

# THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS

*A Narrative of the Black Cavalry in the West*

REVISED  
EDITION

WILLIAM H. LECKIE  
WITH SHIRLEY A. LECKIE



Originally published in 1967, William H. Leckie's *The Buffalo Soldiers* was the first book of its kind to recognize the importance of African American units in the conquest of the West. Decades later, with sales of more than 75,000 copies, *The Buffalo Soldiers* has become a classic. Now, in a newly revised edition, the authors have expanded the original research to explore more deeply the lives of buffalo soldiers in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments.

Written in accessible prose that includes a synthesis of recent scholarship, this edition delves further into the life of being an African American soldier in the nineteenth century. It also explores the experiences of soldiers' families at frontier posts. In a new epilogue, the authors summarize developments in the lives of buffalo soldiers after the Indian Wars and discuss contemporary efforts to memorialize them in film, art, and architecture.

"The authors have improved on what was already a groundbreaking study that adds significantly to our knowledge of American expansionism and, more important, of African Americans in the West."

*Oregon Historical Quarterly*

"The Leckies . . . have reinvigorated *The Buffalo Soldiers*, assuring the title will remain core reading for years to come."

*The Journal of Arizona History*

**William H. Leckie** was the coauthor, with Shirley A. Leckie, of *Unlikely Warriors: General Benjamin Grierson and His Family*. **Shirley A. Leckie**, Professor of History at the University of Central Florida, is the author of *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* and *Angie Debo: Pioneering Historian*.

On the front: *Buffalo Soldiers of the U.S. Cavalry*, by Nathan Jones, courtesy of the artist.

 UNIVERSITY of  
OKLAHOMA PRESS  
Norman • oupress.com

ISBN 978-0-8061-3840-4



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## The Final Years

The death of Victorio and the near annihilation of his Warm Springs band at Tres Castillos on October 14, 1880, did much to bring peace to the Texas–New Mexico region. Still, a remnant survived that was capable of inflicting a painful, if not fatal, sting. A party of thirty warriors, en route to Victorio's stronghold, tarried long enough at the Rio Grande to escape the fate of their comrades. Its members now wanted revenge. At dawn on October 28 they ambushed one of Colonel Grierson's patrols, under Sergeant Charles Perry, on the river below Ojo Caliente, Texas. Firing at point-blank range, they killed Corporal William Backus and Privates Jeremiah Griffin, James Stanley, Carter Burns, and George Mills. When reinforcements arrived, the Indians had departed, taking with them four of the patrol's horses and two of their mules.<sup>1</sup>

For the next few months, small parties of these inveterate raiders, ranging in number from eight to ten, were active enough in southern New Mexico to keep Colonel Hatch and most of his Ninth Cavalry in the field. In January 1881 the stage was attacked near Fort Cummings. The driver, Thomas White, and a passenger were killed, and the mail scattered to the winds. Detachments of Companies C, D, E, and I were unable to run down

<sup>1</sup> Organizational Returns, Tenth Cavalry, October 1880, AGO, RG 94, NA; Major John Bigelow, Jr., "Historical Sketch, Tenth United States Cavalry, 1866–1892," U.S. Army Commands, RG 98, NA.

the raiders, who fled back and forth across the international boundary. Repeated raids in February, March, and April brought the same results.<sup>2</sup>

More serious trouble was forthcoming. Nana, one of Victorio's lieutenants, had not been at Tres Castillos. More than seventy years old, bitter, implacable, and quite able, he nursed a burning desire to avenge his kinsmen. Carefully he collected a few warriors, guns, and ammunition, and by July 1881 he was ready. Nana with fifteen warriors left his refuge high in the Sierra Madres of Mexico, and General John Pope later described them as "rush[ing] through the country from one mountain range to another like a pack of hungry wolves, killing everybody they met and stealing all the horses they could get their hands on."<sup>3</sup> Nana stopped long enough, however, to recruit about two dozen war-hungry Mescaleros, and with a force of forty warriors, he gave the buffalo soldiers a nightmarish four months of campaigning.

Nana served notice on July 17, when he struck the pack train of Company L near the mouth of Alamo Canyon, wounded one trooper, and made off with three mules. Lieutenant John Guilfoyle with twenty men of L and a body of Apache scouts set out in pursuit. The chase led through Dog Canyon; across the inferno of White Sands, where the hostiles killed three Mexicans; and on into the rugged vastness of the San Andres. There on July 25 Guilfoyle caught up and attacked. The Indians, after sustaining two casualties, Guilfoyle believed, fled, leaving two horses and twelve mules behind.<sup>4</sup>

Nana rode west, crossed the Rio Grande, killed three more citizens, and headed into the San Mateos. Ranchers in the area formed a posse of thirty-six men in the naive belief they could do better than regular troops and marched into the San Mateos to beard the Apaches. They found the trail and followed it into Red Canyon and into an ambush. When the firing was over, one rancher was dead, seven were wounded, and Nana had all their horses. Guilfoyle, following rapidly, caught up again on August 3 at Monica Springs, captured eleven horses, and wounded two warriors, but the rest of the band got away.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hatch to the AAG, Department of the Missouri, January 15, 1881, LR, Selected Documents Relating to the Activities of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry in the Campaign against Victorio, 1879–80, File 6058-1879, AGO, RG 94, NA; Organizational Returns, Ninth Cavalry, February–April, 1881.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1881*, 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 126; Organizational Returns, Ninth Cavalry, July 1881; Hutcherson, "Ninth Regiment of Cavalry," 286.

<sup>5</sup> Organizational Returns, Ninth Cavalry, August 1881; *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1881*, 127; Sonnichsen, *Mescalero Apaches*, 192.

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