



0. JACK ROBINSON KEEPS HIS BUS SEAT - Story Preface

1. JACKIE ROBINSON - EARLY YEARS

2. JACKIE ROBINSON - WORLD WAR II

**3. JACK ROBINSON KEEPS HIS BUS SEAT**

4. COURT MARTIAL of JACKIE ROBINSON

5. BASEBALL'S COLOR LINE

6. BRANCH RICKEY MAKES A CHANGE

7. BREAKING the COLOR LINE

8. CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

The 761st Tank Battalion - of which 2nd Lt. Jack Robinson was a member - was a segregated unit during World War II. Here members of "Dog Company" are checking their equipment before leaving England for combat duty on the Continent. Image online, courtesy 761st Tank Battalion official website.

Lt. Robinson was an officer with the 761st Tank Battalion. That unit of African-American soldiers - later dubbed "The Black Panthers" (and "Patton's Panthers") - became famous when they fought for 183 straight days in Europe (including at the Battle of the Bulge). Their motto was "Come Out Fighting."

If an eventful bus ride had not sidetracked Jack Robinson, during the summer of 1944, the 2nd Lieutenant could have been with his men when they shipped-out to Europe. Instead, he faced charges of insubordination, resulting in a court-martial.

We learn the story with Jackie's own words, both from a letter he wrote (at the time) and his autobiography (which he published years later). We also have the complete trial record, from the U.S. Army Legal Services Agency, as a primary source for understanding what happened.

On the night of July 6th - exactly one month after D-Day - Robinson caught a bus to get back to his quarters at the base hospital. Stationed in Texas, at Camp Hood - known today as Fort Hood - Jackie's unit was in training for combat in Europe.

Earlier that night, he had visited the black officers' club. Getting on the bus, he sat next to a fellow-officer's wife, Virginia Jones:

*I got on the bus first and sat down, and Lt. Robinson got on and came and sat beside me. I sat in the fourth seat from the rear of the bus, which I have always considered the rear of the bus.*

*The bus driver looked back at us, and then asked Lt. Robinson to move. Lt. Robinson told the bus driver to go on and drive the bus. The bus driver stopped the bus, came back and balled his fist and said, "Will you move to the back?" Lt. Robinson said, "I'm not moving," so the bus driver stood there and glared a minute and said, "Well just sit there until we get down to the bus station."*

(Pretrial Investigating Officer's report, quoting Virginia Jones.)

Arriving at the bus station, the driver reported Jackie's refusal to change his seat:

*When we reached the last stop on the post ... the driver jumped out of the bus ... returning quickly with his dispatcher and some other drivers ... We heard the screeching of tires and a military police jeep pulled up. The two military policemen asked a few questions, then, with great politeness, asked if I would be willing to go along with them to talk to their captain. (I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson, by Jackie Robinson, page 19.)*

Captain Peelor L. Wiggington investigated the situation and reported that Lt. Robinson was disrespectful while answering his questions:

*While he was talking to me and while I was talking to him, Lt. Robinson was leaning on the high desk in the interior Sgt of the Guard Room, in a very disrespectful manner. His attitude in general was very insolent, disrespectful, and smart-alec, and certainly his actions were unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman, particularly in the presence of the enlisted men together with other officers. (Pretrial Investigating Officer's report, statement of Captain Peelor L. Wiggington.)*

From that point forward, the focus of the legal process against Robinson changed. The powers-that-be wanted to charge him for disrespecting white officers who were investigating the bus incident. Before a court-martial could proceed, however, Robinson's commanding officer would have to agree that it was warranted.

Lt. Col. Paul L. Bates, commander of the 761st Tank Battalion, did not believe Robinson should be court-martialed. When Bates refused to sign-off on proposed court-martial documents, the attempt to prosecute Robinson should have ended before it started.

Instead, the Army transferred Jackie to another Tank Battalion (the 758th) where the commanding officer signed the paperwork.

Lt. Robinson was arrested on the 17th of July, 1944. He would stand trial - at Camp Hood - for two counts of insubordination.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/JACK-ROBINSON-KEEPS-HIS-BUS-SEAT-42-Jackie-Robinson>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/JACK-ROBINSON-KEEPS-HIS-BUS-SEAT-42-Jackie-Robinson>

## Questions 2 Ponder

### Why Did Jackie Robinson Refuse to Give-up His Bus Seat?

Before reading this story, did you know that Jackie Robinson had refused to give-up his bus seat—as ordered by a white bus driver—during the summer of 1944? Why do you think this significant event is not widely known?

Why did Robinson's refusal to give-up his seat result in his arrest and trial by court-martial?

At the time of this incident, Robinson was serving his country as a member of the U.S. military. Why would a bus driver—or anyone else—disrespect an active-duty member of the Army in such a way?

## Media Stream



### Camp Hood - Stateside Base for 761st Tank Battalion

Image online, courtesy 761st Tank Battalion official website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Camp-Hood-Stateside-Base-for-761st-Tank-Battalion>



### Lt. Jack Robinson at Camp Hood

Image online, courtesy Robinson Foundation.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lt.-Jack-Robinson-at-Camp-Hood>

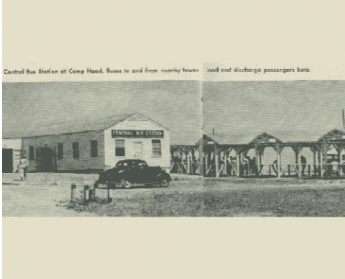


### 761st Tank Battalion - "Come Out Fighting"

Image online, courtesy U.S. Department of Defense.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/761st-Tank-Battalion-Come-Out-Fighting->



### Camp Hood - Bus Stop

Image of bus stop at Camp Hood, online courtesy 761st Tank Battalion official website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Camp-Hood-Bus-Stop>



### Paul L. Bates - Robinson's Commanding Officer

Photo of Lt. Col Paul L. Bates, online courtesy the 761st Tank Battalion official website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Paul-L.-Bates-Robinson-s-Commanding-Officer>



### JACK ROBINSON KEEPS HIS BUS SEAT

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>