



# 1ST SGT. GEORGE JORDAN

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

## This Month in NCO History

### Aug. 12, 1881 — Buffalo Soldier Repels Apache Attacks

*By Pablo Villa, NCO Journal*

**I**st Sgt. George Jordan was a Buffalo Soldier, part of the famed group of African-American men who served after the Civil War and into the 20th century.

As such, Jordan was not immune to the inequality faced by veterans of the segregated regiments. After his days in the Army, he struggled to find help when his health declined dramatically, being denied admission to the hospital at the now-defunct Fort Robinson in northwest Nebraska.

But on the battlefield, Jordan had few equals. His tenacity and bravery while part of the 9th Cavalry were unmatched. These attributes helped him learn to read and write after growing up illiterate. They helped him earn his sergeant stripes. And they helped him become worthy of the nation's highest military honor.

Jordan was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1890 for his actions during the Apache Wars. The conflicts between the U.S. Army and the Apache nations were

fought in the Southwest between 1849 and 1886.

Jordan became a sergeant with K Troop, 9th Cavalry in 1879. At the time, the unit was stationed at Fort Stockton, Texas, and charged with maintaining order between the Rio Grande and Concho River from Fort Clark to El Paso.

In May 1880, Jordan led a 25-man detachment into the New Mexico Military District to protect Fort Tularosa from potential attack. The fort was near the present-day town of Aragon in Catron County, New Mexico. On May 13, Jordan received word that Apaches led by Chief Victorio were laying siege to the town. Jordan implored his troops to reach the area quickly through a forced march. On the morning of May 14, the detachment arrived at Fort Tularosa, finding the town intact. Jordan immediately had his troops build a new fort to protect the townspeople and a new stockade for their animals.

That evening, about 100 of Victorio's men attacked, sending the townspeople scurrying under volleys of arrows. The town's occupants found safety inside the newly built fort as the Buffalo Soldiers kept their attackers at bay. The Apaches staggered their attacks against the fort but Jordan successfully reorganized and mustered his men to repel each wave. His Soldiers even made a daring rescue to save all of the town's cattle. The Apaches eventually relented after suffering several casualties. Jordan didn't lose a man.

Protecting the town was an impressive feat, but it was what Jordan did 15 months later that cemented his place in the annals of Army history.

Jordan was one of 19 9th Cavalry troops actively pursuing Nana, a Warm Springs Apache chief who had ravaged areas of Texas, Mexico and New Mexico. The Soldiers were led by Capt. Charles Parker and had tracked Nana and his band of Navajos and Chiricahua Apaches into Carrizo Canyon. The canyon lay south of present-day Carrizozo Spring, New Mexico. Though not daunting in size, the outcropping was a treacherous place to come upon as it provided many high, hidden vantage points for an entrenched contingent to fire upon approaching enemies.

It is unclear how many enemy combatants the Buffalo Soldiers faced when they arrived at the canyon Aug. 12, 1881. Parker's after-action report estimates that the opposing force had 40 guns. The Americans were easily outnumbered but would need to find a way through the canyon to continue the southward pursuit of Nana. That's when Parker leaned on the battle-tested Jordan. The Buffalo Soldier was charged with taking a few men to head up the right flank along the gradual slope of the canyon to lay down suppressing fire along the opposite slopes as the rest of the group moved through. But the day didn't go as planned. During their trek through the underbrush, Parker's group came under fire from the slopes opposite Jordan. Jordan's group returned fire

from the other side, intermittently making the enemy retreat into the surrounding forest only to see them return further up the path to again cut off Parker's progress.

While Parker was pinned down, the danger intensified for Jordan and his small detachment up above. They encountered hostile forces that had been posted on their side of the crest who had flanked them from the right. Parker rallied his men, positioning them so they were able to stave off their attackers in close combat while also periodically firing across the canyon at enemy forces that were shooting into the canyon below.

It is unknown how long Jordan and his men remained in this position, but his citation states, "he stubbornly held his ground in an extremely exposed position and gallantly forced back a much superior number of the enemy, preventing them from surrounding the command." The desperate courage of Jordan allowed the unit to retreat back to Carrizozo Spring. The Americans lost one Soldier while inflicting four enemy casualties.

For his actions at Carrizo Canyon as well as Fort Tularosa, Jordan was awarded the Medal of Honor on May 7, 1890. Another NCO present at Carrizo Canyon, 1st Sgt. Thomas Shaw, also received the Medal of Honor later that year for actions during the battle.

Jordan left the Army in 1897. He originally joined in 1880 in Nashville, Tennessee. By the end of his service he had spent a decade as first sergeant of a troop renowned for its efforts against the Apache and Sioux. Jordan lived among other Buffalo Soldier veterans in Crawford, Nebraska, became a successful land owner and made headway in earning the right to vote.

Jordan became ill in the fall of 1904. He was turned away from Fort Robinson's hospital and told to travel to Washington, D.C., to gain admission to the United States Soldiers' Home. He never made the trip, as he died Oct. 24. Jordan was buried in Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Maxwell, Nebraska. ■



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