk to me like that!" He said "No, no, no..." I said, "What's an F4?" you know? It's kind of close to being an MF, you know? – and I'm thinking, hey, you don't have to talk to me like that. So six days after being in the service, I'm wounded, I get a Purple Heart. Six days!

FL: Good lord!

JD: Carrying coffee and donuts! [laughter] See, I wasn't even fighting, I'm just bringing up the lieutenant's coffee and donuts.

FL: Oh good God!

JD: So look how fast things happen.

CH: I don't know whether to laugh or cry...that's, I mean...

JD: Well, I tell you, I didn't do either one, I didn't laugh or cry, I was just mad as hell.

[laughter]

JC: The third option is, yell about it...

CH: Exactly, exactly.

JD: That's all, I was just mad as hell. I told him I don't wanna be here no more, the guy said "Ha ha ha ha ha..." I said "Whatchu laughing at?" He said "You think we wanna be?" I said "No, no, no, no, lemme tell you this. You laughing at the wrong thing. I don't wanna be *here* with *you* no more." If I'm gonna get killed over here, I wanna get killed fighting. Then I'm mad, see, I'm thinking, you send a letter back to my mama and tell her that I got killed, and you gonna tell her the truth, that I was bringing up coffee and donuts to the lieutenant? Come on now!

[laughter]

CH: Now you said, you said you got your first Purple Heart.

JD: Yeah.

CH: Does that mean that you've had others?

JD: No, that's all I've ever gotten. You know why? I was so damn much smarter after that, [laughter] I wasn't carrying no more damn coffee and donuts no more. And I was on the other end. I was angry. You know how many people I killed over there? I'm not gonna tell you. But I'll tell you it was more than 50.

FL: God.

JD: You thought about that? For a kid who didn't wanna do none of that.

JC: We hope you've enjoyed this little something extra – if you're looking for even more information on the topics from the show, please do check out our website for transcripts, show notes, and links to additional materials.

CH: We'll have a whole new set of questions coming up in season 2 this winter!

JC: This episode was produced by me, Joan Cummins, and Callie Hawkins. Music for Q & Abe was written, performed, and is copyrighted by Clancy Newman.

CH: Q & Abe is possible thanks to generous supporters of President Lincoln's Cottage. To find out how you can support this podcast and other programming, visit [www.lincolncottage.org](http://www.lincolncottage.org). You can also write to us at [podcast@lincolncottage.org](mailto:podcast@lincolncottage.org).

JC: President Lincoln's Cottage is a home for brave ideas. Stay curious!