



ERASED

WW2'S HEROES OF COLOR

DESCENDANT BIOGRAPHIES

Pearl Harbor

Erika Bethea – Erika Bethea is the eldest grandchild of Clark Simmons, an African American mess attendant who survived the attack on Pearl Harbor. Erika currently lives in Plano, Texas, but spent part of her childhood living with Simmons in New York City. Erika speaks proudly of her grandfather, aka Papa, whom she describes as the patriarch of the family. Erika revealed that Simmons was more of a father to her than her own dad and asked him to give her away at her wedding. Erika powerfully conveys fond memories of her grandfather and intimate conversations that they shared before he passed away in 2017.

Frank Bland – Frank Bland is the son of George Bland, an African American messman who survived the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. In 2022, Bland published the book “A Rope from Above at Pearl Harbor,” which documents his father’s experiences serving in a segregated Navy during WW2. Frank’s book powerfully portrays his father’s miraculous escape from the USS West Virginia during the attack on Pearl Harbor. It depicts the brutal racism that he endured within the military and on his return home to the United States. Thanks to his extensive research and personal conversations with his father, Frank offers an unparalleled insight into how the horrors of war and virulent racism traumatized his father for the remainder of his life. Frank lives in Richmond, Virginia, with his wife, Irene.

Irene Bland – Irene Bland is the daughter-in-law of veteran George Bland and wife to Frank. Irene formerly trained as a journalist and recognized the importance of interviewing her father-in-law before he passed away in 2014. Irene spoke lovingly of George and encouraged him to open up about his wartime experiences later in life. George revealed many stories to Irene that he had never spoken about before and revealed details that Frank was later able to include in his book, “A Rope from Above at Pearl Harbor.” Irene and Frank live in Richmond, Virginia.

Daniel Martinez – Daniel Martinez is the former chief historian at the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, where he spent over 40 years educating visitors about the attack on Pearl Harbor. Martinez also co-authored the book “Kimmel, Short and Pearl Harbor: The Final Report Revealed” (2005). He also has a personal connection with the historic day as his grandfather worked as a foreman at a fuel storage facility in Pearl Harbor and watched as Japanese planes flew overhead. Martinez has been

featured as a historical consultant on a number of documentary series, including “Attack on Pearl Harbor: Minute by Minute,” “Elvis and the USS Arizona,” “Unsung Heroes of Pearl Harbor” and “Tora Tora Tora: The Real Story of Pearl Harbor,” among others.

Desiree Miller – Desiree Miller is the great-grandniece of Doris Miller and daughter of Salena Miller. Desiree has been taught about her great-granduncle by her mother and other close family members over her life and feels passionately about passing this family history on to her own children. Desiree works as a classroom teacher and recognizes the importance of educating the next generation of Americans about historical figures, such as her great-uncle. Desiree also hopes to see Doris Miller awarded the Medal of Honor for his services to his country. Desiree currently lives in Texas.

Salena Miller – Salena Miller is the great-niece of Doris Miller, an African American messman who became famous for shooting down Japanese planes during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Salena learned about her great-uncle’s heroic actions and other stories of his life from Doris’ mother, Henrietta Miller. Salena is fiercely proud of her uncle and continues to fight alongside the wider Miller family for him to be recognized with the Medal of Honor for his service. Salena currently lives in Midland, Texas.

D-Day

Beulah Dabney – Beulah Dabney is the wife of William Dabney and the mother of Vinnie Dabney. She met William in January 1948, and they married in 1951. Beulah recalls firsthand how the G.I. Bill failed to afford Black veterans the same benefits as white veterans, as she and William were denied a loan for a mortgage immediately upon his return from war. William shared a number of stories with Beulah about his wartime experience, including how he and other African Americans were warmly received by Britons on arrival to England. Beulah and William were married for almost 67 years before William died in 2018. Beulah lives in Roanoke, Virginia.

Vinnie Dabney – Vinnie Dabney is the oldest son of William Dabney, a corporal in the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, who performed heroically on D-Day. Vinnie speaks lovingly of his father, who “loved to have fun” and “loved to laugh.” As he grew up, he began asking his father more questions about the war and his struggles both during the war and on his return home. Vinnie explains how his family had no photos of his father in military uniform because his father was so disillusioned by the racism and discrimination directed toward Black veterans following the war. Vinnie lives in Roanoke, Virginia.

Joann Woodson – Joann Woodson is the wife of Waverly Woodson and the mother of Stephen Woodson. She first met Waverly while he was serving in the military in the early 1940s. Joann witnessed firsthand how Black veterans like Waverly were discriminated against on their return home to the United States, as he was initially denied the opportunity to pursue a career in medicine. Joann reveals how Waverly shared little of his war experience in the following decades and only fully opened up much later, at the observance of D-Day’s 50th anniversary. Joann attended the awards ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in September 2023, where Waverly was posthumously awarded the Combat Medic Award. Joann hopes that Waverly will eventually be recognized with the Medal of Honor, which would “complete the legacy for all Black families and all people.”

Stephen Woodson – Stephen Woodson is the son of Waverly Woodson, a combat medic who served in the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion on D-Day. Stephen speaks lovingly of his “impeccable father,” who bravely served his country in WW2. Stephen revealed how his father only began speaking about his war experience during the mid-1990s due to the 50th anniversary celebrations of D-Day, which “allowed him to start release a little more” about what he witnessed during his service. Stephen recalls how his father was a proud member of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion but also recognized the hypocrisy of African Americans dutifully serving their country and returning home to Jim Crow America. In September 2023, Stephen received the Combat Medic Award on behalf of his father at Arlington National Cemetery. He hopes his father will eventually be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Stephen lives in Frederick, Maryland.

Dunkirk

Syed Hashmi – Syed Hashmi is the great-grandson of Maj. Akbar Khan, the most senior Indian in the British Army during WW2. Syed has written various articles about his great-grandfather, whom he refers to using the Urdu term “Nana Abu.” His writing celebrates Maj. Akbar’s selflessness and poise: “In his memoirs, the only people Nana Abu is concerned about are his men and the civilians who had to relive another world war in their lifetime.” Syed had a close relationship with Akbar as a child and often turned to his great-grandfather’s writing for inspiration. He is not only a huge admirer of Akbar but an expert on his life and works. Syed is based in Westborough, Massachusetts.

Shahid Khan – Shahid Khan is the grandson of Maj. Akbar Khan. He is based in Karachi, Pakistan, where he lives at Lal Kothi, a home he shared for a number of years with his grandfather until Akbar’s death. Shahid remembers his grandfather for his kindness, charisma and resoluteness, speaking of Akbar’s decision to go against his family’s wishes to join the Army. His grandfather, who left home to join the Army at 16, later turned down an offer to serve as the first chief of the Pakistani Army. Shahid offers a unique insight into the story of a man he knew so well, outlining his grandfather’s personal thoughts and specific motivations.

Zeenut Ziad – Zeenut Ziad is the fifth and youngest child of Maj. Gen. Anis Ahmad Khan, who spent nearly four years as a prisoner of war — the longest of any Indian officer in WW2. She talks of her father’s presence and stoicism, defining him with just two words: integrity and decency. Maj. Gen. Anis was born into nobility and was trained at Sandhurst, the center of the British military establishment, as a young man. Zeenut is proud of her father’s position within this system, noting his propensity to speak truth to power and rally against injustice. Zeenut is based in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Mohammed Zubair – Mohammad Zubair is the son of Naik Chaudry Wali Mohammad. Growing up, his father would tell him war stories, recounting specific events such as facing freezing cold conditions and terrifying attacks and the kindness of locals in France. Zubair and his siblings have passed on these stories to their children, hoping to keep their father’s legacy alive. He speaks of the complicated relationship his father had with Britain, a country he admired for its discipline and organization but resented for its

occupation of India. In 1979, Zubair moved to Woking, a town near London, and prays at the same mosque his father visited during the war after his evacuation from Dunkirk.

Battle of the Bulge

Carole Johnson – Carole Johnson is the daughter of E.G. McConnell, a 761st Tank Battalion private first class, who joined the Army at age 16. Carole believes her father felt compelled to join the war because of his love for his country but suffered deep racial discrimination during and after the war, which permanently altered his vision of America. Carole relays a number of stories, including McConnell's first experience of Jim Crow en route to his military training in Louisiana, which had a long-lasting impact on him. Carole remembers her father as a charismatic man who was extremely proud of his WW2 service and keen to share his war experience in later life. Carole lives in Long Island, New York.

Shauna Dade Siah – Shauna Siah is the daughter of 761st Tank Battalion Cpl. Floyd Dade. Shauna speaks fondly of her proud and generous father, who instilled in her the value of education. Shauna had a close relationship with her father and remembers stories that he told of his upbringing in segregated Texarkana, Arkansas. Shauna developed a vast knowledge of the 761st Tank Battalion as she spent time listening to her dad and his comrades speak about their service in the war. Shauna reveals how her father was proud to have served with the 761st Tank Battalion and was encouraged by his wife to share his stories of service during the war in his later life. Shauna lives in San Marcos, California.

Doreen Stevens – Doreen Stevens is the daughter of 761st Tank Battalion Staff Sgt. Johnnie Stevens. She regards her father as “a hero to me my whole entire life” and fondly remembers him as a humble, kind man who always looked out for others. Doreen recalls coming across her father's secret war diary as a child but did not fully appreciate its significance until adulthood when her father began to be recognized for his service. Doreen believes her father always struggled to come to terms with the death of fellow 761st tankers whom he fought alongside during WW2. Doreen lives in Carteret, New Jersey.