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**LFM Buffalo Soldiers: Black
Soldiers on the Frontier**

Lead: For 400 years service men and women have fought to carve out and defend freedom and the civilization we know as America. This series on *A Moment in Time* is devoted to the memory of those warriors, whose devotion gave, in the words of Lincoln at Gettysburg, *the last full measure*.

Intro: A Moment In Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: Following the Civil War, U.S. Army regiments made up of

African-American soldiers proved themselves among the most efficient and professional in the Indian Wars. During the Civil war over 180,000 blacks served in volunteer regiments fighting with the U.S. Army. They filled out units and even comprised one entire corps, the 25th, which helped occupy Richmond in the closing days of the war. Despite valiant and faithful service in the face of great danger, no African American troops were allowed to serve in regular army units. That all changed in the summer of 1866 when four infantry and two cavalry regiments were created by Congress to be made up exclusively of black enlisted men. Most of their service was on the

frontier where Indian opponents nicknamed them Buffalo Soldiers.

It did not go easily for the black soldiers. They got the worst supplies, rotted food, cast-off horses, and surplus equipment. Their white officers were usually of poor quality and considering the assignment to be professional exile they often took their frustration out on the men and abused them. Social prejudice dies a slow death and, despite a Civil War fought in part to secure freedom and citizenship for blacks, they continued to feel the sting of discrimination. Both inside the Army where blacks were only rarely commissioned and outside in

the local communities the troopers were sent to protect, African-American troopers were often physically assaulted and even killed while the Army stood by doing nothing.

In 1875 Col. Edward Hatch took his command, the 9th Cavalry regiment, into New Mexico territory where his unit was later joined by the 10th Cavalry. The 9th and 10th were made up exclusively of African American enlisted men. Their valor and determination, skill and professionalism had confounded critics of black military service. Hatch and his command spent years chasing Apache war parties that would periodically

conduct raids off the reservation. These were consummate mountain guerrilla warriors, able to spring from ambushes with deadly effect and then cleverly elude their pursuers. The Indians called the African-Americans Buffalo Soldiers, partly due to their color, but mostly out of grudging respect born of the devotion American Indians had for the wandering bison.

Perhaps the craftiest enemy faced by the Buffalo Soldiers was Chief Victorio of the Warm Springs band of the Apache. During the Victorio War, 1879-1880, the troopers of the 9th and 10th, with pursuit and clever ambushes, brought his

raiding parties to grief and laid the groundwork for his final defeat and death at the hands of the Mexican Army.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Stiles, T. J. "Buffalo Soldiers," Smithsonian 29 (9, December 1998): 82-94.

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