

Book Reviews

BROTHERS IN ARMS: THE EPIC STORY OF THE 761ST TANK BATTALION, WWII'S FORGOTTEN HEROES¹

REVIEWED BY MAJOR ITALIA A. CARSON²

It is hard to imagine the U.S. Army today without African-Americans in its ranks. To do so, you would have to eliminate approximately 118,650 Soldiers (24%) from the active Army and about 103,442 Soldiers (18.4%) from the Army Reserve and Army National Guard.³ The total loss would be around 222,092 Soldiers (21%), including officers and enlisted, from a total force of approximately 1,056,042 Soldiers.⁴ Equally hard to fathom today is that sixty years ago, a racially segregated⁵ Army was the norm. Then, it was 1944. The second global war involving the world's superpowers was in its fifth year. As the war raged in two theaters—Europe and the Pacific—the U.S. found itself needing more troops to fill the widening void caused by mounting casualties on both fronts.⁶ Moreover, German advances in tactics and weaponry meant replacements had to be highly disciplined and expertly trained, not just space fillers.⁷ This dilemma became the catalyst for the unplanned and unintentional introduction of African-American combat troops into the war, temporarily, and their integration into the Army, permanently.⁸

I. Introduction

Brothers in Arms, by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Anthony Walton,⁹ is the biographical history of the “761st Tank Battalion (Colored),”¹⁰ the first all African-American tank battalion committed to battle along side white Soldiers during some of the bloodiest fighting in the European Theater in the latter part of World War II (WWII).¹¹ The Army created the 761st on 1 April 1942, with no real intention of committing it to fighting on the war front.¹² Three days after the D-Day Invasion on 6 June 1944, however, the Army alerted the 761st for possible deployment overseas.¹³ By October 1944, Lieutenant General George S. Patton could wait no longer; his Third Army needed tanks and trained crews for replacement

¹ KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR & ANTHONY WALTON, *BROTHERS IN ARMS: THE EPIC STORY OF THE 761ST TANK BATTALION, WWII'S FORGOTTEN HEROES* (2004).

² U.S. Army. Written while assigned as a student, 53d Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³ Dr. Betty D. Maxfield, *Blacks in the U.S. Army: Then and Now* (Apr. 2004), Deputy Chief of Staff, Army G-1, at <http://www.armygl.army.mil/hr/demographics/BlacksThenNow83-03.ppt> (last visited Sept. 19, 2004) (presenting the 2003 black demographics of the U.S. Army as prepared by the Chief, Office of Army Demographics). In addition, African-American enlisted Soldiers made up 16% of the active duty combat arms in 2003. *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*; telephone interview with Dr. Betty D. Maxfield, Chief, Office of Army Demographics (Oct. 27, 2004).

⁵ The Army was not only predominately Caucasian, but also exclusively male. The first experiment involving women in a collective military status came with Congress's establishment of the all-female Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in 1901. MATTIE E. TREADWELL, *UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II: THE WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS 5-7* (Kent Roberts Greenfield ed., Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army 1953). Although it was a military entity, the ANC operated without military rank, officer status, comparable salaries, or veteran's benefits and, as such, was separate from the Army. *Id.* at 6. Nevertheless, the ANC provided the template for the later establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), a service support organization of women in “noncombatant service” positions and “not a part of the Army.” *Id.* at 19 (emphasis added). The WAAC was the precursor to the Women's Army Corps (WAC), established in 1944 during the height of fighting in Europe. *See id.* at 6. The WAC gave women “full Army status and rank” and was a part of the Army. *Id.* at 6, 220. Thus, the 1940s was a decade of monumental change for the Army with integration by race as well as gender.

⁶ *See* ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 45, 53.

⁷ *See generally id.* at 38-39.

⁸ *See id.* at 17.

⁹ Abdul-Jabbar conducted twelve years of research, fact gathering, and interviewing in preparation for *Brothers in Arms*, which is the fifth book written by the basketball great. *Id.* at xiv-xv, book jacket. On this project, however, Abdul-Jabbar was joined by published author and English teacher Anthony Walton. *See id.* at book jacket. This review acknowledges the joint efforts of both authors in creating *Brothers in Arms*.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 6.

¹¹ *Id.* at 17.

¹² *Id.* at 17, 20. Rather, the unit was created to “placate black voters and the Negro press.” *Id.* at 20.

¹³ *Id.* at 53.

on the battlefield.¹⁴ Thus began 183 days of combat for the 761st, with the tank unit supporting almost a dozen different infantry and armor combat units and tracking over 2000 miles in six European countries.¹⁵

The authors tell the collective story of the unique unit by following the lives of three of its surviving members: Leonard “Smitty” Smith, William McBurney, and Preston McNeil.¹⁶ While the authors’ purpose is to inform the public about the heroic exploits of the 761st “Black Panthers,” a central theme permeates throughout the 271 pages: the men of the 761st were not novelty Soldiers, who happened to perform well in battle despite voiced doubt. They were the ultimate contradiction to years of status quo, and therefore, the Army could not ignore them, and the Nation could not forget them.¹⁷

The biographical history is a bifurcated story that covers the unit’s pre-deployment training in the United States and its actual fighting in France, Germany, Luxembourg, Holland, Austria, and Belgium.¹⁸ The book closes with a short, somewhat abrupt, synopsis of a few of the more notable members after their return from liberated Europe to segregated America. On the whole, *Brothers in Arms* is entertaining while serving its dual purpose of informing the public about and gaining widespread recognition for the unit. It elicits admiration for the Soldiers and invokes disgust for the blatant racism that followed these men from the United States to Europe and back to the United States again. At the conclusion, the reader will feel that both stories needed to be told.

The casual and informal writing alerts the reader early on that the focus is not solely on military maneuvers and battle formations. Instead, the story maintains a number of focal points, sometimes simultaneously. First, it is the biography of an old family friend, Smitty, whom Abdul-Jabbar has known most of his life and whom the author later discovered (with unabashed admiration) is a war hero as well as an unlikely player in the African-American journey for equal rights. Second, it is a straightforward military account of the creation of a unique military combat unit, its unplanned commitment in the war, and its unexpected military success, which later contributed to the full-force integration in the Army of African-American Soldiers.¹⁹ Third, it is a historical vignette (and reminder) of our nation’s former political and social state of open and active segregation and degradation of African-American citizens of the United States. Finally, it is a story of righting wrongs, from the eventual recognition by white veterans and the overdue rewards from the Army, to the open gratitude and quiet apology of a nation.

Despite its main purpose and target audience, however, a few flaws are worth noting. For instance, the authors rely more on secondary sources than primary ones to support fact. Instead of citing original sources such as survivor interviews, General Patton’s diaries, or the Robinson court-martial transcript,²⁰ the authors cite to sources that reference these primary materials.²¹ Furthermore, a scan of the ten-page “Endnotes” section reveals that the authors rely most often on two sources: *Come Out Fighting: The Epic Tale of the 761st Tank Battalion 1942-45*²² and *The 761st “Black Panther” Tank Battalion in World War II*.²³ A war correspondent wrote the former in 1945, and it is somewhat difficult to find. The son of a surviving tanker of the 761st wrote the latter. While no controversy may surround the accomplishments of the 761st, reference to some of the neutral sources listed in the book’s bibliography, and not directly associated with the 761st, would have served as a more objective source of the facts.

Another weakness is the omission of a few relevant photographs and sources. The book’s photographs consist of Abdul-Jabbar’s father in uniform, Smith (then and now), and the 761st, individually and as a whole. Noticeably absent are any photographs of the other two main characters, McBurney and McNeil; the unit’s beloved battalion commander, Lieutenant

¹⁴ *Id.* at 70, 77. General Patton specifically requested the 761st for the front, and despite the unit’s successes in Europe, he noted in his diary that he continued to “have no faith in the inherent fighting ability of the race.” *Id.* at 87.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 247.

¹⁶ *See id.* at xv.

¹⁷ *See id.* at 252-53.

¹⁸ *See id.* at 6.

¹⁹ On 26 July 1948, President Harry Truman ended segregation in the armed services with respect “to race, color, religion or national origin.” Exec. Order No. 9981, 3 C.F.R. 722 (1943-1948), available at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpaper/fahy.htm>.

²⁰ *See infra* Part II and notes 45, 46, 48.

²¹ *See* ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 274-75.

²² TREZZVANT W. ANDERSON, *COME OUT FIGHTING: THE EPIC TALE OF THE 761ST TANK BATTALION 1942-45* (The Advocate Press 1979) (1945). “Come Out Fighting” was the motto of the 761st. ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 47.

²³ JOE W. WILSON JR., *THE 761ST “BLACK PANTHER” TANK BATTALION IN WORLD WAR II* (McFarland & Co. 1999).

Colonel (LTC) Paul L. Bates;²⁴ or the sole recipient of the Medal of Honor from the 761st, Sergeant Ruben Rivers. Finally, when citing to “Internet Sites of Interest” in the bibliography, the authors omit an obvious choice: the homepage of the 761st!²⁵

II. Training at Home: An Unwelcome Presence

Their training at home began with the journey to military posts in the South. It is 1942, and Smith, McBurney, and McNeil travel separately from their homes to their eventual destinations at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, and Fort Knox, Kentucky, for initial training.²⁶ Despite the open racial animosity of the period, all three men were deeply patriotic and volunteered to fight for their country following the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor.²⁷ Smith and McBurney were born in Harlem and grew up in New York City.²⁸ Both men had dreams of becoming military pilots.²⁹ After all, each boy had studied aviation mechanics at vocational high school and had scored well on the military entrance examination.³⁰ But, the Army Air Corps did not accept blacks regardless of their demonstrated aptitude and potential.³¹ Instead, seventeen-year-old Smith and eighteen-year-old McBurney were “steered” by recruiters into joining “armored.”³² Nineteen-year-old McNeil, a soft-spoken Southerner, had no illusions about the limitations imposed upon him and his family by segregation.³³ Having grown up in North Carolina, racial separation was a way of life.³⁴ A stint in President Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps eventually brought McNeil to New York City, where in 1942, he enlisted in the Army.³⁵

In the first half of the book, the authors describe in detail the battalion’s composition (three companies of M4 General Sherman tanks, one company of M5 General Stuart tanks, one headquarters company, and one service company), the M4 and M5 tanks’ technical specifications and combat limitations, the tank crew training and equipment maintenance drills, the barracks’ segregation, the white officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) trainers’ contempt of the battalion, and the locals’ open hostility towards the enlistees.³⁶ Leadership lessons emerge from the authors’ description of the white officers and NCOs who openly voiced doubt about the abilities of the men and frequently complained about having to serve in the assignment.³⁷ Soon, black commissioned officer replacements arrived fresh from training at Fort Knox.³⁸ The Caucasian battalion commander, however, chose to remain with the 761st.³⁹

Lieutenant Colonel Paul L. Bates was a striking example of leadership and moral courage. Bates was a fair, honest, and decent man, who treated his men with “simple, direct humanity, and they responded in kind.”⁴⁰ He led from the front by

²⁴ The authors, however, dedicate the book to “Colonel Paul Levern Bates”, the unit’s Caucasian battalion commander, as well as the members of the 761st. ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at dedication page. Apparently, Lieutenant Colonel Bates was eventually promoted to the rank of colonel. *See infra* note 42 and accompanying text.

²⁵ The website for the 761st Tank Battalion’s homepage is <http://www.761st.com> (last visited Sept. 17, 2004).

²⁶ ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 6, 12-15.

²⁷ *Id.* at 6, 10.

²⁸ *Id.* at 6-7, 10.

²⁹ *Id.* at 8-9, 11.

³⁰ *Id.* at 9, 12.

³¹ *Id.* at 9, 11-12.

³² *Id.* at 9, 12.

³³ *See id.* at 13.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* at 16-61.

³⁷ *Id.* at 28-29, 44, 49.

³⁸ *Id.* at 28.

³⁹ *Id.* at 29.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

training with the 761st, living on post close to his unit, protecting them from mistreatment from the military and local civilians, and accompanying them into battle.⁴¹ His commitment to stay with the 761st cost him a promotion to colonel.⁴²

Brothers in Arms also reminds us that African-Americans took great risks to enlist and serve in the Army during this period. In general, they faced open hostility, vocal racial slurs and epithets, physical assault, and sometimes even death from local townsfolk, civilian law enforcement, and military police (MP).⁴³ Such maltreatment followed the enlisted Soldiers of the 761st when they relocated to Camp Hood, Texas, for training. It also extended to the officer ranks. One of the highlights in this section of the book is the brief appearance of baseball legend Jackie Robinson.⁴⁴ While many may be familiar with Second Lieutenant John Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson’s tarnished active duty military experience during the war, probably few remember that this occurred while he was a member of the 761st.

Robinson’s troubles began when a white bus driver saw the officer sitting next to and talking with a woman who appeared to be Caucasian.⁴⁵ The bus driver ordered Robinson to move to another seat, and he refused.⁴⁶ The MPs arrested Robinson and took him to the police station where an NCO and two captains repeatedly questioned him and addressed him by racial epithets.⁴⁷ In the end, the MP commander preferred charges.⁴⁸ When LTC Bates refused to refer charges to a court-martial against the wishes of “the top brass at Camp Hood,” they swiftly transferred Robinson to another unit and a more accommodating commander.⁴⁹ The court-martial acquitted Robinson on all charges, but by then, the 761st had left for Europe.⁵⁰ Second Lieutenant Robinson will never rejoin them.⁵¹ Robinson went on to earn his fame on the baseball field, while the 761st made its legend on the battlefield.

As stated earlier, a weakness here is the authors’ reliance on secondary sources instead of the actual court-martial transcript. The drama is not lost, however, and the Robinson episode provides another example of the abuse and injustice experienced by African-American Soldiers during this period. It also provides another study of leadership: Lieutenant Colonel Bates’s actions demonstrated the honor, integrity, and moral courage of a leader who chose the hard, right choice when faced with what surely was intense pressure from his peers and superiors to make the easy, wrong choice.⁵²

Standing alone, the first half of the book is a little tedious with the authors’ detailed description of pre-deployment life for the 761st. It is not until the second part of the book that the purpose of such detail becomes apparent: the repeated training drills in adverse terrain and weather sharpened their skills, and the unrelenting racial hostility toughened their resolve.⁵³ Undoubtedly, they were ready for combat.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 29, 32, 46.

⁴² *Id.* at 29.

⁴³ *Id.* at 26-31.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 50.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 54-55. The woman, the “wife of a fellow lieutenant with the 761st,” was actually an “extremely light-skinned” African-American. *Id.* at 54-55.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 55.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 56-57. Second Lieutenant Robinson was referred to as that “nigger lieutenant,” a “nigger,” and an “uppity nigger.” *Id.* at 56-57. The disrespectful treatment of Robinson by military law enforcement and fellow officers, however, would serve to contribute to Robinson’s complete acquittal by the court-martial. In a crucial moment at trial, Robinson’s civilian defense attorney impeached a key government witness, who testified that he had never called Robinson “a nigger” during the MP station ordeal but moments later testified that Robinson’s exact words in custody were, “If you ever call me a nigger again, I’ll break you in two.” *Id.* at 59.

⁴⁸ *See id.* at 57.

⁴⁹ *Id.* Today, it is possible that these facts might elicit a defense claim of unlawful command influence by “the top brass.” *See* UCMJ art. 37(a) (2002) (“No commanding officer . . . may attempt to . . . by any unauthorized means, influence . . . the action of any convening authority, or reviewing authority with respect to his judicial acts.”); MANUAL FOR COURTS-MARTIAL, UNITED STATES, R.C.M. 104(a) (2002) [hereinafter MCM]. *See also* MCM, *infra*, R.C.M. 306(a):

Each commander has discretion to dispose of offenses by members of that command. Ordinarily the immediate commander of a person accused or suspected of committing an offense triable by court-martial initially determines how to dispose of that offense A superior commander may not limit the discretion of a subordinate commander to act on cases over which authority has not been withheld.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 59.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *See also id.* at 58 (describing how Bates “put his career on the line to defend Jackie Robinson” by providing supporting witnesses for Robinson’s defense).

⁵³ *See id.* at 120.

III. Fighting Abroad: Reluctant Alliances

The second part of *Brothers in Arms* picks up speed as the 761st sailed to Europe and hit French soil at the allied port at Omaha Beach on 10 October 1944.⁵⁴ From this point on, the unit spent six months fighting the forgotten Saar Campaign (a portion of the Lorraine Campaign), pushing past the Siegfried and Maginot Lines and the Rhine River into Germany, and fighting the Ardennes Offensive, which was the extended Battle of the Bulge.⁵⁵ Excessive rain and mud and heavily emplaced German defenses turned the Lorraine Campaign into a protracted and costly campaign.⁵⁶ After a brief bivouac at La Pieux, France, the Black Panthers were attached operationally to the first of many all-white infantry and armor units.⁵⁷ With each successive attachment, however, the 761st had to prove itself all over again in the eyes of the white Soldiers.⁵⁸ The tankers also began to refer to their unit as one of the “bastard battalions,”⁵⁹ because the tank battalions were “designed to be assigned to an Army corps” or its “component divisions . . . most [in need of] their specialized services at a given moment.”⁶⁰ As such, they did not feel a permanent attachment to any higher headquarters.

The authors complain later that the numerous attachments to various infantry and armor units contributed to the accomplishments of the 761st going unrecognized for years.⁶¹ Therefore, the authors applaud “the combined arms infantry division of the present day,” which replaced the former arrangement and allows for more distinction among component units.⁶² The authors’ position is outdated, however, because it ignores the Army’s new combat structure, which goes back to the building block system of the past. The current “modularity” doctrine advocates the restructuring of the Army to a modular system, which will allow a force to be tailor-made from modular combat units to meet the specific and temporal needs of the combatant commander.⁶³ A quick update of their research into Army doctrine before the 2004 publication of *Brothers in Arms* would have prevented this misunderstanding of the Army’s new combat structure.

Where *Brothers in Arms* primarily falls short as a military book is its failure to include a single map, chart, or diagram to depict graphically the unit’s six months of fighting and maneuvering.⁶⁴ As a result, the reader must rely solely on text to visualize the high operational tempo of the 761st as it blazed its trail across central Europe. Moreover, such graphics could have been adapted easily from the sources the authors referenced in the bibliography.⁶⁵ In addition, the authors omit any line or block chart to illustrate the 761st Battalion’s numerous attachments to various infantry and armor units during their six-month deployment. These supporting graphics would have added some welcomed clarity to this complicated section of the book.

⁵⁴ See *id.* at 79-80.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 85, 115, 129, 154, 159, 160-61, 163-68, 172-73, 189-90.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 85, 92-93, 115, 120, 173; CHRISTOPHER R. GABEL, *THE 4 TH ARMORED DIVISION IN THE ENCIRCLEMENT OF NANCY 1*, 23 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute 1986).

⁵⁷ ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 81, 206. Some of the units included: 101st, 104th, and 328th Infantry Regiments of the 26th “Yankee” Infantry Division; 4th Armored Division; 17th Airborne Division; 345th and 347th Infantry Regiments of the 87th “Golden Acorn” Infantry Division; 95th Infantry Division of XVI Corps; 79th Infantry Division of the Ninth Army; 103d “Cactus” Infantry of the Seventh Army; and 71st Division of XII Corps, Third Army. *Id.* at 89-91, 96, 114, 131, 156-57, 170-73, 203, 208, 210, 213-14, 228.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 91, 122, 157, 172.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 81, 229.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 81.

⁶¹ See *id.* at 259.

⁶² See *id.*

⁶³ See, e.g., U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, *THE WAY AHEAD 9-12*, available at <http://www.army.mil/thewayahead/quality5.html> (last visited Sept. 19, 2004).

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Customer Reviews, *Not quite there on either goal!*, at <http://www.enotalone.com/books/0385503385.html> (last visited Sept. 20, 2004) (criticizing the book for its lack of “a single map or diagram”).

⁶⁵ See ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 283-87. One reference in particular, *The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, September – December* by Christopher R. Gabel, contains numerous maps of the Lorraine Campaign, which, with little change, could have been adapted for use in *Brothers in Arms*. See CHRISTOPHER R. GABEL, *THE LORRAINE CAMPAIGN: AN OVERVIEW, SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 1944* 2, 4-6, 21, 29, 34 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute 1985).

IV. Coming Home: A Hero's Welcome Years Later

At the close of 1945, the men of the 761st individually returned home.⁶⁶ There were no ticker-tape parades or national celebrations for these Soldiers.⁶⁷ Despite their heroic actions in Europe, their return only put them “at the beginning of a struggle [for racial tolerance and acceptance rather] than at the end.”⁶⁸ At this point, the authors briefly describe the homecoming of Smith, McBurney, McNeil, and a few of the memorable Soldiers of the 761st. The majority of the closing chapter, however, is devoted to describing an ungrateful nation that continued to perpetuate racism and segregation against the 1.2 million returning African-American WWII veterans.⁶⁹ The authors also detail the 761st Soldiers's long struggle, beginning in 1945 and ending in 1997, to gain recognition from the Army for the unit's and several individual members's numerous acts of bravery and exceptional service during the war. While the chapter provides closure, this portion of the book is somewhat disjointed because the authors describe the lives of some of the 761st veterans in short, abrupt paragraphs that lack smooth transitions between each other and to new topics. The result is that the reader is left with various unrelated snap shots rather than the big picture of the post-war 761st.

V. Conclusion

Sun Tzu said, “Conflict is essential to the development and growth of man and society. It leads either to the construction or destruction of an entire group or state.”⁷⁰ If this is the case, the struggles of the 761st, abroad and at home, led to the construction of a stronger Army and a greater nation.

Americans have an inherent, if not fervent, sense of fairness. The reader will not be disappointed to learn that after a fifty-year fight, our brothers in arms finally received their fair recognition and just reward. For the unit, it was a presidential citation,⁷¹ for a fallen comrade, it was the Medal of Honor.⁷² *Brothers in Arms* is a personal biography as well as a public tribute, and while not your typical military history, it is a story worth reading.

⁶⁶ ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 249-50.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 251.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 250.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 253.

⁷⁰ SUN TZU, *THE ART OF WAR 3* (Stephen E. Kaufman trans., Tuttle Pub. 2001).

⁷¹ The original request for a Presidential Unit Citation (PUC) was submitted in June 1945. ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 259. It was preliminarily denied without much explanation two months later and, completely denied upon subsequent review by President Eisenhower's office. *Id.* at 260. Congressional intervention almost thirty years later caused an inquiry into the denial that revealed that “racial discrimination and inadvertent neglect” on the part of the Army were possible factors in rejection of the PUC. *Id.* at 261. Finally, in 1978, President Jimmy Carter awarded the 761st its PUC for “Extraordinary Heroism.” *Id.* at 262. The total award count for the 761st is as follows: 296 Purple Hearts (8 with clusters), 70 Bronze Stars (3 with clusters), and 11 Silver Stars. *Id.* at 260. Other distinctions include eight battlefield commissions and four campaign streamers. *Id.*; U.S. Dep't of Army, Center of Military History, *Fact Sheet on 761st Tank Battalion* (1946), available at <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/topics/afam/761TkBn-2.htm>.

⁷² On 13 January 1997, President Bill Clinton awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously, to Sergeant Ruben Rivers. ABDUL-JABBAR & WALTON, *supra* note 1, at 262-63.

FOUNDING MOTHERS: THE WOMEN WHO RAISED OUR NATION¹

REVIEWED BY CAPTAIN HEATHER J. FAGAN²

*Women ventured into all kinds of spheres. They went with [S]oldiers to camp. They served as spies. They organized boycotts of British goods. They raised money for the troops. They petitioned the government. As the Daughters of Liberty, they formed a formidable force. They defended their homesteads alone as their husbands hid out, marked men with a price on their heads. The generals on both sides of the Revolutionary War marveled at the strength of the women.*³

I. Introduction

“Drawing upon personal correspondence, private journals, and even favorite recipes,”⁴ the author, Cokie Roberts, reveals the many “founding mothers” who helped shape the American Revolution.⁵ In approximately 278 pages, Cokie Roberts attempts to resuscitate over thirty-eight women.⁶ Although she does not succeed in her ambitious attempt to bring so many to life, the more-developed main characters include the following founding mothers: Abigail Adams, Martha Washington, Deborah Reed Franklin, Mercy Otis Warren, and Eliza Pinkney.⁷ Rather than devoting a chapter to each main character, the author discusses them intermittently in rough chronological order from 1775-1789.⁸ This technique effectively illustrates their interaction with one another as the Revolution progressed. It also emphasizes that this was an elite circle of women—“[t]here are many other women of the time whose lives were much harder than the ones described here, but the Founding Fathers weren’t listening to them.”⁹

Cokie Roberts is particularly suited to write on this topic since she is also part of an elite circle of women. Besides the obvious—she is a well-known news commentator and author¹⁰—her ancestors “have been active in Louisiana politics in every generation since [1790].”¹¹ Consequently, she is barely a decade short of being a direct descendent of the founding mothers of the American Revolution. The greatest influences for this book, however, were her parents who served in Congress. According to Cokie Roberts,

My mother and father were both in politics My mother . . . is actually quite interesting, because when my father was in Congress she was his campaign manager, and when he went into the leadership, she ran his district office, and then she took a seat in Congress and was on the very powerful Appropriations Committee. She could make the case that there were times when the behind-the-scenes power was greater than the on-the-scene power.¹²

These life experiences combined with her extensive research¹³ make Cokie Roberts a very reputable source to resurrect the founding mothers.

¹ COKIE ROBERTS, *FOUNDING MOTHERS: THE WOMEN WHO RAISED OUR NATION* (2004).

² U.S. Army. Written while assigned as a student, 53d Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center and School, U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³ ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at xix.

⁴ *Id.* at book jacket.

⁵ *See id.*

⁶ *See id.* at 1-278.

⁷ *See generally id.* at xvi-xx.

⁸ *Id.* at table of contents.

⁹ *Id.* at acknowledgements.

¹⁰ *Id.* at book jacket (explaining Cokie Roberts is a commentator for ABC News, a senior news analyst for National Public Radio, and a two-time best-selling author of *From this Day Forward* and *We are Our Mothers’ Daughters*).

¹¹ *Id.* at xv.

¹² Cokie Roberts, Address at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*, NPR (Apr. 21, 2004), available at <http://www.lawac.org/speech/roberts,%20cokie%202004.htm> [hereinafter Roberts Address].

II. Analysis

Readers who are expecting a general history of early-American women will be disappointed. In a narrative format, *Founding Mothers* retells the American Revolution amidst a collection of stories about the “women who influenced the Founding Fathers.”¹⁴ Although many national publishers¹⁵ praised this book, its writing ranges from informal to colloquial. A layperson aptly summed up the book when she stated, “[I] could have done without the personal commentary Cokie threaded through the book . . . I wanted to scream.”¹⁶ Another layperson astutely observed, “Cokie Roberts has provided a service to remedial readers everywhere.”¹⁷ The book also strays from its thesis about the founding mothers’ influence and randomly discusses historical minutiae related to the founding fathers.¹⁸ This background is often superfluous. Despite these weaknesses, *Founding Mothers* is still worth reading because it offers a well-researched glimpse at the women that history had previously overlooked.¹⁹

At times, the book addresses such a large cast of characters that it resembles a montage of countless letters.²⁰ There are, however, some inspirational *and* well-developed characters as previously outlined. Out of that category, Abigail Adams is the most developed character.

Perhaps Cokie Roberts more fully developed Abigail because Roberts had written about Abigail’s letters in an earlier book, *From this Day Forward*.²¹ Abigail’s story intermittently unfolds in more than seventy-five pages in the *Founding Mothers*.²² After several references early in the book, Cokie Roberts illustrates Abigail’s feisty character with the following anecdote: “When [Abigail’s] husband was a delegate to the Continental Congress, she wrote to him[,] . . . ‘Why should we not assume your titles when we give you up our names’”²³

Through Abigail, Cokie Roberts conveys two important points. First, she shows the sacrifices women made for the Revolution. As a result of John Adam’s role in the Revolution, Abigail “was alone for years and years at a time She had to do everything. She had to run the farm, . . . keep his legal business alive, . . . raise the children and . . . the British were coming.”²⁴ When Abigail wrote for advice to deal with the threat of British Soldiers, John responded, “[F]ly to the woods

¹⁴ See ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at book jacket, xii-iv. One cannot fault Cokie Roberts’ scholarly research on the founding mothers. Unearthing vast historical sources including correspondence, military records, recipes, pamphlets, and songs, Cokie Roberts has arguably compiled the most comprehensive research on this topic. *See id.*

¹⁵ Barnes & Noble.com, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation, From the Critics*, at <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch> (last visited Sept. 3, 2004) (quoting Publisher’s Weekly Review (no further reference provided)).

¹⁶ See Joyce Appleby, *Let Us Know Praise Famous Women*, CHI. SUN TIMES, May 9, 2004, at 14 (“Roberts artfully stitches together [the founding mothers’] separate and overlapping experiences These domestic details quicken our sympathy for [this] group of women”); Patricia Brady, *Patriot Dames: In “Founding Mothers,” Cokie Roberts Celebrates Women Who Were There When America Began*, TIMES-PICAYUNE, May 2, 2004, at 6 (“Cokie Roberts has given America a wonderful Mother’s Day gift in ‘Founding Mothers.’”); Maria Fish, “*Founding Mothers*” *Get Their Place In the Birth of American History*, USA Today, May 6, 2004, at D4 (“*Founding Mothers* is a welcome addition to American Revolution Biography.”); Amanda Fortini, *Books In Brief: Nonfiction, Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*, N.Y. TIMES, May 9, 2004, at 20 (“While her commentary—mainly glib quips or superfluous recapitulations—provides little insight, she creates a strong, though perhaps overstated, case that without the patriotism of women on the home front, the Colonies would have lost the Revolutionary War entertaining mini-biographies and engaging vignettes.”).

¹⁷ Powells.com, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation, Synopses & Reviews*, at <http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?inkey=62-0060527889-0> (last visited Sept. 3, 2004) (quoting a customer’s review (no further reference provided)).

¹⁸ Amazon.com, *Books: Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation, Reviewer: Jimmy Frank West*, at <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/0060090251/103-5078557-8905459?v=glance> (last visited Sept. 3, 2004) (noting the book is “[f]or In Style Readers who’ve yet to graduate to People Magazine”); *see also* Gaile Robinson, *And Now A Word About Our “Founding Mother”*; *Cokie Writes of Women Who Often Were Greater Patriots*, CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, June 21, 2004, at 9A (“Roberts introduces us to many fascinating women here. Unfortunately, she interjects herself in their stories, adding unnecessary comments. It’s the only jarring note in her narrative, and a seasoned journalist should know better.”).

¹⁹ See ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 54.

²⁰ The majority of the reviews appear to conclude this book tackles a little-known subject. *See, e.g.*, Appleby, *supra* note 15 (“With *Founding Mothers*, Roberts fills a gap in our coverage of the era without straying far from the familiar story of colonial resistance, the struggle for independence and the writing of the U.S. Constitution.”).

²¹ See generally ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 279-82 (listing a rather long “cast of characters”).

²² COKIE ROBERTS & STEVE ROBERTS, *FROM THIS DAY FORWARD* (2001); *see also* Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 2.

²³ See ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at xvi, 14, 44-45, 50-52, 56, 58, 59-77, 88, 97-103, 149-57, 173-76, 179-85, 204-05, 219, 224-25, 231-34, 239-43, 251-54, 257-58, 260, 262-63, 273-77.

²⁴ *Id.* at 61.

²⁵ See Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 2.

with our children. Thank-you very much. She must have wanted to throttle him.”²⁵ It is this type of running commentary throughout the book that one national publisher praised as “delightfully intimate and confiding.”²⁶ Yet, it becomes distracting when it randomly surfaces without contributing to the thesis.

Second, Cokie Roberts cleverly outlines the women’s behind-the-scenes power. In Abigail’s case, she used her wit to influence her husband as well as others, such as Thomas Jefferson.²⁷ In letters to John, Abigail wrote the following:

If we separate from Britain, what code of laws will be established. How shall we be governed so as to retain our liberties? . . . When I consider these things and the prejudices of people in favor of ancient customs and regulations, I feel anxious for the fate of our monarchy or democracy or whatever is to take place.²⁸

Cokie Roberts sprinkles the remainder of the book with these letters. Alone, these letters make the book worth reading. Cokie takes it one-step further by tying in Abigail’s letters and her relationships to other founding mothers such as Martha Jefferson²⁹ and Mercy Otis Warren.³⁰ It is fascinating to read that early America—at least the upper crust—was a very small world.

With such a small circle comprising the upper crust, one may not expect there to be significant differences among the founding mothers. Mercy Otis Warren is one founding mother that stands out. Unlike the others, she is notable for her own accomplishments rather than those of a spouse or a son. An author, Mercy Otis Warren published propaganda in the form of poems and plays.³¹ Even though the major newspapers published them, she did not use her own name until later in life.³² She particularly influenced John and Samuel Adams, Massachusetts founders.³³ She was “as influential a propagandist for the cause as Tom Paine—and [Cokie Roberts like most] had never heard of her” until she conducted research for this book.³⁴ The following excerpt from a letter Mercy wrote to Abigail (she wrote a similar one to John Adams) about the impending revolution reflects Mercy’s influence: “We cannot long continue in this state of suspense. It is and ever has been my poor opinion that justice and liberty will finally gain a complete victory over tyranny.”³⁵

It is also represents a main flaw in the book—Cokie Roberts offers little to no analysis of her characters. In another passage, Mercy writes, “Yet notwithstanding the complicated difficulties that rise before us, there is no receding; and I should blush if in any instance the weak passions of my sex should damp the fortitude, the patriotism and the manly resolution of yours.”³⁶ Cokie Roberts’s initial analysis of that excerpt is “Whew!”³⁷ While such commentary ranges from disappointing to annoying, readers should be grateful to know such inspirational women even if it is due mainly to their own words and not those of the author.

²⁵ ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at xvi.

²⁶ HistoryWizBooks, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation, Editorial Reviews*, available at <http://books.history.wiz.org/moreinfo/foundingmothers.htm> (last visited Sept. 3, 2004) (quoting Publishers Weekly Review (no further reference provided)).

²⁷ ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 181 (noting “Abigail Adams and Thomas Jefferson struck up a lively correspondence, full of news and opinions”).

²⁸ *Id.* at 71.

²⁹ *Id.* at 232-34 (“[Martha] received me with great ease and politeness. She is plain in her dress, but that plainness is the best of every article . . . Her manners are modest and unassuming, dignified and feminine, not the tincture of hauteur about her.”).

³⁰ *Id.* at 45, 50-52, 56, 58-59, 61, 64, 66, 70, 71, 73, 97, 99, 102-03, 154-55, 251, 253-54. Abigail and Mercy were friends even though they experienced periods of political rifts. *Id.* at 45, 253. “[T]hey had met through their husbands—and the letters between the two women over the years reveal a great deal about political attitudes on the distaff side.” *Id.* at 45.

³¹ *Id.* at 45-47.

³² *Id.* at 47, 253 (noting Mercy did not publish under her own name until 1790).

³³ *Id.* at 50; *see* Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 3.

³⁴ *See* Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 3.

³⁵ ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 52.

³⁶ *Id.* at 55.

³⁷ *Id.*

Martha Washington is another inspirational founding mother. Unlike Mercy and Abigail, Cokie Roberts does not have as much personal correspondence to reprint and weave throughout the book.³⁸ Therefore, Martha's character development appears more organized than the other founding mothers. Cokie Roberts gives biographical information about Martha but really develops her starting age at forty-three—her age when the war began.³⁹ It is inspiring to learn she spent eight winters at camp with George Washington and the Soldiers.⁴⁰ She not only brought supplies for the Soldiers but also initiated a diplomacy campaign and met with leaders along the way.⁴¹ “George felt so strongly [he needed her] that he begged her every year to come even though she thought she was derelict to her duties in Virginia where many members of her family needed her, she always decided the greater duty was to join the General.”⁴²

While most⁴³ of the characters in the book had a strong sense of duty, Deborah Franklin epitomizes that attribute.⁴⁴ “Benjamin Franklin essentially abandoned his wife for sixteen of the last seventeen years of their marriage, returning only when it became clear that he had to take over the business because . . . ‘my wife in whose hands I had left the care of my affairs died.’”⁴⁵ It was somewhat disheartening to learn how poorly Benjamin Franklin had treated his dutiful spouse. Until her death, Deborah prosperously ran Benjamin's print shop and newspaper.⁴⁶ Cokie Roberts' response was “[a]ll heart that Ben.”⁴⁷ While it was enthralling to learn about such a stalwart woman, again the author's triteness undermined the thesis.

The mother of two founders, Thomas Pinkney and Charles Cotesworth Pinkney, Eliza also introduced the indigo crop to the United States.⁴⁸ By the time of the Revolution, indigo was a million dollar export.⁴⁹ When she died, “George Washington insisted on serving as a pallbearer at her funeral because of the service she had rendered the nation.”⁵⁰

While her story is inspirational, it was difficult to follow in the book, which the author bases on a rough timeline of the Revolution. Cokie Roberts introduces Eliza in the first chapter in-depth.⁵¹ Then Roberts intermittently inserts Eliza later in the book, but readers do not learn of her fate—death—until the last chapter.⁵² This problem is also systemic to other characters in the book. It would not be so disruptive if the book strictly adhered to a timeline. For instance, the last chapter is about the post-revolutionary period yet it jumps from 1796 to 1776 and then forward to 1790.⁵³

III. Lessons Learned for the Judge Advocate

Despite its flaws, this book is worth reading because the founding mothers are gender-neutral role models for male and female judge advocates. The founding mothers' tenacity and courageousness are exemplary. There is an important reminder specifically for female judge advocates—they should not take leadership opportunities for granted. Like other leadership books before it, *Founding Mothers* does not provide a template for balancing family and the duty to lead.⁵⁴ It merely emphasizes that women can have impact behind-the-scenes or in front of them. Perhaps the best lesson for females already in

³⁸ See generally *id.* at 85-95.

³⁹ *Id.* at 85.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 87; see also Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 2.

⁴¹ ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 87.

⁴² Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 3.

⁴³ Margaret Arnold, wife of Benedict Arnold, is the exception to that principle. See ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 131.

⁴⁴ See *id.* at 24-36.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at xvii.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 26.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 6-7.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 6.

⁵⁰ Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 5.

⁵¹ See ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 1.

⁵² See *id.* at 110, 112-14, 197-98, 265-66.

⁵³ *Id.* at 254-55.

⁵⁴ See Major Karen L. Douglas, *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way: Timeless Strategies from the First Lady of Courage*, 178 MIL. L. REV. 163, 170 (2003).

professional leadership roles is that those females in stay-at-home positions of leadership can also significantly impact society. Whether at a “coffee,” a dinner-party, or in a professional setting, people always have opportunities for leadership.

IV. Global Lessons Learned

Although one of the book’s weaknesses is that it takes so much time retelling the American Revolution, that same weakness yields a global lesson learned. By retelling this part of history, Cokie Roberts reminds readers of the fervent patriotism of this country’s founders. Families, like John and Abigail Adams, were apart years at a time. There were many years when the Soldiers did not have pay, food, shelter, or sufficient clothing; and still others suffered from boycotts because they had to make the goods they did not import from England. There were countless stories of incredible hardship in which the easier path would have been to forgo independence from England especially since it was not a forgone conclusion. It was largely due to the talents, persistence, and cohesion of the leading families that America eventually overcame the British. These families voluntarily chose to make these sacrifices and to take enormous risks. The idea that they knowingly put their own prosperity and safety at risk to achieve a goal for not just themselves but for future Americans is important.⁵⁵

Now contrast that with our recent invasion of Iraq—the break from the dictatorship did not surge from within the country.⁵⁶ Based on the media coverage, it does not appear the Iraqis “in charge” after the imposed revolution have as much of themselves invested in the process.⁵⁷ Additionally, women in Arab cultures are not supposed to be influential in their husband’s affairs.⁵⁸ It is reasonable to conclude the American founding mothers were able to add something to the revolutionary effort that Iraqi women may not be able to contribute. For these reasons, is it logical to believe Democracy will thrive once our occupation of that country ceases? Have we so soon forgotten how democracy precariously existed in post-Revolutionary America but for the will and sacrifice of its citizens?

V. Conclusion

Perhaps this book is the victim of false expectations. National publishers gave such laudatory reviews that readers may have higher expectations than the book warrants. Contrary to these reviews, the book has too many characters for its page length, lacks plot development, substitutes analysis with stream-of-consciousness commentary, and contains colloquialisms. It also deviates from its thesis and often focuses as much on the founding fathers as the founding mothers. Its conclusion ends with the same sort of running commentary that pervades the book and detracts from its thesis—“A salute from the Father of the Country to its Founding Mothers.”⁵⁹ In the style of the author, “Thank-you very much.” In the end, the book is *still* worth reading because it is a compilation of highly researched letters of the founding mothers—an area that previously received little attention and whose letters are inspiring in their own right.

⁵⁵ See *id.* at 64-65, 68; see Roberts Address, *supra* note 12, at 2.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Thomas E. Ricks, *Ex-General Gives His Take on Iraq War*, WASH. POST, Aug. 1, 2004, at A10.

⁵⁷ See generally John F. Kerry, *A Realistic Path in Iraq*, WASH. POST, July 4, 2004, at B7; Thomas E. Ricks, *Rumsfeld’s War Plan Shares the Blame*, WASH. POST, Aug. 25, 2004, at A1; Marvin Zonis, *Facing Up to Defeat in Iraq: A Game Plan That Makes the Best of a Tinderbox*, CHI. TRIB., June 27, 2004, at C9.

⁵⁸ See generally IRAQ: A COUNTRY STUDY 113 (Helen Chaplin Metz ed., 1990).

⁵⁹ ROBERTS, *supra* note 1, at 278.