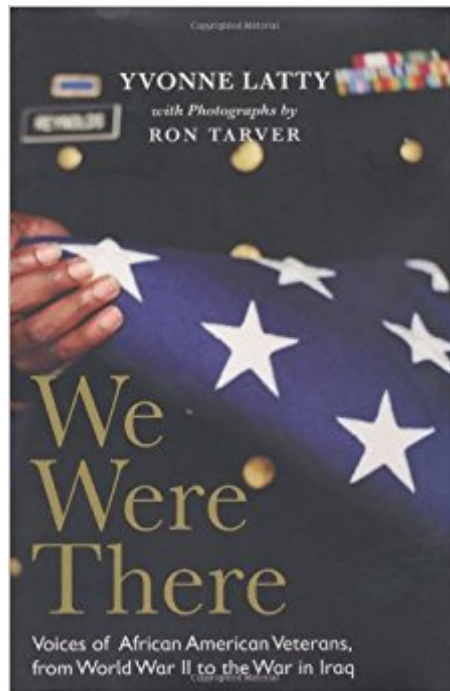


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# We Were There: Voices Of African American Veterans, From World War II To The War In Iraq



## Synopsis

Black Americans have had an ongoing presence in the American military, from the Revolution to the Civil War to Vietnam to the War in Iraq, yet their contributions are often relegated to a footnote of history, if mentioned at all. The recent successes and wide visibility of African Americans in the military -- such as those of Colin Powell and Shoshanna Johnson -- belie a harsh reality: the Army was segregated until the Korean War. Only in the last fifty years have blacks been allowed to serve in a manner commensurate with both their skills and commitment. Now, in a book that honors their service to their country, more than two dozen veterans and military personnel, including Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, one of the foremost spokespersons to the media on the War in Iraq, speak for themselves and their peers about their experiences -- in combat, in the barracks, and in their hometowns after they returned from war. Each profile is accompanied by photographs of the men and women from their days in uniform, as well as specially commissioned contemporary portraits from acclaimed photographer Ron Tarver. With stories of patriotism combined with a determination to overcome obstacles, *We Were There* is an inspiring account of the extraordinary sacrifices of everyday Americans.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Amistad; 1 edition (March 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060542179

ISBN-13: 978-0060542177

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #511,553 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #358 in [Books > History >](#)

[Americas > United States > African Americans > History](#) #452 in [Books > History > Military >](#)

[United States > Veterans](#) #525 in [Books > History > Military > Iraq War](#)

## Customer Reviews

I came across "We Were There" in the new books section of my library. I'm glad I picked it up -- it's a prettily written and photographed collection of reminiscences by African-American men and women who served our country from World War II to Iraq. One of the things I especially enjoyed were the dual photographs of all the interviewees, one from the period when they were serving in the military

and one taken when they were interviewed for the book. Ron Tarver lit and framed his subjects from the same angle as their earlier photographs, allowing you to compare the adult that was to come in their young face with the young person that remains in their adult face. At a time when presidential candidates are bickering over the legitimacy of their opponent's military record, "We Were There" reminds us of the selfless, and essentially thankless -- if even that -- contributions and sacrifices made by America's men and women of color. As the title of my review says, this serious recreational reader found this to be a sweet little gem of a book.

This was a fairly fascinating, albeit short, book. Black veterans of every conflict from World War Two up to the more current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq share their experiences. They recount painful details of discrimination, in addition to the usual horrors that one finds attendant to war. Indeed, the book deserves a ton of credit for the balanced way it shows how black Americans were ostracized from sharing in equal citizenship with their white cohorts, and yet, despite this, how they persevered in their soldiering duties without giving in to hatred or bitterness. The book makes no bones about the racial skeletons in America's closet, but neither does it belabor the point, or have an axe to grind. The best tales for me were the ones that centered on the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. It was also fascinating and tragic to hear how black GIs received better treatment from their Japanese and Nazi (!) captors than they many times received at home, from white Americans. If I have one minor complaint (the reason for the four, rather than five-star rating), it's that some of the narratives are just too short. The reader sometimes only gets two to three page thumbnail sketches of some very fascinating individuals, who suffered through the privations of German stalags or the liberating of the concentration camps. It would have been nice to see some of these very abbreviated tales expanded, if not to book length, then at least to more than a couple of mere pages. The above is a fairly minor cavil, though, against a book that, as a veteran, and as an American, I found to be an illuminating, and above all necessary reading experience.

Through the reflections of the 28 Veterans in WE WERE THERE, we see how racism affected Americans who willingly served their country which only gave lip service to the words: "freedom and justice for all". These men & women signed up during times of war often eagerly, sometimes as the only way to get out of trouble. Even as they served in a community that belittled them, they were willing to give their all. It's as if going to war against our enemies wasn't enough, to be an African American, you had to survive, as these Veterans' stories ably show, soul-crushing racism within the military. Executive Order 9981 signed in 1948 was supposed to have changed all of that. As these

reminiscent show, it took decades to defeat racism within the armed services so they could become truly integrated. Rebecca's Reads highly recommends WE WERE THERE as a unique & exceptional glimpse into what it was like to be an African American in the armed forces since World War II. Could have had 50 voices & not been repetitive. Could not put it down!

Very pleased to find this book! It's important work as it looks at the many, many African American veterans who are often overlooked, particularly those from WW II. (Even respected journalist, Ted Brokaw, hardly gives African Americans deserved attention in his acclaimed book, Greatest Generation.) Yvonne Latty, and all others who shed 'light' on 'other' Americans who risked their lives for this great country, are to be commended. This book was very well done.

Really touching and personal stories, very enjoyable and shows the contribution of the African Americans to America's wars. A must read for any African American planning to join the armed forces. Lt Col Joseph W. Hoffler, USAF-retired.

WE WERE THERE is a collection of photographs, brief biographies, and first hand accounts from African American men and women who have served in the armed forces during times of war. These first hand accounts include stories from veterans that served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, The Persian Gulf War and the ongoing War on Terror. The author includes veterans from many different parts of the United States and includes most branches of the military. It would be a disservice to select a few of the people included in this collection, as each individual made an important contribution to our national history and security and each of their stories touched me in a different way. WE WERE THERE is a book that should be a part of every library, particularly those in African American homes. While the book is targeted to adults, the language and format of the book lends itself to be easily used with children and even in classroom settings. These veterans, ordinary people like you and me, have had extraordinary experiences defending the United States and the ideal it represents in spite of the obstacles such as racism, sexism and dangerous warfare, that they encountered. I particularly enjoyed the fact, that the book uses the words of the men and women who are relating the experiences, allowing the individuals to have their own voice. And the voices shared in this collection will educate as well as inspire. Reviewed by Stacey Seay of The RAWSISTAZ Reviewers

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