



From Boston, To Viet Nam

FOR SOME inexplicable reason to the average Negro (there is certain to be a psychological explanation for it), white America has always generously conceded Negro expertise in sports. Particularly those considered that more "brawn" than brains necessary. Even when professional sports excluded Negroes from participation at the major league level, sportswriters were always free to chronicle and extol exploits of the Negro athlete.

However, the contribution, courage, and exploits of the Negro (or lack of it) in historical chronicles of the wars of the United States offers another bewildering segment of our nation's neglected, camouflaged, or hidden history.

For a peace-seeking, peace-loving nation, the United States has engaged in a number of full-scaled wars (more than a half dozen) not counting the Indian Wars or such 'police actions' as Korea and Viet Nam.

IN THE PREFACE of "The Negro in the American Revolution", author Dr. Benjamin Quarles, in explaining the limited military service of the Negro until the third year of the Revolutionary war, makes a statement of U.S. military procedure worth noting.

Dr. Quarles, eminent professor of History, author of "The Negro in the Civil War", and editor of "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass", prefaces his book on the Negro's role in the Revolutionary War with the opening premise that "In the Revolutionary War the American Negro was a participant and a symbol. He was active on the battlefronts and behind the lines; in his expectations and in the gains he registered during the war, he personified the goal of that freedom in whose name the struggle was waged. The Negro's role in the Revolution can best be understood by realizing that his major loyalty was not to a place nor to a people, but to a principle. Insofar as he had freedom of choice, he was likely to join the side that made him the quickest and best offer in terms of those "unalienable rights" of which Mr. Jefferson had spoken. Whoever invoked the image of liberty, be he American or British, could count on a ready response from the blacks."

HE CONTINUED that "On the American side the Negro saw only limited military service until the war dragged on into its third year. This negative attitude toward enlisting the colored man sprang from a reluctance to deprive a master of his apprenticed servant or chattel slave, and from the fear of putting guns

in the hands of a class of persons most of whom were not free. In the main, the Negro was thought of as a servile laborer rather than as a potential warrior. BUT WHEN MANPOWER NEEDS BECAME ACUTE, WHETHER IN THE VOLUNTEER FORCES, THE MILITIA, OR THE CONTINENTAL troops, hesitations and fears were put into the background and the NEGRO WAS MUSTERED IN."

In view of the current disparate ratio of Negro induction in the Armed Services and the justifiable resultant furore over the inequity, it is especially noteworthy that Dr. Quarles as a commentary on the hesitancy of mustering Negroes as soldiers in the Revolutionary War, had written "This procedure typified an attitude toward Negro enlistment that would prevail in America's future wars. From colonial times until the twentieth century, the Negro would be bypassed in the early stages of conflict. But as the struggle grew arduous, civilian authorities and military commanders would turn to the one great remaining manpower pool, and THE NEGRO WOULD EMERGE FROM HIS STATUS AS A REJECTED INFERIOR TO BECOME A COMRADE IN ARMS".

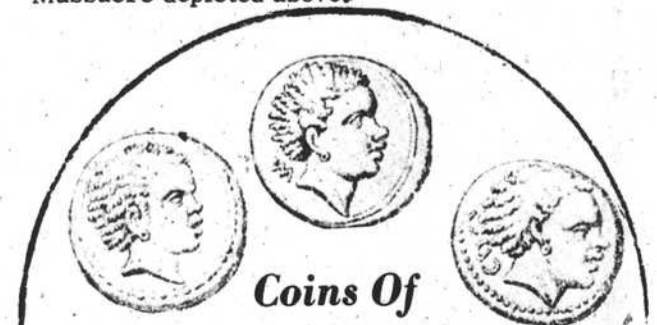
It is significant that a Negro was the first to open hostilities between Great Britain and the Colonies. It was on the fifth of March, 1770, that anger of the citizens of Boston at the quartering of two British regiments in the city erupted into revolt--resulting in the "Boston Massacre" which triggered the War of Independence.

A monument stands in the Boston Commons to the memory of that Negro, Crispus Attucks, "the first to defy, and the first to die".

NEGROES HAVE distinguished themselves in every war in which the U.S. has been engaged. On four separate occasions, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln made the statement that without the Negro it would be "impossible" for the North to win. A note of irony on this assertion of Lincoln's is that, reportedly in response to popular prejudice, he had steadfastly refused at first to employ Negro troops although the South was doing so. It is a matter of congressional record that Lincoln was successful in influencing Congress to vote \$600,000 (in 1862) to defray shipping costs for the first load of Negroes to be dispatched to the Ile de Vache in Haiti for colonization which was Lincoln's own projected resolution (See WARFARE, page 5)



CRISPUS ATTUCKS--To whom a monument stands in the Boston Common memorializing him as hero and patriot--first, casualty in the Boston Massacre depicted above.



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