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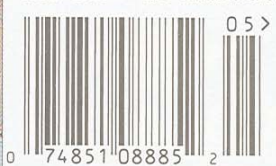
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Soldiers from the mounted unit perform their infamous cavalry charge on Fort Riley's Cavalry Parade Field during a military ceremony.

Horse-Soldier Traditions

The U.S. Cavalry is still alive at Fort Riley, Kansas.

Article by
Christie Vanover

BEFORE the days of technology, before armored tanks and precision lasers, U.S. cavalrymen rode into battle with pistols drawn astride their trusty horses. Today, the traditions and heritage of the cavalry are still alive through the Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard at Fort Riley, Kansas.

This mounted color guard, including mustangs, Thoroughbreds, Paints, Quarter Horses, and 15 active-duty soldiers, represents historic cavalry units that participated in battles

like that at Little Big Horn. They demonstrate the Army's proud cavalry tradition through ceremonies, parades, and reenactments.

"This team performs literally hundreds of shows a year on and off Fort Riley," says Lt. Col. Danny Pummill, commander, 1st Personnel Services Battalion. "They march in a lot of parades, but they're not a Hollywood unit. The unit trains wild horses and portrays cavalry soldiers in period uniforms, carrying genuine equipment."

According to 1st Sgt. (Ret.) Mark



In full cavalry gear, soldiers and horses from the Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard bear the U.S., Army, and installation colors as they lead a 2,000-soldier parade during an open house at Fort Riley.

For more information:
Fort Riley Public Affairs Office
785-239-6727

Atwood, former director/trainer of the unit, Fort Riley is the only mounted unit in the Army that trains wild mustangs. Unit members travel to Elm Creek, Neb., to adopt mustangs the Bureau of Land Management has rounded up through the western United States.

Fort Riley has 15 horses, 6 of whom are mustangs. Atwood and his riders trained five of the mustangs.

The color guard accepts donated horses who are bay geldings, 4 to 6 years in age, and around 15.2 hands. This is what cavalrymen traditionally rode.

"Each breed has a different thing that it's good at, but what we're looking for is an all-purpose horse," Atwood says. "I'd say the best would be mustangs, Thoroughbreds, and Quarter Horses because that's what we've predominantly been using in the past, and they've performed the best."

As members of this elite unit, Fort Riley soldiers have learned a lot about horses and the traditions of the U.S. Cavalry.

Pfc. Jose Baeza joined the Army to become a tanker, but after arriving at Fort Riley, he tried out for the team because of his love of horses.

"In the past, when I rode a horse I used to just jump on him and go," he says. "Mr. Atwood taught me to work on the ground with a horse to gain the horse's respect. Then, when you get on his back it's a lot easier. I respect my horse."

Like Baeza, all of the riders started out in a different military specialty. To become members of the team, soldiers try out when a slot becomes open. After making the team, they remain part of the mounted unit for 12 to 18 months before returning to their original field.

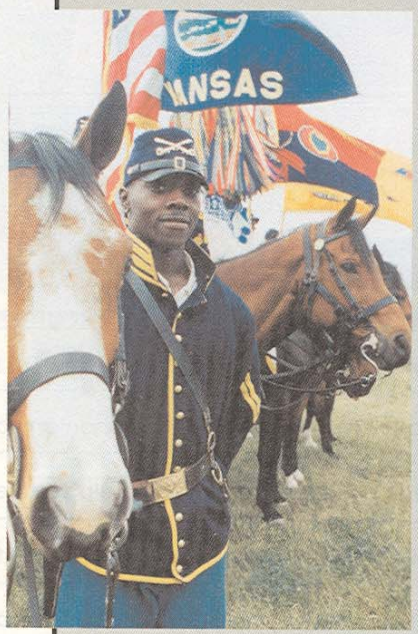
"Riding horses takes a lot of discipline," Atwood says. "Soldiers are required to stay proficient in their military occupational statuses and

be riders at the same time. They put in seven days a week, about twelve hours a day. And that's what it takes to be a cav soldier."

The color guard's busiest season is summer, when the unit has several missions every week. They travel within a 500-mile radius, but they've also been drafted by New York City's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade Committee and the events director for the Cotton Bowl. 🐾

Cavalry Gear & Garb

Members of the Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard dress like most Civil War cavalrymen did, wearing 1854 pattern jackets, kersey blue trousers, and forage caps. They carry authentic weapons, such as .52-caliber 1863 Sharp's carbines, 1858 Remington New Army revolvers, and the 1860 revised-model saber.



Cpl. Melvin Freeman stands proud by his mount, Stonewall, between demonstrations.

Their horses bear the U.S. Cavalry brand and wear tack designed to the exact specifications of the model 1859 saddle developed by Capt. George McClellan. It weighs approximately 18 pounds and is made of black bridle or harness leather, with buckles made from blued, malleable iron. The saddle has a rawhide seat, two skirts, two stirrup leathers, one girth and girth strap, a surcingle, one crupper, and saddlebags.

Fort Riley's stables were built in 1889 and are the last original cavalry training stables on the post. The cobblestone floors and stone walls provide comfortable quarters for the equine members of the color guard.

The stables, located at Fort Riley's Main Post in Bldg. 273, are open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Visitors are welcome.