

## THE BUFFALOES IN FRANCE

BY LIEUT. OSCEOLO E. MCKAINE

*Lieutenant McKaine is one of the negro officers who commanded the 367th Infantry of the American army—The "Buffaloes"—at the battlefront. They were the nearest Allied troops to Metz when the armistice order came to cease fighting.*

**T**HE Black Crusaders landed in France with the same emotions Elijah must have had when he landed in heaven. They had made a strange and perilous journey from the terra firma where they had played and toiled, which they hated and loved, to a strange semi-mythical region, where a grand reception and a cordial welcome, where a square deal and an absolute equality awaited them. France was a terrestrial heaven where they could forget that they were sinners simply because they were black. They were not disillusioned. France proved herself more free from those color caste distinctions which had, everywhere under the Stars and Stripes, made them feel a people apart, an abnormality in the body of its citizens, than their fondest dreams could have conceived. They found that the "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" inscribed on her national escutcheon were more than high sounding words, for they expressed a national idealism that guided them in all of their daily intercourse. They found that France was really free; that the Government of France was the father of all Frenchmen; that all Frenchmen enjoyed the same economic, political and educational equality without regard to color or section. They discovered, also, that France had no man made laws governing social equality; but, on the contrary, submitted obediently to the great natural law of individual selection. The absolute lack of color caste in this great republic dazzled and bewildered them for a moment even as the superb splendors of heaven must have dazzled and bewildered Elijah.

America suffered by the comparison.

If you can imagine how Elijah must have felt when he first penetrated the inner portals of the heavenly gates you can obtain a slight conception of how the Buffaloes felt when they were received by France in her cities, churches and homes.



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The French should have added another word to those on their national escutcheon—Service—for the French serve. The colored soldier has learnt that if he would be a full fledged citizen he must serve—serve until it hurts—or kills.

For the duration of the war he has put aside his grievances; but he is determined that the new physical liberation of Belgium, Rumania and Serbia will also mean complete economic, political and educational liberation for himself and his race. The process will be a little different, the results a little different, but the sum totals absolutely the same. He feels that any inhabitant of a country who willingly, nay eagerly, offers himself for the supreme sacrifice in defending that country's honor, liberty and peace has an inalienable right to share equally in that honor, liberty and the prosperities of peace. He keenly resents the double battle he has had to fight, the double burden he has had to carry. Not only has he had to fight the enemy in No Man's Land, but he has had to fight at the same time his traditional oppressors and enemies in the rear. He was weaponless in the battles with the latter, for they were his countrymen and the enemy was at our gates.

He feels that an unfair handicap has been placed upon the full expression of his desire to serve. He feels that any Americans who committed any act which would lessen our chances for an early victory should be interned with the rest of the enemy, for they were as guilty of disloyalty to the flag as the German who blew up munition factories. Because his first duty was to win the war he ceased fighting for the compensation for past services. He further inquires of himself his peculiar status. How is it possible for a people to eulogize a certain citizen for his bravery in battle and then deny him the right to use public accommodations equally with the uneulogized?

What manner of people be these who in time of national need select certain citizens to guard its capitol and then deny them the right of economic equality?

Can it be possible for people whose motto is "A square deal" and who live under a government whose very foundation is the freest possible individualism, whose superstructure is a revolt against "taxation without representation," whose most beautiful embellishment is a "Government of the People, for the People, by the People," to include in the defenders of this noble edifice a certain class of citizens whose very lives are nearly



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hopelessly imperiled by their duties, and place them where the grim shadow of death may forever obscure the beautiful sunshine of life and deny them the right to vote?

Is the servant to remain without compensation for his services?

These self inquiries are recurrent and constant. His homecoming will give him the answer.

Perhaps the most significant and important phase of the war's reaction is the enthusiastic and unconditional acknowledgment by the colored soldier of intelligent, efficient and successful black leadership. He has acquired an inordinate and passionate love and respect for the colored officers. The black man in the ranks demands black superiors. This acknowledgment, this love and respect forever refutes the contention that black men could not successfully lead black men, for these black officers led their Buffaloes successfully and sometimes brilliantly in the carnage of Chateau Thierry, the bloody and bitter Argonne and in the eleventh hour drive on Metz. When the peace bells tolled their first stroke its echoes found the old 15th New York (colored) the nearest American troops to the Rhine, and the 367th Infantry (the Buffaloes) the nearest Allied troops to Metz.

The white and colored Americans in the ranks mixt nearly everywhere, indiscriminately. There were times when they ate out of the same mess outfits, drank out of the same canteen and bunked in the same hay pile at night. They—the white and colored soldiers—have been seen strolling and eating with French women without the least exhibition of embarrassment. Many times white soldiers have invited the Buffaloes over to their billets for a good time, and they have fairly lived among us. We *Continued*

sang together, played together, ate together, slept together and fought together. The world was safe for democracy. These men will not hold these friendships lightly. These white "bunkies" of the Buffaloes will not subject them to the old humiliating prejudices. The Buffaloes have gained a new respect and knowledge of their fairer brothers. Neither will forget easily. These war attachments and alliances have been welded together by a common ideal, a common country, a common danger and a reciprocal respect and admiration; peace will weld them closer.

The white soldier has learned that it was a psychical and intellectual impossibility for the colored soldier to have lived in glorious America for more than three hundred years, attend its schools, study its history, its literature, absorb its ideals, its principles, its culture, and, yes, serve its best families, without becoming thoroly Americanized, without becoming an inte-



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The colored soldier has learned that there are millions of his white brothers who are really democratic in spirit and practise; that they have considered him a man apart, a foreigner, because they did not know him, because they had not investigated him impartially, because they did not understand him nor properly appreciate his marvelous progress under their tutelage.

Contrary to general belief among some of the whites, the colored soldier, broadly speaking, is more anxious to get back home than the whites. In spite of the fact that he has experienced what it means to be really free; in spite of the fine, cordial relations existing between him and the French; in spite of the fact that he has penetrated the hitherto mystic veil of white society by his associations with the French of all classes and found warmth and welcome everywhere; in spite of the injustices, discriminations, indignities and perhaps lynchings, he knows he will have to face and fight. he yearns to return home—for he is an American.

*Metz Sector. France*