

13 Soldiers - Rioters Pay/Death Penalty

From SA News Archives 11 Dec 1917

By Carl Langford

“This was first reported in a Houston News Paper, then by the SA News.” (read more on internet).

San Antonio, Texas, Dec. 11, 1917: A trampled clearing in a lonely mesquite thicket, no different in appearance from hundreds of other clearings on the big Government reservations here except for the ashes of two huge bonfire's show no signs tonight that it was the execution place for thirteen negro soldiers of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry this morning.

The Negro's, convicted of participating in the fatal riots at Houston Texas, Aug. 23, last were hanged 07:17 o' clock, one minute before sunrise in this latitude. The bonfire illumination for the hanging, just as streaks of daylight were beginning to appear through a cloudy sky, the bleak landscape of dull gray and brown against which the new timber of the double scaffold stood out sharply, the khaki, clad military guard, officers with coat collars turned up, for the morning was cold, made an unforgettable picture. In only one detail did the execution differ from other military execution's which have preceded it. That was the, part which the modern army motor track played in making the execution itself and all the preparation for it secret.

After dark last night motor trucks carried the lumber for the scaffolds and a company of engineers to the clearing. The scaffolds were built by firelight. Motor trucks, shortly after 5 o'clock this morning, carried the condemned, Soldiers's from the barracks where they spent their last night, and the officers and military guard to the place of execution.

“When white police arrested a black infantryman who tried to prevent their detaining, a drunk black woman, then beat up and shot at a black corporal sent to inquire after him, hostility boiled over. Over one hundred soldiers marched through the city - confronting a mob of white citizens and police who had likewise armed themselves. Fifteen whites and four blacks were killed in the ensuing confrontation”.

From Internet: “Most importantly, from General Ruckman's standpoint, Wilson (a former law professor) wrote the actions taken by the former Commander of the Southern Department were “legal and justified by the record.”

Indeed, the President agreed that “a stern redress” of the rioters' “wrongs” was the “surest protection of society against their further recurrence”.

“As historian Calvin C. Smith noted in 1991, there was no proof of a "conspiracy", and many of the sentenced were not conclusively identified in the dark and rainy night as having even participated in the riot”. On September 29, 1918, five more soldiers met their deaths at daybreak. One week later, the sixth was marched to the gallows.

The hanging of the first 13 soldiers is mentioned in part 4 of the 1979 television miniseries *Roots: The Next Generations*.

KHOU, a CBS affiliated TV station located in Houston produced a documentary of the riot in 2006 entitled *Mutiny on the Bayou: The Camp Logan Story*.