

24th Infantry Regiment

The black soldiers known as “Buffalo Soldiers” were organized and served in the United States military during perhaps the most volatile period in the history of America, the post-Civil War era. Often the victims of racial discrimination, the Buffalo Soldiers conducted themselves with dignity and honor. Their efforts during peacetime, as well as during conflicts such as the Indian Wars and the Spanish American War, clearly established that blacks were capable soldiers, and thus aided in the desegregation of the armed forces.



Buffalo Soldiers proudly served in the American Military. Through an act of Congress 6 army units were made up of African-Americans; 9th and 10th cavalry, and 38th-41st infantry regiments, which were later reorganized into the 24th & 25th infantry.

While blacks fought in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, it was their participation in the Civil War that led to the creation of organized black regiments. Due to a policy established in 1820 barred blacks from serving in the regular army, many of them fought for the Union Army in volunteer regiments such as the Seventy-third Regiment of U.S. Colored Troops, Hunter’s Regiment, the First Kansas Colored, and the 54th and 55th Regiments of Massachusetts.

The bravery that blacks exemplified during the Civil War led Congress to consider the formation of black divisions in 1866. In spite of the opposition, Congress voted to enlist six black regiments for two reasons. First, given their strong record of participation in the Civil War, several members of Congress voted to create the black regiments out of a sense of fairness. Second, Congress realized that blacks were less likely than whites to desert, because they had fewer opportunities in civilian life. Therefore, on July 28, 1866, Congress passed an act establishing the 9th and 10th Cavalries and the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Infantry Divisions.

The 24th Infantry Regiment was organized 1 November 1869 from elements of the 38th and 41st Infantry Regiments, comprised of both freed slaves and veterans of the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT). From its activation to 1898, the 24th Infantry served throughout the Western United States protecting road and railways, battling Native Americans, and guarding frontier outposts.

Scores of blacks rushed to enlist for five-year terms at thirteen dollars per month. The men came from several states, including Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Their ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-four, and many of them were former slaves. A typical group of 100 recruits in the Ninth Cavalry had worked as soldiers, laborers, farmers, painters, and cooks prior to enlisting.



The troops of the 24th were one regiment among four of African-American soldiers formed in 1866, at the end of the Civil War. These black troops became known as “Buffalo Soldiers,” a term loosely applied to all African-American soldiers during the time the four units operated. Although the origin of the term is unclear, many say it

came from Native Americans who applied what they considered a term of respect to the African-American soldiers they fought with. The term “Buffalo Soldier” was attributed to the soldiers’ fierce fighting ability, and to the resemblance of the men’s hair to the tuft of fur found atop the heads of buffalos. The Buffalo Soldiers were African-American U.S. Army troops who served in the American West building western towns, fighting native peoples, and generally participating in westward expansion during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The military segregated black troops and their families, causing the formation of tightly knit African American communities, and associations between cavalry and infantry. As black frontier soldiers moved from place to place, they sometimes changed regiments when re-enlisting. Thus, they came to know one another and found a shared experience in military and family connections. When the army ordered the four black regiments to report to Chickamauga Park, Georgia, and Key West, Florida, in March and April of 1898, many were excited to have the opportunity for wartime service. Some also had regrets, having become established in the West. When the 24th Infantry arrived at Fort Douglas, Utah in 1896, whites had protested vigorously. By the time they left to join the battle in Cuba, the people of the city lined the streets to see them off.

On June 14, 1898 the 24th left Tampa Bay, Florida on the transport ship Margaret, as part of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division, V Corps, and U.S. Expeditionary Force. They arrived at Santiago, Cuba June 19. By the late summer of 1898, the 24th Infantry had earned the status of heroes after serving on the front lines at Las Guasimas and El Caney. The 24th Infantry distinguished itself in the charge of up the open slopes of San Juan Hill against heavy enemy fire and captured on July 1, 1898, the Spanish blockhouse and entrenchments guarding the approach to the city of Santiago. Seventy-seven troops were wounded and thirteen killed.

In August 1898 the regiment left Cuba for the United States, arriving in Long Island, New York on September 2, 1898.

When the companies of the 24th Infantry returned to the United States, they were stationed at diverse posts. By the first of October, Company B returned to Fort Douglas, Utah where they joined garrison with companies L and M, two new companies formed during that month.

Major (Dr.) R. G. Ebert, surgeon, cared for the ill, many of whom were among the 112 troops of Company L who came to Vancouver Barracks in early May 1899.

Company L remained at the barracks for nine days. They departed May 14 enroute to Dyea, Department of Alaska, where they were relieved, on July 28, 1899, B and H Companies, 14th Infantry. Company L of the 24th left Vancouver for Alaska on May 14 and Companies B and H returned to Vancouver ten days later.

Coincidentally, the same day Company L arrived, a forest fire occurred that night. It forced the company to relocate to Fort Wrangel and Skagway. Captain H. W. Hovey, commander, and his troops succeeded in removing most of the public property and supplies to Skagway, and took station there.



Aside from peacekeeping, Company L's principal duty in Skagway was to "show the flag" and maintain a government presence near the U.S./Canadian border. During the gold rush era, the Army opened six posts around Alaska to keep order among the prospectors and miners. Company L remained on duty in Alaska until their departure May 15, 1902 when they returned to Vancouver Barracks, Washington.

Skagway was garrisoned by a small detachment of the initial body of 14th Infantry troops which occupied the Lynn Canal region in early 1897. With the addition of Captain Hovey's company in July 1899, and the subsequent abandonment of Fort Wrangel, Skagway became the only military garrison in southeastern Alaska at the turn of the century. The Military Department of Alaska recommended that a permanent post be established at Skagway.

Buffalo Soldiers kept order in the Alaskan gold-rush towns of Dyea and Skagway, and between 1867 and 1885, they served at Fort Davis. The Buffalo Soldiers eventually left to be stationed elsewhere. In the ensuing years, many fought the last of the Indian Wars and retired in Arizona, Montana, Nebraska, and Texas to farm their own land. Meanwhile, Buffalo Soldier regiments went on to fight in World War I and World War II, before President Truman desegregated the military in 1948.

Respectfully submitted by:

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