

# Fort Davis

## National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 9-12

Student Activity: A Buffalo Soldier and his Horse

### LESSON: A BUFFALO SOLDIER AND HIS HORSE: STEP INTO THE PICTURE— BRING A HISTORICAL CHARACTER TO LIFE!

**GRADE LEVEL:** 9-12

**DURATION OF ACTIVITY :** 2-3 Class Periods

#### MATERIALS

- Background information (see list below under “Additional Resources”)
- July, 1871 “Muster and Descriptive List of Public Animals” of 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Troop H (3 pp) *(This is a primary source; original in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.)*
- Historic drawing by Frederic Remington of a Buffalo Soldier and his horse (1 p)
- LCD projector and computer -- desired but not necessary
- “Step into the Picture—A Buffalo Soldier & His Horse” worksheets (2 pp)

#### BACKGROUND

In 1866, Congress passed the “Act to Increase and Fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States.” It called for the creation of 30 new army regiments, including 2 cavalry and 4 infantry that were to “be composed of colored men.” These all-Black regiments, organized in 1866-1867, became the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry and the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first U.S. Infantry Regiments.

In 1869, the infantry regiments were consolidated. The Thirty-eighth and Forty-first became the new Twenty-fourth Infantry, and the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth became the new Twenty-fifth Infantry.



*Modern reenactment photo of Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Davis*

Black men enlisted in the army for a variety of reasons. Many of them had been slaves prior to the Civil War. The U.S. Army not only offered them paying jobs but room and board as well. Some of the men simply wanted to get away, to see the Wild West, or to “make something of themselves.” Some of these new soldiers who joined the cavalry were men who had never

ridden a horse or had the opportunity to learn horsemanship. They had to learn how to ride, to care for their horses, and to depend on them while out in the field.

Cavalry soldiers were horse soldiers—a title that denoted how they got around. For a man in the cavalry, the horse was his life. He fed, watered, and took care of his horse before he took care of himself. The well being of the horse could mean life or death for the soldier. On the frontier, it was the horse that offered a man transportation. Before the railroads, the trails were not well traveled, and in many places the watering holes were few and far between.

To be in the cavalry, a man had to be no taller than about 5'9" or 5'10" tall and weigh no more than 155-160 pounds. Smaller men were chosen for the cavalry out of consideration for the horse, which had to carry the man and his equipment. Bigger men became infantry soldiers.

It was the soldier's horse that carried him from place to place and enabled him to participate in campaigns. His horse helped him not only to carry his gear, but to avoid enemy fire. The U.S. Army provided men with horses, but it was often hard to get horses that met government standards. This made it all the more important for soldiers to take good care of them.

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## **TEACHING THE LESSON**

After researching Buffalo Soldiers, students will take factual information from the historical record and make inferences about the Buffalo Soldier and his horse in the photo. Based on that information, students will invent their own historical fictional character—an exercise that will culminate in giving a 2-minute speech in the character of that created person. Each student will present a speech that is both believable and interesting and that will exhibit a sense of the persona of the soldier he/she has developed. The speech can be given standing in front of the class, or if there is an LCD projector available, students can actually step into the picture...standing in front of the soldier in their picture and "Stepping into the Picture." (As an extension, they may use props or costumes to better portray their characters).

1. Students begin by doing research about Buffalo Soldiers. Several resources are listed, including a historical army record of the horses of Troop H of the 9th Cavalry in July, 1871. (Note: Troop H, 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, helped re-establish Fort Davis in 1867 following the Civil War. The troop transferred in 1868 from Fort Davis to Fort Bliss, where it was when the 1871 list of animals was made.) This research can be done several different ways. The information pages can be printed out and given to the students to read to themselves, students can research and read information in library books or online, or the students can be divided into groups and read the information within their groups.
2. Following the research, each student creates a fictional Buffalo Soldier character. Each student will fill out the information about his or her created character on the worksheets. Students should note various names given to horses by Buffalo Soldiers of Troop H, 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, and perhaps choose one of the historical horses' names (Spitfire, Apache, Old Nick, Hercules, Eagle, Thunder, etc).
3. Students write a 2-minute speech using the information they have written on their character worksheets. Students present their 2-minute speech to the entire class. This can be done with the picture of the Buffalo Soldier and his horse (see link in the Materials section above) projected on a screen behind them, or they can just stand up and give their speech in 1st person in the character of the Buffalo Soldier. Students may add props to their presentations.

EXTENSIONS: Each student can choose a different scenario for his or her speech. (*For an actual list of soldiers stationed at Fort Davis, see 1<sup>st</sup> listing below under "Additional resources."*) Some examples of speeches include:

- ✓ Speech as an army recruiter trying to recruit soldiers. Define a time and place (e.g. 1867, Chicago).
- ✓ Speech to a group of army veterans 50 years after you served in the military
- ✓ Speech at the funeral of a fellow soldier who died when he was accidentally kicked in the abdomen by a horse, bled internally, and died. (This actually happened at Fort Davis to 22-year-old Private John Mitchell in July 1881—see partial list of Fort Davis death records at <http://www.nps.gov/foda/fortteachers/upload/posthospital&medicine.pdf>). Tell about the soldier's character and service in the army.
- ✓ Speech to newspaper reporters at the celebration of the first Veteran's Day in 1918
- ✓ Speech as a soldier who returns to his church after serving his five- year enlistment

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- This remarkable URL has a roster of those who actually served at Fort Davis, just in case students wish to choose a historical name, or see if they are kin to anyone who served at Fort Davis.  
[http://www.nps.gov/archive/foda/fort\\_davis\\_web\\_page/About\\_the\\_Fort/Soldier%20Roster.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/foda/fort_davis_web_page/About_the_Fort/Soldier%20Roster.htm)
- *BOOK - The Black Regulars 1866-1898* by William A. Dobak and Thomas D. Phillips
- *BOOK - Voices of the Buffalo Soldier* by Frank N Schubert. This is a collection of documents that tells about the lives and experiences of African Americans who served in Regular Army between the Civil War & WWI.
- *BOOK - Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay* by Don Rickey Jr.
- *BOOK – The Buffalo Soldiers (revised edition)* by William H. and Shirley A. Leckie
- "African Americans in the Frontier Army" and "History of the Black Regiments"(These handouts give good basic background -- you may wish to print out a copy for each student)  
[http://www.nps.gov/archive/foda/fort\\_davis\\_web\\_page/HOME.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/foda/fort_davis_web_page/HOME.htm)  
[http://www.nps.gov/archive/foda/fort\\_davis\\_web\\_page/About\\_the\\_Fort/History\\_of\\_Black\\_Regiments.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/foda/fort_davis_web_page/About_the_Fort/History_of_Black_Regiments.htm)
- Henry B. Crawford is the Curator of History at the Museum of Texas Tech University in Lubbock. This is his two-page essay on the basic history of the Buffalo Soldiers.  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ranchhouse/1867\\_essay3.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ranchhouse/1867_essay3.html)
- A story written and illustrated by Frederic Remington, American artist 1861-1909, about time he spent with some Buffalo Soldier scouts--published in 1889. <http://www.discoverseaz.com/History/RemingtonScout.html>
- <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/webcasts/texas/buffalo.phtml> (4-minute audio podcast that gives a brief background on the Buffalo Soldiers from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website)
- <http://www.pchswi.org/outside/remington/buffalosoldiers.html>
- Information about the horses on the plains - <http://www.discoverseaz.com/History/HorsePlains.html>