

NCO History Brief

The Buffalo Soldiers

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I. Introduction

A. Research paper reference list:

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3. Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry 1867 – 1898
by Charles Kenner
4. The Black West, A Documentary and Pictorial History by William Katz
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6. Buffalo Soldiers and Indian Wars, www.buffalosoldier.net
7. www.discoverseaz.com
8. www.ncbuffalosoldiers.org
9. www.zianet.com
10. www.vq.com

B. The research that I used to get my information came from books and Internet sites.

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The Buffalo Soldiers

In 1866, Congress approved legislation creating six all African-American Army regiments: two cavalry (the 9th and 10th) and four infantry (the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st). The units represented the first African-American professional soldiers to serve in a peacetime army. The unit mainly consisted mostly of former slaves. Others served in the Union Army during the Civil War. A later reorganization of the Army, merged four infantry regiments into two units, the 24th and 25th. The Cheyenne Indians originally gave the soldiers of the 10th Cavalry Regiment the nickname 'Buffalo Soldiers'. The nickname represented their fierce fighting in 1867. The Native-American term used was actually "Wild Buffaloes", which was translated to "Buffalo Soldiers." After a while, all African-American Soldiers were known as "Buffalo Soldiers." Despite second-class treatment these soldiers received, they made up first-rate regiments of the highest caliber and had the lowest desertion rate in the Army (The Buffalo Soldiers).

The Buffalo Soldiers had endless problems finding presentable uniforms, functional weapons, food and other supplies. The greatest humiliation forced upon them were, the pitiful, crippled discarded Civil War horses that they received. In addition, they frequently received spoiled food, thrown from moving trains and damaged to the point that it was no longer fit to eat. Their clothing issue consisted of white cotton shirts, white cotton drawers, cotton or wool socks, sky blue wool pants, and a navy blue 4-button wool sack coat. In some cases, they received a nine-button navy blue wool frock coat with sky blue piping. They also received heavy, ankle-high boots. Their headgear was either a navy blue kepi or forage cap also known as a bummer. On rare occasions, they received the tall black Hardee hat. They carried black tarred haversacks along with a canteen. The canteen covers varied in color. The noncommissioned officer dressed the same as his white counterpart (The Buffalo Soldiers).

Like White troops, the duties of the Buffalo Soldiers were to escort Indian tribes to designated reservations, fight them when they tried to preserve their traditional way of life and protect settlers from attacks. Of the 139 Indian campaigns launched between 1866 and 1890, a large percentage involved the Buffalo soldiers. The men had little choice when their orders demanded them to remove the American Indians from their native lands. This was a government policy, and the Buffalo Soldiers carried out their orders out of a sense of duty, commitment to their country, and the oath they took to the flag of the Republic. The Buffalo Soldiers built and defended the telegraph lines, built and repaired forts, which helped establish foundations for future towns. They were involved in the settling of railroad and union disputes, assisted the local authorities in settling disputes between the White settlers, mapped the vast territories in New Mexico and Arizona, marked the water holes, helped settlers find safe places to live, and protected railroad workers (The Buffalo Soldiers).

The Buffalo soldiers had many heroes among them. One of those heroes was Sergeant Emanuel Stance. Emanuel Stance was born around 1848, in Carroll Parish, Louisiana. He was a former slave and sharecropper. In October 1866 at the age of 19, he joined the Army. Stance was thin and strong, but he was only a little over 5 feet tall. The recruiting officer initially hesitated before allowing him to sign. However, he eventually enlisted Emanuel Stance. He became member of the newly formed Company F, 9th US Calvary. Stance earned promotion to Sergeant in less a year. The literacy was rare for the Buffalo Soldiers in the early years of their existence because, education of slaves was illegal. The soldiers that could read and write quickly advanced to Noncommissioned Officers, because paperwork came with the position. Stance's unit transferred to San Antonio, Texas. Their duty was to police American Indian tribes, American settlers, and protecting stagecoaches and mail routes. Stance had a discipline problem. He had little control over his temper. He continuously stayed in trouble for

drunkenness, fighting, and insubordination. On a number of occasions, he was arrested or fined. During the first two months of 1870, he received conviction three times by garrison courts martial for “conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline”. Each time his fine was five dollars (Schubert).

During this time, Stance’s company was located in Fort McKavett, Texas. In between his trials, he participated in several scouting missions. On May 16, 1870, a group of Apache Indians kidnapped two children from a nearby settlement. Sergeant Stance’s commander ordered two detachments to rescue the children. Sergeant Stance led one of the detachments. On May 20, 1870, Sergeant Stance and his detachment left for Kickapoo Springs. When they were about 14 miles out, Stance spotted a group of Indians driving a herd of stolen horses and began chasing them. The Indians abandoned the horses and went up in to the mountains. The next day on their way back Fort McKavett, Stance noticed a band of Indians about to ambush two government wagons. He ordered his troops to charge. The Indians tried to take a stand but when the troops began firing their weapons, the Indians retreated up in to the hills. The very same day while resting at a watering hole, his men were attacked by the Apaches, they began firing their weapons and once again, the Indians took off, leaving their horses behind. They recovered a total of 15 horses and the two children and headed back to Fort McKavett (Schubert).

Stance’s Commander was happy with the success and put him in for the Medal of Honor. In July of 1870, Sergeant Stance received the Congressional Medal of Honor. In a letter of acknowledgement, Sergeant Stance promised, “by my future conduct” to live up to “the high honor conferred upon me”. However, Stance’s conduct did not change, early the next year; he was sentenced by courts martial, fined and reduced in rank from Sergeant to Private. He reenlisted to go another troop (Troop M). His new commander promptly promoted him

Sergeant. There was a lot of conflict between Stance and his First Sergeant. One day, they got into a fight and Stance bit off a piece the First Sergeant's lip. He received a reduction to Private for his actions. His Commander did not want to give him a dishonorable discharge because he felt that he had potential and he did not want to discharge the regiment's only Medal of Honor holder. After a number of rank reductions and promotions, Sergeant Stance went back to his old troop (Troop F) (Schubert).

Sixteen years after the Battle of Kickapoo Springs, Emanuel Stance was still in the Army. He was the First Sergeant of F Troop. His unit transferred to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The soldier had a lot of idle time and Garrison duty wore heavily on them. They troops began to have discipline problems such as insubordination, fighting, and drunkenness. First Sergeant Stance's noncommissioned officers began to lose control of their men. Stance was strict disciplinarian and always a center of the conflict. He was physically and verbally abusive to his troops. He would frequently bully, threaten, and hit the Soldiers. On Christmas Eve 1887, First Sergeant Stance went to Crawford, Nebraska for a night on the town. The next morning a Lieutenant found his body with four gunshot wounds. No one ever knew the identity of his killer or killers, however, people suspected that his own men killed him. First Sergeant Stance was buried at Fort McPherson National Cemetery with full military honors (Schubert).

Another Buffalo Soldier hero was Sergeant John Denny. John Denny was born in Big Flats, NY. During the Vitorrio Apache Campaign (1879), Sergeant Denny had already spent 12 years in the Army. He a member of Company C, 9th US Cavalry. Five days of tracking the Apache Chief Victorrio and more than 200 of his warriors through the deserts of New Mexico ended when the Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th Cavalry found themselves ambushed and trapped within a box canyon, the Los Animas. The unit received many losses, even with reinforcements, and decided to retreat. Just as they were about to leave, Sergeant Denny saw a wounded Private

lying in the open, more than 100 yards from the nearest source of cover. Sergeant Denny asked CPT Beyer, an officer from Company C, to have the troop cover him while he retrieved the private. Captain Beyer ordered him not to leave the safety of the rocks where most of the troop had found cover and to let the private die. Denny knew that if he left the Private in the open, he would definitely die. He also understood that if he were not killed in the rescue attempt, he would face a court martial for disobeying an order. Denny decided to do the right thing. He ran 100 yards under heavy fire to the Private's position, put him on his back, and carried him to safety (The Buffalo Soldiers).

Later the same day a plan was devised to enable the soldiers of the 9th Cavalry to escape the box canyon. The mission called for a small group to climb a cliff and move the Apaches on the East Side of the canyon. First Lieutenant Emmet of G Troop, 9th Cavalry, asked for volunteers, but most of the soldiers knew it was almost certainly a suicide mission. It was not until Sergeant Denny volunteered for the mission first that the other soldiers followed suit and volunteered to go as well. First Lieutenant Emmet took Sergeant Denny, five other soldiers and two Navajo scouts on the mission. After climbing about half way up the cliff, they found themselves trapped under heavy fire. They could no longer advance up the cliff, but the Apaches above could not fire on the troops below with the volunteers in the middle. However, the volunteers could fire on the Apaches effectively enough to suppress them on the west side of the canyon, thus allowing the remaining Cavalry soldiers to escape to safety. When the four Cavalry troops below escaped from the canyon, the soldiers on the cliff fought their way down to safety while surrounded by the Apaches. During the fighting, one of the Navajo scouts was wounded. Denny carried the scout on his back as they went down the cliff (The Buffalo Soldier).

Lieutenant Emmet said the deciding factor of the battle was Sergeant Denny's actions. He, repeatedly, kept the troops focused on the mission and why they were facing certain

death along the cliff. If not for Sergeant Denny's actions, all four of the Cavalry troops within the canyon would have died. The small group accomplished their mission and returned safely to their units losing only one soldier to enemy fire. Sergeant Denny received the Congressional Medal of Honor almost sixteen years later (Medal of Honor).

The Buffalo Soldiers played a huge in the Army. Even though, they were humiliated and degraded, they continued to march on and accomplish their mission with pride and honor. Their actions emulated the Seven Army Values.