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In the Land of Jim Crow' Negro War Hero Slain for Daring to Vote

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When they call the roll of Americans who died to make men free, add to that heroic list the name of Pvt. Macy Yost Snipes, black man, Georgia, U. S. A.

Death missed him on a dozen bloody battlefields overseas, where he served his country well.

He came home to die in the littered door-yard of his boyhood home because he thought that freedom was for all Americans, and tried to prove it.

It wasn't that he didn't get fair warning. He knew what to expect. And he got just that.

Early in July the white folks passed the warning through the Negro countryside around the little sun-warped country hamlet of Rupert, in Taylor County, Georgia. It was brief and to the point. The first Negro to vote in Rupert would be killed, ran the word.

DEFIES WARNING

Macy Yost Snipes hadn't even thought of voting, so his friends told me. But when the word came that he'd die if he did—then he decided that he'd vote. He had never voted. He didn't know where or how to do it. He went to Butler, the county seat, to register. There they told him he'd have to go back to his home town of Rupert to register, and later, vote. The white folks in Rupert let him register. There were already a few Negro names on the registry lists.

Bright and early on election day Macy appeared at the polling place—and voted. Afterward Macy told a friend that the white folks on the Election Board appeared "sorta dazed" as he cast his ballot.

"It was like they thought a dead man was voting," Macy said laughingly to his friend who told me the story of how a Georgia Negro died.

Pvt. Snipes didn't know it, but the white folks were right. He was already dead when he dropped that ballot in the box. The white folks just let him walk around another week before they buried him.

BURIAL FORBIDDEN

Just a week later four white men drove up to Macy Snipes' home, called him out, and after a few words riddled him with bullets and drove off.

Taking courage from the fact that the white folks had promised to kill only the first Negro who voted, another black man voted after Pvt. Snipes. He was right. The white folks didn't kill him. They just ran him out of the county.

But even after they had murdered him, the white folks weren't finished with Pvt. Macy Yost Snipes. The Snipes family owned a little burial plot in a Negro cemetery near Rupert. The mother and father of the dead soldier arranged with a Negro undertaker to bury their slain son in the family plot. But the day of the funeral the undertaker got word from Rupert.

"You try to bury that nigger here and you better have another grave ready for yourself." The undertaker had a plot in another cemetery at the other end of the county. That's where Macy Snipes rests.

FAMILY ORDERED OUT

But it wasn't enough to murder the returned veteran and deny his body burial because he had sought to overthrow white supremacy by dropping his ballot in the box. The white folks decided that they wanted none of Macy Snipes' family in their midst, either. The Snipes family were hard-working and respected farmers owning 150 acres which provided them with a better-than-ordinary competence. They were warned that they had better get out of the county.

"Remember what happened to your son," one note read.

So the Snipes family sold their farm and fled North. They live in Ohio now.

And what about the champions of racial purity who murdered Macy Snipes? Well, one William Cooper proudly claimed the honor of having fired the shots that dropped the young veteran in front of his own threshold.

KILLER'S VERSION

He hunted up the Coroner and explained that he and his friends were just trying to collect \$10 that Macy Snipes had borrowed from him. When Snipes told him he hadn't any money he said he told Macy to go to work for his companion, a sawmill owner, and the sawmill man would pay off Macy's \$10 debt.

"You don't get me in no saw mill," was Macy's reply, according to Cooper. A few more heated words, said Cooper, and Macy started toward his door, saying "I've got something in the house that'll move you fellows off."

"That's when I shot him," explains Cooper. There was no gun on Private Snipes' body but there was \$40 in his pocket and all the members of the Snipes family had through the years built up a reputation for paying their debts.

TWO HONOR ROLLS

"Justifiable killing in self-defense," was the verdict.

Well, what price a monument for Private Macy Yost Snipes now?

But surely, even if you're black, if you've died for your country in France, or Germany or on Saipan or Iwo Jima, the white folks will forget your color and remember only that you were a hero!

Reader, you don't know. Here is the ultimate in Jim Crowism.

In every Southern town you'll find not one by two honor rolls, one for white, one for black, sometimes side by side, oftener the Negro honor roll hidden in the dingy Negro section.

No Negro is going to contaminate the white race by getting his name on the same honor roll with a white man even if he did die a hero in the service of his country.

Tomorrow: The Delta Country, Last Outpost of Feudalism.

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