BUFFALO SOLDIERS

UNITED STATES ARMY

THE CREATION OF ALL BLACK UNITS

During the American Civil War, the U.S. Government formed regiments known as the United States Colored Troops, composed of black Soldiers led by white officers. Congress reorganized the Army in 1866 and authorized the formation of two regiments of black cavalry with the designations 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry, and four regiments of black infantry, designated the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Infantry Regiments (Colored). These men were the first black Soldiers to serve during peacetime. In 1869, the 38th and 41st were reorganized as the 24th Infantry Regiment and the 39th and 40th became the 25th Infantry Regiment.

These unsung heroes were fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands. They were former slaves and Civil War veterans. They were unlearned and self-educated. They were writers, share-croppers, painters, cigar makers, waiters, cooks and mechanics. Just as their white colleagues, these men came from all walks of life.

This exhibit features the two regiments of cavalry. It is not an attempt to give a full account of their contributions; rather it is an endeavor to answer some of the questions often asked about these brave patriots who have been so long uncelebrated. Specifically, who were they? Where were they? What did they do? What did they look like? And the most intriguing question of all, why the name Buffalo Soldier?

HOW THEY DRESSED

Buffalo Soldiers often received secondhand uniforms, the poorest quality horses and the worst equipment. During the 1870-1880's the Buffalo Soldier wore a flannel shirt and a blouse of dark blue with light blue trousers tucked into over-the-knee boots and a civil war kepi (hat) adorned with crossed sabers bearing regimental and troop designation. He was armed with a .45-70 caliber Springfield carbine, a Colt Army .45 caliber pistol (model 1873) and a saber. While in the field he wore a slouch 'campaign' hat, black at first and a light grayish-brown by 1874. Buffalo Soldiers were not issued a neckerchief but generally purchased one to wear, sometimes choosing a yellow color, but more often red or white. These were real necessities, especially for the men riding farther back in the column who needed protection from the clouds of dust kicked up by the front ranks.

WHY THE NAME?

Stories relating to the origin of the legendary name Buffalo Soldiers are as varied as the people who tell them. Some scholars attribute the name to the Indians likening the short curly hair of the black troopers to that of the buffalo. Another possible source of the nickname was the heavy buffalo robes the soldiers wore on winter campaigns. Still others say that when the American bison was wounded or cornered, it fought ferociously, displaying uncommon stamina and courage, identical to the black man in battle.

Their adversaries — whether Indians, outlaws, Mexican revolutionaries or gun smugglers — found that the Buffalo Soldiers, like their namesake, could not easily be diverted from their mission. Whatever the reason for the name, the Buffalo Soldier has gone down in American military history as one of the proudest Soldiers of all.

HEROIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The impact these two cavalry regiments had on the American West is not often noted. Their mission included establishing forts, protecting the Frontier, conducting surveys and preserving peace. Historian Gary Donaldson noted, "Even today, relatively few Americans realize that when the cavalry came to the rescue of white settlers in the 'Old West,' the rescuers, Soldiers in blue, might well have been 'black'."

The American West has fascinated people all over the world since settlers first crossed the Mississippi. However, unless it includes the contributions of the Buffalo Soldiers, any story told about "How the West was Won" is incomplete. The Great American Frontier and Buffalo Soldier country were one and the same.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Additional information on the Buffalo Soldiers:

~~ Buffalo Soldier Monument and Circle of Firsts, located north of the corner of Grant and Sedgwick Avenues.

~~ Frontier Army Museum, 100 Reynolds Avenue. Please call for days and hours of operation - (913) 684-3767.

~~ The Charles Young Reading Room - second floor of the Combined Arms Research Library, Eisenhower Hall, 250 Gibbon Avenue. It is named for the first African-American to reach the rank of Colonel as a Buffalo Soldier.

~~ Fort Leavenworth Garrison public website:
http://garrison.leavenworth.army.mil

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9th U.S. CAVALRY

Constituted July 28, 1866 in the Regular Army as the 9th Cavalry. Organized September 21, 1866 at Greenville, Louisiana. Inactivated March 7, 1944 in North Africa. The 9th Cavalry served in the following campaigns: Indian Wars, War with Spain, Philippine Insurrection and World War II.

Legacy and Honors

The qualities of valor, courage and patriotism are not restricted to any single race or ethnic group. The exploits and achievements of the 9th Cavalry clearly indicate their selfless and dedicated participation in the settling of the Great American Frontier. During their period of service on the frontier, 9th Cavalry soldiers earned 15 Medals of Honor – 11 by enlisted men and four by officers. The Honor Roll of heroes from the 9th Cavalry are: Capt. Francis S. Dodge, Troop D; 2nd Lt. George R. Burnett, Troop I; 2nd Lt. Matthias W. Day, Troop I; 2nd Lt. Robert W. Emmet, Troop G; First Sgt. Moses Williams, Troop I; Sgt. Thomas Boyne, Troop C; Sgt. John Denny, Troop B; Sgt. George Jordan, Troop K; Sgt. Henry Johnson, Troop D; Sgt. Thomas Shaw, Troop K; Sgt. Emanuel Stance, Troop F; Sgt. Brent Woods, Troop B; Cpl. Clinton Greaves, Troop C; Cpl. William O. Wilson, Troop I; and Pvt. Augustus Walley, Troop I.

9th Cavalry Lineage and Campaigns

Most of the 9th's officers and enlisted men came from colored volunteer regiments of the Civil War. The rest were recruits from the local area. Army recruiters centered their efforts on the nearby city of New Orleans and had no problem enlisting Negro men to fill the ranks of the regiment. These men were eager to sign-up because the Army offered them a chance to better themselves both economically and socially.

Thirteen dollars a month, a place to live, food and clothing was considered a golden opportunity – knowing the alternative was trying to advance in a society all but closed to them. The Soldiers of the 9th worked hard at discipline and organization.

In addition to Louisiana, recruits came from such places as Virginia, South Carolina, Kentucky and Texas. They joined in such numbers that there were not enough officers to train them, nor was there enough work to keep them busy even at routine tasks. Despite the shortage of officers, Edward Hatch, the first colonel of the regiment, managed to organize all twelve companies of the regiment by February 1867. On March 13, 1867, the 9th received orders to proceed to Headquarters, Department of Texas, in San Antonio. From there, the units or troops of the regiment were sent to man various small forts in south and west Texas, while the regimental headquarters was dispatched to Fort Davis, Texas. Their duties were to protect travelers and settlers from numerous bands of Comanche, Apache, Kickapoo and Lipan Indians, and lawless thugs and gun smugglers.

Brief History of the 9th Cavalry

The regiment came into existence by virtue of an act of Congress approved by President Andrew Johnson in July 1866 and published in General Order 56 on August 1, 1866. In a letter of instruction, dated August. 13, 1866, Major General P.H. Sheridan, then commanding the Department of the Gulf with headquarters at New Orleans, Louisiana, was authorized to raise and organize one regiment of colored cavalry, "to be designated the 9th Cavalry."

From 1867 to 1890, the unit saw constant field duty. Law and order were virtually nonexistent in the post-Civil War southwest, and civil authorities consistently relied upon the aid of the Army in rounding up undesirables who were the cause of many disturbances. The all-too-common result was the cavalry to the rescue and the 9th answered that call.

In 1875, the 9th Cavalry's headquarters moved to New Mexico. 1881 brought about yet another move, this time to Fort Riley, Kansas where it was assigned the unpopular task of keeping settlers out of Indian Territory. Four years later, the headquarters were moved to Fort McKinney, Washington. Studded with 15 Medals of Honor received between 1870 and 1890, the 9th left an enviable campaign record as part of the legacy of the frontier.

In Cuba, the 9th again rose to the occasion as it captured one of the Spanish blockhouses defending the city of Santiago. Consequently, a blockhouse appears on the regimental crest. Like their brothers in the 10th, the 9th were in the thick of the action in the fighting to secure the San Juan heights.

10th U.S. CAVALRY

Constituted July 28, 1866 in the Regular Army as the 10th Cavalry. Organized September 21, 1866 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Inactivated March 20, 1944 in North Africa. The 10th Cavalry served in the following campaigns: Indian Wars, War with Spain, Philippine Insurrection and World War II.

Legacy and Honors

Although the 10th Cavalry did not receive as many Medals of Honor as the 9th, it certainly did not face less hazardous duty. The demonstrated courage and patriotism of the Soldiers of the 10th is beyond reproach; the profound achievements of six troopers and two officers earned them our nation's highest award for valor — the Medal of Honor. The Honor Roll of heroes from the 10th Cavalry are: Capt. Louis H. Carpenter, Troop H; 2nd Lt. Powhatan H. Clarke, Troop K; Sgt. Maj. Edward L. Baker, Jr.; Sgt. William McBryar, Troop K; Pvt. Dennis Bell, Troop H; Pvt. Fitz Lee, Troop M; Pvt. William Thompkins, Troop G; and Pvt. George H. Wanton, Troop M.

10th Cavalry Lineage and Campaigns

The 10th regiment of cavalry is one of the most unique regiments in the annals of the U.S. military history. Moving west from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas within the year after its activation in 1866, the 10th began its march into immortality. The spring of 1867 marked the beginning of more than two decades of continuous service on the Great Plains and in the mountains and deserts of New Mexico and Arizona. The challenge was a formidable one. Fifteen years of constant campaigning would pass before there was peace along the tormented Rio Grande frontier.

The regiment distinguished itself in Cuba at Santiago and Las Guasimas, and in the famous charge up San Juan Hill. While the more famous "Rough Riders" are given the credit for taking the blockhouse atop San Juan Hill, the brunt of the fighting was borne by the Soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. One eyewitness wrote: "If it had not been for the Negro Cavalry, the Rough Riders would have been exterminated. The 10th Cavalry fought for 48 hours under heavy fire from the Spaniards who were in brick forts on the hill."

Discharging their duties under conditions as inhospitable as any on earth, Buffalo Soldiers served courageously. They had the lowest desertion rates and the highest re-enlistment rates at that time and are deserving of considerably more credit than can be contained herein.

Brief History of the 10th Cavalry

The 10th Cavalry was organized September 21, 1866 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas with Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson as commanding officer. Most of its recruits came from Philadelphia, Boston and Pittsburgh. Organization of the regiment proceeded very slowly because of a lack of officers coupled with Grierson's insistence on a very high standard for the enlisted men. These instructions sent to Captain L.H. Carpenter recruiting in Philadelphia were typical: "Recruit men sufficiently educated to fill positions of noncommissioned officers, clerks and mechanics in the regiment. You will use the greatest of care in your selection of recruits…enlist all the superior men you can who will be a credit to the regiment." Recruitment was slow until the spring, which brought a sharp increase in enlistments.

A larger problem for Colonel Grierson was the attitude of General William Hoffman, the commanding general of Fort Leavenworth. Hoffman had little fondness for Negro troops or their officers. Grierson and his men chafed under Hoffman's regime. In the spring of 1867, the number of officers increased and the unit finally had its full compliment of recruits.

Bugle calls became routine for the troopers of the 10th: reveille, stable and mess call, school call, drill call, fatigue or retreat, tattoo and taps. The troops learned the discipline that makes a Soldier by answering these calls. Early on, the young Soldiers refused to obey the orders of their noncommissioned officers, since they were only accustomed to taking orders from white men. They soon learned that sergeants and corporals earned their chevrons (stripes) and wore them as symbols of authority, delegated by the regimental commander.

Aside from their garrison routines and details, the Soldiers of the 10th Cavalry performed duties such as building forts and roads, riding shotgun on stagecoach and mail routes, protecting the builders of railroads, escorting cattle drives and wagon trains, locating water holes, installing telegraph lines, and protecting settlers in areas plagued by bandits, Mexican revolutionaries, outlaws and bands of renegade Indians. In early August 1867, Grierson received orders to transfer his command to Fort Riley, Kansas.

Buffalo Soldier Monument Sculpture by Eddie Dixon