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The Archeology of Buffalo Soldiers and Apaches in the Southwest

The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, heralded fundamental changes in American society. Though not all-inclusive, or immediately implemented, as it applied only to the states that had seceded (NARA 2007), it opened a path towards freedom for African Americans. This path was to take them in many directions as thousands of newly freed slaves strove to reconfigure their lives following the end of the Civil War in 1865. Lack of employment, continuing prejudice, and generally difficult conditions in the impoverished South drove many to migrate. A large number moved north, primarily to cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York, looking for greater employment and freedom. A smaller, but significant number migrated west, as part of the newly created African American military regiments that became known collectively as the Buffalo Soldiers.



Archeologists mapping artifacts near Pine Springs base camp in Guadalupe Mountains National Park. NPS photo.

African Americans in the Nineteenth Century U.S. Military

The Emancipation Proclamation not only freed the enslaved but announced the acceptance of African Americans into the Union Army (NARA 2007). Despite strong opposition by most high-ranking officers, almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors served on the Union side during the Civil War (NARA 2007) and proved their fighting ability time and again. As a result, several regular African American military units were created in 1867. The significance of this move is underscored by the fact that the post-conflict Army was downsizing and reorganizing its fighting force at the time. Dissolving and consolidating units rather than creating them were on the agenda. Indeed, most of the officers who chose to re-enlist after the Civil War had to take a demotion in rank and pay in order to continue serving.

Originally, six African American regiments were planned, but in the end only four came into being: the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the 24th and 25th Infantry. These troops, like the earlier African American units in the Civil War, were led by European American officers who volunteered to serve with them. Many of the personnel, officers and enlisted men alike, were Civil War veterans. Others were new recruits, the enlisted men coming largely from the ranks of the formerly enslaved. African Americans were attracted by the promise of the same regular pay as for European Americans: \$13 a month for a private, plus clothing and food. They were probably also attracted by the promise of freedom and of different opportunities on the western frontier where life ways were not as entrenched as they were in the East. The importance that military jobs had for them is reflected in Army statistics on desertion. In 1867, while rates for the Army as a whole reached 25 percent, only 4 percent of African American troops deserted.

As the new units were being constituted, there were long delays in mobilization. Tent cities sprang up around recruiting places such as Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, while the newly inducted waited for sufficient numbers to accrue to be sent into the field. Outbreaks of cholera and other diseases swept through these camps but the recruits, by and large, remained (Leckie and Leckie 2003:3-18). This dedication to the job was to continue as the new regiments were forged into impressive fighting forces during the pacification of the frontier.

Buffalo Soldiers

The new African American regiments were sent to some of the toughest places known to the Army. They took part in much of the major fighting of the Indian wars, from the High Plains to the Southwest. In the process, African American soldiers garnered 23 Medals of Honor (Schubert 1997:7). It is believed the Plains Indians gave them their nickname of "Buffalo Soldiers" because of their courage and their hair, which the Indians thought resembled the fur between a bison's horns. The soldiers adopted the name with pride, as they knew how the Indians esteemed the buffalo.

African American military units saw more fighting than their European American counterparts,

and this was not serendipitous. Often African American units were assigned to the more remote outposts, well away from European American frontier communities, in tacit segregation. This was particularly true in formerly secessionist states such as Texas where, of the three regiments stationed there after the Civil War, only the African American 9th was assigned exclusively to the west Texas frontier. An important duty was patrolling the routes used by wagon trains bearing supplies to frontier communities. Thus, the African American soldiers could remain out of sight of the European Americans farther east while still protecting them and their economy (Wooster 1990).

Despite this isolation, there was interaction between African, European, and Hispanic Americans in frontier forts and fort towns such as Fort Concho and neighboring San Angelo. African American soldiers who married local women regularly settled in their wives' communities both during and after their stint in the Army. How many stayed and the impact of their presence on the development of those communities remains to be investigated. There seems to have been more integration in the incompletely settled parts of the frontier, however, than in the more established areas.

The Army and the Indians

Pacification of the Indians posed great difficulties to the U.S. forces. They fought against skillful and often elusive opponents and Buffalo Soldiers made significant contributions to the efforts. On the Texas and New Mexican frontiers U.S. troops, comprised mostly of Buffalo Soldiers, encountered fierce opposition from, primarily, the Lipan, Mescalero, and Warm Springs Apache, as well as the Comanche and Kiowa. Indian raiding parties moved fast, knew the country intimately, and usually vanished before troops sent after them closed in. Military units faced a tremendous challenge in attempting to find and catch them. The ability to move troops rapidly, to supply them in the field, to communicate with scattered units and to position soldiers at a network of strategically placed military posts would prove to be important in securing the frontier for European American settlements (Uglove 2001:3-4).



A guard picket station on the periphery of Pine Springs base camp. NPS photo.

Success in stopping well-mounted raiding parties required mobility. Mounted patrols, coupled with large-scale offensive operations against Indian sanctuaries, became the primary tactic of the Army on the Southwestern frontier. The patrols usually consisted of African American units, first from the 9th and later the 10th Cavalry. The infantry saw considerable action as well, as they were involved both in re-supplying the cavalry and in building roads. Fielding a mobile and flexible fighting force demanded strong supply lines, detailed knowledge of the terrain, and good communications. Large columns of troops in the field required considerable quantities of food, ammunition, and forage if they were to operate effectively. Supplying those columns became one of the major obstacles to successful pursuit and engagement of Indian raiders. Equally important was knowledge of the location of water sources, an essential commodity in this dry area that sometimes proved decisive in an action or in an entire campaign. This information was critical not only for planning troop movements but also for understanding the movements of their opponents, as the Indians, too, had to rely on limited drinking sources.

Scouting and mapping, as part of regular patrols, were key to military strategy in the Southwest. As the Army learned the location of water sources, it used that information to force Indian bands to retire from the region or to fight on the Army's terms. Good roads, which provided the primary means of communication between posts, were also essential to military strategy. Roads eased supply efforts and allowed for a more rapid concentration of forces when necessary. The two Buffalo Soldier infantry regiments, the 24th and 25th, did the lion's share of road construction in the Southwest, under the direction of Colonel Benjamin Grierson, commander of the 10th Cavalry. His comprehensive program of scouting, mapping, occupation of water sources, and road construction provided a true defensive framework that ultimately allowed the Army to wrest control of the region from the Indians (Uglove 2001; Wooster 1990).

Solving mobility, supply, and communication problems would have meant little to the Army, however, without a network of forts and posts from which troops could operate. Following the Civil War, forts such as Fort Davis in Texas, that had been abandoned during the conflict, were reoccupied and refurbished and new forts were established. The Army also set up a series of isolated posts to protect remote strategic points such as water sources.

Sub-posts were usually manned by one or two companies on detached service from the forts. Sub-post commands, in turn, sent out detachments to scouting camps in country traversed by Indian raiding parties. Patrols fanned out to cover trails, fords, and water holes likely to be used by the raiders. Picket stations of a dozen men or fewer were established at mail stations

or water holes that needed ongoing protection. These stations were especially vulnerable and came under attack far more frequently than other posts on the frontier (Uglove 2001:15-17). This grid of far-flung military positions proved most effective in discouraging raids by bands of Indians.

The Apache Wars

The United States began to move toward confrontation with Apache tribes at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). Apache relations with the newly arrived European Americans actually began in a relatively friendly manner, with various Apache bands offering friendship to military units that crossed their region prior to the Civil War. This was an era when military posts were established, treaties negotiated, and Apache hostilities not as widespread as they were during the post-Civil War decades. Yet the seeds of future troubles were sown in the early 1850s. The Apaches would not accept the United States' insistence that Indian raids into Mexico must stop, and Apaches could not understand why European Americans thought they owned the land by treaty with Mexico when the Mexicans had never conquered Apachería. Apaches were willing, however, to allow Anglos to pass through their domains and to permit settlement there on a regulated basis if settlers would pay them for the privilege. The uncertainty of the government as to how it should control the Apaches, combined with its inability to stop miners and settlers from expropriating Apache lands, created a dangerous situation.

By the eve of the Civil War open conflict existed, brought about by settlers who wanted to exterminate the Apaches; by the U.S. Army, which did not always make fine distinctions between hostile and peaceful Apache bands; and by agents of the Indian Bureau, who wanted to concentrate the Apaches on wastelands termed reservations. The result was a three-cornered struggle for supremacy in controlling the Apaches, which caused American authorities to vacillate, created overlapping responsibilities, and ultimately led to chronic violent conflict that lasted well into the 1880s.

During the Apache Wars, Mescalero and Lipan Apache Indians controlled the Trans-Pecos region, including the Guadalupe Mountains, from which they conducted guerilla warfare against pioneer communities. Typically, the Indians placed their camps with defense in mind, that is, on the crest of ridges where anyone approaching was visible and escape routes were plentiful. Highly mobile hunters and gatherers, they constructed simple sapling-and-grass wickiups for shelter that could be quickly abandoned when military patrols were sighted (Adams, White and Johnson 2000:11-15; Haecker and Mangum 2004:183-187). During the 1879 to 1881 uprising, initially led by Chief Victorio, the Warm Springs Apache and their allies used the Guadalupe Mountains before the Army drove them further west.

U.S. troops regularly patrolled the Guadalupe Mountains during the uprising. The African American 9th and 10th Cavalry were in this area, as well as the European American 3rd and 8th Cavalry. Military occupation of the Guadalupe Mountains reached its zenith during the Victorio campaign as, under orders from Grierson, the 10th Cavalry settled down to occupy all the major springs and water sources in order to prevent the Apache from re-supplying. Grierson's strategy ultimately proved successful in leaving Victorio and his followers without room to maneuver, thereby leading to their defeat.

Military presence during the Apache Wars, however, did not completely prevent the Indians from using the mountains, except perhaps towards the end of this time period, when troop maneuvers escalated. While the military regularly patrolled, they typically did not stay long in one place. A stint of several weeks or months in the Guadalupe Mountains for a cavalry troop would be followed by a visit to the Texas Plains or another area. Even while in the mountains, the cavalry would not necessarily remain in the same location. Individual companies of the 10th Cavalry, for example, regularly traveled 250 to 400 miles on horseback each month except in winter, when they were largely confined to the forts. This sporadic occupation allowed the Apache to visit the Guadalupe Mountains during the long stretches of time the Army was not in the immediate area and avail themselves of the local resources, and materials the soldiers left behind. Tin cans, cartridge cases, and bottles all provided raw materials for a variety of useful items and perhaps made the mountains more attractive to them.

Archeological Investigations at Pine Spring Camp, Guadalupe Mountains NP

The interlaced record of Apache and military activities was the subject of our research at Pine Springs Camp, Guadalupe Mountains National Park, an officially designated sub-post (Levy 1971:119) on the eastern slopes of the Guadalupe Mountains. Ethnohistoric and archeological information suggests that the Mescalero Apache occupied the Guadalupe Mountains area since at least the late seventeenth century, but a number of other Apache tribes and non-Apache groups regularly traveled to the mountains to collect important resources such as mescal.

Pine Springs Camp, which featured clean water from two sources, abundant grass for livestock, and pine for building material, was attractive to the military and the Indians alike. It witnessed several intermittent occupations by both groups during the Apache Wars and was most heavily used by the 10th Cavalry during the Victorio campaign. Several companies camped there at different times, most for only a few days. The longest occupation we know of to date was by Company K of the 10th Cavalry, under the command of Captain Thomas Lebo, who remained at Pine Springs for almost two months in the fall of 1878.

It is against this broad canvas of history that our investigation of Pine Springs Camp took place, approximately 120 years after the conclusion of the Apache Wars. This site was first recorded in 1970 by the Texas Archaeological Society (TAS) field school, which recorded a linear pattern of 32 hearths along with an associated surface scatter of late 19th century artifacts. The TAS estimated that the site encompassed approximately three acres. In 1996, co-author Charles Haecker, while conducting an archeological survey within Guadalupe Mountains NP, made a condition assessment of Pine Springs Camp and noted that, in addition to materials associated with a military component, artifacts that typify an Apache encampment (e.g., cone tinklers made from strips of tin can) were also present. Two years later Haecker conducted a non-collection metal detection survey of this site, which resulted in the identification of two subsurface trash deposits and a cobble-lined cleared area, the latter tentatively identified as "the prepared surface for a nineteenth century military, wall-type tent."



This slab-lined fire box, used for baking food, contained ashy soil and a baking powder can lid. NPS photo.

In 2004, an archeological survey was initiated to examine Pine Springs Camp in greater detail. This project was itself part of the larger Warriors Project sponsored by the NPS. The aim of this ambitious program is to encourage African Americans and American Indians to discuss their mutual past on the frontier. To further this goal, Howard University partnered with the Mescalero Apache Tribe, NPS, and BLM, to introduce students to archeology. As co-directors of the field school, King and Haecker worked with Howard University graduates and undergraduates, Mescalero and European American high school students, archeologists from the Mescalero Apache Tribe, a Mexican botanist, Guadalupe Mountains NPS staff-volunteers, and volunteers from the local community. The varied backgrounds and life experiences of these individuals made for dynamic field seasons and a unique sense of community as together we explored the past.

The results of three seasons of fieldwork expanded our understanding of Pine Springs Camp. We now know that this unique, multi-component site spreads out over more than 60 acres. Prominent features deriving from military occupations include the line of hearths first reported by TAS, used on at least two separate occasions and probably more, one of them by Lebo and his company. Another line of hearths represents a separate, single-component military occupation. The field team also identified a wagon road, picket stations that delineated the camp boundary, and cobble-lined areas whose surfaces had been prepared for the placement of wall tents. Features of particular interest include hypocausts, or underground heating channels, that apparently served to warm the ground under several of the tents. The hypocausts were connected to campfires outside the tents, at least one of which was used for cooking as several can lids were found stashed nearby. Other buried stone boxes, one underneath a hearth in the main row, may also have been used for cooking. These features protected fires from the fierce winds, up to 110 miles an hour, which blow here in the cold-weather months (Gorden Bell, personal communication, 2005).

Overall, the debris of military life are scattered throughout the site, but are especially concentrated near the hearths. Bottles, buttons, coins, cartridges, and particularly nails of all kinds (primarily horseshoe, box, and bridge spikes) are visible. Some of the horseshoe nails were fashioned into fishing hooks, a common practice at the time (Farrow 1881:212), which confirms reports that the soldiers hunted and fished to supplement their regulation fare.

The immediate surroundings of one hearth contained a considerable number of framing nails and bridge



This tent stake is non-issue/non-regulation, possibly made by

spikes. Discovery of this latter artifact **a cavalry blacksmith using at-hand iron stock. NPS photo.** type is significant since we had determined that, during the fall of 1878, soldiers of the 25th Infantry were detailed to Lebo's Company K, and given the task of constructing bridges in the vicinity of Pine Springs. Near the semi-permanent structures fewer materials were found, with the notable exception of several wooden posts still solidly implanted in bedrock. While their placement suggests they were probably used to secure tents, pegs sometimes tethered horses (Farrow 1881:62; King and Dunnivant 2007). Other artifact concentrations indicate areas where food was prepared and/or consumed and suggest, unsurprisingly, that drinking was a common mode of taking comfort (King 2006; King and Dunnivant 2007).

Artifact distributions away from domestic features gave us additional clues about camp life. Abundance of horseshoe nails, horse shoes, and chisel-cut iron bar stock near the single-component line of hearths suggest a farrier, apparently using a portable forge, shod horses there. Long spike fragments found nearby may indicate a corral or at least a place where horses were temporarily tethered.

Apache occupations of the Pine Springs Camp left a lighter signature, though a number of distinctive items have been found. The presence of several wickiup rings and a possible burnt-rock midden suggest periodic visits to the site. Wickiup rings are the circles formed by the cobbles used to hold down their frames of bent saplings. A scraper manufactured from the base of a bottle, a cartridge case modified for measuring gunpowder, and several food cans cut into rectangular pieces used to make cone jingles testify to Apache re-cycling of military materials. One large cut tin can lid was discovered in situ beside a buried hearth inside a wickiup ring. The buried hearth cut through three previous hearths. A small amount of stone tools attests to prehistoric as well as historic use of this location.

The total number of occupations at the site is hard to determine, as many left few traces. At a minimum we can identify three military and five Apache occupations, although there were probably many more (King and Dunnivant 2007). The interleaved occupations at this site inspired us to explore the complicated interactions between the two groups. Although the field phase of this project is over, we are continuing to research the history of the site, using both historical records and live informants to get a sense of what happened here in the past. We have been privileged to talk with Apache elders and others over the years and learn their point of view. We have also worked with chapters of the 9th and 10th (Horse) Cavalry Association to learn more about the African Americans who occupied the site. We now have some of their names, and hope to locate their descendants. We anticipate that we will be able to correlate the archeological evidence more specifically with the people who lived and camped at Pine Springs Camp, thereby providing a larger window on the post-emancipation life of African Americans and their impact on the communities and cultures of the Southwest.

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