

Fort Davis

National Historic Site
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE FRONTIER ARMY

BLACK REGIMENTS ESTABLISHED

It was opposed by many, considered only an experiment by others, but the 1866 “Act to Increase and Fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States” changed the course of military history, and afforded blacks a permanent place in the Armed Forces of the United States.

The legislation stipulated that of the thirty new regiments created, two cavalry and four infantry “shall be composed of colored men.” For the first time in the history of the United States, regiments composed of black troops were authorized as part of the Regular Army.

It was their exemplary service in the Civil War that paved the way for the authorization of black regiments. Designated as the Ninth and Tenth United States Cavalry, and the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first United States Infantry, the units were organized under white officers between the summers of 1866 and 1867.

THE NINTH CAVALRY

The Ninth Cavalry, organized in Greenville, Louisiana, initially was comprised of men from the New Orleans vicinity. In late 1866, recruiting was conducted in Kentucky. When the regiment was ordered to Texas in March of 1867, it numbered 885 enlisted men. Stationed at a number of posts including Fort Davis, the Ninth remained in Texas until 1875 when it was transferred to the District of New Mexico. Duties here were the same as they had been in Texas: escorting mail

and stage coaches, building roads, patrolling the border, scouting, and sometimes engaging in battle with the Apaches and Comanches.



9th Cavalry Non-Commissioned Officers

The mid-to-late 1880s saw units of the regiment in Wyoming, Utah, Nebraska, and Kansas. In the spring of 1890, seven troops were sent to the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations during the last uprising of the Sioux.

THE TENTH CAVALRY

In the summer of 1867, companies of the Tenth Cavalry, headquartered in Kansas, were involved in a series of fights with the Cheyenne as they guarded the Kansas Pacific Railroad and its work crews. Soon the regiment saw duty in Colorado and Oklahoma and was engaged in skirmishes with the Kiowa and Comanche.

In 1873, five companies came to Texas and in 1875 the regiment’s headquarters moved to Fort Concho (San

Angelo), Texas. The Tenth played a vital role in the campaign against the Apache leader Victorio in 1879-1880 in southeastern New Mexico and western Texas. After transferring to the Department of Arizona in 1885, most of the regiment was “in the field” for the entire Geronimo Campaign.

The regiment moved to the Department of Dakota in the early 1890s where it remained until the Spanish – American War. Here it was engaged in protecting the property of the Northern Pacific Railroad when trouble broke out between employees and the owners. The summer of 1896 saw the regiment in the field gathering up the Cree Indians who were off their reservations in Canada and who had been committing minor depredations on the U. S. side of the border for almost twenty years.

THE INFANTRY REGIMENTS

In 1869, the infantry regiments underwent consolidation. The Thirty-eighth and Forty-first became the Twenty-fourth, while the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth combined to form the Twenty-fifth.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH INFANTRY

When the new Twenty-fourth Infantry was organized it was stationed in Texas where it remained until 1880. Guarding stage stations, and constructing roads, telegraph lines, and building at the various posts it served at were primary duties. Although the regiment spent its share of time scouting and chasing the illusive Apache, Comanche and Kiowa, it rarely saw action. Company H was involved in the Battle of Rattlesnake Springs that ultimately forced the Apaches under Victorio to retreat to Mexico in the summer of 1880. Two months later Victorio was killed by Mexican forces.

After serving in Texas, the Twenty-fourth moved to the Indian Territory (Oklahoma) with headquarters at Fort Sill. Here its duties included overseeing the thousands of Indians held on reservations and keeping settlers out of the territory. The regiment was transferred to New

Mexico and Arizona in 1888 where it again found itself in the role of a sentinel guarding Apaches on various reservations and protecting settlers.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH INFANTRY

The regiment began its existence in Louisiana and Mississippi performing usual garrison duties, but in April of 1870 received orders to proceed to Texas where its companies were scattered far and wide to posts in the western part of the state – Forts Bliss, Clark, Davis, and Stockton. Scouting, escort and guard details, and road building soon became regular assignments.

Perhaps the most important field-labor for the regiment was that completed by the men of Company I in February 1879. The men constructed ninety-one and one-half miles of telegraph line from Fort Davis to Eagle Springs (near present-day Sierra Blanca, Texas). The line, in conjunction with another from Fort Concho to Fort Davis, served as the vital communications link used by Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, Tenth U. S. Cavalry, during the Victorio Campaign.

In 1880, the regiment transferred to the Dakota Territory where its duties initially were similar to those performed in Texas. Soon, however, the regiment settled into performing routine garrison tasks. But this tranquil state was jarred when the regiment was sent to Montana in 1888. Again it was ordered into the field where it participated in the Pine Ridge Campaign of 1890-91.

The early 1890s saw the men of the Twenty-fifth restoring peace in a mining district of Idaho where labor unions had declared open war on mine owners. With the Tenth Cavalry, the regiment was called to guard the mail and trains on the Northern Pacific Railroad after labor troubles erupted in 1894.

THE SEMINOLE-NEGRO INDIAN SCOUTS

Although the Scouts were not enlisted into the army like the men of the regular regiments, their unit was one of the toughest to serve in the Frontier Indian Wars. The



Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts
Fort Clark Historical Society

group was recruited in 1870 from black people and their descendants living in Mexico who had fled slavery in the United States.

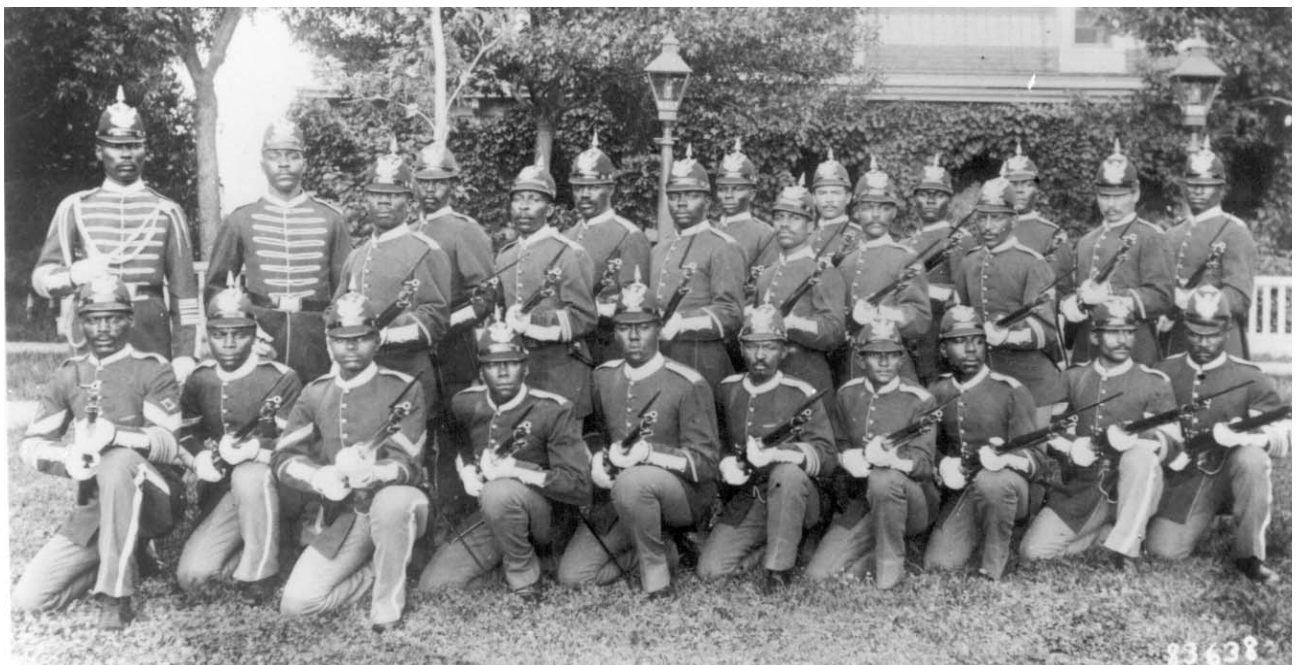
The Scouts operated primarily out of two Texas forts – Forts Clark and Duncan and saw combat in extremely

rugged conditions on both sides of the border. During twenty-six expeditions, the Scouts engaged in twelve battles without losing a single man in combat. They never numbered more than fifty men at a time, yet four of the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts were awarded the Medal of Honor. They continued to serve in the army until 1914.

PROUDLY THEY SERVED

Surmounting obstacles of harsh living conditions, difficult duty, low pay and racial prejudice, the men who served in the black regiments and in the Scouts gained a reputation of dedication and bravery. Stationed continuously on the frontier during the years of Indian hostilities, they played a major role in the peaceful settlement and development of the American West.

Black regiments later served in the Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, Mexican Punitive Expedition, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. In the mid-1950s, the last all black units were desegregated. For the first time, black and white soldiers served together in the same regiments.



Company B, 25th Infantry