



# The Black Panthers: A Story of Race, War, and Courage-the 761st Tank Battalion in World War II

*Gina DiNicolo*

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Known as the first

African American armored unit to see combat in World War II and as future baseball star Jackie Robinson's one-time outfit, the 761st Tank Battalion emerged from the adversity of Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Led by a small cadre of white and black officers, the men trained to the pinnacle of their craft to fight a common enemy. The Black Panthers, as their unit insignia designated, proved their battle prowess on the parched Texas training fields against units bound for combat. The 761st earned a coveted assignment to fight under General George S. Patton to fight head-to-head with the best of Hitler's arsenal.

Moving to the front in November 1944, trial by fire soon shook the unit to its core. Ambushed by a veteran German force, the 761st suffered heavy casualties in the confusion as they cut their way out of the trap. But the men rallied to overcome self-doubt and vindicated their losses. Battle-hardened, the tankers saw intense fighting through November and as well as December when Germany launched its last-ditch offensive through the Ardennes. The 761st fought side-by-side with Patton's Third Army. Moving through deep snow against uncertain opposition, the unit helped check the German advance, cut resupply routes to the forces surrounding beleaguered Bastogne, and drove the enemy back, recapturing towns crucial to the final defeat of Germany.

In *The Black Panthers: A Story of Race, War, and Courage--the 761st Tank Battalion in World War II*, historian Gina M. DiNicolo tells the full and unvarnished history of this important American fighting force. Relying on extensive archival research, including documents not consulted in previous accounts and interviews with surviving soldiers and family members. The author describes the unit--its training, deployment, combat, and notably its men, such as Sergeant Ruben Rivers, one of only seven African American men awarded the Medal of Honor for World War II heroism. The professionalism, dedication, and courage of the 761st endures.



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