

Buffalo Soldier

By Arthur L. Harness #18391

I entered the service August 24, 1940, at 19 years old, enlisting at Fort Riley, Kansas, just three miles from Junction City, Kansas, where I was born and reared. As a teenager, I had spent a lot of time at Fort Riley caddying for the officers.

I went into the Ninth Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers) for basic training. The Buffalo Soldiers were organized in 1866. They had the reputation of being the first black group that was organized. I went into the cavalry just before the Buffalo Soldiers disbanded.

Mid-1941 we went on “Louisiana Maneuvers,” which was by horseback through Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. It was pretty miserable because it rained much of the time.

No matter what time of the night it was when we completed our forced march of the day, our horses had to be fed, watered and cared for before we could begin to eat or do anything for ourselves. There were also mechanized units on this trip, but we never did catch up to them.

After I got in the military, when we got our new horses, they weren’t that tame at the time. They were probably ridden one time, and then we had to break them.

I was on what they call a remount squad for our special weapons troop. I was one of the sergeants who knew how to handle a horse. If I rode one, I rode 50 of them!

As a file-closer sergeant, it was my duty to keep the troop in formation. When we were in formation, the first sergeant was at the head, and the file



closer was at the tail of the troop. It was my job to drop out with any trooper having a problem with his packhorse, correct the problem and get the trooper and horse back in formation.

I had one horse, Speedy, that was one heck of a horse. He was terrific because he had to do double duty. Anytime we dropped out, we had to catch up with the troops. Sometimes it took me five or 10 minutes to get a trooper reorganized and to get his pack straight.

After we got back to Camp Funston, Kansas, it was proven that the horses could not keep up with the mechanized units, so the Buffalo Soldiers were disbanded, and the Air Base Security was formed (part of the U.S. Air Corps).

Our next stop was Camp Rucker, Alabama. After a few nights there, as an all-black unit, we were confronted with racism. Many of our men were badly beaten when they went into town. Our commander told us to stay in large groups, stay together to stop this from happening.

After a month, we moved to Camp Butner, North Carolina. We received new men and went through basic training for Air Base Security. Then we went on to Camp Shank, New York, and on May 18, 1943, we headed overseas.

The Marines would capture an air base, and we would secure it and then keep it safe for our troops. This procedure carried on from one base to another throughout the south and southwest Pacific theater.

Then I was promoted to tank commander. When a tank was hit by small arms fire, we could smell lead inside the tank. The tanks were very essential to keep the air base secure. Security includes a new password daily to get clearance to come on base.

One evening at about 2:00, Eleanor Roosevelt and her party arrived to board their plane but did not have the correct password, so the private on duty would not let them on base.

Later, she commended him for doing a fine job.

When the War ended in Europe, the point system was put in place and, because I had enlisted before V-J Day, was married and had one child, I had accumulated a lot of points and was top of the list to go home.

Upon arrival at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, I was told my job as tank commander was on the essential list, and I was not eligible for discharge. The next day, the classification was removed, so I was granted my discharge after all.

When I arrived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the train station, everyone was hugging, kissing and shouting, and I found out Japan had surrendered! V-J Day.

Then I spotted my wife and 20-month-old son waiting for me. I had not seen my wife in 27 months, and I'd never seen my son. What a day that was! A big celebration, for sure.