



The Battle of Philosophies

One of the jolliest diversions we had in Africa and Sicily was the unfinished conflict between the philosophies of "The New Negro" and "The Bandanna Heads." That is the way 1st Lieut. James B. Knighten of Tulsa, Okla., named the sides for this debate.

And Knighten—that riotous, witty, amiable fighter pilot of the 99th who is known far and wide as "The Eel"—is as fit a person as I know to supply the titles for this show. For show it was, aided and abetted by the eternally amusing Knighten who conceived the idea and furnished most of the antics for this battle of the philosophies.

Its unpolished comedy was as good as any I've paid \$3.30 to see on Broadway. Sometimes I used to think that when



Knighten, Vincent, Watson and Purnell, (left to right) who call themselves "New Negroes," serenade their opposition with one of Knighten's songs.



The "Bandanna Heads," as Knighten called them, listened gracefully. Shown (left to right) are Campbell, Lane, Mitchell, Carter, Thompson and Davis.

we called Knighten the insane genius, we really hadn't done violent injury to the meaning of the words.

Good For Morale

During those uncertain, critical days when the 99th "experiment" was getting its battle on the skies over Africa and Sicily, "The Eel" more than any other person or circumstance—except, of course, letters from home—kept the spirits of the pilots and ground officers and crews high.

That is an enviable accolade to bestow on any single individual. But Knighten deserved it, without question. And all those who were there to observe the 99th during those trying first six months will unhesitatingly agree. I am sure.

The argument goes back to college days. "The Eel" went to Dillard University in

New Orleans and quarterbacked the football team. I don't think it was a world-heating aggregation, however, because the other boys used to laugh when references were made to it. Even Knighten subtly advised against my writing about his football record.

Yet he was quite insistent about its scholastic superiority, especially over the alma maters of the "Bandanna Heads." Knighten indiscriminately pushed into the mythical organization which he opposed all graduates and former students of Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes.

Accepted Substitutes

"Harvard, Yale and Dillard," Knighten often would say in one breath. That was his concept of scholastic preeminence. There being no Harvard and Yale men among us, he accepted as his constituents the Howard and Lincoln University men in the squadron.

Thus Capt. Cornhus Vincent, of Boston College, and First Lieuts. Spann Watson, Howard, and Louis R. Purnell, Lincoln, became active members in Knighten's "New Negro" organization.

Inferior, despised, degenerate—because they didn't read and appreciate Thoreau, as he did—were 1st Lieuts. William A. Campbell, Allen G. Lane and Herbert Eugene Carter of Tuskegee, and Paul Graham Mitchell (deceased), and William R. Thompson of Hampton Institute. They were the "Bandanna Heads," sometimes called the "Handkerchief Heads."

One evening when the "New Negroes" called the "Bandanna Heads" together to serenade them with a new song written especially for their benefit by "The Eel," (see cut) Lt. Col. B. O. Davis Jr., commanding officer, aligned himself with the "Bandanna Heads" because he had once taught military science and tactics at Tuskegee.

On Borrowed Music

As I have pointed out, the chief wit was Lieut. Knighten who was far more witty than classical in his composition of verse about the opposition. However, in his more serious moods "The Eel" has written poems that are highly regarded, although I don't feel he will acquire immortality by reason of his verse.

The following ditty was sung to the tune of "The Shores of Tripoli."

From the cotton fields of 'Skegee to the Shores of Sicily
 We must wear our Red Bandannas for our leader, Booker T.
 Booker T. says plant more cotton,
 Booker T. says plant more corn.
 We must never leave the cotton fields
 Where old Uncle Tom was born.

Just as the laughing and kidding died down, the "New Negroes" would strike up a fresh serenade to the tune of "Turkey in the Straw." Here are the words:

Tus . . . skegee the pride of the swift growing South—
 We make our living from hand to mouth.
 We spend our time playing tonk and whist;
 If we can't get the girls, we . . . (censored).
 So get out your shovel and hoe,
 Let all education go.
 With a red bandanna on our head,
 We'll follow old Moton until we're dead.

It was all in fun, of course. But you had to know the participants in this apparently violent conflict of philosophies to understand that there wasn't a harsh thought on either side against the other.