

Synopsis of the testimony of Lt. Aaron B. Cronkrite of Co. "A" 328th Labor En. Glass Junction w

1. There is a mob of about 200 men. This squad shall be obeyed by pvt. Hadley Braveboy commanding officer Capt. Wood and the and striking Sgt. Aaron B. Cronkrite the said Braveboy ment in chains gathered around to yield to the dangerous weapons



1918, at Looking e encamped. Commissioned officer and his order was dis- led all orders from Later the said pvt. Cyrus G. Wood his try out the order of t by taking a club t. Wood and I (Lt. Sgt. Hewitt and placed e said Braveboy in con soldiers including pris s release. Upon my re abs, rocks and other d

2. Being ordered (Lt. Aaron B. Cronkrite) our mules by the mob and later attempting to make our way on foot by the railroad we were again cut off by the mob which crossed the river below well and forced us back. At this time the locomotive train for Co. "A" was at Glass Junction and we boarded it. I (Lt. Cronkrite) told the engineer not to stop as there was a mob in the woods. As we passed the place where the mob was congregated they boarded the train and climbed into the cab and ordered the engineer armed with clubs, rocks and other dangerous weapons. I (Lt. Cronkrite) ordered the engineer to stop the train and to caution the mob. The mob replied back, "we are going to kill you and that God Damn nigger."

The Mutiny at Pisgah Forest

Arming myself with a coupling pin I held them off while Sgt. Floyd jumped from the train and started running through the woods, quite a number followed yelling "we'll get him, get the other man", but we (the train crew and myself) forced them from the train and proceeded to headquarters for help.

By Jan Hodges

Aaron B. Cronkrite

Aaron B. Cronkrite,

2nd. Lt. QMC. NA.

WITNESSES

CHARGES

- 1- Wood, Capt. Cyrus B.
- 2- Cronkite, Lt. Aaron B.
- 3- Floyd, Sgt. Milton
- 4- Hewitt, Sgt. James C.
- 5- Jenkins, Sgt. Alex

The court-martial at Camp Jackson, South Carolina, ended; the military panel had considered the evidence and made a decision that two-thirds of its members agreed upon.

All that remained was for the outcome to be announced.

Col. J. T. Conrad, president of the trial, faced the 22 prisoners across the plain wooden table as Capt. William L. Martin stood to read the charges and sentences:

Headley Braveboy, Pomeroy Jackson, Tom Nelson; you have been found guilty of mutiny against the US army, threatening an officer, attempted murder of a non-commissioned officer, and disobeying orders. You are sentenced to be executed by musketry squad.

Captain Martin went on to read the sentences of the remaining 18 prisoners. All were accused of some degree of disobedience or mutinous behavior, found guilty, and sentenced to either life imprisonment or 20 years at hard labor.

Life of the African American Soldier in World War I

The military draft of 1917 did not discriminate. It merely required all young men to report for military duty. But it would take decades to develop a culture of tolerance and respect in the military. In World War I, African American soldiers in France were often assigned to menial jobs: digging, collecting stones to build roads, chopping wood for bridges, and burying the dead. African American and white soldiers in France had one thing in common, however; all were recognized by their uniforms as American soldiers.

In the United States, African American soldiers were isolated from the rest of the division to which they were assigned; they were separate but unequal. They had different sleeping quarters, often of lower quality than the white soldiers. They received different training—white soldiers trained for combat; the majority of African American soldiers did not. White officers led every African American unit because it was believed that black soldiers were inferior and unqualified to be leaders.

Stateside, the African American soldier was often required to wear army regulation denim work clothes instead of the usual olive drab uniform, ostensibly because of the manual labor he was doing. Instead of being a proud soldier, he felt like a common laborer.

These issues came to a head in the 5th Division during a seemingly trivial task to repair a small railroad line in the Pisgah Forest of North Carolina.

That episode and its surviving trial records reveal much about the stark realities of the segregated military at that time—of the status and harsh treatment of African American soldiers and of the difficulties and dangers of maintaining that military system.

Camp Jackson, S.C. Home to the 5th Division

In preparation for fighting with the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I, the 5th Division was headquartered at Camp Logan, Texas, but most of its units were scattered across the eastern United States. It came together as a division in France in May 1918. A portion of the division, consisting of replacement detachments, remained in Camp Jackson, just outside Columbia, South Carolina.

Opposite: Black soldiers of the 93rd Division, 317th Engineering Regiment, working in the Argonne Forest, October 1918. Background: The testimony of Lt. Aaron B. Cronkite discusses the mutiny at the Looking Glass camp in July 1918.

Witness Name	Charge Code	IV	V
Berry, James	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Inabinett, Leonville	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Jackson, Pomeroy	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Little, James T.	2-3-7-Q	—	5
Love, John	2-3-7-Q	2-3	—
Murray, Robert	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Nelson, Tom	2-3-7-Q	2-3	—
Phoenix, Richard	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Pitts, Fate	2-3-7-Q	2-3	—
Radley, Simon	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Richardson, Sam	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Riley, Thomas	2-3-7-Q	—	5
Sease, Jacob	2-3-7-Q	—	—
Simmons, Matthew	2-3-7-Q	—	5
Simons, Simuel	2-3-7-Q	2-3-Q	5
Skinner, Pete	2-3-7-Q	—	5
Warren, Paul	2-3-7-Q	2-3	—
Williams, Lee	2-3-7-Q	—	—
Williams, Talmag	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Wingfield, Mondroe	2-3-7-Q	2-3	5
Young, [unclear]	2-3-7-Q	—	—
Braveboy, Headley	2-3-7-Q	—	—



The Densely wooded Pisgah Forest, where men of the 328th Labor Battalion were sent to rebuild and repair logging roads in June 1918.

Camp Jackson burst whole from the earth in 1917 as the United States built up its military strength and capabilities.

Before the Armistice was declared, the camp housed over 80,000 men. The buildings, constructed of local wood, were crude but serviceable. In the beginning, roads in and out of the camp were few and mostly made of packed dirt.

Army organization was imposed early and thoroughly in the camp. Closely followed regulations governed the upkeep of the barracks and schedules for sleeping, eating, reveille, calisthenics, drilling, training classes, and retreat. Soldiers took classes in

subjects as diverse as automotive repair, typing, handling and caring for weapons, and engineering.

Newly minted soldiers drilled on the sandy fields, learning how to shoot, how to dig trenches, and when to wear a gas mask. They learned the crafts that were important to an army: how to maintain motor vehicles, shoe mules, type, build bridges and roads, and install telephone poles and lines.

That was army life for the newly inducted white soldier.

African American soldiers were not afforded many opportunities to learn a skill or trade. They were assigned to manual labor in

engineering and labor battalions, where they were put to use building, digging, and hauling.

While some African American companies overseas trained with the French and fought with valor when called upon, most black soldiers dug graves, built roads and bridges, repaired railroads, and hauled supplies.

A Base Made Up of Tents At Looking Glass Creek

Pisgah Forest was primal, thick with hardwood trees, such as red oak, yellow poplar, hemlock, and chestnut oak, and an abundance of fir trees. Part of the Appalachian Mountains, Pisgah Forest snaked its way through western North Carolina, where the tallest of the mountains in the chain had been pushed up, opening paths for rivers, streams, and waterfalls. It was a beautiful and wild area, prime for logging.

The men of the 328th Labor Battalion, 5th Division, were moved to Pisgah Forest on June 17, 1918, with a mission to rebuild and repair logging roads, a task vital to the area's logging and railroad interests.

The battalion headquarters and base camp were built at Avery Creek, in the lower portion of the mountains. From there, companies were sent to perform tasks at temporary camps higher up in the mountains. On July 4, Company A trekked to Looking Glass Creek, close to the Davison River, to establish camp and begin clearing the dense woods. The camp was six miles from battalion headquarters and seven miles from the nearest town.

The only available transportation was by mule or by catching a ride on the logging train as it passed near the camp late in the afternoon.

A series of tents, each large enough to hold several men, lined the sides of the main path through the Looking Glass camp. Far down the row of tents lay the guardhouse, which itself was a tent, in which the guards lived and slept along with the inmates. Some yards from the back of the tents was the creek where men would wash their clothes.



Above: Headquarters at Camp Jackson, South Carolina, in 1921. The camp housed over 80,000 men of the 5th Division before the Armistice. Below: A general view of tents and barracks at Camp Jackson, ca. 1921. Bottom: African American troops during inspection at Camp Jackson, South Carolina, ca. 1921. In the United States during World War I, they were isolated from the rest of the division to which they were assigned; they were separate but unequal.



Close to a corral, another tent held the company's riding equipment.

The enlisted men of Company A were African American. Most were illiterate, and few had skills. In 1918, only 53 years distant from the Civil War, they had left the land and had hoped for something better in the U.S. Army.

Three white officers, two lieutenants and a captain, were attached to Company A, and among them they had one revolver and six rounds of ammunition. On the day of the mutiny, one of the lieutenants was away on an assignment.

Under the leadership of Capt. Cyrus Wood, the men cleared space to build the camp and settled into a routine that quickly lost military crispness and discipline. Within two weeks of arriving, the daily drill was discontinued.

A Typical Day in July Erupts with Discontent

A murmur of discontent spread among the enlisted men as the detail in the mountains continued.

Men were unhappy for several reasons, including a chronic shortage of food. Their only entertainment was what they created for themselves; card games were popular. When they had the rare opportunity for leave, they had to jump onto the daily logging train and ride it down the mountain to the nearest town.

At Camp Jackson, soldiers drilled every day, did calisthenics, and practiced the skills they learned in training. At Camp Looking Glass, no other Army protocols were followed after reveille. The men felt they were being treated as common laborers. Except when they left camp, they were not permitted to wear the cherished olive drab uniforms that identified them as American soldiers.

Moreover, the enlisted men were certain that a few of the noncommissioned officers, who were of mixed race, were bearing tales about them to the officers, telling them who

was slacking, who was not following orders, and who was speaking against the officers.

July 17, 1918, began like every other day at Camp Looking Glass. Men woke up early, went to breakfast, and then lined up for roll call. Those on duty left to cut wood and clear the forest, and the rest loitered around camp with nothing to do.

When supper time came, the men lined up to get their food. That day the men received two slices of bread each, so no complaints could be made about the quantity of food. It was a quiet and orderly process until Headley Braveboy decided that he wanted more lemonade. Instead of getting in line again and waiting his turn, Braveboy marched to the front and demanded more lemonade, setting off the events of the evening.

Seeing the disturbance, Captain Wood ordered the mess sergeant, James Hewitt, to arrest Braveboy and put him in the guard tent. Hewitt approached Braveboy, but the soldier picked up a stick and brandished it. Hewitt ordered him to drop the club, but Braveboy refused.

Wood stepped in and marched Braveboy down to the guard tent, followed closely by Lt. Aaron Cronkrite, who held a pistol leveled at Braveboy's head. By that time, the activity had attracted the attention of many of the men, who followed the trio down the trail to the guard tent.

Upon reaching the guard tent, Braveboy refused to enter, and Captain Wood ordered a corporal to fasten two halter chains around his neck. Wood left the tent, leaving Braveboy in the custody of Lieutenant Cronkrite. The crowd, angered by the sight of Headley Braveboy standing with chains around his neck, turned to the officers in a threatening manner and yelled, "Turn him loose." Cronkrite ordered the chains to be removed.

WITNESSES		CHARGES				
	I	II	III	IV	V	
1- Wood, Capt. Cyrus G.						
2- Cronkrite, Lt. Aaron B.						
3- Floyd, Sgt. Milton						
4- Hewitt, Sgt. James C.						
5- Jenkins, Sgt. Alex. S.						
6- Lewis, Sgt. Sanders						
7- Flemming, Cpl. Henry						
8- Sanders, Pvt. Eugene						
9- Chandler, Pvt. William						
10- Threadgill, Pvt. Joseph T.						
11- Brown, Pvt. Benjamin						
12- Washington, Pvt. Joe						
Berry, James	2-3-7-J-Q-V	2	2-3-8-A-U-V-J-G-Q	2-3	5	
Brabinett, Lemille	2-3-7-J-Q-V	2	2-3-11-8-V	2-3	5	
Jackson, Pomeroy	2-3-J-P-V	2	2-3-8-11-A-F-G-T-U-V	2-3	5	
Little, James T.	2-3-7-Q-V	2-3-7-Q	3-8-V	-	5	
Love, John	2-3-7-J-	2	2-3-11-A	2-3		
Murray, Robert	2-3-7-E-J-P-V	2	2-3-8-A-G-V	2-3	5	
Nelson, Tom	2-3-7-J-P-V	2	2-3-8-11-A-F-G-T-U-V	2-3		
Phoenix, Richard	2-3-7-J-V	2	2-3-V	2-3	5	
Pitte, Fate	2-3-7-V	2	2-3-8-V	2-3		
Radly, Simon	2-3-7-Q-V	2-H	2-3-8-A-G-J-V	2-3	5	
Richardson, Sam	2-3-7-V	2	2-3-V	2-3	5	
Riley, Thomas	2-3-7-	2	3-A	-	5	
Sease, Jacob	2-3-7-V	2	3-8-Q-V	-		
Simmons, Matthew	2-3-7-I-V	2	2-3-8-V	-	5	
Simons, Simuel	2-3-7-V	2	2-3-8-V	2-3-Q	5	
Skinner, Pete	3-7-V	2-7	3-8-V	-	5	
Warren, Paul	2-3-7-J-P-V	2	2-3-A-F-G-V	2-3		
Williams, Lee	2-3-7-V	2	3-J-V	-		
Williams, Talenage	2-3-7-12-V	2	2-3-8-V	2-3	5	
Wingfield, Mondroe	2-3-7-Q-V	2	2-3-8-V	2-3	5	
Young, Ed	2-3-7	2	3	-	5	
Braveboy, Headley	—	—	2-3-11-A-T-U	2-3	5	
Brennon, Primas						
Bennison, Arnett						
Singler, George						
Sauls, Beaac						

A court-martial list of the defendants links their names with the charges filed against them and the witnesses testifying on their role in the mutiny.

Mutiny Changes Venue To the Logging Train

The situation was clearly getting out of control, and Captain Wood ordered two mules to be saddled so that Cronkrite and Sgt. Milton Floyd could make the long trek down the mountain to battalion headquarters at Camp Avery to get help.

Enlisted men raced to the corral and confronted Floyd, preventing him from getting

the mules. When he reported empty-handed to Captain Wood, Wood directed Cronkrite and Floyd to start walking down the railroad track in the hope that a logging train would come by. If one did not appear, they would walk to headquarters.

Cronkrite and Floyd were in luck. Shortly after they started, a logging train was making its slow, five-mile-an-hour chug down the mountain, and they climbed on. Their

To learn more about

- Early steps in desegregation, go to www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/spring/weaver.html.
- President Harry Truman's executive order desegregating the U.S. military, go to www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=84.
- Jackie Robinson's Army court-martial, go to www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2008/spring/.

luck soon ran out as the enlisted men who were following—including Braveboy, Pomeroy Jackson, and Tom Nelson—also jumped aboard.

Standing on top of the coal tender, Nelson picked up a lump of coal and threw it at Cronkrite, who dodged out of the way. In the meantime, Sergeant Floyd was standing in the firemen's box, and Nelson climbed into the cab after him.

Braveboy and another mutineer went after Cronkrite, who picked up a coupling pin to defend himself. Floyd managed to get onto the running board and jumped off the slow-moving train with the mutineers in hot pursuit.

Afraid for his life, Floyd ran as fast as he could, but the mutineers caught up with him.

"We can't kill both of the sons of bitches,

but we'll beat the hell out of this one," yelled one of the mutineers. Nelson pulled out a small knife, put it against Floyd's face, and made him kiss it.

Several of the men began to pummel the sergeant with blows to the head, while others ran up behind and kicked him. They dragged him toward the lumbering train with the intention of throwing him under the wheels. Floyd was saved by another enlisted man who locked his arms with Floyd's around a tree and held tight until the train passed beyond the horizon. The mutineers continued to lash out at Floyd while they dragged him back to camp, where they turned him loose.

Cronkrite in the meantime made his way down the mountain to battalion headquarters and relayed the tale of the mutiny to the

commander. Help arrived at Camp Looking Glass around 10 p.m. Cronkrite and 18 officers from headquarters met with Captain Wood. After learning that the men had been sent to their tents, the officers took immediate steps to prevent anyone from leaving.

The men were rousted from their tents and paraded before the officers. In the harsh light of a bonfire augmented by a single flashlight, Cronkrite and Floyd identified the men who assaulted them. Wood, the mess sergeant, and other noncommissioned officers of Company A identified those who participated in the initial lemonade incident.

In all, 22 men were singled out, held under guard, and moved back to Camp Jackson, where they found themselves subject to military discipline and awaiting court-martial in a solid wood guardhouse.

Left: Court-martial orders detailing the charges against Headley Braveboy and others. The first charge was that of violating the "66th Article of War" by creating a mutiny. Right: The defense listened carefully to the testimony of Capt. Cyrus Wood, the officer in charge at Camp Looking Glass. He testified that the officers suspected a brewing conspiracy among the men and that "we suspected trouble."

GENERAL COURT-MARTIAL } WAR DEPARTMENT,
ORDERS, No. 281. } WASHINGTON, September 13, 1919.

Before a general court-martial convened at Camp Jackson, S. C., January 10, 1919, pursuant to Special Orders, No. 359, Headquarters, Camp Jackson, Columbia, S. C., December 26, 1918, and orders amendatory thereto, of which Col. J. T. CONRAD, 59th Field Artillery, was president, and Capt. WILLIAM L. MARTIN, 4th regiment, F. A. R. D., trial judge advocate, and First Lieut. M. J. DOUGHERTY, 13th Regiment, F. A. R. D., assistant trial judge advocate, were arraigned and tried—

Private *Headley Braveboy*, 1872728 * * * Private *Pomeroy Jackson*, 1870157 * * * Private *Tom Nelson*, 1888426 * * * 444th Labor Battalion, Quartermaster Corps.

Each and every one of the accused was then arraigned upon the following charges and specifications:

CHARGE I.—"Violation of the 66th Article of War".

Specification 1.—In that Privates *Headley Braveboy* * * * *Pomeroy Jackson* * * * and *Tom Nelson* * * * all of 444th Reserve Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., U. S. A., then Company A, 328th Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., N. A., acting jointly and in pursuance of a common intent, did, at the Camp of said Battalion, Pisgah Forest, N. C., on or about the 17th day of July, 1918, attempt to create a mutiny in said 444th Reserve Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., U. S. A., then Company A, 328th Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., N. A., by urging members of said 444th Reserve Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., U. S. A., then Company A, 328th Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., N. A., to refuse to obey the orders of their superior officer, Captain Cyrus G. Wood, Q. M. C., U. S. A., and their superior officer, 2nd Lieutenant Aaron B. Cronkrite, Q. M. C., U. S. A., to disperse, to perform duties, to go to their tents, and respect a lawful order of arrest".

Specification 2.—"In that Privates *Headley Braveboy* * * * *Pomeroy Jackson* * * * and *Tom Nelson* * * * all of 444th Reserve Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., U. S. A., then Company A, 328th Labor Battalion, Q. M. C., N. A., acting jointly and in pursuance of a common intent, did, at the Camp of said Battalion, Pisgah Forest, N. C., on or about the 17th day of July,

On one occasion only the baker sent the fifty pounds on Saturday instead of the usual one hundred pounds, so that there was no bread on Sunday. This limitation upon the quantity of bread issued was removed as soon as the Battalion bakery began to operate.

I further swear that when the Company was camped at Avery Creek, the Non-commissioned Officers had trouble in getting work out of some of the men, and that after I had reprimanded them, the results were slightly better for a time. I had told Lieut. CRONKRITE to look out for POMEROY JACKSON, LEWIS IMBENNETT, JAMES BERRY, SAM RICHARDSON, HEADLEY BRAVEBOY, JAMES LITTLE and PETER SKINNER (these last two being savel-droppers who hung around and carried reports of Officer's conversation to the rest of the Company) RICHARD PHOENIX, MATHEW SIMONS, SIMUEL SIMONS, LEE WILLIAMS, TALMAGE WILLIAMS and MONROE WINGFIELD. Several times it looked as though they were getting together in a sort of conspiracy, but we could not get any evidence to prove it.

About July 7th, 1918, four men refused to work; SIMUEL SIMONS and MATHEW SIMONS were two of them; I think LEE WILLIAMS was another, and I have forgotten the fourth one. For about two weeks before the mutiny we were watching the men very closely for signs of concerted action - we expected trouble.

I further swear that on the evening of July 17th, 1918 while we were eating supper, I heard loud talking and went out and found Private BRAVEBOY at the head of the line. Mess Sergeant JAMES C. HEWITT told me that BRAVEBOY had broken into the head of the line, and I told BRAVEBOY to go to the foot of the line, and started back. Then I returned to Sergeant HEWITT to get a complete report on the trouble, and HEWITT said BRAVEBOY had caused trouble in this way at nearly every meal, and was a sort of a bully. I ordered HEWITT to turn BRAVEBOY over to Corporal FLEMING, Corporal of the Guard, as soon as BRAVEBOY had had plenty to eat. When BRAVEBOY had finished eating, I called HEWITT'S attention to the fact that he had not confined him, and told him to get such assistance as was necessary. Then I went back to my tent. I heard a commotion near the mess table, and Lieut. CRONKRITE and I went out and saw BRAVEBOY attacking HEWITT with a club. Lieut. CRONKRITE said "Get your pistol". I went to my tent and got my revolver, which was the only fire-arm of any kind in Camp, and gave it to Lieut. CRONKRITE.

I further swear that I took BRAVEBOY to the Guard Tent, and told him to put down the club which he was carrying. This he refused to do, and once he

In the confusion of getting all the men back into their tents, Headley Braveboy escaped. He crossed the river into the woods, where he stayed the next day.

The following day, he made his way to his mother's home in Lake City, South Carolina. There he slept under a tobacco shed and found work at a tobacco warehouse for a short time. Braveboy moved on to Kingstree, where he picked cotton. He later told investigators from the 5th Division that some people there recognized him and told him that he had "done wrong," so he turned himself in to the local sheriff, who locked him up until the military came for him.

An Army Court-Martial Issues Harsh Sentences

A military court-martial is a process as well as a court hearing. The army has no standing court system; rather, courts come together as needed. Prior to a hearing, an investigation is conducted to determine if a case has merit.

Investigators conducted individual interviews with the enlisted men of Company A, who claimed to know nothing and to have seen nothing of the events of July 17 because they were in their tents playing cards or sleeping. One enlisted man did admit that he went to the nearby stream to wash his clothes, but he also was unaware of any details of the turmoil.

The accused men signed confessions with an "X" because none of them could read or write, even their names. The Judge Advocate General later excluded confessions from the court proceedings.

The trial began on January 10, 1919, and took several days because there were many witnesses. The defense paid special attention to the testimonies of Captain Wood and Lieutenant Cronkrite, and they were recalled multiple times for cross-questioning. Sergeant Floyd testified that he "had considerable trouble with various of the accused in respect to obedience of orders and cited instances where certain of the accused would willfully disobey orders at drill."

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND) ss.

Book 6
2 -V-

I, HEADLEY BRAVEBOY, Private, Company A, 328th Labor Bn, Pisgah Forest, N. C., first being duly sworn and warned that I need make no statement unless I care to do so, and that any statement I may make may be used by the Government as it sees fit in the disposition of my case, depose and say that I am 22 years old; that I was born in Florence County, S. C.; that my mother's name is Cilla Braveboy.

I further swear that on the night of the ruckus at Pisgah Forest we were all lined up to get supper, and when I ate what I had and came back for some lemonade, I went to the rear of the line and when I got up to the front the Mess Sergeant said to "Get out", and he shoved me out. I got a good sized stick and hit him several times, then Capt. Wood took me by one arm and Corporal by the other arm, and they took me to the prison tent. The Corporal was the one who stayed at the prison tent. He put a chain on my neck when Capt. Wood ordered him to, and then Capt. Wood walked away. I told the Corporal to take the chain off my neck. There were a whole lot of boys standing around and they crowded up close and did a lot of cussing and yelled "Take the chain off", and then there was a lot more yelling and cussing, and they kept crowding closer and closer all the time. It looked as though they were going to fight if the chain was not taken off my neck, and they meant trouble. Some of those who were the closest to me and did the most yelling and cussing were Robert Murray, Tom Nelson, Inabinett, Pomeroy Jackson, James Little, Jacob Sease, Simon Radley, Paul Warren, Monroe Wingfield, Isaac Sauls.

I further swear that the Corporal took the chain off my neck then and I ran after him a piece and then I walked away. Some of the other boys persuaded me to go after ~~the~~ Corporal. They said he was going down to Headquarters to get some guns. I went with them over on the railroad track. Some of those who went were Paul Warren, Robert Murray, Isaac Sauls, Pomeroy Jackson and others I can pick out. Some of the boys saw this Corporal and a Lieutenant who was a big man get on the engine, and so I got on the train when it came past, and so did Pomeroy Jackson, Paul Warren, Isaac Sauls, Robert Murray, Monroe Wingfield and others I can pick out. We got pretty close to them while we were crawling over the cars, and we were yelling a lot and said to the Corporal that "he better get off" that we would catch him, so he got off the train and ran across to the woods.

Headley Braveboy freely admitted in his testimony his role in the mutiny and noted the causes of the unrest: that the men had earlier complained about insufficient food and that "these Corporals were toting news" about the men not working hard.

I further swear that the boys said we were not getting enough to eat, and that the Corporal was the cause of it, and the boys said that these Corporals were toting news, and they used to say what they would do to these Corporals when they got a chance. Corporal Floyd was one of them, but I do not remember the names of the others.

I make this statement voluntarily, without any threats having been made against me, and without any promises of immunity or hope of reward. I make it simply because it is the truth.

Headley Braveboy
Mark *with name & initials*

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO before me, the undersigned authority, this 2nd day of October, A. D. 1918.

M-

WITNESSES:

John F. Evans
2nd Lt. U.S.A.
Jordan K. MacEdward
2nd Lt. U.S.A.

C. W. B. Hony
Captain, F A, U S A,
Hqrs. Summary Court Officer,
Camp Jackson, S. C.

The unrest among the enlisted men, according to one defense witness, started in Camp Jackson, when the men were summarily moved from their barracks to a barn to make room for other troops.

W. M. Daniels, the operator of the logging train on the fateful evening, told the panel of how Cronkrite and Floyd climbed aboard the engine of the slow-moving train. About five minutes later, “three colored men came across the tender of the engine and commenced to arguing with Lt. Cronkrite who told them to ‘hush up,’ that they were under arrest.” He further testified that there were “20, 25, or 30 of the men on the flat car back of the engine and they got off and took off through the woods after Floyd.” He did not see anyone make an attempt to strike Floyd.

The defense called in Nathaniel Golden, former adjutant for the 328th Labor Battalion, who testified that Company A did not have close-order drill and reveille and that every company had “some sort of guard tent which was as ineffective as could be, merely a form and show.”

He noted that many complaints had been received about the Company A mess. Golden expressed the opinion that the officers of the battalion “ought to be brought before an efficiency board for negligence and inefficiency.” He said the Captain Wood was a “likeable man, but an inefficient officer,” which he had reported to his commanding officer, who took no action.

Other witnesses for the defense offered no testimony that could diminish the strength of the prosecution’s case.

After the testimony concluded, the board reviewed the evidence and issued its verdict, with harsh sentences that were typical of military justice of the time. Three men—Braveboy, Jackson, and Nelson—received death sentences. The others received sentences of hard labor for 20 years or life. The guilty men were marched back to jail—some fearful, some angry, some bewildered, all despondent.

But in the darkest of times, sometimes a small ray of human kindness shines.

Burwell Henry Boykin of Boykin, South Carolina, owned a large farm and was familiar with many of the laborers in his area since he hired them for seasonal work. Boykin knew one of the defendants, Sam Richardson, and visited him in jail when he heard of the trial.

Upon learning of Richardson’s sentence of hard labor for life, Boykin wrote a letter to the commanding general at Camp Jackson, noting that Richardson was a “very ignorant Negro, but there is nothing vicious about him,” and argued that the evidence against Richardson was flimsy.

When Braveboy was being led to the guard tent after supper, a lieutenant thought he heard Sam Richardson say that he would not help the lieutenant even if he asked for help. Based on such slim evidence, Richardson was found guilty of mutiny. Boykin pointed out that the words, even if uttered by Sam, were impertinent but “did not prove a conspiracy to aid and abet others in the crimes that were committed.”

He offered to employ Richardson as a farm laborer should the Army release him. The Army chose not to release Sam, and he remained in prison.

Sometimes, the guilty experience a bit of luck. Part of the court-martial process is the review of every sentence by a higher authority.

Because the events occurred during the First World War, the court-martial results were forwarded to President Woodrow Wilson for final review and disposition. Wilson was not known for promoting civil rights for African Americans and had even introduced segregation into federal government offices. So it may have surprised the mutineers to learn that Wilson commuted all of their sentences on August 15, 1919. Headley Braveboy, Pomeroy Jackson, and Tom Nelson received sentences of 10 years at hard labor; the rest received sentences of 2 to 5 years at hard labor.

A Postscript

Little was done to advance the cause of African Americans in the military until the late 1940s, when President Harry Truman acted. An African American soldier, returning from service in Europe in 1946 and still in uniform, was pulled off a bus in South Carolina and beaten nearly to death. Truman ordered the Justice Department to investigate. Later in 1946, he established the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, and the next year became the first President to address the NAACP.

In 1948, Truman ordered the desegregation of the U.S. military. “It is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States, the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country’s defense,” Truman wrote.

Sixteen years later, the Civil Rights Act was passed, and in 1989 the first African American, Colin Powell, became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. **P**

NOTE ON SOURCES

The records of the 5th Division from the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in World War I provided most of the information for this article. Especially important for the details of the investigation into the mutiny and trial testimony were the records of the Judge Advocate General (JAG): Judge Advocate Decimal File 201, 5th Division, “Negro Mutiny at Pisgah Forest,” Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), Record Group 120, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

Internet sites provided background information about Pisgah Forest: (www.lib.ncsu.edu/special_collections/forestry/schenck/series_vii/biltmore_estate/pisgah/pisgah_forest.html) and the 5th Division (www.militaryvetshop.com/History/5thID.html).



Author

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