

True and literal meaning is lent to the phrase “brothers in arms” by **Edward Bynum (1895-1954)** and his younger brother Lincoln, who served in France as fellow soldiers of Company K of the all-black 370<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry during World War I—the only unit to be commanded entirely by black officers. Segregated units were often led by white officers. Both brothers saw battle from the trenches, but lived to return home to Bloomington at the end of the war.

Edward Daniel Bynum, one of eight children, was born September 1, 1895 in Bloomington, IL to parents Edward Wesley and Mary (Smith) Bynum.<sup>1</sup> Described as a “fine boy baby, weighing eight pounds,” little did Edward know that he would grow into a fine soldier who would fight in the final skirmishes of the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the United States’ formal declaration of war on April 6, 1917, Bynum would never have anticipated spending time overseas.<sup>3</sup> Bynum had served four years as a sergeant in the Illinois National Guard, but not much else is known about his first twenty-one years of life before registering for the draft in June 1917.<sup>4</sup> As can be discerned from city directories, the Bynum family moved residences within the city fairly regularly while Edward was growing up. From 1895 to 1917, Bynum’s family lived at no less than seven separate addresses in Bloomington.<sup>5</sup> Bynum’s father, Edward Sr., was employed as a waiter or a janitor in a variety of places. He worked as janitor at Bloomington City Hall when his two sons were deployed overseas.<sup>6</sup>

When he registered for the draft, Edward Jr. was working as a porter for H.D. Bunnell of Bunnell Brothers shoes, while his brother Lincoln was employed at the Illinois Hotel on Jefferson Street in Bloomington.<sup>7</sup> Upon his return to Bloomington after the war, Edward continued to find employment as a porter—primarily for the Gibson For Service Cigars and Pocket Billiards at 425 N. Main Street, later owned by Jas H. Rose.<sup>8</sup>

War had been raging in Europe since July 1914, but on April 6, 1917, Congress effectively abandoned the United States’ policy of neutrality by declaring war on Germany. The country was ill equipped to furnish an army large enough to fight a war overseas. In order to raise an army, Congress passed the Selective Service Act of 1917 in May of that year, which enabled the federal government to order young men into the Army and the Navy. Bynum, being a man aged 21 to 30, registered in June and was mobilized as a member of the segregated Chicago-based Eighth Illinois Regiment, Illinois National Guard, in July.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Pantagraph*, September 3, 1895; “Bloomington-Normal Deaths: Edward Bynum,” *The Pantagraph*, January 25, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> *The Pantagraph*, September 3, 1895

<sup>3</sup> Bynum’s father Edward W. Sr. served as a cook in Company G of the Eighth Illinois. “Soldiers of Company G,” *Pantagraph*, September 12, 1908.

<sup>4</sup> “Registration Card: Edward Daniel Bynum,” June 5, 1917, Ancestry.com. *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Bloomington-Normal City Directories: 1895, 1899, 1902, 1905, 1909, 1911, 1913.

<sup>6</sup> Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1917; At the time, City Hall was located at the corner of N. East and E. Monroe streets, what is today the south half of the Frontier Communications building. *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> “Registration Card,” Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Bloomington-Normal City Directories: 1919, 1920, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1929-31, 1932, 1937.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Kemp, “PFOP: ‘Black Devils’ Earned Fame in WWI,” *Pantagraph*, April 30, 2017; Edward E. Pierson and J.L. Hasbrouck, *McLean County in the World War, 1917-1918* (Bloomington, IL: McLean County War Publishing Company, 1921), 202. Originally formed during the Spanish American War to serve as an occupation force in Cuba, the Eighth Illinois was re-designated the 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division upon the U.S. entering WWI.

On July 27, 1917, the cars of the 6 p.m. interurban bound for Peoria were loaded with the recently mobilized men of the Eighth. As the *Pantagraph* noted, with only a few hours notice of their mobilization, the 68 men were not a “very soldierly looking congregation,” but were “full of life and the spirit of adventure.”<sup>10</sup> Mostly composed of men from Bloomington, Company K also received men from Pontiac, Clinton, and elsewhere to satisfy the immediate need for soldiers.<sup>11</sup> Two special cars had been prepared to transport the troops, who boarded the train prior to it pulling into the Bloomington station.<sup>12</sup> The cars only lingered in the station for a few minutes, just long enough for friends and family to shout farewells from the platform and for the soldiers inside to stick their heads, hands, and sometimes “the greater part of their bodies,” outside the windows to shake hands, share kisses, and yell their own final goodbyes to those who had gathered to see them off.<sup>13</sup> After arriving in Peoria, the men trained for roughly ten weeks before being sent to the newly constructed Camp Logan in Houston, Texas.

Tensions were high in Houston when the Eighth arrived at Camp Logan on October 12. Back in July, members of the all-black Twenty-Fourth United States Infantry Regiment had been ordered to guard the construction site of the new camp. In the eyes of the local residents and law enforcement, however, the arrival of the armed Twenty-Fourth in the then-segregated city was less than welcome. Hostilities intensified when a rumor that a black soldier had been killed by white police officers incited a riot between white civilians living in the city and 156 black soldiers stationed there.<sup>14</sup> Four black soldiers and sixteen white civilians were killed during the riot. All 156 soldiers were court-martialed, nineteen of whom were executed. As a result of the incident, animosity against blacks was palpable at the time the Eighth arrived.<sup>15</sup>

After an almost five-month stay in Texas, the unit left for Newport News, Virginia in March 1918, and from there arrived in France on April 22, 1918—whereupon the unit’s arrival, the Eighth was re-designated the 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the segregated 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. Like the Eighth, the 370<sup>th</sup> had the distinction of being the only regiment in the U.S. Army that was led entirely by black officers. Seven days after their arrival in France, Bynum and his fellow members of the 370<sup>th</sup> began training with French soldiers in Drandvillars.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the majority of African American units that were relegated to support positions, members of the 370<sup>th</sup> saw combat. According to an account relayed by Sergeant Major James L. Page, the regiment was “with the best division of the French army during this time.”<sup>17</sup> First Sergeant Eugene De Forest Love had “good word[s] for the French people and their cordial treatment of the colored troops,” implying that “not anything is banned to them that belongs to France.”<sup>18</sup>

In his writing on the subject, renowned author W.E.B. Du Bois comments on the clear racist motivations of white American soldiers in their treatment of their fellow black soldiers and the

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<sup>10</sup> “Cheer Colored Boys Off to the Front,” *Pantagraph*, July 27, 1917; A later report published upon the unit’s return to the United States following the end of the war indicated that 62 men from “Bloomington and vicinity” belonged to the regiment. “Bloomington Colored Men Arrive From France,” *Pantagraph*, February 10, 1919.

<sup>11</sup> Pierson and Hasbrouck, 202.

<sup>12</sup> *Pantagraph*, July 27, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Texas State Historical Association, “Houston Riot of 1917,”

<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jch04>, Date accessed September 11, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Jim Hill, “The 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Chicago’s 8<sup>th</sup> Illinois National Guard in WWI,” *The Western Front Association*, <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-on-land/75-other-war-theatres/55-370-infantry.html>

<sup>16</sup> “Colored Veterans to Receive Hearty Welcome,” *Pantagraph*, February 27, 1919.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Colored Officer in Praise of His Soldiers,” *Daily Pantagraph*, February 7, 1919.

desire to remove black soldiers from the influence of the French as soon as possible.<sup>19</sup> There were active attempts on the part of the American military to discredit the efforts of the black soldiers fighting abroad. As Du Bois quotes from a conversation he overheard between three American soldiers and two French soldiers, one of the American officers suggested that “they had no use for ‘n\*\*\*\*\*s’ in the United States, and were only trying them out in the war.”<sup>20</sup> According to the officer, “they had proved themselves a bunch of cowards, and that every one of the ----- would rape a white woman if he was not held down by the whites.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the French officers had “nothing but the highest of praise for their black soldiers...and the work that they had done.”<sup>22</sup>

After roughly six weeks of training under the tutelage of the French Army, on June 23 the unit was sent into the trenches near Regonville, where they remained for one week before relocating to the trenches at Vraincourt.<sup>23</sup> After ten days, on August 16, the unit left for the front at Verdun and were back in the trenches by September 14.<sup>24</sup> For two weeks, the unit was subjected to heavy shelling and gas attacks.<sup>25</sup>

Trench warfare was the dominant method of fighting during WWI. Typical trenches were designed in a system of two to four parallel lines, each line approximately one mile to the rear of the front or next line.<sup>26</sup> All trenches were dug in a zigzag pattern to prevent enemy fire from traveling more than a few yards down the trench if the shooter was standing at the end.<sup>27</sup> Each main line trench was connected by perpendicular communication trenches, through which information and supplies were exchanged.<sup>28</sup> Trenches were often reinforced with sandbags and topped with coils of barbed wire, and lined with wooden planks at the bottom.<sup>29</sup> Enemy trenches were usually located anywhere between fifty and 250 yards apart, separated by what was often referred to as “no man’s land.”<sup>30</sup> This “no man’s land” belonged to neither side, was open to frequent artillery barrages, and was the site of many deaths. The trenches were cramped, muddy, and often times filled with water. Machine gunfire, mortar, and gas attacks were commonplace.

Referred to as “Partridges” by the French because of their cockiness and pride in battle, among enemy German soldiers, the men of the 370<sup>th</sup> were known as the “Black Devils.”<sup>31</sup> Though speaking to the unit’s courage and ferocity, this loaded term speaks also to the larger situation black American soldiers found themselves in, well into the twentieth century. Until 1948, when President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, black

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<sup>19</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Negro Soldier in Service Abroad During the First World War,” in *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 3 (Summer, 1943), 324-25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Pierson and Hasbrouck, 202-203; *Pantagraph*, February 27, 1919.

<sup>24</sup> Pierson and Hasbrouck, 203.

<sup>25</sup> *Pantagraph*, February 27, 1919.

<sup>26</sup> “Trench Warfare,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/trench-warfare>, Date accessed September 8, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> “World War I: Trench Warfare,” [http://www.ducksters.com/history/world\\_war\\_i/trench\\_warfare.php](http://www.ducksters.com/history/world_war_i/trench_warfare.php), Date accessed September 8, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> William Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* (Project Gutenberg: 2005), Chapter XVI, e-book <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16598/16598-h/16598-h.htm>, Date accessed September 13, 2017; Shawn SanRoman, *The Eighth Illinois Volunteers: a Brief Regimental History of an African-American Unit* (Bloomington, IL: McLean County Historical Society, 1998), 8.

soldiers were only allowed to serve in all-black units.<sup>32</sup> Though these men could be ordered to mobilize and serve on behalf of their nation in a world-encompassing conflict the likes of which was then unknown, the same men could not fight for their country alongside their white comrades-in-arms. That being said, it seems as though the moniker was nevertheless apt. As Bynum wrote himself while recovering in a military hospital in France following the Armistice, “I am writing you to let you know that Lincoln and I are still alive. Why I never wrote any sooner? We were fighting like the devil and had no paper, either, to write on.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite claims of being short on paper, Bynum did find opportunities to compose letters and musings to people back home. Though no poet laureate, Bynum seemed to possess a casual affinity for verse as a means of relaying his experiences abroad—which resulted in at least two of his poems being published in the *Pantagraph*.<sup>34</sup>

While still stationed at Camp Logan, Bynum penned the candid words of an unseasoned soldier, which he titled “The I’ve’s of a Rookie.”<sup>35</sup> Sent to his father, Bynum’s poem is a list of prosaic, sometimes poignant, ponderings of a “former Bloomington boy” turned private.<sup>36</sup> As the author states:

“I’ve joined the boy and a rookie; / I’ve said goodbye to my sweet  
cookie; / I’ve shaken my mother’s hand; / I’ve wondered in what  
country we will land. / ...I’ve stood inspection with a dirty cot; /  
I’ve prayed the Lord ‘Forget me not’; / ...I’ve thought I’d like to  
give Bloomington one more look; / I’ve often wished I were the  
Kaiser’s cook. / ...And this will be all of this rookie’s I’ve’s, / But  
let us all pray that the Kaiser soon dies.”<sup>37</sup>

Written while stationed in Virginia after leaving Texas, and published just one day after Bynum and his fellow soldiers landed in France, Corporal Bynum dedicated his second poem to the Colored Women’s Club of Bloomington.<sup>38</sup> Although similar in theme to the first, this poem speaks more directly to the experience of a black American soldier. Untitled, it reads:

“Good-bye to your wife, / Home and country, to; / We are called to  
Germany / To fight for you. / ... We are the black men / Who must  
fight and defend, / And share in the glory / When America wins.  
... / Our fathers fought for Old Glory / A hundred years ago, / And  
freed us from bondage / With its great weight of woe. / Made us a

<sup>32</sup> “Executive Order 9981,” <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981.htm>, Date accessed September 9, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> “Corporal Bynum Has Been Very Busy Fighting,” *Pantagraph*, January 7, 1919.

<sup>34</sup> “Colored Soldier Writes a Poem,” *Pantagraph*, Date unknown; “From Ed Bynum,” *Pantagraph*, April 23, 1918.

<sup>35</sup> “Colored Soldier Writes a Poem,” date unknown, Box 4, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project collection, McLean County Museum of History.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “From Ed Bynum,” *Pantagraph*, April 23, 1918.

The purpose of the Civic Women’s Club was to bring “negro Women of the community together to stimulate a greater interest in Civic and Social Contact.” Edwards, Ruby A. “History of the Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., 1901-1975,” Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 4, Folder 2, McLean County Museum of History Archives.

republic, / And taught us how to fight— / Now after the  
 Germans— / Every one in sight. / The cry is democracy, / On land  
 and overseas; / We will fight in the trenches, / On our hands and  
 knees. / The groans of our brothers, / As they die on the field, /  
 Sounds the doom of the kaiser, / And the autocrats must yield. /  
 When the war all is over, / When we're home with vict'ry won, /  
 You will then hear the story / What the black men have done, / We  
 will then salute Old Glory, / Until our dying day, / As we ask and  
 get all justice / In this grand old U.S.A.”<sup>39</sup>

When the war ended on November 11, 1918—203 days after Bynum and his unit arrived in France—the 370th was still in pursuit of the Germans having pushed them back to the Belgian border. For their distinguished service, many men in the 370th received medals and awards from both the French and American governments. All totaled, the unit received almost 100 medals including twenty-one American Distinguished Service Crosses, several Croix de Guerre (France’s highest honor), sixty-eight French War Crosses, and one French Distinguished Service Medal. Many of those men who were decorated for their service gave their lives as well. Twenty percent, or ninety-six men total, were killed in the 370th.<sup>40</sup>

Though the armistice was signed in November 1918, return to normalcy was nowhere near immediate. For Edward and the 370th, life continued abroad until February. In a letter written to his father in January 1919, Edward recounts that though his holidays were spent in a military hospital in France, they were “a good time.”<sup>41</sup> The Red Cross treated the wounded to car rides through Paris and tickets to the show *Zig-Zag*. However, though Edward thought France to be “some place,” he and many of the men were ready to go home to the states without any designs of returning to France in future.<sup>42</sup> Yet, despite these mixed feelings on the part of the African American soldiers, France made its appreciation known. Prior to the unit’s departure, French General Vinedon issued a statement commending the 370th for their bravery and commitment to the which stated that,

“the blood of your comrade’s fell on the soil of France mixed with the blood of our soldiers, renders indissoluble the bonds of affection that unite us. We have besides, the pride of having worked together at a magnificent task, the pride of bearing on our foreheads the ray of a common grandeur.”<sup>43</sup> The unit landed in New York on February 9.<sup>44</sup>

According to the *Pantagraph*, no floors or windows at City Hall could have been dirty enough to keep Edward W. Sr. from meeting his sons. On February 17 the men of the 370th arrived in Chicago, after returning to the states from France by way of New York City.<sup>45</sup> More so than “pride of race and color,” Edward Sr. was motivated by a longing for his sons to be home.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “From Ed Bynum,” *Pantagraph*, April 23, 1918.

<sup>40</sup> E.J. Scott, “The American Negro in the World War, Chapter XV,” <http://www.gwpda.org/>, Date accessed September 9, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> “Corporal Bynum Has Been Very Busy Fighting,” *Pantagraph*, January 7, 1919.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> W. Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* (Chicago: G.G. Sapp, 1919; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 155, e-book <https://archive.org/stream/historyamerican00sweegoog#page/n196/mode/2up>, Date accessed September 9, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> *Pantagraph*, January 7, 1919.

<sup>45</sup> “Bynum Welcomes ‘Black Devils’ Back in Chicago,” *Pantagraph*, February 18, 1919.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

After finding his sons in the crowd, the trio shared a two-hour visit before being treated to the “dazzling” welcome the city of Chicago had planned for the nation’s “crack negro regiment.”<sup>47</sup> The large crowds prevented any dancing to be done at a reception at the Chicago Coliseum, but members of the 370<sup>th</sup> paraded through the streets before returning to Camp Grant near Rockford, IL where the regiment officially mustered out on February 24.<sup>48</sup>

The return of the members of Machine Gun Company 3 (of which Edward was a member) of the 370<sup>th</sup> to Bloomington on February 27, 1919 marked the largest single body of returning soldiers of one unit from Europe to Bloomington.<sup>49</sup> To celebrate the occasion, the Association of Commerce prepared an evening program complete with a parade downtown, a banquet at the Wayman A.M.E. Church, and a public program at the Bloomington Coliseum, which began with a series of speeches from public officials and concluded with dancing until midnight.<sup>50</sup> Mayor E.E. Jones delivered a welcome, followed by a response from the Adelbert H. Roberts, a state representative from Chicago, who in 1924 became the first black state senator in Illinois.<sup>51</sup> In line with the *Pantagraph*’s urging that it was “the duty of the Bloomington people to join in this celebration and give these heroes a welcome,” Roberts stated that he was glad to see the ‘best white people join the best black people of the city in a welcome for these ‘Black Devils,’ for a ‘government that is great and grand enough to carry democracy over the seas ... is great enough to spread it to the colored race at home.’<sup>52</sup> Roberts went on to encourage greater cooperation between white and black citizens, suggesting that the “accomplishments of his race in the war will do much to bring it about.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to the mayor and Robert, speakers included Dr. Eugene Covington, a local black physician; Bloomington attorney and Jewish civil rights leader Sigmund Livingston; and Wayman minister Henry Simons.<sup>54</sup> Edward Sr., the Bynums’ father, served on the speakers committee for the event.<sup>55</sup>

Though most of Bynum’s known words concerning his wartime experience were written while in active service, he did present at least one public program—hosted by the Wayman A.M.E. Church on the evening of October 7, 1919—on what he witnessed firsthand on the front lines.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the warm welcome home and the optimistic sentiments of people such as the Hon. Roberts, black U.S. soldiers returned to a society still predicated on prejudice and discrimination. The extent of their service was largely undervalued in comparison to the efforts of their white counterparts—so much so that black ex-servicemen were barred from joining “white” veteran organizations such as the local Louis E. Davis Post 56 of the American Legion in Bloomington, founded in June 1919.<sup>57</sup> As a result, twenty-two men—including Bynum—gathered on February

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.; “Edward Bynum Greets His Soldier Boys in Chicago,” *Pantagraph*, February 19, 1919.

<sup>48</sup> “City to Welcome Her Colored Warriors,” *Daily Pantagraph*, February 25, 1919.

<sup>49</sup> “Colored Veterans to Receive Hearty Welcome,” *Pantagraph*, February 27, 1919.

<sup>50</sup> “Plans for Welcome of Colored Troops Made,” *Pantagraph*, February 22, 1919; “Colored Veterans;” “Colored Veterans to Receive Hearty Welcome.”

<sup>51</sup> “Colored Veterans to Receive Hearty Welcome.”

<sup>52</sup> *Pantagraph*, February 22, 1919; “Bloomington Honors Famous ‘Black Devils,’” *Pantagraph*, February 28, 1919.

<sup>53</sup> *Pantagraph*, February 28, 1919.

<sup>54</sup> Kemp, “PFOP: ‘Black Devils’ Earned Fame in WWI.”

<sup>55</sup> *Pantagraph*, February 22, 1919.

<sup>56</sup> “Observations in France,” *Pantagraph*, October 4, 1919.

<sup>57</sup> Lisa Dretske, “Private Gus Williams,” 2009. <http://mchistory.org/research/resources/gus-williams.php>, Date Accessed September 11, 2017. The Louis E. Davis Post 56 was the first post of the American Legion to be founded in McLean County; Pierson and Hasbrouck, 274.

18, 1920 at the club of the Louis E. Davis Post at 309½ Main Street in Bloomington to organize their own colored American Legion post—so named the Stevenson-Lewis Post after two of their fallen comrades, David Stevenson and Harry Lewis.<sup>58</sup> Stevenson, a former sergeant in the 370<sup>th</sup>, was killed by shell fire on the Verdun front as the unit advanced toward the Belgian border.<sup>59</sup> Lewis, on the other hand, never made it to the front, as he died of double pneumonia prior to the unit being sent to Texas for training.<sup>60</sup> The post was to be “known in the future as an organization of colored civilians who served the country during the great war.”<sup>61</sup> Bynum served as temporary secretary at the meeting, and later served on a committee tasked with visiting the sick.<sup>62</sup> Almost exactly three years later, Bynum repeated this process with a slightly expanded group of men, who possessed similar intentions.<sup>63</sup>

On February 5, 1923, more than thirty black veterans (including Bynum) gathered at the Griesheim Building in downtown Bloomington to organize the colored American Legion post, Redd-Williams Post 163—named for John Redd and Gus Williams, two other fellow veterans who perished during the First World War.<sup>64</sup> Williams, like Stevenson, was killed on the frontlines at Verdun.<sup>65</sup> Redd was seriously wounded in battle, but died later from his injuries.<sup>66</sup> The Ladies’ Auxiliary to the post was launched one year later in 1924.<sup>67</sup> Bynum’s mother Mary was elected president and Bynum’s wife Bessie (Thompson)—whom he married on October 19, 1923—served as secretary.<sup>68</sup>

For most of its history, the Redd-Williams post was without a permanent facility for its members. The post did meet regularly in the basement of the McBarnes Memorial Building on Grove Street in Bloomington, the permanent address of the Louis E. Davis post, until fire damaged the building in September 1972.<sup>69</sup> Following the fire, the McLean County Board accepted the Davis post’s sale of its leasehold interest in the building for \$94,000 (roughly \$540,000 in 2016 dollars)—with the agreement that the post provide space at its future headquarters for other veterans’ organizations in the county.<sup>70</sup> More than a year later, members of the still homeless Redd-Williams post complained that the post had received no money from the sale of the lease, accusing the Davis post of breaking its promise to provide funds for a new location.<sup>71</sup> Members of the Davis post responded to the accusations, saying that no promise had been made regarding a payout and that such a decision would have to be submitted to the post’s board.<sup>72</sup> Claims circulated that offerings of \$1,000 to \$3,000 (less than \$5,000 to \$15,000 in 2016 dollars) had been made by the Davis post to Redd-Williams, and that the latter had either

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<sup>58</sup> “Colored Post of Legion Named,” *Pantagraph*, February 19, 1920.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; “Stevenson-Lewis Post Committees,” *Pantagraph*, March 6, 1920.

<sup>63</sup> It is not known by the author when the Stevenson-Lewis post disbanded, but there is no record of the post in the *Pantagraph* after 1921.

<sup>64</sup> “Local Colored Men Form Legion Post,” *Pantagraph*, February 7, 1923; “How Time Flies: 75 Years Ago,” *Pantagraph*, February 6, 1988.

<sup>65</sup> “To Hold Funeral of Gus Williams Sunday,” *Pantagraph*, January 1, 1921.

<sup>66</sup> Pierson and Hasbrouck, 203.

<sup>67</sup> “Auxiliary of Redd-Williams Post Holds Its Annual Election,” *Pantagraph*, April 10, 1924.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*; “Bynum-Thompson Marriage,” *Pantagraph*, March 28, 1924.

<sup>69</sup> “Legion post buys old S&H store,” *Pantagraph*, February 4, 1976.

<sup>70</sup> “Post says promise broken,” *Pantagraph*, October 10, 1974.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

rejected the offers or countered with figures closer to \$20,000 (or close to \$100,000 in 2016 dollars).<sup>73</sup> The concern on the part of the Redd-Williams post was that the post had already begun preparations to secure a permanent location on Main Street with the knowledge that some funding would be coming from the Davis post.<sup>74</sup> Though the Redd-Williams Post never saw payment from the sale of the lease of the McBarnes building, in January 1975 the Davis post offered the members Redd-Williams temporary use of a room at their new permanent location at 108 E. Market Street in Bloomington and contributed \$500 to the Redd-Williams' fund drive for a permanent location of their own.<sup>75</sup>

On July 1, 1976, members of the Redd-Williams Post 163 opened their new headquarters at 529 N. Main Street in Bloomington—the former S&H Green Stamp Store.<sup>76</sup> However, after suffering recent drops in membership, the Redd-Williams Post disbanded three years later in 1979.<sup>77</sup> Afterwards some black veterans joined the then-integrated Carl S. Martin American Legion Post 635—founded in Normal in 1928 expressly as an alternative to the Louis E. Davis Post.<sup>78</sup>

First elected post Sergeant-at-Arms, Bynum served as Redd-Williams Post Commander from 1927 to 1943.<sup>79</sup> While Commander, Bynum participated in Legion activities including various Memorial Day and Armistice Day (Veterans Day) services and celebration, and numerous fundraising efforts.<sup>80</sup> Upon again being reelected Post Commander after three years serving in the position, the *Pantagraph* reported that post membership remained 100 percent and specifically mentioned the number of social gatherings that were held.<sup>81</sup>

One such social gathering that debuted during Bynum's tenure was the annual President's Birthday ball (held in the honor of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt), which served as a fundraiser for local efforts to fight polio.<sup>82</sup> The evening included musical performances and dancing at the McBarnes building in downtown Bloomington, and though sponsored by "colored people... anxious to help," was no "race affair."<sup>83</sup> All members of the public were invited to participate.<sup>84</sup> Bynum served as the master of ceremonies on at least one occasion.<sup>85</sup>

In another philanthropic effort, on December 12, 1941, the Redd-Williams Post under Bynum "pledged full co-operation with city authorities in the current emergency"—referring to the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "25 Years Ago," *Pantagraph*, January 6, 2000; "Fund drive hits \$1,000," *Pantagraph*, April 23, 1975.

<sup>76</sup> "25 Years Ago," *Pantagraph*, July 1, 2001.

<sup>77</sup> "May We Always Remember: Redd-Williams American Legion Post in Bloomington," *Pantagraph*, May 29, 1994.

<sup>78</sup> "B-N vets: Army integration slow process," *Pantagraph*, November 8, 1988; "Back Then: American Legion Recruiting," *Pantagraph*, February 8, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> "Bynum Again Heads Redd-Williams Post," *Pantagraph*, October 2, 1930; "Post to Install New Officers: Edward Bynum New Commander of Legionnaires," *Pantagraph*, August 31, 1941; "S.H. Matthews Commander of Redd-Williams," *Pantagraph*, July 23, 1944.

<sup>80</sup> "Parade Halts at Cemeteries," *Pantagraph*, May 31, 1930; "In Memoriam to Those Who Died," *Pantagraph*, May 31, 1932; "5 of G.A.R. Participate: All Patriotic Organizations Represented in Memorial Day Parade," *Pantagraph*, May 31, 1933; "Prayer for Peace is Armistice Theme as Other Nations Fight," *Pantagraph*, November 12, 1940.

<sup>81</sup> *Pantagraph*, October 2, 1930.

<sup>82</sup> "Colored People Hold Their Polio Ball Tonight," *Pantagraph*, January 28, 1941; "Redd Williams Honors President With Ball," *Pantagraph*, January 31, 1943.

<sup>83</sup> "Public Get Second Chance in Polio Drive," January 30, 1943.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

United States' recent entry into World War II.<sup>86</sup> The following summer, the post headed a war drive to collect old phonograph records so the shellac from which they were made (a material under ration at the time) could be recycled to manufacture new records complete with current music to boost the morale of soldiers and civilians alike.<sup>87</sup> Evidence that Bynum was never without patriotic passion, the *Pantagraph* quoted him as saying, "This is the people's war. It's up to all of us to do everything possible to bring about the victory."<sup>88</sup>

In addition to his propensities for philanthropy and poetry, Bynum seems also to have possessed an aptitude for athletics—particularly basketball. While stationed at Camp Logan in Houston before leaving for France, the *Pantagraph* reported that both Edward and Lincoln had made a "great hit in the athletic work that the army [was] producing,"—in this case, referring to the brothers' contributions to the army basketball league.<sup>89</sup> At the time of the article, the Bynums and their fellow players had won twenty-two straight games.<sup>90</sup> Following the end of the war, Bynum applied his ball skills to management of the Bloomington Buffaloes, a local black basketball team with a number of winning seasons in the books.<sup>91</sup> Edward was not the only Bynum to contribute to the success of the Buffaloes, however, as his brothers Lincoln (guard, coach) and Eugene (center) played on the team.<sup>92</sup>

Another Buffaloes player worthy of note was star forward Eli White, or "Lightning" White as he was known in the boxing ring.<sup>93</sup> It is possible that Edward Bynum managed White as boxer, or at least promoted his abilities amongst his opponents.<sup>94</sup> It also appears that White's relationship with the Bynums extended beyond basketball and boxing, as he was later appointed successor to Lincoln Bynum as automobile driver for the Bloomington police.<sup>95</sup>

Knowing that the Buffaloes played both black and white teams, it is not surprising that the team found themselves playing defense off the court at least once. On Tuesday, December 19, 1922, the Bloomington Buffaloes defeated the San Jose Triple A's, of San Jose, IL, 29 to 11 on the court of the gymnasium in Bloomington High School, located at 500-516 E. Washington Street.<sup>96</sup> In preparation for the game, the *Pantagraph* reported that "the visitors are represented with some of the fastest basketball players in semi-pro circles and the locals will be forced to travel at a fast pace to register a win with them."<sup>97</sup> Five days later, on December 24, the *Pantagraph* reported that San Jose refused to meet the Buffaloes in any further matches due to their failure to appear at their last scheduled game on Thursday, December 21.<sup>98</sup> The paper

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<sup>86</sup> "Redd-Williams Post Pledges Mayor Full Co-Operation," *Pantagraph*, December 12, 1941.

<sup>87</sup> "Redd Williams Post In Record Drive," *Pantagraph*, July 25, 1942; Karen Fishman, "Scrap for Victory," <https://blogs.loc.gov/now-see-hear/2015/01/scrap-for-victory/>, Library of Congress, Date accessed September 10, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> "Bynum Boys Making Good: Colored Soldiers From This City Make Hit in Athletic Stunts," *Pantagraph*, February 15, 1918.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> "Bloomington Buffaloes Win," *Pantagraph*, October 26, 1926.

<sup>92</sup> "Buffaloes Win at Peoria," *Pantagraph*, December 7, 1921; "Buffaloes Wallop San Jose Quintet," *Pantagraph*, December 20, 1922; "Colored Boys Will Perform This Evening," *Pantagraph*, December 28, 1921.

<sup>93</sup> *Pantagraph*, December 7, 1921; "Bynum Warns Brown to be Very Careful," *Pantagraph*, December 15, 1921.

<sup>94</sup> *Pantagraph*, December 15, 1921.

<sup>95</sup> "Protest Announced Over Appointment of Police Auto Driver," *Pantagraph*, June 9, 1933.

<sup>96</sup> *Pantagraph*, December 20, 1922; "San Jose Will Refuse to Meet Buffaloes Now," *Pantagraph*, December 25, 1922.

<sup>97</sup> "Buffaloes Prepared for San Jose," *Pantagraph*, December 19, 1922.

<sup>98</sup> *Pantagraph*, December 25, 1922.

reported that a large crowd had assembled for the game and was disappointed by the unexplained cancellation.<sup>99</sup> In response, the Buffaloes published a statement on December 27 that stated that there was “good reason” for cancelling the game as the team had received threats following their win on December 19 that the defeated Triple A’s were planning to have the Buffaloes “beaten up” and “chased out of town.”<sup>100</sup> On December 30, San Jose issued their own statement defending the character of the town, saying, “No visiting team at San Jose has received anything but the most courteous treatment from players and public. The games are played in the First M.E. church gymnasium. No rough tactics are allowed.”<sup>101</sup> The statement went on to claim that contact had been made with Manager Bynum by phone prior to the game and that he had stated the team had left for San Jose around 4:30 p.m. that afternoon.<sup>102</sup> After the team failed to appear, several more calls were made to Bynum with no reply.<sup>103</sup> The *Pantagraph* last reported on the story on December 29, writing that San Jose was “indignant” over the charges made by the Buffaloes and were “willing to meet the colored boys on [a] neutral floor.”<sup>104</sup>

On the Fourth of July, 1925, Edward D. Bynum was arrested on the charge of assault and battery against Howard Scott.<sup>105</sup> The incident occurred at Lake park (now State Farm park), where Bynum claimed to have “parted a fight between Scott and another colored boy at a dance...[that] might have resulted in a riot.”<sup>106</sup> The complaint was filed by Effie Henderson, Scott’s grandmother.<sup>107</sup>

Edward D. Bynum, of 313 S. East Street, Bloomington, died at the age of 56 at the Veterans Hospital in Dwight, IL on at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, January 22, 1954.<sup>108</sup> He had lost his wife Bessie to heart disease twenty-one years earlier when she was just 31 years of age.<sup>109</sup> The couple resided at 503 S. Wright Street in Bloomington at the time and had no children.<sup>110</sup> Funeral services for Edward were held the Tuesday after his death, at the Murray-Stamper Memorial Home.<sup>111</sup> Three brothers survived him: Eugene (Buffalo, NY), Frederick (Chicago, IL), and Lincoln (504 S. Wright Street, Bloomington). Along with his wife, Bynum was preceded in death by his parents, two brothers, and two sisters.<sup>112</sup> Bynum is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Section 16, one of four designated military burial sections in the cemetery.

By: Hannah E. Johnson, 2017

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; One report cites that a \$65 house turned out for the game, at \$0.35 a ticket. “San Jose Presents Its Side of Controversy,” *Pantagraph*, December 30, 1922; “Tonight Basketball: San Jose vs. Buffaloes,” *Pantagraph*, December 19, 1922.

<sup>100</sup> “Game Was Called Off When Trouble Brewed,” *Pantagraph*, December 27, 1922.

<sup>101</sup> *Pantagraph*, December 30, 1922.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> “San Jose Quintet is Winner Over Mason City,” *Pantagraph*, December 29, 1922.

<sup>105</sup> “For Assault and Battery,” *Pantagraph*, July 6, 1925.

<sup>106</sup> “Case Under Advisement,” *Pantagraph*, July 7, 1925.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> “Bloomington-Normal Deaths: Edward Bynum,” *Pantagraph*, January 25, 1954.

<sup>109</sup> “Mrs. Bessie E. Bynum Dies—Ill 3 Weeks,” *Pantagraph*, February 6, 1933.

<sup>110</sup> Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1932. The couple also resided at 604½ S. Madison Street and 205 E. Oakland Avenue. Bloomington-Normal Directories: 1924, 1928.

<sup>111</sup> *Pantagraph*, January 25, 1954; “Bynum Funeral,” *Pantagraph*, January 27, 1954.

<sup>112</sup> *Pantagraph*, January 25, 1954.