

Buffalo Soldiers 150th Anniversary-2016

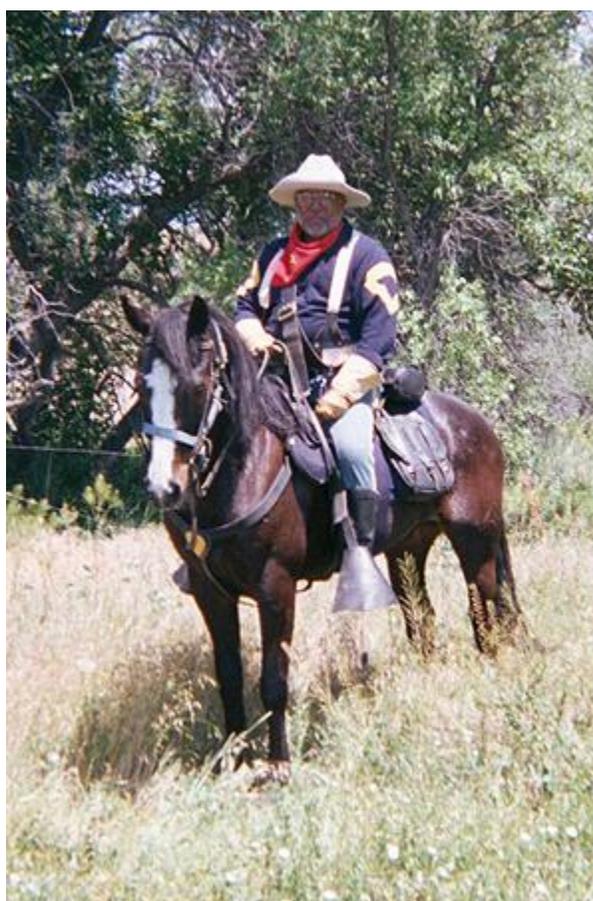
July 2016, marked the 150th anniversary of the formation of the units that came to be called Buffalo Soldiers. The Sesquicentennial Observance was held in Houston Texas at the home of the National Buffalo Soldier Museum. Mounted cavalymen reenactors from across the United States rode in tribute to the men of the Ninth and Tenth Horse Cavalry who earned the name Buffalo Soldiers. Many more celebrated the Sesquicentennial in their home areas with parades and commemorative events marking the legacy of the first regular army units made up of black American soldiers.

Buffalo Soldiers

Shadow Warriors of the western frontier

After serving in the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the American Civil War as volunteers, for the first time in American military history, African Americans were allowed to enlist in the Regular Army during peacetime. In a clear pattern, the Army posted these soldiers to the most remote frontier forts in the West, provided them with the least training, worst supplies, condemned equipment, cast off, broken down mounts and often disregarded their outstanding military service.

The "Buffalo Soldiers" nevertheless, made significant and lasting contributions to the settlement of the desolate and dangerous American West. Because the Army posted black soldiers away from areas of civilization to avoid possible racial conflicts, black soldiers actually constituted a higher percentage of troops in the West than in the entire Army. While black Americans made up approximately 10 percent of the Army's enlisted corps, 1 in 5 soldiers (20%) serving in the West was black.



Authorized in July, on 1 August 1866, the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry Regiments were officially organized . The Infantry Regiments were reorganized into the 24th and 25th Infantry in 1869. The records of the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Infantry were closed, and the 24th and 25th Infantry began as new Infantry Regiments. Of the Black men who joined these new units, most came from the infantry and cavalry ranks of the United States Colored Troops. They were former slaves and freedmen who made up the 140 Infantry, 7 Cavalry, 13 Artillery regiments that helped the Union win the Civil War. The ranks of the new cavalry units were filled with ex-slaves but they now had a new perspective "freedom and equality".

They protected wagon trains, railroad construction crews, ranches and settlements from Indian attacks; mapped water holes; built roads and erected telegraph lines; and carried the mail longer than the fabled Pony Express, they also escorted stage coaches and survey parties. They are a full twenty percent of the legendary mounted horse cavalry of the American Frontier West. They were proud warriors in the saddle and the best special forces of their time. They fought for the opportunity to be viewed and accepted as any other American. No hardship or sacrifice could turn them from their quest for recognition and acceptance as United States fighting men.

Buffalo Soldiers helped maintain order during civil disputes, such as the Johnson County War in Wyoming and the Lincoln County War in New Mexico. They rode against the Comancheros in Texas, one of the first multi-national crime syndicates in the world. One of their lesser known duties was protecting the lands of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Cherokee and Seminole) from white land-grabbers called "Boomers" in the Oklahoma territory.

The organization of the 9th Cavalry took place by order of General Philip Sheridan. Recruiting began in a suburb of New Orleans, Louisiana and another recruiting office in St Louis MO, under the auspices of the Division of the Gulf (covering Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, August 1866). The unit was immediately sent to San Antonio, for posting in Texas duty stations. The 9th was commanded by Cololonel Edward Hatch, an outstanding Civil War cavalry commander.

On August 6, 1866, General William T. Sherman, Commander, Military Division of the Mississippi, issued from his headquarters in St. Louis, General Order No. 6, which established the first command structure for the 10th Cavalry. The unit was based initially at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Recruitment for the new unit was meticulous and slow. Many of these new cavalymen were recruited in eastern cities like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In fact, there are many Philadelphia families that can claim a relationship with the vaunted 10th Cavalry.

It was at Ft Leavenworth that Colonel Benjamin Grierson, an accomplished cavalry commander during the American Civil War, after being told that his men shouldn't fall in for the normal evening post review, ordered the 10th to fall in for review anyhow. This further aroused the anger of the post commander and at Grierson's insistence, the 10th was soon moved to Ft. Riley Kansas.

It has been said that George Armstrong Custer had been offered command of one of the black cavalry units. He refused to command black troops. The Buffalo Soldiers would have surely been blamed, as the reason for his defeat at the Little Big Horn, had he accepted.

What's in a name?

Between 1867 and 1886, the 10th was engaged in extended campaigns against the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and the Apache in Kansas, New Mexico, Arizona, and the Oklahoma, Indian Territory. According to Colonel Grierson, the 10th acknowledged the name "Buffalo Soldiers" on a widespread basis during the 1871 campaign against the Comanche in the Indian Territory. Before then, it was named enjoyed by the 10th as a result of their encounters with Cheyenne Dog Soldiers. According to noted historian and author William Leckie, who researched the definitive history of the Buffalo Soldiers, this is the story of how the 10th Cavalry earned the name; Crazy Buffalos, later termed Buffalo Soldiers

It was along the Saline River, in Kansas during September 1867, that Private John Randall of Troop G of the 10th Cavalry was assigned to escort two civilians on a hunting trip. Soon after losing sight of the

camp, the hunters suddenly became the hunted when a band of 70 Cheyenne warriors swept down on them. The two civilians quickly fell in the initial attack and Randall's horse was shot out from beneath him. Randall managed to scramble to safety behind a washout under the railroad tracks, where he fended off the attack with only his pistol until help from the nearby camp arrived. The Indians beat a hasty retreat, leaving behind 13 fallen warriors. Private Randall suffered a gunshot wound to his shoulder and 11 lance wounds, but recovered.



Around the Cheyenne campfires, word spread of this new type of soldier, "who had fought like a crazed buffalo; who like a buffalo had suffered wound after wound, yet had not died; and who like a buffalo had a thick and shaggy mane of hair. Over time, the nickname literally translated as "crazy buffaloes" was embraced by all black soldiers and the 10th Cavalry later incorporated the buffalo into its regimental crest. The legend of the Buffalo Soldiers was born.

Shadow Warriors

The toughest assignments always fell to the Buffalo Soldiers. They patrolled the most desolate areas of the West and campaigned on the roughest trails of the Great Plains, along the entire Mexican border, in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming and Dakota Territory. In fact, most of the western states and territories of the frontier west saw the presence of the Buffalo Soldiers at one time or another. Their antagonists were the enemies of peace, order and settlement, and sometimes they ended up placing whole towns under martial law.

They rode against some of the greatest war chiefs of the American Southwest and the Plains Nations. The black cavalrymen also fought and captured bandits, cattle thieves, murderous gunmen, bootleggers, claim-jumpers and Mexican revolutionaries, regardless of the extremes of climate or a terrain that ranged from the wilderness of Big Bend to the badlands of South Dakota. Buffalo Soldiers were at the Battle of Red River and the capture of Cochise. They chased the Chiricahua Apache into Mexico, engaging Nana, Chato, and Geronimo. They drove Chief Victorio back into Mexico where he was finally killed by the Mexican army.

They responded from Ft. Stanton, New Mexico when the Dolan-Murphy syndicate feuded with the Tunstall-Chisum-McSween faction in the famed Lincoln County War. They subsequently helped in the first capture of William Bonney (AKA Billy the Kid). It was the Buffalo Soldiers who finally put an end to

the Johnson County War in 1892 Wyoming. They replaced the 6th Cavalry who couldn't control the warring factions in a famous and notorious cattle war between the big cattle barons and the homesteaders of late nineteenth century Wyoming.

The Spanish American War

In 1898 the Buffalo Soldier regiments were the only combat-ready military units in the United States Army. They were ordered from their posts in the West, to prepare for combat against the Spanish in Cuba.

Normally isolated from the fierce segregation and prejudice of the Deep South, these combat hardened troops experienced extreme racial abuse as they moved closer to their military staging areas in Florida. Even as they moved forward as the champions for the United States military, the Buffalo Soldiers regiments were harassed and insulted by their countrymen. The elite combat veterans understood who it was they represented.

In Cuba, the Buffalo Soldiers cavalry and infantry units demonstrated their prowess as the first rapid response troops in the military, by their unequaled enthusiasm for combat in the rugged terrain of Las Guasimas, El Caney, Kettle Hill and San Juan Hill.

There are official and unofficial reports of the battle in Record Group 391, US Regular Army Mobile Units, 1821-1942. Among the Letters and Endorsements sent in 1896-99, is a handwritten account of the 9th Cavalry in battle. The 10th Cavalry's Regimental History, 1866-98, also covers the participation of that unit in the battle and other engagements during the war. It is said that other military units watched in awe, when the Buffalo Soldiers marched into view.

In the early 20th century, the 10th Cavalry Regiment was the first US Army unit to circumnavigate the earth. The feat began when the 10th left the Presidio in San Francisco for combat service in the Philippines and then to China during the Boxer Rebellion. They later returned to the U.S. by way of the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal and the Atlantic Ocean arriving for duty assignment at Fort Ethan Allen Vermont in July of 1909.

After Pancho Villa and his Dorados (cavalry) invaded the US and attacked Columbia New Mexico on March 9, 1916, the Buffalo Soldiers were sent west again, this time as a part of the Punitive Expedition commanded by General John (Black Jack) Pershing that pursued Villa. Major Charles Young, the third black graduate of West Point, was then a commander under General Pershing. The Punitive Expedition



is recognized as the first time the U.S. Army utilized mechanized forces on a wide scale. Of course, the rugged terrain still mandated the use of mounted cavalry forces.

The Buffalo Soldiers were among the first U.S. Forest Rangers. They were the first to test fire-team configurations for machine gun units, and were also the first to test the use of bicycles for combat purposes

Although most Buffalo Soldier cavalry re-enactment units are found in the western states, there are black cavalry re-enactors who ride as both United States Colored Cavalry and as Buffalo Soldiers in many areas of the country.

Join the Cavalry!

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Or contact the Bill Pickett Riding Academy in Philadelphia PA. We can help you introduce the Buffalo Soldiers to your next event. If it's an outdoor venue, we can bring you a mounted, period authentic cavalryman, to make an exciting moment in history come alive.

Scouts and Comancheros

We also recruit, train and schedule appearances at Living History presentations and other events for horsemen who enjoy presenting 19th century American history.