



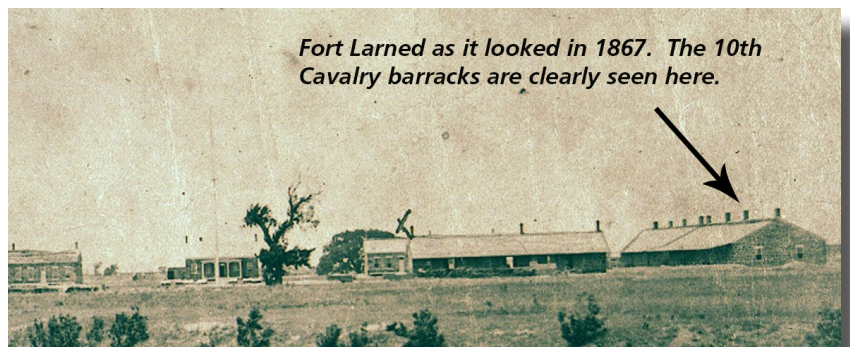
Serving With Distinction Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Larned

In September of 1867 ten men from Company G of the newly formed 10th U.S. Cavalry were guarding a railroad construction crew near Fort Hays. As part of this guard detail, Private John Randall was assigned to escort and protect two hunters hired by the railroad to provide meat for the crew. The party didn't get very far before they were attacked by a band of 70 Cheyenne warriors. Taken by surprise and outnumbered, the two civilians were killed before Private Randall could do anything. He did manage to get to the relative safety of a washout under the railroad tracks and although he would eventually sustain 11 lance wounds and a gunshot wound to the shoulder, the Indians were not able to kill him.

What's in a name?

The more commonly known story of how the Buffalo Soldiers got their name has to do with the similarity of their curly hair to that of the buffalo, but another version has to do with the courage these men showed in their engagements with the Indians. To the Plains Indians, the American bison was a sacred animal. It was also one they greatly respected for its courage and tenacity in the face of repeated attacks—the kind of courage and tenacity shown by Private Randall in their attack on him. It's easy to understand that a demonstration of courage like that could earn these new soldiers a nickname from the Indians that would be based not only on their appearance, but on their actions as well.

Company A of the 10th U.S. Cavalry was stationed at Fort Larned from July of 1867 to January of 1869. During their time at the post, and indeed throughout their more than 25 years of service on the western frontier, the men in this company showed the same courage in battle and commitment to duty as did Private Randall.



Professional Soldiers

Company G and A, and all the units that would eventually earn the name of Buffalo Soldiers, were authorized by Congress in 1866 as part of a downsizing and restructuring of the Army after the Civil War. Congress passed a bill calling for the creation of four new Cavalry regiments that year, two of which were to be, in the words of the authorizing legislation, "composed of colored men." Along with the two cavalry units, the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry, "colored" infantry regiments were created as well, the 24th and 25th U.S. Infantry.

These new units, initially commanded by White officers, represented the first professional African-American soldiers in the country's peacetime army. Recruitment of the officers and men, as well as organizing and training the new soldiers took up to a year, so they were not sent west for frontier duty until 1867. These men quickly proved themselves to be a capable and courageous addition to the country's frontier military force, despite the common belief of many people of the day that they would not make good soldiers.

Though they couldn't have known it at the time, Congress' authorization of those "colored" units led to the creation of a legendary American fighting unit: the Buffalo Soldiers.

Company A at Fort Larned

Company A of the 10th U.S. Cavalry was one of the first of these new units sent west for frontier duty. The men came mostly from Missouri, Kansas, and a small number of northeastern cities. While stationed at Fort Larned members of Co. A participated in the normal routine of a frontier post. This included work details and guard duty, as well as grooming their horses and practicing cavalry drills.

The troopers went on constant patrols, and fought against Indians twice in 1868. In the first encounter, they assisted Fort Dodge by pursuing “a large party of Indians from that post fifteen miles to Mulberry Creek, killing three.” In December of that same year, Indians attacked a supply train bound for Fort Dodge at Little Cow Creek and drove off the cattle. Twenty troopers from Co. A rode 14 miles to Little Cow Creek, recaptured the cattle and escorted the train to safety. Thirteen men suffered frostbite in this action due to the severe winter weather at the time.



With 96 men, Company A was one of the few companies at Fort Larned close to the full 100 men regulation strength. Their quarters were in this original barracks building at the fort. As with all the enlisted men at the fort, they slept in the squad room with two men to a bunk and ate their meals in the company mess hall.

Racism on the Frontier

Life in the frontier army was lonely and difficult for all soldiers but these men had an added hardship—the racism common during that time. At Fort Larned this racism would eventually lead to the 10th Cavalry’s transfer from the post.

On January 1, 1869, there was a disagreement in the Sutler’s store between two men of Co. A and three men of the White Infantry company stationed at the post. Although the post commander, Major Yard, did not have all the facts about what happened, he apparently blamed the men from Co. A because he sent the entire company to guard the post wood pile that night during a blizzard.



The Blockhouse at Fort Larned, which was used as the post Guard House. Members of Co. A would have taken their turn at guard duty here just like the other companies on the post.

On the following morning around 7:00 a.m., the fort’s Cavalry’s stables caught fire and burned, killing 39 horses and destroying the grain and ammunition stored there. The fire’s cause was never determined for sure. Major Yard initially decided not to investigate and sent the 10th to Fort Zarah to avoid further trouble. Although the Military Division headquarters quickly ordered an investigation, the Court of Inquiry decided that the men of Company A were at fault even though they were not present at the stables that morning. That verdict was later overturned.

A Proud Tradition

For more than 25 years both the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry, along with the 24th and 25th U.S. Infantry Regiments served in some of the roughest areas of the American frontier. Whether it was the blistering desert of the Texas Big Bend region in summer, or the sub zero temperatures of the Dakotas in winter, these brave soldiers kept settlers safe from Indians, cattle thieves and outlaws.

Most of their efforts are not remembered or appreciated, and racism often prompted the very locals they were protecting to harrass them. The White settlers in these areas were not used to Black men in blue uniforms and were slow to value the protection of their property, lives and prosperity the Buffalo Soldiers so valiently provided.

After the close of the frontier, the Buffalo Soldiers went on to participate in the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, World Wars I & II, as well as the Korean War. After President Truman desegregated the Army during the Korean War, the remaining Buffalo Soldier units were disbanded and their soldiers integrated into the regular Army.

All the men who served in the Buffalo Soldier units are part of a proud military tradition, one that reflected devotion to duty and service with distinction. An honorable tradition by anyone’s standards.