



Fort Riley in the late 1880s.

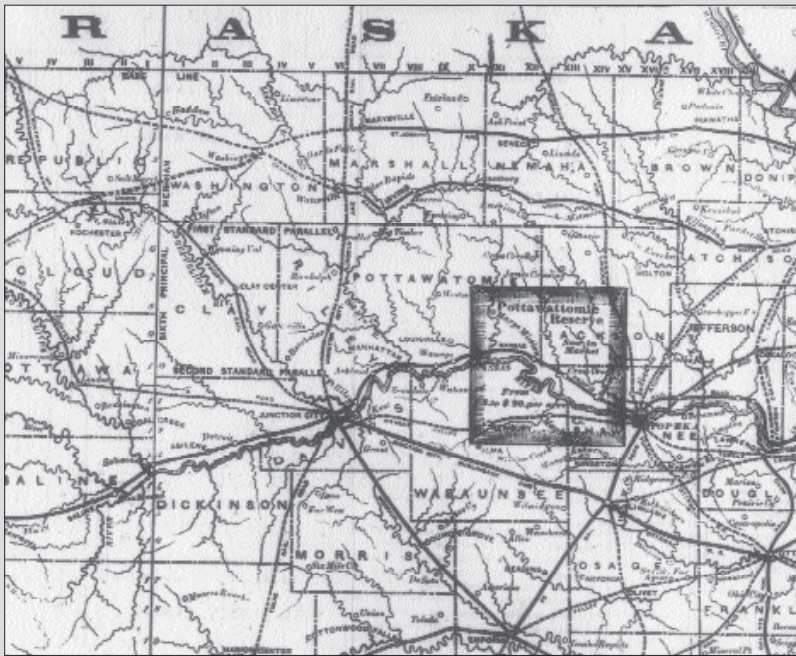


Fort Riley's Black Soldiers and the Army's Changing Role in the West, 1867–1885

by William A. Dobak

At the end of the Civil War, the United States Army faced three major strategic challenges. The states of the former Confederacy required a military occupation force. South of the Rio Grande, Mexican nationalist forces were fighting a French army of occupation, which created turmoil along the border. Transportation routes westward to the Pacific Coast, and to recently developed goldfields in Montana and Colorado, also required protection. To meet these needs, the regular army mustered a force that numbered, by law, fewer than forty thousand men.

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By the mid-1860s Fort Riley was no longer an isolated frontier post. The fort and its twenty thousand-acre military reservation lay close to major transportation routes.

Part of the solution to these new problems was to enlarge the army and increase available manpower by enlisting black soldiers in the regular army for the first time. Before the Civil War the regular army had accepted no black recruits, but Republicans in Congress noticed the satisfactory performance of the black volunteers—more than 175,000 of them—who had served in the U.S. “colored” troops during the war. When the appropriation act of 1866 provided for an expanded army, it specified that four regiments of infantry and two of cavalry would be “composed of colored men.”¹

As it turned out, both of the black cavalry regiments passed through Kansas and furnished part of Fort Riley’s garrison during the next two decades. The years they spent at the fort—the Tenth Cavalry in 1867 and 1868 and the Ninth from 1881 to 1885—bracketed an epoch in the military history of the American West. The army’s duties in the West changed during these years, and the black regiments’ service at Fort Riley exemplified that change.

Although Fort Riley had been the westernmost fort on the central route to Colorado during the gold rush of 1859, by the mid-1860s it no longer was an isolated frontier post. The fort and its twenty-thou-

sand-acre military reservation lay close to major transportation routes, a few days’ march from the Platte River to the north and to the Arkansas River to the south. The Kansas state census of 1865 counted 3,002 residents in adjacent Davis (now Geary) and Riley Counties. General William Tecumseh Sherman, on a tour of inspection in the summer of 1866, remarked that “the country out as far as Fort Riley is as much a settled country as Illinois and Missouri.” What, then, justified keeping the post open?²

A few weeks before Sherman’s visit, the commanding officer, Major John W. Davidson, had pondered the fort’s future:

As a station of troops . . . in [the] event of Indian hostilities Fort Riley has lost its importance, settlements being well in advance of it on both the Smokey [*sic*] Hill and Republican Rivers. But as a Depot for the supply of the posts in our western Territories . . . it is of great importance to the Government. This should be, in my opinion, the Cavalry Depot of the West. The Government owns a large reserve here; the facilities for grazing are unsurpassed in the West. . . . The remount horses of all the cavalry Posts . . . should be kept here. The

1. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 14 (1866): 332.

2. William T. Sherman to John A. Rawlins, August 17, 1866, in *Protection of Routes Across the Continent*, 39th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 23, 3; Kansas State Census, 1865, Davis and Riley Counties.

Part of the duties of Fort Riley's soldiers involved dealing with Indians who left their reservations, raiding both white homesteads and other Native Americans. Shown here in front of their dwelling are Cheyenne tribal members Eagle Shirt and Black Horse.



broken down stock, instead of being condemned or sold at the posts, should be conducted here for recuperation.”³

It would be eighteen years before the army's high command followed Davidson's recommendation and ten beyond that before the Mounted Branch School—for cavalry and horse-drawn field artillery—opened. In the meantime, cost-conscious military leaders used Fort Riley as a winter dormitory for troops whose summer campaigns took them far to the west and south, often by rail. Railroads enabled the troops to travel farther and faster than ever before.⁴

To keep open the central transportation corridor between the Arkansas and Platte Rivers, the federal government negotiated new treaties with the Plains

tribes. When the Cheyennes and Arapahos signed the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in October 1867, they “reserve[d] the right to hunt on any lands south of the Arkansas as long as the buffalo may range thereon in such numbers as to justify the chase.” The following spring the Sioux reserved the right to hunt buffalo on the Republican River, in an identically worded clause of the treaty they signed at Fort Laramie. The Medicine Lodge and Fort Laramie treaties were intended to assure the whites of a central region, free of Indians, through which railroads could pass to California, Colorado, and New Mexico. Within a few years these railroads made possible the commercial slaughter of the buffalo, eliminating the hunting rights guaranteed in the treaties. Meanwhile, the railroads afforded the army a cheap way to move supplies and troops—always a paramount concern of a government agency with a fixed annual budget.⁵

The new black regiments knew well the army's concern with transportation costs. The Ninth Cavalry and the Forty-first Infantry organized in Louisiana and moved to Texas by sea in 1867, marching inland from the coast. The Tenth Cavalry and the Thirty-eighth Infantry followed the line of the Kansas Pacific Railway west through Fort Riley

3. John W. Davidson to Roger Jones, May 16, 1866, Letters Sent, Fort Riley, RG 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Major Davidson of the Second Cavalry would be promoted to lieutenant colonel of the Tenth Cavalry in December 1866 and serve with the Tenth for more than twelve years. See Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 1:355.

4. Sherman regarded the Kansas Pacific as “the most important element now in progress to facilitate the military interests of our Frontier. . . . Fort Riley is a well built post with ample quarters stables and storehouses, . . . and the Govt will save a vast amount in money, and will increase the efficiency of the Army on the Frontier by facilitating . . . the Construction of the Pacific Railroad to that point.” William T. Sherman to John A. Rawlins, October 23, 1865, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, ed. John Y. Simon, vol. 15 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 381–82.

5. Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs. Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 988, 1002.

and dispersed from there. Half of the Thirty-eighth Infantry stayed in Kansas, guarding the railroad, while the other half marched overland to New Mexico. By 1869 the Tenth Cavalry had gathered in Indian Territory, where it built Fort Sill, the regiment's main station for the next five years. From the fall of 1867 to the spring of 1868, however, the Tenth became the first cavalry regiment to take advantage of Fort Riley's position on the railroad, using the barracks as winter quarters for the troops and the spacious reservation as pasture for the horses.

Beginning in April 1867 companies of the Tenth had been heading west, as fast as they could be organized, to guard construction crews on the Kansas Pacific. A common dateline on the bimonthly company muster rolls that summer and fall was "Near end of track Pacific Railroad." The Tenth's commanding officer, Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, asked that companies of his regiment be sent to winter at Fort Riley, to receive recruits, fresh horses, and weapons, and to drill "as nearly as possible in the order in which they marched to the field." Six companies arrived in November and December. Company K, marching in from Fort Harker, near Ellsworth, "was caught in a severe snow storm . . . and the men suffered severely from frozen feet."⁶

At Fort Riley, the companies spent the winter taking in recruits and horses and replenishing their clothing, arms, and equipment. They left in April 1868 and passed the rest of the year on the Plains, looking for Indians who were living in the valleys of the Republican and Smoky Hill Rivers, off their reservations, and raiding both white homesteads and other Indians as far east as the Kansas tribe's agency at Council Grove. In September Company H of the Tenth rode hurriedly to relieve a beleaguered company of fifty-two civilian scouts at Beecher Island in the Arikaree Fork of the Republican River. The scouts were Kansas residents for the most part, auxiliaries

6. John N. Craig to Chauncey McKeever, April 15, 1867, Letters Sent, Fort Riley; Muster Roll, H Company, Tenth Cavalry, August 31, 1867, RG 94, National Archives; Benjamin H. Grierson to McKeever, October 1, 1867, Letters Sent, Tenth Cavalry, RG 391, National Archives; Muster Roll, K Company, Tenth Cavalry, December 31, 1867.

recruited for their knowledge of the Plains, but a force of about six hundred Cheyennes and Sioux from nearby camps had cornered them for eight days before the soldiers arrived.⁷

The year 1868 ended for the Tenth Cavalry with four companies taking part in a winter campaign out of Fort Lyon, Colorado, that kept them in the field from November to February. "The weather was so very cold that our horses froze to death on the picket line," Private James H. Massey recalled years later. "Every man who lost his horse had to march with his saddle on his back. We run short of rations, was without anything to eat except quarter rations for some three or four days." Meanwhile, four other companies of the regiment wintered at posts along the line of the Kansas Pacific. The Tenth Cavalry did not return to Fort Riley, but the army's practice of using the post as winter quarters and leaving in the spring to campaign on the Plains continued whenever cavalry served there. Raids had not halted railroad construction in 1868 as they had the year before, and trains loaded with supplies rolled past Fort Riley to Forts Hays, Wallace and, by 1872, Dodge, and kept the troops in the field armed, fed, and clad.⁸

Soldiers guarded construction of the railroads, which in turn helped supply the army and, within a few years, changed the face of the West and the army's role in it. An unforeseen result of the railroads' presence was the trade in raw buffalo hides, which destroyed the Plains Indians' chief source of food, clothing, and shelter. About 1870 a new tanning technique made possible the use of buffalo hides for shoe leather and industrial drive belts. The new railroads

7. Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 299–314, and John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne Nation: A Social and Demographic History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 198–201, are recent accounts that include Indian evidence. William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 19–44, sketches the Tenth Cavalry's activities from 1867 through 1868. John H. Monnett, *The Battle of Beecher Island and the Indian War of 1867–1869* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1992), includes Indian evidence about the fight. David Dixon, *Hero of Beecher Island: The Life and Military Career of George A. Forsyth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), is the biography of a major in the Ninth Cavalry whose duties on General Philip H. Sheridan's staff kept him away from the regiment during most of the years when his name appeared on its rolls.

8. James H. Massey, Pension File, IWSC 7902, RG 15, National Archives.

A railroad construction crew is accompanied by the Thirty-eighth Infantry, far left, a black regiment which, in part, remained in Kansas to guard the Kansas Pacific Railway.



were the only profitable means of shipping the high-bulk, low-value hides. By the late 1870s the buffalo had been nearly exterminated in the Central and Southern Plains. Their disappearance annulled those treaty provisions that allowed Plains Indians to leave their reservations to hunt. For the army, this meant that instead of camping out in the summer to keep an eye on buffalo-hunting Indians in sparsely settled western Kansas, troops would be called on at any time of year to frustrate schemes for white occupation of tribal lands in Indian Territory, just to the south.⁹

By the end of the 1870s new railroad lines were able to carry troops from Fort Riley to several campaigns that historians seldom mention. Military historians do not write much about the army's activities in the 1880s because little shooting occurred. Nor does the army appear frequently in tribal histories of the early reservation period unless there was a fort adjacent to the agency, such as Fort Sill on the Comanche and Kiowa reservation or Fort Reno on the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Yet the army spent a large part of its time, manpower, and budget during the 1880s in quiet demonstrations of federal authority.

9. David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1974), 94–95, lists several attempts to make leather of buffalo hides. Before the 1870s the only commercial demand was for robes (tanned buffalo skins with the hair).

Those in which troops from Fort Riley took part are worth examining, since they were more typical of the army's activities during the last two decades of the century than were the more violent incidents that usually receive historians' attention.¹⁰

Late in the fall of 1881 four companies of the Ninth Cavalry arrived at Fort Riley, hoping for a rest from years of rigorous campaigning in New Mexico, where the regiment had been scattered at a dozen small posts. A quotation from one company's "Record of Events" (part of the bimonthly muster and payroll) offers a sample of the regiment's activities during the previous six years.

About 8 o'clock found trail of hostile Chiricahua Apache Indians going south and followed it along the eastern slope of the Dragoon Mountains Struck hostiles about 2 o'clock P.M. a running fight took place which lasted for 15 miles when the Indians

10. Fort Sill figures in William T. Hagan, *United States—Comanche Relations: The Reservation Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), and Fort Reno in Donald J. Berthrong, *The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976). For the cost of these operations, see William T. Sherman's remarks in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1879, 46th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 6; John Pope's remarks in *ibid.*, 1882, 47th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 99; Pope's remarks in *ibid.*, 1883, 48th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 130; Christopher C. Augur's remarks in *ibid.*, 1884, 48th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 118–19.



Reuben Waller, Tenth Cavalry, a member of the rescue mission sent to relieve Forsyth's Scouts, who had been under siege for eight days during the Battle of the Arikaree.

took to the rocks in the main range and made a stand about sunset a sharp fight ensued continuing until Dark Pvt's James Goodlow, Henry Harrison and Wm H Carroll were wounded one horse slightly wounded Indians escaped during the night and crossed into Mexico.¹¹

Many brief narratives like this appear in company records of the Ninth Cavalry, especially in the years from 1879 to 1881, when the men of the regiment exchanged shots with Indians on thirty-seven occasions. The regiment, General John Pope reported, had been "almost continuously in the field, the greater part of the time in harassing and wearisome pursuit of small bands of Indians" and was "much run down in every way." Pope hoped to give the Ninth a rest, stationing regimental headquarters and four of the regiment's companies at Fort Riley, with its good rail connections, and the other eight companies at posts in the western part of Indian Territory.¹²

Dispersed as they had been throughout New Mexico, companies of the Ninth arrived piecemeal at

Fort Riley in December 1881. They soon made themselves at home at the fort and in nearby Junction City, adopting a more tranquil routine than they had known for years past. "About a dozen" singers from the regiment came to town on Christmas Eve "for our colored folks Christmas tree entertainment," the *Junction City Union* reported, and two days later enlisted men invited their black civilian neighbors to a ball at the post. In January members of the regimental band played at a meeting of Junction City's black Masons.¹³

When orders came for the Ninth to go to Colorado the following June, the *Union's* editor wrote: "Our whole community sincerely regrets this, because the entire command, officers and men, are very popular with our people, in social and business circles." During the Ninth's six months' residence at Fort Riley, the newspaper had only once reported drunken soldiers in the streets of town, and a soldier's cap left at the site of an attempted burglary. The men of the Ninth Cavalry seem to have been good neighbors.¹⁴

11. Muster Roll, F Company, Ninth Cavalry, October 31, 1881. For other examples, see Muster Rolls, B Company, October 31, 1879, February 28, 1881; C Company, February 28, 1877, June 30, October 31, 1879, February 29, 1880; F Company, October 31, 1876, August 31, 1878; I Company, August 31, 1881; K Company, October 31, 1878.

12. *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1881, 47th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 124. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 2:444-47, lists the Ninth Cavalry's Indian fights. The number of fights conveys no idea of the

weeks spent in the saddle or the thousands of miles marched. Muster rolls from these years show that companies of the Ninth rode more than 350 miles a month, on average. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 172-229, covers the regiment's service in New Mexico, including the Lincoln County War. Dan L. Thrapp, *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 175-274, concentrates on Indian affairs in New Mexico, particularly military campaigns, from 1876 to 1880.

13. *Junction City Union*, December 17, 31, 1881, January 14, 1882.

An unforeseen result of the railroads' presence in Kansas was the enormous increase in buffalo hide trade, which ultimately destroyed the Plains Indians' chief source of food. This mass quantity of hides was shipped by rail from Dodge City.



The errand that took the Ninth from Kansas to Colorado in June 1882 was the removal of the Ute Indians from their old reservation, which had taken up the western third of Colorado. After statehood in 1876, Coloradans set about opening up the mineral-rich Ute reservation, which they accomplished with only a brief shooting war in 1879 and a treaty the next year that removed the northern Utes to a reservation in Utah, and confined the southern Utes to a much smaller reservation in southwestern Colorado. (General John Pope, supervising operations from Fort Leavenworth, remarked that the “whites were so eager and so unrestrained by common decency that it was absolutely necessary to use military force to keep them off the reservation until the Indians were fairly gone.”) In 1881 the Fourth Cavalry had traveled by rail from Fort Riley to attend the Utes’ removal. The year after it was the Ninth Cavalry’s turn to spend a summer in the mountains.¹⁵

The cars of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad took them as far as Pueblo, Colorado, where

men and horses transferred to the narrow-gauge Denver and Rio Grande. They chugged on west through Royal Gorge and beyond the town of Gunnison, until the train dropped them at the end of track, a spot named Kezar. It was “a counterpart of all terminal points,” M Troop’s Lieutenant John F. McBlain, who signed his letters VERITAS, wrote to the *Junction City Union*: the businesses comprised one butcher, one blacksmith, and “some fifteen” saloons. The companies of the Ninth moved five days’ march west, which put them five weeks’ distance ahead of the track-laying crews. Officers and men spent their time fishing and wondering why they were there. “The Indians are, at present, perfectly quiet,” McBlain wrote, “and my idea is that we will move through the country in order to pacify the settlers and prevent conflict between them and the Indians. There is scarcely any possibility of trouble with the Utes unless the policy of disarming them is insisted upon by Secretary [of the Interior Henry M.] Teller.” Vehement reaction to camp rumors about a move to Wyoming showed that the troops really had no idea what lay in store for them. “After five years hard campaigning in New Mexico, having been sent there for a rest after hard service in Texas, only to get into another hornet’s nest. We came to Kansas with a hope that we were to have at least a couple of years of rest,” only to be told “that having done nothing for almost five

14. *Ibid.*, February 4, April 15, June 24, 1882.

15. Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 332–42; Francis P. Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 542–44; *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1881, 116.

months we must pick up, and take ourselves to another department." But the men of the Ninth stayed put until Denver and Rio Grande construction crews caught up with them, and when the troops left Colorado early in October, the railroad carried them back to Fort Riley.¹⁶

There they resumed garrison life. A few weeks after their return, a group of enlisted men who called themselves the Social Dancing Club sponsored a ball. "The music was furnished by the orchestra of the Ninth Cavalry Band. Supper was served at midnight, then dancing . . . continued until three in the morning," the *Union* reported. Late in the winter, Private Nicholas Dunlap of the band married Nancy Johnson, daughter of a Junction City farmer. In the spring of 1883 men of the regiment strung the first telephone line between Junction City and Fort Riley. The band took part in Decoration Day ceremonies at the post and in town. Throughout the years of the Ninth Cavalry's stay at Fort Riley, only an occasional announcement in the *Union*, advertising the sale of condemned cavalry horses, hinted at the rigors of summer campaigns in which no shots were fired.¹⁷

With rail transportation available, however, even smaller disturbances could evoke responses that would not have been possible ten, or even five, years earlier. In June 1883, when Navajo herdsman were reported to be grazing sheep off their reservation, two companies of the Ninth Cavalry from Fort Riley again went by rail to southwestern Colorado. This time the "narrow but comfortable cars" of the Denver and Rio Grande dropped them at Fort Lewis, near Durango, about a hundred miles farther along than the tracks had run the previous year.¹⁸

16. *Junction City Union*, July 8, 22, August 26, 1882. Later references to McClain make his identity quite clear. He was the only officer in the Ninth to have served as an enlisted man in the Second Cavalry, see *ibid.*, May 12, 1883; he did not send letters about the Ninth's operations while he was "on a leave of absence in California," see *ibid.*, October 11, 1884; and the editor sometimes mentioned McClain's letters or visits to the *Union* office, see *ibid.*, January 17, April 4, 1885.

17. *Ibid.*, November 25, 1882, March 17, June 2, 1883. Sales of condemned horses are in *ibid.*, December 1, 1883, May 31, December 20,

The Navajos were a large tribe, numbering about sixteen thousand, with an estimated eight hundred thousand sheep. The reservation that they had been assigned in 1869 had been enlarged substantially in 1880, and soon would be again, although it remained inadequate for a large pastoral population. With few white settlements nearby to bother them, the Navajos did not pay much attention to the reservation boundaries. Their flocks had "clear[ed] the country of every blade of grass," the commanding officer at Fort Lewis reported, and reinforcements from Fort Riley would have to bring a grain ration for their horses. When word of the cavalry's arrival reached them, the Navajos withdrew to their reservation. Ninth Cavalry patrols "saw no Indians with herds" and "found no trouble."¹⁹

In August, M Troop accompanied about seven hundred Jicarilla Apaches during their removal from northern New Mexico to another reservation in the southeastern part of the territory. They parted company with the Apaches near Santa Fe, where a company from another regiment took over the escort duty. The men "went to bed full of anticipations," Lieutenant McClain wrote,

for we had been informed that we were to leave Santa Fe for Fort Riley. . . . About 10 o'clock, Capt. Lawton, of the Fourth cavalry, rode into camp with an order . . . to immediately draw rations and

1884.

18. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1883.

19. Estimates of Navajo population and sheep are in agents' reports in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1881, 47th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 5, 195; *ibid.*, 1883, 48th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 5, 180. Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1961), 222, calls the "original land arrangement simply . . . not sufficient to support the increasing numbers of Navajos and livestock." Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change Among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 216, comments: "Reservation boundaries had little immediate impact on Navajo life." Commanding Officer to Adjutant General, District of New Mexico, April 17, 1883, Letters Sent, Fort Lewis, RG 393; Adjutant to Adjutant General, District of New Mexico, June 28, 1883, *ibid.*; Commanding Officer to Adjutant General, District of New Mexico, August 11, 1883, *ibid.* The results of the cavalry patrols are in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1883, 139. Population figures for the Jicarilla Apaches are in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1883, 176. Veronica E. Velarde Tiller, *The Jicarilla Apache Tribe: A History*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska

The lone water tower, photographed in the 1870s, stands as an emblem of Fort Riley's critical position at the juncture of many railroads, thus making the post a major transportation center for shipping supplies and deploying troops to regions farther west.



forage, and return to Fort Lewis as rapidly as practicable as a man had been killed by the Navajoes . . . and that the Indians were threatening. . . . The wagons which had been sent to Santa Fe after supplies returned to camp and we at once broke camp and started on our return, the most dejected looking lot of mortals the sun ever shone on.²⁰

Soon after M Troop reached Fort Lewis, a scouting party of the Ninth learned that a few Utes or Navajos had shot and killed a white farmer (“a violent man,” who “on former occasions had pointed his gun at Indians,” according to the commanding officer at Fort Lewis) when he accused them of stealing his corn and melons. The incident did not foreshadow a general rising.²¹

McBlain was disgusted. “What few settlers there are” near Fort Lewis “will keep up their cry of wolf, fooling the troops, until . . . when they may possibly require assistance it will be denied them under the impression that it is the old cry. The quartering of troops in that locality is asked for without the shadow of a necessity, but solely with a view of getting the trade and what little money the soldiers may have to dispose of.” This was a common attitude among civilians throughout the West. General Sherman had

noted it soon after the Civil War; it was the prevalent view in the neighborhood of Fort Riley, and the men of the Ninth Cavalry would encounter it again soon, for their next field of operations lay in Indian Territory, where they struggled with white trespassers on tribal lands.²²

Just south of Kansas, in present Oklahoma, Indian Territory was home to five tribes that had been removed there from the Southeast before the Civil War. Most of these people had sided with the Confederacy, and in 1866 the federal government imposed a series of punitive treaties by which the tribes forfeited about one-third of their lands. Some of the ceded area was assigned as reservations to southern Plains tribes—Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa—and some to tribes who were moving south from Kansas, where their old, pre-war reservations were being opened to white settlement. In the middle of Indian Territory lay the Oklahoma District, nearly two million acres that had not been assigned to any tribe.²³

During the 1870s settlement in Kansas approached the ninety-eighth meridian (approximately the twen-

ters Sent, Fort Lewis.

22. *Junction City Union*, September 22, 1883; *Army and Navy Journal*, December 4, 1880. Years earlier Sherman had complained that “people west of the Mississippi River look to the army as their legitimate field of profit and support and the quicker they are undeceived the better for all.” See William T. Sherman to John A. Rawlins, September 30, 1866, in *Protection of Routes Across the Continent*, 18–19.

Press, 1992), 89–90, describes the removal.

20. *Junction City Union*, September 22, 1883.

21. Commanding Officer to Warren Patten, September 1, 1883, Let-



Beginning in the summer of 1879, Fort Riley troops paid frequent visits to the southern border of Kansas to pursue Boomers who trespassed into Indian Territory. These Boomers, photographed a few years later, are camped on Walnut Creek near Arkansas City.

ty-inch rainfall line), beyond which farmers found it increasingly difficult to make a crop using traditional methods. At the same time, new military posts in Indian Territory promised stricter control of potentially hostile Plains Indians. The commercial slaughter of buffalo increased the urgency of government efforts to teach tribesmen to farm, which, reformers contended, would enable them to survive on a greatly reduced land base. All these developments led railroad promoters, land speculators, and farmers to cast covetous eyes on the Oklahoma District.²⁴

The Boomers (named for the land boom they hoped to create) argued that in not assigning the Oklahoma District to any tribe, Congress had implicitly added it to the part of the public domain that was open to settlement. Carl Schurz, the secretary of the interior, expressed a different view in a letter to the secretary of war, in which he requested the army's help to forestall the Boomers' colonization scheme and, if necessary, to arrest their leaders. Not only had Congress failed to authorize settlement in the Oklahoma District at any time since the treaties of 1866,

Schurz pointed out, but recent legislation had explicitly placed the district, along with the rest of Indian Territory, within the jurisdiction of the federal court at Fort Smith, Arkansas. He asked the secretary of war to send troops to Coffeyville, Wichita, and Arkansas City, Kansas, three towns where the Boomers were assembling.²⁵

Beginning in the summer of 1879, troops from Fort Riley and other posts paid frequent visits to towns along the southern state line of Kansas, sometimes staying for months at a time, sometimes pursuing the Boomers into Indian Territory. The only penalty for trespass on Indian lands, however, was a fine for the second offense. Since the Boomers who were convicted owned no property and could not pay a fine, federal authorities released them each time, and each time the Boomers prepared another invasion. The Ninth Cavalry's Colonel Edward Hatch, who in 1884 commanded the army's newly created District of Oklahoma, thought that the Boomers' leaders were confidence men who sought to "obtain money from the ignorant people deluded into the purchase of claims and town lots, and from the fees paid on joining what they term the 'Oklahoma Colony.'" They

23. Prucha, *The Great Father*, 434–36, 743–44.

24. By 1880 the army had stationed fifteen companies of cavalry—one-eighth of its mounted force—and seventeen companies of infantry at posts in or close to Indian Territory. See *Army and Navy Journal*, December 13, 1879. For early efforts to teach Plains Indians to farm, see Berthrong,

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal, 48–71.

25. Carl Schurz to George W. McCrary, May 1, 1879, in *Occupation of*

As the Boomer problem continued into the 1880s, Caldwell, photographed here in 1888, became a temporary headquarters for the troops from Fort Riley.



had already collected, Hatch reckoned, in “the neighborhood of \$100,000. . . . Should the country be open to settlers there would be an end to their profits.” The Boomers’ leaders, Hatch said, grew fat on their annual circuit from the assembly points on the Kansas state line, to a campsite in the Indian Territory where troops arrested them, to the federal court in Fort Smith, and back to Kansas again.²⁶

Officials of the War Department and the Office of Indian Affairs urged imprisonment as punishment for trespass, and bills were introduced in session after session of Congress, but none passed. Finally, the death of the Boomers’ leader in 1884 deprived them of their guiding spirit, and the question of the Oklahoma District merged with the larger one of the allotment of Indian lands in severalty—individual ownership of land, a step toward eventual assimilation and citizenship—and the opening of reservations throughout the Plains, which led in 1887 to the General Allotment Act. The federal government allowed white settlement in the Oklahoma District in 1889, and in 1907, after federal efforts to wreck tribal governments in Indian Territory had succeeded, Oklahoma attained statehood.²⁷

Companies of the Ninth Cavalry at Fort Sill and other posts in Indian Territory had been chasing the Boomers since early 1882. In the summer of 1884 two companies from Fort Riley marched south to Indian Territory to help make the last arrest of the Boomers’ leader, David L. Payne. The troops returned to Fort Riley in October.²⁸

Payne died a month later in Wellington, Kansas, while preparing yet another assault on the Oklahoma District, and his followers soon crossed the line again. This time the soldiers from Fort Riley took the railroad—four coaches for the men and sixteen freight cars for their horses and equipment. It was the coldest winter in nine years. From the Ninth Cavalry’s camp at Caldwell, Colonel Hatch telegraphed repeatedly to Fort Riley’s post quartermaster, requesting arctic overshoes and baled hay. Before January was over, twenty railroad carloads of hay would travel

Doc. 50, 5.

27. *Annual Report of the Commission of Indian Affairs*, 1880, 46th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 5, 93; *ibid.*, 1881, 55; *ibid.*, 1883, 147; *ibid.*, 1884, 48th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 1, pt. 5, 33–34. *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1883, 70; *ibid.*, 1884, 118–19, which are the annual reports of John Pope and Christopher C. Augur, respectively. Augur was Pope’s successor in command of the Department of the Missouri, whose troops were responsible for restraining and removing the Boomers. See also *Prevention of Trespass on Indian Lands*, 1881, 47th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 145, 2; *Trespass on Indian Lands*, 1883, 48th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 17, 2; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 737–57.

28. Muster Rolls, H and L Troops, Ninth Cavalry, August 31, October

Indian Territory by White Settlers, 46th Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 20, 16–18.

26. *Certain Lands in the Indian Territory*, 1884, 48th Cong., 2d sess., S.

from Fort Riley to the Ninth Cavalry's camps at Arkansas City and Caldwell.²⁹

The railroad, however, could not comfort the men once they were ahorse in the field. First Lieutenant Patrick Cusack, who had served with the Ninth for sixteen years, marched seventy-three miles in two days during February 1883. "[T]his was one of the worst marches I Ever Experienced in the Service," he wrote, and "although the Command Suffered Sever[e]ly I never heard a man Grumble or make any Complaints." Private Benjamin Bolt's horse went through the ice crossing one stream, leaving him in wet clothes, fifteen miles from camp; he mentioned the incident twenty years later, when he filed for a military pension because of his rheumatism. In another pension case, Private Frank Marshall recalled that "nearly all of the company were frozen, some more and some less."³⁰

The men of the Ninth rounded up the Boomers, escorted them across the Kansas line, and camped on Chilocco Creek, a few miles south of Arkansas City, to head off occasional small groups still trying to steal across the line. The *Arkansas City Republican's* editor indulged in some gloating that Lieutenant McBlain, author of the VERITAS letters, would have recognized at once. "This is another luscious plum for Arkansas City," the editor crowed.

Poor old Caldwell. This will be a bitter pill for her to swallow.

The [Caldwell] *Journal* has boasted that that city was the headquarters for the soldiers while Arkansas City was for the boomers. We are headquarters for both now. Gen. Hatch pronounced this city the natural gateway to Oklahoma and accordingly moved the troops here. . . . They will be stationed here for quite a while, and as the companies will draw their pay here lots of shining shekels will find their way into the coffers of our mer-

chants.³¹

By early March it was time for officers to detail a couple of men from each company to go back to Fort Riley and start the company gardens. Some of the companies had been called into the field the previous summer and had missed the fresh vegetables that they had planted in the spring. Just a month later, however, came orders that put the Ninth Cavalry on the road for Nebraska and Wyoming.³²

This routine change of station ended chapters in the histories of the regiment and of Fort Riley. The Ninth Cavalry would patrol the Pine Ridge reservation during the Ghost Dance winter of 1891, and the year after that they would occupy Johnson County, Wyoming, to prevent a range war there. The collapse of the Boomer movement meant that Fort Riley would not serve as a staging ground for field operations again until companies of the Seventh Cavalry traveled to Nebraska by train during the Ghost Dance disturbance. After that, the founding of training schools for cavalry and field artillery would further change the nature of service at Fort Riley.

General Sherman had written about all of this a few years earlier, on the eve of his retirement, when the Boomer movement was at its height. He foresaw no more large Indian outbreaks, he told the secretary of war in the fall of 1883. "The Army has been a large factor in producing this result, but it is not the only one," Sherman wrote. "Immigration and the occupation by industrious farmers and miners of lands vacated by the aborigines have been largely instrumental to that end, but the *railroad* which used to follow in the rear now goes forward in the picket-line in the great battle of civilization with barbarism, and has become the greater cause." The year before, Sherman had outlined plans for concentrating the army's troops in large garrisons, at strategic points along the railroads. Fort Riley, on the Kansas Pacific and with

31, 1884.

29. Edward Hatch to John F. Guilfoyle, December 31, 1884, January 1, 1885, Letters and Telegrams Sent, District of Oklahoma, RG 393; Hatch to James Gilliss, January 5, 7, 1885, *ibid.*; *Junction City Union*, January 10, 31, 1885.

30. Muster Roll, G Troop, Ninth Cavalry, February 28, 1883; Benjamin Bolt's affidavit, March 21, 1906, in Bolt, Pension File, IWSO 10602, RG 15; Frank Marshall's affidavit, June 18, 1895, in Elias Hayes, Pension

File, SC 902778, RG 15.

31. *Arkansas City Republican*, February 28, 1885.

32. Eugene D. Dimmick, John S. Loud, and Jerauld A. Olmsted to Assistant Adjutant General, Department of the Missouri, March 9, 1885, Letters Received, District of Oklahoma; General Orders 44, Headquarters

As long as the army needed to keep order in the West, Fort Riley was a base from which troops came and went as various services called them to duty. This 1860s photo depicts black troops accompanying a stage traveling between the western Kansas forts of Hays and Wallace.



short-line connections to the Union Pacific, the Santa Fe, and the Missouri, Kansas & Texas, was on Sherman's list of permanent posts, to be repaired and augmented.³³

As it happened, the cavalry regiments whose service marked two periods in Fort Riley's history were both, as the army appropriation act of 1866 put it, "composed of colored men." The Tenth Cavalry, guarding construction crews of the Kansas Pacific railroad against possible Indian attack during the late 1860s, was the first regiment to be ordered into winter quarters at the fort, to rest its horses and graze them on the twenty-thousand-acre military reservation. Some fifteen years later, the Ninth Cavalry was the last regiment to use Fort Riley as a base for seasonal operations to which the troops traveled each year by rail—by the 1880s these operations were mostly to protect Indian lands from white invaders.

That the Tenth and the Ninth passed through Fort Riley was purely chance, for the army assigned stations to black troops as it did to whites and expected the same service of them. To this end, the army paid, fed, clothed, housed, armed and, in the cavalry,

mounted them just as it did whites. As long as the army needed men to keep order in the West—whether to guard railroad construction or, later, to assure the *orderly* opening of Indian lands to white settlement—a sort of parity between black soldiers and white prevailed. A change became apparent by the end of the century, and increasingly restrictive Jim Crow laws in civilian life were reflected in the army's thirty-three-thousand-man expansion of 1901, which provided for no new black regiments. During the First World War the army assigned nearly 90 percent of its black soldiers to labor battalions and other service organizations.³⁴ However, throughout the post-Civil War era black soldiers, despite having to serve in segregated regiments, enjoyed a more equal footing with white soldiers than they would see again for decades. Black soldiers' military ability assured their regiments' survival within the army, and the continued presence of black soldiers in the army was itself as important for the country's future as were the regiments' particular services in the army's changing strategic schemes in the late nineteenth century.

[KH]

of the Army, April 9, 1885, RG 94.

33. *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1883*, 45–46.

34. Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 112.