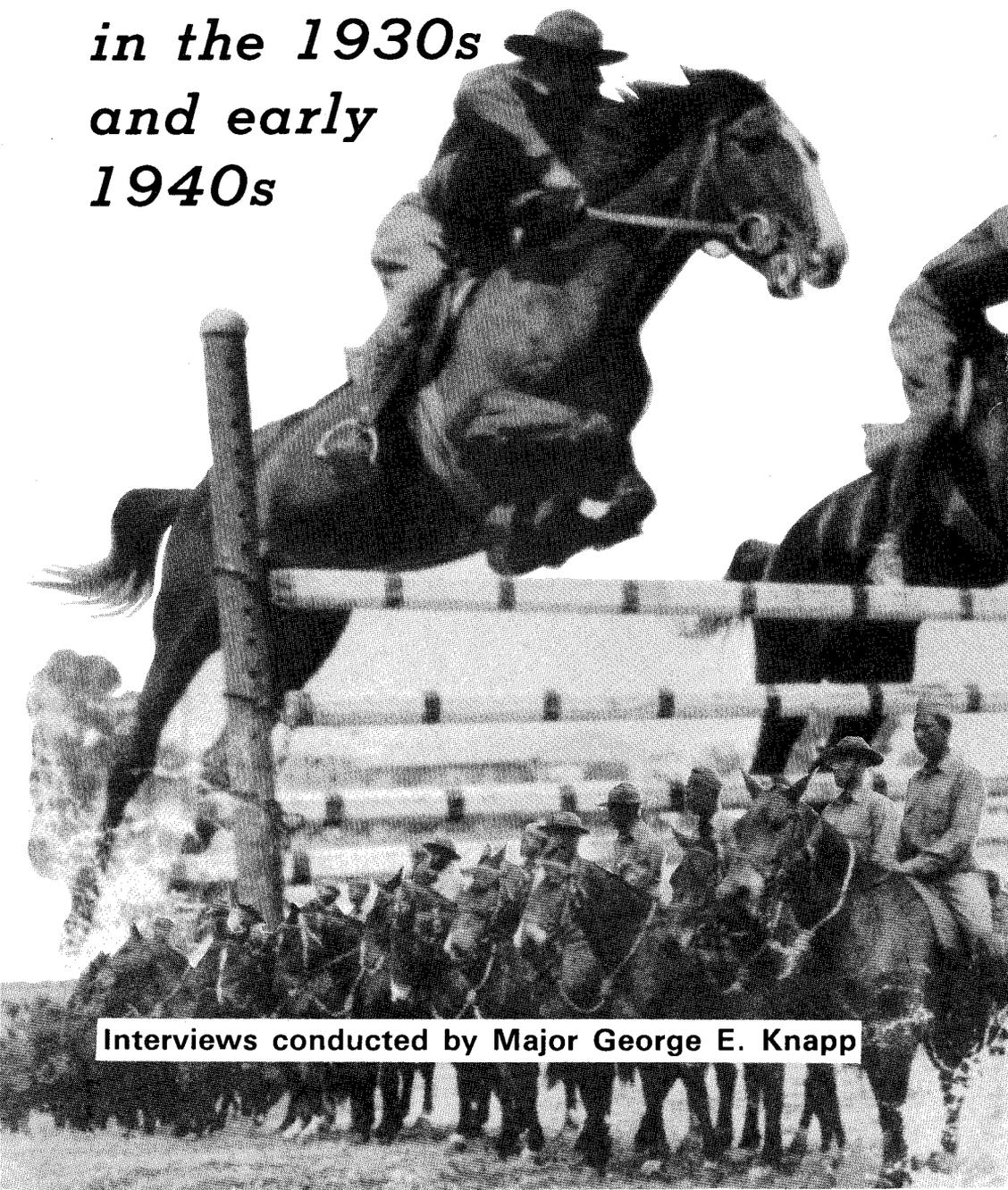


Buffalo Soldiers

*at Fort Leavenworth
in the 1930s
and early
1940s*



Interviews conducted by Major George E. Knapp

FOREWORD

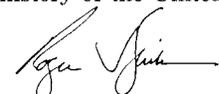
Military historians have often focused on the period between the world wars in order to examine issues such as preparedness, doctrine, technology, and politics. Less often have we looked closely at social issues peculiar to the military in that period. These interviews do that for a small segment of the Army—black soldiers at Fort Leavenworth in the 1930s.

In the fall of 1989, the Combat Studies Institute decided to conduct a television interview with veterans of the 10th Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers). Captain (now Major) George E. Knapp, an instructor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (USACGSC), conducted background research and preliminary interviews with several veteran Buffalo Soldiers living in the Leavenworth area. Finally, on 19 October 1989, Captain Knapp and four veterans of the 10th Cavalry met in the television studio at Bell Hall for a videotape session. This is a transcription of that session.

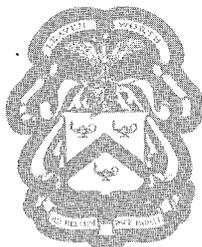
During the interview, the four veterans reminisced about their service at Fort Leavenworth and how they felt about their role in the history of the United States Army. Harry Hollowell remembered much about his fellow soldiers and the officers who commanded them. Elmer Robinson talked mostly about his work in the USACGSC bookstore and those with whom he worked. Julian Brown told about working in the stables and as a striker (a soldier who worked daily in the home of an officer for extra pay). Lorn Brown described the details of taking care of the officers' polo ponies and later breaking in new mounts for the regiment. Each veteran focused on different aspects of the 10th Cavalry's service at Fort Leavenworth.

Out of these reminiscences clearly emerges one impression: these men are proud of their military service and, more specifically, proud of the contributions that they have made toward equality in the Army. They believe that they have played an important role in the evolution of Army race relations and that they have seen the results of that evolution during their lifetimes. They remain proud veterans, aware of their contribution to the history of the United States Army.

April 1991



ROGER J. SPILLER
Director
Combat Studies Institute



CSI publications cover a variety of military history topics. The views expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of Army or the Department of Defense.

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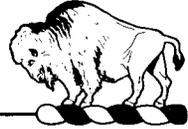


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Most of all, I thank the interviewees, Harry Hollowell, Elmer Robinson, Julian Brown, and Lorn Brown for their gracious cooperation in sharing their experiences as Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Leavenworth.

GEORGE E. KNAPP
Major, Infantry
Combat Studies Institute

Art and design by Alfred T. Dulin



Captain Knapp: I'm Captain George Knapp of the Combat Studies Institute, United States Army Command and General Staff College. Today, we're talking with veterans of the 10th Cavalry.

The 10th Cavalry was organized on 21 September 1866 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It, along with the 9th Cavalry, 24th and 25th Infantry, formed the first all-black regiments in the United States Army.* Collectively, the men who served in these regiments are called Buffalo Soldiers from the descriptive name given them by the Indians. The 10th Cavalry served in the West against the Indians until the war with Spain in 1898. The 10th served in Cuba along with the 9th Cavalry as part of The Cavalry Division.

After the war with Spain, the regiment served in a series of posts in the United States and in the Philippines. In 1916, the 10th was part of General Pershing's punitive expedition into Mexico. It remained on the southwest border during World War I and until 1931 when its squadrons were posted to support Army training at West Point, Fort Meyer, and Fort Leavenworth. The regiment reassembled in 1940 [1941] at Camp Funston [Fort Riley], Kansas.

The 10th was inactivated during World War II and its soldiers transferred to various service units. In the fall of 1950, the 10th Cavalry was converted as the 510th Tank Battalion and activated at Camp Polk, Louisiana. The battalion was transferred to West Germany in 1952 and became [racially] integrated in that year. It remained in West Germany until 1958 until it was reorganized and redesignated as the 10th Cavalry at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The 1st Squadron fought with the 4th Infantry Division in Vietnam. The 2d Squadron served as the reconnaissance unit in the 7th Infantry Division. The 3d Squadron performed reconnaissance missions for the 77th Infantry Division in the Army Reserve and, in 1977, was activated as an armor battalion in the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. The 10th Cavalry was reorganized under the United States Army Regimental

*Initially, all these black regiments had white officers and black enlisted men.



Frontier Army Museum

(1) McNair Hall, (2) Funston Hall, (3) stables, (4) riding hall, (5) Command and General Staff School, and (6) 10th Cavalry service club and athletic fields

System in June 1987 and assigned to the 194th Armored Brigade at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

From 1931 to 1940, the 1st Squadron of the 10th Cavalry served at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It performed caretaking and housekeeping duties. Its soldiers served as saddlers, painters, horseshoers, mechanics, carpenters, cooks, military police, and grooms for the horses used by officers assigned to the Command and General Staff School. They also performed duties in the houses of officers for extra pay. They cared for the grounds; taught military wives and children how to ride; and served as messengers, clerks, and warehousemen.

They were billeted in what are now called Funston Hall and McNair Hall. Their stables comprised what are now Muir Hall, Flint Hall, and Gruber Gymnasium. Their service club was located in what is now Gruber Field. They trained in the area now occupied by Normandy housing area and Patton Junior High School.

We're fortunate to have with us today four veterans of the 10th Cavalry—four Buffalo Soldiers. They will share with us some of their reminiscences of their service at Fort Leavenworth in the 1930s.

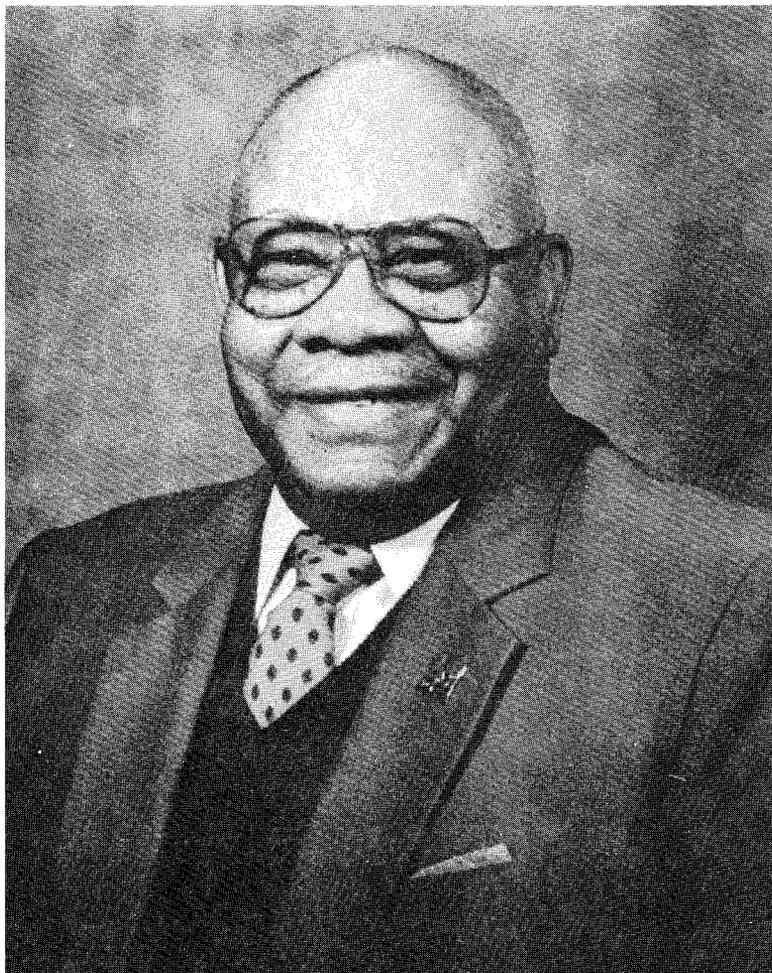
Our four guests today are—

Retired Chief Warrant Officer Harry H. Hollowell of Leavenworth, Kansas. Mr. Hollowell enlisted as a private in the 10th Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth on 25 January 1936. He served in A Troop as troop clerk, recruiting sergeant, and later as squadron sergeant major. He attended the Army Music School in 1942 and graduated as a bandleader. He served as a bandmaster both in the United States and overseas. He retired in August 1964 after more than twenty-eight years of service.



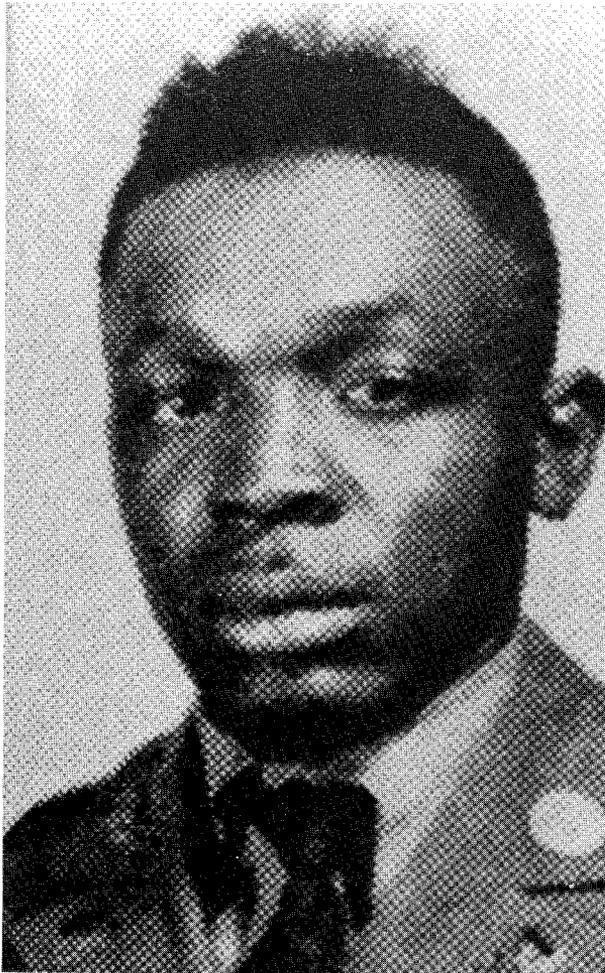
Chief Warrant Officer Harry H. Hollowell, 1958

Retired Sergeant First Class Elmer E. Robinson of Leavenworth, Kansas. Sergeant Robinson enlisted as a private in the 10th Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth on 15 May 1935. He served in A Troop as a groom in the polo stable until selected to work in the Command and General Staff School Book Department as a shipping clerk. He worked in the Book Department until December 1941 when World War II began. He retired in July 1955 after more than twenty years of service.



Elmer E. Robinson

Retired Staff Sergeant Lorn Brown of Lansing, Kansas. Sergeant Brown enlisted as a private in the 10th Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth on 14 January 1936. He served in A Troop as a groom in the polo stable and later as a remount sergeant. During World War II, Sergeant Brown served in the Pacific theater of war. He retired in August 1956 after more than twenty years' service.



The Historical and Pictorial Review: 10th Cavalry of the United States Army—Camp Funston-Fort Riley, Kansas, 1941 (hereafter referred to as 10th Cavalry Yearbook, 1941)

Staff Sergeant Lorn Brown, 1941

Mr. Julian R. Brown of Leavenworth, Kansas. Mr. Brown enlisted as a private in the 10th Cavalry in July 1936. He served as a groom and as a striker (a soldier who worked in an officer's home). Mr. Brown left the service at the end of his first enlistment in September 1939.



Julian R. Brown

Welcome to all of you gentlemen. We're very pleased to have you with us today.

Let's begin with Mr. Hollowell. Mr. Hollowell, you were a troop clerk and recruiting sergeant in the 10th Cavalry. Tell us about how the 10th was organized at Fort Leavenworth when you served there.

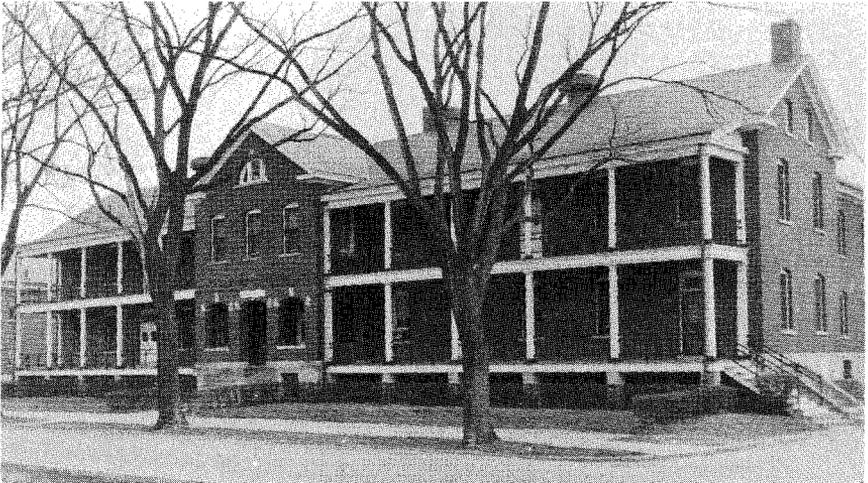
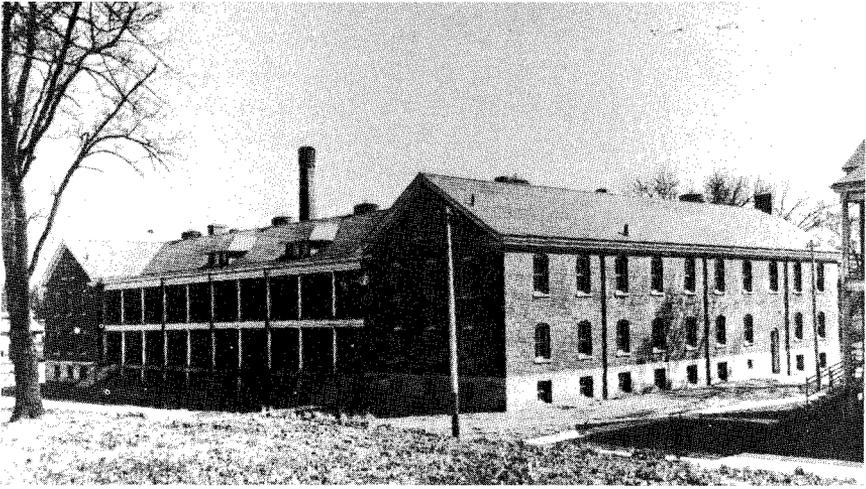
Mr. Hollowell: The regiment was organized . . . consisted of Headquarters Troop, A Troop, and B Troop. The regiment maintained itself up until 1940 at which time the regiment moved to Fort Riley [Camp Funston]. My main interest is that of making any statements that enhances the creditability of the 10th Cavalry soldiers. They performed admirably at that time, and we desire to make creditable the work that they did then and bring it up to make its importance appropriate today as I see it.

Captain Knapp: Sergeant Robinson, you have an interesting story about how you came to enlist in the 10th Cavalry.

Sergeant Robinson: Well, my father was a member of the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp, old World War I veterans, and they were stationed here at Fort Leavenworth next to the old 10th Cavalry barracks in a little place of their own there. At the time, I was working in Kansas City as a young man at Fred Harvey's [in the] Union Station. My parents had moved to Leavenworth. I decided to come up to visit them one time. While visiting them, I decided to come out and visit with my dad, my stepfather, rather, at the time.

While visiting with him, I had dinner. He took me around to the 10th Cavalry where they were serving—cafeteria style. The food was so wonderful, and we had a good dinner. Everybody was so jovial and so interesting too—so friendly. He asked me if I wanted to go around and see the barracks. I said that I wanted to see because I wasn't familiar with soldiers. I hadn't been around soldiers. In the meantime, he took me around through the barracks and, at the time, the beds were made up so they looked like stones that way. Everything was in line. The shoes by the bed were just like glass. The floors were like glass, and I was impressed with that.

I asked him, "Can anybody be a soldier?" He said, "Well, if you are accepted, if you want to be a soldier." I said, "Well, how do I go about being one?"



Frontier Army Museum photos

Funston Hall (top) and McNair Hall (bottom), 10th Cavalry headquarters and barracks

In the meantime, one of the fellows was there, and my dad asked him to open his locker—his wall locker with his clothes displayed in it. I looked in there, and the uniforms were hanging so nice, everything was right in its place, you know. I was really impressed with that. We looked at his foot locker, and it was likewise. Everything was so nice and neat. I just simply drew a mental picture of myself being in the 10th Cavalry.

I asked him, “Who do I have to see to get into the 10th Cavalry?” At that time, they had the regimental sergeant major,

Carter, I believe was his name. He [Robinson's stepfather] said, "Go and see him." He took me around to the place. I went in to talk to this man. He was a nice person, and he asked me at the time, "What sports do you play?" Well, as I said, I wanted to get into the 10th Cavalry. He said, "Do you play football?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you play baseball?" I said, "Yes, I do. I play baseball."



10th Cavalry Yearbook, 1941

Master Sergeant L. M. Carter

But I exaggerated on the football. I never played football before in my life. But anything to impress him, and he was impressed because I was a young sapling that way—all built up. I was heavy.

He said, “Well, I’m going to put you on the list.” At that time, you had to wait for somebody to die . . . or, I say, wait for a vacancy to be filled before they could call you. At the time, I think they must have had about twelve vacancies. So, he put me on this list and I waited, I think, for about . . . it must have been six months, I guess somewhere along there, before I was called. When I was called, I went in and I stayed with it until I got out, until I retired. As I said, I was just impressed with what I saw. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was good. And that’s just about all I have to say about it, you know. That’s about the way it was.

Captain Knapp: Sergeant Lorn Brown, you worked down at the polo stable. What were your duties down at the polo stables?

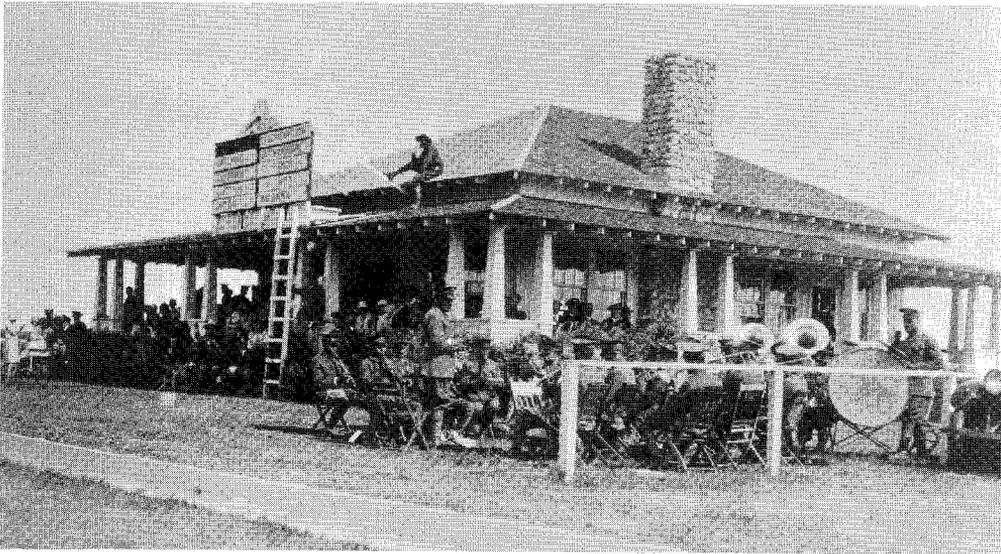
Sergeant Brown: They assigned you four polo ponies. You had to, every morning, take them out and clean each stall—get it ready so it would dry out. After you did that and got the stable cleaned out, you had to saddle up and take them out for exercise. [I’d] ride them from the stables clean out to Metropolitan [Avenue] across the fields and then back, tie them back on the line, and come back in. You’d have to take and get your currycomb and brush, rag, and clean them up, groom them, brush them down. Then, long about noon, we’d have to put them back in the stable and feed them.

Then, about two o’clock or so, if we had a game, we had to take and put the boots on them. So, we’d get the boots on them, maybe round about two. We had to be on the field about 3:30. Each horse was assigned to some officer. He had a certain mount that he rode. All they’d do is call for their mount, and whoever that mount belonged to would carry him up to where they were playing polo. We’d, maybe, get off from up there round about six o’clock. Then, we’d have to come back to the stables, dry the horses, dry them down, wipe them down, water them, put them in their stalls—just put them to bed.

Captain Knapp: How many horses did each man have to take care of?

Sergeant Brown: We had four horses to take care of.

Captain Knapp: Mr. Brown, you were a groom, but you were also a striker.



National Archives

The 9th Cavalry Band plays at a polo match between the Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley polo teams. Names on the scoreboard are Captains Wood, Davis, Truscott, Gay, Wilkinson, and Smith and Majors Swift and Brown.

Mr. Brown: Yes, but I was a groom first.

Captain Knapp: Tell us about being a groom, and tell us also about being a striker.

Mr. Brown: I was a groom. I had six horses. We kept those just for the officers to ride.

Captain Knapp: These are not the polo horses.

Mr. Brown: No, they were not polo [horses]. These were for officers to ride just on classes. They'd have their class, and you'd have to get the horses ready for them to ride. I done that for a while. Then, later on, the stable sergeant told me that he'd let me go up and be an instructor for the ladies riding class. That would give me a little more money; you know I'm going to take it.

Captain Knapp: You got paid extra for doing that.

Mr. Brown: I got paid extra for doing it—three dollars.

Captain Knapp: Three dollars a month?

Mr. Brown: Yes, that's good money. So, I done that for a while. Well, everything was nice, and then, I thought I could do a little bit better. So, I went up, put in, and got to be a striker. I went to the officer's quarters and things and cleaned and done whatever. That was fifteen dollars more.