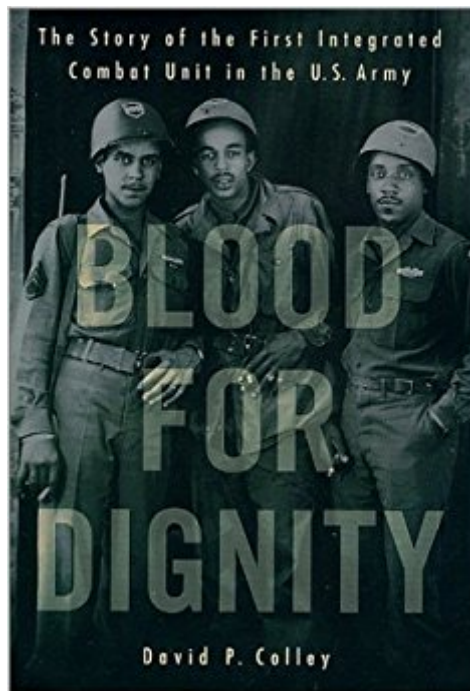




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Blood For Dignity: The Story Of The First Integrated Combat Unit In The U.S. Army



Synopsis

Meticulously researched and wonderfully suspenseful, *Blood for Dignity* is the tale of a fascinating and little-known piece of World War II American history, seen through the eyes of 5th Platoon, K Company, 394th Regiment, 99th Division--the first black unit integrated with a white infantry company since the Revolutionary War. David P. Colley paints an absorbing, combat-heavy portrait of these African American and white men fighting together for their country--an historical event whose resonance would be felt for generations, and whose lesson would be transposed onto American society, shattering myths and destroying assumptions that had haunted blacks for years. The integration of African American platoons with white combat units at the tail end of World War II almost didn't happen. With the pressing need for more troops and the vision of men such as Dwight Eisenhower, black soldiers who only wanted to fight for their country were finally given the opportunity in March of 1945. The performance of these soldiers laid to rest the accepted white attitude of a century and a half that African Americans were cowardly and inferior fighters. In fact, they proved to be just the opposite. From basic training in the deep south, to hard labor in Europe, these men traveled a long and difficult road before they could take up arms for their country. The 5th of K finally saw combat at the Remagen Bridgehead as they fought side-by-side with white soldiers, driving back a dangerous German army in 1945. Thanks to in-depth interviews with many of those who fought in and alongside the 5th of K, author David P. Colley mixes the horrors of war with the intensely personal in a way that brings us closer to the brave men of this Platoon--a group of soldiers whom readers will come to know and admire and not soon forget.

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Customer Reviews

This compact and clearly written book adds detail to the history of African-American soldiers in World War II. Its subject is the African-American platoons added to white rifle companies near the end of the war in Europe because of a desperate shortage of infantry replacements. The focus is the Fifth Platoon, K Company, 394th Infantry Regiment, 99th Infantry Division, in action in March and April of 1945, against a German army down but far from out. Ably commanded by white Lt. Richard Ralston, some of the platoon's men had mostly street smarts (such as Waymon Ransom) and others had college degrees (such as Bruce Wright). All felt they had something to prove and by and large come away satisfied. Colley (*The Road to Victory: The Untold Story of World War II's Red Ball Express*) presents the men directly, flaws and all. The black platoons have been frequently mentioned but not covered in such detail before, and the author has added capsule accounts of the African-American experience in the military before World War II and the assaults on their dignity in that war before they were allowed to shed blood. Based on comprehensive interviews and use of written sources, the book will be steadily engaging for anyone interested in WWII and integration history. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

General Eisenhower ordered the integration of U.S. combat divisions in Germany in 1945, providing an opportunity for black soldiers to exhibit bravery and loyalty and solidify the basis for their demands of dignity. Colley interviewed several veterans of K Company, 394th Regiment, the first black soldiers to be integrated with white troops since the American Revolution. The veterans recount memories of an intense combat environment--fighting alongside their white countrymen on battlegrounds and, at the same time, fighting the bias and negative perceptions of those same countrymen toward black soldiers. Their war experience proves to be exemplary, dispelling more than a century of stereotypes of blacks as cowardly and disloyal. However, along with the glory of their combat experience, the veterans recalled racial prejudice and hatred, starting with basic training in the Deep South. But the frontline held the greatest appeal as an arena for proving their bravery, loyalty, and expectations to be treated as equals in all aspects of American life. Vernon Ford

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I read this book years ago and have found my thoughts returning to it often. No one to whom I've mentioned it, though, has been familiar with the facts. They should be far better known. These soldiers, from many units, were invited to volunteer for an all-black unit assigned to "mop up" during the highly dangerous last months in Germany. Although their performances far exceeded

expectations, they were accorded almost none of the recognition, honors and gratitude given white units. At least, however, top U.S. military personnel took note (literally) and the unit's accomplishments influenced President Truman's later decision to integrate the armed services. An inspiring piece of U.S. and African-American history.

Another good piece of black military history. Colley does a masterful job of combining first person recollections with the broad historical context of World War Two. The stories of these over-looked American soldiers serves to vindicate the efforts forward thinking Generals like Eisenhower and B.O. Davis but even more importantly gave long over-due recognition to men who spilled their blood to gain their dignity as American soldiers.

great book.

What a great book, well written. Read about a unit of brave men who history and the Army gave no credit to for a long hard fought war. I may be bias knowing a family member of one of the subjects of the book but a great read for anyone interested in real military history

My father is one of the brave men featured in this book. He was and will always be my hero. Guess I'm a little biased, but those are the facts. It's a shame 50+ years had to go by before any Bronze Stars were awarded to the men for their bravery.

As the son of a 99th Division infantryman, I heard stories of The Battle of the Bulge, and the Remagan Bridge battles. So when I saw this unique book on the first "integrated" army units of WWII, many serving in the 99th, I purchased it. Just as Chinese workers were rarely pictured in the 19th Century railway construction photos, black soldiers never appeared in popular WWII films, except when seen as laborers, servants, orderlies, or drivers. This book helps to initiate wider recognition of these men and a historical correction. Each of the early chapters contain contemptuous outrages of life in the U.S. Army, including racist incidents, segregated Red Cross centers, poor training, and earned combat medals that were never delivered to African American soldiers. German POW's were treated better than black soldiers, in many cases, and one can imagine life for soldiers from the Northern states who were shipped to racist Southern states for training, such as at Camp van Dorn. The book details how at the end of the war, black combat soldiers were quickly sent back to their old units, sowing bitterness. The dignity for their spilled

blood did not come until fifty years later. Colley, who briefly outlines the contributions of black soldiers in colonial American armies, the Civil War, and the Spanish American War, opens this book in the heat of a battle, when black volunteers come to rescue their fellow infantrymen in K Company on March 13, 1945. 2,221 African American soldiers in about 52 platoons were allowed to volunteer for combat assignments as the war was coming to an end. This book mainly focuses on members of the 5th of K (99th Infantry, 394 Infantry Regiment, K Company, 5th platoon, led by Lt. Richard Ralston) and the 5th of E. The author introduces the reader to these men's lives prior to war, and shows their evolution into combat troops. By the close of the war, as Iserlohn falls, and the 394th crossed the Altmuhl, they are grizzled veterans. An excellent book, an exciting read, and a necessary contribution to American History.

This story of the black soldiers in the 5th platoon (attached to K-Company, 394th regiment), which were allowed to join their white counterparts in the 99th in the Spring of 1944, as the white soldiers were losing badly to the Germans (as one of the first divisions to cross the Rhine River at the bridgehead of Remagen (enshrined in the movie Saving Private Ryan)), was intended to be another one of those "uplifting" stories about how, very much after-the-fact, a manner of dignity is restored to the black soldiers. Only this after-the-fact version is accorded through verbiage when it should have been accorded through the same dignified honors that were accorded the whites soldiers these black soldiers so bravely rescued. In fact, all things considered, this book is not uplifting at all but is just another "bitter pill" that blacks like Harold Robinson of Buffalo and myself -- a member of a black family that had a grandfather who served with the French forces in WW-I, a stepfather who was a navy cook in WW-II, an Uncle who served as part of the support infantry in the Pacific in WW-II, a father who was a fuel truck driver on D-day + 9, and a step uncle who was killed in Korea during the winter of 1951 - must swallow. Like Mr. Robinson I did not find this attempt at a backhanded acknowledgment of black heroics, (or this book) either uplifting or amusing. I found it down right insulting and demeaning to the sacrifices my family made. Why? Because it was difficult to focus on the narrative in the main story line due to the wanton and unnecessary hypocrisy and racism that was being perpetrated by white soldiers in the background of the story. Even as the author used various technical devices to help white racism remain in the subtext, it was the White hatred and white racism of the American soldier that completely overshadowed the narrative in the foreground. Anyone who reads this story cannot come away without asking the only question this story begs: What kind of a country was the U.S. that it could ask its black soldier's for help at a critical stage of the "battle of the bulge" -- when the all white regiments it came to rescue, were

losing badly to the Nazis -- and then once the black soldiers (intended to be used mostly as cannon fodder) more than proved their mettle on the battlefield, they were then summarily disbanded from the units into which they had been integrated and shipped back to the states in a segregated status, solely so that they would be denied the dignity and glory that is afforded heroes who have accounted themselves bravely in battle? There is nothing that can be "uplifting" about such a mean-spirited hate-filled story no matter how well it is told and no matter how much the white racism is "tucked away" in the subtext. That is, unless the question it begs is addressed directly. For after all, the allies were engaged in an existential battle against the world's greatest racist, Adolph Hitler. Somehow, white Americans can no longer get away with shifting the perspective of the narrative, and using other literary devices to deflect the only important moral issue about that war: The white soldiers who were fighting Hitler must finally come to grips with the fact that the upshot of WW-II was that the racial attitudes of white Americans (including Jews) were only slightly less barbaric and hate-filled than those of the Nazis they were fighting against? There is no way anyone -- least of all a black person -- can have his attention misdirected to a lesser more "uplifting" cover story. We know that our fathers, stepfathers, uncles and black brothers were brave in battle. For us the question of the bravery of black soldiers was never an issue. It was an issue only from racist whites. And when blacks proved their gallantry on the battle field, their white foxholes brothers, could not deal with it. The issue for us blacks has always been: Why was it that the very U.S. army fighting against Hitler's industrialized racist genocide was only slightly less racist than was Hitler himself? That is the question that begs for an answer in this cleverly crafted narrative. Were that the only such instance in American history where this kind of hate-filled hypocrisy in which blacks were called up as cannon fodder to help pull the white man's irons out of the fire, then this instance possibly could be excused. However, we cannot forget that Abe Lincoln also pulled the same unholy maneuver to help ensure a victory over the South in the Civil War. There, almost 200,000 black soldiers came to his rescue in the waning hours of that war, and they acquitted themselves equally well, and were also rewarded in the same backhanded, demeaning way as were the black soldiers of WW-II: "Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation" was a fraud issued only to blacks under the control of the Confederacy. It took the Thirteenth Amendment to finally end slavery. Lincoln himself was little more than a shrewd Illinois politician who was also a confirmed racist and white supremacist. It was the sign of the double "V" that black soldiers used signifying a victory over both the racism of Hitler and the racism of America. So far, even with a mulatto President, that battle has yet to be won. Three stars

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