

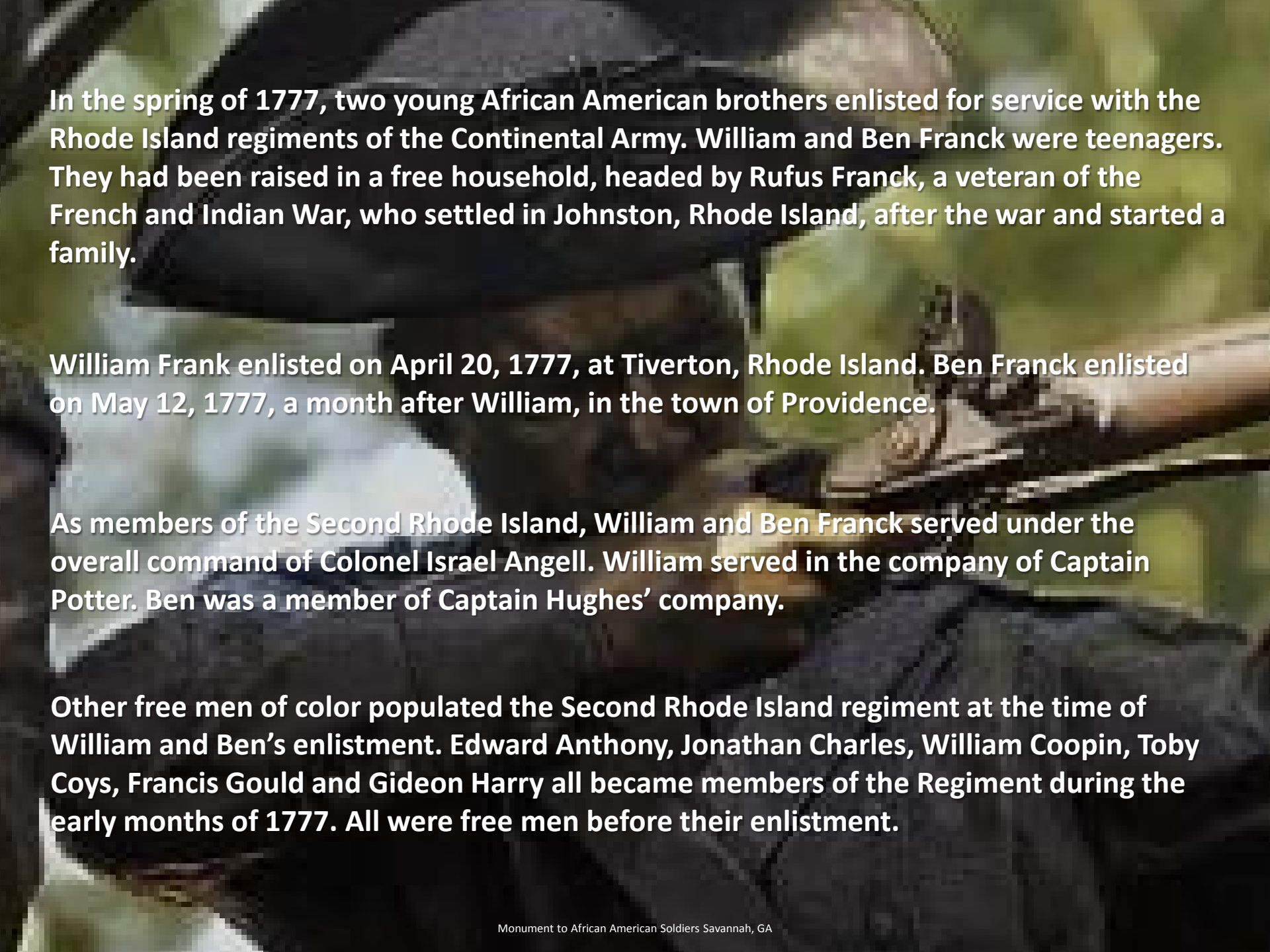
A bronze sculpture of four African American soldiers in 19th-century military uniforms, standing in a line and holding rifles. The soldiers are depicted in a dynamic, forward-moving pose. The background consists of dense green foliage.

FREEBORN MEN OF COLOR

The Franck Brothers

of the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment

at the Battle of Red Bank

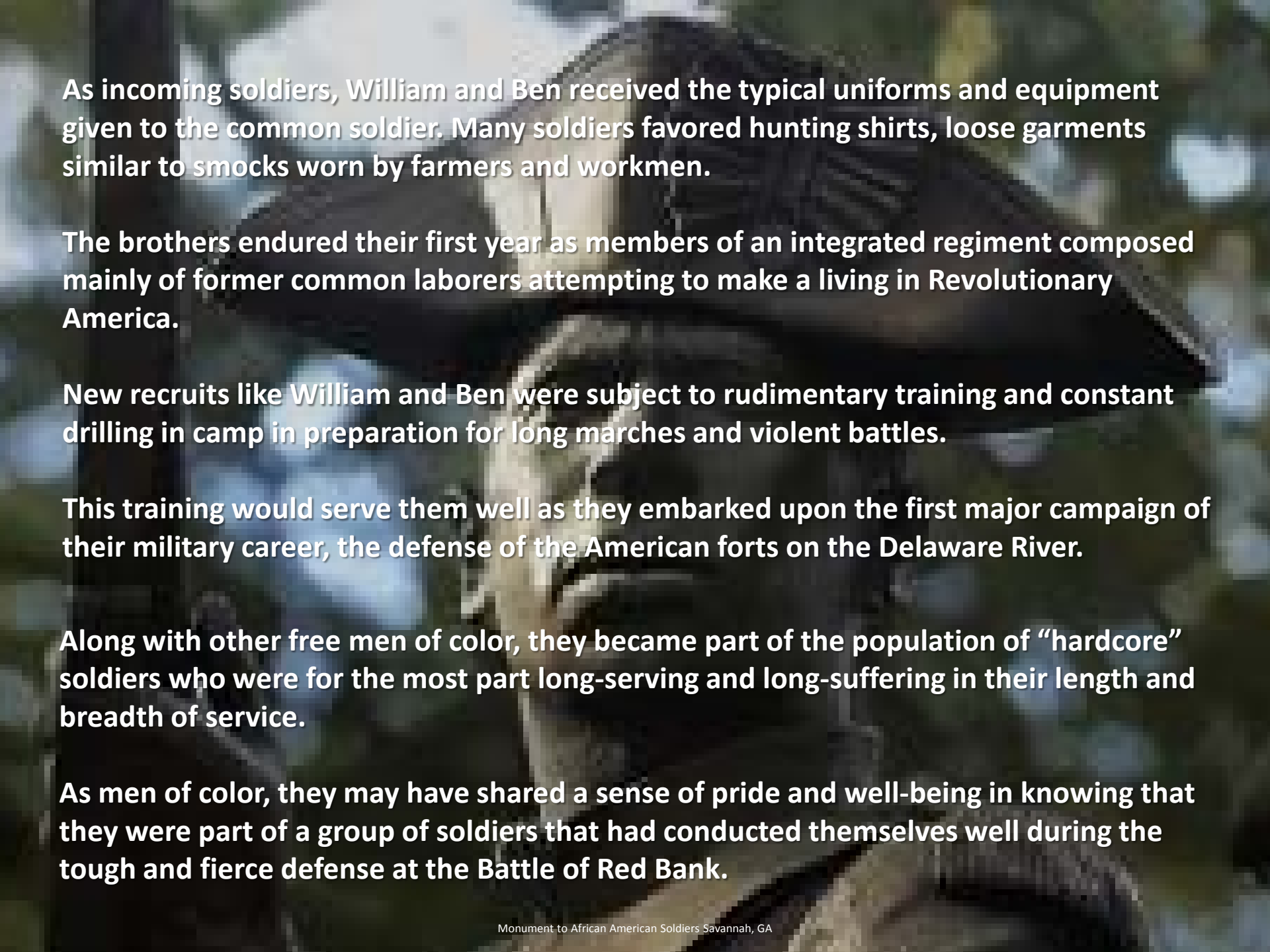


In the spring of 1777, two young African American brothers enlisted for service with the Rhode Island regiments of the Continental Army. William and Ben Franck were teenagers. They had been raised in a free household, headed by Rufus Franck, a veteran of the French and Indian War, who settled in Johnston, Rhode Island, after the war and started a family.

William Frank enlisted on April 20, 1777, at Tiverton, Rhode Island. Ben Franck enlisted on May 12, 1777, a month after William, in the town of Providence.

As members of the Second Rhode Island, William and Ben Franck served under the overall command of Colonel Israel Angell. William served in the company of Captain Potter. Ben was a member of Captain Hughes' company.

Other free men of color populated the Second Rhode Island regiment at the time of William and Ben's enlistment. Edward Anthony, Jonathan Charles, William Coopin, Toby Coys, Francis Gould and Gideon Harry all became members of the Regiment during the early months of 1777. All were free men before their enlistment.



As incoming soldiers, William and Ben received the typical uniforms and equipment given to the common soldier. Many soldiers favored hunting shirts, loose garments similar to smocks worn by farmers and workmen.

The brothers endured their first year as members of an integrated regiment composed mainly of former common laborers attempting to make a living in Revolutionary America.

New recruits like William and Ben were subject to rudimentary training and constant drilling in camp in preparation for long marches and violent battles.

This training would serve them well as they embarked upon the first major campaign of their military career, the defense of the American forts on the Delaware River.

Along with other free men of color, they became part of the population of “hardcore” soldiers who were for the most part long-serving and long-suffering in their length and breadth of service.

As men of color, they may have shared a sense of pride and well-being in knowing that they were part of a group of soldiers that had conducted themselves well during the tough and fierce defense at the Battle of Red Bank.



The incomplete muster and payrolls are silent about the assignment of the Franck brothers during the month of October 1777.

However, after their action at the Battle of Red Bank both Rhode Island regiments were ordered to winter quarters at Valley Forge and made immediate march to that location. Both brothers are listed on the Valley Forge muster rolls with the combined Rhode Island forces. This evidence indicates that both brothers served in their regiments during the battle.

Later in 1778 the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment was merged into the 1st Rhode Island Regiment and active recruitment primarily of slaves and free men of color eventually transformed the Regiment into the “First Black Regiment” as it is now known of today.

Both William and Ben served together in the new 1st Rhode Island Regiment. They stood guard at Newport, Rhode Island, and they wintered at Valley Forge with General Washington.

Their joint service came to an abrupt end when Ben Franck left Continental service to join the British cause. His older brother, William, continued his service with the Continentals until the end of the war.