

Blacks in the Military

“Our Blood Runs Deep”

By Lois Whaley
BLACK SOLDIERS

Introduction

Before language became more than just sound, anthropologists contend that man, whose birthplace was in Africa, was basically solitary and nomadic in nature; taking from the land when his needs so dictated. This dependence upon nature for his sustenance probably consumed much of his energies and left little time for anything else.

As his reasoning powers grew, so too did his awareness of nature's bounties in specific geographical areas, and he began to control nature rather than being controlled by her forces. A desire for some semblance of permanence was then developed, and early man united with others into clans or tribes to overcome a hostile environment. These elemental governmental forms evolved into larger, more complex units by benign or aggressive coercion; through the latter was born the military.

AFRICA AND ASIA

For so long, the history of Africa, with Egypt the exception, depicted its inhabitants as unsophisticated, savage, hostile, and lacking in culture. The writers of the legend were generally European, and their desire for the acquisition of the copious quantities of minerals (gold, salt, precious gems and the like) gave rise to the propaganda.

The reality is that much of Africa had flourished civilizations for centuries before Europe, was experimenting with rudimentary governments. John Hearick Clarke, the noted black historian, states, "When Europe became known to history for the first time, Africa was already old and in decline."

Egypt escaped the denigration to which the more southerly areas were subjected. This was due to the wide currency that Grecian and Roman traders had with northern Africa. Even so, current history books attribute only one dynasty as being black. Here again is more erroneous information, for most of the dynasties were black. Sir E.A. Wallis Budge contends that the earliest settlers of Egypt came from the south, generally in the area of Somalia and Uganda. An examination of many of the carvings and sculptures from Egypt will reveal figures with distinct black features.

Piankhy (Eighth century, B.C.)

The dynasty that history books allow blacks was the 25th that was founded by Piankhy.

For over 1800 years, Egypt had been demanding tribute from Nubia in the form of gold and warriors for her own army. As sovereign of his country for twenty-five years, he grew tired of having his nation's wealth bleed by King Osorkon of Egypt and decided to rebel.

He set out upon the Nile with equipment that



stretched for miles. With his finest warriors, he captured all of the towns along the mighty river until he reached Hermopolis. This well-fortified city fell before Piankhy's onslaught and tribute of precious gems, cloth and other gifts were offered in an attempt to allay further destruction. However, he ignored the gifts until the pleadings of the Hermopolis women to the women in Piankhy's camp reached his ears. He then consented to listen to Namlot, the ruler of Hermopolis and was convinced to accept the diadem that crowned Piankhy King of Hermopolis.

Continuing on toward Heliopolis, the capital of Egypt, Piankhy next captured all of the small city-states along the Nile until he reached Memphis. Here, the massive fortifications along the northern and western sides of the city dictated that the east, with its natural water boundary, would be most easily vaulted by the Nubian forces. Directing that all enemy shipping be barricaded, captured and arranged side by side, Piankhy then used these ships as a foot bridge for the assault. The Memphians

were so surprised by this brilliant plan that the city easily fell to Piankhy and his troops.

The news of this masterful stroke of military genius preceded him further north so that little resistance was met along the route to Heliopolis. Upon entering this holiest city of Egypt (about 725 B.C.) where the temple of their god Amen-Ra was located, Pharaoh Osorkon III and his priests surrendered peacefully upon the steps of the temple.

Piankhy founded the 25th or "Ethiopian" dynasty of Pharaohs. (The appellation "Ethiopian" is given by historians as a synonym for black.) Succeeding members of his family including a brother and son remained as rulers for over one hundred years.

Clitus (4th century B.C.)

History books have glamorized the exploits of Alexander the Great of Macedonia (Greece) who captured the world as it was then known.

One must search diligently to find that he chose not to engage in battle with Queen Candace, Empress of Ethiopia, whose skill in military strategy was legendary. Alexander thus decided that it was better to end his conquests in Egypt in 332 B.C. rather than to risk defeat at the hands (or weapons) of a woman, and a black one at that!

These same history books also neglect to mention that his commander of the cavalry was Clitus, his black foster brother, the son of Alexander's childhood nurse. Clitus Niger had been a general in the army of Alexander's father, Philip, King of Macedonia, and he continued to serve under Alexander when the latter succeeded to the throne.

So courageous and distinguished a soldier was Clitus during the campaign eastward through Asia that Alexander crowned him King of Bactria (roughly in the area now known as Afghanistan).

Clitus took his mother's admonition to take care of Alexander very seriously, and, unless it was deemed militarily necessary, he rarely left Alexander's side. This vigilance enabled him to save his foster brother's life.

During the battle of Arbela in what is now Iraq, the Greek army was opposed by a massive army of men led by King Darius of Persia. Although Alexander's tactically superior forces soundly defeated the Persians, at one point he was attacked by a group of Persians and his life was endangered. Clitus went to his aid and killed a general whose battle-ax was about to descend upon Alexander.

The respect and love that the two men had for each other was very deep, but Clitus was quite troubled by Alexander's apparent adoption of the more luxuriant life style of the East. During a banquet, Clitus voiced his concern. Outraged and resenting this familiarity before the foreign guests, Alexander seized a nearby weapon and killed

Clitus. Remorseful, he then attempted suicide but was thwarted by a guard. Alexander is said to have died of alcoholism in 323 B.C.

Hannibal (247-183 B.C.)

Of all of the military geniuses throughout history the names of Hannibal of Carthage, Alexander the Great and Napoleon are the most familiar to people today. Napoleon, the last born of the three, rated Hannibal the greatest. So impressed was he by this earlier militarist that he adopted many of Hannibal's strategies. Even now, two thousand years later, Hannibal's techniques and tactics are taught in military schools worldwide.

The son of another great Carthaginian general, Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal, at the age of 26, sustained and strengthened the hold upon Spain that his father had begun. Rome did not like the idea of another military force on the continent, so the Second Punic War began.

At that time, Rome had a stronger navy than did Carthage so that she was virtually unapproachable by sea; and to reach Rome by land from Spain, Hannibal would have to go through France and scale the "impregnable" Alps. It was not easy.

At the beginning of his campaigns against Rome, he had 70,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalry, most of them fierce Numidians who were unequaled in horsemanship and swordsmanship, and forty elephants trained for warfare.

Marching through the unfamiliar terrain of France, he met resistance which he overcame with superior planning. He moved southward until he captured what is now Marseilles from Rome. Here the sea prevented him from completing the relatively short distance to Rome. Returning northward, he decided to cross the Alps rather than to return to Spain. Over incredible odds, including hostile tribes and wintry weather which these men from the tropics had never experienced, they crossed the mountains in fifteen days. With less than half of his original force surviving, but with all of his elephants, he marched southward.

Rome was astounded! With its army of over one million men, however, it felt confident of victory. The Romans had failed to reckon with Hannibal's ability to correctly assess all factors — terrain, manpower, weather, etc., and to devise tactics to defeat the might of his enemy. He overcame them first at Ticino, then in the Battle of Trebia. As he continued his march southward, winning battle after battle, more Italian troops joined him until he controlled all of Northern Italy. Winter was not too far off, so that Hannibal began to use much of his time and forces to gather stores for the coming season. When Rome received this intelligence, its most able commander, Flaminius, was dispatched with an

(Continued on Page 18)

New Booklet Outlines Struggles Of James City

It is 1862 — the Union Army is occupying New Bern and thousands of suddenly-liberated slaves are finding themselves crowding into a freedman's camp on the Trent River. What is their future?

A new booklet published by the Department of Cultural Resources outlines the unique problems and perspectives of the camp which became James City. Joe A. Mobley, researcher with the archaeology and historic preservation section, chronicles the settlement on the Trent River, pointing out the struggles and triumphs of society in an all-black community in the volume entitled "James City: A Black Community in North Carolina 1863-1900."

The social, economic and political developments of this stronghold of black self-determination, according to Mobley, offer insight into the adversities of blacks since the Civil War. Struggling to secure an economic and political foothold, their primary goal was to own permanently the land on which they resided as tenants.

James City began in March, 1862, following the capture of New Bern by Union forces. The community grew as North Carolina slaves sought freedom and safety within Union lines. U.S. Army chaplain Horace James established the camp for freedmen, which became Trent River Camp and later James City, honoring its founder. James had a significant impact upon the settlement and his career in North Carolina is part of the James City narrative.

Because blacks have steadfastly remained in this cohesive black community, James City provides a good model for the study of Afro-American history on the local level, according to Mobley.

The 113-page booklet.
(Continued on Page 18)

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