



Negro Soldiers

Buffalo Soldiers: During the Civil War, over 180,000 African Americans served in the Union army with 33,380 being killed. Many also served in the Confederacy.

In 1866, African American soldiers contemplated a question: Now what?

Although they had fought and died with their Union Army brothers-in-arms, Colored Troop soldiers found that the hard-won battlefield equality didn't always make its way onto the quieter streets of postwar society.

That same year, Congress contemplated a question, too – How do we revise and rebuild the military now that the bloodiest war in American history is over? It turns out that the answer to both questions was mostly the same.



The carnage of the Civil War had severely depleted military troop numbers. The Army needed more men, and it needed a new way to organize them.

On July 28, 1866, the Army Reorganization Act authorized the formation of 30 new units, including two cavalry and four infantry regiments "which shall be composed of colored men." About half of the Civil War Colored Troops took the opportunity and signed on.

For the first time in history, African American men were now considered "regular" soldiers. They could serve their country and further their quest for equality in the institution that gave them the best opportunity to do both – the U. S. Army.

The Legend Begins



Under the new Army structure, African American soldiers were organized into six segregated regiments, which were later combined into four: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry.

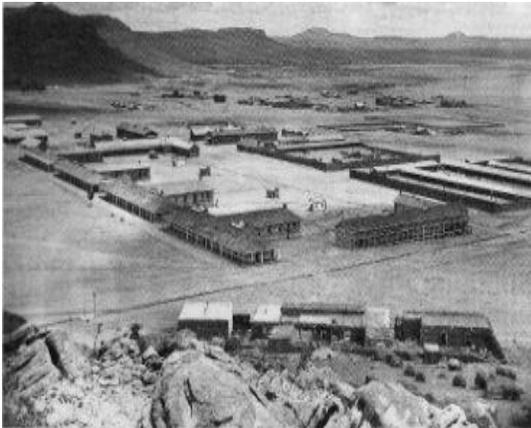
Eventually, their ranks would include the first black graduate of West Point, 23 Medal of Honor recipients, and one woman disguised as a man.

These soldiers fought in over 100 significant military engagements as America pushed ever westward, earning the nickname that symbolized their fighting bravery and fierceness: Buffalo Soldiers.

In addition to protecting frontier settlements, all Buffalo Soldiers regiments surveyed and mapped the vast Texas plains, built and repaired dozens of forts, strung thousands of miles of telegraph lines, and escorted countless wagon trains, stagecoaches, railroad trains, and cattle herds across the southwest.

The troops were led by white officers. Many officers, including George Armstrong Custer, refused to command black regiments and accepted a lower rank rather than do so. The Black regiments could only serve west of the Mississippi River because of the prevailing attitudes following the Civil War.

The Buffalo Soldier's main charge was to protect settlers as they moved west and to support the westward expansion by building the infrastructure needed for new settlements to flourish. Under the new Army structure, African American soldiers were organized into six segregated regiments, which were later combined into four: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry.



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Fort Davis, Texas 1887

Buffalo Soldier regiments were stationed at Texas forts stretching from the Panhandle to the Valley. Major General William T. Sherman, commander of the 24th Infantry unit, reported to Congress in 1874 that it was probably a good idea to keep Buffalo Soldier troops in Texas because "that race can better stand the extreme southern climate than our white troops."

That same year, the 9th and 10th Cavalries mounted up at Fort Griffin and rode into the now legendary Red River War with the southern Plains Indians (Comanche, Kiowa, southern Cheyenne, and southern Arapaho).

In 1880, they chased the notorious Apache Chief Victorio from Fort Davis across most of west Texas before forcing him into Mexico. In addition to protecting frontier settlements, all Buffalo Soldiers regiments surveyed and mapped the vast Texas plains, built and repaired dozens of forts, strung thousands of miles of telegraph lines, and escorted countless wagon trains, stagecoaches, railroad trains, and cattle herds across the southwest.



Buffalo Soldiers guarding a stagecoach

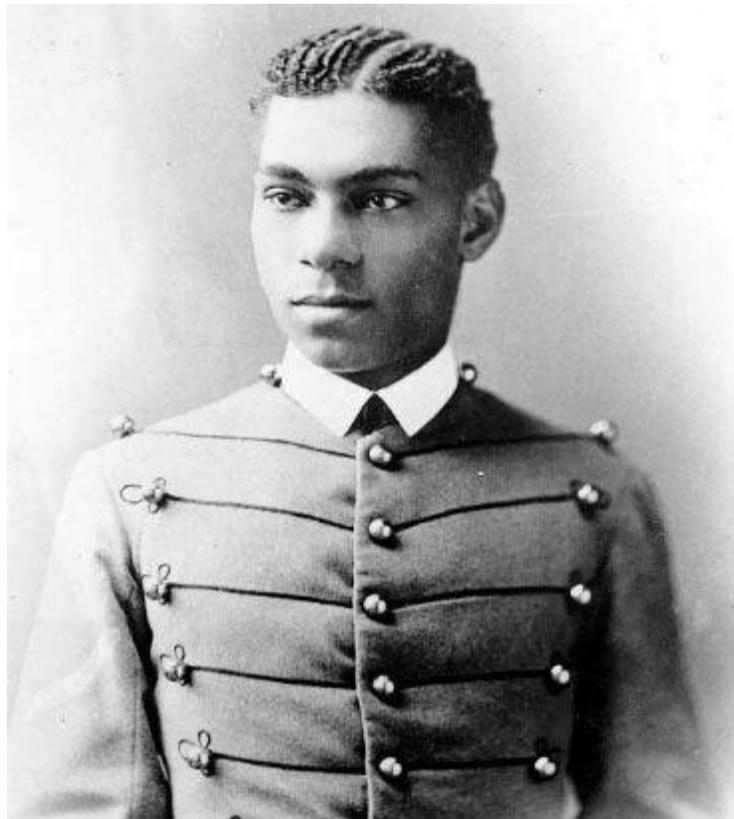
Henry Ossian Flipper

For every Buffalo Soldier, regardless of regiment or rank, there were always two enemies waiting to strike: prejudice and discrimination.

Most often, those partners holed-up with the white civilians outside the fort. But at least once, in Henry O. Flipper's case, they showed up right at home, which almost made it worse. Henry Ossian Flipper was born into slavery in Georgia on March 21, 1856. He was described as "a sturdy, well-built lad, a mulatto," who was "bright, intelligent and studious."

While a freshman at Atlanta University in 1873, Flipper received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In his published memoir, *The Colored Cadet at West Point*, he writes,

“May 20th, 1873! Auspicious day! From the deck of the little ferry-boat that steamed its way across from Garrison's on that eventful afternoon, I viewed the hills about West Point...With my mind full of the horrors of the treatment of all former cadets of color, and the dread of inevitable ostracism, I approached tremblingly yet confidently.”



West Point Cadet Henry O. Flipper

Things Fall Apart

Flipper was right to feel some dread about his impending West Point experience.



During his four years as a cadet, he was harassed, ignored, insulted, isolated, and threatened. But by 1877, Flipper was West Point's first African American graduate as well as the first commissioned black officer of the regular U.S. Army.

2nd Lieutenant Flipper began his military service in 1878 as a 10th Cavalry Buffalo Soldier at Fort Sill, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). In 1880, after many frontier skirmishes with American Indians, Lt. Flipper and his 10th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers headed for service at Fort Davis, Texas. That was where things truly fell apart.

2nd Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper

Henry O. Flipper's story is just one of many in the history of the Buffalo Soldiers. After leaving the Texas forts in the 1890s, Buffalo Soldier cavalry and infantry units went on to serve with distinction in the Spanish-American and Philippine wars, the U.S.-Mexico border wars, and both world wars.

Buffalo Soldiers

The last African American Buffalo Soldier regiment was deactivated during the Korean War in response to President Truman's Executive Order #9981 to desegregate military units. By 1951, all Buffalo Soldier troops were integrated into other U.S. Army regiments.

"We are home now though our flame flickers low. Will you fan it with the winds of freedom, or will you smother it with the sands of humiliation? Will it be that we fought for the lesser of two evils? Or is there this freedom and happiness for all men?"

- **James Harden Daugherty**, World War II Buffalo Soldier, 92nd Army Infantry Division

A Brief History of the Buffalo Soldiers



African Americans have served proudly in every great American war. Over two hundred thousand African American servicemen fought bravely during the Civil War. In 1866 through an act of congress, legislation was adopted to create six all African American army units. The units were identified as the 9th and 10th cavalry and the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st infantry regiments.

The name “Buffalo Soldiers” has become interesting lore in itself. There seem to be three possible reasons for the name. One, it is said that the curly hair of the soldiers reminded them of the Buffalo. Two, they were given the name because their fierce, brave nature reminded them of the way buffalos fought. Third, it may have been because they wore thick coats made from buffalo hide during winter. Whatever the reason, the term was used respectfully and with honor.

The four infantry units were reorganized in 1868 as the 24th and the 25th infantry. Black soldiers enlisted for five years and received \$13.00 a month, far more than they could have earned in civilian life.

The 10th cavalry was formed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and recruited soldiers from the northern states. Colonel Benjamin Grierson was selected to command the 10th cavalry. Colonel Edward Hatch was selected to command the 9th cavalry and he recruited soldiers from the south and set up his headquarters in Greenville, Louisiana.



The troops were led by white officers. Many officers, including George Armstrong Custer, refused to command black regiments and accepted a lower rank rather than do so. The black regiments could only serve west of the Mississippi River because of the prevailing attitudes following the Civil War.

The Buffalo Soldier’s main charge was to protect settlers as they moved west and to support the westward expansion by building the infrastructure needed for new settlements to flourish.

The Buffalo Soldiers of the American West represent members of the 10th Cavalry M Company, organized in 1867 under Commanding Officer, Capt. Alvord. Troopers of the M Company rode mix colored horses—black, brown, bay, gray, chestnut, and at times, other color combinations. Company M, therefore, is known as the Calico Company.



The 10th Cavalry mounted units were deactivated in North Africa in 1944.