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***THEIR GLORY CAN NEVER FADE: THE LEGACY OF THE HARLEM
HELLFIGHTERS* EXHIBITION ON VIEW AT THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL GALLERY
AT THE EMPIRE STATE PLAZA
FEBRUARY 1, 2018 THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2019**

Opening Reception to be Held February 7, From 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

New York State Office of General Services Commissioner RoAnn M. Destito today announced a new exhibition, *Their Glory Can Never Fade: The Legacy of The Harlem Hellfighters*, will be on view in the Vietnam Memorial Gallery located in the Robert Abrams Justice Building at the Empire State Plaza, February 1, 2018 through February 28, 2019. Exhibition hours are Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and by appointment.

“This special exhibition will honor the achievements and sacrifices the soldiers of the African American 369th Infantry Regiment made in defense of our nation as well as their contributions to the great American art form, jazz,” **Commissioner Destito said.** “For too long their valor went unrecognized, and we at OGS are proud to continue what Governor Cuomo, following the 2015 posthumous awarding of the Medal of Honor to Harlem Hellfighter and Albany resident Sgt. Henry Johnson, described as efforts to right this historic wrong. I encourage everyone to see this exhibition and be inspired by these brave New Yorkers’ courage and accomplishments.”

This exhibition explores the history and legacy of an all-African American regiment from New York that was dispatched to fight for France in World War I. Authorized in 1913, and based in Harlem, the 369th Infantry Regiment, formerly known as the 15th Infantry of the New York National Guard, was the first



African American regiment of the New York National Guard. Prior to the War, the 369th also assembled talented African American and Puerto Rican musicians to form an impressive regimental band that influenced the development of jazz music.

The 369th served longer than any American regiment of World War I, and was nicknamed “Hellfighters” by the German army due to its actions on the battlefield. Through dedication and a sense of purpose to prove their worth, the 369th transformed into a decorated unit, despite the discrimination they faced during that time. In addition to their story of valor on the battlefield, members of the 369th regimental band left an indelible mark on music and cultures worldwide. 2018 marks the centennial of the Harlem Renaissance.

This legacy has had a lasting impact on African Americans’ participation in impending conflicts post-World War I, especially notable in the Vietnam War, which saw the largest proportion of African Americans serving in any American war. The Vietnam War officially marked the first time that African Americans served in fully integrated combat units.

NYS Division of Veterans Affairs Executive Deputy Director Joel Evans said, “New Yorkers who served during World War I faced a conflict that the world had never previously seen. They faced these battles with bravery and for their service and actions we are eternally grateful. With the centennial of World War I, it is important to remember those veterans who served like the soldiers of the 369th Regiment, which included heroes such as Henry Johnson. This exhibition ensures that the sacrifices and struggles of the dual identity of soldier and as African Americans of those who served in the 369th Regiment are recognized and given homage.”

369th Veterans Association Inc. Albany Chapter President Deryl McCray said, “As a member and president of the 369th Veterans Association Inc. This exhibition is a pride-building platform for our community, and will brighten the light upon a group of men who fought with conviction to prove their worth to our great country with hopes of equality as their reward. It gives me great pleasure to be the representative of 369th Veterans Association and our members who are committed to keeping and protecting the legacy of these great warriors who have played a significant role in shaping American and world history.”

The exhibition will feature historical objects and images, including a presentation of images that will be accompanied by the spoken words of Noble Sissle Jr., son of 369th veteran and musician Noble Sissle; Bronx Music Heritage Center Folklorist, City Lore and Co-Artistic Director Elena Martinez; 369th Experience Program Executive Producer Stephany Neal; and 369th Veterans Association Inc. Albany Chapter President Deryl McCray.

There will be an opening reception that is free and open to the public on Wednesday, February 7, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the lobby of the Vietnam Memorial Gallery. The event

will feature special remarks by representatives of the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs and the 369th Veterans Association Inc.

For additional information about the exhibition and the New York State Vietnam Memorial & Gallery, visit www.empirestateplaza.org; follow @NYSCapitolVisit on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; or call the Empire State Plaza Visitor Center and Gift Shop at (518) 474-2418.

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Image Attached: Members of the 369th Infantry Regiment wearing the Croix de Guerre (Cross of War) in 1919. The Croix de Guerre is a French military decoration first awarded during World War I to French and allied foreign soldiers.
Image Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration