

WHO ARE THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS?

EXCERPTS FROM TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DOCUMENT

African Americans have fought in military conflicts since colonial days. However, the Buffalo Soldiers, comprised of former slaves, freemen and Black Civil War soldiers, were the first to serve during peacetime.

Once Westward movement had begun, prominent among those blazing treacherous trails of the Wild West were the Buffalo Soldiers of the U.S. Army. These African Americans were charged with and responsible for escorting settlers, cattle herds, and railroad crews. The 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments also conducted campaigns against American Indian tribes on a western frontier that extended from Montana in the Northwest to Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona in the Southwest.

Throughout the era of the Indian Wars, approximately twenty percent of the U.S. Cavalry troopers were Black, and they fought over 177 engagements. The combat prowess, bravery, tenaciousness, and looks on the battlefield, inspired the Indians to call them Buffalo Soldiers. The name symbolized the Native American's respect for the Buffalo Soldiers' bravery and valor. Buffalo Soldiers, down through the years, have worn the name with pride.

Buffalo Soldiers participated in many other military campaigns: The Spanish American War, The Philippine Insurrection, The Mexican Expedition, World War I, World War II, and the Korean Police Action.

Much have changed since the days of the Buffalo Soldiers, including the integration of all-military servicemen and women. However, the story of the Buffalo Soldiers remains one of unsurpassed courage and patriotism, and will be forever a significant part of the history of America.

African Americans have fought with distinction in all of this country's military engagements. However, some of their most notable contributions and sacrifices came during the Civil War. During that conflict, more than 180,000 African Americans wore the Union Army blue. Another 30,000 served in the Navy, and 200,000 served as workers on labor, engineering, hospital and other military support projects. More than 33,000 of these gallant soldiers gave their lives for the sake of freedom and their country.

Shortly after the Civil War, Congress authorized the formation of the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry Regiments: Six all Black peacetime units. Later the four infantry regiments were merged into the 24th and 25th Infantries.

In countless skirmishes and firefights, the troopers won the respect of the Plains warriors who named them "Buffalo Soldiers." African Americans accepted the badge of honor and wore it proudly.

At least 18 Medals of Honor were presented to Buffalo Soldiers during the Western Campaigns. Similarly, 23 African Americans received the nation's highest military award during the Civil War.