

Book details life of 1st 'Buffalo' officer

He was popular and handsome. And that was his undoing.

The first African-American graduate of West Point Academy (June 14, 1877), who also became the first black Buffalo Soldier officer, was framed by an officer of the "all-black" 10th Cavalry Regiment.

When 2nd Lt. Henry O. Flipper arrived at Fort Sill, Okla. ("Indian Territory"), he was surprised to find that he was readily accepted by the white officers, according to "Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper — 'Buffalo Soldier'" by David Edmond Hilton (Sprinkle Printing Co., 1989).

"Capt. Nicholas Nolan invited Flipper to board with him and his wife, and eventually became his dearest friend," the author wrote.

"Miss Molly Dwyer, Mrs. Nolan's sister, and Flipper also became good friends and often went horseback riding together."

The young man's unit was moved to Fort Elliott, Fort Sill, Fort Concho and then to Fort Davis, all in Texas.

"Flipper and Miss Mollie Dwyer, who had moved to Fort Davis, continued their horseback rides around the post, as they had at Fort Sill," the author said.

"Their friendship now aroused resentment. Lt. Charles Nordstrom, who was in love with Miss Mollie, now became Flipper's bitter enemy. Some of the officers sided with Nordstrom, blaming Flipper for Miss Mollie's refusal of his marriage proposal."

The 24-year-old Flipper, who was well liked by the Fort Davis townspeople, was warned by his civilian friends that Nordstrom and another



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officer had bragged of preparing a trap for him. Flipper ignored their warnings.

Then, a new commander ordered him to put unit money into his own trunk instead of into the quartermaster's vault. Later, some money was discovered missing. Flipper was court-martialed, cleared of an embezzlement charge but found guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer.

After a dishonorable discharge, his first civilian job was in an El Paso steam laundry. He died when he was 84 and was buried in Atlanta.

In 1972, a white Georgia school teacher, Ray O. MacColl, got the Department of the Army to review the case, and Flipper's conviction was reversed. Dec. 13, 1976, a certificate of honorable discharge was issued.

His remains were removed to his hometown, Thomasville, Ga., "where he was buried with full military honors," the author reported.

"A proclamation was issued by the governor of Georgia commending Flipper's many years of service to his country. West Point Military Academy Superintendent, Lt. Gen. Sidney Berry, designated Feb. 10 as Henry O. Flipper Day at West Point, with an annual award to be given in his name." And, "today, a large



Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper's dishonorable discharge was reversed after he died.

bronze bust of Henry Flipper stands in the Cadet Library as a permanent memorial to a strong and gentle man."

Flipper, besides being a West Point graduate and cavalry officer, achieved many "firsts" for an African-American, including surveyor, cartographer, civil and mining engineer, translator, inventor, editor (of the Nogales, Ariz., Sunday Herald), author ("Colored Cadet at West Point") and special agent for the Justice Department.

Oh, yes. Henry Ossian Flipper was born a slave, March 21, 1856, before the Emancipation Proclamation, Jan. 1, 1863. (Texas slaves learned of it on "Juneteenth," June 19, that year.)

His father, a shoemaker and carriage trimmer, bought the boy's freedom from a slave owner, the Rev. Reuben Lucky.

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