

# Fort Davis

National Historic Site  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## JULY 1866: A MILESTONE IN BLACK HISTORY

### *THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BLACK REGIMENTS IN THE REGULAR ARMY*

It was opposed by many, considered only an experiment by others, but the “Act to Increase and Fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States” changed the course of American Military History, and afforded blacks a permanent place in the Armed Forces of the United States.

The Act of Congress, dated July 28, 1866, increased the size of the regular peacetime army by raising the number of infantry regiments from nineteen to forty- five. The legislation stipulated that of the new regiments created, two cavalry and four infantry “shall be composed of colored men.” For the first time in the history of the United States, regiments composed of black troops were authorized as part of the Regular Army.

As slaves and as free men, blacks participated in the French and Indian Wars. They fought under Generals Braddock and Washington in the American Revolutionary War. In the War of 1812, black troops manned defenses against the British at the Battle of New Orleans. It was the Civil War, however, that provided the first opportunity and need for the use of blacks in the army on a large scale. Nearly 200,000 blacks wore the Union blue and more than 33,000 of them died in that tragic conflict.

Their exemplary service in the Civil War paved the way for the authorization of the black regiments. Designated as the Ninth and Tenth United States Cavalry, and the Thirty- eighth, Thirty- ninth, Fortieth, and Forty- first United States Infantry, the units were organized under white officers between the summers of 1866 and 1867.

### THE NINTH AND TENTH CAVALRY

The Ninth Cavalry initially saw action in Texas with Companies C, F, H, and I reoccupying the abandoned post at Fort Davis on June 29, 1867. The first home of the Tenth Cavalry was Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After seeing duty in Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado, the regiment came to Texas in 1875. It was troopers of these two cavalry regiments that earned the nickname “Buffalo Soldiers” – a term given them by the Indians because of the resemblance of their hair to the short, curly hair of the buffalo.

### THE INFANTRY REGIMENTS

In 1869, the infantry regiments underwent consolidation. The 38<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> became the 24<sup>th</sup>, while the 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> combined to form the 25<sup>th</sup>. In 1870, the regiments began a tour of duty in Texas which lasted over a decade.

### PROUDLY THEY SERVED

Black troops served at Fort Davis from 1867 to 1885. Surmounting obstacles of harsh living conditions, difficult duty, low pay and racial prejudice, they gained a reputation of dedication and bravery. Stationed continuously on the frontier during the years of Indian hostilities, the black regiments played a major role in the peaceful settlement and development of the American West.

Black regiments later served in the Spanish American War, Philippine Insurrection, Mexican Punitive Expedition, World War I, World War II,

and the Korean War. In the mid- 1950s, the last all black units were desegregated. For the first time, black and white soldiers served together in the same regiments.

