

Celebrating Forgotten WWII Heroes

A Detroit-based company created a tabletop game that spotlights underappreciated all-black units during World War II

Feb 03, 2021

An artist by nature and tabletop gaming designer since 2014, Lee Gaddies fused his love for board games and military history to pay homage to America's first African-American tank unit.

The founder and CEO of Detroit-based Gaddis Gaming, a manufacturer of tabletop games and accessories, launched "Empires Fall" in November to spotlight the Army's 761st Tank Battalion, a segregated African-American tank unit dubbed "the Black Panthers" during World War II.

"The fighting men in 'Empires Fall' made significant real-world accomplishments that changed the course of history," said Gaddies, a graduate of the College for Creative Studies in Detroit. "Our mission was to bring a game that featured these underrepresented people and overlooked heroes to tabletops worldwide."

The tabletop game showcases the 761st Tank Battalion on an alternative WWII landscape created by Gaddies to enhance the historical narrative of their triumphs.

The game comes loaded with custom dice and miniature figures that include characters such as Sgt. Ruben Rivers and Sgt. Warren Crecy, both key figures of the "Black Panthers." In recreating their story on the tabletop, players can learn how Rivers, for example, fought through Nazi lines in tanks and on foot, earning him a posthumous Medal of Honor for his valor, which was presented by President Bill Clinton in 1997.

"Empires Fall" also features the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, nicknamed "The Triple Nickles" and the country's first all-black parachute infantry test platoon, company and battalion.

"Most of these brave men are often unmentioned in popular history of WWII," Gaddies said.

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“Now is the time to hear their stories, play these heroes and create a place where their history is fully remembered and rightly celebrated.

This article is part of the VFW's initiative to celebrate African-American service members and veterans in honor of Black History Month. It is featured in the February 2021 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.