

OUR SOLDIERS — FOR INDEPENDENCE

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

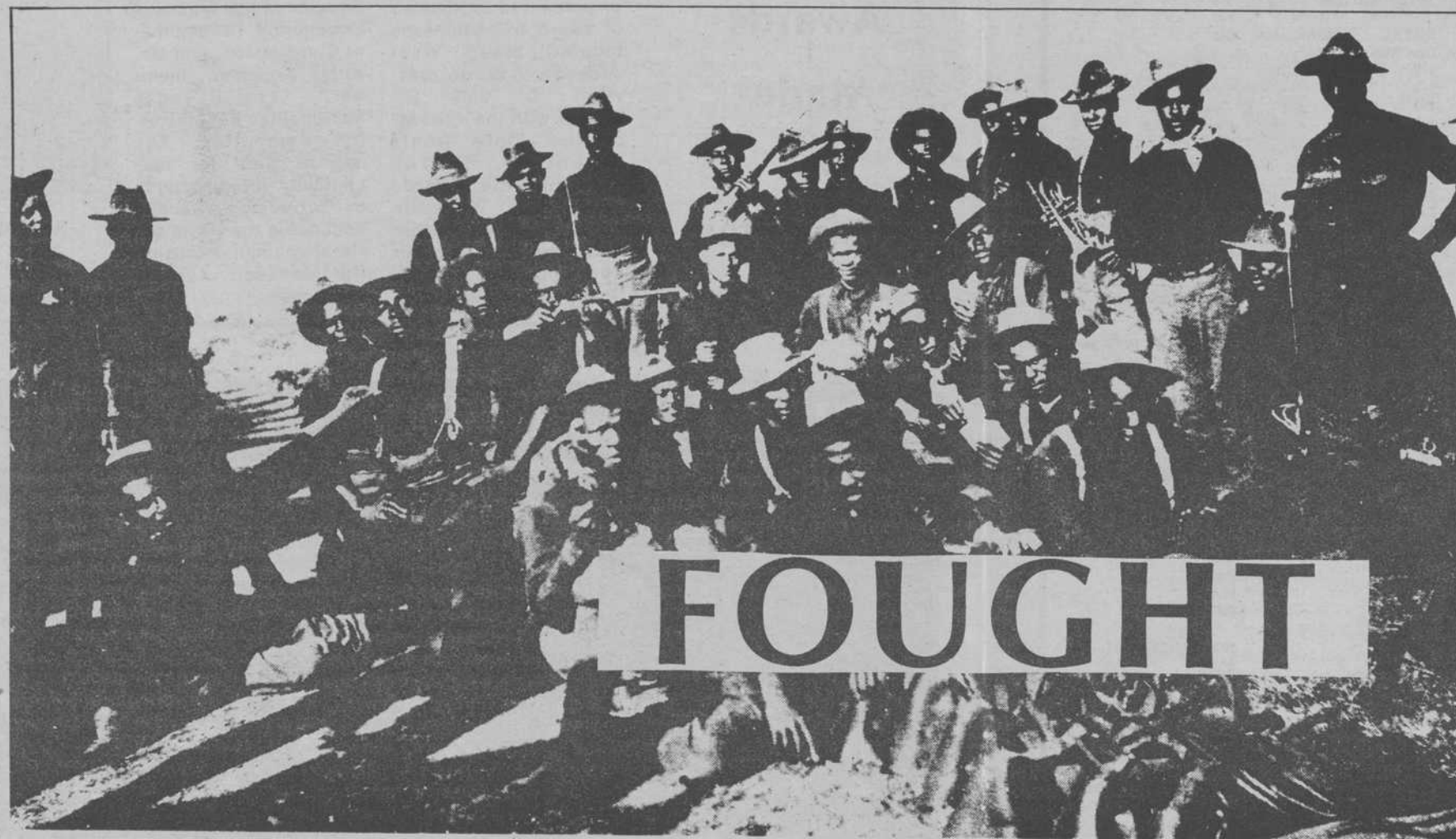
"To this end, we pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." With those or similar utterances, soldiers have marched off to war for centuries. The vanquished, those who are and were fortunate, returned to their homelands with bowed heads and shame. There were no reception committees or "ticker tape" parades. It is just as well. What does one say to those who have not won? "Better luck next time" "you did your best" "it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game" or some other similarly trite comment? Such might suffice in little league ball, but as Vince Lombardi once said: "Winning isn't everything — it's the only thing."

Thus it is with war. No one comes in second. The United States, like other countries, has had its military involvements. Until the past decade, the returning armies were greeted with triumphant parades. Those who had risked and sacrificed their lives have been af-

forded the traditional heroes' welcome.

Our history has been one in which the soldiers have been held in high esteem. Our first soldiers fought to gain independence. Subsequent armies have fought to maintain it. Those who have risked the most deserve the most. The writers of our histories have been quite selective about those to whom they were willing to bestow such honors. The key to the city, a place of prestige in the community, a position in society acknowledging the efforts, the gala balls, parades, handshakes, embraces and total adulation have been but small measures of the appreciation the nation has felt compelled to extend to its defenders. A parent might say "I want my son to grow up to be just like him." Such would have been impossible, if Black heroes had been duly recognized.

Crispus Attucks was among the first to die during the American Revolution. He was



This photograph, from the National Archives, was taken after the charge at San Juan Hill.

Black and was one of the three slain during the infamous Boston Massacre. Numerous Black slaves were members of the Continental Army and they quite often served with valor. Certainly, there were cowards among them. No race has a monopoly on cowardice or courage. Blacks brought up supplies, served as spies and fought as soldiers. They were at Bunker Hill, Yorktown, and even participated in the retreats. They were there but not in the history texts. While Lafayette and other Frenchmen volunteered their services along with Polish soldiers such as Kosciuszko and Pulaski, there were also Black Haitians of Fontange Legion who also fought. They came at their own expense from Haiti and paid the ultimate price of their lives in fighting for independence in America. Some time later when the French were involved in their own revolution for "Liberty, Fraternity and

Equality" America responded. "Lafayette, we are here." Today, Haitians cry out for liberty and equality and assistance and they wait



patiently to hear the same sound coming from America. To date, such has not happened. Yet they wait.

Black slaves who fought for independence

were promised freedom if the venture proved successful. It was, but they did not get the freedom they had fought to obtain. Most returned

to slavery, some ran away and still others were promised freedom upon the death of their masters."Most Blacks would have to wait another three-quarters

of a century for freedom. During the War of 1812, Blacks also participated. In the final battle, after the peace agreement had been signed, Blacks fought in defense of the city of New Orleans. At a time when the citizens of the city were reluctant to risk their lives, Andrew Jackson was compelled to rely on the pirates of Barataria with Jean Lefite and on Black slaves to help shore up the battlements at Chalmette. Over 600 Blacks fought in defense of the city. Seventy were either killed or wounded. The history texts tell us that the Americans suffered no casualties. One might suppose that they did not consider the loss of life of slaves to be noteworthy. Once again, Blacks had been promised freedom and the promise was not kept. They returned to the drudgery of slavery. Promises, promises, promises — sounds like a familiar tune, doesn't it?

The American Civil

War once again found Blacks in the ranks. Over 200,000 served. Though some people persist in believing that the war was fought to end slavery, we know it was fought to preserve the Union. At wars end, those soldiers of the Ninth, Tenth, Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth regiments were assigned to preserving the peace in the western lands. They made up part of the now well known "Buffalo Soldier" outfits of the Southwest. They patrolled the western lands between the Canadian and the Mexican borders. Their commanders were white and they were given the very worst of equipment to do the very best they could. Isaih Dorman rode into history with George Armstrong Custer on June 26, 1876, at the Little Big Horn. He did not get lost on the way to the river, he got lost on the way to the history books.

On February 15, 1898, 22 Black sailors were among the 250 who lost their lives when the U.S.S. Main exploded and sank in Havana Harbor in Cuba. When war was officially declared, Blacks were involved. They did not get lost going up San Juan Hill with Theodore Roosevelt — they got lost on the way to the history books.

Their enemy was not only waiting in Europe. They were also to be found in the U.S. and among their own comrades. That which they fought for was not theirs at home. Not only were they discriminated against on a general basis, nationwide, but they received similar treatment from a great percentage of the white soldiers. Even towns

bordering the training camps looked upon them with disfavor. Spartanburg, South Carolina offers a classic example. Its Chamber of Commerce, in 1917, sent the following statement to the base commander. "I was sorry to learn that the Fifteenth Regiment has been ordered here. For, with their northern ideas about race equality, they will probably expect to be treated like white men. I will say right here that they will not be treated as anything except negroes. We will

treat them exactly as we treat our resident negroes. This thing is like waving a red flag in the face of a bull, something that can't be done without trouble."

Even after having fought in five wars, Blacks were still not afforded a bit of respect. Instead, they returned to the U.S. and to discrimination, lynchings, unemployment, ghettos and other forms of social, economical and political abuse. They held fast to their



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ideals even though the country did not.

We do not need to go to Europe or to Spartanburg to see how Black soldiers were treated. We need only look home — right here in Las Vegas. This article, along with the next two, is in honor of those Blacks who have fought and continue to fight in defense of the United States. Veterans Day is upon us and we wish to make certain they they are not forgotten.




Black troopers of the Tenth Cavalry, led by "Black Jack" John J. Pershing (left), Colonel Leonard Wood (center) and Major Charles Young (right), were assigned to chase Pancho Villa in Mexico in 1916. It was the last important military action for the black mounted cavalry.

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Kathy Fox Gay, a native Las Vegas, attended Las Vegas High School and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. Her hobbies include reading, horticulture and interior design. Kathy has been a member of the Toler Realty Staff for 4 years and specializes in Residential sales and vacant land.

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