



Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Charles N. Taylor Jr. (left) of the Donnie Brown Chapter of the 9th and 10th Horse Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers Association in El Paso, Texas, relates a story to Sgt. DeAngelo Coatie of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, U.S. Army Garrison-Fort Bliss, before the start of the ceremony Feb. 20 to rename a major arterial at Fort Bliss "Buffalo Soldier Road." (Photo by Michael L. Lewis)

Feb. 20, 2014 — A Belated Tribute To The Buffalo Soldiers At Fort Bliss

Pablo Villa

The Buffalo Soldiers Memorial statue has been a gleaming sentinel near the main southeastern entrance to Fort Bliss, Texas, since 1999.

Last week, the statue, which depicts a Buffalo Soldier — Cpl. John Ross of I Troop, 9th U.S. Cavalry Regiment — with rifle in hand riding atop a horse in full gallop, watched over a "small and belated" ceremony that recognized the legacy and sacrifice of the Soldiers that the \$100,000 monolith represents.

A small crowd was on hand Feb. 20 as Fort Bliss commanding general Maj. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland presided over a ceremony to rename the road on which the Buffalo Soldiers Memorial sits. The thoroughfare was officially renamed Buffalo Soldier Road to honor the famed group of black troopers of the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry regiments who protected settlers, pioneers and

the interests of the United States as the nation continued its westward expansion in the late 19th century. The road was previously known as Robert E. Lee Road.

"These American fighting men valiantly and selflessly served our great nation," MacFarland said. "No other group of American Soldiers sacrificed so much and yet received so little respect in return."

The renamed road was deemed a fitting tribute, MacFarland said, as various Buffalo Soldier regiments served at Fort Bliss and nearby areas from 1869 to 1885. Barracks for black Soldiers were located not far from where the memorial statue sits. The unit produced 23 Medal of Honor recipients for actions during the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection and World War I. There are 52 Buffalo Soldiers buried at Fort Bliss National Cemetery and at nearby Concordia



Robert E. Lee Road at Fort Bliss was renamed Buffalo Soldier Road partly because of the large memorial located in the median of the road, a statue titled The Errand of Cpl. Ross, which was based on a painting by El Paso artist and former warrant officer Bob Snead. (Photo by Michael L. Lewis)

Cemetery in El Paso. The renaming ceremony also came during Black History Month.

The Buffalo Soldiers were borne of an experiment to utilize black Soldiers to bolster the Army's ranks in the aftermath of the Civil War, said Bob Snead, a retired chief warrant officer and El Paso artist whose painting, *The Errand of Cpl. Ross*, served as the inspiration for Fort Bliss' memorial.

"It was not hard to recruit Soldiers, it was hard to get good ones," Snead said during the dedication ceremony.

In 1866, the 9th Cavalry Regiment was formed in Greenville, La. The 10th Cavalry Regiment followed at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Initially, the units, which were led by white officers, trained in squalor. But they quickly proved their mettle, emerging as what Snead calls, "some of the toughest and hardest fighting units in the Army." They did so despite encountering racism from the very people they were charged with protecting.

"No detachment [of Buffalo Soldiers] ever bolted under fire or failed to do its duty," Snead said. "Their desertion rate was among the lowest in the entire Army. These men fought, bled and died for their country."

The Buffalo Soldiers moniker was bestowed upon the units by Native Americans as a sign of respect for their fierceness and appearance. That fortitude was on display April 11, 1878. That day, Ross was conducting a mission in the Guadalupe Mountains of West Texas. He was dispatched alone to guide a supply wagon that had lagged behind. When he reached the presumed location of the wagon, he was fired upon by three armed Mescalero Apaches. Ross bucked his horse in an effort to slip his attackers. While in a full gallop, he turned in his saddle and fired at his pursuers, killing one of them. The other two bid a hasty retreat. With the threat nullified, Ross completed his errand and entered Buffalo Soldier lore.

Snead's painting is one of many he's created to honor the history of the renowned units. He says he is honored to tell their story and convey the importance of the Buffalo Soldier name.

"That's a nickname that many black Soldiers today carry with pride, and rightly so," Snead said. "They've climbed up on the backs of some brave men and courageous men who fought and died for this country in the face of disgrace, in the face of prejudice and bigotry.

"The annals of American military history are full of their heroic deeds and accomplishments. Even though they endured many hardships, they rose above that to serve their country with honor, with pride and with glory." ■

— *Compiled by Pablo Villa*

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