



Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War

Linda Hervieux

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The injustices of 1940s Jim Crow America are brought to life in this extraordinary blend of military and social history—a story that pays tribute to the valor of an all-black battalion whose crucial contributions at D-Day have gone unrecognized to this day.

In the early hours of June 6, 1944, the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, a unit of African-American soldiers, landed on the beaches of France. Their orders were to man a curtain of armed balloons meant to deter enemy aircraft. One member of the 320th would be nominated for the Medal of Honor, an award he would never receive. The nation's highest decoration was not given to black soldiers in World War II.

Drawing on newly uncovered military records and dozens of original interviews with surviving members of the 320th and their families, Linda Hervieux tells the story of these heroic men charged with an extraordinary mission, whose contributions to one of the most celebrated events in modern history have been overlooked. Members of the 320th—Wilson Monk, a jack-of-all-trades from Atlantic City; Henry Parham, the son of sharecroppers from rural Virginia; William Dabney, an eager 17-year-old from Roanoke, Virginia; Samuel Mattison, a charming romantic from Columbus, Ohio—and thousands of other African Americans were sent abroad to fight for liberties denied them at home. In England and Europe, these soldiers discovered freedom they had not known in a homeland that treated them as second-class citizens—experiences they carried back to America, fueling the budding civil rights movement.

In telling the story of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, Hervieux offers a vivid account of the tension between racial politics and national service in wartime America, and a moving narrative of human bravery and perseverance in the face of injustice.

Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War Details

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at War Linda Hervieux

From Reader Review Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War for online ebook

Dee says

Jim Crow laws and rules established white supremacy, racial discrimination, segregation and racism allowed terrorism against blacks resulting in lynching, rape, arson and murder. And yet under these inhuman circumstances African-American Soldiers served their country and their stories and military histories were not told and suppressed. THANK GOODNESS author Linda Hervieux searched out, researched and wrote this story/book about these WWII Heroes. It's well told and the photos are wonderful too.

Spencer Hargadon says

Eyeopening and challenging. I am appreciative of what Linda Hervieux collected and chronicled. There were striking moments that broaden my typical view of what the American forces in WWII looked like. She also balanced drawing conclusions with presenting the case and walk that line well. The book is also supported and in someways weakened by the richness of some of the other details. There were many diversions further into the past, into life in pre-war Atlantic City and into the history of balloons in militaries. As diversions and asides they were detailed and provided excellent information that I had never encountered and am grateful for now having. In the midst of the book, they sometimes felt like a tangential piece of information. I don't know that any of it should have been excised as much as framed better. By the end of it all, its relevance was clear, but I almost didn't push through the set up of what life was like in Atlantic City in the 30s in the opening of the book.

Brandon Wilkins says

Linda Hervieux shows us people and parts of WWII that we may not have heard as much about. She also shows some of the racial tensions that happened during WWII. To that extent, she gives special attention the unit of black soldiers that made up the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion. She also shows how Jim Crow policies and racism affected black soldiers.

The book is very good because it showed how unfair and evil the treatment of black soldiers by Americans (usually southern) truly was.

- + In the south, German and Italian POWs could eat in restaurants that black soldiers were not allowed in (meaning they would rather have Nazis dine there than blacks who were defending our freedoms!)
- + A black person in military uniform made him a target for violence and abuse by whites in the south
- + Many black soldiers felt safer in battle in Europe than in the south, because if they died in battle it was honorable, as opposed to being lynched and killed by their own countrymen.
- + Black soldiers were welcomed in England and France and were embraced by the people there without any qualms at all. This infuriated some whites, who sought ways to try and export America's Jim Crow laws to Europe (which, mercifully, was not effective).
- + After fighting for our country, many blacks hoped they would come home to a more understanding America than the one they left, they did not.

+ Saving Private Ryan which gives a very gripping portrayal of the Normandy invasion failed to include a single black person in the invasion at Normandy beach, even though there were plenty that were there.

Finally, I would just say, Part III of the book, which offers a detailed look at the Normandy invasion, was very moving for me. I can never get over what so many Americans/British/Canadians did that day for freedom.

Why read a book like this? The present is inextricably linked to the past. And even among those who consider themselves historically-minded, for whatever reason this historical-mindedness tends not to include understanding racial history. Yet, the present grows out of the past. There were points in this book where I said (if my ancestors were treated that way, I would be outraged too!).

The liberty to ignore past injustices--injustices that have never been addressed properly-- and to say "quit living in the past" really is the definition of privilege. It leaves the hurting to have to heal their own wounds by themselves.

But in order to do something positive and helpful for those who have experienced so much wrong at the hands of powerful forces in our country, the first step is with a heart ready to see what really happened.

That's not Marxism. That's not politics. That's humanity.

Ellen Lebelle says

Linda Hervieux spoke at the American Library in Paris on February 2. I was immediately hooked. So hooked that I got the e-book edition even though I'm ordering the paper book for our library and so my husband will read it. I've since also ordered a copy for my aunt and uncle; he's a veteran as was his father, my grandfather, and an avid reader of anything concerning WWII.

The story is well told. Sometimes, I felt we were too much into background and I was itching to get on with the story, but the more I read, the more I appreciated having all the background information. We did not learn any of it in classes in the 60s. These men deserve proper recognition.

I have visited the author's website and it contains much additional material, including videos of interviews with some of the men.

Dan says

We call it "The Greatest Generation" for a reason. We don't call it the greatest white generation. This book tells the story of just a few of the black, colored, or using the word of the time Negro soldiers. They were thought to be inferior in intellect, courage, and ambition, despite that they served with pride and Valor. The Jim Crow laws followed them from South through Europe, they courageously suffered the racism and performed their duty. Not until the end of the 1900's did they begin to get the recognition they deserved. This book is not a great read, but the story is spell binding.

Jane says

Heartbreaking. And well done.

Didi says

This is an excellent read of the exploration of discrimination towards blacks in the military as well as highlighting the extraordinary men from the 320 Balloon Barrage Battalion. They may have been forgotten at some point but this book certainly honors them and educates us all on their bravery during the war and at home. This is a must read!

L.A. says

Posted first to Blog Critics as Book Review: 'Forgotten, The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War by Linda Hervieux.

Sometimes the most heroic stories are those you don't hear about, those held in the hearts of the men who lived them. In *Forgotten, The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War* by Linda Hervieux, we are introduced to the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion. With a time of war and especially the fateful landing on a French beach Normandy there are many unsung heroes, those who willingly gave their lives to save the lives of the many.

The 320th Balloon Battalion was a unit of African American soldiers who also landed on the beach—their job—to use their curtain of armed balloons and deter enemy aircraft.

With the discovery of military records and the interviews of the last of the survivors, Hervieux has given us a look into the lives of those who served anonymously. While known and respected for their work, they were nonetheless ostracized by other U. S. battalions for race was still a major issue. Lacking freedom from their home in the U.S. the treatment and friendship they garnered in England and most of Europe opened their eyes to the way things could be if equality could really happen for them.

This work draws on the life of Wilson Monk, Henry Parham, William Dabney, Samuel Mattison and thousands of other sent abroad to fight for the liberties they were not yet afforded in their own country. These very experiences they carried back added fuel to the civil rights of the time.

As Hervieux tells the story of this group of freedom fighters she also imbues the work with the tensions of the racial politics of the time as well as the human bravery for a group fighting for freedom and for many giving up their lives for something they had yet to earn for themselves. For these veterans most of their stories remained unheard for the depth of danger and anguish made the retelling difficult.

As Hervieux tracks the stories through the lead up and aftermath of the Normandy landing you get a visual picture of the situations as well as the danger involved. Yet this team of amazing individuals were a very necessary part of taking the beach that day, and the trail of searching for them and getting the stories from the survivors and their families, as well as the few records, we once again see the courage and brilliance of their actions and how their heroism helped to fuel as well as inflame the civil rights movement that came

after.

If you enjoy history and works about D-Day, and just getting to know more about the differing views of occurrences and as well as the lives and faces belonging to the Barrage Balloon Battalion you will find this a great work.

This would be a great work for a book club or reading group with a great deal of detail to discuss.

Jessica Buike says

This book is an in-depth look at the pervasive race discrimination in the American military during the World Wars, and provides the tales of some of the young black men involved in the D-Day attack. These men were extraordinarily resilient and brave heroes, and few received any of the honors that they were due. My only complaint is that there wasn't as much focus on the men as on the general racist climate, but overall this was still an original look at Barrage Balloon Battalions and their impact on D-Day.

I received an Advance Review Copy of this book.

Sarah Beth says

I received an uncorrected proof copy of this book from HarperCollins.

Linda Hervieux has managed to shed light on a group of American heroes that sadly truly were nearly forgotten in this new work of non-fiction. In it, the author tells the story of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, a unit of African American soldiers, who assisted in deterring enemy aircraft on the beaches of France. Despite their heroic actions, most of these men were never awarded medals, are never represented even in fictional portrayals of D-Day, and returned home to a country that promptly regulated them to basically second class citizenship due to their race - many even struggled to be given the benefits supposedly open to them through the GI bill.

Hervieux did an excellent job of not only describing these men's war efforts, but setting the scene to show it was remarkable that they were even given the responsibility of the barrage balloons. At the time, in the 1940s, most black men in the armed forces were relegated to menial tasks. In 1925, the Army released a study that helps depict how African American soldiers were viewed: "He has not the physical courage of the white. He simply cannot control himself in fear of some danger in the degree that the white man can. His psychology is such that he willingly accepts hard labor and for this reason can be well employed in labor troops or other non-combatant branches" (27). Although somewhat welcomed in the army, black were excluded from the marines, only allowed to work as servants in the navy, and completely excluded from the Army Air Corps, the forerunner to the air force (39).

The 320th were trained at Camp Tyson in Tennessee, where many of these northern men faced Jim Crow racism of the South for the first time. German prisoners of war were welcomed into restaurants where blacks were excluded. The very sight of African American men in uniform and standing at attention - "a pose of strength, dignity and pride" - was deeply offensive to white southerners. Yet when they arrived in Britain, the

men were astounded to be treated as equal with whites for the first time - they were invited to British home for dinner and were welcomed in British restaurants, pubs, and churches - here they "were *Americans* first" (158). This caused racial tensions between white and black American soldiers to escalate, contributing to anxiety from British officials, who resented Americans importing their racial issues to Britain. In fact, the polite demeanor and general appreciation for equal treatment led their hosts to say, "the general consensus of opinion seems to be that the only American soldiers with decent manners are the Negroes" (155).

In addition to shedding light on men worthy of our recognition and respect, I enjoyed learning about the use of barrage balloons, which I had never studied in detail before. Hervieux reports that she had difficulty finding information on wartime balloons "because there are so few people alive today who know anything about them" (271). Apparently the first balloon was used in a military sense by Napoleon in 1794. Balloons were used in the second world war to effectively keep planes away from a target. "As a defensive barrier, a curtain of balloons flying in a staggered sawtooth pattern forced pilots higher, fouling the aim of their bombs. Flying higher also made those planes better targets for the big guns on the ground" (67). Early balloons were also filled with hydrogen, which would explode when a plane collided with it and their cables held bombs that were triggered when planes came in contact with them.

Hervieux embarked on this research in the nick of time - only a few men from the 320th were still alive when she began locating them. I feel grateful that she was able to interview some of the men and finally shed light on their contributions to ending World War II - like Waverly Woodson, who worked thirty hours straight as a medic on the beaches of Omaha before collapsing. When he woke up, he asked to go back to keep helping.

At times I did feel like this book was merely plumbing the surface of the 320th's stories. I would love to have had more accounts of the individual men, although this was likely complicated by many having passed away by the time of writing. However, overall this was an excellent read about a sorely undocumented part of our history.

Kate says

While having some knowledge of the horrors of Jim Crow, I did not know much about the thousand of African American soldiers who served in WWII until I saw a TV film on the Tuskegee Airman in the late 90s. Even though I was an Air Force brat, I don't remember seeing many black people at any of the bases except as Mess Sgts. and working as cooks and servers...as a child I didn't think much about it. I was familiar with the difference between the way blacks were treated in the late 50s, even in California, having friends who attended Grant High School in Sacramento, a run down school w/no A/C, used text books that were shabby and not enough to assign every student, no amenities or science labs, minimal sports equipment where the High school in or neighborhood had A/C, great labs with every type of equipment, competition swimming pool, wonderful library, plenty of staff and counselors and every bell and whistle.

So this book was a real eye opener on how entrenched Jim Crow racism was in the Armed Services and how horrifically black soldiers were treated by the white officers who they were assigned to, and the violence white soldiers and MP visited upon them, both at home and in England as they trained for D'Day.

The stories of the men of the 320th Balloon Brigade, and others who served in Patton's tank division and the 92nd Infantry and other units and how even their presence was erased from history was painful to discover so many years after they for the most part have been long gone from this earth caused me actual pain for their mistreatment and the indignities they suffered, even post war.

Hervieux has painted well the experiences they endured both at home and in war. It is worrying that this still was the pattern in Korea and Vietnam, long after most of us thought it had been addressed.

Today's Army offers minorities probably more room for advancement than is available in many civilian areas of this country, where bigotry and discrimination still takes a toll on non-whites...

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in history, war or politics as we still live in a world where we see voter suppression and open expressions of hatred that no amount of facts to the contrary seems to be able to diminish. A belated thanks to the families of these brave men who served and sacrificed in ways beyond imagining.

Kevin Thompson says

When I was younger, I used to get a lot of stories from other relatives about my grandfather serving in WWII. From what I remember he was in England. My grandfather had died when I was around 6 or 7 years old so I wasn't able to get more information from him about his experience. The author did a great job in telling the story of the black soldiers in WWII. This is probably as close I can get to the accounts of the black WWII soldiers. An interesting thing I got from the book was two of the soldiers were from Roanoke, VA. My grandfather was from there and I wonder did he know those soldiers at one time. I definitely recommend this book. Definitely a tough subject matter to discuss. It was hard being a black soldier during that time. They had to deal with a racist system that segregated them and gave them from the most part menial jobs. And in spite of all of that, the soldiers did their duty. Great book.

Garrett Suttle says

This is a decent book about the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, who were the only African American soldiers to see action on D-Day.

In the foreword, the author states that historians told her "you won't find enough to write a book about them." Well the historian was right.

This book dives deeper into the racism through Jim Crow laws of the day and how life in the military and outside the military was like. While this is a very important topic that needs more light shed on it, I was hoping for more about the brave men of the 320th rather than a history of racism and a history of war balloons.

In my opinion, the book is partially slow and repetitive until the 320th ships off to Britain. Then it picks up and becomes a quick read

Lynn says

Today's post is on *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War* by Linda Hervieux. It is 368 pages long including notes and published by HarperCollins. The cover is a picture of Normandy beach with soldiers on it and three balloons in the background. The intended reader is someone interested in World War 2, history, and African Americans. There is language, no sex, and violence in this book. There Be Spoilers Ahead.

From the back of the book- The injustices of 1940s Jim Crow America are brought to life in this extraordinary blend of military and social history—a story that pays tribute to the valor of an all-black battalion whose crucial contributions at D-Day have gone unrecognized to this day. In the early hours of June 6, 1944, the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, a unit of African-American soldiers, landed on the beaches of France. Their orders were to man a curtain of armed balloons meant to deter enemy aircraft. One member of the 320th would be nominated for the Medal of Honor, an award he would never receive. The nation's highest decoration was not given to black soldiers in World War II. Drawing on newly uncovered military records and dozens of original interviews with surviving members of the 320th and their families, Linda Hervieux tells the story of these heroic men charged with an extraordinary mission, whose contributions to one of the most celebrated events in modern history have been overlooked. Members of the 320th—Wilson Monk, a jack-of-all-trades from Atlantic City; Henry Parham, the son of sharecroppers from rural Virginia; William Dabney, an eager 17-year-old from Roanoke, Virginia; Samuel Mattison, a charming romantic from Columbus, Ohio—and thousands of other African Americans were sent abroad to fight for liberties denied them at home. In England and Europe, these soldiers discovered freedom they had not known in a homeland that treated them as second-class citizens—experiences they carried back to America, fueling the budding civil rights movement. In telling the story of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, Hervieux offers a vivid account of the tension between racial politics and national service in wartime America, and a moving narrative of human bravery and perseverance in the face of injustice.

Review- Hervieux brings the story of African Americans in American war to the front with this book. That is a good thing and a bad thing at the same time. It is good because she gives a good overview of the service that African Americans have done for America. But it is bad because it over shadows the story of these soldiers in WW2. When Hervieux is giving the story of the men that she interviews I really enjoyed this book but she including a thirty-five page account about the history of ballooning I did not. When she talked about what Monk and Parham and Mattison and the other soldiers had to deal with during their daily lives and during the war itself, it was moving and made me angry. But Hervieux has too many tangents. She goes too many places. I wanted more from the interviews she had with the men but we only really get one. That said when she is on target, this is a very moving and interesting book. I want Hervieux to write more but I want her to be concise.

I give this book a Four out of Five stars. I was given a copy of this book by HarperCollins in exchange for an honest review.

Jere Hester says

Linda Hervieux brings to life the heroism of 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, an all-black squadron of soldiers who battled racism at home before and after helping save the free world on the beaches of Normandy. The book, propelled by an historian's penchant for unearthing long-lost documents and a journalist's knack for weaving a compelling, people-driven narrative, relays the saga of these brave men with the dignity they deserve and the full context the story demands. She's revived a chapter of American history too long ignored and now, thanks to her excellent work, too powerful to be forgotten.
