

# FIRST DRAFT



UINTAH COUNTY REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER DIGITAL COLLECTION / Special to the Sentinel

Buffalo soldiers perform maneuvers at Fort Duchesne, Utah, early in the 20th century.

## Buffalo soldiers played big role in region's history

During a snowstorm in early October of 1879, some 35 African-American cavalry troops — Buffalo soldiers — rushed to aid about 150 white soldiers pinned down by Ute Indians at Milk Creek, northeast of present-day Meeker.

Led by their white commanding officer, Capt. Francis Dodge, the members of Company D, U.S. Ninth Cavalry covered approximately 60 miles from Hayden to Milk Creek in 23 hours.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

When they galloped into the barricades where the white soldiers were hunkered down early on the morning of Oct. 2, any racial animosity that may have existed disappeared. The white troops leaped up to cheer the Buffalo soldiers and shake their hands.

Amazingly, the Utes who had the whites besieged didn't fire a shot as the black troopers arrived. A number of explanations have been given for that fact. Pvt. Caleb Benson, one of the Buffalo soldiers at Milk Creek, offered his thoughts years later:

"The Indians never shot a colored man unless it was necessary," he said. "They always wanted to win the friendship of the Negro race and obtain their aid in campaigns against the white man."

That may be, but in 1886, when units of the 9th Cavalry were sent to serve at new Fort Duchesne on the Ute Reservation in northeastern Utah, Utes there were horrified.

"Buffalo soldiers! Buffalo soldiers! We can't stand it! It's bad! Very bad," one Ute leader exclaimed to Eugene E. White, the Indian agent on the Uintah Reservation.

White later said all of the Utes had "a strange and irconcilable antipathy to negroes." It's not clear why the Utes so adamantly objected to the arrival of the Buffalo soldiers at Fort Duchesne. Perhaps it was because many of them were originally from Colorado.

They had been forcibly removed to Utah after the battle at Milk Creek and the simultaneous killing of Nathan Meeker and his employees. No doubt



A buffalo soldier on horseback in the Dakotas in the late 19th century.

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many of those Utes recalled the involvement of the Buffalo soldiers at Milk Creek.

In any event, Companies B and F of the Ninth Cavalry arrived at Fort Duchesne and helped build its permanent structures. Ninth Cavalry companies would be garrisoned there until late 1901.

They served as a regional police force, kept white settlers from invading the reservation and even protected the Utes from angry whites, both in Utah and northwestern Colorado.

In 1898, the Buffalo soldiers guarded a shipment of government payments for the Indians when rumors spread of a possible robbery attempt by Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch. No such attempt was made, perhaps because the outlaws weren't willing to attack well-trained soldiers.

The Buffalo soldiers eventually earned the respect of the Utes, as well as many whites in the area. White and black regiments served simultaneously at Fort Duchesne and often worked together at the fort or on maneuvers outside it.

The black soldiers participated in regional baseball games, band concerts, horse races and holiday celebrations.

But that doesn't mean they avoided the overt racism of the time. In fact, the first white commander of the Buffalo soldiers at Fort Duchesne was appalled that he was assigned to their unit. Maj. F.W. Benteen described the black soldiers as having a "low-down, rascally character."

Black soldiers were excluded from many of the social activities, and from the Owl Club,

which was organized for white soldiers. There were several confrontations between off-duty Buffalo soldiers and whites at local saloons.

African-Americans served in every United States military conflict beginning with the Revolutionary War. An estimated 186,000 served during the Civil War, and afterward there was a push to create new units for them.

In 1866, Congress passed legislation establishing six new African-American units — four infantry regiments and the 9th and 10th Cavalry — all to be commanded by white officers.

The cavalry units and two of the infantry were assigned to outposts in the West, where they protected white settlers from hostile Indians, helped track down outlaws and guarded the border with Mexico.

The 10th Cavalry first received the nickname Buffalo soldiers from Cheyenne or Comanche Indians, although there are various stories about how this occurred.

Some said it was because they wore buffalo coats or that their hair reminded Indians of buffalo hair.

More likely are accounts that the black troopers repeatedly demonstrated their bravery and tenacity in confrontations with Indians, character traits that the Indians ascribed to the buffalo.

Soldiers with both the 9th and 10th Cavalry accepted the nickname as a sign of respect. The 10th Cavalry eventually included the buffalo as part of its regimental crest.

Both the 9th and 10th served in the Southwest, the Rocky Mountains and the Great

Plains, from Texas to Montana. The 9th was at Fort Lewis — at the fort's first location near Pagosa Springs — when it was sent north in 1879 to help deal with the Utes.

During its service at Fort Duchesne, the 9th Cavalry included a pair of young black officers, two of the first three African-Americans to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point: John H. Alexander and Charles Young.

Additionally, a young enlisted man named Benjamin Oliver Davis served with the Buffalo soldiers at Fort Duchesne from 1899 to 1901. In 1940, Davis became the first African-American general in the U.S. Army.

Companies of the 10th Cavalry under then-Maj. John Pershing joined Teddy Roosevelt in the charge up San Juan Hill in Cuba in 1898. Both the 9th and 10th served in the Spanish-American War, and later in the Philippines.

When the 9th Cavalry units left Fort Duchesne, headed for Cuba in 1898, and prepared to board trains in Price, Utah, white citizens of Price gave them a rousing send-off. There were a luncheon, an integrated baseball game which the soldiers joined and children singing patriotic songs.

Together, the 9th and 10th Cavalry units served more than a quarter-century in the West. Military historian William Leckie summed up their service:

"The 9th and 10th Cavalry were first-rate regiments and major forces in promoting peace and advancing civilization along America's last continental frontier."

Information from: "Hollow Victory: The White River Expedition of 1879 and the Battle of Milk Creek," by Mark E. Miller; "One Soldier's Service: Caleb Benson in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, 1875-1908," by Thomas R. Buecker, Nebraska History magazine, Summer 1993; "The Buffalo Soldiers: Guardians of the Uintah Frontier 1886-1901," by Ronald G. Coleman, Utah Historical Quarterly, Fall 1979; "For Duchesne's Buffalo Soldiers," By Dr. Gary Lee Walker, The Outlaw Trail Journal, Winter 1994.

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## Junction driver, 18, faces charges of vehicle assault

By GABRIELLE PORTER  
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One 18-year-old is in jail and another in the hospital after hitting an electrical pole with a car at high speeds early Sunday morning in Fruita, according to the Fruita Police Department.

Cory John Colby, of Grand Junction, is facing felony counts of vehicular assault while driving in a reckless manner and vehicular assault while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, after allegedly causing the single-car wreck near the intersection of 18 and J 3/10 roads, according to Fruita Police Cpl. Ross Young.

An 18-year-old passenger, identified by police as Tanner Crosby of Fruita, was injured during the wreck.

Crosby, who had to be extricated by emergency crews, remained hospitalized Sunday afternoon, according to Young. He suffered "serious bodily injury," but Young didn't know his status as of Sunday evening.

The Daily Sentinel was unable to independently confirm Crosby's medical condition with St. Mary's Medical Center on Sunday evening.

Colby, who was able to get out of the car unassisted, was taken to St. Mary's and treated, then taken to the Mesa County Jail.

He's expected to be arraigned Tuesday afternoon on the felony charges, as well as a misdemeanor count of driving under the influence and a traffic infraction for driving without a valid driver's license, according to the Police Department.

Young said Colorado State Patrol troopers assisting with the early morning wreck estimated Colby was driving 64 mph in a 35 mph zone when he struck the pole.

Young said investigators believe either drugs, alcohol or both might be involved in the wreck.

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## BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

### Alley fight leads to arrest

A 33-year-old man faces felony charges after allegedly pulling a gun during a fight in an alley near Lincoln Park on Sept. 30.

Adolph Anthony Nuncio was arrested after a Grand Junction police officer responded to the alley behind 2425 Teller Ave. on a report of two men fighting over a gun, according to arresting documents.

One man told officers he had been sitting in a car nearby when Nuncio and another man walked past. After a verbal confrontation,

the man said he followed Nuncio and the other man into the alley to see what they were going to do, the report said.

The man said he started fighting with Nuncio, while the two were wrestling, he thought he felt a gun in Nuncio's waistband and saw Nuncio reaching for it, the report said.

The man said he got the gun away from Nuncio and held him at gunpoint until officers arrived.

Nuncio, a convicted felon, said he pulled the gun out of his waistband "to throw it away so it was not involved in the fight," the

report said.

He was arrested on suspicion of attempted first-degree assault, felony menacing, two weapons charges and a misdemeanor assault charge.

**According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:**

■ Davey Kilcoyne, 31, was arrested Sunday for an active warrant out of the Colorado Department of Corrections.

■ Deputies took an unattended death report in the 3200 block of Front Street on Friday.

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