

The Book Shelf

ARMY LIFE IN A BLACK REGIMENT, by Thomas Westworth Higginson. Introduction by Howard Mumford Jones. Michigan State University Press, \$4.95. Howard Mumford Jones, in his introduction, describes this book as an expression of yearning of the north for the south, for color, for warmth, for a simpler and healthier way of life than that of industrialized cities. A lesser appeal, he says, is the study of a race that was, for most Northerners of that day, unknown.

Jones goes on to say, "For once the pen of the writer was touched with the incommunicable power that turns writing into literary art."

The book is about experiences, thoughts and observations of Col. Thomas Westworth Higginson, who was offered, and accepted, the command of the First South Carolina Volunteers, the first regiment composed of ex-slaves mustered into the service of the Federal government in the Civil War. The book throughout is the expression of his sympathy for a downtrodden people, and his efforts to improve their status in life.

SIMILAR COMMAND

Perhaps I should not have been asked to review this book, because, for me, there is one outstanding chapter, "The Negro as A Soldier." I, too, have commanded Negroes in training and in combat, and it gave me a chance to compare my observations of the Negro soldier of 1860-65 with the Negro soldier as Higginson saw him during the days of the Civil War.

So, if the rest of this review is more about Pritchard's Black Gamecocks than Higginson's book, I hope I may be forgiven.

Before comparing these soldiers of the two periods, it is necessary to say that in neither World War I nor World War II was the Negro soldier highly regarded by white troops. The most sympathetic and understanding observer would have to agree that, as a general rule, Negro organizations fell far short of the white soldier in combat, and the Saturday Evening Post, during the hostilities in Korea, carried an article about the 24th Infantry regiment that was the worst condemnation of any military organization I have ever read.

But Higginson's men were good combat soldiers and my soldiers were good combat soldiers. He writes that the mass of his regiment rose to the same level under excitement and were more excitable than whites, but neither more nor less courageous. With that I agree.

MORE TO FIGHT FOR

He says that his men had more for which to fight than white troops, which was true then, for had the North lost or had his men been captured, they would have been returned to slavery or killed.

The Negro soldiers in World Wars I and II felt that they had little reason to be risking their lives, because, in many sections of the country, especially in sections of the south where so many army training camps were located, they were downtrodden, abused and placed on a level hardly above that of animals.

"You tell us we are equals of the white soldier in combat, yet we cannot vote, eat in a white restaurant, go into a white post exchange or generally associate with whites," many of them said to me. "What do we have to fight for?"

Higginson had no trouble getting volunteers for dangerous missions, nor did I. He found men who were naturally daring, who hungered for adventure and were constantly seeking it, and so did I find



COLONEL PRITCHARD

such men. Not only that, but some of my Negro officers and enlisted men suggested such things as night combat patrols and other missions not generally enjoyed by troops of any color.

ELEMENT OF RELIGION

He speaks of the other decency of language of his freed-slave soldiers, which leads to the observation that things have changed. He says they were strongly religious. One of my companies offered prayer before every meal, but a Negro captain said to me directly after one such incident "these men are not religious, they have no conception of religion such as my mother has."

Higginson declares that love of drill made his troops easier to keep in hand than white troops. My soldiers could outperform any white outfit I ever saw on a drill field, and I realize the value of drill is a disciplinary way, but surely they were not easier to "keep in hand" than white troops.

Were freed slaves better soldiers than Negroes from the north? he asks himself. His answer is that the southern Negroes were more docile and affectionate than those from the north. I doubt that condition prevails today. But I did find that northern Negroes, with more education, were able to learn more rapidly. He found, for instance, it was easier to teach Negro troops how to shoot than it was to teach white soldiers. I found the opposite to be true.

He says that at first his men were reluctant to take orders from Negro non-commissioned officers. I believe my soldiers accepted orders from military superiors of their own race as well as from whites, especially after they came to know and respect them.

NATURAL LEADERS

Higginson, as every troop commander does, soon found the natural leaders among his men. A few of them were outstanding and, with more education, should have been officers, he writes.

Because they had fewer opportunities to develop leadership in civil life before joining the army, I found fewer good leaders among Negroes than one finds among white troops. But some of mine were outstanding. I had officers and non-commissioned officers that I would put up against any leaders I ever saw, absolutely superior in every way. Some of my colored men got battlefield commissions, and looking back, I realize that I had many sergeants who should have been so promoted.

"Would my men fight?" Well, one Distinguished Service Cross, about eight Silver Stars and perhaps 40 Bronze Stars did not constitute the best record in the army, but surely not the worst. And one of my platoons received the Presidential Unit citation for a particularly vicious fight, the account of which appeared in the book, "The Hundred Best Stories From Stars and Stripes."

MORE TO LEARN

My men had far more to learn than Higginson's men. His people had muskets for weapons and mules and wagons for transportation. My people had rifles, carbines, machine guns, three-inch anti-tank guns, rocket launchers and other weapons, and had to learn to operate tracked vehicles, armored cars, motorcycles and trucks. And some of my men were like his, in that their previous experiences had been limited to mules and wagons and plows.

How did white troops react toward Negro soldiers who demonstrated they were fighters?

Perhaps this will answer. I had two reconnaissance platoons that alternated with the reconnaissance troop of the

A folk singer-guitarist and a full symphony orchestra will appear at Michigan State university this week in two M. S. U. lecture-concert series programs.

Tenor Richard Dyer-Bennet will perform Monday night, Feb. 6, in Series B, and William Steinberg is to conduct the Pittsburgh Symphony orchestra Wednesday, Feb. 8, in Series A. Both concerts are to be presented in the University auditorium and are to begin at 8:15 p. m.

Dyer-Bennet, a presentation of repertoire S. Hurst, is called the "20th Century Troubadour." Born in England, Dyer-Bennet grew up in California. He thought of becoming a professional athlete, but turned instead to his voice and guitar.

RARE ART SONGS

The balladeer is somewhat of a scholar about his music. He looks for the out-of-the-way folk songs and seeks out the rare art songs of great composers, especially in the little-known music of the 16th and 17th centuries.

A baritone, he need not rely on English-language songs only. His M. S. U. performance will consist of songs from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Sweden, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, France and the United States, from the 13th to the 20th centuries.

When he can, he uses the original accompaniment for a tune. Otherwise, he uses ac-

A. J. M. Smith To Lecture on New Poetry

"Fire in the Attic," will be the subject of a lecture by Arthur J. M. Smith, professor of English in Michigan State university, poet, and editor of the Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, at 8 p. m. Tuesday, Feb. 7, in the Union ballroom.

The lecture will cover emergence of a brilliant new poetry in Canada in the past few years. Prof. Smith's program is sponsored by the Union board and the M. S. U. department of English.

The lecture which will be free to the public, is to be one of a series planned for speakers on various aspects of contemporary literature.

Kedzie Clubs

The Kedzie Clubs of Lansing and East Lansing are scheduled to meet this Sunday at 2 p. m. in the home of Mrs. Earl Peckham, 208 Kensington rd., East Lansing. Dawn Allan, soprano, will present "American Music Scenes from Opera." Members to perform will be Cindy Cheney, Raymond Hanson, Bonnie Evans and Allison Smith.

Best Sellers

Created by *Esquire* Weekly
in 1955
and re-issued in 1958
THE LIFE OF THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVELISTS AND SHORT STORIES—1958
THE LIFE AND POETRY OF THE GREAT AMERICAN POETS—1958
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THE LIFE AND POETRY OF THE GREAT AMERICAN HISTORIANS—1958

200th Infantry division in leading the division in that last mad dash for Innsbruck, Austria, and the Boomer pass. I had many losses, inflicted by isolated groups of German soldiers who did not realize that further resistance was futile. The conduct and fighting ability of my soldiers so impressed the 10th "Recon" men that, after VE Day, the white soldiers were too often too liberal hosts at the wine shops at Innsbruck.

My soldiers, more than white soldiers, I believe, took care of the "Old Man." I noticed, when with my reconnaissance soldiers ahead of our own forces, several of them seemed to be detailed to protect me, keep me out of trouble, perhaps.

BATTLE LOSSES

In more than three years with Negro troops, I never had an order questioned. I never felt fear of them, and they always did, and did well, whatever they were asked to do. I had very little trouble in Europe with the men I took overseas with me, but I did have trouble with others sent to replace battle losses.

Integration in the armed services should be the answer to most of the troubles of the past. Given equal rights, equal tasks and equal rewards, there should be no difference between the performance of the Negro and the white soldier provided their educational backgrounds are equal.

Records at Washington will verify all statements I have made about my organization, the 84th Tank Destroyer battalion. If the members of that battalion are as good citizens today as they were soldiers in World War II, there should be no complaints about them.

—FRANK S. PRITCHARD,
Colonel, Army of the
United States (Retired)

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