

The Forgotten Black Panther of the Pen: Trezzvant Anderson Publicized the Heroics of African American Tankers in World War II (James Mueller)

Abstract

The 761st Tank Battalion, an African American unit that fought with George S. Patton Jr.'s Third Army during World War II, is celebrated today in books and movies for its heroic efforts in defeating Nazi Germany. However, Trezzvant Anderson, who covered the 761st for the Black press and wrote a book about the unit after the war, is largely forgotten. Anderson's relative obscurity is a shame because his remarkable war reporting ensured the exploits of the 761st would be preserved, Anderson, who was born in 1906 in Charlotte, North Carolina, began his journalism career at the student newspaper of Johnson Smith College. He left before graduation to write professionally. During the years before World War II, he tackled a variety of issues like lynching and discrimination in employment. He developed a reputation as a crusader for civil rights, and when the United States entered the war, he turned his focus to discrimination in the military. Although he was almost 40 years old in 1943, he enlisted in the U.S. Army with the goal of becoming a public affairs officer so he could promote the achievements of African American soldiers, who were getting scant recognition in the mainstream press. Anderson was sent to Europe as an Army war correspondent. He argued for equality in the then-segregated U.S. Army and told the story of African American soldiers. Anderson found a dream story in the 761st Tank Battalion, known as the Black Panthers. The unit landed in France in October and was in frequent combat as the Allies drove across France and into Germany. It played a key role in relieving the siege of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. The 761st earned a Presidential Unit Citation and its soldiers earned numerous individual awards, including a Medal of Honor and 11 Silver Stars. But because of the reluctance of the mainstream press to cover African American troops, the 761st would have been largely overlooked were it not for Anderson, who witnessed much of its actions and wrote about them for the Black press. In 1945, with the war just ended, Anderson wrote a unit history called *Come Out Fighting*. After leaving the Army, Anderson returned to journalism and wrote extensively about civil rights until his death in 1963. Anderson did not live to see the popularization of the 761st in fiction and nonfiction books and movies, most of which used his writing as source material.

This paper will explore Anderson's contribution to the history of the 761st by examining his articles in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *Come Out Fighting*. The research will compare Anderson's coverage with that in mainstream newspapers in the same cities, shedding light on how Anderson preserved the record of the 761st and recovering the contribution of this important but little-known journalist.

Bio

James E. Mueller is interim dean and professor at the Mayborn School of Journalism at the University of North Texas in Denton. He is the author of four books, including *Shooting Arrows and Slinging Mud: Custer, the Press and the Little Bighorn*, which was named a finalist in nonfiction in 2014 by the Western Writers of America and the High Plains Bookfest. He holds a Ph.D. in Journalism from the University of Texas. He worked as a journalist for about 10 years before entering academia.