

"Profile of a Race Riot" (1971) by Ed Wheeler

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[[image - photograph]] [[caption]] BLACK CASUALTY OF THE LITTLE AFRICA WAR. [[/caption]] The time was 12:30 A.M., June 1, 1921.

The riot had not yet reached its full intensity.

An armed mob of whites, scouring the vicinity of the Frisco Railway station after an attack by a black mob, mistook a lone white man for a negro. The mob immediately fired more than 25 shots in the innocent bystander. His remains were beyond identification.

At the same time the bystander was being gunned down at the railway station, a lone white man stumbled into a crowd of approximately 1,000 negroes North of the Frisco depot. He was immediately attacked and beaten into a bloody pulp.

Between 12:30 A.M. and 1:00 A.M., the mayor and the chief of police signed a message to Governor J.B.A. Robertson informing him that the riot had gone beyond the control of local authorities and requesting assistance. The Governor in turn ordered out the Oklahoma National Guard and requested two companies of regular troops from Fort Sill.

1:00 A.M., June 1, 1921.

The bulk of the black mob was separated from the whites who occupied the downtown business area of the city while white motorized patrols reconnoitered north of the business section.

A temporary but uneasy quiet settled on the city.

Meanwhile, thousands of white men, women and even children gathered in the downtown business area. Most of the mob was heavily armed and offered its services to the law enforcement officers as long as they could "shoot some niggers."

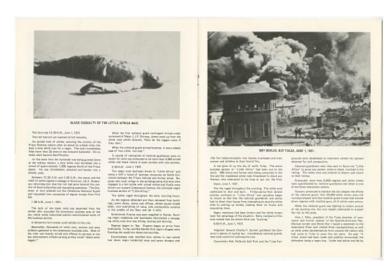
When the first national guard contingent arrived under command of Major L.J.F. Rooney, cheers went up from the white mob which shouted, "Now let the niggers come if they dare."

When the national guard arrived however, it was a classic case of "too Little-too late."

A couple of companies of national guardsmen were no match for what was estimated to be more than 3,000 armed white and black rioters in open combat with one another.

2:30 A.M. June 1, 1921.

The negro mob had been driven to "Little Africa" and along a half a block of business structures on North Cincinnati between the Frisco railroad and Archer street. Negroes who took refuge in the buildings along this strip were engaged in a hot battle with armed whites and finally were driven out toward Greenwood Avenue, the principal negro business section of "Little Africa."



The battle raged throughout the early morning hours.

As the negroes defended and then retreated from buildings, pawn shops, stores and offices, whites would invade them, loot everything of value, pile combustible material in the middle of the floor and set it afire.

Greenwood Avenue was soon engulfed in flames. Burning negro residences and businesses illuminated a rampaging white mob that was killing, looting and burning.

Negroes began to flee. Reports began to arrive from Collinsville, Turley and Bartlesville that negro refugees were flooding the roads into those communities.

Eyewitnesses later testified that whites in cars would roar down negro residential areas and spray shotgun and

[[image - photograph]] [[caption]] NOT BERLIN, BUT TULSA, JUNE 1, 1921 [[/caption]]

rifle fire indiscriminately into homes, businesses and men, women and children in their line of fire.

A red glow lit up the sky of north Tulsa. The entire business section of "Little Africa" had been put to the torch. 860 stores and homes were being consumed in the fire and the maddened white mob threatened to shoot any fireman who attempted to lay hose or put out the fires.

Dawn, June 1, 1921.

The fire raged throughout the morning. The white mob continued to loot and burn. Firing was by then almost entirely confined to "Little Africa" and casualties began to mount so fast that the national guardsmen and police had to divert their forces from attempting to stop the white mob to picking up bodies, loading them on trucks and evacuating them.

Negro resistance had been broken and the white rioters took full advantage of the situation. Many members of the mob related that the whole affair was "exciting."

9:00 A.M., June 1, 1921.

Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett published the Governor's decree of martial law. Immediately national guardsmen took control of policing the city.

Convention Hall, McNulty Ball Park and the Tulsa Fairgrounds were established as interment centers for persons detained for civil prosecution.

National guardsmen were then sent in force into "Little Africa" to arrest

any person, white or black, involved in the rioting. The white mob was ordered to disarm and return to their homes.

Eventually more than 6,000 negroes and white rioters were apprehended by national guardsmen and taken to one of the three internment centers.

Rumors continued to blanket the city despite the efforts of the national guard, that 25,000 white rioters were still running rampant and that national guard troops had mowed down negroes with machine guns, all of which were untrue.

While the national guard was fighting to obtain control of the burning city, the civic leaders attempted to explain the riot to the press.

Alva J. Niles, president of the Tulsa chamber of commerce and former veteran of the Spanish-American War, Mexican border and World War I issued a statement to the Associated Press and United Press representatives as well as other press representatives from around the nation who had come to Tulsa to cover the riot story. He said, "A minor arrest had been made and publicly announced, the defendant being a negro boy. Under bad advice and led by

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