

Battalion of the Forgotten

by Babs Gons, translated by Egan Garr

More than 1.2 million African American soldiers fought in World War II; over 15,000 were stationed in the Netherlands. They fought for a freedom they did not have at home, but their stories are absent from the prevailing narrative of the war.

We buried your dead

And honored them with peace

En route to rest eternal

Won liberation before our own release

From war to a country

Where it was not the army we chose

But rather a future

Beyond the poor boroughs

On the same side in the same war

Fighting for the same ground

Eyes locked on the same foe

Marching to the same sound

But we were made to dig the graves

Wash the bodies and pack the trucks

We did the dirty work

For our white compatriots

We buried your dead

Who in life would not sit with us

Demoted to a world

At the back of the bus

Neither ceremony nor medals
Honors nor accolades
No praise for our triumphs
No turn in the veterans' parades

We were no story
We were never told
No part in the memorial
No hero's glory to hold

We were promised much
More wages and compensation
Higher ranks and promotions
Huge sums of remuneration

And we, in turn, pledged loyalty
To our motherland with pride
Bore the flag with love
Our unity symbolized

We buried others' dead
From a far-flung war
At the burial grounds in Margraten
Left prayers for nevermore

The battalion of the forgotten
The regiment without ballad or song
We fought with you and gave our lives
But were dishonored all along

No reparations

Have yet come our way
We wait in sorrow still
For what should have been our fate

We the forgotten soldiers
Await our due pay
Tribute to our service
The honor of recognition
On this Remembrance Day
The fourth of May