

## **The Buffalo Soldiers**

### **The Black Units Are Formed**

At the close of the Civil War, the U.S. Army formed regiments of black men, many of whom had served in the United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.). The cavalry units were the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the infantry were the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st which several years later were consolidated into the 24th and 25th infantry units. Black infantry troops often fought side-by-side with the black cavalry.

To many black citizens, the Buffalo Soldiers were a symbol of hope for a better future.

Professor Rayford Logan of Howard University commented: "Negroes had little, at the turn of the century, to help sustain our faith in ourselves except the pride that we took in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry...They were our Ralph Bunche, Marian Anderson, Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson."

No one is quite certain why the Indians nicknamed the African American cavalrymen "buffalo soldiers." Some say it was because the men were rugged as buffalo and others that it was because the Indians saw a resemblance between the black soldier's hair and the buffalo's shaggy coat. It has also been pointed out that many black soldiers favored the long buffalo-robe coats. Although the name was primarily applied to the cavalry, it was sometimes extended to include the black infantry.

Many of the original members of the African American units were former slaves who had served in the Union Army. Other emancipated slaves also saw the Army as a way to start a new life on the frontier. Men displaced by the Civil War could find food, shelter and some medical benefits in the military

### **The Frontier Years**

The buffalo soldiers served in the Indian Wars on the Plains and in the Southwest. They often distinguished themselves in spite of being issued old horses, scanty ammunition and faulty equipment. They were rarely guilty of drunkenness in a time and place where alcoholism was common. Their rate of desertion and court martial was much lower than that of white soldiers. During the period from 1880 to 1886 the 24th Infantry held the record for the lowest desertion rate in the entire United States Army. In 1888 the 24th and 25th Infantry were tied for the honor.

During the early years of their history the buffalo soldiers served mainly in Kansas, Texas and New Mexico. In 1885 several companies from the 9th Cavalry were detailed to Indian Territory to remove the Boomers--white homesteaders who were trying to stake illegal claims on Indian lands. In addition to controlling the Indians of the Plains and the Southwest, the soldiers built roads, discouraged illegal traders who sold guns and alcohol to the Indians, policed cattle rustlers and formed escorts for stagecoaches carrying military payroll or other valuables.