Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Davis

In 1866, following the Civil War, Congress passed a law to increase the size of the U. S. Army. As a result, a number of new regiments were authorized and six of the new units (two cavalry and four infantry) were composed of black troops. For the first time in the history of the United States, black men could serve in the Regular Peacetime Army. By this legislation, Congress offered African-American men—many of whom had been former slaves—a place to live and the opportunity to earn a monthly salary, learn a trade, receive an education, and travel. In short, the army offered these men the chance to have a better life.

The name "Buffalo Soldiers" has come to mean those African Americans who served in the Regular Army between the Civil War and World War I. The term is attributed to the Plains Indians who were said to have compared the hair of the black soldiers to that of the buffalo.

Buffalo Soldier regiments were stationed at Fort Davis from 1867 to 1885. When they came to Fort Davis, western Texas was a place open to attacks by raiding Apaches and Comanches. When they left in 1885, peaceful travel and settlement prevailed in much of the region. They served the army and their country well, and fourteen of them earned the Medal of Honor during the frontier Indian Wars period.

More than half of the soldiers who served at Fort Davis were African Americans. When both black and white soldiers were stationed at the fort at the same time, they were segregated into different regiments and lived in different barracks. All soldiers at Fort Davis performed everyday duties to keep the post running, and their major job was to protect travelers, freight wagons, and the mail on the San Antonio-El Paso Road. They were also involved in numerous military campaigns.

Visitor Center Diorama

In the biggest battle ever fought by troops from Fort Davis, Buffalo Soldiers engaged Apaches and their war leader, Victorio, in 1880 at Tinaja de Las Palmas—about 100 miles west of Fort Davis. When you visit the museum at Fort Davis National Historic Site, you will see a diorama depicting this battle.

RESEARCH:

For more information on the Buffalo Soldiers, read the February, 1995 issue of *Cobblestone* magazine. Share interesting facts you learned with your classmates. Also, check out the following websites and share the information your class. Remember that not all information on the Internet or in books is completely accurate.

> A. Texas Parks and Wildlife site (www.tpwd.state.tx.us)
> > 1. Click on Search and type in "Texas Buffalo Soldiers."
> > 2. Find and read an article that interests you.
> > 3. Write five facts that you learned about the Buffalo Soldiers and share this information with your class.
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> B. Texas Beyond History site (www.texasbeyondhistory.net)
> > 1. Click on "Map Tool."
> > 2. Click on Fort Davis.
> > 3. Read the three articles about Fort Davis.
> > 4. Write down facts you find interesting about Fort Davis, the soldiers, or the Indians. Share your information with your class.
> > 5. For more information on the U.S. Army, click on "Frontier Forts Main," found at the end of the three articles you read.
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> C. Handbook of Texas Online (www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online)
> > 1. In the search box, type in "Buffalo Soldiers."
> > 2. Choose article 1, 8, 10, 12, 19, 20, or 23, and read about the Buffalo Soldiers.
> > 3. Write five facts that you learned about the Buffalo Soldiers and share this information with your class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

> 1. If you were an American Indian in the 1860s, what might you have thought the first time you saw a black soldier?
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> 2.   The Buffalo Soldiers were proud of their nickname. Why do you think this was true?
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> 3. How do you think the response of the white soldiers to the black soldiers changed between 1866 and 1890? Explain your reasoning.
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> 4.   If you had been a black man in 1866, why might you have wanted to join the army?