



# **Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, WWII's Forgotten Heroes**

*Kareem Abdul-Jabbar , Anthony Walton*

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A powerful wartime saga in the bestselling tradition of *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Brothers in Arms* recounts the extraordinary story of the 761st Tank Battalion, the first all-black armored unit to see combat in World War II.

## Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, WWII's Forgotten Heroes Details

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# **From Reader Review Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, WWII's Forgotten Heroes for online ebook**

**Steve-betsy Pollock says**

**Well Done**

Fills an important part of the USA's story about all of its citizens helping to rid the world of evil people, and acknowledges the barriers faced by black soldiers to serve their country.

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**Linda Lou McCall says**

**MAKES ME EVEN PROUDER TO BE A (BLACK) AMERICAN!**

*( Narrated by Richard Allen for Audible.com )*

**Would you listen to Brothers in Arms again? Why?**

Most definitely! Normally I would never read a book about a military war written by a professional basketball player. I say "Play your position!" (I'd already been through the period in my career when we tried to convince Shaq to keep his "day job" because he absolutely could not RAP!). But I digress..... Kareem Abdul Jabbar did his research here and, as a result of due diligence, delivers "nothing but air" - definitely "ALL NET"!! An amazing, amazing story not known to most black Americans, much less the world at large.

**What did you like best about this story?**

This is not just an emotional "we been done wrong - where's my 40 acres?" bleeding heart account. It is factual, well-written, and unbiased.

**What does Richard Allen bring to the story that you wouldn't experience if you just read the book?**

*(Applicable for the audiobook version only)*

He is a black man and, probably without realizing it, adds layers of pride and dignity to an already heroic story.

**Was there a moment in the book that particularly moved you?**

The very end, the interviews with two of the surviving 761st Tank Battalion "Black Panthers". WOW! It brought me to tears! I can't say that about any other book I've read.

**Any additional comments?**

This is a must-read for everyone who calls themselves an American. To hear about the bravery and sacrifice of men fighting for a nation that treated them like second-class citizens is heart-breaking. Talk about hidden historical facts! These guys helped Patton win the war, even though he never acknowledged their contribution. (Patton died in a car accident the year after the war ended. See? God don't like ugly! ) The greatest tank battalion to ever fight in any war.! They lost their lives to bring an end to Adolf Hitler's reign of terror against the Jews and to gain the freedom of American, British, Australian and Danish soldiers being starved, beaten, tortured, murdered, and otherwise degraded by the Japanese in prisoner of war camps. To avenge the wholesale rape, mutilation and murder of Chinese women from the age of 8 to 80, the use of Chinese children as targets in "skeet shooting", and living citizens for bayonet practice by Japanese soldiers during the siege on Nanking. The enforced unpaid labor and killings of Chinese peasants throughout the

country by the Japanese.

Then these brave black American "citizens" returned home to sit in the back of buses, be lynched for just about anything, drink from "Colored" water fountains, be denied jobs, benefits, home loans and education for themselves and their children - the things given to every white veteran, many of whom saw no action at all.. Even while saving the lives of white soldiers or carrying the wounded under fire in freezing weather, these heroes were called "nigger" and "monkey" by their own country men. Yet they fought on with dignity, honor, respect and a bravery not borne from the support of a nation who treated them like second-class citizens. One member of the 761st was beaten and blinded while trying to vote after returning to the United States. His assailants were acquitted by an all-white Southern jury, not one a veteran. (How is that "a jury of HIS peers"?)

The US claimed that they weren't smart enough or brave enough to be airmen so they were assigned to do a job that "no white man should be wasted doing" - to be boxed into what the military itself termed "iron coffins", huge unwieldy, untested rolling death boxes, often full of deadly carbon monoxide. Yet those black soldiers taught themselves how to drive and survive in those Sherman tanks, thereby being responsible for saving the lives of thousands upon thousands of white soldiers and officers. They had to fight another several decades to get the recognition they deserved. The records of their service and heroism were purposely destroyed because the government did not want it to be known how this country, allegedly the first democratic nation in the world, treated its citizens (and still does today) solely because of the color of our skin. These soldiers had to wait until the administrations of Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton - long after most of the surviving members of the 761st battalion had passed away - to get their due. Or PART of it, anyway. White Americans should be ashamed to show their faces after such hypocrisy. I hope you all read this book written by a brother about the REAL "Band of Brothers"! Learn what it means to be a true American!!!

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### **Diane says**

I so much appreciated learning about the 761st tank battalion. What an incredible group of men! And to think that each time they were put with another battalion, they were despised, insulted, and abused makes my blood boil. Despite this constancy, they remained constant in their loyalty towards America; their patriotism a beacon light to all. To learn that after service they returned home to hatred, especially in the south, and lower class citizenship is despicable. It makes me appreciate their sacrifices all the more and reminds me not to judge others. How blessed I am to live in America, thanks to men like Leonard Smith and William McBurney and tens of thousands of others.

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### **Peter Barnett says**

#### **Good Historical Read**

In many ways a story of men at war. The discrimination and abuse faced by the soldiers of the 761st Tank Battalion both before deployment to Europe and upon their return home makes for discouraging reading.

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## **Jerry says**

In the flush of outrage and patriotism in the days and months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans by the hundreds of thousands volunteered to serve in our nation's armed forces. It was no different for black Americans, who were ready to fight for their country, even one that still treated them as decidedly second-class citizens. Eager to maintain the support of black citizens for the war effort, the government attempted to placate them by accepting blacks into the still racially segregated armed services in support roles such as cooks, mechanics, quartermasters (supply troops) and the like, while never actually intending to let them fight. This is well-known, but to this day, a myth persists that no blacks fought in combat during World War Two, except perhaps in isolated instances such as the famed Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group. But in fact, driven by the urgent need for combat replacements in the last year of the war, tens of thousands of black soldiers fought and were killed and wounded in front line combat, mostly in all-black units. The 761st Tank Battalion was just such a unit.

With "Brothers in Arms, The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, WWII's Forgotten Heroes", Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who has become a capable historian in his post-NBA years, and Anthony Walton, finally do justice to the remarkable but almost completely unknown story of the 761st Tank Battalion, whose motto was "Come Out Fighting!"

Highly trained, but manning poorly-designed Sherman tanks that were in many ways mobile death traps and were in all ways under-armored and outgunned by the vaunted German Panzers, the 761st fought their way over 2,000 combat miles from the hedgerows of Normandy to the concentration camps of Mauthausen. You could say they had to fight a two-front war - not only against the best Nazi Germany could throw at them, but also the worst to which some of their own countrymen could subject them. Both in stateside training and European combat, they fought to overcome indifference, stereotypes, outright racism and even violence. They struggled against mistrust, disrespect, disdain, ignorance, doubting leaders, poor leadership and tactics, neglect and exhaustion. They dealt with the ambiguous and contradictory feelings toward them personified in their sometime commander General George S. Patton, who had made it plain in past writings that he thought blacks couldn't think quickly enough for armored warfare, yet was only too glad to have their support in critical battles. They fought for weeks and months without more than a day's break from combat, adequate winter clothing or even a change of uniform. To drag a wounded comrade to safety under fire or to scout ahead or attack German positions on foot was nearly an everyday occurrence. Rather than being part of a self-contained armored division staffed with infantry trained to support tank operations, the 761st Battalion was a detached unit (known to themselves and the rest of the Army as a "bastard" battalion) that was shuffled around different armored or infantry units according to need or the whim of commanders. They would be placed alongside an all-white unit whose reactions to them ranged from caution to outright contempt, and win most of them over with their courage, skill, dedication and humanity, demolishing stereotypes that blacks weren't brave or intelligent enough to fight or lead. Then they would be abruptly bounced to another unfamiliar unit and have to start again from scratch, suffering the crushing indignity of going from heroes and life-savers one day to "n---r tankers" the next.

Through it all, they fought with unheralded but unexcelled valor and determination, and often with conspicuous gallantry. And when they returned home, sure that their bravery and sacrifices in blood and lives would open America's eyes to their worth as men and finally gain them full participation in American life, they found a country mostly eager and determined to go on as if they had never even set foot overseas. Their status as an unattached unit hampered record keeping, as did "lost" commendations and paperwork and old stereotypes, to the extent that even other black Americans refused to believe that they had fought at all, let alone from inside the iconic Sherman tank. Their skill in maneuvering thirty-two ton tanks through

difficult terrain and demolishing German fortifications and machine gun teams with 75mm armor-piercing shells did little to prepare them for the postwar workforce and the reluctance of white managers to hire them, even after some obtained college degrees.

It would have been little wonder had they given up and retreated into bitterness and disillusionment. But instead, we see in almost all of them a determination to start families and make new lives for themselves. (We also see that men whose courage had been forged in bitter fighting against elite German armored units and SS troops were not easily intimidated by jeering crowds and phalanxes of police with nightsticks, dogs and fire hoses). What is surprising is that so many people had to work so long and hard for them to receive the recognition that should have been theirs from the beginning.

While not without minor flaws (such as the need for more maps), the thoroughly researched and well-written "Brothers in Arms" illuminates an important part of black history and American history (including the history-shaping involvement of one John Roosevelt Robinson with the unit). The experience of the black serviceman in World War II is an important prelude to the Civil Rights struggles of the '50s and '60s. It's hard to read this account knowing that what they went through was just the beginning of a fight that would stretch on for another two decades. It's hard, knowing they thought they had won peace for their children, but their children would have to continue struggling.

"Brothers in Arms" also retells an important part of military history. The flawed and bloody campaign for the Saar, a low point in Patton's career, has been almost completely overshadowed by the Battle of the Bulge and the final drive through Germany (in both of which the 761st also fought) and receives deserved attention here.

But I recommend "Brothers in Arms" simply because the men of the 761st Tank Battalion, as well as all black WWII veterans, deserve for their story to be told.

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### **Margaret says**

This book was eye opening and heart breaking. Got a little bogged down in the battle details in the middle and was sometimes hard for me to follow but should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in WWII

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### **Bob Harris says**

A well-written tale of discrimination, bigotry, and heroism in spite of that. This is another tale of African American warriors who have been ignored and Abdul-Jabbar brings recognition to these brave men, not unlike the story of the Tuskegee airmen.

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### **Susan Liston says**

I heard Kareem speak last week in Beverly Hills and he talked about this, saying that most white people had never heard of the 761st. Well I had to admit to being a white person who had not, so I read his book. The thing of course, that sets the 761st apart from other brave troops who saw vicious combat and were killed and maimed is the despicable and unfathomable way they were treated by both civilians and white fellow troops at all points at all times. It's so frustrating and sad and I got teary on several occasions. So anything to



American tradition of racism.

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### **Drtaxsacto says**

I first encountered Kareem Jabbar as a writer in a novel he did about Sherlock Holmes' brother Mycroft. But he has done a number of other books, many on the issues of race. The 761st Tank Battalion was a tank unit that many thought would never see action. At the time of WWII Blacks were excluded from many military occupations - including tanks and the air corps (although of course the record of the Tuskegee airmen has been well documented). But in the last year of the war this unit got shipped to Europe and saw more than 180 days of action. Jabbar got interested in this because one of his father's friends in New York, who had mustered out and went on to serve as a NY Transit cop, had been a member of the battalion.

The story is divided into two parts which are ultimately interwoven. Jabbar's story focused on the experiences of three members of the battalion. The first set gives you an idea of what it was like to be a Black soldier around the time of the Second World War. Some of the members of the battalion grew up in the North and some in the South - but they had volunteered to fight for their country. Segregation around the Southern bases where they trained was a brutal fact of life. So even though these young men had volunteered they were treated poorly.

The second set describes in great detail what it was like to be a tank soldier. The Sherman tank was not exactly a perfect piece of machinery. The German Panzers were better fortified and armed. And the 761st soldiers had to contend with that. The stories are nothing short of heroic. Jabbar went through records of the battalion and was able to interview many of the surviving members.

Jabbar has a well developed narrative style - so the book is compelling.

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### **Wesley Wade says**

In WWII, there were 433 Medals of Honor awarded to American military personnel for their self-sacrificing acts of heroism. During the war, 1.2 million Black American men served and fought in the US military, and despite hundreds of well-documented stories of self-sacrifice by these men, not one of them were awarded the Medal of Honor. This did not change until 1993 when an Army review commission was created to rectify this act of racial discrimination. One of the Medal of Honor recipients from this review commission was Ruben Rivers of the 761st "Black Panther" Tank Battalion, which was an entirely Black battalion. The 761st has been said to be the greatest tank battalion the Army has ever seen, and through the prose of Kareem Abdul-Jabar, we are afforded the opportunity to learn about these men and their lives.

Abdul-Jabar does not pull any punches in this book. His words are vivid and work efficiently in sharing the facts with the audience in addition to creating a narrative with melodic flow. Entrenched in the nonsensical racism of their day, the 761st experienced their hardest battles at home, in the US. Seeing the contrast in their treatment abroad versus their treatment in the US, and by White US soldiers, gives the reader a true sense of how these men redefined what it means to be patriotic. These men fought for a country they loved despite the complexities of such a love—despite being hated, treated poorly, and viewed as less than human due to the color of their skin. This is the American history we need to be more present in our educational system and media, because overall, this is a story of human achievement and empathy.



In the book a few notable historical figures share the pages, such as Jackie Robinson who was a brief member of the 761st, and General Patton who encouraged the 761st but consistently voiced his perspective that African-Americans were not fit to fight. Never has the 761st truly received the notoriety they earned, but in "Brothers in Arms" Abdul-Jabar serves us a slice of justice. Loved this book

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## **Urenna Sander says**

Brothers in Arms is the actual, heroic account of the 761st Tank Battalion, an African-American armored unit that fought in World War II.

The book chronicles the lives of young black men from all over the United States who registered for the draft or volunteered in the United States Army in 1942. Most men who served were in segregated combat groups. Recent high school graduates, or some with higher learning, they were principled, proud, and eager to learn. They took pride in serving their country and selection for the 761st Tank Battalion. The most famous member was famed baseball player, First Lieutenant Jackie Robinson, transferred to another Tank Battalion, who after the war desegregated professional baseball.

The men experienced painful memories of innate hostility from the civilian population during Basic Training at camps in Louisiana and Texas. In addition, there was something amiss about parity and respect from their white peers and commanding officers. The exceptions were Lieutenant Paul L. Bates and Captain David Williams who developed a close and harmonious relationship with the men. Villagers and townspeople in Europe greeted the Tank Battalion with warmth and respect.

The 761st Tank Battalion fought bravely during the Battle of the Bulge; however, after the war, they did not receive the recognition they deserved. It was difficult purchasing home loans and the advantage of good, salaried employment. One of the men, Leonard Smith, did obtain the status of a New York City police officer; however, two of his friends, just as intelligent and hardworking were not accepted. Mr. Smith believed that at that time, the City had a quota of how many African-Americans they would hire. William McBurney studied drafting, but could not obtain a job as a drafter.

I am trying to be more concise in reviewing this book. There is so much history to absorb, but, at times, I found it difficult and painful to read.

In the past, the men received Purple Hearts, Bronze Stars and Silver Stars, and on January 24, 1978, President Jimmy Carter awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for their World War II service.

Although the men said they would never return to Louisiana or Texas, surviving veterans attended a monument memorial dedicated to the 761st Tank Battalion at Fort Hood, Texas, on November 10, 2005. The monument is located on 761st Tank Battalion Drive. The townspeople were hospitable and apologized for their family members' behavior during the 1940s.

This is a poignant story of the young men's pure innocence, their loss of innocence seeing their friends' tragic demise, their unthinkingly, enthusiastic and eager readiness to take part in warfare, and the unfortunate racialization experienced. Yet, it made them tough, self-aware, and disciplined. Their camaraderie made them brothers.

I gave this book five stars.

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**Brion says**

Great book about an amazing Armor unit in WWII written by one of my favorite players and an equally amazing person.

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