

MANSFIELD MEMORIES: ‘A Fine Appearance’- Buffalo Soldiers come to town

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MANSFIELD - After the Civil War six African-American Army units were formed by an act of Congress. They would serve admirably through World War II, but might have been best known for their role in the old West. It was here that the units would earn their nickname, “Buffalo Soldiers.”



10th US Cavalry of Buffalo Soldiers were dressed in service uniforms and were equipped with a magazine rifle, revolver, saber and scabbard, cartridge belt and field kit.

Serving in a segregated military commanded by white officers, the Buffalo Soldiers earned a reputation for bravery and discipline. In the West they were often charged with escorting settlers, cattle or railroad crews through hostile new lands. The Native Americans held these troops such high esteem they dubbed them “Buffalo Soldiers,” possibly because of the similar respect they afforded the buffaloes of the Great Plains.

In 1909, after decades of service in the West, the 10th Cavalry of Buffalo Soldiers was transferred to Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont. For many in the unit it marked the first time they had been east of the Mississippi River.

Their arrival coincided with Army war games to be held in Bristol and Plymouth counties in Massachusetts. There were troop movements and mock skirmishes everywhere. One account told of how the townspeople of Middleboro were entertained by several lively bouts right in the streets. Freetown, New Bedford, Wareham and Taunton all figured prominently in the events. In total the exercises involved thousands of men, ships, and tons of equipment.

These war games brought the Buffalo Soldiers to Mansfield.

Wednesday, Aug. 11, 1909 was a typical warm summer day. Selectmen Daniel Richardson and W. J. Barker, along with Chief of Police Thomas Nelson, chocolate factory owner Walter Lowney, and an unnamed army major climbed into Richardson’s automobile. They proceeded to Central Street at the Foxborough town line. It was here they met a long column of mounted men with wagons, spare horses and mules. It was the 10th US Cavalry — the Buffalo Soldiers had arrived in Mansfield.

The welcoming committee escorted the troops to their camping ground in a field on Lowney’s farm off Oakland Street (in the area now known as Francis Avenue).



In honor of Black History Month, the Mansfield Historical Society shared a column about a visit of Buffalo Soldiers to Mansfield in 1909.



On Aug. 11, 1909, the 10th Cavalry of Buffalo Soldiers spent 11 days doing war exercises in a field on Walter Lowney's farm off Oakland Street in the area now known as Francis Avenue.

One report said, “The troops made a fine appearance as they rode through town astride well trained, fat, sleek horses.”

The soldiers were dressed in service uniforms and were equipped with a magazine rifle, revolver, saber and scabbard, cartridge belt and field kit. They had camped in Milford the previous night and had been on the road since 5:30 that morning. They arrived in Mansfield at 2 p.m.

By 3 p.m. Lowney Farm had a “decided military appearance with rows of shelter and commissary tents.” Lowney had made arrangements for the convenience of the troops. A line of fire hose was run from the factory to the camp to allow for running water. Large vats had been taken from the factory for watering the horses. Lowney entertained 15 commissioned officers that night at his North Main Street hotel, The Tavern.



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A large number of townspeople visited the camps that afternoon and evening. They agreed the soldiers were “obliging, polite and gentlemanly.” At the conclusion of the war exercises 11 days later the Buffalo Soldiers returned to the camp. They were afforded the same privileges from Walter Lowney as they began their long return horseback ride to Fort Ethan Allen.

The 10th Cavalry remained in Vermont until 1913 when they returned to their new headquarters at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. When the Army was integrated in the early 1950s, these proud units were rightly relegated to history. But the men of these regiments proved their combat prowess, bravery and tenacity both on the battlefield and in peacetime.