

**RESPONSE TO *Braided in Fire*
BY THE SON OF A 366TH SOLDIER**

The following letter is from Robert Brown, Jr., the son of an intelligence lieutenant who was with the 366th Infantry Regiment. Solace Wales first interviewed Robert Brown, Sr. in 1995 and often consulted with him thereafter.

Hello Solace,

I enjoyed reading the book because it provided a lot of background and information that was missing for me. I guess that is why the focus was threefold. It is quite evident that you are not merely a writer but a novelist whose graphic artistic vision is reflected in the descriptive prose. This gives the work another dimension.

Some surprises for me: I never knew about the 366 POWs, and why there were so many casualties in the Sommocolonia battle. I found it amazing how some villagers walked down that steep trail from Sommocolonia to Barga and then miles further to work in a factory.

My father and Otis Zachary would talk about Italy, especially around Christmas. He also would talk to Sam Tucker [a 366th vet who became an effective civil rights lawyer] around the same time. As I remember, they would say that that they would not have survived if it hadn't been for the partisan Pippo. He had saved their lives and every Christmas their thoughts went back to Italy and how grateful they were were to be alive.

My most vivid recollection in the book is what the medic Rock said when he was wounded, wondering who would be there to come to his aid as he had helped others. My father never told us anything about Rock's Story. [No one knew it until Wales interviewed Rock —Rothacker Smith— in 1996.]

The picture you paint is so detailed and descriptive that the reader feels transported back to that time and, whether you were aware of it or not, you create a crescendo-like pace even though many of us readers know what

will happen later, but the lead-up and background are essential to get the full impact of the story.

My father did relate most of the 366 infantry stories: the officers' club, the poker game that lasted throughout the war, the ship's crossing, the metallic clicking sound that the German boots made. He told me that recognizing that sound saved him. He was on patrol one night, and upon hearing that click-click, he and his partner made their way to a small house. With the force of his shoulder he opened the door, put this finger up to his mouth, and said in Italian 'be quiet we are American soldiers.' They stayed in this house until the danger passed. My father learned Italian and even brought home an Italian language study book. He had minored in German at Howard University, and he enjoyed seeing how the Germans would react when he interviewed them in their language. I asked him why he studied that language in the 1930's. Well, he would tell me that he majored in math and at that time all of the advanced math textbooks were written in German.

The undercurrent of the double war fought by the black soldiers against the Germans *and* against the white U.S. officers hasn't been documented enough. Until reading *Braided in Fire*, I didn't realize the extent of the cruelty, inhumanity and maliciousness of the white officers who undermined the efforts of the 366 infantry. But Axis Sally [the German propaganda radio station] wouldn't let them forget it as she played jazz to keep a receptive audience among the black troops. Unfortunately some of those same attitudes that the black soldiers had to endure are still with us today.

Robert Brown Jr. / December 3, 2020

Learn more:

Braided in Fire by Solace Wales

www.braidedinfire.com