

Fort Gordon community remembers African-American Civil War veterans

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It's a warm September night in 1864 and a division of African- American Soldiers from the Eighteenth Corps have been pinned down for half an hour by heavy Confederate artillery. As soon as the explosions cease, the courageous group of men rush forward to meet their enemy. In what became known as the Battle of Market Heights, an epic hour-long battle ensued between the two forces even though the African-American Soldiers were outnumbered. Of the 16 African- American Soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor during the Civil War, 14 of them were a result of this battle.

A group of hundreds of servicemembers and civilians heard the story of the brave Eighteenth Corps Soldiers, and many other true- life accounts of African- American Soldiers as the Fort Gordon community celebrated Black History Month at Alexander Hall on Feb. 25.

This year's Black History Month theme is 'African Americans in the Civil War', and guest speaker Corey Rogers, a Historian for the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History in Augusta, recounted African Americans' role in the conflict. The expert historian is known for researching even the smallest details of history's events, and was able to tell the gathered crowd of details they might have been previously unaware of.

" Many history lessons are "top-heavy," focusing on the big names and leaders on the forefront but leaving out the lesser-known people down in the streets," said Rogers. I believe it's important to recount and remember all history. There were many brave individuals throughout the Civil War that accomplished feats just as great as those accomplished by the more known leaders of that era."

Rogers also spoke of Lucy Laney and the museum in her honor that he is proud to be a part of.

Laney was known as the 'Mother of the Peoples' Children. She established a school for black children in Augusta in the 1880s; one of the first to offer Kindergarten to African- American children. She also opened a nursing school for black women.

Laney also impacted other influential black educators; including Mary McLeod Bethune – founder of Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Fla. Bethune was a teacher at Laney's Haines Normal Institute in Augusta.

The Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History is located at 1116 Phillips St. in downtown Augusta and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and 2 to 5 p.m. on Sunday.