

# Black History Month



John Arthur (Jack) Johnson, born in Galveston, Texas, was the first black to win the world heavyweight title and was one of boxing's greatest and most controversial champions.

## Distinguished Solider was an American Hero

African American succeeded in life despite racism and false charges

BY SEAN P. NELSON, THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Born a slave in 1856 in Thomasville, Ga., Lt. Henry Ossian Flipper distinguished himself as a Buffalo Soldier for the 10th U.S. Cavalry only to be falsely accused of embezzlement and dismissed from the Army in disgrace.

Despite the stigma visited upon him by what was later determined to be a racist white Army officer corps, he led a successful life as a civil engineer, assistant to the Secretary of the Interior, special agent for the U.S. Justice Department, cartographer, author and newspaper editor. Flipper was also prominent in the nation's oil industry.

North Portland resident Carl Flipper is a descendant of this African American hero.

"Henry was the oldest son of five Flipper brothers, two of whom were born into slavery. Henry was the first and oldest brother, my great grandfather, Bishop Joseph S. Flipper, was the second brother," Flipper said.

Flipper said his great granduncle retired to Atlanta, Ga. after travels in the American Southwest, Mexico and Venezuela. He lived with his brother, Joseph until his death in 1940.

"Henry had no children, never married and consequently we were his closest relatives. His three younger brothers were much younger than he in age and lived in the Southern part of Georgia," Flipper said.

He counts among one of his most prized possessions a letter his great granduncle wrote in 1939 to his grandfather, Rev. Carl F. Flipper Sr. of Kansas City. The letter tells what Lt. Flipper knew of his family's history on Carl Flipper's father's side.

"It's among my most valued possessions of personal family history and certainly my most valued possession of Henry's," Flipper said.

Lt. Flipper spent his childhood as a slave in Thomasville and lived in Macon and Atlanta during the Civil War. In 1864 another slave taught him to read. By late 1865, he attended several schools established by the American Missionary Association.

In 1873, Flipper was appointed to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point by Rep. James C. Freeman of Georgia. He graduated 50th in a class of 76—the first black man ever to do so.

On his first assignment as an Army soldier in 1878, Lt. Flipper and his troop were sent to Fort Sill, Okla. to construct a drainage ditch to keep water away from the encampment in a battle against mosquitoes carrying malaria. Today, "Flipper's Ditch" is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1880, Flipper received military honors for building a ferry to bring soldiers across a river at Fort Davis, Texas. During the same period, his troop won praise for a surprise attack against a band of marauding Indians.

Lt. Flipper would later return to Fort Davis and to a job that would lead to his court martial. At Fort Davis, he encountered officers who showed an open dislike of him and set traps for him. On June 20, 1882, he was accused of embezzling government funds and of conduct unbecoming an officer.

A general court martial followed, finding him innocent of the theft charge but guilty of misconduct. He was dismissed from the Army in disgrace.

Today, Lt. Flipper's great grandnephew says everybody in connection with the case, and everybody who had ever reviewed the case, agrees that



Lt. Henry O. Flipper, a former slave, Buffalo Soldier and hero, was pardoned by President Bill Clinton in 1999 after being falsely accused of embezzlement and dismissed from the Army in 1882.

"Exonerating him and restoring him to full military honors 37 years after his death helped to resolve some of the guilt that society had to feel about this great injustice done to a loyal servant of America, but Henry during his lifetime was denied justice. There's no softening of that blow."

On Feb. 11, 1978, Lt. Flipper returned to his hometown of Thomasville, Ga. His body was disinterred and then reinterred with full military honors. About 500 people came to pay their respects at the First Missionary Baptist Church as Lt. Flipper's remains lay draped in a steel gray coffin draped with the U.S. flag.

At high noon, six military pallbearers snapped to attention and carried Lt. Flipper's coffin from the church to the waiting cortege, a military ammunition wagon. Honor guards were from the 586th Engineering Company and the 36th Engineering Group.

*Everybody in connection with the case, everybody who had ever reviewed the case agreed that there were racial motivations and trumped up charges behind his court martial.*

—North Portland resident Carl Flipper, descendant of 10th U.S. Cavalry Lt. Henry O. Flipper.

The Thomasville High School Band played The Star Spangled Banner. Afterwards the military detail lifted and held the flag above the coffin as a 21 gun salute was fired.

Lt. Henry Ossian Flipper was home to stay, his name cleared at last. On Feb. 19, 1999 President Bill Clinton pardoned Lt. Henry Ossian Flipper posthumously erasing the stigma on an extraordinary military and professional career.

Today, the African American solider is commemorated by the Henry Ossian Flipper Memorial Award, established in 1981 by the Association of Graduates, United States Military Academy, West Point. The award is given to the cadet who demonstrates the highest qualities of leadership, self discipline and perseverance in the face of unusual difficulties.

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"We always knew the charges were racially motivated. Ultimately President Clinton was made aware that they were racially motivated," Flipper said.

Still, Flipper calls it a case of "Justice delayed is justice denied."

"I believe Henry was denied justice," Flipper said.

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Racial & Ethnic Approaches to Community Health  
A program of the African American Health Coalition, Inc.  
Sponsored by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Wellness Within REACH: Mind, Body, and Soul Activity Calendar**

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
<b>Matt Dishman</b> 77 NE Knott					Old School Dance 6:00-7:00pm Kendrick	African Dance 10:00-11:00am Addo
<b>Salvation Army</b> 5325 N Williams		Water Aerobics 2:00 - 3:00pm Hampton		Water Aerobics 2:00 - 3:00pm Hampton		
<b>Nature's</b> 3535 NE 15th		Yoga 7:30-8:30 pm O'Rourke				Body Conditioning 9:30-10:30am Nickerson
<b>Peninsula Park</b> 700 N Portland		Walking Group 6:00-7:00 pm Nickerson (Meet inside the Lloyd Center in front of Sears)	Aerobics 7:30-8:30pm Keller			Aerobics 9:00-10:00am Keller  Walking Group 12:30 pm Nickerson
<b>Mallory Avenue Christian Church (Gym)</b> 126 NE Alberta	Aerobics 6:30-7:30pm Nickerson		Aerobics 6:30-7:30pm Nickerson		Aerobics 6:30-7:30pm Nickerson	

\*\*Must be 21 or older to participate. Please check with AAHC before showing up to the first class 503-413-1850. Please receive approval from your doctor before beginning exercise class. All classes are free of charge!

**AAHC** African American Health Coalition, Inc.  
2800 N. Vancouver Ave., Suite 100 • Portland, OR 97227 • Phone: 503-413-1850  
E-mail: [kdempsey@aahc-portland.org](mailto:kdempsey@aahc-portland.org) • Web: [www.aahc-portland.org](http://www.aahc-portland.org)

**The Portland Police Bureau supports Black History Month**

City of Portland Police Bureau

1111 S.W. 2nd, Portland OR 97204