

Buffalo Soldiers

in Big Sky Country, 1888–1898

by JOHN P. LANGELLIER



During the second half of the nineteenth century, African American buffalo soldiers formed a significant part of U.S. Army forces in Montana. Military service provided black men, like these five members of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, opportunities for advancement and adventure unavailable to them in the pre-Civil War era.

Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, B.I.J-3

While African Americans constituted a sizable population in some territories and states of the American West, relatively few blacks lived in the Rocky Mountain region and the northern plains.¹ Montana was no exception.

Not until the immediate post-Civil War era, during Montana's halcyon mining boom, was there a perceptible increase in the number of blacks heading to Big Sky country. As federal census data indicated, there were 183 blacks in the territory in 1870, 346 by 1880, and 1,256 a decade later. Even then, African Americans were few in number when compared to whites and Indians. Consequently, contact between blacks and other groups tended to be infrequent. This paradigm shifted toward the end of the 1880s.²

At that time, the arrival of the black troops now popularly known as "buffalo soldiers" brought a relatively substantial increase in African Americans to the area.³ These troops represented a legacy of a major restructuring of the U.S. Army after Appomattox. During the last decades of the 1800s, the military provided black men an avenue for advancement, adventure, and escape.⁴

Officials dispatched units comprised of black soldiers far away from the centers of white population in the American West, a result of political pressures that arguably kept African Americans from being stationed in northern states. Then, after more than twenty years of hard campaigning in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, the War Department responded to the requests of white officers seeking movement of their troops to less remote locations. Efforts to obtain transfers to the northern Great Plains eventually bore fruit. This gradual move north started in the early 1880s when the Twenty-Fifth Infantry reported to Minnesota and the Dakotas. By 1888, the regiment's companies once more marched out, in this case to Forts Custer, Missoula, and Shaw in Montana Territory.⁵

The Tenth Cavalry followed in 1892, bringing cavalry troopers to Forts Assiniboine, Custer, and Keogh.⁶ The relocation came with its own hardships, as noted by one of the regiment's officers: "With characteristic kindness, orders came to move at once to Montana, detraining there in midwinter, in a blizzard. The regiment left Arizona in the southern spring."⁷ The *Billings Gazette* described the posting in more vivid language, noting: "The sun baked troops of the

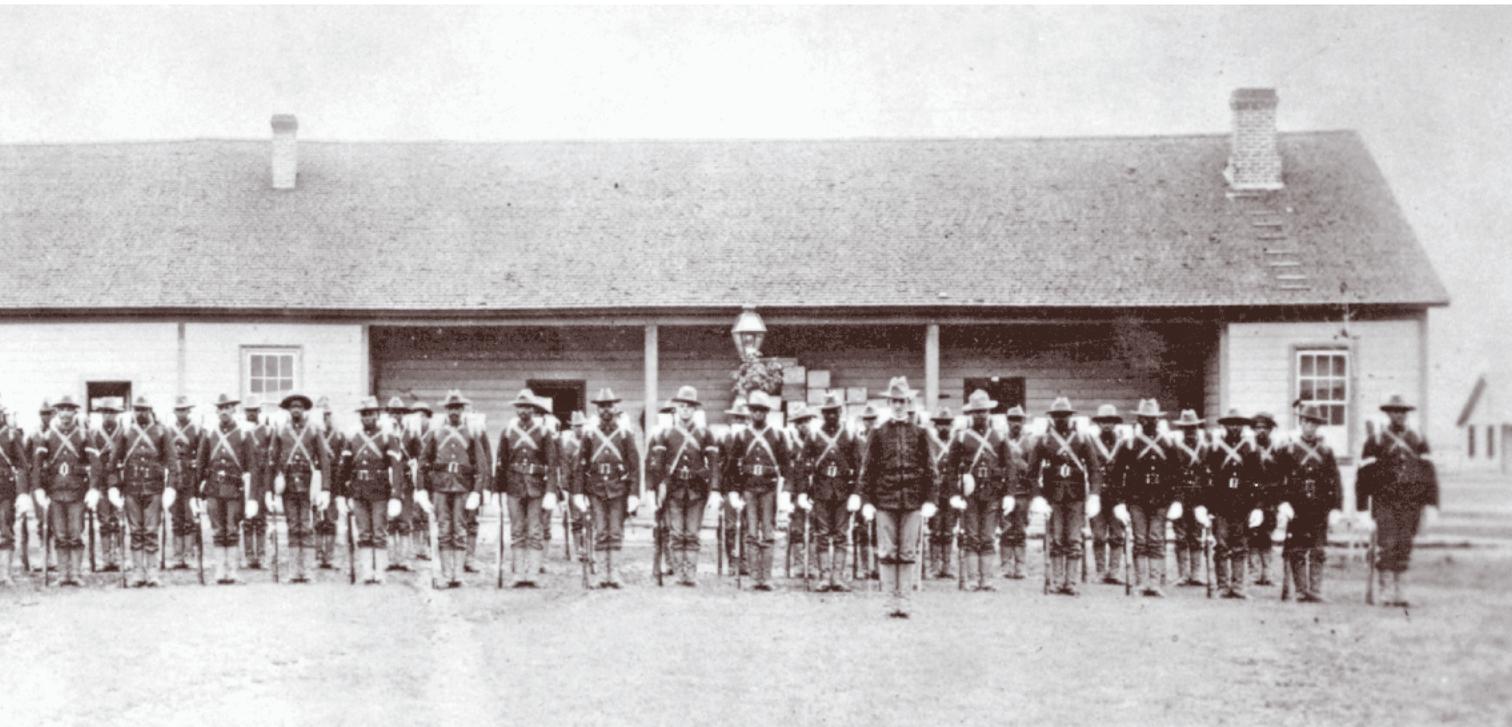


National Archives and Records Administration, 111-SC-8371

In 1888, the Twenty-Fifth Infantry arrived in Montana Territory, taking stations at Forts Custer, Missoula, and Shaw. Shown above, Company B at Fort Missoula participated in the first major field maneuver held by the army in 1895. Three years later, such exercises paid dividends when the regiment mobilized for combat in Cuba.

Tenth Cavalry, fresh from the sand deserts and semi-tropical clime of the Gila river, in southern Arizona, shivered with every gust of wind that raced around the corner in Billings yesterday." The article went on to underscore that all the enlisted men were African Americans, who "were not at all pleased at the change from the sunny south to this northern latitude." Allegedly, "A sergeant with teeth chattering as he talked said, 'Boss, is this what y' call summah, couldn't hardly wear a cotton shirt ten days ago at Fort Grant, Arizona Territory, diffunt heah, shuah.'"⁸ Black soldiers had not previously been sent to military installations in the frigid north because it was thought their African origins made them ill-suited to the climate.

With the arrival of these two regiments, African American soldiers formed a vital part of the military presence in Montana.⁹ Black soldiers contributed to the economies of the towns near posts, as many merchants realized, and this tended to blur the color line. According to one Miles City newspaper account, after "[t]he paymaster arrived" at Fort Keogh "on Friday



Located between the Flathead Indian Reservation to the north and the Bitterroot Valley to the south—where the Salish then resided—Fort Missoula (left in 1886) bolstered the U.S. military’s presence in western Montana Territory.

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 947-345

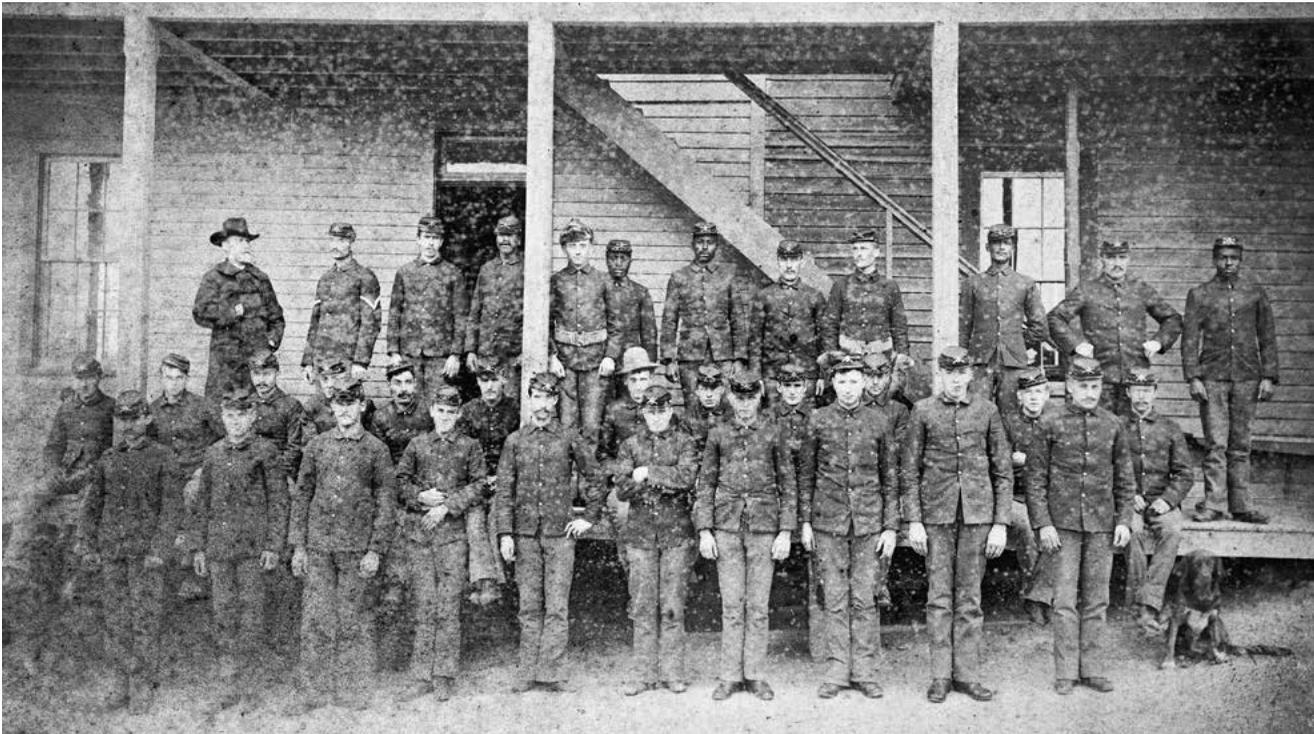


afternoon,” businesses in town did “quite a lively trade from the colored troops, the latter receiving four months back pay.”¹⁰ Whereas the paymaster’s visit often spelled trouble at western posts, the black soldiers at Fort Keogh conducted themselves with reserve. The *Daily Yellowstone Journal* conceded: “It was the quietest pay day ever seen in the city, not an arrest having been made during the day.”¹¹ Such conduct was in keeping with the Tenth’s overall pattern of behavior established in the Southwest, and it became the norm for black soldiers serving in Nebraska, Utah, and Wyoming during the late 1880s and early 1890s.¹²

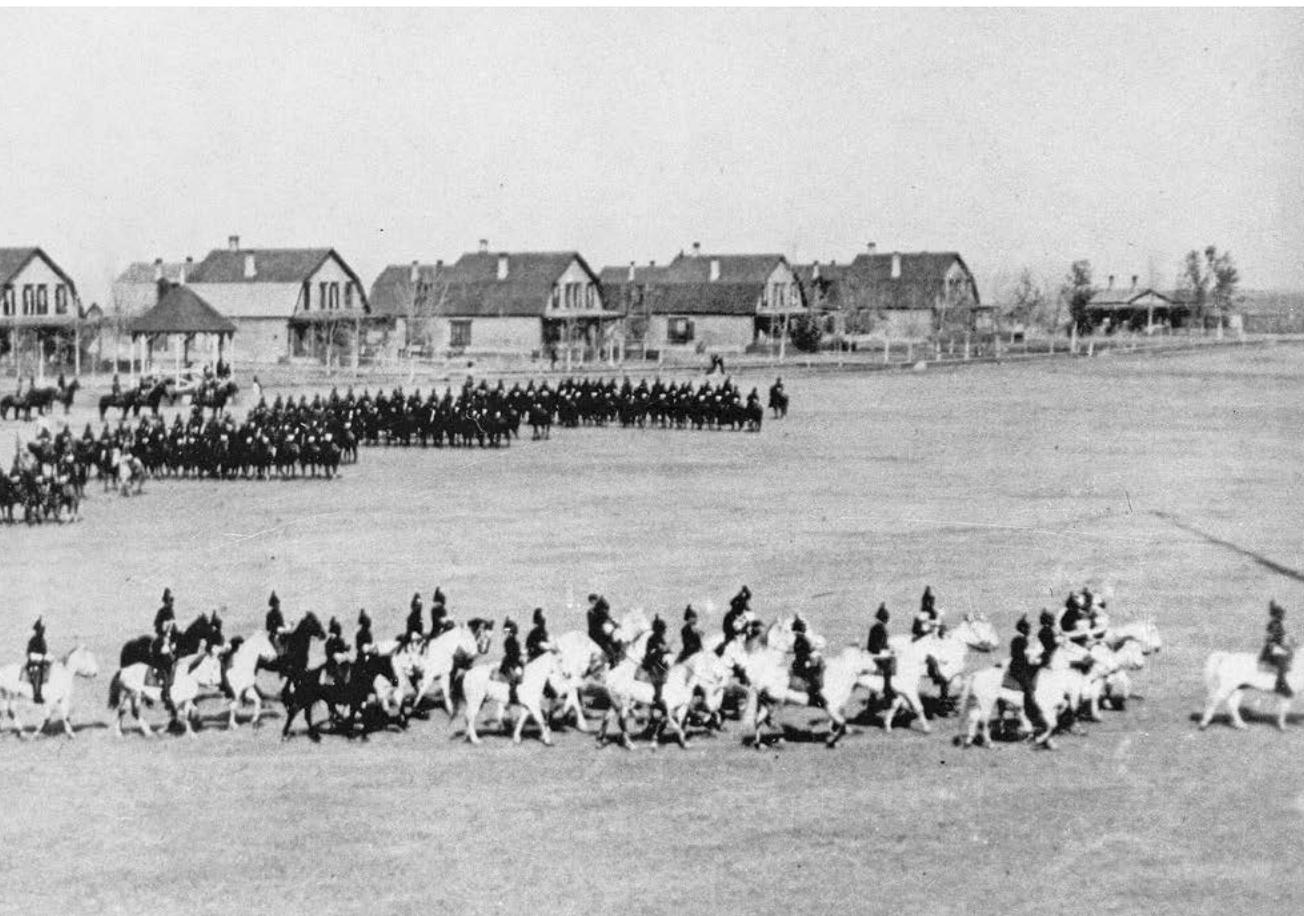
In Montana, African American troops occupied and maintained outposts that sometimes were isolated and lonely, participating in the full gamut of garrison and field duties that represented a routine seldom broken except during holidays. The men drilled frequently.¹³ According to an officer of the Tenth Cavalry during the 1890s, the troops did so to “perfection” and “required little of the officers. The ranks were filled with veterans and the power and prestige of the old top sergeant was sufficient to maintain discipline and manage the minor details of administration.”¹⁴



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 947-226. Below, Christian Barthelmess, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 947-274



This class of soldier students at Fort Keogh's post school, photographed in 1892, included African Americans. Illiteracy among both black and white enlisted men was not uncommon, and educational opportunities at western posts were sometimes racially integrated.



After departing Arizona Territory in the early 1890s, the Tenth Cavalry transferred to Montana, where much of the regiment gathered at Fort Custer. As part of their drill exercises, they paraded in dress uniforms and plumed helmets. In this 1890s photograph, the highly accomplished regimental band leads the way, playing their instruments on horseback—no mean accomplishment for even the most experienced musician.

As part of their duties, the men trained to use the army's evolving armaments, including short-barreled and long-barreled Gatling guns, or Hotchkiss field pieces. One officer at Fort Assiniboine noted, "The men are unskilled in their use, but men here can be trained to use them in a few hours." A Hotchkiss breech-loading mountain gun was on hand at the post, and troops were presumably drilled in its use. In another instance, new .38-caliber, double-action revolvers replaced the earlier, hard-hitting, single-action .45-caliber pistols, requiring not only a return of the old weapons to the ordnance department but also familiarization with the new ones. As a commanding officer recollected, the men went to the target range, this being a source of "keen competition."¹⁵

Besides marksmanship practice, black troops fell out for inspection, stood guard mount, and paraded, including at memorial ceremonies for laying a com-

rade to rest.¹⁶ Other training included instruction in the use of pack train equipment.¹⁷ The men also engaged in organized athletic competitions and the physical fitness exercises that were coming into vogue in the late Victorian era.¹⁸

Attendance at a garrison school was required for some soldiers.¹⁹ When they entered the military, many of the enlisted men, both black and white, had little or no formal education. To overcome this deficiency, the army established separate post schools—one of the many examples of its official segregation policy.²⁰ These schools operated under the watchful eye of the garrison or regimental chaplain, a practice that continued through the mid-1890s and even beyond.²¹ In most cases, the chaplains performed in a supervisory capacity, and enlisted personnel-turned-educators instructed their fellow soldiers and, on occasion, the children of the garrison.²² Most often a civilian



Maintaining their mounts was a particularly dirty chore for cavalymen. Above, Tenth Cavalry soldiers wearing army-issue white outfits for stable duty tend to horses at Fort Maginnis in 1888.

General Wesley Merritt's camp offered troopers from the Tenth Cavalry a welcome relief from the routine of garrison life. Right, soldiers camped on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in 1894 fished in St. Mary's Lake. Fishing was a pleasant pastime and the catch a supplement to their rations.



A. B. Coe, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 957-995. Above, W. H. Culver, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 947-340

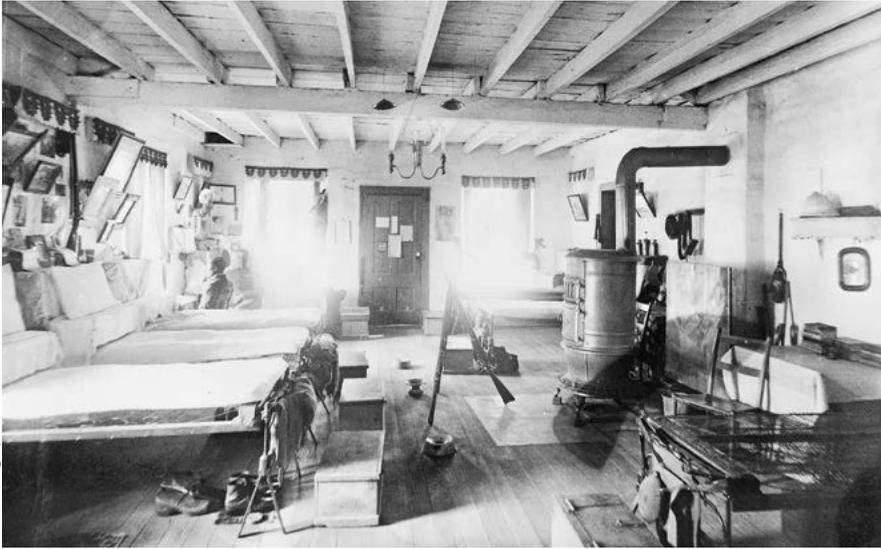
teacher took on the latter task. During the 1890s at Fort Assiniboine, the children of officers received tutoring from a French governess.²³

More strenuous physical chores—from cutting ice and securing wood for lumber and fuel to working at nonmilitary tasks known as “fatigues”—were part of the regimen. Special details, or extra duty, sometimes took soldiers away from their martial schedule, much to the chagrin of their commanders. Such tasks ranged from reporting to the quartermaster as teamsters or day laborers to undertaking chores such as working in the post library, serving as a janitor in the post exchange, performing as carpenters, logging, and picking wild berries near the fort.²⁴ Additionally,

some served as bakers or cooks or took on the responsibility of serving an officer, which brought extra pay as a “dog robber” or “striker,” the military slang for a man who took on this outside work.

Not all the buffalo soldier's duty time was spent in or near the garrison. Maneuvers increasingly took troops to the field, with considerable emphasis being placed on war games and practice marches in the later 1800s and early 1900s. Further, the men escorted paymasters and high-ranking officers as well as pursued deserters, both black and white.²⁵ Less routine assignments included erecting new headstones in 1890 for fallen men of Lieutenant Colonel George Custer's Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn cemetery.²⁶

C. Eugene LeMunyon, photographer,
MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 947-376



Enlisted men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry lived in spartan, open-bay barracks such as this one at Fort Shaw in the early 1890s. Such accommodations allowed little privacy and no provisions for family members. A common saying of the era held that “if the army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.”

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 946-932



Officers serving on the frontier, such as those stationed at Fort Assiniboine in the late 1800s pictured here, typically required servants. Although relatively few African American enlisted men were married, family members of those who were sometimes found employment as domestics, which supplemented military pay and allowed enlisted men to raise a family.

African American soldiers reenlisted at high rates. In one sample group from Fort Keogh during the 1890s, all but one man had served a minimum of two enlistments—each enlistment was from three to five years, up to seven enlistments—and all but one, an underage recruit, listed his occupation as soldier.²⁷ Furthermore, desertion, a major problem for the nineteenth-century army, generally proved

the exception in the black regiments.²⁸ Indeed, the Twenty-Fourth Infantry boasted the lowest desertion rate in the entire army from 1880 through 1889, while it shared this honor with the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment in 1888, the year that unit reported to Montana. This statistic prompted the Secretary of War to pay tribute to the black troops: “There are two regiments of infantry and two of cavalry of colored men,

and their record for good service is excellent. They are neat, orderly, and obedient, are seldom brought before court martial, and rarely desert.”²⁹ For the most part, this pronouncement held true during the decade in Montana.

Examples drawn from Fort Assiniboine indicated a relatively small number of deserters in comparison to the post’s military population. Even then, the commander of Fort Assiniboine opined, albeit somewhat naïvely, that it was the nature of a few individuals who were malcontents that caused men to desert, rather than external causes stemming from unfavorable circumstances and situations encountered as part of life within the army. This officer concluded that “in most cases these men are restless, uneasy characters, and are not inclined to stay anywhere for any length of time.”³⁰

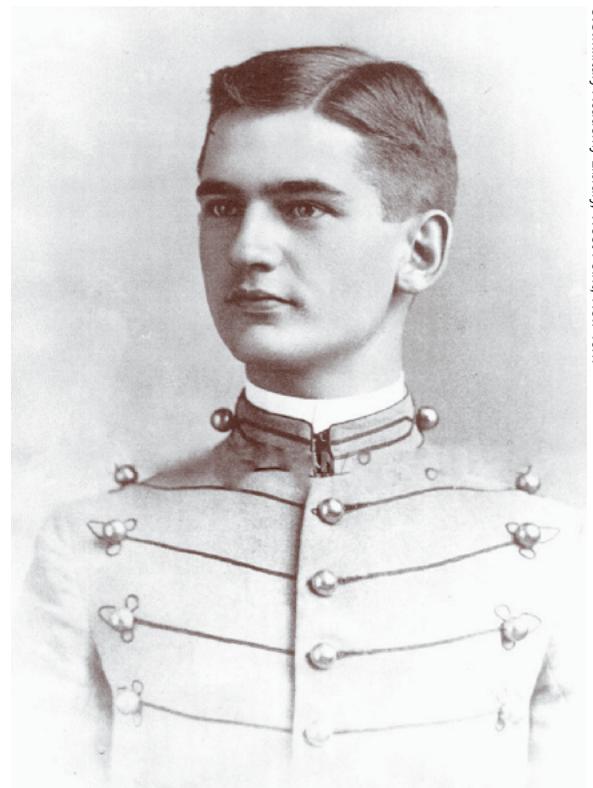
The most unusual of the buffalo soldiers’ assignments were the Bicycle Corps experiments that the men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry participated in during 1896 and 1897 as part of the army’s quest for a more rapid form of transport and a replacement for the cavalry’s horses. By the early 1890s, improvements in technology made bicycles a potential means of quickly moving fighting men across distances, an idea endorsed by the army’s commanding general, Nelson A. Miles. Consequently, the army’s most senior officer became unlikely partners with one of its most junior officers: James Moss, a Louisiana native and 1894 graduate of West Point. Assigned to Fort Missoula with the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, the second lieutenant’s proposal for the experimental Bicycle Corps gained Miles’s approval on May 12, 1896.³¹

Moss arranged for the A. G. Spalding Company to supply bicycles codigned by the young officer for military applications. Equipped with a knapsack, blanket roll, and a shelter half strapped to the handlebar, the bicycles featured a hard leather case fitted to the frame and an under-the-seat bag containing a drinking cup for each rider. Steel rims, tandem spokes, and extra-heavy side forks and crowns ensured the mounts were suitable for the rigors of

service. Including the issued Krag .30-40 caliber rifle and fifty rounds of ammunition, each bicycle-mounted trooper’s field kit weighed nearly eighty pounds.³²

The exuberant lieutenant and the eight enlisted men assigned to his new unit were soon testing the capabilities of their mechanical mounts by riding in formation, conducting drill maneuvers, scaling barriers and crossing streams, and pedaling up to forty miles a day. The first outings were relatively brief but productive, including a trip to McDonald Lake near Saint Ignatius. By August, Moss tested his men with a grueling round trip between Fort Missoula and Yellowstone National Park, a journey of eight hundred miles. Throughout the journey, the lieutenant maintained a careful accounting of the road conditions and noted the progress made by each day’s ride. Although challenging, the Yellowstone trek proved a success.

Encouraged, Moss sought approval for an even more ambitious distance—nearly two thousand miles to St. Louis, Missouri. The well-prepared Bicycle Corps set out on June 14, 1897. In addition to Moss, another white officer, Assistant Surgeon James M. Kennedy, joined the unit, serving as second-in-command. Lance Corporals William Haynes and Abram Martin headed the two squads with ten men



U.S. Military Academy Library, West Point, New York

After graduating from West Point, James A. Moss began his long and distinguished tenure as a second lieutenant with the Twenty-Fifth Infantry at Fort Missoula. With approval and support from General Nelson Miles, Moss established an experimental Bicycle Corps.



On June 14, 1897, Moss's Bicycle Corps began a nearly two-thousand-mile cross-country journey from Fort Missoula to St. Louis, Missouri, traveling fifty miles each day. Above, James Moss rides alongside two columns of bicycle-mounted soldiers as they cross Montana.



Fording rivers and crossing rough terrain challenged the determined foot soldiers-turned-bicyclists.

Edward H. Boos, photographer, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, 672.239
Archives and Special Collections

in each, with Sergeant Mingo Sanders as acting first sergeant. Along for the ride was correspondent Edward “Eddie” H. Boos, who kept newspapers in both Montana and St. Louis updated with periodic dispatches. Cached at one-hundred-mile intervals along the route were standard field rations of flour, baking powder, salt, pepper, dry beans, coffee, sugar, bacon, canned beef, and canned baked beans. Carrying only a two-day supply of food gave the troopers a powerful incentive to pedal the scheduled fifty miles a day.

Moss’s account left no doubt that the forty-one-day expedition was challenging throughout:

The bicycle, as a machine for military purposes, was most thoroughly tested under all possible conditions, except that of being under actual fire. The Corps went through a veritable campaign, suffering from thirst, hunger, ill effects of alkali water, cold, heat and loss of sleep. A number of times we went into camp wet, muddy, hungry and tired. . . . Much of the time the roads were so bad that the Corps had to dismount and carry or push their bicycles, that required frequent repairs, and press train tracks into service as a rough road bed.³³

The stalwart bike men were greeted triumphantly at each town along the route and upon their arrival in St. Louis on July 24. Moss intended to ride from St. Louis to Minneapolis to further demonstrate what could be accomplished on more improved roads, but lacking official approval, he and his men returned to Missoula by rail on August 19, 1897, having been instructed that their loaned bicycles should be shipped back to the A. G. Spalding Company. By the following year, war with Spain was imminent, and the army deemed further bicycle tests unnecessary.

A far more typical assignment for the Twenty-Fifth Infantry and the Tenth Cavalry was patrolling on Montana’s various Indian reservations. During spring 1890, Company H of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry responded to the killing of three prospectors near Flathead Lake, the subsequent shooting of a Kootenai man, and the lynching of two others, establishing a presence in the area as a deterrent against further violent acts.³⁴ Later in the year, black soldiers were



Courtesy the author

Although the Bicycle Corps was short-lived because of the Spanish-American War, soldiers who participated took pride in the experiment. Above, one such individual sports a Bicycle Corps pin on the left lapel of his uniform, a significant purchase given that a private’s base pay was a mere thirteen dollars per month.

called out as reinforcements during the Ghost Dance. Several companies gathered at Fort Keogh as a ready reserve, although they never engaged in fighting.³⁵

A few years later, during June 1893, a troop of the Tenth Cavalry sent from Fort Keogh to quell problems at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation met trouble while in the field, as related in an official communique:

The following dispatch received from Camp Merritt. . . . Private Hauley Troop L 8" Cavy. forcibly arrested. . . . Indian Police grabbed rifle my sergeant of guard near Camp was knocked down. War songs sung all night. Some feeling and much excitement. Have tried to quiet matters down have effect no serious trouble apprehended.³⁶

One officer who was present expressed the view that “the trouble might have been intensified because the troops making arrest were colored men and Tenth

F. J. Haynes, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, H-3140

Cavalry are also colored[.] my judgement that the presence of Indian troops would have a better effect than more ‘Buffalo Soldiers.’”³⁷

In the summer of 1896, Tenth Cavalry troops under First Lieutenant John J. Pershing apprehended some six hundred landless Indians who, it was assumed, were Canadian Crees.³⁸ The men of the Tenth spent more than a thousand miles in the saddle on this assignment, which ended with the deportation of the destitute Indians to the north. Canadian authorities at first refused admission but subsequently relented. The next summer, Troops A, E, and K “were called out to arrest” several Cheyennes near the Tongue River Agency, but again this duty did not conclude in a clash between the two groups. The Blackfeet agent asked for 150 troops from Fort Assiniboine in spring 1898, but officials denied this request because most of the Montana garrison had been sent to the Department of the Gulf as part of the force destined for the invasion of Cuba.³⁹

These various forays of Montana’s buffalo soldiers against Native Americans were resolved without bloodshed. In fact, by the time African American soldiers reached Montana, providing a combat force to engage Native peoples had all but ended. However,

another duty—mobilization in response to organized labor protests—temporarily assumed a prominent role. African American troops from Montana were first dispatched to quell strikes in the mines of Idaho during 1892.⁴⁰ Again, in 1894, they came onto the scene in reaction to Coxe’s Army, a protest movement among workers led by Ohioan Jacob Coxe in response to suffering triggered by the economic crash of 1893. Perceived threats of possible violence and vandalism led the government to deploy troops in a number of areas across the nation.⁴¹

At Fort Missoula, men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry were placed on alert. Eventually, two companies from the fort camped near the Missoula depot while another guarded trestles. The soldiers had orders to “be prudent and cool in the discharge” of their assignment of protecting railway property and maintaining peace. A minor incident occurred when

civilians heckling two railroad employees resulted in a Twenty-Fifth sentry prodding one man with a bayonet. Although “a warrant for arrest charging him with assault” was served, matters did not come to a head.⁴²

In the meantime, cavalrymen from Troop K of the Tenth under the command of Captain Robert D. Reade left Fort Custer to ensure that railroad operations would not be disrupted at Billings during the



Courtesy Mark Kasal

First Lieutenant John J. Pershing served with the Tenth Cavalry at Fort Assiniboine, an assignment that in part gave him the nickname of “Black Jack.” Pershing later participated in the battle for San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War and, as a general, oversaw the American Expeditionary Forces in France during World War I—the command for which he is best known.



In addition to drilling at the forts, black troops in Montana performed a variety of off-site duties. Here, cavalry troops from Fort Custer escort a U.S. Army paymaster and ambulance in 1894.

nationwide 1894 Pullman Strike, a landmark in U.S. labor history that pitted the American Railway Union against the powerful Pullman Car Company. Captain Reade's cavalymen were not required to use force. While there, they provided an "open air concert" for "a number of invited guests" from Billings and at another time "gave a highly interesting exhibition of horsemanship and skill." In a baseball game between "a scrub of nine citizens" from Billings and a team selected from the enlisted ranks, the troops bested the townsmen with ease.⁴³

While Billings was outwardly cordial, a *Daily Gazette* article denigratingly referred to Troop K as "The Fighting Coons."⁴⁴ This racial slur might have derived from the perception that the soldiers were "hired guns" and "strike breakers." According to another *Gazette* writer, "whatever need there had

been for U.S. troops" was past. "While grateful" to the soldiers

for protecting us from dangers, the citizens of Billings would speed their parting with more spirit than their advent was hailed. No matter what the circumstances leading up to the presence of troops and military discipline, there is an undeniable something which causes every free born American citizen down in his heart of hearts to despise military thralldom [*sic*] and revolt against orders from soldiers of the government, be they white or black.⁴⁵

The *Anaconda Standard* took a middle ground, setting aside the "question of the advisability of ordering out the troops" to look at the "conduct of

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the soldiers.” The paper concluded the Fort Missoula troops performed in an exemplary manner. The men had

demonstrated beyond a doubt the excellence of the negro as soldier. During the entire period that the guard was on duty, no act of the troops was open to criticism, and there was not a single instance of unjust exercise of authority. There were several instances when an impudent act might have led to serious results, but at these critical times the conduct of the men was admirable. The railroad authorities are naturally loud in their praise of the troops, and the majority of the strikers admit that if the soldiers had to be called out there could have been none better than the

companies of the 25th infantry who were encamped here.⁴⁶

The paper then turned to a larger issue, maintaining that the “prejudice against the colored soldier seems without foundation for if the 25th is an example of the colored regiments, there is no exaggeration in the statement that there are no better troops in service.” As such, the journalist pronounced these men to be “model soldiers” with an “excellent spirit.” Both “orderly and quiet,” the rank and file made the Twenty-Fifth “a splendid regiment and worthy of unstinted praise.”⁴⁷

The laudatory remarks stemmed from a long relationship between the town and the garrison. The regimental band was a source of both esprit and public relations. In 1888, these military musicians enlivened the Memorial Day parade, where they “discoursed the sweetest music ever heard in Missoula.” They repeated their performance at the following year’s celebration, marching behind the grand marshal in the parade. The Twenty-Fifth’s band offered concerts in Missoula on Thursday evenings, while at the fort they regularly gave open-air concerts after guard mount. Erecting a bandstand in front of the Missoula courthouse had even taken priority over improving the rather poor barracks upon their arrival in the area. The musicians, along with seven companies from the regiment, performed “smart maneuvers” and offered “stirring marches” when Mark Twain came to visit Fort Missoula in 1895. On another occasion, the entire band played at the funeral of a prominent local citizen, C. P. Higgins, whose passing brought an estimated six hundred mourners. The inclusion of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry’s musicians was an indicator of the townspeople’s esteem.⁴⁸

Missoulians also could watch the many athletic competitions held at the fort and in town, organized mainly because the Twenty-Fifth’s colonel, Andrew S. Burt, “was an enthusiastic sportsman.” Religious services sometimes enticed civilians to the garrison,



Resembling a group on safari in their white summer helmets, musicians of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Band lounge at Fort Missoula, where they played both for martial purposes and for the entertainment of the garrison and local civilians.



Pictured here in 1902, soldiers on the Fort Missoula baseball team engaged in exhibition games with other squads from the area. Athletic contests offered opportunities for morale-building among the troops and fostered good relations with local communities.

too; at Fort Keogh, an open-air “Gospel song” to the accompaniment of the band and the post chaplain’s daughter at the organ brought black and white troops together with civilian worshippers. A white post chaplain conducted the service. Another concert at Fort Keogh’s post chapel included the Tenth Cavalry’s “Troop A Trio” performing three numbers, “all plantation melodies.”⁴⁹

The sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana Harbor, which was blamed on Spain, led many to speculate that western troops would transfer to mobilization points in the South preparatory to an invasion of Cuba. One report had it that the Twenty-Fifth was to be sent permanently to the Dry Tortugas; another that Fort Missoula would be abandoned.⁵⁰ While a Florida transfer did not materialize, most of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry and the Tenth Cavalry responded to the call for war against Spain in April 1898.⁵¹

Montanans hailed the black soldiers as they departed for combat. According to the April 6 *Daily Missoulian*, Colonel Andrew S. Burt “made arrangement at the request of a number of our citizens” for

his men to depart from the Northern Pacific Depot, in order for citizens to turn out and see the troops off to war. With reveille at 4:30 A.M. on Easter Sunday, April 11, the men arose and ate their breakfast. Roll call found every man ready for duty. The band played as the battalion marched off the Fort Missoula parade ground for the final time. They were followed by the wives and families in the post “school wagon.” In contrast to the tourist cars assigned the men, the eleven women and seventeen children boarded Palace Pullman cars. Aboard for a brief time, the battalion detrained and marched down South Third Street and Higgins Avenue “headed by the celebrated band of the regiment,” where they were awaited by “the citizens of Missoula” who “turned out en masse to see the boys off.”⁵²

Missoulians sent the soldiers off with patriotic fervor and what seemed a genuine respect.

The line of march was lined with our own citizens and many country folks who had come miles to see the troops depart. As the boys in blue passed through the streets with

the band playing and colors gaily flying, most for the last time in this city, they never presented a prettier picture. . . . As the train pulled out of the station, the band struck up the familiar strains of “The Girl I Left Behind Me,” but the music was drowned by the cheers of the crowd. . . . At every station and line the population turned out and cheered as the train whizzed through, and where the stops were made, the soldier boys were the recipients of many a treat. At Helena it seemed that the whole colored population of the city was at the depot to see them off.⁵³

Helena bid farewell to its own contingent of the Twenty-Fifth from Fort Harrison as they joined the rest of the regiment when the train arrived in the capital city. Helena’s *Daily Independent* predicted that “whether in the tropical clime of Cuba or the winter snows of Montana, it [the Twenty-Fifth Infantry] can be depended upon to do its duty well, judging from its record in the past.”⁵⁴

The Havre paper charted the departure of troops from nearby Fort Assinniboine, contending, “behind them a life that was ertsome [*sic*], before them the fickle goddess of fame, the terrible green-eyed dragon of war.” The post’s chaplain, William T. Anderson of



Above, Missoula residents bid farewell to the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, shown here marching across the Higgins Street Bridge on Easter Sunday, 1898. After the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, the Twenty-Fifth deployed to Cuba, where the buffalo soldiers served with distinction.

A graduate of the Hampton Institute, Horace Bivins enlisted with the Tenth Cavalry in 1887 and remained in the service for decades, becoming one of the army's most noted marksmen and climbing the ranks to the position of ordnance sergeant at Fort Missoula. Bivins participated in the military campaign against Geronimo and in 1898 earned recognition for his heroic service in the Spanish-American War. Upon retirement, he settled with his wife Claudia in Billings. Like Bivins, many of the African American troops stationed in Montana at the end of the nineteenth century exemplified the qualities of courage, discipline, and patriotism, earning them the respect of the state's white citizens.

the Tenth Cavalry, faced an unprecedented challenge as troopers from his regiment and foot soldiers from the Twenty-Fifth Infantry left, taking all but twenty men from the garrison. The chaplain became the post quartermaster, commissary officer, exchange officer, and, incidentally, the post commander. Consequently, he became the first African American to command a U.S. Army installation. Not until June 1898 did a line officer (an officer from one of the combat arms) arrive to relieve Chaplain Anderson, thereby freeing him to join his outfit overseas.⁵⁵

The years black troops spent in Big Sky country were ones of considerable change as the army transitioned from a small Indian fighting force to a martial instrument of emerging international power. Most soldiers did so with professionalism. Well-trained and disciplined, they made a favorable impression on whites who observed them. Regular exchanges between black soldiers and white civilians in diverse forms of contact, along with the economic impact of the soldiers on local communities, helped create a relatively tolerant atmosphere in contrast to the South's spike in lynching and the rise of Jim Crow laws after the end of Reconstruction.⁵⁶

It is possible that the generally good relationships between blacks and whites came into being from some degree of personal respect—or at least out of a growing awareness through frequent exchanges that stereotypes born of ignorance or separation had little basis in reality. The fact that the soldiers were a relatively cohesive group likewise may have given them some additional advantages over black civilians in the region, who, scattered or in lesser numbers, were not perceived as having the same economic influence or status as the troops.



Public domain

Finally, the posting of African American troops to Montana brought about a significant population increase of blacks in the last years of the territory and Montana's early statehood. In fact, never before or seldom since have so many blacks been present relative to other groups in Montana.⁵⁷ The departure of these men and those family members and support personnel who accompanied them essentially altered Montana's ethnic makeup.

John P. Langellier received his PhD with an emphasis in military history from the University of San Diego. He is the author of scores of articles and dozens of books, including his most recent title *Fighting for Uncle Sam: Buffalo Soldiers in the Frontier Army* (Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2016). Research for this article was conducted while Dr. Langellier served as a James H. Bradley Fellow at the Montana Historical Society.

Notes

1. Duane A. Smith, *Rocky Mountain West: Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana 1859–1915* (Albuquerque, NM, 1992), 119. For useful contextual references, see Lucile Smith Thompson and Alma Smith Jacobs, *The Negro in Montana 1800–1945: A Selective Bibliography . . .* (Helena, MT, 1970).

2. *Report of the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census*, pt. 1 (Washington, DC, 1895), 420. Prior to 1870, no census data is available, but in that year 183 African Americans were listed in Montana (with 71 of these individuals residing in Helena) versus 1,949 Chinese, 18,306 whites, and an estimated 19,300 Indians. By the 1880 census, 346 African Americans were counted, in comparison to 1,761 Chinese and 35,385 whites. James McClellan Hamilton, *From Wilderness to Statehood: A History of Montana 1805–1900* (Portland, OR, 1957), 352, 356.

3. When this term came into use, and what inspired it to be coined in the first place, remains a matter of varying contentions. One of the earliest recorded references to “buffalo soldiers” supposedly is a letter written from Camp Supply, Indian Territory, in June 1872, which indicated, “The Indians called the black troops ‘buffalo soldiers,’ because their woolly heads are so much like the matted cushion that is between the horns of the buffalo.” See Frances Roe, *Army Letters from an Officer’s Wife* (Lincoln, NE, 1981), 65. Roe also indicated, “The officers say that the negroes make good soldiers and fight like fiends.” This statement, however, while attributed to the early 1870s, did not appear in print until 1909. As such, the origins and meaning of the term remain inclusive. For more, see Frank N. Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldiers: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Albuquerque, NM, 2003), 26, 47–49. Also see Tom Phillips, “Sobriquet: A Chronological Commentary on the Name ‘Buffalo Soldier,’” *The Journal of America’s Military Past*, 35 (Spring/Summer 2010): 5–30; and John P. Langellier, *Fighting for Uncle Sam: Buffalo Soldiers in the Frontier Army* (Atglen, PA, 2016), 186–89.

4. William A. Dobak and Thomas D. Phillips, *The Black Regulars 1866–1898* (Norman, OK, 2001) offers an excellent overview on this topic.

5. E. L. N. Glass, *The History of the Tenth Cavalry, 1866–1921* (Fort Collins, CO, 1972), 28. One Montana paper noted the transfer of the Third Infantry, a regiment that had been in the territory since 1877. “Goodbye to the Third,” *Missoula Gazette*, May 26, 1888. This outfit was to be replaced by men “of

the Twenty-fifth Infantry, Companies G, H, I, C, Captains Sanborn, Wilson, Lawson, Ritzius company commanders respectively.” Fort Missoula was then to become “the headquarters of the regiment and band, and commanded by Col. George L. Andrews.” The article further indicated that Companies A and D, commanded by Captains French and Sweet, were to be posted to Fort Custer, while Companies B, C, E, and F, commanded by Captains Bentzoni, Robe, Reade, and Lieutenant Tully, were off to Fort Shaw under Lieutenant Colonel J. J. Van Horn. “The Change in Troop,” *Missoula Gazette*, May 19, 1888. It should be noted that these articles did not make mention of the fact that the enlisted men in these companies were African Americans.

6. The companies arrived by train on May 5 and divided at Butte to take up their various posts. *Miles City Daily Yellowstone Journal* (hereafter *Yellowstone Journal*), May 6, 1892.

7. Glass, *The History of the Tenth Cavalry*, 28. Assignments when the Tenth first arrived were as follows: Troops A, B, E, and K were to be sent to Fort Custer; Troops C and F were slated for Fort Assiniboine; and Troop D was destined to report to Fort Keogh. Finally, Troop H was posted to Fort Buford, North Dakota, and Troop I was sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Supposedly, “life in Montana and North Dakota was a great relaxation . . . after strenuous work in Arizona.” The troops “enjoyed hunting and change of scenery and became acquainted with the country.” *Ibid.*, 29.

8. *Billings Gazette*, May 5, 1892.

9. For instance, from 1888 through 1898, most of the enlisted men of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment were posted to Montana. The number of troops each year during this decade in the regiment were as follows: 1888 (454), 1889 (451), 1890 (428), 1891 (415), 1893 (456), 1894 (470), 1895 (513), 1896 (522), 1897 (516), 1898 (598). From 1892 through 1898, the years when Montana was home to the Tenth Cavalry troop, strengths were 1892 (488), 1893 (588), 1894 (583), 1895 (565), 1896 (570), 1897 (592), 1898 (968). The Twenty-Fourth Infantry called Montana home from 1902 through 1905 with 964, 786, 810, and 747 men carried on the regimental returns for the respective years of that period. See Frank N. Schubert, *On the Trail of the Buffalo Soldier: Biographies of African Americans in the U. S. Army, 1866–1917* (Wilmington, DE, 1995), 517–19. Prior to the arrival of the headquarters and several companies of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, only four African Americans were listed on the 1880 census for Missoula County, where Fort Missoula was located. The 1890

census recorded 314 blacks in the county. Likewise, Cascade County, where Fort Shaw was located, had no blacks residing in its boundaries, according to the 1880 census, but the 1890 census reported 214 African Americans there in the wake of Twenty-Fifth infantrymen taking up residence at that post. Additionally, Custer County, the locale of Fort Custer, went from 33 African Americans in 1880 to 114 by the 1890 count. See *Report of the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census*, 420. Because the Tenth Cavalry and Twenty-Fourth Infantry came and left Montana between census periods, it is not possible to provide similar comparisons for these units.

10. *Yellowstone Journal*, May 22, 1892.

11. *Ibid.*, Mar. 21, 1893.

12. Monroe Lee Billington, *New Mexico’s Buffalo Soldiers 1866–1900* (Niwot, CO, 1991); Michael James Tins Clark, “A History of the Twenty-Fourth United States Infantry Regiment in Utah, 1896–1900” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1979); and Frank N. Schubert, “The Black Regular Army Regiments in Wyoming, 1885–1912” (master’s thesis, University of Wyoming, 1970) offer comparative information for the Montana experience. Schubert’s *Buffalo Soldiers, Braves and the Brass* (Shippensburg, PA, 1993), while not a state- or territory-wide study (the emphasis is on Fort Robinson, Nebraska), deserves close attention not only to provide additional comparative data but also because of the excellent model it offers for analysis of the army during a transitional period in the 1890s.

13. Letters Sent, vol. 6, Dec. 8, 1892, Fort Assiniboine Records, 1879–1906, MC 46, MHS (hereafter MC 46, MHS) required new recruits to be drilled by their commanders in the “school of the soldier” and the “manual of guard duty.” Also see *ibid.*, vol. 8, Nov. 15, 1893; and vol. 9, July 20, 1895.

14. *Livingston Park County News*, Apr. 18, 1930.

15. Letters Sent, vol. 9, July 20, 1894, MC 46, MHS; Letters Received, vol. 19, Mar. 17, 1894, *ibid.*; *Livingston Park County News*, Apr. 18, 1930. This is one of several instances that indicate the buffalo soldiers were receiving up-to-date arms and equipment at the same time the white troops were being issued the same ordnance and gear, thereby demonstrating no preference at least when it came to supply by this point, although that had been a contention earlier in the history of black troops.

16. Letters Received, vol. 17, Jan. 19, 1893, MC 46, MHS. See Letters Received, vol. 20, Oct. 26, 1896, and Dec. 21, 1896, *ibid.* for examples of funeral rites.

17. Letters Sent, vol. 7, Oct. 5, 1893,

MC 46, MHS.

18. Letters Sent, vol. 6, Oct. 24, 1892, and Nov. 5, 1892, 64, MC 46, MHS; Letters Sent, vol. 9, July 20, 1895 and Apr. 15, 1896, *ibid.*; Fort Keogh, Montana, Letters Sent, vol. 19, RG 393, entry 2, NARA; *ibid.*, Dec. 20, 1896; and "Going To War," *Helena Daily Independent*, Apr. 11, 1898, all provide evidence of exercise and athletics as a regular part of garrison life.

19. See Letters Received, vol. 18, Mar. 22, 1893, MC 46, MHS.

20. Not until July 26, 1948, when Harry S. Truman released an executive order did the official policy of segregation in the armed forces come to an end. It should be noted that having separate schools and other post-wide facilities proved difficult to maintain, although it was easier to keep the men in their own barracks and mess halls by company or troop. On one occasion it was suggested that a white soldier mess with black troops, but this was prohibited according to July 28, 1892, Fort Keogh, Montana Letters Sent, vol. 16, RG 393, entry 2, NARA, which stated that "no white men could be messed with this latter [Tenth Cavalry] Company," and besides the troop of the Tenth supposedly had "no cooks worthy of the name."

21. The assignment of regimental chaplains to black troops evolved during the Civil War and continued after Congress enacted legislation in the mid-1860s establishing the four infantry and two cavalry regiments, that, at first, were largely composed of formerly enslaved men who had been denied the "three Rs." See Earl F. Stover, *Up From Handymen: The United States Army Chaplaincy 1865-1920* (Washington, DC, 1977), 5, 47-57; and John Phillip Langellier and Alan M. Osur, *Chaplain Allen Allensworth and the 24th Infantry 1886-1906* (Tucson, 1980), 192-93. For background on post schools, see W. Bruce White, "ABC's for the American Enlisted Man: The Army Post School System, 1866-1898," *History of Education Quarterly* 8 (Winter 1968): 479-83.

22. For instance, Private Paul Blake, Troop A Eighth Cavalry, and Private Andrew Wray, Company H Second Infantry, were given extra duty as school teachers and instructed to report to Chaplain Ritner at the enlisted men's school to begin at one o'clock. Additionally, given the many demands on a soldier's time, attendance at post schools caused recruits to be away from drill and other training required of the troops. Dec. 1, 1896, Fort Keogh, Special Orders No. 117; Fort Keogh Post Records and Special Orders, vol. 2 of 5, entry 19, RG 393 NARA; Sept. 23, 1892, 1st endorsement, Fort Keogh, Montana, Letters Sent, vol. 16,

entry 2, NARA; Feb. 1, 1893, Letters Sent, vol. 6, MC 46 MHS.

23. Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime 1784-1898* (Oxford, UK, 1986), 325.

24. For representative special duty assignments, from painters to laborers, see Letters Sent, vol. 6, Oct. 8, 1892, MC 46, MHS; Letters Received, vol. 17, Dec. 31, 1892, *ibid.*; Feb. 19, 1896, Fort Keogh, Special Orders No. 123; June 27, 1896, Fort Keogh Special Orders No. 61; July 6, 1896, Fort Keogh, Special Orders No. 65; July 19, 1896, Fort Keogh, Special Orders No. 7, Post Record Fort Keogh, Special Orders, vol. 2 of 5, entry 19, RG 393, NARA.

25. For instance, see W. Seward Webb, "Hunting Trip Record Jackson Hole, 1896," No. 79-17, MHS, that provides a brief commentary with accompanying photographs of one such excursion in Sept. and Oct. 1896 with General John J. Coppinger. Men from the Tenth likewise accompanied General Wesley Merritt on an 1894 excursion into what is now Glacier National Park.

26. John H. Nankivell, *The History of the Twenty-fifth Regiment United States Infantry, 1869-1926* (Fort Collins, CO, 1972), 44.

27. This information was based upon thirty-two Tenth Cavalry troopers listed in Post Records, Fort Keogh Descriptive Book of NCOS, part V, entry 31, vol. 1 of 1, RG 393, NARA and *ibid.*, Jan. 1896-June 1908, Fort Keogh, Post Records, Descriptive Book of Recruits, entry 49. The youngest member of the group and the exception cited, Thomas C. Veach, began his first enlistment at age eighteen.

28. According to *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War 1879*, vol. 1, (Washington, DC, 1879), 34, the Ninth Cavalry had 16 deserters and the Tenth 19 deserters during 1879, whereas the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry had only 4 at the same time, as compared to from 58 to 107 deserters in the Eighth and First Cavalry respectively and from 13 to 86 deserters from the Eighteenth and Eighth Infantry for the same reporting period. According to *ibid.*, 1889, 82, between 1880 and 1889 the Ninth Cavalry had 339 desertions and the Tenth only 175 compared to a total of 7,582 troopers who deserted during the decade. In turn, the Twenty-Fourth Infantry lost 59 to desertion and the Twenty-Fifth, 104, a small fraction compared to the 11,852 infantry deserters during the 1880s.

29. *Annual Report of the Secretary of War 1889*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC, 1889), 5. Earlier in the decade, however, the court martial statistics were not so favorable for at least the Ninth Cavalry.

For instance, in 1881, the Ninth Cavalry with seventy-eight general courts martial and the Tenth Cavalry with forty had the highest and lowest rate of cavalry regiments for the year, with the Second Cavalry at forty-one having the second lowest and the Sixth Cavalry at seventy-five having the second highest. In turn, the Twenty-Fourth and the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiments were among the lowest in number of courts martial in 1881 for infantry, with fifteen and fourteen, respectively, as opposed to the sixty-three in the Twentieth Infantry. It should be noted that the Second Infantry tied the Twenty-Fifth with fourteen courts martial. *Ibid.*, 1881, 73.

According to *ibid.*, 1883, 80, the Ninth Cavalry had forty-eight courts martial and the Tenth fifty-two versus forty-nine in the Sixth Cavalry and up to eighty-two in the Fourth Cavalry during 1883. In that year, the Twenty-Fourth Infantry had twenty-four and the Twenty-Fifth had twenty-eight compared to nineteen in the Seventeenth Infantry and fifty-six in the Twenty-Second.

30. Letters Sent, vol. 7, July 26, 1893, MC 46, MHS. Also see the Oct. 25, 1893, entry that listed Cassius H. Williams, Troop F, Tenth Cavalry as a deserter and "one of a number of members of the troop who appeared to be endeavoring to cheat the post Chinese Laundry out of a small amount of money due washing." Letters Received, vol. 18, Apr. 23, 1893; Letters Received, vol. 20, Feb. 7, 1896, Feb. 18, 1896, Oct. 27, Nov. 19, 1896.

31. See "25th Infantry Bicycle Corps," Fort Missoula Museum website, www.fortmissoulamuseum.org/blackbicyclecorps.php for information used in this and following paragraphs.

32. They were geared to sixty-eight inches and weighed thirty-two pounds. The average weight of the bicycles, packed, was about fifty-nine pounds. For these and other details consult, George Niels Sorensen's *Iron Riders: Story of the 1890s Fort Missoula Buffalo Soldiers Bicycle Corps* (Missoula, MT, 2000), which provides a succinct overview and offers a concise bibliography related to this interesting footnote of the black military experience in the West.

33. "25th Infantry Bicycle Corps" web site.

34. Nankivell, *The History of the Twenty-Fifth Regiment*, 44.

35. The withdrawal from Fort Keogh of "four companies of the 25th (colored) infantry, seven troops of the 1st cavalry and two companies of the 20th infantry" was announced in the local Miles City paper. The men had been concentrated there from Forts Custer, Shaw, and Assiniboine during the Ghost Dance. This

group included some Tenth Cavalry troopers from Fort Assiniboine who were accompanied by the artist Frederic Remington. He asserted, "We plugged all day—tired out men and horses." *Yellowstone Journal*, Feb. 4, 1891; Frederic Remington to General O. O. Howard, Nov. 11, [1900], in private collection.

36. Fort Keogh, Montana Letters Sent, vol. 17, June 19, 1893, entry 2, RG 393, NARA.

37. *Ibid.*, June 20, 1893. While this observation may have been unfounded, the situation did return to a peaceful state, and the cavalrymen were able to return to Fort Keogh without further incident. *Yellowstone Journal*, June 20, 24, 1893.

38. In 1895, Senator Hedges of Montana brought a House Joint Memorial before Congress to have landless Indians in Montana deported to Canada. Pershing's role and that of the Tenth Cavalry are documented in the Robert Zion interview, OH 1657, MHS.

39. Letters Sent, vol. 20, June 18, 1896, MC 46, MHS. See also Letters Sent, vol. 20, June 15, 23, and 26, 1896; Glass, *The History of the Tenth Cavalry*, 30; Letters Received, vol. 20, Apr. 8, 10, 1898, MC 46, MHS.

40. For a running contemporary commentary on the Idaho miners' strike, read *Yellowstone Journal*, July 16–23, 1892.

41. See Thomas A. Clinch, "Coxey's Army in Montana," *Montana* 15 (Oct. 1965): 2–11. For black troops' role in labor unrest in Burke, Idaho, see "The Wardner Riot," *Harper's Weekly* 43 (May 20, 1899): 498.

42. *Anaconda Standard*, July 8, 19, 12, 1894.

43. *Yellowstone Journal*, Apr. 26, July 16, 10, Aug. 14, 1894. The Aug. 7, 1894, *Anaconda Standard* reported the Fort Missoula team beat the team from Bonner by a score of five to three. After the baseball game "the victory of the boys in blue was appropriately celebrated. The Bonner people entertained the visitors in royal style," thereby indicating both good sportsmanship and a relatively high degree of good race relations.

44. *Billings Daily Gazette*, July 9, 1894.

45. *Ibid.*, July 25, 1894.

46. *Anaconda Standard*, Aug. 7, 1894.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Missoula Gazette*, June 2, 16, 1888; Feb. 6, May 29, Apr. 3, 24, Oct. 16, 1889; Rufus A. Coleman, "Mark Twain in Montana, 1895," *Montana* 3 (Spring 1953): 17.

49. "History of Fort Missoula, Montana," n.d., PAM 3280, MHS, 25; *Yellowstone Journal*, Aug. 13, 1892, May 17, 1894.

50. *Helena Weekly Independent*, Apr. 7, 1898; *Helena Evening Herald*, Mar. 29, 1898. The second article contended the black troops from Forts Assiniboine and

Missoula were "better able to stand" the climate in the Gulf. It was thought black troops would be better able to cope with the tropical environment and diseases because of their African heritage. See Bernard Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York, 1986), 66, 72. Rumors also indicated that Fort Assiniboine would be abandoned.

51. Letters Received, vol. 20, Mar. 29, 1898, and Apr. 15, 1898, MC 46, MHS. The previous month, the paper expressed regrets for the loss of the "gentlemanly officers" as well as the men of the Twenty-Fifth, who "at all times deported themselves in a manner to win the respect of all civilians."

52. *Missoula Daily Missoulian*, Apr. 6, 11, 1898.

53. *Ibid.*, Apr. 11, 1898.

54. *Helena Daily Independent*, Mar. 17, 30, Apr. 4, 8, 11, 1898.

55. *Havre Milk River Eagle*, Apr. 22, 1898. The chaplain was left with a sergeant from Troop F, Tenth Cavalry; a corporal from Company E, Twenty-Fifth Infantry; a half dozen privates from various troops of the Tenth; and the post quartermaster sergeant, ordnance sergeant, and the hospital steward. The corporal retired just a few days later. During this period, Anderson assumed such mundane tasks as inspecting potatoes for rations and, after most of the troops departed, reported on the stock of beer on hand at the fort to the Anheuser Busch Brewing Association. The chaplain was in command in April and May 1898 and in June of that year. Major J. M. Kelly came to take charge of the post through October when another officer assumed the responsibility from Kelly. Chaplain Anderson remained in the military and rose to the rank of major as of 1907, retiring three years later because of physical disability. He died on August 21, 1934, at age seventy-five in Cleveland, Ohio. Fort Assiniboine Consolidated Morning Reports, vol. 80, Apr. 21 and June 13, 1898, MC 46, MHS; Letters Sent, vol. 20, May 10, 13, and June 1, 1898, *ibid.*; Schubert, *On the Trail of the Buffalo Soldiers*, 15–16.

56. From time to time, Montana newspapers carried reports of racial tension and white bigotry then gathering momentum in the South, which was, for the most part, deplored by the papers. Examples include *Yellowstone Journal*, Apr. 10, 1892; *Helena Daily Independent*, July 6, 1897, and June 26, 1902; *Helena Evening Herald*, July 7, 16, 22, Aug. 13, 25, 1897; *Helena Daily Herald*, Aug. 6, 1897.

57. By 1890, just two years after the arrival of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry soldiers, Montana's African American population rose to 1,490, of which 279

lived in Helena and another 20 in the county where this city was located, but in either instance not near a military garrison. Conversely, in 1890, Missoula County had 314 black residents. *Report of the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census*, 1890, pt. 1, 420 and 467. The 1900 census indicates the number had increased slightly to 1,523, and 1910 logged 1,834 blacks, of which nearly a quarter lived in Helena. Between 1920 and 1960, the figures for each decade were recorded as 1,658, 1,256, 1,120, 1,232, and 1,467, respectively. *Eighteenth Census of the United States*, 1960, vol. 1 (Washington DC, 1963), 22. According to this last source, the percentage of African Americans in comparison to overall population for Montana at each census ranged between .8 in 1870 to .2 in 1960, while .9 was the highest percentage, which was in 1890, coincidental with the posting of the first black troops to the area. This number may have been even higher had the Tenth Cavalry's strength been factored into the equation, but that unit did not arrive until after the 1890 census and departed along with the Twenty-Fifth Infantry before the 1900 census because of the Spanish-American War.