

## Outline

## I. Introduction

## A. References

- Sorensen, George N. Iron Riders. New York: CRC, 2000.  
 Schmitzer, Jeanne C. American History Magazine. 2002.  
 Hangan, William and Terra Steel Steeds. 1999.

B. Statement. When I searched the internet for contributions of the noncommissioned officers in the transportation corps, I found a unique unit of pioneers that used a mode of transportation that is not mentioned in the transportation corps today. None of these brave warriors received awards for their courageous sacrifice and dedication to duty, but their actions made a significant impact on the transportation corps. I decided to dedicate this briefing to the noncommissioned officers of this unit who were responsible for the training, discipline, and the accomplishment of a very remarkable mission.

The role of the noncommissioned officer in the transportation corps

## II. Body

25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bicycle CorpsA. Formation of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bicycle Corps

SGM Thomas Rouse, Jr.

## B. Training that prepared the unit for the unit's mission

RM-02

## C. Discipline that was instilled by the noncommissioned officers

Mr. Tommy G. H. Wong

## D. A hero emerged during a difficult mission

## III. Closing

## A. Summary. During the last 15 minutes, I have presented a briefing on the following topics:

1. The formation of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bicycle Corps
2. Training that the unit performed
3. Noncommissioned officers instilled discipline within the unit
4. A hero emerged during a difficult mission

## B. Questions and Answers

C. Conclusion: The noncommissioned officers of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bicycle Corps made significant contributions to the transportation corps and to the United States Army. During 1896, much has been mentioned of the contributions of the black Soldiers in the infantry. The courageous acts, sacrifice and mission accomplishment of these men must be told. We must continue to train, teach, and share this information with our superiors, peers, and subordinates.

narrow focus  
 doesn't say what  
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Fairly well written

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“The Act of July 28, 1866, added to the 19 regiments of infantry then in service, ~~Eight~~ new regiments of ten companies each, four regiments of which shall be composed of colored men” (Schmitzer). The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was one of <sup>those</sup> four African American units in the Army during the late 1860s. The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was stationed west of the Mississippi along the Texas border <sup>and ed.</sup> serving as guardians and peacekeeping troops. During those days there were many attacks by Indians which cause a lot of fear among the people and slowed the development of communities. The regiment served proudly and protected the people and the land owners throughout the border. Around 1880, the unit completed their mission and was transferred to Fort Missoula, Montana to perform another important mission. The unit’s new mission in Montana was too support the region as a peacekeeping force during the railroad and mine strikes. The strikes became violent when temporary workers replaced the hired workers that were on strike. Although <sup>it</sup> ~~the unit~~ was an infantry unit, many of the Soldiers used bicycles while conducting patrols along the railroad and mines.

“Following the advent of the chain-driven "safety" bicycle, developed in 1874 by H.J. Lawson, and John Boyd Dunlop's 1888 pneumatic tire invention, cycling for pleasure and for everyday transport became popular. Meanwhile, several European armies had already established the bicycle's value for reconnaissance and courier services” (Schmitzer). Many of the units in the U.S. Army were still using horses and horse driven wagons to move their Soldiers and supplies. Leaders in the military did not entertain the concept of using bicycles as an alternate mode of transportation for transporting Soldiers and supplies. <sup>However,</sup> ~~In~~ 1896, the leaders of the Army received information that the European armies were using the bicycle as a mode of transportation. The Army leaders <sup>directed</sup> ~~informed~~ the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to create a bicycle unit. Twenty African American Soldiers were selected from the 40 that ~~had~~ volunteered to be part of

this unit. The new bicycle unit was officially named the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bicycle Corps. The officer that was selected to be the commander was Lieutenant James A. Moss. All the Soldiers that were selected were in good physical shape and their ages ranged from 24 to 39 years old.

Lieutenant James A. Moss, SGT Dalbert Green, SGT Mingo Sanders, and Private John Findley played a very important role in the unit's mission. Lieutenant Moss relied heavily on the sergeants to prepare the unit for their training events. Another person <sup>who</sup> ~~that~~ was recruited for this adventure was an Assistant Surgeon named J. M. Kennedy. "Kennedy was not all enthusiastic about participating in this big ride; regulations, however, called for a medical officer to accompany the men on an expedition of this duration and he got the call. Regulations also stated that the 32-year old Kennedy would take over command if something happened to Moss" (Sorenson 52). The Soldiers of the unit did not ride ordinary bicycles. Their bicycles were top of the line bicycles donated by A.G. Spalding & Bros. of Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts built to military specifications. "Eager for its product to undergo a rigorous service test, Spalding donated the bicycles to the government. Although constructed with the most up-to-date specifications, the bicycles had steel frames and rims and were cumbersome and heavy" (Schmitzer). ~~The Soldiers were excited to receive the new equipment and the bicycles gave each one a boost of confidence.~~

SGT Dalbert Green was responsible for supervising the training of this new equipment. The Soldiers had to get used to their bicycles. Many of the training events required the Soldiers to complete many riding missions without carrying any equipment. One drill that the Soldiers had to master before their first riding mission was called "jump fence." On the command "jump fence" the Soldiers climb up a nine foot wall by propping their bicycle next to the fence, stand on the bicycle's seat, climb to the top of the fence, then pull the bicycle up and over. This drill was

done many times before anyone mastered it. After several weeks on this drill and many others, the Soldiers began riding their bicycles and prepared themselves for some challenging training with equipment. The Soldiers first training mission was to ride their bicycles with a full load. The load consisted of 59 pounds of equipment. "Each rider carried a 10-pound blanket roll that included a shelter tent and poles, a set of underwear, two pairs of socks, a handkerchief, and toothbrush and powder. Properly packed, the roll fitted into a luggage carrier in front of the bicycle's handlebars. Each man also carried rations of bacon, bread, canned beef, baked beans, coffee, and sugar in hard leather cases attached to the bicycle frame. Every other man carried a towel and a bar of soap, and each squad chief carried a comb and brush and a box of matches" (Schmitzer). For protection the Soldiers traveled with their assigned equipment and a 50 round <sup>rifle</sup> cartridge belt.

"On Aug. 19, 1896, the men embarked on a second trip, this time to Yellowstone National Park, which meant they had to cross the Rocky Mountains. To maintain a fast pace as they climbed, the men often rode along railroad beds. The surface was hard on both their bodies and their bikes. Still, the one-way trip was completed in eight days, the cyclists' speed averaging 6 mph. As Moss observed his soldiers performing heroically during storms and through mud, heat, and thirst, <sup>IP</sup>he admired their tenacity. He described the corps as "about as fine looking and well-disciplined a lot as could be found anywhere in the United States Army" (Hangen). SGT Green encouraged the Soldiers with his motivational speeches and by being the lead rider in every training event and mission. With SGT Green prior experience in other units and his age, the Soldiers referred to him as their father but sought after him for his knowledge on riding the bicycle. There was one Soldier that SGT Green depended on a great deal. The Soldier's name was PVT John Findley and he was the unit mechanic. The bicycles took a lot of beating on the



trails and unpaved roads. PVT Findley was responsible for keeping the bicycles rolling. After completing their second trip, the unit was <sup>ed</sup> preparing to embark on a very difficult and complex mission.

The next mission would take the unit from Fort Missoula, Montana to St. Louis, Missouri on bicycles. The distance was 1,900 miles. Lieutenant Moss and SGT Green assembled the Soldiers and informed them of the unit's next mission. Lieutenant Moss showed the Soldiers the route and the rest points on the map. After the meeting, SGT Green stressed the importance of the trip to the other African American Soldiers. He informed them that this trip would help them to make history and do a lot for the black people. Some of the Soldiers thought that Lieutenant Moss was taking them through dangerous territories. The Soldiers that did not like Lieutenant Moss's plan wanted to take another route. SGT Green and another noncommissioned officer whose name was SGT Mingo Sanders recommended that they <sup>y</sup> support Lieutenant Moss's plan. The noncommissioned officers discouraged the uncooperative Soldiers <sup>From</sup> ~~not to~~ <sup>ing</sup> attempt to navigate the trip without their commander because they all could be killed. SGT Green and SGT Sanders harsh words open the eyes of those rebellious Soldiers.

On June 14, 1897, the unit began their historic expedition. SGT Green placed the unit in a double file formation as they rode through the town. People lined the streets with cheers as they showed their support for the Soldiers. "Unfortunately, the bright start quickly dimmed as heavy rains turned the road to mud. Lieutenant Moss noted in his official report that "we rolled our wheels through weeds and underbrush on the road side in order to avoid the mud, and then would carry them a few paces and stop for second wind, as it were." About 3:00 p.m. the weather began to clear, and "we stopped for an hour's rest, after which the ride or rather the march was

resumed over the muddy, hilly roads" (Schmitzer). It was an exhausting first day, but despite the wet weather the men managed to travel 54 miles.

After traveling through three states with a limited supply of water, water became a very important concern. The unit had to get drinkable water from railroad tanks. If the unit found themselves off course and were unable to reach the water points in a timely manner, they were required to drink contaminated water that made them sick. Two weeks into the journey there were signs that this mission was beginning to take its toll on the Soldiers and their commander. "Moss reported that on June 29, after having ridden somewhat over twenty miles up an almost continuous grade, under a broiling sun, we stopped, about 2 p.m. at Gillette, Wyo., for lunch, although many of the men were so tired that they fell asleep while eating. After being advised that the next place where they could obtain water was the town of Moorcroft, some 30 miles away, the corps started on its way again. By 7:00 p.m. the men had covered about 16 miles and "were bounding along at an eight-mile gait, when all at once the clouds began to gather thick and fast, and almost immediately darkness was upon us. Suddenly, the front axle on one man's bicycle broke. Their need for water was too urgent to stop for repairs, however, and the soldier had no choice but to push his bicycle all the way to Moorcroft" (Schmitzer).

no closed  
quote

Once the unit reached a rest point, some of the Soldiers including SGT Green could not travel another mile. Lieutenant Moss did not want to stop, so he left SGT Sanders behind with the Soldiers that could not travel. He informed SGT Sanders that he and the other Soldiers would try to get to Moorcroft and have camp ~~setup~~ by the time they arrive. Lieutenant Moss assumed that the trip would take another hour. The road conditions were terrible and it required the Soldiers to get off their bicycles and push. "While almost feeling our way along a road wet and muddy from a rain from the previous day, we walked and walked and walked, pushing our

wheels before us," noted Moss. The night air was damp, chilly, and penetrating, and we were cold, hungry, and tired . . . I was really sleeping on my feet. After several hours of walking, the men were overcome by sheer exhaustion. They collapsed on top of their tents, covered themselves with their blankets, and fell asleep. When the four men awoke the next morning, they saw the town of Moorcroft about a mile away" (Schmitzer).

The next day Sergeant Sanders encouraged the other Soldiers to find some inner strength so that they could catch up and join Lieutenant Moss and the unit. SGT Sanders displayed very important role while SGT Green was dealing with some physical issues. He was helpful and caring towards each Soldier. SGT Sanders would talk with the Soldiers when the unit would stop traveling for the day. He was very sensitive to the Soldiers concerns and needs. The next day the unit continued the journey through South Dakota arriving in a small town in Nebraska on July 3. The people of the town were preparing for the Fourth of July festivity. The unit became the highlight of the celebration. "As the men continued east over the Nebraska plains in extreme heat, water problems intensified. In one instance they rode 50 miles without water, their lips parched and tongues swollen. Daytime temperatures were so high that the men began their trek at daybreak and rode until mid-morning. They rested through the hottest hours of the day and continued on in the late afternoon. If road conditions were good, the corps frequently pedaled by moonlight. About nine miles out of Alliance, Nebraska, Lieutenant Moss was overcome from the effects of alkali water, and taken back to town. For the next four days the corps was under the command of Asst. Surgeon J.M. Kennedy. Moss remained in Alliance to recover from his illness. He <sup>eventually</sup> rejoined the riders by train. During the four days under Dr. Kennedy's command, the soldiers endured some of the highest temperatures of their journey. Making matters worse, their bicycles sank eight to ten inches deep in Nebraska's Sand Hills, forcing the men once again onto



the railroad tracks, where they rumbled along for 170 miles. Moss recalled that this distance was covered in four and a half days by almost superhuman effort. On July 7 the thermometer registered 110 degrees in the shade, and over half of the corps were sick . . . . Fortunately, the journey was nearing its end" (Schmitzer)".

Henry Lucas was a reporter that joined the unit for the last leg of the journey. He sent a report to the newspaper in St. Louis informing the newspaper that the unit looked good physically and they were motivated. "He further reported, "It is no uncommon sight for residents of this city to see a company of wheelmen . . . but in today's visitors there is a distinctiveness which will mark them at once as different from other riders . . . . All belong to the African race except the Lieutenant" (Schmitzer). "On July 24, 1897, people from St. Louis cycled out to meet the corps and accompanied them on the last leg of the journey. Upon reaching St. Louis, the men were greeted by a cheering crowd of about 10,000 people" (Hangen).

"The trip has proved beyond peradventure my contention that the bicycle has a place in modern warfare. In every kind of weather, over all sorts of roads, we averaged fifty miles a day. At the end of the journey we are all in good physical condition. Seventeen tires and half a dozen frames is the sum of our damage. The practical result of the trip shows that an Army Bicycle Corps <sup>could</sup> can travel twice as fast as cavalry or infantry under any conditions, and at one third the cost and effort" (Sorenson).

Work cited

Hangen, William and Terra. Steel Steeds, 1999. Retrieved October 31, 2005 from

↳ [http://www.moaa.org/magazine/February2004/f\\_steeds.asp](http://www.moaa.org/magazine/February2004/f_steeds.asp)7.

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Sorensen, George N. Iron Riders, Montana, 2000.

*Montana what?*