The First At The Point

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In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur reviewed the case against Cadet Whittaker and decided that the evidence against him was not sufficient to warrant his dismissal. But even so, the authorities at the academy went ahead and dismissed Whittaker anyhow. So with this kind of anti-black attitude prevailing, it is easy to understand why only three of the first twenty black cadets admitted to West Point managed to survive the ordeal and stick around long enough to graduate.

Among the three of the first twenty black cadets who managed to stick around and graduate was Cadet Henry O. Flipper. Flipper, who was born a slave in Georgia in 1856, graduated in June of 1877 ranking fiftieth in a class of seventy-six. And when the graduation exercises were over, Henry O. Flipper had become the first black cadet to ever graduate from West Point.

The second black cadet to graduate from the Point was John Alexander, who graduated in June of 1887. And the third black graduate was Charles Young, who graduated with the class of 1889. Then, following the graduation of Young, there was a 47-year lapse before another black face punctuated the long gray line of West Point cadets at graduation time. The dry spell wasn't broken until June of 1936 when Benjamin O. Davis Jr., graduated from the school and became the fourth black cadet ever to do so.

And while graduating from West Point usually meant that the worst was over for a black officer, this was not true in the case of Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper. For the total ruin of his military career awaited him. But contrary to its bad ending, the military career of Lieutenant Flipper started off on a high note. Not only did he have the honor of being the first black officer to ever graduate from the West Point Military Academy, he also had the added distinction of being the only black officer in the whole U.S. Army at that time. And on his first tour of duty, Lieutenant Flipper showed every sign of adding to these laurels.

Raft of trouble for Lt. Flipper followed horseback ride with girl

Assigned to the all-black but white officered Tenth Cavalry in 1878, Lieutenant Flipper was immediately thrown into the Apache Campaign of the Plains Indian Wars. And while all of the black troopers of the Tenth Cavalry performed exceptionally well against their red-skinned foes, Lieutenant Flipper performed even more so. He was the star of the Buffalo Soldiers, as the black troopers of the Tenth Cavalry were called.

During one daring exploit, Lieutenant Flipper rode almost a hundred miles in less than twenty-four hours and delivered a dispatch to the Tenth Cavalry commander, Colonel Benjamin Grierson, warning him of the approach of a large band of Apache warriors led by Chief Victorio. It was a dangerous ride through hostile Indian country and for it Lieutenant Flipper received the heartiest congratulations from his fellow Teneth Cavalry officers. Although he was black and they were white, they now fully accepted him as one of their own. But when the Tenth came in from the field and made camp at Fort Concho, the friendliness of the white officers toward Lieutenant Flipper suddenly turned to bitter hatred.

The cause of this sudden change was a white girl.

One day Lieutenant Flipper went horseback riding with the girl and to the white officers this was an unpardonable sin. And to make matters even worse, one of the officers, Lieutenant Charles Nordstrom, considered the girl to be his steady date.

So it is not surprising that Lieutenant Flipper soon found himself in a raft of trouble. And to his dying day, Flipper maintained that it was a frame-up engineered by the jealous Nordstrom and several other Tenth Cavalry officers.

Now whether or not this was true, is something that will never be known. But the chain of events that followed his ride with Lieutenant Nordstrom's girlfriend do tend to support Lieutenant Flipper's charge that he was the victim of a frame-up.

Only three of first 23 black cadets admitted to West Point survived

In any case, this is the way that it went. Following the ride, Lieutenant Flipper was transferred from Fort Concho to Fort Davis, Texas. At Fort Davis, he was given the job of post commissary, which was a duty that required him to handle large sums of government money. And almost immediately, he was arrested for embezzling two thousand dollars and put in the Fort Davis guardhouse.

On June 30, 1882, a general court-martial held at Fort Davis acquitted Lieutenant Flipper of the embezzlement charge—but at the same time it found him guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer. And it was the conviction on the latter charge that resulted in Lieutenant Flipper's dismissal from the service and the ending of his military career.

In latter years, Flipper tried to get a review of his case based on the contention that his acquittal on the embezzlement charge meant that there was no basis for the charge of conduct unbecoming an officer since the latter charge stemmed from the first. But the review was never granted and Flipper's conviction on the conduct charge was never reversed.

Fortunately, in today's army the treatment of black officers has greatly improved and the review of court-martial cases is freely granted whenever the situation warrants it.

Pack Right For Fall

Traveling, whether it's simply a weekend in the country or a trip around the globe, should be smooth, easy and above all, fun. Planning makes the difference, a big difference.

Basics are the key. A bright warmup suit for tennis or just plain jogging should be included along with a classic blazer and straight pants for informal occasions such as shopping or sight-seeing. Pull ons and cardigans with vests work with the pants. By adding a simple gored skirt, a lot of wardrobe stretching can be achieved easily.

For dinner and the theater, a loose T-shirt dress in a light jersey knit is the answer. Many have matching scarves. For more wardrobe stretching, the new full jumper dresses with striped turtlenecks underneath are ideal. They can be accessorized with soft, wide belts, clunky jewelry and yards of scarves.

At night, Oriental-inspired prints in layered dresses skimming the knee vie for attention with soft flowing dresses in creamy colors. Often, a fringed shawl adds welcomed drama. In either case, the dresses should be made of an easy-to-care fabric that won't emerge from the suitcase looking like a wrinkled prune.

As for the hair, forget it. Wigs, now better than ever, offer a variety of styles which create new attractive looks morning till night.

By following a few easy steps when selecting a wig, one can find just the right styles to use on a trip as well as at home. For the first wig, try one that is close to the color and texture of one's own hair. Above all, make sure it's comfortable. If it isn't, don't buy it.

Also, the wig should have the look of very healthy hair and be easy to manage. A properly designed wig or hairpiece get better and better when well brushed.

Kings, 16 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine; Longs, 17 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine, av. per cigarette, FTC Report Apr. '75