

THEIR STORIES - OUR HISTORY

Buffalo Soldiers Background – Six Regimental Units Activated

Over 180,000 Black Americans served in the Union Army and Navy during the Civil War. More than 33,000 died. After the war, the future of the Black soldiers in the US Army was in doubt. However, in 1866 Congress authorized, for the first time, Black Americans to serve in the peacetime army of the United States. Two cavalry and four infantry regiments were created and designated the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry regiments and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st U.S. Infantry regiments were activated on July 28, 1866. The four infantry regiments later became the 24th and 25th Infantry regiments. The all-Black American regiments, commanded mostly by white officers, were composed of Civil War veterans, former slaves, and freemen.

Buffalo Soldiers played a major role in the settlement and development of the American West. After serving in most of conflicts against bandits, renegades, and Native Americans throughout the western United States, several units moved to Arizona at such posts as Ft. Bowie and Ft. Verde in the 1880's. As protectors of the southern border and the New Mexico Territory including Arizona, Buffalo Soldiers created the atmosphere to establish Arizona and New Mexico as states.

While stationed at Fort Huachuca, AZ, Buffalo Soldiers:

- Protected traffic on the San Antonio-El Paso Road
- Protected Native American Indian reservations
- Protected settlers and guarded stage stations
- Participated in campaigns during the Indian Wars
- Constructed roads and telegraph lines
- Maintained law and order along the US-Mexican Border

Also, all four regimental units (9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry) were garrisoned at Fort Huachuca, AZ at one time or another. Fort Huachuca is the only military installation to have this distinction.

In the spring 1916, Buffalo Soldiers and Major Charles Young (one of only six black officers in the Army at the time) were called upon to join General "Black Jack" Pershing in his pursuit of Pancho Villa into Mexico after his attack on Columbus, NM. This became known as the "*Punitive Expedition of 1916.*"

In January 1918 Buffalo Soldiers defended ranchers from incursions by the Yaquis just west of Nogales, AZ in one of the last battles of the Indian wars in the continental United States.

Throughout the period of the Indian Wars, about twenty (20%) of the U.S. cavalry troopers were black soldiers, while eight (8%) of the infantry were black soldiers. These black soldiers rose above the challenges of harsh living conditions, difficult duty, and racial prejudice to gain a reputation of dedication and bravery.

Buffalo Soldiers were known to have played a significant historical role in at least six National Park Service Units in the American Southwest:

- Fort Davis National Historic Site (N.H.S.), TX
- Guadalupe Mountains National Park, TX
- Fort Larned N.H.S., KS
- Fort Bowie N.H.S., AZ
- Chiricahua National Monument, AZ

The Buffalo Soldier units were disbanded in 1948 when President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981 integrating the military services.

Behind the Nickname "Buffalo Soldiers"

According to the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, the name originated with the Cheyenne warriors in the winter of 1867. The actual Cheyenne translation was "Wild Buffalo." However, writer Walter Hill documented the assertions of Colonel Benjamin Grierson, who founded the 10th Cavalry regiment, who recalled an 1871 campaign against the Comanche tribe. Hill attributed the origin of the name to the Comanche based on Colonel Grierson's assertions. Some sources contend that the nickname was given out of respect for the fierce fighting ability of the 10th Cavalry. Other sources say that Native Americans called the black cavalry troops "Buffalo Soldiers" because of their dark curly hair, which resembled a buffalo's coat. Still other sources point to a combination of both legends. The term Buffalo Soldiers became a generic term for all African-American soldiers. It is now used for U.S. Army units that trace their direct lineage back to the 9th and 10th Cavalry, units whose service earned them an honored place in U.S. history.

BUFFALO SOLDIER MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS

The Medal of Honor, the highest military award that can be given to a member of the U.S. military, is presented by the president. It is awarded 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.

The Medal of Honor was awarded to 417 men who served in the frontier Indian Campaigns between 1865 and 1899. Eighteen were awarded to Black American soldiers:

- Eight were presented to members of the 9th Cavalry
- Four to members of the 10th Cavalry
- Six to members of the 24th Infantry

Five members of the 10th Cavalry received the award during the Spanish American War.

ARIZONA'S BUFFALO SOLDIER MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS

Corporal Isaiah Mays and Sergeant Benjamin Brown were both awarded the Medal of Honor for their protection and defense of the Wham Paymaster stage in February 1890 near Fort Grant, Arizona. They were among twenty-three Buffalo Soldiers to receive America's highest honor.

Also, in 1890, Sergeant Major William McBryar was awarded the Medal of Honor for his part in the capture of a group of Apaches who had retreated to a cave after a five-day, 200-mile pursuit. Under fire, McBryar maneuvered to a position where he could ricochet his bullets into the cave, forcing surrender. His was the first Medal of Honor awarded to a 10th Cavalry Soldier. The following are the accounts of these brave soldiers the who were awarded the Medal of Honor.

Sergeant Major William McBryar

William McBryar was the only enlisted member of the 10th Cavalry to receive the Medal of Honor prior to the Spanish-American War. He was the second African-American from North Carolina to be so honored. Born in Elizabethtown, he enlisted in the army in New York in 1887. Older than most recruits, he was better educated, having completed three years of college. He joined Company K at Fort Grant, Arizona, following the 1886 capture of Geronimo; his outfit spent much of 1887 pursuing an Apache guerilla named Kid. The following year McBryar suffered abdominal injuries when a horse fell on him.



A good soldier and skilled cavalryman, McBryar was promoted to sergeant and first sergeant. In 1890 McBryar was involved in a 200-mile pursuit of five fugitive Apaches. When the hostile Indians took shelter in a cave, McBryar fired his rifle at rocks along the edge of the cave sending bullet fragments and splintered rock flying at the trapped men who, as a consequence, surrendered. McBryar was awarded the Medal of Honor for "coolness, bravery, and good marksmanship."

McBryar remained in the army, serving during the Spanish-American War with the 25th Infantry in Cuba, where he commanded a platoon, his company lacking commissioned officers. He was commended for leadership in what was a pivotal battle in the campaign. McBryar received a commission in 1898 and was sent to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, as a lieutenant in the 8th Volunteer Infantry. When his unit was mustered out in 1899, McBryar reenlisted as a private and went to fight in the Philippines, becoming a quartermaster and first lieutenant.

For years McBryar tried to become a regular commissioned officer and was supported by his white commanders who considered him competent and intelligent. However, in 1901 after fourteen years of service, McBryar's unit was mustered out and he found himself at the bottom of the ladder once again. He rejoined the Buffalo Soldiers as a private in 1905, but due to rheumatism, was discharged a year later, and moved to Greensboro. McBryar tried civilian

careers including farmer, military school instructor, and watchman at Arlington Cemetery. During World War I, he again tried to reenter the Army. He died in 1941 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Wham Robbery

For more than a century, some \$28,000.00 in gold and silver coins has been missing after the little-known Wham Paymaster Robbery occurred near Pima, AZ. Though eight suspects were caught and tried for the crime, they walked away free men. The tale of the robbery and the mystery that surrounds remains unsolved today.



In the early morning hours of May 11, 1889, U.S. Army Paymaster, Major Joseph Washington Wham was preparing for a trek from Fort Grant to Fort Thomas to pay the soldiers' salaries. About 15 miles west of Pima in the Gila River Valley, just after midday, the caravan came to a stop as a large boulder was blocking the road. When the wagons were unable to get around it, the soldiers lay down their weapons in order to dislodge the large rock. However, before they made any progress, a cry came from a ledge some 60 feet above on the adjacent hill, "Look out, you black sons of bitches!" and bullets began to hail down upon the soldiers. Three of the 12 mules pulling the wagons were killed and the other animals panicked, rearing and pulling both vehicles off the road.

In the meantime, the soldiers scrambled for the guns and took cover. As the bullets continued to reign down upon them from three heavily fortified sides, Sergeant Benjamin Brown was shot, but continued to return fire with his revolver. In the meantime, Private James Young ran through heavy gunfire and carried Brown more than 100 yards to safety. Corporal Isaiah Mays then took command, ordering the entourage to retreat to a creek bed about 300 yards away, despite Major Wham's protests. The battle continued to rage on for about a half an hour as the soldiers valiantly tried to protect the payload.

Two of the Buffalo Soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor for their part in the gun battle with the bandits. Although shot in the abdomen, Sergeant Benjamin Brown continued the fight until he was wounded in both arms. Corporal Isaiah Mays also received the Medal of Honor, as near the end of the gun battle, though shot in the legs, he "walked and crawled two miles to Cottonwood Ranch and gave the alarm." Brown and Mays were the only black infantrymen to receive the Medal of Honor for bravery in the frontier Indian Wars.

Other Buffalo Soldiers cited for bravery in the incident received the Certificate of Merit. These included Hamilton Lewis, Squire Williams, George Arrington, James Wheeler, Benjamin Burge, Thomas Hams, James Young, and Julius Harrison of the 10th Cavalry and 24th Infantry.

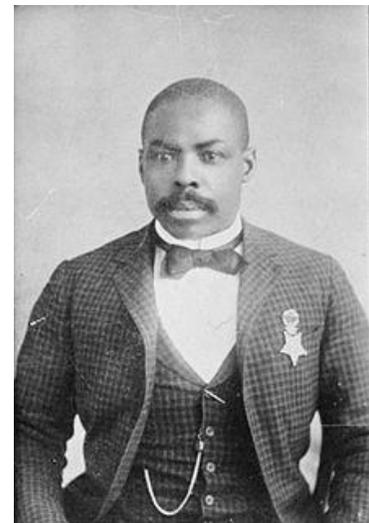
Sergeant Benjamin Brown

Sergeant Benjamin Brown (Born 1859 - September 5, 1910) was a recipient of America's highest military decoration, The Medal of Honor, for his actions during the "Wham Robbery," 1889. The crack of gunfire split the midday quiet in a remote corner of southeastern Arizona, not far from the tiny Mormon settlement of Pima. From behind fortifications overlooking the Fort Grant - Fort Thomas road, at a place known locally as "Bloody Run," a band of highwaymen ambushed Army Paymaster Major Joseph Washington Wham and his Buffalo Soldier escort. Following a hard-fought battle, the bandits made off with more than \$28,000. The money was never recovered. Eight of the twelve-man escort were wounded in the spirited defense of the army payroll, Sergeant Benjamin Brown refusing to give up his defense though shot in the abdomen and then wounded in both arms. Brown died in 1910 and was buried at the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.



Corporal Isaiah Mays

Corporal Isaiah Mays (February 16, 1858 – May 2, 1925) was a Buffalo Soldier in the United States Army and a recipient of America's highest military decoration—the Medal of Honor—for his actions during the Wham Paymaster Robbery in Arizona Territory. Mays was born into slavery in Virginia. He joined the Army from Columbus Barracks, Ohio, and by May 11, 1889 was serving as a corporal in Company B of the 24th Infantry Regiment. On that day, he was among the troops attacked during the Wham Paymaster Robbery. The next year, on February 19, 1890, Mays was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the engagement. After leaving the army in 1893, Mays worked as a laborer in Arizona and New Mexico. He applied for a federal pension in 1922 but was denied. He died at the hospital in 1925, at age sixty-seven, and was buried in the adjoining cemetery. His grave was marked with only a small stone block, etched with a number. In 2001, the marker was replaced with an official United States Department of Army headstone.

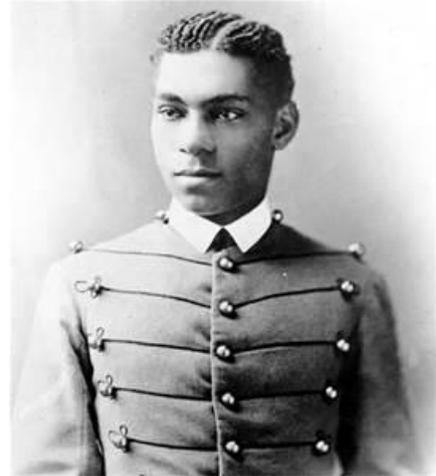


BLACK AMERICAN OFFICERS

Three Black Americans graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point during the 19th century. The men, Henry O. Flipper, John H. Alexander, and Charles Young were assigned to Black American units.

Second Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper

Henry Ossian Flipper was born on March 21, 1856, in Thomasville, Georgia. In July 1877 he became the first Black American to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point. He was assigned to the 10th Cavalry in July 1877 and was first stationed at Fort Sill. One of his successes at Fort Sill, as the post's engineer, was the construction of a system to drain stagnant ponds harboring mosquitoes (and potentially causing malaria). In 1880, Flipper was assigned to Fort Davis, Texas, with the duties of Acting Assistant Quartermaster and Acting Commissary of Subsistence. In 1881, Flipper found that commissary funds were missing, and he hid the loss until he could discover the reason behind it. His actions resulted in a court-martial. In December of 1881, he was tried at Fort Davis and found guilty of "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman" and was dismissed from the army. However, President Bill Clinton posthumously granted Flipper an honorable discharge in 1999, and on the 100th anniversary of his graduation, West Point unveiled a bust to him.



Second Lieutenant John H. Alexander

Because of his early death, John Hanks Alexander often receives only brief mention in histories of African-American service in the armed forces, but as one of the first black graduates of West Point and a pioneering army officer, he was among the outstanding young black Americans of his time.

Alexander was born in the Mississippi River town of Helena, Arkansas, on January 6, 1864. Being inspired by the story of Henry Ossian Flipper, the first African American to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, Alexander entered a competition for an appointment to the academy to be made by Congressman George W. Geddes of Ohio. Two finalists emerged from the preliminary examination: the son of Ohio's chief justice and Alexander. Alexander scored higher on the admission test administered at West Point and therefore won the appointment.



Earlier blacks at West Point, including Flipper, endured verbal and physical abuse from the white cadets. For Alexander, the years at the academy were a time of ostracism and loneliness. No white cadet would speak to him. He and Charles Young, an African American accepted by the military academy in 1884, sat apart from the others in chapel. Alexander said that he felt he was "in the confines of the highest and most secluded peak of the Himalaya Mountains." He graduates as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, 32nd in a class of 1864.

Lt. Alexander was assigned to Wilberforce University in Ohio. On March 26, 1894 he died suddenly and unexpectedly of a ruptured cerebral blood vessel. Springfield's white military guard escorted his remains to Wilberforce, where a funeral was held. In 1918, the Army honored John Hanks Alexander, a "man of ability, attainments, and energy—who was a credit to himself, to his race and to the service," by naming an encampment in Virginia after him.

Colonel Charles Young

Charles Young was born March 12, 1864 in Mayslick, Kentucky. After graduating from high school at the age of 16, he taught at a black high school in Ripley, Ohio. In 1884, he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point and graduated in 1889. In 1903, he was appointed superintendent of Sequoia and General Grant national parks, becoming the first black superintendent of a national park. During the 1916 Punitive Expedition into Mexico, Young commanded a squadron of the 10th Cavalry and due to his exceptional leadership was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Young was medically retired from the military in 1917 and spent most of 1917 and 1918 as a professor at Wilberforce University. In late 1918, he was reinstated into the army and promoted to colonel and assigned as a military attaché to Liberia where he died.



CATHAY WILLIAMS:
THE ONLY BLACK WOMAN BUFFALO SOLDIER

Private Cathay Williams was the only woman to serve in the US Army as a Buffalo Soldier. On November 15, 1866 she enlisted in the Army as a man. Williams reversed her name *William Cathay* and lived as a male soldier and served until she was found out due to the last of many illnesses she suffered while a serving. She is the only documented black woman known to have served in the Army during these times when enlisting women was prohibited. Born in 1844 in Independence, Missouri, Williams was a slave as was her mother, but her father was free. She would work as a house servant on the Johnson plantation near Jefferson City. By 1861, Union forces occupied Jefferson City in the beginnings of the American Civil War. Still considered a slave, she served the 8th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment which was commanded by William Plummer Benton.



During her time with the 8th Indiana, Williams would have seen action on the battlefields and been introduced to uniformed Negro regiments. This may have inspired her to enlist once the war ended. She knew that women were prohibited from serving in the military, but having been transferred to Washington DC, she may have been told stories about women passing themselves off as men to fight and serve. Who knows what her true inspiration was? What we do know was that Williams enlisted in the United States Regular Army on 15 November 1866 at St. Louis, Missouri for a three year engagement, passing herself off as a man. Only two others are known to have been privy to the deception, her cousin and a friend, both of whom were fellow soldiers in her regiment.

Corporal Williams was plagued with illness after illness during her three-year enlistment. She was hospitalized several times. During the last illness, an Army surgeon finally discovered she was a woman and she was "outed." The surgeon informed the post commander and Williams was discharged from by her commanding officer, Captain Charles E. Clarke on October 14, 1868. What took them so long? She must have not had to fully undress the entire time or maybe refused under some kind of ruse. Whatever the reason, she successfully passed for 3 years.

Years after leaving the Army, Williams served as a cook in Fort Union, New Mexico. From there she made her way up to Pueblo, Colorado where her mother Martha Williams ran an orphanage. Sometime in 1872 Williams found herself in Trinidad, Colorado where she lived the rest of her life as a cook, seamstress and nurse. Little is known other than Williams left Trinidad and moved just across the border to Raton, New Mexico where she ran a boarding house until she died in 1924.