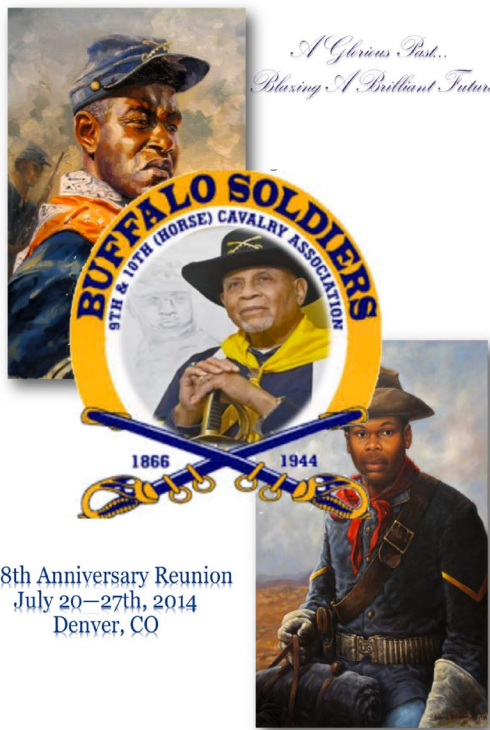


*A Glorious Past...
Blessing A Brilliant Future*



148th Anniversary Reunion
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Trooper John Nichols

Master Sgt. John Joseph Nichols served as a Buffalo Soldier during World War II. In addition to his military background, Nichols is an artist and is shown here with one of his sketches.

Adorned in the dress uniform of his day, Master Sgt. John Joseph Nichols steps into a room, passionately marching through the trials, triumphs and courage of the Buffalo Soldier. He knows firsthand of their struggles because he was one. Born in Colorado Springs, Colo., this soldier's journey began as a 17-year-old army recruit in 1942. Nichols served during World War II, carrying on the legacy of Buffalo Soldiers before him.

The Buffalo Soldier regiments were some 80 years old when Nichols joined their ranks. After basic training he served in the 10th Cavalry and shortly was sent to clerical school; then was assigned as a cadre to the 28th Cavalry, Troop "C." The cavalry had horses which were wild mustangs broken by the remount squad, while the infantry were foot soldiers. "[With] the infantry you had to learn how to drill and shoot in four different battle formations. In the cavalry, one had to learn that, plus you had to learn the mounted tactics. The cavalry had distinctive uniforms which included boots, britches, spurs, sabers, pistols, and campaign hats" explained Nichols.

"My horse knew all the commands," continued Nichols, who grew up with horses. "I loved that animal because you were taught he was your best friend. If anything happened to that horse, you carried the equipment. The horse got first attention, then your equipment, then you. My horse was beautiful."

"Even though they were highly trained and combat ready, the Buffalo Soldiers were often sent to support units that typically did not see combat", said Nichols.

"They would not send us [into battle]," he said, adding that the black units were told they were not qualified for warfare. So in 1944 he joined the 92nd Infantry and got an opportunity to participate in combat against the Germans and Italians. Nichols waved his hand, and in a low and excited tone, sang the Buffalo Soldier regimental song: "*High ho, ready to go, off to go to battle with horse and hand. High ho, ready to go, all we want is the right command. Ride, ride, giddy up, ride, ride, giddy up, and with horse and gun and shot and shell, we'll chase the enemy straight to hell. Oh, we're bound to be a good cavalry; we're taking our horse on clover. High ho, ready to go.*"

Still, there were a couple of high points in Nichols' Buffalo Soldier career, including none other than Joe Louis, the heavyweight champion boxer, and Jackie Robinson, the first black professional baseball player to play with the Brooklyn Dodgers. "Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson were both Buffalo Soldiers," exclaimed Nichols. Cpl. Joe Louis Barrow was Nichols' squad leader, and Cpl. Jackie Robinson served with Nichols.

"Joe Louis came in wearing gabardines [dress trousers]. Enlisted men could not think about wearing gabardines, but Joe Louis did," recalled Nichols with a broad smile. "That is what ticks me off. Not only are most unaware Robinson or Louis were Buffalo Soldiers, many don't know the Buffalo Soldiers ever existed," said Nichols. Consequently, the Buffalo Soldier became known as the forgotten soldier. Nichols has made it a priority to educate everyone about the life of the Buffalo Soldier, including serving as the featured speaker for a program by the Chesterfield Historical Society later this week. While the Buffalo Soldiers were African American, their officers remained mostly white. "They would not assign a black officer to be over us in the field. The black officers we had were either medical or chaplains." Besides that, "white soldiers did not have to salute black officers, and I deeply resented it," he said. Race limited educational opportunities, too. "You could go to horse school, but you could not go to veterinarian school. They had the whites assigned to do that," said Nichols. "We trained doubly hard to prove ourselves. It was considered a disgrace to go to the dispensary for medical aid unless you were bleeding. In fact, I think we had two troopers that died because they did not go to the hospital." After the war, Nichols continued his career in the Army and took various assignments, including one with the 6487th Heavy Engineer Construction Battalion in Italy. "When the cavalry troops came to attention it sounded like a clap of thunder because you had to slap those spurs together - bam! - and you better not be late," said Nichols. Nichols retired from the military in 1964 and returned to Europe where he remained for 20 years. He and his wife currently live in Chester, Virginia.