

Black, White Men Shed the Same Color Tears

By JIM HOUGH
State Journal Staff Writer

Eleven black men, many from far-away cities, came to honor a white man for something he did a quarter century ago.

The white man, Col. Frank S. Pritchard, 72, a retired army colonel and retired state editor of The State Journal, lives at 1132 Weber Drive.

The black men are former officers in the all-Negro 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion which distinguished itself in some bloody World War II battles in the rush from Normandy to German soil.

Col. Pritchard was their leader, their friend, their champion. Of the battalion's 700 men and 35 officers, only five were white.

At as warm and touching a banquet as I ever attended, I heard those 11 black men Saturday night in Detroit sing praises of Pritchard.

'TOUGH'

The black men recalled that Col. Pritchard was tough, demanding and courageous. But what they talked most about was his giant contribution to the black man's course of civil rights. They told how he was fair to them. They told of how he constantly fought the army's white establishment on their behalf.

When the banquet ceremonies were closing and it was time for Col. Pritchard to speak, the short, slightly built, balding man stood erect and

began in his rough and authoritative voice:

"I didn't make the battalion what it was . . . you men did that. You were the finest soldiers I ever commanded in all my years in the army . . . I can't go on . . . I love you, men . . . I love you . . ."

The tough old colonel sat down and he sobbed openly and loudly. And every man in the room cried with him.

They were black. He was white. The tears were the same color. They came from a rare kind of love.

It was World War II and it

was a time when Negro civil rights was not much of an issue. It was a time when white men said that black men would not fight in combat. It was a time when black troops were assigned to run motor pools and man the kitchens.

But, when Col. Pritchard

was asked to command and train a Negro battalion, he agreed on one condition—that all his officers be black. He didn't quite accomplish that end, but 30 of his 35 officers were black.

In combat, the 614th gained one distinguished service

cross, eight silver stars, 40 bronze stars and a host of other commendations. One platoon received a Presidential Citation for a particularly vicious fight, the account of which is printed in the book "The Hundred Best Stories from Stars and Stripes."

Charles Thomas, Detroit, black commander of one of the battalion's four companies, became the second Negro soldier in American military history to receive the Distinguished Service Cross. Capt. Thomas, although wounded three times and bleeding badly, continued to lead a charge of his men which successfully fought off a German tank attack.

FIRST TRANSFERRED

Dr. Thomas M. Campbell, himself a retired colonel and a pediatrician at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, was the first black officer transferred to Pritchard's new outfit.

"I never trusted white men. I never had much reason to trust them until I met Frank Pritchard. I soon trusted him and loved him. He is a truly great man. What more can I say?" Dr. Campbell said at the banquet.

Ulysses W. Watkins, retired lieutenant colonel and now director of education for military personnel at St. Louis, Mo., said:

"Three men gave me my motivation, guidance and inspiration in life—my father, a school principal and Col. Pritchard. But, the colonel most of all because he gave me what black men want most—self respect."

SET GOALS

Watkins said Col. Pritchard told the newly formed battalion that the world would judge them years later on what they

did then. "All he ever asked of us was that we take pride in ourselves and insure that in later years we could be called good Americans," he said.

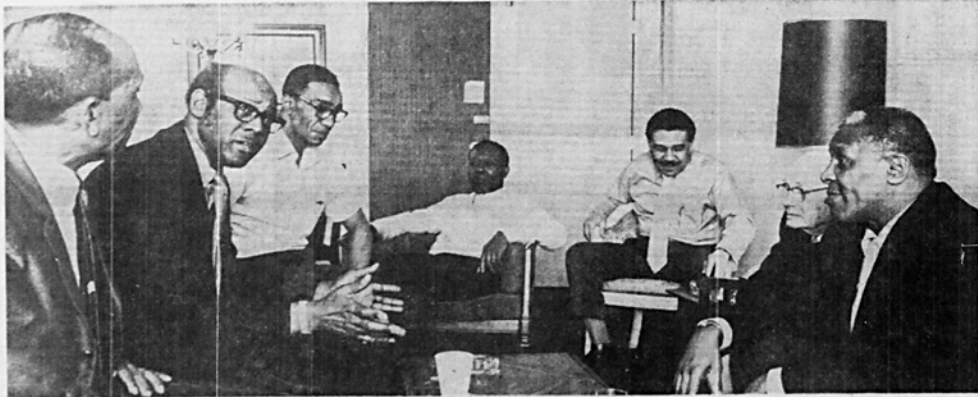
Dr. Campbell recalled that Pritchard told the men he wanted soldiers, not a race of people.

"He instilled such pride and dedication in all of us that we never talked or thought about racial differences. I think we all knew that if we talked about racial problems, the colonel would come down on us hard. He could be tough. But, he made the 614th an almost fanatic fighting unit. We had wounded men fighting despite their wounds because they didn't want to leave the outfit," the doctor said.

Retired Maj. Robert S. Williams, now a U.S. Treasury agent in Washington, D.C., said:

"Col. Pritchard had men who would go to hell with him. I was one of them. The loyalty between us and the colonel was not just a thing which flowed from us to him. It flowed down from him as well. He made a special point of knowing the weaknesses and strengths of his men. After issuing a reprimand, he always closed the book on the subject. He never held a grudge. He would give you hell, but never destroyed you. When I got out of the service in 1951, one of my first acts was to go and visit Col. Pritchard."

See MEN, Page A-3, Col. 1



HONORING THEIR COLONEL—Black officers of a highly decorated World War II army unit who honored their white commander, Col. Frank S. Pritchard of Lansing, Saturday. Left to right, are Ulysses W. Watkins, St. Louis, Mo.; Leonard I. Burch, Chicago; Robert S. Williams, Washing-

ton, D.C.; John W. Hurns, New York City; Forest Walker, Lansing; Pritchard; and Dr. Thomas M. Campbell, Tuskegee, Ala. (State Journal Photo by Bruce Cornelius)



Col. Pritchard and His Officers During World War II

Men Don't Forget Leader

Concluded from Page One

Leonard I. Burch, a Chicago funeral director who served as headquarters company commander for Pritchard, commented:

'LIKE A DAD'

"He was like a dad to the whole battalion. Nothing has had more impact on my life than my association with Frank Pritchard."

Forest Walker, retired lieutenant colonel who is now an official in the Oldsmobile personnel division in Lansing, spoke at the banquet, saying, in part:

"Col. Pritchard, this is a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage to show the respect, love and pride we have for you. We are here to honor you, a man who did some mighty important things for the Negro cause in the pre-civil rights days."

Other black officers from the 614th who repeated the claim that the "colonel is a great, great man" were:

Robert L. Findley, a Detroit businessman; Charles Thomas, a computer programmer in Detroit; Serro S. Nelson, postal supply administrator, Omaha, Neb.; Claude W. Ramsey, Detroit businessman; Christopher J. Sturkey, a De-

troit postal official, and John W. Hurns, a New York businessman.

ADDED PRAISES

Charles J. Richards, an Oklahoma City oilman and a white man who asked to serve with Colonel Pritchard and his Negro battalion, also attended the event and added his praises of the colonel. Richards, a captain in Pritchard's outfit, led a tribute to the unit's 100 men and officers killed or wounded in the war.

There was more than serious talk at the gathering. The men came to the Detroit hotel Friday afternoon and they talked way into the night. Pritchard went to bed at 4:30 a.m. and the men had him up again at 7:30 a.m. as they relived some of their proudest, funniest and saddest days in World War II.

There was more humor than anything. Dr. Campbell recalled the time he entered a restricted combat area without knowing the password. He was stopped by a soldier who was about to take him to headquarters at gunpoint. Dr. Campbell, frustrated, blurted at the GI:

"Good God, man, when was the last time you ever saw a black G.I. man?" The GI shrugged, told Dr. Campbell the password was Yankee, and

waived him on.

There were some wild stories about the Colonel's driver, Willie Magby.

The men called him "Maggie." They resented his being "The colonel's pet."

"Maggie was a terrible driver and nobody dared speak harshly to him for fear of angering the colonel." Forest Walker said. "Maggie was always driving the colonel into a ditch or into a tank or something. We never figured why the colonel kept him as his driver. We learned later that the colonel and Maggie were World War I veterans together and the colonel sort of felt sorry for Maggie. Why, once Maggie got on the wrong road and drove the colonel right down to the middle of a column of 200 Germans. He nearly got the colonel killed."

Walker kidded Pritchard about holding up his promotion once "just because he thought I was unkind to Maggie."

REPLACEMENT

The colonel's men were angered when the division command took away his command car. So, they stole one from a German town, painted it with army colors and fixed it up to such an extent that Col. Pritchard was "the envy of every

commander in Europe."

The men told of the time they stole some pigs from a German farm and began a pig barbecue. The colonel walked by and the men thought they were in trouble. But, he sliced off a chunk of pork, ate it and passed on with the comment: "Bury the bones deep, men."

The men once "liberated" 1,800 bottles of French champagne. Instead of objecting, Pritchard ordered that two bottles be given to each enlisted man in the battalion.

Col. Pritchard told his men he wanted two black game cocks for battalion mascots. But, before the episode ended, the colonel had 13 of them crowing while the outfit tried to sleep.

WERE USEFUL

"Those game cocks saved us a lot of grief though," Pritchard recalled, "because Gen. Orlando Ward never inspected our camp. He just visited my game cock pen. I think I got a promotion because of Gen. Ward's fondness for game cocks. I don't know whatever happened to the birds, but I always suspected they became fried chicken," he said.

To help him remember the reunion, Pritchard's men presented him a large, framed, felt-covered board on which were attached two beautiful bronzed figures of game cocks.

"It used to amuse me," Pritchard said, "that whenever I was traveling in a dangerous combat area, there was always a heavily armed ring of men around me. I know there was a detail of men to watch over the old man. I guess I was a little hard to watch though, especially when I visited my combat platoons on the battle lines at night. I felt that was important. I learned quickly in the army that you never ask a man to do something you would not do yourself. My men were great fighters."

ALSO HONORED

Pritchard won several medals and commendations himself.

Pritchard recalled: "One of my proudest moments in the war came when Gen. Tony McAuliffe heard talk that my men would be moved to another division. The general told the pentagon that if they took the 614th away from him he would pull his whole division off the line. We stayed and each of us stood a little taller. They were great men, all of them."

Frank Pritchard's balding head reddened a little as he heard one of his men say "the colonel was sort of a poor man's Abe Lincoln to us." His rough voice returned to dominate the scene as he said: "Look, enough of that. We lived, ate, worked and fought together for three years. I never thought of you men as black. I hope you never thought of me as white."

A silence struck the room before Col. Pritchard continued, "and now, I've heard enough praise of the old man. Somebody get me a drink." Several black men stumbled over themselves as they rushed to obey the colonel's command.

Grand Ledge Teacher Group Position Told

No Summer Vote on Contract

By MIKE WAGONER
State Journal Staff Writer

GRAND LEDGE—Members of the Grand Ledge Education Association (GLEA) will not be asked to ratify a master contract agreement with the Board of Education during the summer vacation this year, a role of Goldenberg, GLEA president, said today.

This means that if teachers in the association have not ratified the 1971-72 contract prior to June 11, when summer vacation begins, they will not be asked to vote on the agreement until school begins in the fall, Goldenberg said.

'ONE OF 2 THINGS'

"This will do one of two things, either expedite negotiations this spring or delay ratification through the summer," Goldenberg said.

If no agreement is reached before June 11, the GLEA bargaining team will still be authorized to negotiate with the board team through the summer months, he said.

The most recent GLEA membership newsletter reported that the association believes that summer meetings "are unfair to those members who are out of town..."

"Teachers have summer jobs and attend summer school, and it is difficult to contact them," Goldenberg said.

GLEA met once last summer and defeated a ratification proposition, but school sources

said that two other scheduled GLEA meetings failed to produce a quorum.

The 1970-71 contract was not ratified by GLEA until Aug. 31, the first day teachers were required to report to schools. Classes began Sept. 1, on schedule.

NOT SURE

Kenneth T. Beagle, superintendent, said today that he is not sure of the implications of GLEA's new resolution.

"I don't know what discus-

sion took place at their meeting or whether or not teachers would work without a contract to allow school to open on time in the fall," Beagle said.

"We have not received a communication as yet from GLEA even announcing their intent to begin negotiations."

Goldenberg said that a letter requesting a starting date would be mailed to the school board today.

"We hope we can begin negotiations within the next week," Goldenberg said.

MSU Gets Manuscripts Of Tent Show Dramas

The melodramatic era of the tent show is over, but a new collection at the Michigan State University Library provides a unique perspective of old-time rural Americana.

Manuscript and typescript copies of 75 tent show dramas from the repertory of the Rosier Players have been loaned to the library for duplication by Harold Rosier of Jackson. The Players, one of the last tent show companies in existence, last performed in Brighton in 1969.

During the last half of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century, the traveling shows, played under modified circus tents, flourished in rural areas of the Midwest, South and Southwest.

The plays, often written by the actors themselves, lifted from novels, or pirated from successful plays, confirm what Harold Rosier has said of the tent show: "It was just entertainment. If you wanted culture, you didn't go."

Attitudes reflected in the plays are those of rural America—virtues of agrarian cultures, small town-big city conflicts, and the honey side of life.

Some of the titles in the MSU collection, which includes both comedy and serious drama, show the flavor of the tent show: "Cinderella Sue or He'll be for Ramson," "Gypsy Sweetheart," and "As the Shadow Falls or Paid, a Debt."