

MEDAL OF HONOR

RUBEN RIVERS



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MEDAL OF HONOR

RUBEN RIVERS

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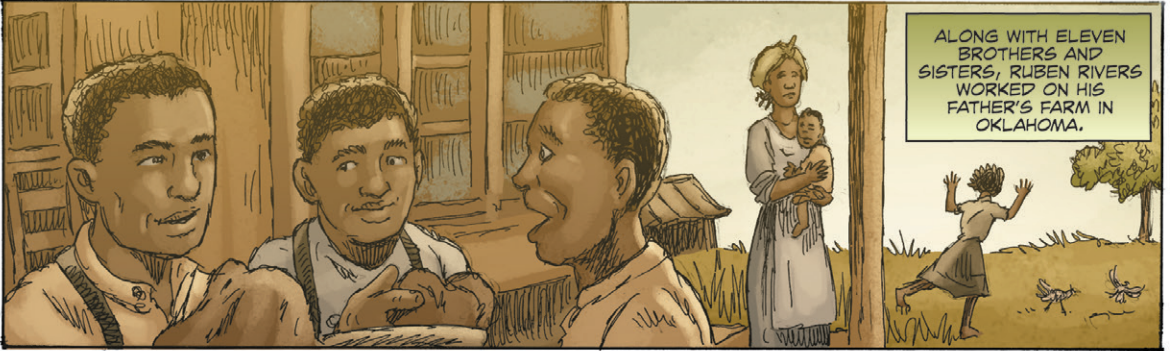
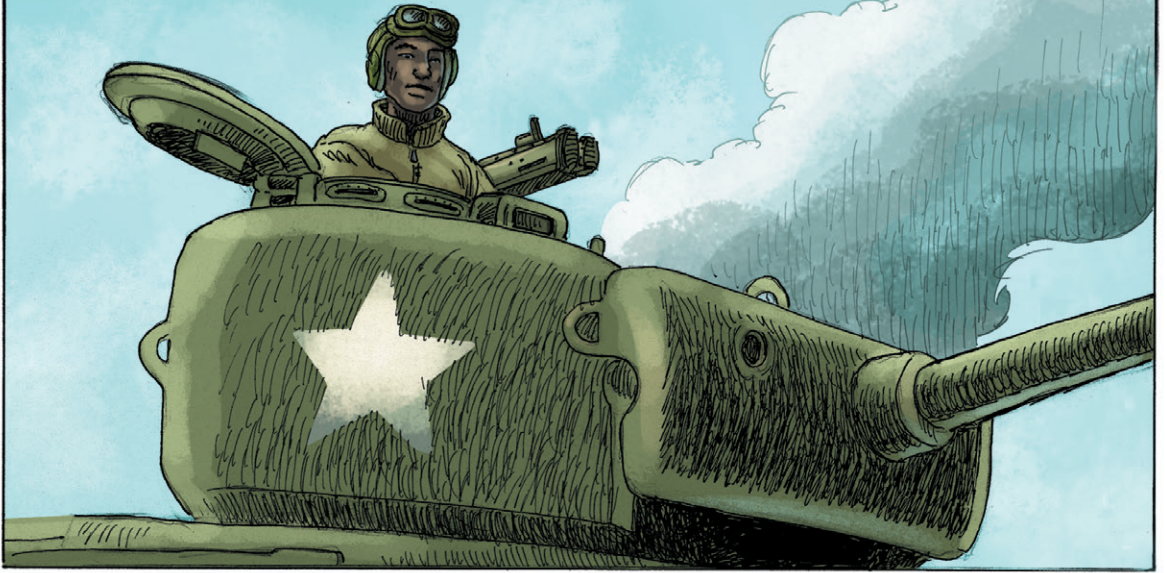
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GENERAL DYNAMICS

HE FOUGHT HARD FOR A COUNTRY THAT HAD LITTLE RESPECT FOR HIM. HE'D EARN THAT RESPECT THROUGH COURAGE AND SACRIFICE IN THE BLOODY FIGHTING OF WORLD WAR II.

RUBEN RIVERS



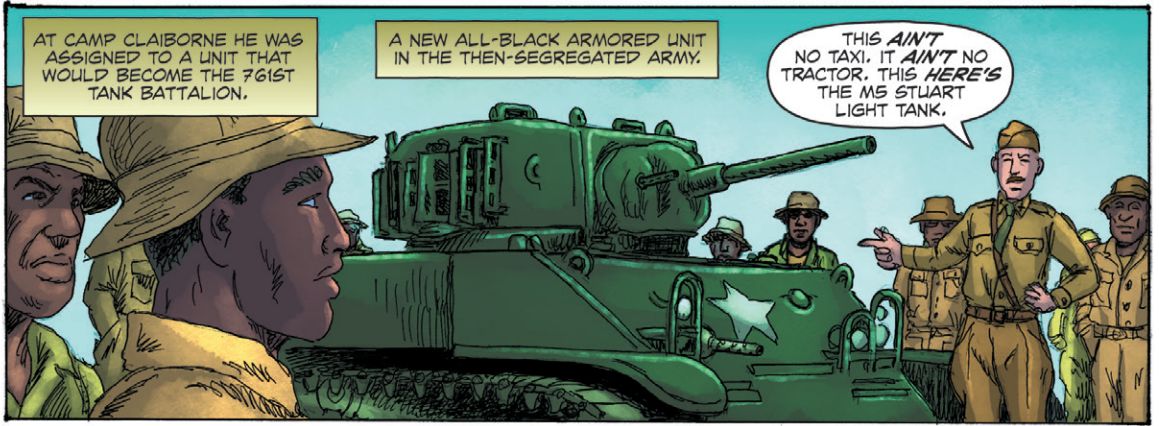
ALONG WITH ELEVEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS, RUBEN RIVERS WORKED ON HIS FATHER'S FARM IN OKLAHOMA.



UPON GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL, RIVERS GOT A JOB WITH THE RAILROAD.



IN JANUARY 1942, RIVERS WAS DRAFTED INTO THE US ARMY AND SENT TO LOUISIANA.



AT CAMP CLAIBORNE HE WAS ASSIGNED TO A UNIT THAT WOULD BECOME THE 761ST TANK BATTALION.

A NEW ALL-BLACK ARMORED UNIT IN THE THEN-SEGREGATED ARMY.

THIS AIN'T NO TAXI. IT AIN'T NO TRACTOR. THIS *HERE'S* THE M5 STUART LIGHT TANK.



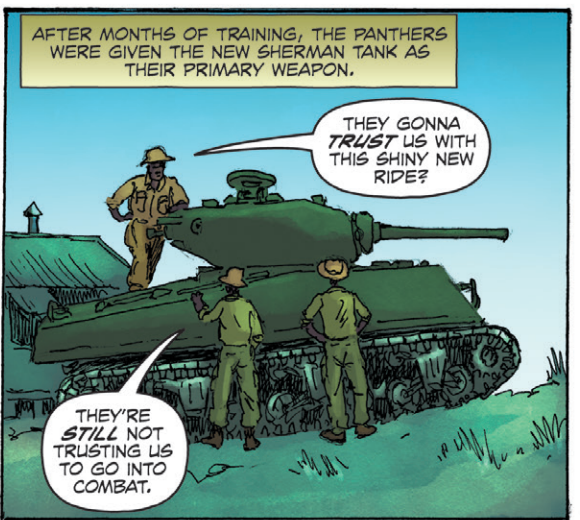
THEY WERE BARRACKED IN MOLDERING TENTS IN A SECTION OF THE CAMP FAR FROM THE MAIN ENTRANCE, NEXT TO THE SEWAGE TREATMENT AREA.



THE BLACK PANTHERS, AS THEY WOULD COME TO BE KNOWN, SUFFERED THE JEERS AND INSULTS OF THEIR FELLOW SOLDIERS.

YOU SURE YOU KNOW HOW TO *DRIVE* THAT THING, BOY?

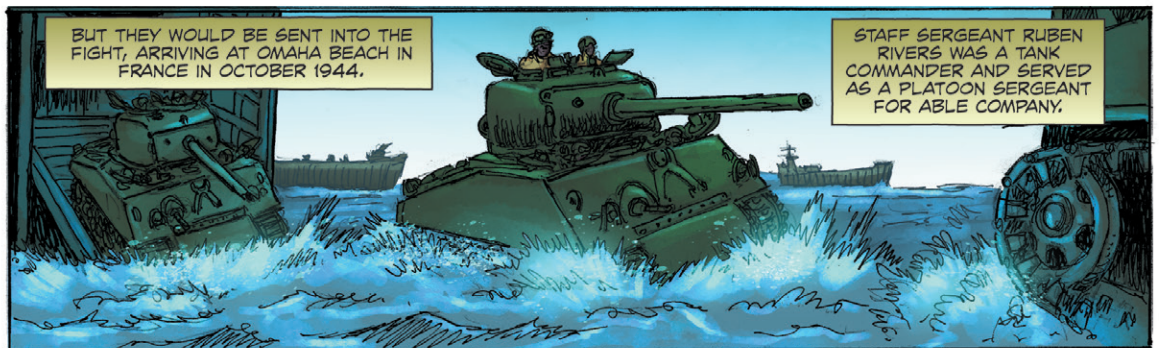
HAW!



AFTER MONTHS OF TRAINING, THE PANTHERS WERE GIVEN THE NEW SHERMAN TANK AS THEIR PRIMARY WEAPON.

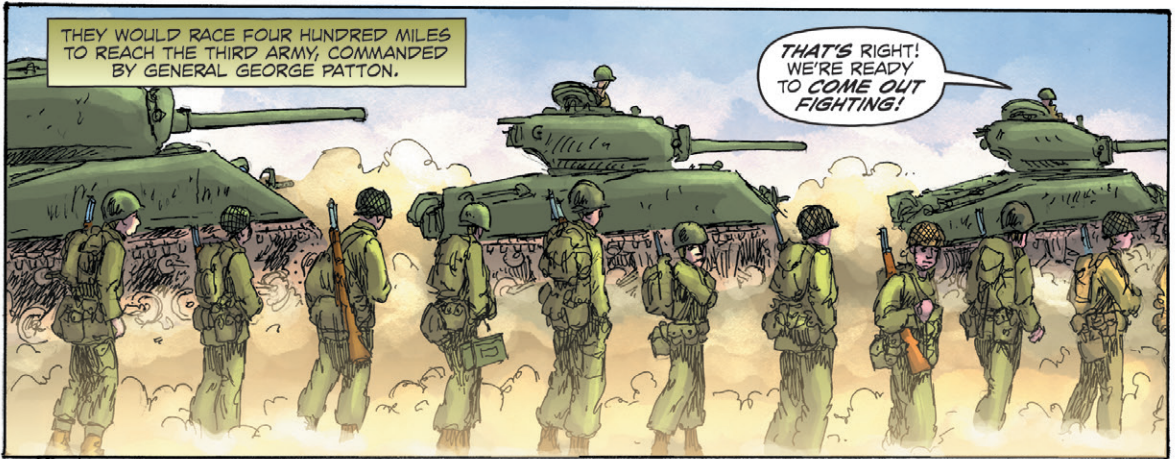
THEY GONNA *TRUST* US WITH THIS SHINY NEW RIDE?

THEY'RE *STILL* NOT TRUSTING US TO GO INTO COMBAT.



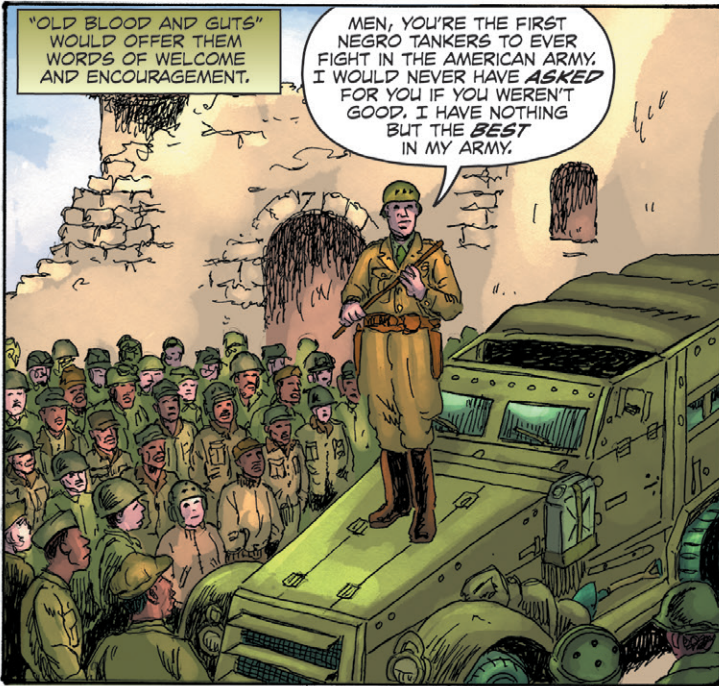
BUT THEY WOULD BE SENT INTO THE FIGHT, ARRIVING AT OMAHA BEACH IN FRANCE IN OCTOBER 1944.

STAFF SERGEANT RUBEN RIVERS WAS A TANK COMMANDER AND SERVED AS A PLATOON SERGEANT FOR ABLE COMPANY.



THEY WOULD RACE FOUR HUNDRED MILES TO REACH THE THIRD ARMY, COMMANDED BY GENERAL GEORGE PATTON.

THAT'S RIGHT! WE'RE READY TO COME OUT FIGHTING!



"OLD BLOOD AND GUTS" WOULD OFFER THEM WORDS OF WELCOME AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

MEN, YOU'RE THE FIRST NEGRO TANKERS TO EVER FIGHT IN THE AMERICAN ARMY. I WOULD NEVER HAVE ASKED FOR YOU IF YOU WEREN'T GOOD. I HAVE NOTHING BUT THE BEST IN MY ARMY.



AND A WARNING.

EVERYONE HAS THEIR EYES ON YOU AND IS EXPECTING GREAT THINGS FROM YOU. MOST OF ALL YOUR RACE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO YOUR SUCCESS.

DON'T LET THEM DOWN AND DAMN YOU, DON'T LET ME DOWN!



THE PANTHERS ENTERED COMBAT IN NOVEMBER OF THAT YEAR.

SGT. RIVERS LED THE ARMORED ADVANCE.

THERE IS A ROADBLOCK RIGHT AHEAD. GOT MINES ON IT. DOUGHS IN THE DITCHES GETTING SHELLED.



THOUGH IN RETREAT ALL ACROSS THE FRONT, THE GERMANS SURRENDERED GROUND A FOOT AT A TIME.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? THERE'S RIPSAN* EVERYWHERE!

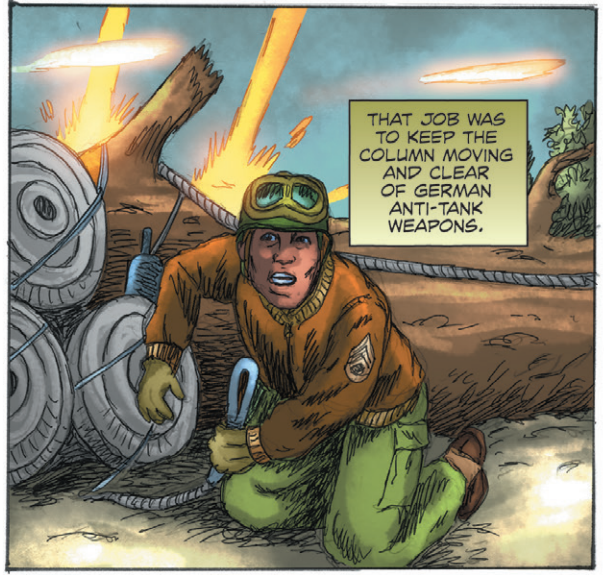
*GERMAN 88MM SHELLS



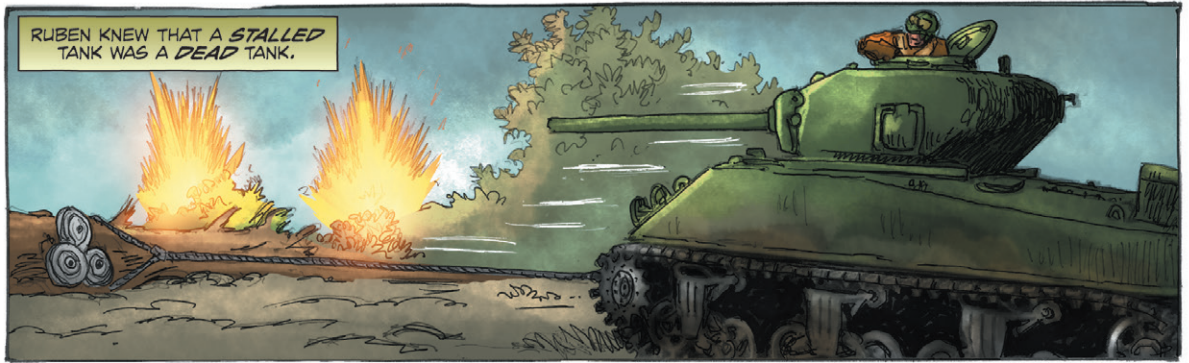
AS COMMANDER OF THE LEAD TANK, RUBEN TOOK HIS JOB SERIOUSLY.

YOU'RE GONNA GET KILLED!

NOT IF YOU ALL COVER ME!



THAT JOB WAS TO KEEP THE COLUMN MOVING AND CLEAR OF GERMAN ANTI-TANK WEAPONS.



RUBEN KNEW THAT A STALLED TANK WAS A DEAD TANK.



HIS FAST ACTION AND DISREGARD FOR HIS OWN SAFETY LATER BROUGHT RIVERS A SILVER STAR. FOR NOW, IT ALLOWED THE OFFENSIVE TO MOVE FORWARD WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY.

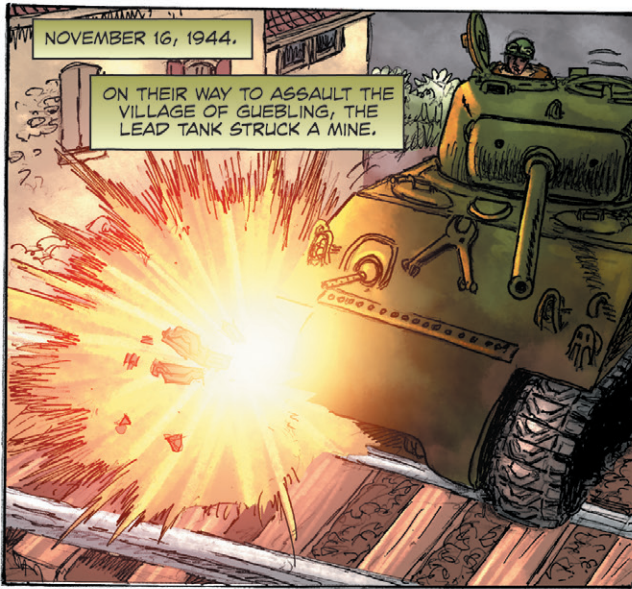
DRIVER, REVERSE.



AND MOVE THEY DID.

SGT. RIVERS, DON'T GO INTO THAT TOWN! IT'S TOO HOT IN THERE!

I'M SORRY, SIR, I'M ALREADY THROUGH THAT TOWN.



NOVEMBER 16, 1944.

ON THEIR WAY TO ASSAULT THE VILLAGE OF GUEBLING, THE LEAD TANK STRUCK A MINE.



RIVERS SUFFERED A MASSIVE WOUND, WITH HIS LEG SLASHED TO THE BONE.

OVER HERE.



HE REFUSED MORPHINE OR TO BE EVACUATED.

JUST TAPE AND BANDAGE.

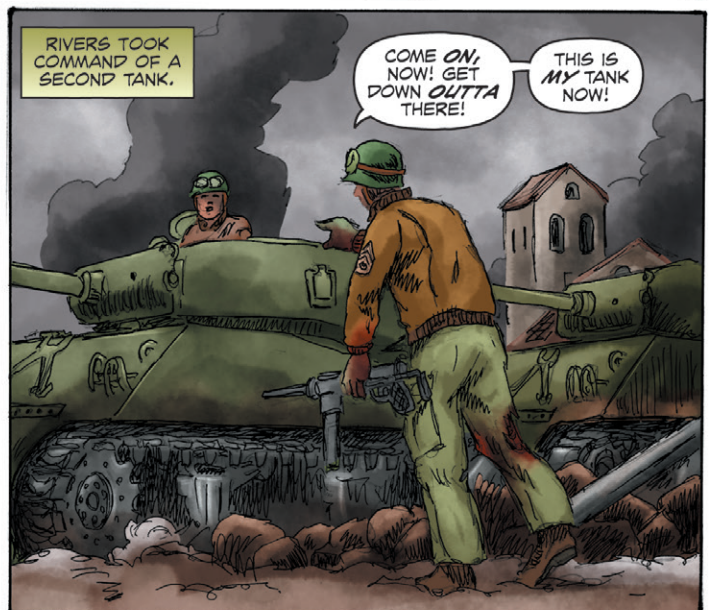


I'M GIVING YOU A DIRECT ORDER. YOU'RE GOING BACK.

MEDICS, GET THE STRETCHER.



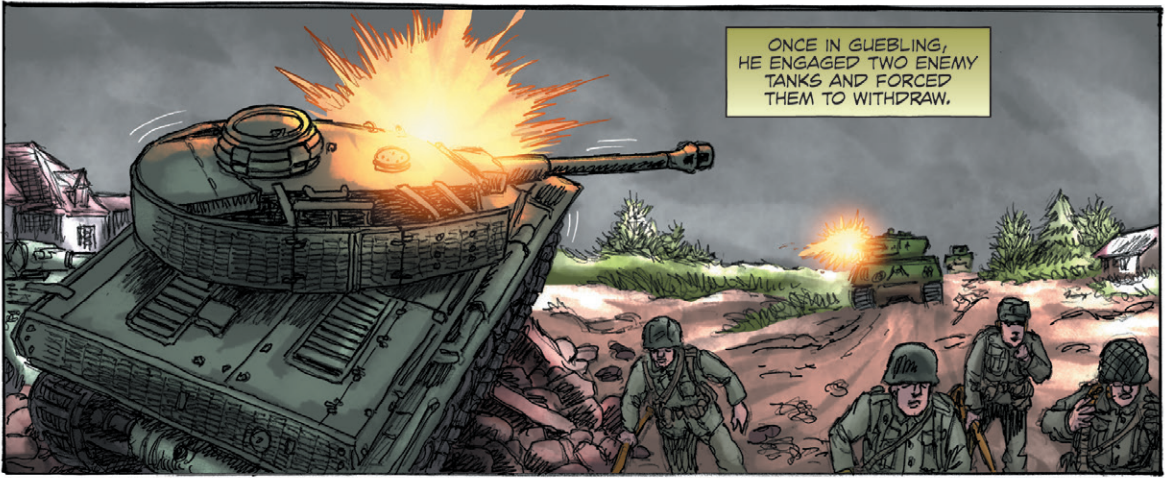
THIS IS ONE ORDER, THE ONLY ORDER I'LL EVER DISOBEY.



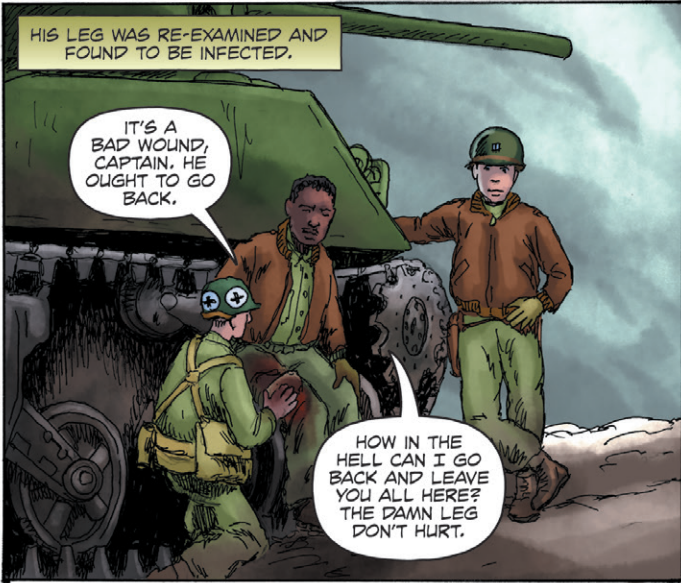
RIVERS TOOK COMMAND OF A SECOND TANK.

COME ON, NOW! GET DOWN OUTTA THERE!

THIS IS MY TANK NOW!



ONCE IN GUEBLING, HE ENGAGED TWO ENEMY TANKS AND FORCED THEM TO WITHDRAW.



HIS LEG WAS RE-EXAMINED AND FOUND TO BE INFECTED.

IT'S A BAD WOUND, CAPTAIN. HE OUGHT TO GO BACK.

HOW IN THE HELL CAN I GO BACK AND LEAVE YOU ALL HERE? THE DAMN LEG DON'T HURT.



RIVERS, I WANT YOU UP HERE WHEN WE MOVE ON BOURGALTROFF. HIT THEM IN THE FLANK WITH H.E.*

WE'LL MOVE IN COLUMN ALONG THE ROAD.

*HIGH-EXPLOSIVE ROUNDS



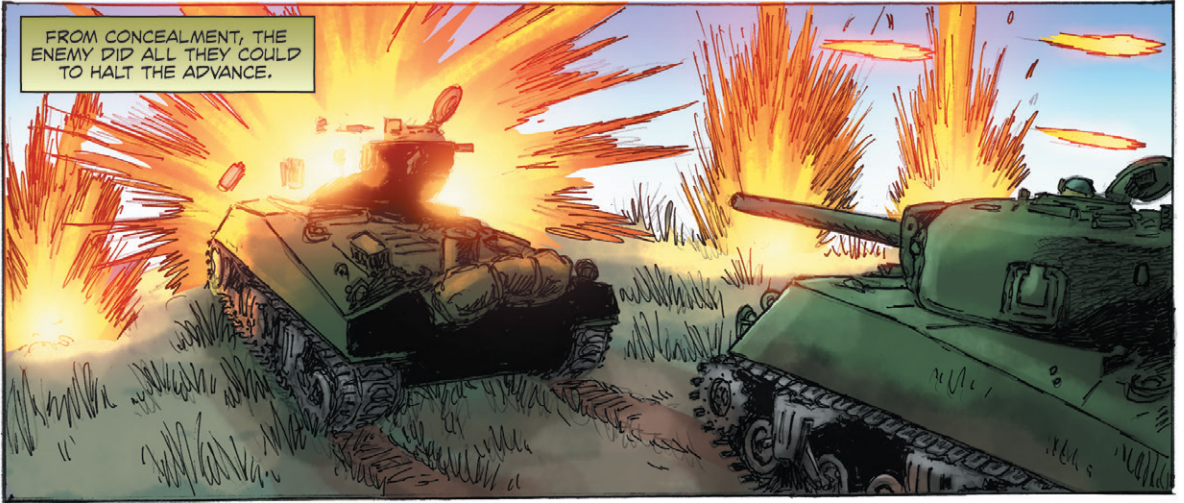
NOVEMBER 19, 1944.

THE BLACK PANTHERS LAUNCHED AN ASSAULT ON THE VILLAGE OF BOURGALTROFF.

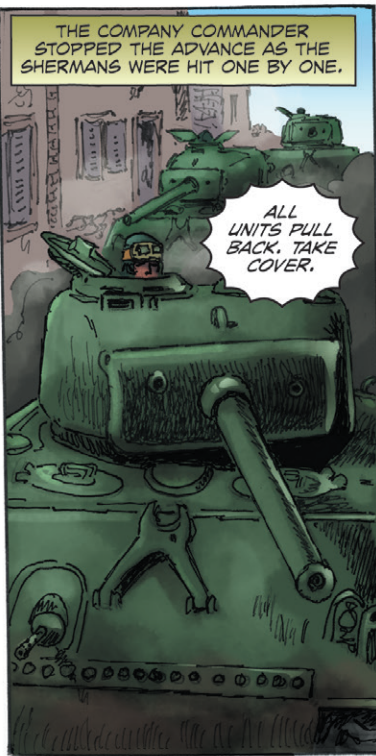


GERMAN ANTI-TANK CREWS LAY CONCEALED ACROSS THEIR PATH.

FROM CONCEALMENT, THE ENEMY DID ALL THEY COULD TO HALT THE ADVANCE.



THE COMPANY COMMANDER STOPPED THE ADVANCE AS THE SHERMANS WERE HIT ONE BY ONE.



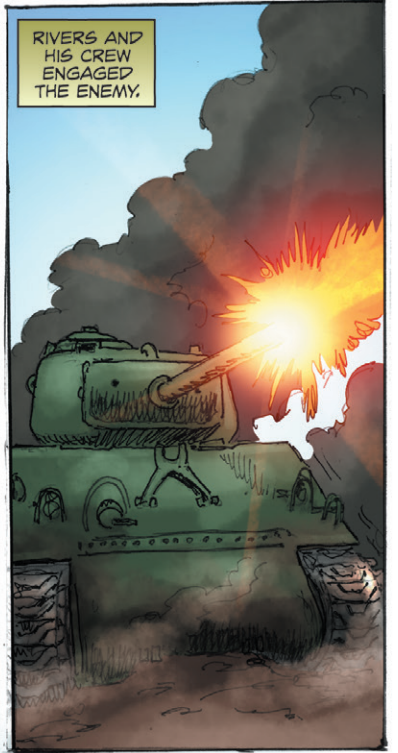
ALL UNITS PULL BACK, TAKE COVER.

RUBEN RIVERS WASN'T GIVING UP THAT EASY.

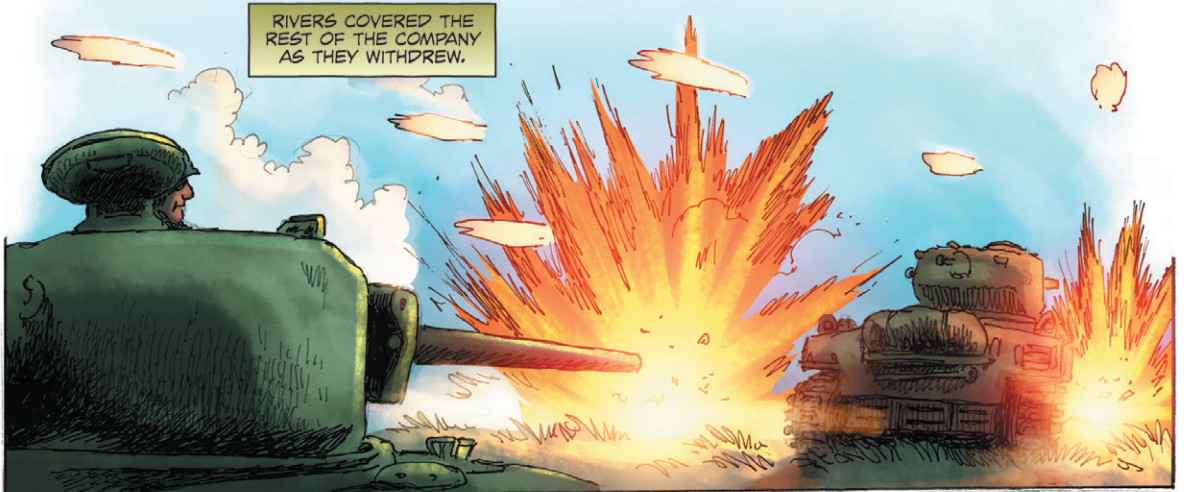


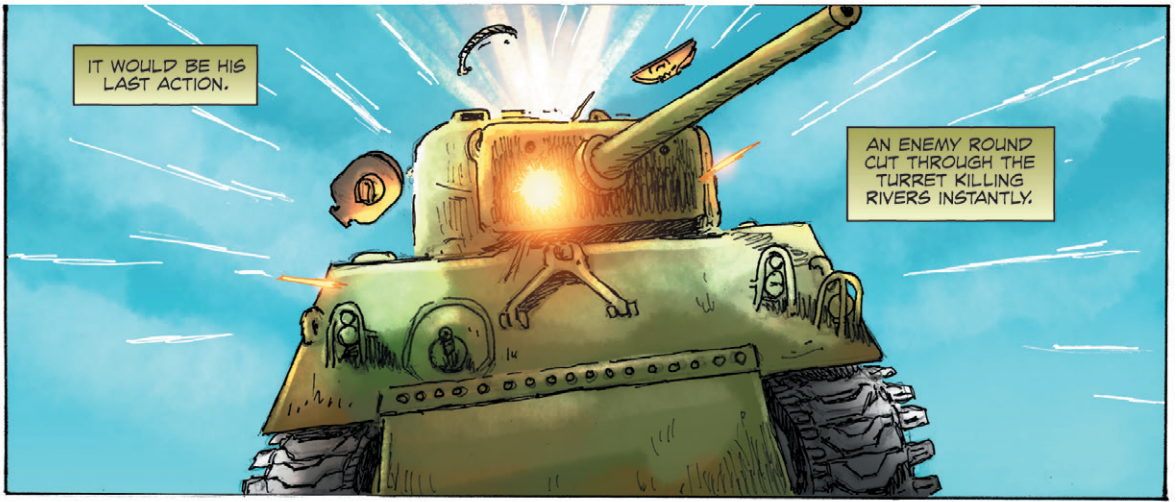
I SEE 'EM. WE'LL FIGHT 'EM!

RIVERS AND HIS CREW ENGAGED THE ENEMY.



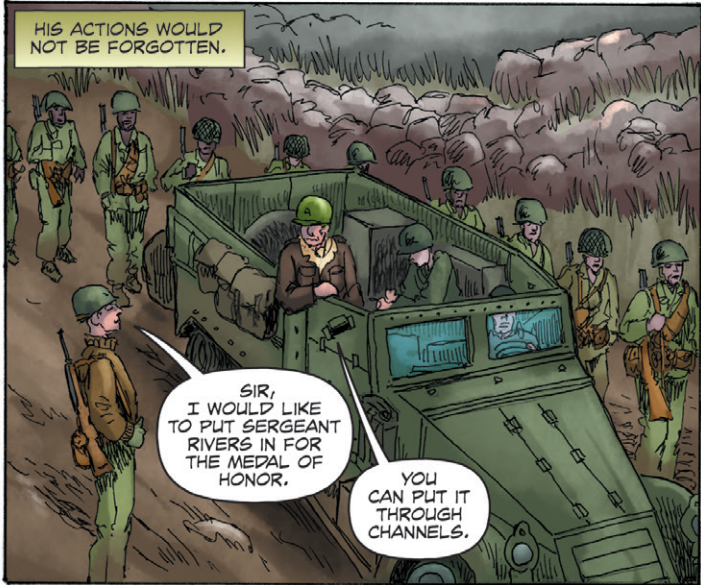
RIVERS COVERED THE REST OF THE COMPANY AS THEY WITHDREW.





IT WOULD BE HIS LAST ACTION.

AN ENEMY ROUND CUT THROUGH THE TURRET KILLING RIVERS INSTANTLY.



HIS ACTIONS WOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

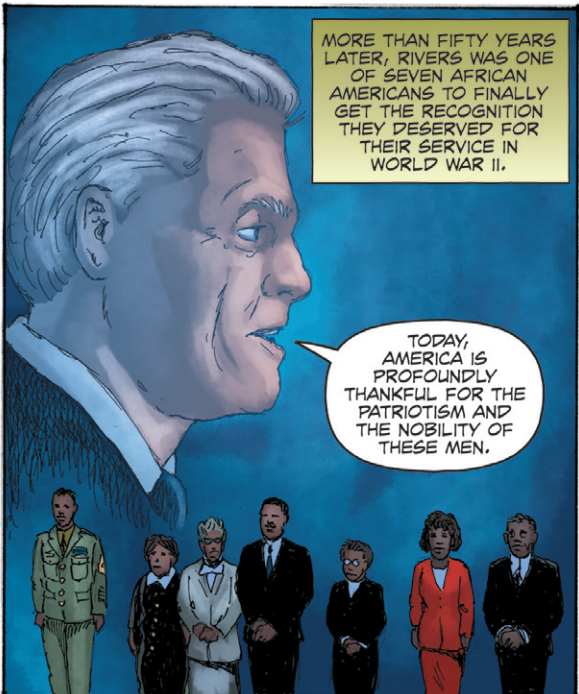
SIR, I WOULD LIKE TO PUT SERGEANT RIVERS IN FOR THE MEDAL OF HONOR.

YOU CAN PUT IT THROUGH CHANNELS.



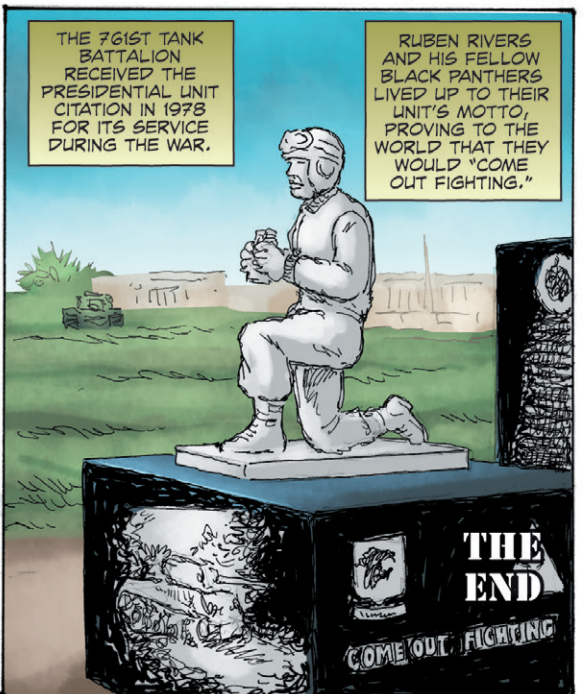
COMPANY COMMANDER CAPTAIN DAVID J. WILLIAMS SUBMITTED THE RECOMMENDATION.

IT DISAPPEARED IN THE SYSTEM.



MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS LATER, RIVERS WAS ONE OF SEVEN AFRICAN AMERICANS TO FINALLY GET THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVED FOR THEIR SERVICE IN WORLD WAR II.

TODAY, AMERICA IS PROFOUNDLY THANKFUL FOR THE PATRIOTISM AND THE NOBILITY OF THESE MEN.



THE 761ST TANK BATTALION RECEIVED THE PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION IN 1978 FOR ITS SERVICE DURING THE WAR.

RUBEN RIVERS AND HIS FELLOW BLACK PANTHERS LIVED UP TO THEIR UNIT'S MOTTO, PROVING TO THE WORLD THAT THEY WOULD "COME OUT FIGHTING."

THE END

COME OUT FIGHTING

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