

## The Buffalo Soldiers of the American West

**Who were the Buffalo Soldiers?** Originally the 10th Cavalry Regiment of the US Army, formed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas on September 21, 1866. Although several African American regiments served in the American Civil War it was not until 1866 that Congress adopted legislation to create four peacetime army units comprised of only African Americans. These peacetime units were known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

**Where could the Buffalo Soldiers serve?** Until the Spanish American War in 1898, the four army units of the Buffalo Soldiers were the only place African Americans could serve their country.

**Were there any women Buffalo Soldiers?** One African American woman, Cathay Williams, wanted to enlist in the army, but women couldn't serve. Williams posed as a man, and joined the Thirty-Eighth Infantry, becoming the first and only female Buffalo Soldier.

**How did the Buffalo Soldiers get their name?** No one is quite sure, but there are several theories. First, the soldiers' curly hair reminded people of the buffalo. Second, the soldiers' fierce, brave nature reminded people of the way buffalo's fought. Third, the soldiers wore thick buffalo coats during winter. Finally, the Cheyenne warriors may have called the Tenth Cavalry "Buffalo Soldiers" out of respect for their notable fighting ability.

**Who didn't like the Buffalo Soldiers?** African Americans ran into hostile attitudes in Oregon Country, so they chose to live north of the river, leading to official territorial status for Washington in 1853.

**What did the Buffalo Soldiers do?** The Buffalo Soldiers' duties included escorting mail and stage coaches, building roads, constructing telegraph lines, and patrolling the border. They also escorted and guarded cattle drives, railroad crews and surveyors. The Buffalo Soldiers played a major part in building the American West and making it safe for the coming westward expansion.

During September of 1868, the Ninth Cavalry pursued a band of about 200 Apaches, and killed 20 to 25 American Indians, wounding many more. The soldiers captured over 200 head of stock, and all of the Apaches' supplies and equipment. The Ninth Cavalry also participated in an expedition into the unexplored region of the southern Staked Plains during the summer of 1871 led by Lieutenant Colonel William Shafter. The Cavalry helped Shafter capture a Mescalero woman who provided valuable information on Apache activities.

During the summer of 1867, the Tenth Cavalry fought the Cheyenne while guarding the Kansas Pacific Railroad and its work crews. The regiment also helped build a new post at Fort Davis while fighting the Apache and Comanche Indians. They also protected the San Antonio – El Paso Road, so mail and stage traffic could get through.

Finally, the Tenth Cavalry distinguished itself during the 1879-1880 campaign against the Apache leader, Victorio, and his followers. The Apaches raided western Texas. Colonel Grierson tried to prevent Victorio from entering Texas, and New Mexico, where he had supporters. The campaign used the biggest military concentration ever assembled in the Trans-Pecos area.

**What about Henry O. Flipper?** In the fall of 1879, the Tenth Cavalry moved to Fort Elliot in Texas. Flipper served for four months as Acting Captain of Company G. The ponds in Fort Sill had filled with water during rainy seasons and became stagnant; soldiers became ill and died of malaria. Lieutenant Flipper surveyed and supervised the drainage construction, and drained the ponds perfectly, stopping the malaria outbreaks.

**Did the Buffalo Soldiers receive Medals of Honor?** Between 1865 and 1899, 18 African American men received the Medal of Honor. However, the Armed Services awarded 417 Medals of Honor.

How are the Buffalo Soldiers being honored today? America's Buffalo Soldiers Re-enactors Association commemorates the courage and patriotism of Buffalo Soldiers who served in the decades following the Civil War. Additionally, in 1992, Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dedicated a memorial to the Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the birthplace of the regiments.

"It was a fitting tribute," said author T.J. Stiles, "from a military that hesitated to accept African-Americans, learned to depend on them and, finally, under the leadership of a modern black soldier has come to honor their memory."

### Resourceful Links:

[Buffalo Soldiers History](#) – A [people search](#) on the Buffalo Soldiers Gives a brief history, including how the troops were established, their duties, and why they are called the Buffalo Soldiers.

[African American History Timeline](#) – Gives an African American history timeline from 1800 to 1900. Includes information about the Buffalo Soldiers being established in 1866.

[Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams](#) – Provides information about the only female Buffalo Soldier, Cathay Williams.

[Buffalo Soldiers Arrival](#) – Gives information about the arrival of the Buffalo Soldiers, and some of the hostile attitudes they encountered.

[All about the Buffalo Soldiers](#) – Gives information about the Buffalo Soldiers' heroic service to the United States.

[Buffalo Soldier Henry O. Flipper](#) – A history of Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper's life. He served in the Tenth Cavalry, and drained ponds perfectly at Fort Sill in Texas, stopping malaria outbreaks.

[Buffalo Soldiers Re-enactors Association](#) – The America's Buffalo Soldiers Re-enactor's Association recognizes the courage and patriotism of African-American soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry and 24th and 25th Infantry regiments who served in the decades following the Civil War. Activities include providing a color guard and an honor guard for various events, delivering lecturers on historic and educational topics, appearing in feature films and documentaries, and performing parades.

[Buffalo Soldiers Memorial](#) – Provides brief history of Buffalo Soldiers, and notes a memorial dedicated to them by Colin Powell.