

# 'For Love of Liberty' sheds light on patriots

Documentary chronicles African-American experiences in warfare from the Revolutionary War to Iraq.

By Leslie Rigoulot

General George Patton decorates Private Ernest A. Jenkins of New York City with the Silver Star in France.



**FOR** most of American military history one question was asked and answered: "Will the black man fight?" From the death of the escaped slave Crispus Attucks on a Boston green in 1770 to the Tuskegee airmen, to the U.S military today, the answer has always been a resounding 'yes'.

Frank Martin, co-writer, producer and director of *For Love of Liberty, The Story of America's Black Patriots* asks the deeper question: why would a group of people shed their blood for a country that enslaved and devalued them?

Martin called what led him to make this two-part, four-hour documentary "a noble calling" yet a rather trivial incident involving a colleague of Martin's started it all.

"Jim Crite found a book at a garage sale and we knew it would make a great documentary," Martin said.

That book was the Department of Defense's tome on African-Americans fighting for their country, produced while Colin Powell was at the Pentagon.

Military leaders recognized in the book the lack of recognition for African-American involvement in American warfare. Crite later became one of the film's producers.

"We set out consciously to make it as entertaining and dramatic as possible," said producer Rich Hull. "We wanted it to play more like a movie."

Dramatic movies that had accurately depicted African-American service members were scarce to none.

"I love the movie *Patton*," said Martin. "But there is only one black face in the whole film and it is Patton's steward. If it hadn't been for the black soldiers driving the supply trucks night and day to keep up with his advancing line, Patton would have been stopped in his tracks."

*For Love Of Liberty* took ten years to make.

"It has a torturous history," Martin said. "Crite took it to Lou Gossett's company but they don't make documentaries. They helped as much as they could. I presented it to the networks and then took it to PBS. They don't produce documentaries; they show them. So we went to Showtime and got the initial kickoff. We started shooting and realized that we had way too much material to give them the 90-minute show they wanted. To their credit, they told us to give the money back when we were able. That was when Rich got involved."

Rich Hull is known in Hollywood for making hit teen



African-American Buffalo Soldiers, pictured above and below, patrolled the American west during and after the Civil War. Native Americans gave the Buffalo Soldiers their name because their hair reminded them of the curly hair on the buffalos' head and neck.

movies such as "She's All That," and running media companies.

"But I wanted to do something that changes the world," Hull said. "I wanted to use my connections at Showtime for something more. We took a page out of Ken Burns' book and cast the documentary voices. We sent a letter to Colin Powell and once he was in, so was Morgan Freeman. From there it took off."

Even after being freed from slavery, African-Americans were not viewed as being fit to serve. *For Love of Liberty* is a documentary that should interest every American.

"After Vietnam, soldiers coming home were ignored or worse," said Martin. "That is what happened to every black soldier. And if we think things have changed, I will point out that Clint Eastwood's recent film *Flags of Our Fathers* had no black faces in it. But there were black soldiers at Iwo Jima."

Halle Berry hosts segments of *For Love of Liberty*, which are narrated by Avery Brooks. Ice-T's familiar tones are perfect for some modern segments. Bill Cosby, a former Navy man, and Morgan Freeman, who served in the Air Force, are some of the more distinct voices.

Among other voice-over cast members are Barry Corbin, a former Marine who is on target as President Lyndon Johnson. From England, Jonathan Pryce and Alan Rickman are evident.

"It is really just a one-day deal," said Barry Corbin. "You come into the studio and read your part. It was an honor to do it."

"We found hours of old footage, which we included in the Collector's Edition," said Martin. "We have five hours of archival footage from 1898 when the Buffalo Soldiers were marching off





**African-American women became members of the Women's Army Corps during World War II, serving in a variety of support jobs.**



with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders to Cuba. Of course, we could only use a portion of it in the documentary."

Trying to make some of the earlier segments come to life took some doing but the documentary is engaging throughout.

"If we had had the money, it would have been a different film," Martin said. "The blessing was that we had the chance to look at it and improve it. I'd put it away for

three months and come back to it with fresh eyes." Martin also took out a second mortgage on his home to complete the film.

"It is ironic that I got that mortgage from US Bank and they turn out to be one of our major sponsors," he said. "They helped get the film made twice."

The most intriguing segment was the shift during the Korean War. Douglas MacArthur was relieved of duty and his successor asked permission to implement the 1948 desegregation edict that Eisenhower had signed.

Eisenhower had seen African-American soldiers in the European theater of WWII and was obviously impressed. Korea was the first desegregated military action.

The second major unexpected shift was the change in African-American perspective after Martin Luther King's assassination.

"I believe Ossie Davis voiced Martin Luther King's sentiment – 'We are forced to watch young boys die who can't be seated at the lunch counter,' " said Martin. "African-Americans were willing to fight but were also willing to voice the hunger for liberty and equality that they believed in for so long."

*For Love of Liberty* is available for purchase on DVD at [www.forloveofliberty.org](http://www.forloveofliberty.org), military exchanges, and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). Public Broadcasting System stations nationwide will be airing the four-hour documentary in two-part segments this spring and summer. **AF**



**Director Frank Martin took out a second mortgage on his home in order to fund production costs of 'For Love of Liberty, the Story of America's Black Patriots.'**