

**THE ORIGINAL BLACK PANTHERS**

**SUMMER 1962**

*“Hut haw, yo left, yo left, yo left right left. Hut haw, haw, hut haw, haw, yo left right left. Jody got yo girl and gone, Jody got yo girl and gone, am I right or wrong, yo right. Rear hut, wake up Jones because Jerry (the Nazis) will shoot your balls off, hut haw, haw.”*

Sergeant Lonzo repeatedly drills his phantom platoon up and then back down 115<sup>th</sup> Street.

It's August 20, 1962, about 7:00 AM. In a few hours, the black pavement on 115<sup>th</sup> St. will be so hot that my PRO-KEDS™ sneakers will disappear into the murky tar that was once a street. It was a chore waking up on those hot muggy mornings to walk my dog Spot. It was made easier by the military clockwork precision of Sergeant Lonzo's wakeup call. I loved to hear the rhythmic cadence calls of SGT Lonzo reverberating off the ceramic tile walls of the first floor hallway just outside of our apartment door. Lonzo loved Spot as much as I did. He always had a warm hug for Spot each morning. We would march along with Lonzo and his phantom platoon up and down 115<sup>th</sup> until Spot found a fireplug to his liking. Lonzo would bring his platoon to a halt until Spot finished his business.

Lonzo never told me his last name and no one else on the block knew it either. Lonzo wouldn't tell anybody for reasons unknown. It was his secret; possibly an ugly secret. I had no idea that gaining knowledge of his ugly secrets would cast me into the middle of the most tumultuous events in America's history and shower me with my own ugly secrets.

“You no good son of a bitch”

WHAM! A flowerpot exploded in the street between Lonzo and me. I quickly tightened up on Spot's leash and darted us both back into the doorway of 112 West 115<sup>th</sup> St. where we lived.

WHAM! The second pot hit. In that instant, this crouched, half-dressed figure ran from the building's doorway across the street. He leaped two garbage cans and shot passed Lonzo and me. He ran so fast that his wake straightened up Lonzo's leaning body. In a mild panic, Lonzo instinctively reached in his back pocket for his bottle to protect the fuel for his battered soul.

My eyes followed the second flower pot's dust trail through the air, back across the street and up the side of the building to the fifth floor. There, on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor's fire escape defiantly stood this huge half-naked woman figure. She was so large that she blocked out the morning's sunlight. She was throwing any movable object within her reach at her latest escaping overnight lover. She was clad in her panties only, spitting, cursing, and her breasts were swinging like bowls of jello in opposite directions of one another.

WHAM! The third flower pot hit the top of Steve's, the number man's, Cadillac parked in front of her building.

It was Sis.

"Grab his ass, Lonzo," she hollered. "You cheap son of a bitch, don't you ever bring your cheap, yellow, blackass back here again."

About this time, this poor fleeing soul leaped two additional garbage cans; breaking Bob Beamon's Olympic long jump record in the process. He then disappeared around the corner of 115<sup>th</sup> St. and Lenox Ave, like a thief at a diamond convention.

Lonzo picked up the lid from a garbage can and held it above his head.

"Incoming, prepare to load, load, fire, withdraw."

Lonzo found safe refuge in his Sherman Tank. He served in the 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Regiment in WWII. The 761<sup>st</sup> was General Patton's crack, Black tank regiment and one of the first allied tank regiments to cross the Rhine River into Nazi Germany during WWII.

"The Fighting 761<sup>st</sup>," Lonzo would often add, "The right fighting 761<sup>st</sup>, The Black Panthers."

Spot became very, very nervous. I tugged on his leash, but he wouldn't respond. He began pulling me feverishly towards the freshly painted fireplug down a few doors from our building. I guess he wasn't nervous enough to let Sis's flying flower pots drive him back into the house without him making his daily contribution to the City of New York.

Spot, hurry up man; I don't want to get my head busted open by a flowerpot, and you don't either.

Walking Spot with Lonzo in the morning started my motor. Outside of Lonzo calling cadence, the mornings were the quietest time of the day in Harlem. My Spot wasn't the Dick and Jane's Spot in your first grade reader. My spot played no Street Games at all.

There was no “see Spot run” or “see Spot fetch” in this dog. He paid no attention to louse balls, or sticks, no matter how hard you tried. He didn’t run or fetch anything, but food. You didn’t pet him either, because you would lose your hand. He wouldn’t let anyone pet him, but family and Lonzo.

He hated Junkies with a passion, because he could smell the dope in their bodies as they exited the drug shooting gallery in the basement next door. If they got too close to him, he would leap at their throats without warning. I had to be very careful with him. I’ll be walking him down the street minding my own business when, suddenly, he would lounge at somebody. Nine times out of ten, that person was a heroin addict. If I put a muzzle on him, it just made him crazier.

Spot was a beautiful dog; he was jet black with a white spot on his neck and chest. He was a full-blooded Mongrel, mixed with a bit of Terrier-Pit Bull type. My family had great difficulty, for a long time, trying to figure out why Spot hated Junkies so. One afternoon we found this junkie, laying one story down in the airshaft of our building, bleeding from his hands and with a broken leg. He refused to tell my mother how he got there; so she left him there for him to figure out how to get himself out.

The next day we found blood and bits of torn clothes all over the floor near the window that opened to the airshaft. We punished Spot for that, because we thought he had gone in the closet and destroyed a pair of my Brother’s pants. We didn’t “put two and two together.” A few days later, we concluded that the Junkie fell one story from our window ledge, trying to break into our apartment, and Spot was on the case. The torn clothes by the window were the Junkie’s and his bloody hands were the work of Spot.

There was always excitement on 115<sup>th</sup> Street, almost anytime of the day or night and especially on weekends. It was easy to allow yourself to be caught up in the entertainment, but you did so at your own peril. Briefly, the excitement of flowerpot mortar attack caused me to forget that I had a very important decision to make concerning Uncle Sam. I was still walking the fence with a serious question. I was running late, I wasted a lot of time enjoying Lonzo, Sis and her latest streaking lover; all staring in Harlem’s version of General Hospital.

I couldn’t make up my mind. Was it yes or was it no? Was I going to take the ride downtown on the Iron Horse to Whitehall Street and take the oath for Uncle Sam’s Army or not?

Lonzo was the Super of my apartment building, 112 West 115<sup>th</sup> Street. I lived on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor in apartment 1C. Lonzo lived in the murky, damp, basement full of coal dust and large “Water Cockroaches.” The roaches were so big they could sign up for welfare checks.

I was deadly afraid of Water Roaches, especially the flying ones. Every now and then, a few would trek up into our apartment on the first floor.

As old as I was, I would run terrified calling for my mother. I would throw things at them, hit at them with a broom, TV antenna or with anything that I could lay my hands on. In the process, I would destroy half of my mother's possessions. One time, I was so terrified of one that I pushed my little brother Bernard into the kitchen to kill it and he almost set the entire apartment on fire. My mother demanded that I did nothing, when I saw one, until she was available to take care of it. This would keep me from burning down the entire apartment building.

Lonzo's job was to keep heat and hot water in the building, mop the halls, pick-up and put out the building's garbage for pickup. My mother never let him in our apartment to fix anything, because she felt he didn't have any fix-it-man skills. He often begged my mother to let him fix something-anything in our apartment. She wouldn't let him touch a thing. She made him tell our Jewish landlord to send a carpenter, plumber or electrician-somebody with real maintenance skills.

Lonzo did his Super's job well between bottles of cheap wine. The floors were always mopped and cleaned. He kept the furnace fired with coal, which produced too much steam heat in the winter and too much steam heat in the summer. It didn't make a damn bit of difference to Lonzo what season of the year it was. In the summer, the heat in our apartment was so hot that you could fry eggs on the radiators.

My mother liked Lonzo, one reason was he didn't use narcotics other than alcohol, but I sensed that she didn't trust him around her children. He lived alone in the basement. He didn't have a family, a woman, or anyone he considered a friend, but me. He stayed drunk most of the time and pissed on himself a lot. He only had two changes of clothing and both reeked of urine. He didn't have a bathroom in the basement so he couldn't take regular baths. Mrs. Mae, who lived by herself in 1A, the front apartment on the first floor, allowed him to use her bathroom when he requested.

When my mother wasn't watching me, I would sneak down into Lonzo's room or his "foxhole" as he put it, just to hear him talk. He applied the right name to his dusty, roach and rat incubator. I loved to hear him talk when he was sober. He had a strong, clear voice. He was very precise with the words he used. His vocabulary was limited, but he made good use of the words he knew. When he wanted to make an important point to me, he would do so stating two or three different expressions; making sure that I understood where he was coming from. Also, he made sure that I always remembered the points he was making.

He loved to sing the blues, especially the naughty blues. Millie Jackson, Bessie Smith and Big Maybelle were his favorites. Big Maybelle was a frequent visitor to the drug shooting gallery next door. After shooting up, she would break out in a song in the middle of 115<sup>th</sup> St. that would light up the whole block. Also, often, he would break out into a blues song; sometimes during a conversation utilizing the song's lyrics to bring home a strong point. Out of habit, I began to sing many of his blues songs myself. Neither of us could sing very well. He didn't have a radio, TV, clock or watch. His room had only one back-less chair, a dirty sheet-less mattress and a broken dresser. On top of the broken dresser was an electric hot plate; harboring a pot containing fossilized food with a rusty spoon imbedded in it. On the other side of the dresser was an old cover-less telephone book that he wrote cryptic notes in.

Sometimes, unannounced, I would walk in on the rats having a party in his pot on the hot plate. When they saw me, they wouldn't flee, so I plugged in the hot plate. For some reason, I was not as afraid of rats as I was of those huge Water Roaches. Rats, I guess, were just cute and cuddly. Water Roaches were creepy.

Hanging up in the corner of his room was the remains of a US Army Eisenhower Jacket loaded with medals and campaign ribbons lined above the left breast pocket. A battered Ranger patch was still visible on the left shoulder and dark triangular spots on the sleeves where sergeant stripes once resided.

There were no locks at all on Lonzo's room door. I would hide in his room when my mother was looking to deal with my rear end for my frequent misbehavior. I would sit on Lonzo's bed quietly; simply staring at his uniform jacket hanging in the corner. I tried to remember what Lonzo said all those ribbons and medals represented; while my mother called my name in vein upstairs with her belt in her hand.

Many times, I would enter Lonzo's room while he slept in a drunken stupor. I would sit quietly listening to his snoring and his frequent in-sleep chatter. Much of it was to incoherent to understand. Lonzo didn't like for me to sit and listen to him sleep. He knew that he talked in his sleep and he might reveal something he shouldn't; a secret-possibly an ugly secret.

He caught me once. It wasn't pretty; he grabbed me by the arm and asked,

“What did you hear me say?”

I didn't hear you say nothing.

The truth was I didn't understand what he was saying. It all sounded like one of the blues songs he would sing with me. I did remember a few numbers that he would repeat frequently,

“The 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea”

I knew not to get him riled-up. He kept a loaded 1911-Colt 45 pistol under his mattress. I sat on the pistol a couple of times. He actually pulled it out once when he was drunk. I thought he was going to shoot me with it. He handed it to me butt first, my eyes got big and it scared me to death. It was the first time I ever held a loaded pistol.

Lonzo stated, “The reason Samuel Colt made the 1911-45 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) was the 38 caliber bullet used by US Forces at the time was too light. Also, the Smith & Wesson six shooter was too clumsy to reload in a hurry. During the Boer War in China, US Marines fired their 38 caliber S&Ws, point-blank, at charging Chinese Guerillas hopped up on opium and they kept coming. It was like slapping them in the face with a fly swatter.

Now, if I fired and hit you in the foot with my 45, you aren't going any place, but straight to hell. The 1911 Colt 45 is the best pistol ever made. Even Mr. Luger, the famous WWI German pistol maker, made 45 versions of his Luger for the US Army right before the start of World War I. Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany stopped the full production of the 45 Luger, because he knew they were being made for the American Army; the Army he might have to fight one day.

Two 45 Luger test models were made for the US Army. Mr. Luger made the pistols himself. The US Army destroyed one of the 45 Luger pistols in a testing competition with the 1911 Colt 45. The US Government sold the other unfired. Some people say the 45 Luger pistols are the most valuable pistols in the world. I actually had one sometime ago. Roy, did I tell you about the first German girl I made love to.”

He would change the subject of his conversation in the middle of a sentence, but I didn't care, I liked to hear him talk. I loved for him to tell this one. I would always listen intently, as if it was the first time he told me this story.

“Roy a hard-johnson has no conscious.

My platoon of tanks just crossed the Rhine River into Germany and began to move through a small German town called Bitburg or something, I really don't remember. I was amazed; the Germans were cheering, dancing in the streets and waving small American flags. I was in the lead tank as I slowly led my tank platoon through the center of town. So

many Germans were jumping on the tanks that I slowed my platoon down for fear of running somebody over.

Out of no where, this healthy built blonde climbed onto my tank and planted a long sloppy kiss in my mouth. She spoke almost perfect English. She said, "My name is Gretchen. I will be waiting for you at the guesthouse that my family owns. It is the only guesthouse with unbroken stained glass windows left in village. You will find it at the end of this street."

I told her that I had to find a place to bivouac my tanks on the other side of town and I would meet her back at the guesthouse later that evening after I squared-away my tank platoon. Roy, my Johnson was so hard, that I couldn't get it and me back through the tank's main turret hatch. I was embarrassed that I let her arouse me so easily in front of the whole town. I was very glad to get her off my tank so my Johnson would stop pounding the turret like a drum. My tank driver was laughing so hard he almost ran over a little German kid.

I ordered my tank platoon to bivouac on the edge of the town. I still couldn't stand up straight because my Johnson was throbbing thinking about Gretchen. I took a GI (General Issue) shower in my steel helmet and sprinkled on some of the cheap French perfume that I took off a dead German in France. I loaded and chambered the first round in my 45, returned it to my holster as I walked slowly down Main Street with my right hand teasing the trigger.

In France, the women flowed like French wine. Some Negro soldiers got over with a candy bar and a kiss. The French girls told us not to make love to the German girls when we got here. They said, "Those German bitches were cold as snakes and they make love the same way." Frankly, I didn't expect such a warm welcome from German women anyway.

I found the building she directed me too. The guesthouse that she said her family owned. There she was sitting in a secluded corner next to the bar wearing a traditional German dress. It had beautiful pink and blue embroidered flowers attached to little frilly shoulder straps that covered a charming, hand-sown white blouse. But, frankly, she looked out of style with most of the other German women in the guesthouse.

Roy, a hard-johnson has no conscious.

She recognized me immediately. She waved me over to sit with her at her secluded table. She asked if I was hungry, I said no. I knew food was scarce for them. She asked if I wanted to share a bottle of wine with her. I also refused. I learned in France, that canon

fire shakes the wine cellars and causes the wine to go bad inside the bottles. We settled on a couple of beers, which were made at the town's local brewery.

I was delighted she spoke English. I spoke no German except "Haultenze schwine" (Stop pig). It was the only warning that I gave to those German bastards before blowing their asses off. She was very tall, a natural blond, big boned and blue eyed. She was very clean for a woman whose town's water plant had been serenaded by George Patton's 55MM cannons.

She stated that, she had to leave the University in Berlin due to the allied bombing and that she took over her parents' guesthouse, here in town, after they were killed in a car accident. Gretchen's conversation was very lively, interesting and intelligent. But, I only had one thing on my mind and that was to get into her panties as quickly as possible. I hadn't made love to a woman in three weeks.

Roy, a hard-johnson has no conscious.

She moved the conversation to me, asking why was I fighting for a country that enslaved my parents and still mistreated me at home. I said to her, I really can't answer that question. I haven't given much thought to the issue with the war going on and all. The true reason was General Patton left little space in anyone's mind for thinking about anything, but killing Germans. I only had room in my mind for four things, killing Germans, keeping my tanks running, sometimes eating and sometimes sleeping. Making love was optional and catches as catch can. General Patton made sure you didn't forget the right order to place them in either.

I said to her, things are not great at home for Negroes, but they are getting better. And, things will definitely get much better after the war is over. I said under my breath, "Bullshit, those American Redneck bastards are still lynching Negro soldiers in their uniforms when they return home." Anyway, I wanted to move the conversation to a more romantic subject, so I pulled the small bottle of French perfume from my pocket and presented it to her. She lit up like a roman candle on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Roy, a hard-johnson has no conscious

Throughout my conversation with her, I never paid any attention to the fact that I was the highest-ranking soldier in the guesthouse. We lost our White Lieutenant three days earlier when his tank hit a mine. After a few beers and some creative begging, she finally invited me into her small apartment in back of the guesthouse. Her apartment was very clean and sparsely decorated almost like a military barracks. I paid little attention to the

details. A small Jewish charm, a Mezuzah was attached to right side of the door frame as I walked into her apartment.

Roy, a hard-johnson has no conscious.

She asked me to get undressed and to wait by the mirrored dresser while she went into the bathroom to get ready. I was so excited that I pulled off my shirt and pants without unbuttoning them. I threw them on a chair in the corner of the room along with my pistol belt and holster containing my 1911 Colt 45 pistol.

She peeked at me several times from behind the bathroom door. Finally, she slowly slid her left leg out through the opening. It looked like someone poured sugar out of the bathroom. She dangled her toes at me and told me to take off my underwear. I did as she instructed. I was now standing butt naked with my back turned to her.

Once again, Roy, a hard-johnson has no conscious.

Men do dumb things in the name of sex. She told me not to turn around as she slipped into the bed between the sheets. As I turned, she flicked her tongue at me while motioning me over to the bed with her left index finger. As I pulled back the covers to get in the bed with her, my eyes bulged as I glazed upon her beautiful, almost flawless, well-proportioned body. Her skin looked like it was bathed in goat's milk. The hair down-there looked like it was manicured. I got so excited that I started to (blank).

Then instantly, she produced a dark object from under the pillow and fired once, "bam," point-blank, hitting me. I fell backwards across the room grimacing from the pain. The bullet hit me in the left shoulder. Now, I could see it was a Luger she hid under the pillow. It was the biggest damn Luger I had ever seen. I knew no nine millimeter Luger could hit like that; it had to be a much larger caliber. My body began to go numb from the tremendous pain. Man, my whole life flashed before my eyes. I killed a number of Germans, even killed a Soul Brother in a bar fight in Kansas City. I fathered two children in Oklahoma that I denied. I began to make peace with my maker. I had never been stunned like this before.

She rose slowly from the bed with her cold steel blue eyes focused on me; hell bent on sending me off quickly to my maker or to hell-whichever one I reached first. She raised the Luger again and fired a second shot, "bam!" it missed, but the blast of the second shot spun me around and knocked me back across the room. I stumbled passed the mirrored dresser, piling my body like a dishrag over the chair that held my clothes.

I watched, helplessly, in the mirror as she walked butt naked and purposefully over to me. She raised her right hand at arms length. She slowly squeezed the trigger of her Luger to fire the final fatal shot in the back of my head. Somehow, my Colt 45 miraculously appeared in my right hand as if God placed it there himself; forgiving me of all my transgressions and sins. I released the safety with my thumb, turned and fired one shot, “bam!” The shot hit her square in the middle of her deranged head, knocking her back onto the bed. I pulled myself up using the chair as a brace. I stumbled to the bed, pulled the tangled covers off her body and fired again. “Bam,” I made sure that witch would never pull a trigger on another American soldier again and especially a Black one.

Bleeding badly and all over her, I checked her neck for a pulse. That’s when I noticed the two tattoos on her left thigh. They were two lightning bolts (Nazi-SS). I picked up her pistol from the bed and discovered it to be a 45 Caliber German Luger. As far as Americans knew, Mr. Luger only made two. This one had the serial number of 3. She tried to kill me with a “Third 45 Caliber German Luger.” What an honor, maybe I am the only American still living to have been shot with a 45 Caliber German Luger.”

Each time Lonzo reached this point in the story, he would stop and pull open his shirt to show me the bullet wound, I guess to confirm he wasn’t lying. The first time he told me the story, I asked him, Lonzo you told me at the beginning of the story that this was the first German woman you made love to, but you killed her before you got a chance to make love to her.

He turned to me with malice in his eyes and said, “Roy, a hard-johnson has no conscious. It was the coldest and bloodiest piece of behind I have ever had in my life.”

I laughed so hard that I couldn’t breathe. To this day, I haven’t figured out if Lonzo was telling the truth about her shooting him and him screwing her after he killed her. But, it was clear to me, he was one of the most courageous and patriotic individuals I knew. Several times, he came within a hair on a gnat’s ass of donating his life for this country.

Lonzo was very proud he served in the US Army. He was equally proud to have served with General Patton in Europe during WWII. He also mentioned that he served in Korea, but he avoided talking about Korea for some reason. I figured out that the bad dreams he often had were due to his service in Korea. Korea was his ugly secret.

Lonzo and I would walk Spot and just talk some mornings.

“When allowed, Negro soldiers fought with honor, distinction and courage in the Pacific, Africa, Italy, France and Germany. There are Black American Soldiers buried on

every continent on this planet. When properly trained, equipped and led, there is no finer a fighting man in America or on the face of this globe.”

He often reminded me that many good American Black soldiers died for me and I had a responsibility to make sure that America didn't allow their lives to be wasted in vein. He would tell me the same war stories over and over again. I would listen intently each time as if he was telling me the stories for the first time.

Lonzo continued, “After we landed in France, General Patton himself climbed up on my tank, “The Mighty Mouse,” and told the entire 761 Tank Regiment, “I don't give a damn what color you are. You are serving with me, because you are the best damn Tankers I could find. I want you to use the guns on your tanks to kill every damn German you see. Shoot up haystacks, graveyards, church steeples, old ladies and children, this is war, damn it. And, as long as you kill F-ing Germans, I won't have any problem with you and no one else better F with you either. If so, I will shoot their damn balls off.”

Some people on 115<sup>th</sup> Street said that old pissy drunk Lonzo was just shell shocked and his stories were all lies. They said the only person on the block that could stand the smell of his urine soaked body, long enough for him to tell his stories, was Spot and me. His exploits seemed truthful to me and made me feel real good inside, they provided a sense of warmth and confidence on a global scale that was rarely experience in my neighborhood. Most people in Harlem never ventured pass the rivers on each side of Manhattan, and many accomplished little with their lives. Lonzo provided a historical foundation upon which I was building my decision on to join the Army and serve America, my country.

I learned from Lonzo what a true Black Panther was. His knowledge released me of my fears of facing White Americans racist who were ignorant of their own history, his history and wanted to fight the Civil War over and over again. Yet, on the other hand, his exploits cemented my fears not to trust racist White Americans with my life.

Lonzo told me that he wanted to make a career out of serving in the US Army. He said he remained in the US Army after WWII was over, because of the changes President Truman made. He felt things would be very different in the new post war Army. After his close election defeat of William Dewey, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 directing equality and equal treatment in America's Armed Forces. This order integrated the Army and other branches of the Armed services in 1948. The Negro-vote carried Truman over the top. Additionally, Truman grew tired of Black soldiers and veterans being attacked, lynched and killed by out of control Southern Whites.

Lonzo was promoted to SFC Sergeant after the war and sent to Japan in 1950. He volunteered to join the first US Army Ranger Battalion stationed overseas. He said it was

a great unit, but he developed a stomach infection and didn't ship out to the Korean front with his unit.

When he recovered, he was sent to another unit in Korea. His new unit was formerly an all Colored Infantry Regiment, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. This unit was the descendent of the famous Buffalo Soldiers. The new unit wasn't truly integrated yet. Harry Truman signed the order to integrate the US Army two years earlier, but those Redneck Army Generals took their damn time about it. When the Korean War broke out, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was still a Negro unit with White Officers. There was one or two low ranking Black Officers thrown in with a few White enlisted soldiers, who served as clerks for the White Company Commanders. Still, the unit was basically segregated. Lonzo said my looks reminded him of the Negro Lieutenant that commanded his platoon in Korea.

Additionally, Lonzo also mentioned that his tank platoon liberated a German Concentration Camp, but he said it was too horrible and too difficult for him to tell me about it, he wouldn't elaborate. I guess this was another of his ugly secrets. He would tell this story only in pieces until he realized what he was talking about; then go silent. He said he saved a Jewish kid from a Concentration Camp in Germany; the kid made his way to America, joined the Army and followed him to Korea. He stopped talking about Korea at that point. Once again, I could see that he was harboring something very deep, something very ugly, and something very secret about Korea. None of my conversational skills could get him to open up on the subject of Korea.

He never mentioned the kid's name that he saved from the German Concentration Camp or the Black Lieutenant's name he served under. He never mentioned the name of the rifle company that he served in while in Korea either. He received a number of medals and citations in WWII, one Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts, but he received nothing during the Korean War.

I noticed several burn marks on his back when he shoveled coal into the furnace in the summertime. When he saw me staring at the burn marks on his back, he would stop shoving coal and get a shirt to put on to cover them. He never answered my questions how he received those burns?

My mornings with Lonzo were very special, I felt very lucky, indeed fortunate and very proud to witness Lonzo drilling his ghost platoon up and down 115<sup>th</sup> Street. He was majestic, remarkable and heroic, though always drunk with his pants steaming from his drying urine; wildly barking orders and stumbling as he marched his phantom platoon to the cadence of his raspy Drill Sergeant's voice. Whenever he stumbled, he quickly and

calmly moved his hand to his back pocket to protect his little soldier, his bottle of Gypsy Rose wine peeping out of his back pocket.

As encouraging as Lonzo was, I was still fogged, unsure and mixed about joining the US Army. On one hand, there was the opportunity to serve my country with courage, honor and the same dedication as Lonzo and so many other Soul Brothers before him. There was also the sense of pride, excitement and respect of continuing the glorious American Negro military traditions and achievements that generally went unheralded.

Yet on the other hand, I was asking myself, was America truly worthy of my complete trust, loyalty and dedication? Should I turn over to America, the most precious gift that I received from God, my life? America had serious flaws in her character that would consume me as it consumed the original Black Panther; flaws that I could not address and correct alone.