



**STRATEGY
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THE LAST BLACK REGULARS

BY

**KENNETH JONES, JR.
DLAMP**

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ABSTRACT

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This study reviews the history of the black regular army infantry regiments formed after the civil war. It tracks the origins, movements, deployments and campaigns of the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments from Ft. McKavett, Texas in 1869 to Chipo-ri, Korea, in 1951. The black infantry soldiers played important roles in the westward expansion of this nation and in its overseas wars over the next 80 years. The black infantry faced these challenges, along with an enemy uniquely theirs - groundless discrimination and prejudice, within and outside the Army. Even when they were employed in combat roles their service went unrecognized. Yet they won the respect and praise of those who fought beside them. The years of prejudice and discrimination, along with a changing Army and a war America was not prepared for, proved to be the adversaries the last black regiment could not overcome. This study analyzes the factors that contributed to these black units successes and/or failures in performance, morale, and efforts. It concludes with speculation about whether these findings can be applied to understanding, developing, and improving today's Army.

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THE LAST BLACK REGULARS

Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States.¹

The story of the U.S. Army's 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments is unique. Organized as an experiment, these black soldiers played important roles in the westward expansion of this nation and in its overseas wars. Like all troops during this period, they faced marauding Indians, outlaws, foreign revolutionaries, as well as, the nation's enemies. These "black regulars" additionally faced the challenges of an enemy that was uniquely theirs, groundless discrimination and prejudice, outside and from within the Army. Yet these regiments became tough, disciplined and highly effective units.

Examination of the history of the two regiments - particularly that of the Twenty-fourth Infantry - revealed changes in how these units were trained and employed. Changes that would impact directly on their effectiveness in combat. The history of these regiments through the Indian Wars to the Spanish-American War and deployments to the Philippines confirms that they were among the best in the Army. By the time of the World Wars and Korean War, however, misuse, abuse and turbulence of racial prejudice, segregation and army personnel policy sowed the seeds which would render these units to be judged combat ineffective.

As today's Army prepares to meet the challenges of the new millennium, and it comes to grips with the revolution in military affairs, it may be instructive to look back to the past to examine the effects of turbulence on unit readiness and the way we fight at the unit level.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the Civil War, former abolitionists argued that blacks had earned a place in the nation's armed forces. They succeeded in pushing a bill through Congress, that gave blacks the right to serve. As an experiment, Congress authorized the formation of six regiments of "colored" soldiers in the Regular Army. As a result of the 1866 reorganization of the military, the Regular Army would consist of five Artillery, ten of Cavalry, and 45 Infantry regiments. Four infantry regiments and two Cavalry regiments were to be colored.²

In New Orleans 2,266 ex-slaves were recruited for service. However, only the largest and blackest Negroes were accepted.³ Some of their number were veterans of the Civil War, but most were untrained recruits. A number enlisted from the northern states, where they had lived free before the war, but many were former slaves from the south. Life in the Army - with its regular pay and free food, clothing and shelter - appealed to men who had little economic security or social acceptance.⁴

A major drawdown and reorganization in 1869 reduced the Regular Army to 25 infantry regiments and consolidated the four black infantry regiments into two, while retaining two regiments of cavalry as the 9th and 10th. The racial prejudice of the time was so prevalent that even enlightened whites gave no

thought to integrating blacks into white units, but the retention of the four black regiments was still a definite step forward.⁵

In September and October 1869 the 38th and 41st Infantry Regiments consolidated and reorganized to form the 24th.⁶ The new regiment took up station in the largely unpopulated Southwest at Fort McKavett, Texas. McKavett housed the main body of the 24th, the unit's headquarters and four companies; portions of the regiment also deployed to Forts Davis, Concho, and Stockton, forming a 220-mile long line across Texas that defined the southern edge of the Great Plains.

While the 24th was beginning its career in Texas, another reorganization was taking shape in Louisiana. The 40th Infantry was transferred from Goldsboro, North Carolina to New Orleans and consolidated with the 39th into a new regiment designated the 25th. The Regiment was less than a day old when it was pressed into service to maintain law and order. At the request of Louisiana's governor, a company of the regiment was sent to Opelousas to help preserve the peace of the community.⁷ During its short stay in Louisiana, the 25th was frequently used by civil authorities to assist in maintaining order in cities where civil disturbances erupted.

In June 1870 the 25th was transferred to San Antonio, Texas. In August it joined the 24th on the Texas frontier. This began a tour of duty for the black infantry regiments that would last over ten years. The 25th garrisoned throughout the southwest frontier, with companies stationed at Forts Bliss, Clark, Duncan, Quitman, Stockton, and with the headquarters at Fort Davis.⁸

During the next decade the regiments defended frontier posts, participated with black and white cavalry units in skirmishes with bands of Indian raiders, escorted supply trains, provided security for railroad and wagon road construction teams, and often dispatched guard detachments to subpost and stagecoach stations. Although the regiments participated in almost all United States expeditions into Mexico to pursue Indians during the period, their role was usually less than glamorous. The cavalry performed most of the combat missions, while the infantry did the routine work of guarding supply lines and securing key passes and water holes.⁹

On the frontier the principal military responsibility of the infantry was guarding and maintaining the post, along with providing escort for government supply trains, railroad construction crews, or Army paymasters. Many infantry companies were engaged in the construction of telegraph lines between forts and of wagon roads to connect posts to nearby communities. Often the infantry encountered hostile Indians while performing its duties. However, for the most part the infantryman's job was unglamorous hard work, performed in isolated and lonely places. Standing guard at a frontier water hole, walking beside a slow moving wagon train over hundreds of hot dusty miles, and digging holes in sun-baked soil for telegraph poles are not suggestive of the adventure and excitement portrayed in television and western films. That is perhaps why the story of the western frontier infantry has been long neglected. Unglamorous as it was the infantryman's contribution to the pacification and protection of the west was as important as that of the cavalryman.

Some of the work the regiments did was nevertheless exceedingly important. Between April and December 1875 companies of the 24th, along with elements of the 10th Cavalry and the 25th Infantry, completed a survey of the Great Plains. The maps from this expedition proved indispensable for commanders planning later operations in the region.¹⁰ During 1879 and 1880 soldiers of the 24th operated with the troopers of the 10th Cavalry during the long campaign that prevented the famous Apache warrior Victorio and his band from entering Texas from Mexico.¹¹

After eleven years of duty that helped pacify the Texas frontier, the units were transferred to the Indian Territory in present day Oklahoma, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. The companies of the 24th took up garrison at forts in Oklahoma, while companies of the 25th occupied forts in the Dakota and Minnesota Territories. Charged with tasks similar to those performed in Texas, the units also assumed responsibility for thousands of Indians from several tribes on reservations in their areas.¹²

In the 1880's the 24th was transferred to the Far West in New Mexico and Arizona, but their duties remained unchanged. During this period two soldiers from the 24th earned the Medal of Honor. An Army paymaster was being escorted between Fort Grant and Fort Thomas in Arizona on May 11, 1889, by Sergeant Benjamin Brown and Corporal Isaiah Mays, with an eleven-man detail. The detail was ambushed by 15-20 outlaws: Shots rang out, hitting the pay wagon driver and two horses of the wagon team, making it impossible to move the wagon. The attackers began picking off the escort personnel one by one. Sergeant Brown and Corporal Mays and six other members were wounded but continued to fight until they had to withdraw. In spite of his wounds, Corporal Mays managed to reach Cottonwood Ranch, two miles away, for help.¹³ In his official report of the action, the paymaster Major Wham praised his escort: "I have served in the infantry during the entire civil war and served in sixteen major battles, but I never witnessed better fighting than shown by these black soldiers."¹⁴ As a result of this action, Sergeant Brown and Corporal Mays received the Congressional Medal of Honor joining 23 other black soldiers who earned this award in the post civil war period.¹⁵

JIM CROW AND STATIONING TROOPS

Despite their performance, the 24th and other black units on the frontier endured increasingly difficult circumstances during the 1880's and the 1890s. By this time a multitude of statutes popularly known as Jim Crow laws had been enacted in the Southern states. The Supreme Court ratified the laws in such landmark decisions as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which became the basis for most kinds of segregation by endorsing the doctrine of "separate but equal" in travel accommodations. Jim Crow laws curtailed the rights of blacks to vote in local and national elections and set rigid limits on the rights of blacks to associate with whites in most public places.

The location and stationing of black troops had been controversial from the day they were organized. First, questions were raised regarding the desirability of enlisting blacks in the regular army. Although many felt that the black community should have a place in the nations military because of the support it gave to the war effort, others took the position that there was no place in the army for black

soldiers. The issue may have been more political than popular, because knowledge that black soldiers made up as much as ten percent of the Regular Army was not widespread east of the Mississippi. Since the Army located black regiments in relatively low population areas in the west, full-scale resistance and controversy over their presence was infrequent. Available evidence suggests that western areas were selected for the location of black soldiers not only because the military needed soldiers in those territories, but also because the states and territories selected lacked the political influence necessary to resist such decisions. This is not to suggest that white units did not garrison isolated posts. They did. Rather the record clearly indicates that black units consistently occupied posts in Texas, Indian Territory, Arizona and New Mexico. These posts were very isolated, far from large white or black populations.

The 24th was stationed in the Southwest frontier for 27 years. Of all the black regiments, the 24th's duty and location was most fixed. Although the army considered transferring black regiments out of the southwest and northwest frontier several times, these plans were never fully pursued due to the political resistance that quickly surfaced in affected communities or states.

This pattern went unbroken until 1896, when the 24th was transferred to Ft Douglas, Utah. The white officers of the regiment had begun to raise numerous issues on the hardships these frontier locations applied to them, their families and the soldiers under their command. Once the interest of black political leaders, black newspapers, white officers and sympathetic white politicians converged, a powerful force developed to push through the transfer decision.

Although the Army was consistent in its policy not to station black regiments east of the Mississippi River, it did break the pattern of not stationing black regiments near large white population centers. The decision to move the 24th to Utah must be regarded largely as an experiment. Not only did the Army want to determine whether the actual transfer could be done with a minimum of political backlash, but it also sought to determine if over time the residents of the selected area might come to tolerate the presence of black troops.

Notified in 1895 of the transfer of the 24th Infantry to Fort Douglas, on the outskirts of Salt Lake City, Utah, the white citizens of the area were so disturbed they sent a delegation to Washington to protest. The people of Salt Lake City were apprehensive about the arrival of the black troops. An editorial in The [Salt Lake City] Daily Tribune in September 1895 expressed deep concerns that the ladies and gentlemen of white Salt Lake City society on street cars would be put "in direct contact with drunken black soldiers on the way from the city to Fort Douglas". The editorial allowed that the drunk black soldier is more offensive than a drunk white soldier. Ironically, the men of the 24th would perform their duties so professionally and with such concern for the community that within a year the newspaper published an editorial apology.¹⁶

Utah and Salt Lake City were probably chosen for a number of political as well as practical reasons. In addition to having earlier hosted the 9th Cavalry in the sparsely populated Ft. Duchesne area, the new state did not have the national political influence of other older and more populous states. Having only recently become a state, some of its political and social practices (i.e. polygamy) were still matters of

national controversies. Also, its Congressional representatives were junior in rank and had not developed political alliances with other states, and Utah had a small population.

By April 1898, when the 24th departed Fort Douglas for Cuba, its 540 men received a heartwarming send off. The people of Salt Lake City, the Governor of Utah and his staff, and the Utah National Guard turned out en masse to honor the regiment and to wish them a safe and early return.¹⁷

OFFICER ASSIGNMENTS

One way to determine the attitude of the Army toward black soldiers is to consider the reaction of white career officers toward black troop duty. Early in the period after the 1866 formation of the black regular regiments, white officers looked on such assignments with disfavor.¹⁸ Despite the possibilities for greater rank and more rapid promotion in the black regiments, many company grade officers clearly expressed their attitude in an advertisement that appeared in the Army and Navy Journal:

A first Lieutenant of Infantry (white) stationed at a very desirable post in the Department of the South desires a transfer with an officer of the same grade, on equal terms if in a white regiment; but if in a colored regiment, a reasonable bonus would be expected.¹⁹

Yet as time passed and the black regiments became a stable and skilled fighting force, reluctance to serve with them tended to disappear. Eventually a time came when such an assignment for a young officer was no longer a major social stigma.²⁰ The frequently-made assertion that the better white officers vied for postings with black regiments cannot be borne out in contemporary accounts. However; after undertaking such assignments white officers often grew to have great respect and affection for the black soldiers. Many such officers came to be among the foremost advocates of black units, serving extended assignments or more than one tour. This respect, built over the years of shared hardships, isolation, and danger on the frontier, allowed the black infantry regiments and their white officers to grow into cohesive and effective units.

Desertion rates for these regiments were the lowest in the Army for most of this period. From 1880-90 only 59 men in the 24th and 104 in the 25th deserted. The lowest number for an all-white regiment was 281, and the highest was 676 desertions in the 15th Infantry.²¹ As the country began to look beyond its shores for expansion, the challenges the Army would be called upon to meet would put the black regiments to their greatest test. For the first time since their activation, they would be employed and fight as full regiments and in formations with white units.

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

On 20 April 1898, Congress by joint resolution recognized the independence of Cuba and authorized the use of the armed forces to drive out the Spanish. Four days later Spain declared war on the United States. When the war began, the regular army consisted of about 28,000 men, scattered around the country at many different posts. This tiny force was insufficient to fight a war, particularly one overseas. Thus the army was quickly bolstered by 200,000 ill-trained and poorly supplied volunteers.

The Spanish-American War became an important page in black military history. During this brief conflict (three months), the black regular regiments competed with the best of the U.S. Army. They gallantly proved themselves. The 25th was the first regiment to deploy in the preparation for war, during March of 1898. The press covered this deployment extensively. The black regulars had completed almost three decades of service before they would have their first test in combat as regiments, in full competition with brother units of the Regular Army in the Cuban Campaign. The 24th Infantry received orders on 19 April and departed Fort Douglas by rail.

The 24th arrived in Tampa on 2 May joining the 25th Infantry and other Regular Army and volunteer units. The next month was spent organizing for the invasion and preparing for combat. On 14 June all the men and equipment for the Army of Invasion, designated the Fifth Army Corps, embarked on a fleet of transports and set sail for Cuba. The expedition consisted of approximately 800 officers and 16,000 men.

It is beyond the scope of this study to present a detailed tactical or operational review of the Santiago Campaign. However, the actions of the 24th and 25th Infantry regiments are very relevant to this study. Every available report on the battlefield performance of the black regiments during the Santiago campaign indicates that as a whole they were truly magnificent. Correspondent Richard Harding Davis wrote that "the Negro soldier established themselves as fighting men". Another writer observed that the black regulars were dependable and gallant.²² Stephen Bonsal noted that "every troop and company commander has reported upon colored soldiers...speaks of the coolness of the men."²³ Elsewhere he observed that the Afro-Americans "were no braver certainly than any other men in the line, but their better training enabled them to render more valuable service than the other troops."²⁴

Military accounts include observations of the Gatling Gun Detachment commanding officer, who said "the black soldiers proved to be excellent...and were in every respect the peer of any soldier."²⁵ No less an evaluator than the old ex-confederate, Gen Wheeler, recalled that he had been with some elements during the battles at Santiago, and he "personally noticed their bravery and good conduct."²⁶ Gen Young asserted that "the fire discipline of these particular troops was almost perfect" and "the fine quality of these troops was also shown by the fact that there was not a single straggler."²⁷ An official history made much later by a member of the Army War College concludes that, "the black regulars did gallant service in the Santiago campaign."²⁸ And a Captain of regulars remarked:

We may blow all we want to, but the victory at San Juan belongs to the colored boys, I was there and for my part, I would not be so mean as to rob them of it. When they dashed up the hill, the Rough Riders and the 71st were gone, our boys were beat, and but for the colored boys we would have been completely annihilated. They won the day.²⁹

In evaluating the performance of the black regulars in Cuba, the following report includes a reference to Teddy Roosevelt:

The fighting of all our soldiers, both at El Caney and at San Juan, was daring and gallant in the extreme; but I cannot refrain from calling particular attention to the splendid behavior of the colored troops. It is the testimony of all who saw them under fire that they fought with the utmost courage, coolness and determination, and Colonel Roosevelt said to a squad of them

in the trenches, in my presence, that he never expected to have, and could not ask to have, better men beside him in a hard fight. If soldiers come up to Colonel Roosevelt's standard of courage, their friends have no reason to feel ashamed of them. His commendation is equivalent to a Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry.³⁰

Ironically, Roosevelt unintentionally impugned the ability and the potential of the black fighting man. The following excerpt from his description of events immediately following the capture of the crest of the San Juan ridge were a source of great complaint from the black population at the time of its initial publication. Roosevelt's account was widely circulated, appearing serially in Scribner's Magazine in April 1899 and in Roosevelt's best selling book, The Rough Riders. Its damaging impact was heightened as its author rose quickly to Governor, Vice President, and President of the United States. Consider the objectionable passage:

...none of the white regulars or Rough Riders showed the slightest sign weakening; but under the strain the colored infantrymen (who had none of their officers) began to get a little uneasy and to drift to the rear, either helping wounded men, or saying they wished to find their own regiments. This I could not allow, as it was depleting my line, so I jumped up, and walking a few yards to the rear, drew my revolver, halted the retreating soldiers, and called out to them that I appreciated the gallantry with which they had fought and would be sorry to hurt them, but that I would shoot the first man who, on any pretense whatever, went to the rear.... This was the end of the trouble for the "smoked Yankees" – as the Spaniard called the colored soldiers – flashed their white teeth at one another, and they broke into broad grins, and I had no more trouble with them, they seeming to accept me as one of their own officers...³¹

Accounts of the war written by black authors frequently make a special point of referring to Roosevelt's remarks, which are understandably seen as a slur on the race and an impediment to the realization of its aspirations. Most black accounts cite a refutation written at the time by Sergeant Presley Holliday of the 10th Cavalry: Holliday maintains that the departing black soldiers were under the orders of another officer to return to the rear for rations.³² Whether or not Holliday's account accurately described the situation, they were limited in circulation to the Negro press. So the damage done by Roosevelt went generally unrepaired.

Regardless of the circumstances of the incident commented upon by Roosevelt, the sociological assumptions it incorporates are representative of those prevalent at that time both generally in white America and among many officers of the Regular Army. Therefore, when generals referred to the black soldiers under their command as superior fighting men, it may be safely assumed that they were speaking of such troopers when operating in black units under white control. "The Negroes fought well" said General Wheeler, "but they had excellent officers."³³ And Roosevelt, once again, did not equivocate when he said that the black troops were "particularly dependent upon their white officers."³⁴

As direct combat operations ceased, the Army of Invasion continued to suffer mounting non-battle casualties from yellow fever. During July, the 24th Infantry, in response to the Chief Surgeons' appeal for help, was moved to the yellow fever hospital area. Not willing to order men to expose themselves to definite infection, the headquarters requested volunteers. The chief surgeon tells what happened next:

There is a more real heroism in marching into a fever-stricken tent and staying there day

and night...than there is in making a single charge up any hill.... Yet, I made the demand, asking the colonel of the regiment to appeal to his men so that, say, a dozen of them would come as volunteers to work in the hospital. "Tell them...that when they go in they will have to stay in, and that I want no man who is not willing to face danger." He made the call...not twelve men, not a hundred men, but every man in the regiment [came forward]. There was not one Negro who stayed behind. [this was] as fine a bit of heroism as was developed in the whole war.³⁵

The regiment was assigned jobs such as taking down and putting up tents, ditching tents, digging graves, cleaning up filth, and other such duties as loading and unloading rail cars. Of the 456 men who entered the hospital area, only 24 escaped sickness. Many would later die as a result of their nursing the sick. On one day 241 men were sick. Only 11 officers and 198 men were able to march to the train at Siboney for redeployment.³⁶

TO THE PHILIPPINES

Upon arrival in the U.S., the 24th returned to Ft. Douglas, Utah and Ft. Russell, Wyoming. The 25th arrived in New York, then after a short stay was transferred to posts in Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.

In June 1899, after the United States went to war in the Philippines to take control of Spain's former colony, the regiments deployed to the islands to assist in defeating the dissident forces of guerrilla leader Emilio Aguinaldo. Over the next three years the men of the 24th and 25th fought in a number of difficult engagements against Philippine guerrillas. At San Nicolas, Co K, of the 24th accepted the surrender of 17 officers and 150 insurgents and recovered 101 rifles. The men of the 24th also aided in the organization of civil government in many towns, supervised elections and provided security for the civilian population.³⁷ This was to be the first of three deployments to the Philippines the regiments would make over the next twelve years.

The 24th served in Montana after the defeat of the insurrection, then returned to the Philippines in 1906 to assist in suppressing continuing outbreaks of violence. It remained there until 1908 when it redeployed to the San Francisco Bay area. Shortly there after the 24th traveled by rail to Buffalo, New York. This marked the first time in the thirty-nine year history of the regiment that it had been stationed near an eastern city. The Army had altered its location policy drastically. The regiment was stationed primarily at Fort Ontario and Madison Barracks in New York. The Regiment sailed once more for the Philippines in 1911 and remained on garrison duty until 1915. This third tour to the Philippines would be their last. The Regiment redeployed again to the United States, first to the Presidio of San Francisco then to Fort Russell, Wyoming.

The 25th returned to the Philippines in June 1907. Their second tour of duty was not as eventful as the first. But they did conduct several minor expeditions against the hostile Moros. Overall, there was little change from the tedium of garrison life in the tropics. The Regiment returned to Forts Lawton and Wright in Washington during September 1909. Their years in Washington were uneventful. In late 1912 the unit received orders for Hawaii and arrived at Schofield Barracks in January 1913. Garrison duty in Hawaii, as in the Philippines settled into the usual tropical routine. The years between 1913-17, though

uneventful for the Regiment, witnessed major world changes with the beginning of the war in Europe, our troubles with Mexico, and eventually our entry into World War I.

The regiment moved to the Southwest border late in 1917 after the Mexican bandit-revolutionary Francisco "Pancho" Villa raided Columbus, NM. Initially the Regiment guarded the lines of communication between Columbus and the other border towns. Later, it deployed across the border to Colonia Dublan, where it operated under the command of BG John J. Pershing as part of a 18,000 man force deployed into northern Mexico in a vain attempt to capture the rebel chieftain.³⁸

BROWNSVILLE AFFAIR

Although the black regiments spent considerable time outside the United States between the Spanish-American War and World War I, they were not spared from the racism that seemed an increasingly important feature of American society at the time. The National Guard in the southern states excluded blacks from membership, and the Army refused to include black units in organizations such as the coast and field artillery. According to racial theories of the time, blacks were inferior to whites in mechanical skills and learning abilities and served much better as servants and menial laborers.³⁹ Although Theodore Roosevelt had at first praised the contributions of black soldiers to the victory in Cuba, in later years he attributed those accomplishments almost completely to the leadership of whites. When the leaders of the nation themselves subscribed to the idea that blacks are inferior, their efforts and accomplishments are overlooked and racial equality seems unattainable.

Following the campaigns in Cuba and the Philippines, the black regiments received considerable praise in the press and within the Army for their conduct in the fighting. Even so, when the soldiers returned home, they saw little improvement in their way of life. Exposed increasingly to the effects of Jim Crow and aware that they had sacrificed much the recent war, they became less inclined than ever to accept racial insults. As a result, armed clashes broke out between black soldiers and whites civilians at a number of sites.

One such clash occurred in 1906 in Brownsville, Texas: Soldiers of the 1st Bn 25th Infantry allegedly raided the city of Brownsville, causing the death of one white. President Roosevelt ignored major flaws in the evidence implicating men of the unit. Presuming guilt, he used his powers as Commander-in-Chief to approve mass administrative punishment: He discharged every soldier and noncommissioned officer on duty the night of the incident. The 167 men, six of them holders of the Medal of Honor, were administratively dismissed from the Army without trial, due process, or legal procedure of any sort.⁴⁰ Roosevelt's decision to punish the entire unit at Brownsville came during the surge of racism and legalization of racial segregation throughout the country.

WORLD WAR I

When the United States declared war on Germany, voluntary enlistment of whites proved inadequate to the needs of modern war. So as the selective service drafted increasing numbers of black

men, the Army decided to establish an officer's training school to prepare black junior officers for service in all-black units it would shortly organize. A large number of the men selected for training were drawn from the corps of NCOs already serving in the regular black regiments. Many of the experienced noncommissioned officers and privates became the officers and non-commissioned officers of these new units. A number of these former enlisted men distinguished themselves on the battlefields of France. Many were decorated for heroic conduct under fire. While two all black divisions, the 92nd and 93rd, were activated for service during the war, the black regulars were not sent overseas.

The decision to train seasoned sergeants as officers had a profound impact upon the 24th and 25th Infantry. One battalion alone sent twenty-five noncommissioned officers to the program. The effects of these NCO losses became apparent during July 1917 when the 3rd battalion 24th Infantry transferred to Camp Logan near Houston, Texas, where it was to guard the construction of a training facility. The men of the unit became increasingly resentful of the city's Jim Crow laws, the brutality of the local police, and persistent racial insults. Without the stabilizing influence of those veteran sergeants and commanded by only a few white officers who were either inexperienced or insensitive to black complaints, more than one hundred troops retaliated by taking arms and marching into the city. During the two-hour rampage, they killed sixteen whites, some in cold blood, and wounded twelve more. Four soldiers were either killed by the town's people or by random firing from other soldiers. A fifth, one of the ringleaders, took his own life. It was the only race riot in U.S. history where more whites than blacks died.⁴¹ The Inspector General report summarized the attitude among local whites: "A nigger is a nigger, and...his status is not effected [sic] by the uniform he wears."⁴²

A similar incident occurred in Waco, where, despite a brief interlude of indiscriminate firing, there were no casualties. An incident with the 1st Bn was avoided by the prompt action of the units' commanders and the self-restraint of the town's white civilian population, keeping a major confrontation from developing.⁴³ Over the next fourteen months 6 soldiers from the Waco and 149 from Houston were court-martialed in a series of four trials. The men involved in the Waco incident got light sentences. Of those involved in the Houston riot most were sentenced to life in prison and 13 were condemned to death.

The Texans' intensely of hostile feelings and actions toward the black soldiers was heightened after the Brownsville affair. The widespread belief that blacks were inferior to whites made the presence of armed and trained black soldiers in their community was repugnant to many whites, both in and out of the military. The final report on the Houston Riot explicitly states white repugnance of black soldiers:

The tendency of the Negro soldier, with fire arms in his possession, unless he is properly handled by officers who know his racial characteristics, is to become arrogant, overbearing, and abusive, and a menace to the community in which he happens to be stationed.⁴⁴
When senior military officers make such observations, how can we expect ordinary citizens to think otherwise?

The Waco and the Houston riots had far-reaching effects on the regiments. Neither regiment would deploy to France. Comprised of well-trained regular soldiers who could have contributed to the

fighting, the regiments spent the war in Hawaii and mounting guard patrols at isolated outposts along the Mexico border. The Army came to regard both units as untrustworthy.

BETWEEN THE WARS

Hopes of the 24th and 25th Infantry of seeing service in France ended when in August 1918, when they were ordered to posts along the southwest border. There they provided protection for towns on the U.S. side of the border with Mexico until friendly relations were reestablished with Mexico.

Although the National Defense Act of 1920, under which the peacetime Army was organized, did not direct the continued existence of any of the regular regiments, it was generally thought in the Army and the black community that the black regiments were required by law. Later, the Judge Advocate General's reading of the law would advise that black regiments would have to be retained. Therefore in spite of the regular army drawdown from about 200,000 to 125,000 soldiers, the black regiments were retained. Their authorized strength however was significantly reduced.⁴⁵

Between 1919 and 1940, the 25th Infantry regiment performed regular garrison duty and unit training in Arizona. The regiment also played a major role in providing cadre for instruction and training of National Guard, Reserve and Reserve Officers Training Corps units in the Southwest. The following letter from commanding officer of the 205th Infantry Brigade (Organized Reserve) at the completion of their summer training camp, commends the Regiments performance:

...Your men are soldiers. That is the highest compliment that can be paid to men in the service. They have displayed a spirit of eagerness to serve that is found only in organizations of the highest standing in discipline and efficiency. We have found the reputation of the 25th Infantry to be richly deserved. To have the opportunity of further service with them would be a pleasure.⁴⁶

The 25th Regimental Rifle Team also won several Army and Arizona state rifle match team championships and athletic competitions.

The years between 1919-22 found the 24th, in action against Mexican rebels in and around the El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico, including a pursuit into Mexico. American troops, however, were ordered not to advance more than five miles from the International Boundary Line in pursuit of rebel forces. After a few skirmishes with the rebel forces in and around Juarez, the regiment was ordered back to Camp Furlong, New Mexico, where it remained until transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia in October 1922.

From 1922 to 1939 a major portion of the construction of Fort Benning's Main Post took place. The Recreation Center project of 1925 was the most ambitious enterprise of its kind in the history of the army. It was designed to foster athletic, social and recreational activities for the troops at Fort Benning. Since there was no government funding for this work, it was done by infantry soldier labor. Nothing was contracted out. 24th Infantry labor significantly contributed to several major projects on post. Major projects of this program are still standing and in use today, including Doughboy Memorial Stadium, Gowdy Field, Post Theater, and the Officers Club.⁴⁷

So the primary function of the 24th was to serve as a labor pool for the post. A member of the unit recalls his early days at Fort Benning:

After I joined the regiment in 1923, members of the 24th performed various labor duties for the building of several parts of the post. For example, during the day some of us were used in road building and at night we hauled concrete, by wheelbarrows, for the construction of Doughboy Stadium (the football stadium). Once the concrete pouring began we could not stop until the sections that were being built were completed. We worked in three shifts because the work continued all night. If not otherwise needed, our band was detailed to play during our working to keep up our morale.⁴⁸

Following the transfer to Fort Benning the 24th was reorganized to 841 men, down from 2,560 in 1920. The Regiment was only a skeleton unit, without sufficient personnel to carry out serious unit training. With the depression era reductions to the Army in the 30's and the movement toward mechanization, the foot soldier seemed to be a thing of the past, like the Army mule. Many rifle companies were so reduced that it was hard to field one full strength platoon for training. At one point the rifles were taken from the unit, so field training exercises were conducted with sticks simulating rifles.

Most of the men did not know what the rifle looked like. One day... those of us not taken on work detail were taken to the woods for simulated rifle exercise with sticks. While there, the Post Commandant, General [J. Lawton] Collins, rode up on horseback along with his aide. Seeing us with those sticks, he asked what was going on. He was surprised to see a bunch of soldiers "playing" with sticks in the woods. The officer-in-charge told him that we were training in the use of the rifle. Well, shortly after that the men of the 24th got some rifles.⁴⁹ Even with the return of the rifles, rigid control and accountability was maintained over the ammunition, so that there was no possibility for it to be mislaid or taken. Soldiers on the live-fire ranges practiced with blanks. When they did use live ammunition they were issued only two rounds at a time on the firing line.⁵⁰

WORLD WAR II

24TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

When the Army began to mobilize during 1940, the black regulars were again called upon to send cadre to various sections of the country to organize black units. Rapid increases in strength of the Army posed a more serious problem for new black units than for white units. Because the black regiments were grossly understrength there were not enough senior noncommissioned officers or enlisted men with the requisite training to provide the required cadre of the new units to be formed. Although the regiments had reputations for having a large corps of well trained, disciplined and responsible career soldiers, for years they had been short of personnel and training had suffered. Because there was no other source, the black regulars had to provide the cadres for most of the first new black units, of all arms and services. The constant draw on the regiments for cadre kept the units from reaching full strength and acquiring go-to-war unit readiness status.

Additionally, the lack of black officers to fill new units led to senior noncommissioned officers of the 24th and 25th being offered Reserve Officer commissions. Many noncommissioned officers accepted these commissions and transferred to the new National Guard and Reserve black units. These losses forced the units to promote younger less experienced men to fill their positions. In some cases men who

were privates and corporals in 1939 were promoted to staff sergeant, first sergeant and master sergeant by early in 1942.⁵¹ Thus when the regiments were brought up to full strength by the influx of conscripts and deployed, they had lost the cream of their leadership.

The 24th was the first black infantry regiment sent overseas during World War II. On 2 April 1942 the regiment left Fort Benning for the South Pacific. While it was not known at the time, the units' farewell at Fort Benning would be a final one: The regiment would never return to the United States. The Regiment arrived in New Hebrides in the South Pacific on 4 May 1942, for defense duty on the island. For the remainder of the year and until August 1943, the Regiment was assigned defensive missions on the islands' perimeter and also served as part of the island's mobile striking force.

On 10 August 1943 the regiment moved to Guadalcanal. Originally the unit was to be used in the latter phases of the campaign on Guadalcanal, but Japanese resistance ended earlier than expected, so when the unit arrived the fighting was over. While the regiment carried out training and field duties, it performed base support functions, including loading and unloading ships, guarding air bases, building roads, spraying and draining for mosquito control, installing and maintaining wire communications, and other labor details.

In January 1944 the 1st Bn, 24th Inf was detailed to XIV Corps at Bougainville. In February the Bn was attached to the 37th Division and further attached to the 148th Infantry. B Company was moved to the front to reinforce the regimental main line of resistance. The first night on line their position was attacked, two men were killed.⁵² The next night, the 1st Bn sent out the first black infantry patrols in a combat area. On March 15th the wire services carried the story that American Negroes of the 24th Infantry were in front-line action for the first time since Cuba. Battalion casualties during operations in Bougainvillea included 11 killed in action and two dead from wounds. The battalion accounted for an estimated 47 Japanese killed and one prisoner of war.⁵³

In December 1944 the Regiment moved to Saipan and Tinian for garrison duty. While these islands had been declared secure, the jungles and caves were still infested with Japanese who had not surrendered. In April 1945, a team from The Inspector General's Office under MG Phillip E. Brown arrived and found the 24th still cleaning out enemy. They commended the Regiment's performance:

Occasions seldom arise where it is appropriate for inspectors general to single out and comment upon any one unit during an overall inspection or survey. However, the conduct of the 24th Infantry as observed on Saipan was so meritorious as to be deemed worthy of special mention. Upon arrival at Saipan, the 24th Infantry Regiment was given the task of clearing the island of all Japanese not previously subjugated. Since then, this Regiment is credited with having killed or captured an impressive number of the enemy, and even today is engaged in continuous patrolling and jungle fighting. ...even after three years of service overseas the morale of this regiment is high and its discipline is well worthy of emulation and praise, as is the exemplary manner of performance in all duties to which it had been assigned.⁵⁴

The 24th left Saipan and Tinian in July 1945 for the Kerama Islands. Its mission was to mop up remnants of Japanese forces still there. Shortly after their arrival in August 1945, Japan surrendered. The Regiment then moved to Okinawa to clear that island of all Japanese who had not surrendered. On 22

August the commander of the 24th Infantry, with representative officers and enlisted personnel, returned to the Kerama Islands to accept the first formal surrender of a Japanese Army garrison.

25TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

During 1940 the 25th Infantry, in addition to providing cadre to various sections of the country, was tasked with organizing the 368th Infantry. In late 1941 the Regiment was assigned to guard Davis Monthan Field, Arizona and the border at Nogales, Arizona. In April 1942 the regiment was sent to Walla Walla, Washington, to perform guard duty, where it also assisted in fighting forest fires. Late the same year they returned to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, to furnish cadre for the activation of the 93rd Division. From July 1943 to January 1944, the Regiment participated as part of the 93rd Division in training exercises in California prior to the Division's deployment to Guadalcanal in February 1944, where it began training in jungle warfare.

In March 1944 the 25th was sent to Bougainvillea to help reinforce the American lines. The unit saw action against the Japanese in a region known as the Empress of Augusta. In October the Division with the 25th Inf went to Morotai to support the Australian operation against Borneo and to keep the Japanese from occupying Morotai. Records show approximately 34,000 Japanese were killed during these operations. The Regiment was sent to the Philippines in September 1945 and was finally returned to the states and inactivated in on 3 February 1946 at Camp Stoneman, California.

POST WAR

With the inactivation of the 25th, the 24th Inf Regiment became the last of the original black Regular Army combat regiments. After the surrender of Japan, the Regiment joined the occupation forces on Okinawa. The unit carried out a range of missions from guard duty to patrolling for fugitive Japanese soldiers. In 1946, the Army undertook its postwar drawdown, and the Regiment became little more than a holding detachment. Officers and enlisted men arrived continually, remained just long enough to qualify for rotation home, and then departed. The constant turnover in personnel left the unit scarcely able to fulfill even a limited mission. By April 1946, of an authorized strength of 135 officers and 2861 enlisted men, the regiment totaled 75 officers and 706 enlisted men.⁵⁵ The turbulence seriously detracted from readiness. By June the regiment had to inactivate some of its battalions and to reorganize its companies according to their assigned missions. For example, HHC 1st Bn contained all the men guarding the Japanese prisoners of war and the staff to administer that activity. Company A provided construction workers, Company B utilities personnel, and Company C cooks and mess crews.⁵⁶

In Sep 1946 the Regiment began intensive training to prepare for occupation duties as part of the 25th Inf Div, in Japan. The Regiment moved to Ie Shima, an island some three miles west of Okinawa to train-up and fill to its authorized strength. In January 1947 the Regiment moved to Japan and was stationed at Kagamigahara Airfield, a former kamikaze base midway between Kobe and Tokyo. Camp Gifu, as it came to be called, would be the Regiments' home until the beginning of the Korean War.

The years in Japan were marked by the continuing turbulence precipitated by the rapid decrease in the Army's size. Although in March 1947 the regiment absorbed 25 officers and 515 enlisted men from its sister regiment the 25th Infantry when it was inactivated, it would see its assigned strength fall from 3,311 to 1,082 by the end of December.⁵⁷ Training continued despite the increased turnover of personnel. But hampered by a lack of training areas near Gifu units worked on individual soldier skills, along with squad and platoon level training. Combat readiness, however, suffered from a lack of company, battalion, and higher level unit and combined arms training.

In 1948 replacements began to arrive and the unit gradually regained its strength. By June, personnel assigned totaled 2,572. As with other units in Japan, the 24th rotated to occupation duties. Its battalions alternated in standing guard at Kobe Base - an important dock, ordnance depot, and storage area. They searched the countryside for abandoned Japanese weapons and munitions, furnished security assistance to the military government, provided medical assistance teams and civil disturbance support.

In 1949 Eighth Army began employing civilian Japanese guards at Kobe and other ports and depots to free its units for training. Intensive training began with battalions conducting reviews of squad, platoon, and company tactics and some battalion level maneuvers. By June 1950 most of the unit training had progressed through battalion level training.

It was in June 1950 when President Truman authorized General MacArthur to commit American ground forces to battle in Korea. But the Eighth Army and the 25th Infantry Division were ill prepared for the task. The condition of unit equipment was fair to poor, all of it dated from WW II. Some vehicles would not start; 80% of the radios on hand in the regiment were non-operational because of poor upkeep and heavy usage in the field, and weapons were in the same state. Many M1 rifles and M2 carbines were not combat-serviceable. Some even lacked firing pins. Machine guns had limited spare parts and mortars were worn out.⁵⁸ Following an initial alert, the men of the Regiment remained largely unconcerned about the possibility that they would go to war. The Regiment had served as a port unit during much of WW II and was operating in Japan more as a service unit than as combat troops.

How well was the Regiment prepared for the tests to come? Some commanders placed heavy emphasis on spit and polish but were less than diligent about other aspects of training and discipline. Other commanders enforced better discipline, but the troops sometimes accused them of racial bias because their policies were more stringent in comparison to those of sister units.⁵⁹ However, the 24th's readiness as a whole was about equal to that of the white regiments in the 25th Division.

Given the conditions in Japan in the spring of 1950, the Regiment may have been as well prepared as was possible. Nevertheless, all of its problems were compounded by the units segregation. With the corrosive influence of segregation and the mistrust it instilled, soldiers of the 24th were sorely handicapped in comparison to their white counterparts. For what matters most in battle is the loyalty that bonds one man to the next and to his officers and his unit—the instinctive, trusting, mutual dependence that welds the whole into the sort of force that can withstand the worst trials and hardships and still keep fighting.

Occupation duty in Japan and turbulence of the post-war drawdown had led to a quick succession of commanders, at the field and company grade levels. During this time a substantial number of black officers were assigned to the regiment, ranging between 52% (1947) and 40% (1949). This created additional problems, since those individuals almost never supervised or commanded white officers, even in cases where their dates of rank made them senior.⁶⁰ The regimental command would even reassign officers wholesale within a battalion or in the regiment rather than allow a black to lead anyone but other blacks. Each time the race of a commander changed in one of the regiment's twelve companies, a turnover in officers from white to black or black to white followed. Between June 1947 and November 1948, Companies B, C, E and K exchanged black officers for white, while Companies G and L went from white to black.⁶¹

White officers serving with the regiment often had little choice in their assignment. Army personnel officers still believed that blacks performed best under the leadership of white southerners, who were usually the first assigned. While a number of whites did well as commanders and dealt equitably both with their troops and their black counter-parts, others complained bitterly, blaming everything that went wrong on the troops they commanded. Exposed to such treatment, many black officers and enlisted men lost confidence in their white superiors. Becoming frustrated and resentful, some concluded that the Army expected so little of them that it had turned the 24th into a dumping ground for white officers no other unit would want. The Regiment's morale mirrored the low expectations of the Army as whole toward blacks. The annual history of I Corp, which contained the 24th, in 1949 reported:

This Corps has the only black regimental combat team in this theater and the largest group of black combat units within the Eighth Army. The command and training of such units has always presented certain problems. By assignment of the better officers to these units and increasing the time allotted for completion of training phases, it is possible for black units to reach the same standard of training as other similar type units.⁶² Just as the Regiment was preparing to depart for Korea, a number of new men joined the unit. Some were replacements fresh from the states or from support units stationed in Japan, but others were members of the Regiment who had been detached for special duty such as sports or housekeeping. Many of the new arrivals were what might be called the "servants" of the army, mess men, cooks, quartermasters, teamsters, and clerks of various sorts. Additionally, the influx included soldiers from the Eighth Army stockade, a number of these soldiers had been confined on charges of heroin abuse or distribution.

Given this personnel turbulence, the uncertainties caused by the Regiment's poor equipment, and the historic mistrust of black soldiers in the Army, doubts festered among some officers of the Regiment, both black and white. The highest ranking black in the regiment was LTC Forest Lofton, who had commanded a black battalion at Fort Dix and was commanding the 24th's, 1st battalion. He refused to accompany the regiment to Korea. When he learned the 24th was destined for combat, he told the Regimental Commander that the Regiment was neither trained nor prepared for war and that committing them to combat would be a disaster. He stated that he wanted no part of it and requested reassignment. The Commander promptly made him the commander of the rear detachment to remain in Japan.

However, LTC Lofton never stated why he was reassigned. So blacks in the Regiment viewed the change in command as one more indication of white prejudice. Since Lofton was a lieutenant colonel and a battalion commander, he would have commanded white officers in combat. Rather than see that happen, the Regiment had found an excuse to leave him behind⁶³ so thought many black soldiers.

Most of the black professionals in the Regiment believed that with few exceptions the white officers holding senior positions in the unit were of low caliber or worse, completely unqualified by experience or training to lead troops in combat. This judgment included COL White, who had been an intelligence officer in the southwest pacific during World War II, and had never commanded troops in combat.

White officers also had concerns. According to 1st Sgt Peter Paulfrey, they seemed nervous and upset, showing signs of fear. They "began to question the NCO's pertaining to the men. They were completely afraid. They heard rumors or had been taught that Negroes were cowards and they would question us as to whether the men would seek revenge on the battlefield."⁶⁴ White, the regimental commander, when questioned several months after being relieved of command, on the combat effectiveness of the Regiment when it had gone to war, had difficulty suppressing his disgust: "I had no great amount of confidence because of their past history, but my estimate gradually deteriorated."⁶⁵ On the day the Regiment arrived in Kumchon, Korea, 1lt Charles Bussey, commander of the 77th Engineer Combat Company (ECC), attached to the 24th RCT, recalled that COL White confided to him that he was unable to command the regiment: "I'm too old for this, I didn't realize it until this morning, but soldiering is for young-uns. Mine is all behind me. I'll do the job as required while I'm here, but I'll have to pack it in soon."⁶⁶

KOREA

So the Regiment was in disarray when it arrived in Korea on 13 July, an unlucky day indeed. Attached to the regiment were the 159th FA Bn and 77th Eng Co, both all-black units to form the 24th Regimental Combat Team (RCT). On paper the 24th RCT was the strongest, best-equipped American fighting force in Korea. But neither Eighth Army nor the 25th ID expected much from it.

The 24th spent a week in Kumchon acclimating itself and preparing for battle. On 19 July the North Korean Peoples Army seized Yechon, an important road hub. The 25th ID was ordered to retake the town. The first combat assignment of the Division fell to the 24th RCT. COL White assigned the mission to a battalion combat team built around 3/24 Inf. The 3/24 Inf had earlier patrolled Yechon and knew the terrain. Moving up on the July 20, the BCT encountered heavy enemy fire and withdrew for the night. The next day the BCT assaulted the town led by L company, commanded by a black paratrooper, Bradley Biggs, who was an alumnus of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion (Triple Nickels). Encountering heavy mortar and machine-gun fire, the assault continued forward. By the end of the day it had recaptured Yechon.

A war correspondent with the Associated Press accompanied the 3/24 BCT assault on Yechon. His dispatch, widely published in the states rightly claimed that the fight at Yechon was the "first sizeable American ground victory in the Korean War" and "a far different story" from the performance of the 24th ID. A week earlier that Division had seen an infantry regiment retreat and field artillery battalion overrun, losing all ten 105-mm howitzers, large amounts of ammunition, as well as seventy vehicles and miscellaneous other weapons.⁶⁷

Over the next two months the 24th would engage in a series of operations that led to collapse of units in the face of strong attacks by the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA). In early August the main force of a NKPA attack enveloped the 3/24th. The battalion was wounded and lost cohesion. An Army historian wrote that the battalion stampeded, that the S-3 was knocked down three times trying to stop the fleeing men, and that the battalion did not stop running until it reach Haman, four miles away. The debacle resulted in the relief of COL White. He was replaced by Arthur S. Champeny. Although he had commanded a regiment in the 88th Div in Italy during World War II, he was clearly past his prime and not physically fit for combat duty at fifty-seven years old. But no young battle-experienced commander in Eighth Army was willing to take the job.⁶⁸

The appointment of Champeny to command was a great disappointment to most of the capable white and black officers in the regiment. The new commander did not help his cause when the day after taking command he delivered an angry dressing down to the soldiers of the 3rd Bn. He declared that "...his observations had proved that colored people did not make good combat soldiers and that his job was to make the frightened 24th into the fighting 24th".⁶⁹ Charles Bussey (77th ECC CO) described that Champeny as not only an offensive bigot but professionally incompetent. He repeatedly cites Champeny as proof of the Army's seeming determination to saddle the 24th with unqualified or incompetent white officers. Champeny was wounded on September 6 and was replaced by COL Corley, commander of 3/24. On Corley's first day in command, the NKPA attacked all along the 25th ID's line, laying down heavy concentrations of fire and then punching forward with ground assaults. Both the 5th and the 35th Infantry regiments succeeded in repelling the attacks, but the 24th once again experienced difficulties. An estimated NKPA battalion succeeded in penetrating the 3rd Bn position, forcing two companies to pull back as the fighting continued. Straggling once again became significant problem. With the large hole in his line, Corley was forced to call in his reserve. After two days of repeated counterattacks, all efforts to dislodge the enemy failed. Corley decided to abandon the attack.

On September 9, MG Kean (CG, 25th ID) had had enough of the 24th. He sent a letter to LTG Walker (CG, EUSA) requesting inactivation of the Regiment and distribution of its soldiers as replacements to other units. He cited experienced troops deserting their positions, throwing away their weapons, and moving to the rear without orders. The excessive straggling and failure to hold positions, despite the best efforts of many, endangered the entire Division at times. Kean wrote "that the 24th Infantry has demonstrated in combat that it is untrustworthy and incapable of carrying out missions expected of an infantry regiment." Walker took the request under advisement, but made no immediate

decision. Corley commanded the regiment until February, when he was evacuated because of a back injury. With Corley the regiment not only had a commander who was tactically competent and experienced but one who had an open mind about the abilities of the black soldier. Corley was revered by the men 24th. He would be sorely missed.⁷⁰

Following Corley, the Regiment, had four commanding or acting commanding officers from February to October. On August 1 the regiment was relieved from the 25th Division and Eighth Army's control. On September 28, the alert order for pending inactivation was received. The following day the Regiment had its last contact with the enemy. It was relieved of its zone of responsibility by the 14th Inf and left its position in Line Wyoming for Chipo-ri.

Thus on 1 October 1951 the 24th Infantry Regiment was ignominiously inactivated at Chipo-ri, Korea, in accordance with General Orders No. 717, Office of the Commanding General, Eighth United States Army, dated September 22, 1951.

CONCLUSION

The story of the black regulars and how they preformed or did not perform for America provides us a legacy of enduring lessons. Their history shows us the destructive efforts of peacetime turbulence on wartime effectiveness of Army units. In the Spanish-American War, the Army took a unit which had lived, fought and died together for almost 30 years and deployed it intact to Cuba. Fifty-two years later that same unit was deployed to Korea corrupted by prejudice, high personnel turnover, poor training, and questionable leadership. How differently this unit performed in combat during these two wars can be explained by how they were trained, manned, and led in the years prior to deployment.

In 1898 when the 24th was deployed to Cuba, the regiment had been garrisoned in forts along the frontier for twenty-two years from 1869-91. Its soldiers had faced hostile Indians, bands of outlaws, and cattle thieves. It had developed into a cohesive, well-discipline and competent unit. They were lead by capable officers with extended service in the unit. The NCO's had served in the unit their entire army careers. The 24th and 25th Infantry were by any standard first-rate regiments, a distinction they achieved in spite of their continuous assignment to isolated areas. These soldiers not only had the lowest desertion rate among all regiments in the Army, but also exhibited a high esprit de corps even though they knew there was little chance of their being relieved from isolated posts and frontier duty. In the years between 1872 and 1898 the 24th had only three commanding officers. At the company level, most officers had long service in the Regiment and developed a close relationship with their men. Frederic Remington, the western artist noted this closeness while accompanying a patrol:

Personal relations can be much closer between white officers and colored soldiers than in white regiments without breaking the barriers which are necessary to army discipline. The men look up to a good officer, rely on him in trouble, and even seek him for advice in their small personal affairs.⁷¹

Those officers who had served with black troops were usually satisfied with these troops' ability as soldiers. But those who lacked firsthand experience appeared to be guided more by their prejudices. So this close relationship between officers and men was the foundation on which the outstanding record of these regiments were built. And it was this foundation the regiments carried with them into Cuba. A combination of factors had contributed to the strong esprit de corps, but most important was the fact that there was a strong desire among the men to prove to the Army, to society, and to themselves that they could soldier as well as white troops.

The 24th in Japan was a model not only of the tensions that dogged all-black units of that day but also of the subtle interplay those problems could have in combination with the many challenges facing the post-war Army. The Army was undergoing extreme turbulence. Personnel strengths swung drastically up and down for both white and black units. Training declined, equipment shortages grew, morale suffered. Many of the units soldiers were civilians at heart, intent upon enjoying life in occupied Japan, where a soldier's pay could afford a very comfortable existence.

The 24th suffered from a virulent racial prejudice that ate incessantly at the bonds uniting its men. The mistrust between black and white officers were fostered by assignment policies which favored whites with career-enhancing assignments even though they were clearly inferior in education and military competence to blacks. This racial favoritism left many black officers frustrated and resentful. Since few if any of them would ever rise to a rank above captain they concluded the Army considered them second class. Tensions among the officers were reflected in the enlisted ranks as well. Black soldiers worked well with their white officers in those cases where the officer recognized the worth of their subordinates and afforded them the impartiality and dignity they deserved. Many whites nevertheless shared the racially prejudiced attitudes and beliefs common to white civilian society. The paternalism and condescension practiced by white officers was readily apparent to the soldiers in their units.

As the Regiment's stay lengthened in Japan, unevenness developed that subtly affected military readiness. In companies commanded by white officers who treated their men with respect, but refused to accept low standards of discipline and performance, racial prejudice tended to be insignificant. A bond of sorts developed, akin to that written about by Remington in an earlier time. In other companies, often commanded by officers who failed to enforce high standards because they wished to avoid charges of racial prejudice or because they were simply poor leaders, mutual respect and reliance were weak. During occupation duty all seemed to go well. But there was hostility and frustration lingering beneath the surface. In the stress of combat, the soldiers of those units realized their lives depended on officers they did not trust.

These problems may have been avoided if commanders had received the time to develop a relationships with their units. But there was a constant churning of company grade officers in competition for prime assignments; this wholesale changeover of officers ensured only that a black would never command whites. Under these conditions officers often had little time to think through what they were

doing. A confluence of good and capable men might have produced a cohesive, high-performing company or platoon. But everything could dissolve overnight with a change of leaders.

The mistrust endemic to the Regiment began to surface just as soon as word arrived that it was headed to Korea. Deficient leadership, particularly at the beginning of the war, guaranteed failures. Then the self-confidence and motivation of common soldiers quickly declined. They began to lose any sense that they were part of something worthwhile, larger than their own personal being. In the end every man stood alone, unsure not only of his own abilities but also of those of the soldier in the next foxhole. A tradition of excellence dissolved sadly and quickly at the onset of the Korean War.

In September 1999, the Chief of Staff of the Army directed the Army War College, to conduct a study of turbulence in the Army. The study group defined turbulence as: "Turbulence is the effect on readiness and well being caused by job position turnover, absence, or lack of predictability."⁷² The group members researched and analyzed historical "first battles" and determined "When our Army faced battle under conditions of high turbulence as evidenced by high personnel turnover, undermanning, and minimum time for unit personnel to train together, it contributed to poor unit cohesion and ultimately disaster despite individual heroism."⁷³ The group gathered research data and information from a cross section of current Army leaders at the battalion level and below, including non-commissioned as well as commissioned officers. The data collected determined that turbulence had a profound negative impact on units, soldiers, current and future combat readiness. They found that units which train together for extended periods become cohesive, learns its strengths and weaknesses, and steadily improves on its overall readiness. In presenting its recommendations to the Chief of Staff the report in part states:

It is time for a significant shift in the way we man units. We must move now to a system of unit replacement built around the historically sound concepts of cohesion, shared experience, bonding and subordination to a common unit.⁷⁴

What the report found is proven in the study of the black infantry regiments.

WORD COUNT = 12,489

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