

The Buffalo Soldiers

9th and 10th Cavalry

More than 200,000 African Americans fought for the United States in the Civil War, 38,280 lost their lives. There were hundreds of recorded acts of bravery and unselfish deeds performed by these men, however, white government officials doubted the ability of these men to be first rate soldiers. In the east, the Native American tribes were being destroyed. They were killed, forced off their land, and finally forced to go to the west and live on reservations.

In the west, some of the Native American tribes had agreed to move to reservations. Others refused and continued to fight to regain their land lost during the Civil War, and hold on to their final refuge, (The Great Plains). This land was being rapidly lost to white settlers and railroad companies.

There were other serious problems in the west; bandits, horse and cattle thieves, greedy land and cattle barons, land hungry homesteaders, dishonest government contractors and heartless Native American agents. The local government authorities were unable to control these activities and called on the Federal Government to provide soldiers to help solve these problems.

On July 28, 1866 Congress passed an act for African Americans to serve in the regular peacetime army, this resulted in the formation of the 9th and 10th Cavalry and four infantry units. This legislation opened a new chapter in American military history, an opportunity for the African American soldiers to play a major role in the settlement of the west.

The 9th cavalry was organized at Greenville, Louisiana led by Civil War hero, Colonel Benjamin Grierson. The 10th cavalry was formed at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas and was commanded by Colonel Edward Hatch. African American men from the south were eager to enlist. Most had been former slaves and were illiterate, 12,500 rushed to enlist, ages 18-35. A great number were in their early 20's. The pay was \$13 a month, with food and clothing included. This was the best deal many of them had seen in their lifetime.

They were issued old Union Army uniforms. These uniforms were blue, made of heavy wool and were to be worn during all seasons. This caused skin problems for some soldiers. They were given broken down horses, along with repaired rifles and pistols. The living quarters were damp and dirty, and they slept on beds stuffed with infested hay. The food was of inferior quality and lacking in variety. Their diet consisted of beans, cornbread, hardtack (hard coarse bread), dried beef, molasses, sweet potatoes and butter made of suet (fatty tissue of cattle and sheep).

Many recruits became ill, developed diseases and died. However, the men trained enthusiastically and took pride in the performance of their duties. They regarded their military service as a privilege and honor.

All officers were white. A chaplain was assigned to each regiment to teach the men reading, writing, and math and to give spiritual guidance. In 1867 the 9th and 10th Cavalry headed west to the area called Indian Territory (the Friends scrapbook contains a map); many treaties had been broken to Native Americans by the United States Government. The Native Americans who lived on the reservation were to be provided with ample food, clothing and other supplies, and hunt buffalo in specific areas, but

usually the Native Americans did not receive the promised provisions, so they formed war parties and attacked the settlements in order to feed their families.

The Native Americans respected and admired the African American soldiers' skilled and fierce fighting ability, and compared them to their sacred buffalo, who also had tightly coiled hair. The soldiers proudly accepted this name and began calling themselves Buffalo Soldiers.

By 1875 all Native American tribes were compelled to move to the reservations. The United States Government, white settlers, hunters and the railroad companies had taken control of their land, 3,500,000 buffalo had been killed for sport and commercial use. The hides and bones of the buffalo were sent east to be made into leather goods, fertilizer and charcoal. The government continued to break their promises to the Native Americans. Some of the chiefs and warriors formed groups and continued their fight for survival.

Until 1891 the Buffalo Soldiers served in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North and South Dakota, Montana, Texas and Utah. The Buffalo Soldiers were in New Mexico from 1875 to 1881 and rode almost 9,000 miles. During that time they were involved in the capture of the great Apache Chief Victorio of Ojo Caliente (Warm Springs). They helped maintain law and order in Lincoln County and were involved in the capture of Billy the Kid. They developed into a fearless and skilled fighting force.

In 1898 the 9th and 10th Cavalry fought in the Spanish American War with Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders. During World War II the Buffalo Soldiers patrolled the southwestern border of the United States against a possible Japanese invasion.

During the Buffalo Soldiers duty in the west, along with their military duties, they protected railroad workers, carried mail, chased bandits and bank robbers, rescued wagon trains, escorted stage coaches, remodeled and built dozens of army posts and forts, built roads, located water sources and helped maintain law and order in the areas.

The Buffalo Soldiers had endured racial prejudice and hatred throughout their time in the military service, but they were proud, tough and confident soldiers who proved their worth and served over thirty years in the west. This is the longest, unbroken period of duty than any other regiment in the United States Army.

The Buffalo Soldiers won eighteen Congressional Medals of Honor, the highest military award. They were the last men on horseback in the United States Army.