

Country Philosopher

A significant thing

Most of us go through our lives without making even the smallest ripple on the ocean of life. We are therefore greatly impressed by those men and women who have climbed their mountain.

The many Americans who soared far beyond mediocrity have always been an inspiration to me. When I was a young man I haunted public libraries reading about those individuals who had leaped upon the pages of history.

My imagination would allow me to stand, bitterly cold, at Valley Forge. I stood, with Custer, at the Little Bighorn. And I knew the swelling of success as I assisted Dr. Morton in the operation where he used ether as an anesthetic for the first time.

Yes, I was a hero worshiper. And this great country of ours produced multitudes who have stirred my blood. I thought of Marconi and his radio. I would contemplate the intricate workings of a radio and be amazed and bewildered that the human mind could build this functioning miracle.

All those fabulous men and women persevered through hardships almost unimaginable. The adverse criticism that stifled creative endeavor and

made the battle near impossible. The forces of nature that placed almost insurmountable barriers in the path of our explorers. The disease and pestilence that staggered those brave combatants of yellow fever. And those noble warriors whose wounds brought death to the body, but glory to the deed.

So, in this column today, I would like to tell you about a few Americans who added greatly to our country's heritage. Men whose deeds have placed them in our history books forever. Men whose contributions make all of us stand tall in the knowledge that they, like ourselves, were products of this great nation.

In the year 1863, when the War Between the States was raging over our land, a sergeant in the Union army performed a brilliant act of bravery. The engagement in which he took part was small compared to other battles then raging. The Union forces were ordered to take a small fortification in South Carolina called Fort Wagner.

The fort was well defended and stood defiantly awaiting the onslaught. The hot July sun added misery to the apparent truth that this

would be the last battle for some of those young men. With a wild yell the Union troops began their advance. Cannons roared and the shells shattered and furrowed the ground. Sgt. William H. Carney urged his men forward. Disregarding the holocaust, he led his men toward the enemy fortification. And in this terrible inferno of hell, the Union Standard-bearer was killed.

Sgt. Carney grabbed that precious flag and raced forward. He was hit. A huge, gaping wound in his chest slowed him, but he staggered on. If only he could plant the Standard on the enemy abutments. He was struck again. A ghastly wound that tore away part of his hip. His blood flowed upon that field of battle. He ran on, unable to yell anymore, but an inspiration to his troops. He planted that flag within the confines of Fort Wagner and he lost his life doing it. And for this act of heroism Sgt. Carney, a young American soldier fighting with the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, won his country's highest award, The Congressional Medal of Honor.

Dr. Charles Drew was a pioneer in blood preservation. He studied medicine at McGill University in



Canada and was chosen for special training at Columbia Medical School. We owe much to this fine physician because it was he who founded the Blood Bank. His discovery of ways to preserve blood plasma saved thousands of lives during World War Two.

Matthew Alexandria Henson was an Arctic explorer. He accompanied Robert E. Peary on his expeditions to the North Pole. In 1909, on their last venture to the top of the world, both Admiral Peary and Matthew Henson were exhausted and suffering from snowblindness. But they pushed on, and their fortitude and courage allowed Matthew Henson, along with Admiral Peary, to be the first men in history to have reached the North Pole.

I think a significant thing about these great Americans is the possibility that you have never heard of any of them.

And, of course, the fact that they were all black.