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The Republican Party of Texas

“A Glimpse At The Buffalo Soldiers”



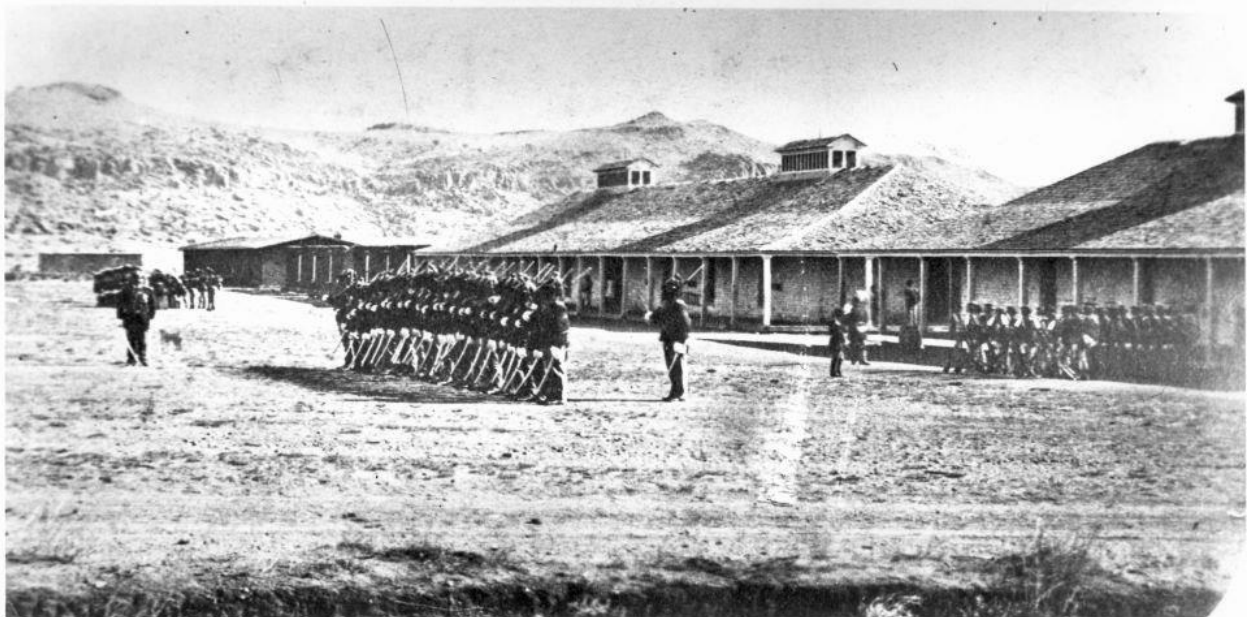
Photograph, Pictures of the Buffalo soldiers. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

Buffalo Soldiers. When the name *Buffalo Soldiers* is mentioned, many people may think about the Black, historical, battle-tested warriors of America’s distant past. They may also think of an era before the U.S. military was integrated and such soldiers were isolated both on and off the battlefields. To gain a greater understanding of the Buffalo Soldiers, their history must be assessed.

On May 22, 1863, the United States Colored Troops (USCT) was established. It consisted of 179,000 Black men, mostly former slaves, who volunteered to fight in the Union Army. During their battles in the Civil War, approximately 37,000 gave their lives for freedom’s cause.¹ After the Civil War, Congress decided to reorganize and restructure the army.² Therefore, in 1866, six all-black peacetime regiments consolidated into four – the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the 24th and 25th Infantry.³

Tennessee Republican Congressman Isaac Hawkins introduced a key provision that established four regiments of African American infantry. Ohio Republican Senator Ben Wade provided a subsequent amendment to establish two regiments of African American cavalry.⁴ The Republican-controlled 39th Congress passed the Army Reorganization Act on July 28, 1866. Ultimately, this would be the foundation to the birthing of the Buffalo Soldiers.

Some people believed the nickname buffalo soldier emerged due to the soldier's dark, curly hair that resembled the fur of a buffalo. Others credited their ability to fight so valiantly and fiercely that the Native Americans revered them as they did the almighty buffalo.⁵ Although renowned as gallant fighters, buffalo soldiers were also known for their exceptional horsemanship. They were so good that non-commissioned officers from amongst their ranks in the 9th Cavalry began training West Point Cadets in riding skills and tactics from 1907 until 1947.⁶ Eventually, from the ranks of the buffalo soldiers would emerge the first black graduate of West Point.⁷ In the end, nevertheless, it was the soldiers' military bravery, prowess, heroism, courage, etc. that would ensure the nickname or moniker became a badge of honor which has stood the test of time.



Photograph, Pictures of the Buffalo soldiers. 9th U.S. Cav. Co. I, Ft. Davis, TX c. 1875

The 9th Cavalry assembled in New Orleans, Louisiana. In August and September of 1866, they organized and trained in preparation for the journey to San Antonio, Texas. By April of 1867, the troops were in place.⁸ These were Black enlisted men commanded by White officers with very few exceptions.⁹ Arriving in the unsettled landscape of West Texas, the buffalo soldiers were, nevertheless, mission-ready.

Ironically, many of the men who had personally known slavery and discrimination were now being ordered to suppress another minority group, the Native Americans. Their main mission was to secure the road from San Antonio to El Paso and restore and maintain order in areas disrupted by Native Americans.¹⁰ These men fought battles on multiple fronts and overcome prejudice from

within the army and from the communities in which they were stationed. They tended to be divided into small companies and stationed at isolated posts.

The buffalo soldiers would eventually participate in many major frontier campaigns and distinguish themselves against the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Sioux, and Arapaho Indians.¹¹

The buffalo soldiers achieved the following additional success:

- Protected the Pacific Railroad from their Fort Riley, Kansas post.
- Battled and overcame the Cheyenne Indians from their Fort Leavenworth, Kansas post.
- Participated in dozens of skirmishes and battles of the Indian Wars.¹²
- Thirteen enlisted and six officers won the Medal of Honor during the Indian wars with five additional enlisted being awarded this award during the Spanish-American War.

Additionally, they protected mail routes, patrolled the frontier, built roads, and handled various difficult civil and military tasks.¹³ Further, they repaired military telegraph lines, scouted, guarded water holes, escorted government wagon trains, survey parties, freight wagons, etc.¹⁴ Interestingly, despite prejudice both inside and outside of the military, being given the worst horses, clothing, and equipment, the buffalo soldiers still managed to thrive. They earned more Congressional Medal of Honors than any unit in the Army and had the lowest desertion rate as well.¹⁵



Picture of the Buffalo soldiers date unknown.

Texas Connection. After the battle known as the Red River War against the Kiowas, the Comanches, the Cheyenne, and the Arapahoe Indians, the 10th Cavalry joined the 9th in west Texas.¹⁶ Interest in the buffalo soldiers would grow in the 1960s, prompting the formation of a reenactment unit known as the Tenth Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers in 1965. Following this, in the 1990s, a reenactment group was formed with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department with the purpose of offering several interpretive programs on the buffalo soldiers.¹⁷

Politics. Although the buffalo soldiers are now revered, they saw their share of discrimination and lack of involvement in major U.S. conflicts previously. During World War I, Democrat President Woodrow Wilson fostered racist policies which led to Black regiments being excluded from the American Expeditionary Force and instead placed under the foreign power and command of the French for the duration of the war (the first time ever for American troops).¹⁸

Regardless of their start and challenges, buffalo soldiers would still rise and do remarkable things militarily and in the civilian sector. One shining example is former buffalo soldier, George B. Jackson. He served in the 25th Infantry Regiment, Company A at Forts Clark, Davis, and Duncan

in Texas and the department headquarters in San Antonio. Upon retirement, he became an entrepreneur, opening saloons, acquiring property, and politically, helping start the Republican Party in Tom Green County (San Angelo, Texas). By 1891, he was listed as the wealthiest Black man in Texas.¹⁹



Photograph, Pictures of the Buffalo soldiers. Year Unknown.

Ultimately, the buffalo soldiers, amassed many victories and proved themselves to be valiant warriors on the battlefield. They left a legacy that continues to be retold and inspire many people today. Working in tandem with other infantry units, the buffalo soldiers protected and defended a vast region of West Texas and hundreds of miles of the southern Rio Grande frontier. When they arrived in western Texas, it was still under frequent attacks by raiding Apaches and Comanches. However, when they left in 1885, peace remained for both travelers and settlers in most of the region.²⁰ The last segregated units in the U.S. Army were disbanded in 1951 during the Korean War with the soldiers being integrated into other units.²¹ Today, many Texans benefit greatly from the sacrifices of the buffalo soldiers.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁴ National Park Services (2022). Buffalo Soldiers. U.S. Department of the Interior. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/foda/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers.htm>
- ¹⁵ Kittitas County Republican Party (2022). Rep. Tom Dent Honors ‘Buffalo Soldiers’ with House Resolution. Retrieved from <https://kitcorp.org/rep-tom-dent-honors-buffalo-soldiers-house-resolution/>
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- ¹⁸ Smithsonian. (2014). The Proud Legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers. Retrieved from <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/proud-legacy-buffalo-soldiers>
- ¹⁹ City of San Angelo, TX (2018). Buffalo Soldier Heritage Day. Retrieved from <https://www.cosatx.us/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/10371/20?sortn=EName&sortd=asc&toggle=all&folder=25>

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