

Fort Davis

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



BLACK RECIPIENTS OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

FROM THE FRONTIER INDIAN WARS

The Medal of Honor is the highest award that can be given to a member of the Armed Services of the United States. It is presented by the president, in the name of Congress, to an individual who while serving his country “distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.” The Medal of Honor was authorized in 1862 and first presented in 1863 to soldiers and sailors who demonstrated extraordinary examples of courage in the Civil War.

Devotion to Duty

Between 1865 and 1899, the Medal of Honor was awarded to 417 men who served in the frontier Indian Campaigns. Eighteen of the medals were earned by men of African-American descent. Of this number, eleven were presented to enlisted men of the Ninth U. S. Cavalry, two to members of the Twenty-fourth U. S. Infantry, one to a trooper of the Tenth U. S. Cavalry, and four to Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts. Although no medals were awarded to men for actions directly involving Fort Davis, several recipients served

at the post during their military careers.

Fort Davis Troopers

Emanuel Stance was a 19-year-old farmer when he joined the newly organized Ninth Cavalry in 1866. Assigned to

Company F, the young private was stationed at Fort Davis from July 1867 to February 1869.

In May 1870, Stance, then a sergeant, was in charge of a scouting party that left Fort McKavett, Texas in pursuit of a number of Apaches who had

stolen several horses. The troopers gave chase and were successful in recovering the horses. The following day, near Kickapoo Springs, Stance and his detachment observed several Apaches about to fire upon two government wagons. Stance immediately ordered his men to attack, causing the Indians to abandon their horses and retreat.



*Medal of Honor awarded to members of the U.S.
Army during the frontier Indian Wars.*

On July 9, 1870, just six weeks after the engagements with the Apaches, Emanuel Stance was awarded the Medal of Honor.

George Jordan served at Fort Davis with the Ninth Cavalry from April 1868 to May 1871. During this time, he was often in the field scouting the elusive Indians who were raiding in western Texas and southeastern New Mexico. On one occasion he was part of a two-hundred-man force detailed to track a party of Mescalero Apaches in the Guadalupe Mountains.

The experience Jordan gained proved invaluable. On May 14, 1880 Sergeant Jordan, in command of a small detachment of soldiers, defended Tularosa, New Mexico Territory against the Apache leader, Victorio, and his warriors. Ten years later, Jordan was awarded the Medal of Honor for bravery demonstrated at the Battle of Tularosa. He retired in 1897 with over thirty years of devoted service.

Another Ninth Cavalry trooper to earn the coveted medal was Sergeant Thomas Shaw who served as a private at Fort Davis in 1870 and 1871. A runaway slave from Kentucky who had joined the Union Army during the Civil War, Shaw was one of the best marksmen in the regiment. In August of 1881, Shaw was part of a small detachment in pursuit of the Apache leader, Nana, and a number of his warriors.



Sergeant Thomas Shaw

The Apaches had attacked a number of small settlements and ranches in southern New Mexico Territory. The outnumbered soldiers surprised the Apaches in Carrizo Canyon on the west side of the Mimbres Mountains. Sergeant Shaw was awarded the Medal of Honor for “extraordinary courage under fire” in preventing the Indians from surrounding the command.

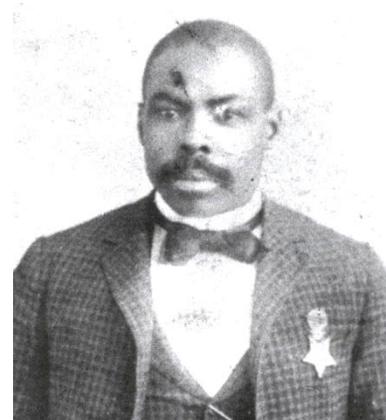


Sergeant William McBryar

Tenth Cavalry Sergeant

Sergeant William McBryar was the sole member of the Tenth U. S. Cavalry to receive the Medal of Honor for bravery during the Indian Campaigns. Enlisting in 1887, two years after the Tenth Cavalry left Fort Davis, McBryar was more educated than most recruits, having attended three years of college and being proficient in Spanish.

In the spring of 1890, McBryar was a member of a small detachment tracking a band of Apaches in southeastern Arizona Territory. As the troopers entered a canyon near Fort Thomas, the Apaches attacked. The ensuing conflict was short but decisive for the army. Sergeant McBryar was honored with the Medal of Honor for demonstrating “coolness, bravery, and good marksmanship” under extremely difficult circumstances.



Corporal Isaiah Mays

Soldiers of the Twenty-fourth Infantry

The only black infantrymen to receive the Medal of Honor for bravery in the frontier Indian Wars were Sergeant Benjamin Brown and Corporal Isaiah Mays. In May of 1889, they were members of a small detachment ordered to guard a government convoy carrying over \$28,000 in gold coins from Fort Grant to Fort Thomas in the Arizona Territory. The soldiers were attacked near Cedar Springs and the gold taken. For courageously defending the paymaster (Major Joseph Wham) and the other enlisted men involved, Brown and Mays were awarded their medals.

The Scouts

In 1870, the U. S. Army began recruiting Seminole-Negroes from Mexico as scouts. The Seminole-Negroes were descendants of escaped slaves who settled among the Seminole Indians in Florida. In the 1840s the government moved them to present-day Oklahoma. Fearing that they might become enslaved, some fled to Mexico.

Never numbering more than 50 at one time, the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts were known for their incredible tracking skills. They amassed an impressive combat record on the frontier. Four of the scouts received the Medal of Honor, the highest number awarded to a single fighting unit.

Private Adam Paine received his medal for “gallantry in action” during the Red River War of 1874-1875. The first of the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts to be so honored, Paine was praised for rendering “invaluable assistance” to Colonel Ranald Mackenzie against the Southern Cheyenne at the Battle of Canyon Blanco.

Private Pompey Factor, Trumpeter Isaac Payne, and Sergeant John Ward received their medals for rescuing their commander, Lieutenant John Bullis, at the Battle of the Pecos River in 1875. Bullis and the three scouts had come upon a party of 25 - 30 Comanches. After waging

battle for almost an hour, the scouts were forced to retreat. Bullis, however, had become separated from his mount. While Payne and Factor provided cover, Ward went back and pulled the lieutenant up onto his horse and rode to safety.

The Last to Receive the Medal

The last soldier of African- American descent to receive the Medal of Honor for heroism during the Indian Campaigns was Corporal William O. Wilson of the Ninth Cavalry. In late December 1890 following the Battle of Wounded Knee, a band of Sioux warriors fired on a government supply train north of the Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota. Corporal Wilson, one of the cavalrymen escorting the train, volunteered to ride to the agency for help. Pursued by a number of Sioux, Wilson made good his escape and troops from the agency soon rescued the besieged soldiers. Wilson was awarded his medal for “qualities of the most conspicuous bravery and gallantry.”

Epilogue

The fourteen black soldiers and four Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts who received the Medal of Honor for heroism during the frontier Indian Wars represent the thousands of African Americans who displayed valor and bravery in the face of adversity. These men brought honor to their regiments and recognition to their race. Fort Davis is proud to be a part of their heritage.

PROUDLY THEY SERVED

**Recipients of the
Medal of Honor**

Ninth U. S. Cavalry

Sergeant Thomas Boyne

Sergeant John Denny

Corporal Clinton Greaves

Sergeant Henry Johnson

Sergeant George Jordan

Sergeant Thomas Shaw

Sergeant Emanuel Stance

Private Augustus Walley

Sergeant Moses Williams

Corporal William O. Wilson

Sergeant Brent Woods

Tenth U. S. Cavalry

Sergeant William McBryar

Twenty-fourth U. S. Infantry

Sergeant Benjamin Brown

Corporal Isaiah Mays

Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts

Private Pompey Factor

Private Adam Paine

Private Isaac Payne

Sergeant John Ward

Fort Davis

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The Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Davis 1867-1885



Ninth U. S. Cavalry at Fort Davis, Dismounted Drill

“BUFFALO SOLDIERS”

Although the term “Buffalo Soldiers” was first used in the early 1870s in reference to black cavalry troopers, in recent years the term has become synonymous with all enlisted men of African-American descent that served in the frontier Indian Wars Army.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REGIMENTS

Following the Civil War, Congress passed legislation to increase the size of the Regular Army. The Act of Congress, dated July 28, 1866, raised the number of cavalry regiments from six to ten and the number of infantry regiments from nineteen to forty-five. The legislation stipulated that of the new regiments created, two cavalry

and four infantry “shall be composed of colored men.”

In compliance with the new law, the Ninth and Tenth U. S. Cavalry Regiments and the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first U. S. Infantry Regiments were

authorized. They were composed of white officers with black enlisted men. In November of 1869, the army reduced the number of infantry regiments. In so doing, regiments were combined. The Thirty-eighth and Forty-first regiments became the new Twenty-fourth U. S. Infantry, while the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth were organized into the new Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry. From 1867 until 1885 units of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments, the Forty-first, Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry Regiments served at Fort Davis.

AT FORT DAVIS

Troopers of the Ninth U. S. Cavalry were the first “Buffalo Soldiers” to garrison Fort Davis. On July 1, 1867, Companies C, F, H, and I, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Merritt, officially reoccupied the post that had been



24th Infantry - Victorio Campaign, 1880

abandoned since 1862. Merritt and the Ninth had a sizeable job ahead of them. In addition to helping to construct a new post, they had the Apache and Comanche Indians to contend with.

A major responsibility was to protect travelers and the mail on the San Antonio-El Paso Road. In so doing, small detachments of men were stationed at a number of stage stations, while other troops were sent out on scouts and patrols.

In 1869, Colonel Edward Hatch replaced Merritt as commander of Fort Davis. During his brief stay, Hatch ordered three separate expeditions against the Mescalero Apaches into the Guadalupe Mountains. All three campaigns involved Ninth Cavalry troopers.

In 1871, Lieutenant William (Pecos Bill) Shafter led Ninth Cavalry enlisted men on an expedition to a previously un-scouted region of the southern Staked Plains. Although Shafter failed to encounter any Apaches, the Buffalo Soldiers proved that troops could survive in an area almost void of surface water. In September 1875, the Ninth U. S. Cavalry was transferred to New Mexico. The regiment had

spent eight years at Fort Davis and other Texas posts.

THE FORTY-FIRST INFANTRY BECOMES PART OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH

Companies B and E of the Forty-first U. S. Infantry arrived at Fort Davis in the spring of 1868. For the next year and one-half, they were involved in regular garrison duties, and scouting and patrolling with the Ninth Cavalry. In November of 1869, when the infantry regiments were reduced and consolidated, Company E became part of the new Twenty-fourth U. S. Infantry and remained at Fort Davis.

The Twenty-fourth served at Fort Davis from 1869 to 1872 and again in 1880. The men performed all the usual, tedious, every-day soldier tasks and fatigue details in garrison. In addition, they provided an invaluable service by repairing military telegraph lines, scouting, guarding water holes, escorting government wagon trains, survey parties, freight wagons, and mail coaches.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH INFANTRY

The Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry, like the Twenty-fourth, was formed during the army's reduction-in-force of 1869. In July 1870, Companies A and G arrived at Fort Davis. From that summer until the spring of 1880, various companies of the Twenty-fifth served at the post. In their ten-year stay, these infantrymen had numerous accomplishments.

Company E, under the command of Captain David Schooley, was responsible for constructing new roads through Wild Rose Pass and Musquiz Canyon. In December 1876, a large contingent of the regiment marched to "Presidio del Norte, Texas (present-day Presidio) for the purpose of protecting American citizens from aggression by Mexican marauders and bandits." Many of the troops remained in Presidio for more than two months before peace was restored to the town.

Perhaps the most important field work for the Twenty-fifth was completed by the troopers of Company I under the command of Second Lieutenant George Andrews. They constructed ninety-



Company I, Ninth Cavalry — Mounted Drill at Fort Davis, 1875

one and one-half miles of telegraph line west from Fort Davis to Eagle Springs (located at Sierra Blanca). The line became a vital communications link and was used by Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, Tenth U. S. Cavalry, during the subsequent Victorio Campaign.

THE TENTH CAVALRY

Company H of the Tenth Cavalry was ordered to Fort Davis in 1875. For the next ten years, units of the Tenth were stationed at the post, which became headquarters for the regiment in 1882.

The mission of the Tenth, like that of the other “Buffalo Soldier” regiments, was to protect the mail and travel routes, control Indian movements, and gain knowledge of the terrain.

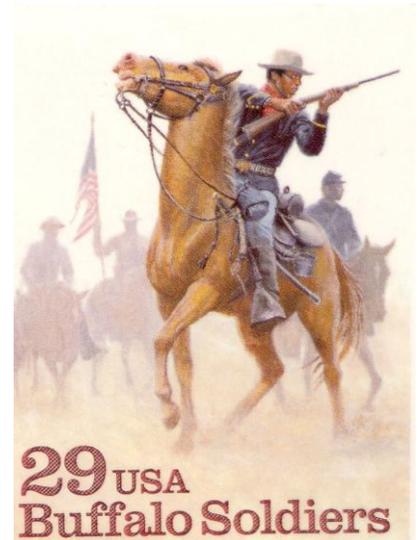
A major campaign involving the regiment occurred in 1879-1880 when the Apache leader Victorio led a number of followers off a reservation in New Mexico and began raiding in areas of western Texas.

Learning that Victorio was in Mexico, Colonel Grierson attempted to prevent him from reentering Texas and especially from reaching New Mexico where

the shrewd Apache leader could find more supporters. The campaign called for the biggest military concentration ever assembled in the Trans-Pecos area. Six troops of the Tenth Cavalry and Company H of the Twenty-fourth Infantry were assigned to patrol the area from the Van Horn Mountains, west to the Quitman Mountains, and north to the Sierra Diablo and Delaware Mountains. Major confrontations occurred at Tinaja de las Palmas (a waterhole south of Sierra Blanca) and at Rattlesnake Springs (north of Van Horn). These two engagements halted Victorio and forced him to retreat to Mexico where he was killed by Mexican troops in October 1880.

A REMARKABLE LEGACY

In the history of Fort Davis, African-American troops now known as the “Buffalo Soldiers” amassed a notable record of accomplishments. They arrived at the post in 1867 when western Texas was still very open to attack by raiding Apaches and Comanches. When they left in 1885, peaceful travel and settlement prevailed in much of the region.



**Company H, Tenth Cavalry
in the Barracks - 1884**

Painting by Clyde Heron