

**Soldiers,**

Hopefully everyone is home safely from this weekend's trip to Charleston, West Virginia. I really don't know where to start the explanation for the type of weekend that we experienced in West Virginia. It was so rewarding in so many different ways and it will remain as one of the most memorable few days that I have had the pleasure of sharing with my Buffalo Soldier sisters and brothers.

On last Friday morning at 5:30am the New Jersey Buffalo Soldiers all met at one of our usual spots to begin our trip to Charleston, West Virginia. We were joined by Daniel "Rhode Runner" Brown, President of our Rhode Island Buffalo Soldiers Chapter and his lovely wife Joyce. Most of us were on bikes with the exception of "Big T" who was driving the "Chuck wagon" with our presentation supplies, "Birdman" and his wife Shirley who were in the chase vehicle with trailer and Herb Dorsey who because of medical problems was unable to ride so he brought his whole family with him, wife, daughter and grand-daughter in the family car. We were all in our leather jackets and chaps and had our electric gloves close by ready to be donned when we pass through the mountains of western Maryland and West Virginia. We all had coffee to take off the chill of the early morning, gathered in a circle and had prayer, assigned duties during our safety briefing and rolled out on time. We had to stop before we got out of the parking lot because "The Chuck Wagon" couldn't be released from the park position. It was too early to find a shop open so we decided to roll on without "Big T" and our supplies and have them join us later that evening after repairs could be made. Karen, wife of our New Jersey President, Nate Gundy remained with "Big T" to keep us informed of their progress. We pushed on and arrived at the end of the Delaware Memorial Bridge a few minutes late, picked up two more riders and pressed on down I-95 toward Baltimore. We were rolling with 13 bikes and 2 vehicles. Traffic was light as we rode into daybreak without incident. A quick stop at the Maryland House for gas and a rendezvous with a few more members and then back on the road trying to make Frederick, Maryland in time to meet with members from our Maryland Mother Chapter and our Northern Virginia Chapter. We circled Baltimore on 695 west, hit some morning traffic for a few miles, then rolled on to I-70 west towards Frederick. I smiled as our caravan of bikes and cars rolled through the countryside of Maryland where I was born, raised, worked on farms and drove my first cars and bikes. We passed by Marriottsville and I remembered the old one room Dance Hall that we Black folk used to go to in the late 50s and early 60s. It was where I first saw Patty Labelle and the Blue-belles. She was appearing in Baltimore at the Royal Theater on Pennsylvania Avenue and agreed to come out to the country to entertain us with just 3 or 4 songs between her shows in Baltimore. It was a special treat for the many blacks that lived away from the big cities. We made good time on open highway towards Frederick and got our first few glimpses of the gorgeous rolling hills of western Maryland. Arriving on time we were met at the Golden Corral by "Boobie" Spencer, a member of our Maryland chapter that lives close to Frederick. He had already had them set up for the 30 plus that would be meeting there for breakfast. Not long after our arrival Maryland Mother and Northern Virginia began to roll in. Soldiers were meeting Soldiers with our traditional hugs and kisses and laughing about the chilly weather experienced along the way and what was yet to come,

Breakfast completed, we gathered in the parking lot for prayer and then divided our large group into 3 formations. We rolled out with New Jersey's Road Captain, "Thor" leading the first group, I had the second group and Maryland Mother chapter President, Felipe had the third group including the chase vehicle. We rolled back onto the highway and decided to run about 100 yards between each group. Rolling through the beautiful hills and mountains of western Maryland and West Virginia during autumn was a special treat for all of us. The weather changed from cool to cold as we worked our way through the mountains and valleys but the beauty remain constant. We rolled off I-70 onto I-68 then to I-79 south for hours before finally reaching I-64 west. Our destination was in sight so about 10 miles out our 3 formations combined, we moved our New Jersey member, "Shoot" to the front of the pack because we were coming to his hometown and we wanted him to be seen first. He had worked real hard to make this happen. We made the final exit and started up the steep hill to the Comfort Inn. As the ground surface leveled we could see a

group of people waiting for us and cheering as we rode in. They laughed and waved and moved toward us as we parked the bikes. They were the members of the church that had invited us there including the parents of "Shoot", Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus, and Reverend Larry D. Patterson, Pastor of the Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church. Everyone hugged and kissed and welcomed one another and the "Soldiers" all hugged and thanked each other for contributing to a safe trip. The Rev. welcomed us and thanked us for our willingness to travel so far to help them. He stated, as many others did, that "this many black bikers had never been seen in Charleston, West Virginia". A briefing was held and times were given to all of the Soldiers so that they would know where to meet and at one time in the morning. We all went to our respective hotels or to get something to eat but most just wanted to rest from a long day in the saddle. Some of us still had more riding to do. Joe Tyree, the State Motorcycle Safety Program Coordinator was also there to meet us and he wanted to take Nate Gundy, the other chapter presidents and I as well as all of the road captains on a tour of the areas that we would be visiting on Saturday. The tour took about two hours so we were all beat by the time we got back to the hotel. All we wanted to do was get something to eat and then go to bed. When we arrived at the hotel the "Chuck Wagon" was in the parking lot. "Big T" and Karen had made it in safely with all of the supplies. Saturday would be one long day for everyone.

Saturday morning came much too quickly. Most of us were up at 5:30 am for a 7 am departure from the hotel. The Soldiers rolled in on time and the road captains lined them up according to protocol. We gave another safety briefing and told everyone about the full day's schedule, our National Chaplain, John Callis led us in prayer and we rolled out over 60 bikes strong for a photo shoot with the Governor of West Virginia, Mr. Joe Manchin. We arrived at the State Capitol Building on time and lined the circled in front of the Capitol with our bikes. We had just begun to take pictures when Gov Manchin was seen walking towards us accompanied only by a single member of his security staff. He approached me, shook my hand, introduced himself and then shook the hands of every Soldier that had gathered there to meet him. After personally welcoming every Soldier individually Gov Manchin gave us a history lesson on West Virginia and then took pictures with all of the Soldiers. He then surprised all of us by invited us to go on a personal tour of the Capitol Building. Can you believe this? He had security open the Capitol building just for us and then he personally guided us through the building including into his office where we took more pictures and took turns sitting in the Governor's chair. It was an excellent experience and the first time that had been done for any motorcycle organization. Governor Manchin is himself a biker. He rides a Harley and his brother has a GoldWing. We took our time enjoying the beauty of the building before saying our goodbyes and thanking the Governor for his time and unusual act of kindness toward the National Association of Buffalo Soldiers and Troopers MC.

Mounting our bikes and enjoying the weather warm up that took place while we were inside the Capitol, the Soldiers prepared to move to our next stop for the day, the campus of West Virginia State University. We rolled in and was immediately met by the campus Chief of Security who after being convinced by one of our members, rushed back home and got his bike so that he could ride with us in the campus parade. While waiting for the parade to start more Soldiers rode in from Columbus, Ohio and Roanoke, Virginia to join us. It was going to be a good showing for our first appearance at West Virginia State. Nate, "Shoot" and I were kept busy with TV interviews while many Soldiers cleaned and wiped down their bikes for the parade. When we finished the interviews we were greeted by Mr. Wolfe, Mayor of the city of Dunbar. The University is located in his city. He introduced his wife and welcomed me to the Charleston area and to the University. I asked him to address all of the Soldiers and if he would be willing to assist me and Nate in presenting the "Center Patch" to 3 of our New Jersey members. He agreed to do both and now "Solo", "Batman", and "RoadKill" can brag about getting their "colors" from the Mayor on the campus of WVSU.

Before we rolled from the staging area we requested from the Chief of Security to be allowed to wear our Cavalry hats instead of our helmets. He agreed. We would only be on campus grounds and traveling less than 5 miles an hour. Kids along the route were in awe of the bikes but none

was more excited than the alumni and students of West Virginia State. When we rolled slowly through the campus everyone began to applaud and cheer and stand up and point and yell out "BUFFALO SOLDIERS, OOOOH YOU ALL ARE SO SHARP". This was the first time to have a motorcycle organization in there parade and they never expected so many of us to be there. They all loved it. Even the people who were cooking at the tailgate party came out to see what we were all about. As soon as we parked the bikes people were coming over to ask us questions. Old people and young, everyone wanted to know about the Soldiers. While the Soldiers grabbed something to eat, Nate, "Shoot" and I were once again rushed off, this time to meet with the WVSU President and his family. We were welcomed warmly. Before we entered the stately residence we could see the President Hazo Carter walking down the sidewalk to greet us. He was all smiles and his arms were outstretched. Without him saying a word we could just tell how appreciative he was of the Buffalo Soldiers being there. He told us how proud he was to see us there and how we impacted everyone at the Homecoming especially the alumni. He welcomed us to his home and introduced us to his wife and daughter and of course offered us more food. Surprisingly, President Carter and his wife remembered "Shoot" who had graduated from WVSU 18 years earlier and greeted him with a lot of sincerity. We spent only a short time there but before we left President Carter asked us to please return next year if we possibly could.

It was getting close to "kick off time" so we rushed back to our bikes and begun gathering the Soldiers for another "first" at WVSU. The Soldiers had been asked to circle the football field on our bikes before the start of the game. Rolling out of the parking lot with the Chief of Security still in the lead we made our way to the stadium gate and stopped as a dozen WVSU cheer-leaders ran out to sit on our bikes and circle the field with us. People in the stands cheered as we circled the field and stopped in front of the home crowd to allow the cheer-leaders to dismount our bikes. I guess that it made them feel good to see all of us in the University's colors of black and gold. Our bikes completely circled the field and were still coming in when the first bikes were leaving. As a matter of fact opening kickoff and the first plays of the game took place while some of our bikes were still on the track. We didn't have time to stay for the game because we had another appointment at 2:30 so the Soldiers mounted up and pushed on to the Clay Center in downtown Charleston.

When we arrived at the Clay Center more interviews were conducted for the TV stations and the Center's personnel briefed the Soldiers on the exhibits currently on display in the Center including the exhibit "For the Love of Liberty; The African American Soldier 1866-1945 that our Soldiers were anxious to view. The Clay Center waived the customary \$7.00 charge for each adult and allowed the Soldiers to enter free of charge. Before moving inside I was approached by Mr. Danny Jones, Mayor of the Capital City, Charleston, West Virginia. I introduced him to the Soldiers and he greeted us, gave us a little history of the City and State and made us feel welcomed to Charleston and the Clay Center. In one day, the Soldiers had now met the State Governor, the Mayor of the State Capital, and the Mayor of Dunbar that includes the WVSU campus as well as the University President. It was hard to believe and we still hadn't accomplished yet our initial purpose for coming to Charleston and that was to help Simpson United Methodist Church celebrate their 142<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary. Coincidentally the church was started the same year as Buffalo Soldiers, 1866.

While some Soldiers remained at the Center, others rushed back to the hotel to get a few minutes rest or to freshen up before coming to the evening presentation at the Church. The effects of the long ride on Friday and a full day schedule on Saturday was starting to take a toll on everyone. I went directly to the Church to help set up for the New Jersey presentation. When I arrived "Big T" and "Bemoe" had already completed everything for the evening event. The artifacts and pictures were displayed at the front of the church. All we needed now was for the Soldiers and the local parishioners to show up. The program was scheduled to start at 6pm. At 5:50 we were starting to worry because only a hand full of people were there but the Soldiers showed up in numbers and the locals began to come in. Soon the church was full and an extra section was opened to allow for a few more seats. Felipe', President of our Maryland chapter had all of the Soldiers move from

the center of the church, and replaced them in that area with all of the kids and local parishioners so that they would be directly in front for the presentation. We were welcomed by the Rev. Patterson, and by "Shoot's" lovely mom, Mary and his dad Bryant Cyrus Sr. The presentation opened with remarks by "Shoot" and a heartfelt prayer by "Preach" that touched everyone. The presentation went well and we tried hard to incorporate the children and local people into some of the discussion. The audience was silenced when during the presentation I asked Kym to sing a portion of Amazing Grace. She sang it so beautifully and she did it without knowing that I was going to call upon her. Our Soldiers are such a special people! As always I'm so proud of our New Jersey Chapter for all of the energy that they put forth in preparing for our presentations. I hope that everyone appreciated their efforts. As Nate brought the program to an end we allowed everyone to come forward and review the artifacts before going downstairs to take part in the huge home-cooked meal that the church had prepared for us. The night ended with us all stuffing ourselves on ribs, turkey, chicken, collard greens, kale, sweet potatoes, sweet potato casserole, potato salad, cranberry sauce, green beans, rolls, macaroni and cheese, peach cobbler, cakes and pies. I know I missed something but boy it was good. I'm sure that everyone got enough.

I guess that it was around 10pm before most of us got back to the hotel. We said our goodbyes to those that were still up and moving around. Many of us agreed to leave around 6:30 Sunday morning heading back to our many locations. This had been a long day. It will feel good to lie down, even if only for a few hours.

We met in the lobby at 6am and loaded up our bikes, had our coffee and laughed about the goodtime that we shared over the weekend. Someone brought in a local paper and there we were, Buffalo Soldiers on the front page. We even beat out OJ, he was on page 2. Mr. Cyrus arrived at the hotel to thank everyone again and to say goodbye. He couldn't thank us enough. At 6:56 the first group of us rolled out onto I-64 heading back home. We adjusted ourselves in our seats, turned on the heated equipment and settled in for the 10 hour trip back to Jersey. In all our minds, we knew that we had made a big difference and Charleston, West Virginia would be better because of it.

I want to personally thank the following chapters for supporting New Jersey's efforts in Charleston, WV. The Black population of West Virginia is only 3%. Our positive showing there will certainly help the majority of the residents to better understand who we are and what we are about. A big thanks to:

Rhode Island Buffalo Soldiers, Maryland (Mother Chapter) Buffalo Soldiers, Virginia (Mother Chapter) Buffalo Soldiers, Northern Virginia Buffalo Soldiers, Roanoke, Virginia Buffalo Soldiers, and the Columbus, Ohio Buffalo Soldiers. I apologize for any chapter that I may have missed.

To my brother John Callis, National Chaplain, thank you for your genuine concern and your support.

I think that all of the "Soldiers" made it home safely although not without incident. New Jersey's Road Captain, "Big Thor" had a tire blow out after leaving Baltimore. Carrying the treasure of his wife and pulling a trailer his rear tire began to separate and then blew. "Big Thor" was able to manhandle the bike to the side of the road. Thankfully no one was injured and he was able to get the bike towed home.

Many of you observed our New Jersey Treasurer, "Bemoe" as he did his presentation at the church Saturday night. He really wasn't himself and was feeling awful but didn't want to let me and the Soldiers down so he performed although in pain. He was not allowed to ride his bike back to Jersey. Instead he rode in the chase vehicle.

We are so thankful to Bryant "Shoot" Cyrus, Mr. Anthony Kinzer and Mr. Joe Tyree for all the behind the scene negotiations that they accomplished to make this past weekend an absolutely great success.

Please check out the following sites for more info:

<http://www.wvgazette.com/News/200810020861>

<http://www.wvgazette.com/News/200810040483>

click on watch video

[Click here: Group Rich In History Rides Into The Kanawha Valley - WOWKTV.com](#)

I remain proud and honored to be your president,

TC

*Thomas "TC" Costley*

*National President*

*National Association of Buffalo Soldiers and Troopers Motorcycle Clubs Inc.*

*(NABSTM)*