

Who were the Buffalo Soldiers?

In 1866 after the conclusion of the Civil War, Congress created African American Army regiments including two Cavalry units and four Infantry units. The first recruits included former slaves, freemen and veterans from the war.

Tradition has it that the nickname “Buffalo Soldier” began with the Cheyenne warriors referring to the dark hair and fierce fighting ability of the black soldiers. The first “peace-time” campaigns were actually dangerous assignments during the westward expansion on the United States. The Buffalo Soldiers were charged with protecting settlers, cattle and railroad crews. Famously, the 9th and 10th Cavalry Units played an essential role in the settling of the southwest during a time of extreme change, conflict and chaos



including the forced movement of Native Americans to reservation land, fast-paced development of new towns and rural settlements, territorial changes between Mexico and the U.S. and groups of bandits and outlaws raiding newcomers. Buffalo Soldiers also fought in the Spanish American War of 1898 (including San Juan Hill in Cuba) and both World Wars I and II.

Example of a Buffalo Soldier maneuver. Image is over Sargent Armistead Anderson Earls. Image courtesy of Arizona Museum of Natural History in Mesa.

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