



Evans, 1893, retired
as a captain. He
had this photo taken at
Kaufmann's Department Store.

Patricia Finkel collection.

AN *Officer* AND A *Troubled Gentleman*

A PITTSBURGHER COMMANDS THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS

By Patricia Finkel with Paul Roth and Kelly Anderson



Above, Emblem of the Tenth Regiment,
United States Cavalry. Courtesy National Archives.

Opposite, a 40 star flag c. 1889.

From collection of Peter J. Keim MD.

In 1891, Pittsburgh native and First Lieutenant George Evans was pleading for his career. Accused of drunkenness during a military review, he was tried in a court martial and found guilty, stripped of his commission, and discharged from the army. Calling on friends and fellow soldiers, he appealed his case to President Benjamin Harrison himself and requested that the Commander in Chief mitigate the military's ruling. It was perhaps as intense a moment in his career as his battles with hostile Apache and Kickapoo Indians.

When my dad, Robert Lane, died and I began going through his personal belongings, there were two boxes marked George Evans, my dad's great-uncle. The boxes contained material about Evans' four years at West Point as well as his 26 years of service with the U.S. Army. There was little of Evans' own writing; rather, the material documented a career that included repeated trouble of some sort, from demerits at the academy to that court martial.

At the end of the Civil War, peacekeeping in the territories became a major mission of the army. In 1872, newly commissioned

Evans as a West Point cadet.
Patricia Finkel collection.



“I THINK I HAVE
DONE MY PART IN
THE HARDSHIPS OF
A CAVALRY OFFICER
ON FRONTIER
DUTY. THIS IS
MY FIRST COURT
MARTIAL SINCE
I JOINED
THE REGIMENT.”

~ GEORGE EVANS, 1891¹

Evans became an officer of the 10th Cavalry, which (along with the 9th Cavalry and several infantry regiments) was composed of black troops led by white officers. Their lives were anything but idyllic, as many a Western movie would have modern audiences believe. These men, black and white, faced a multitude of struggles. Evans' career and his court martial illustrate the very human nature of life on the frontier, battling hostile Indians, the elements, and sometimes his own demons.

George Evans was born in 1848 to Charles and Mary Evans on the South Side of Pittsburgh (then known as Birmingham), an

area filled with iron works and glass factories. He was the oldest of four children. The Evans' house at No. 40 Tenth Street remained the family home during the 26 years in which Evans served in the army and, when on leave from his duties in the West, he returned there to visit.²

After graduating from Central High School in June 1868, Evans headed to the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, where he became known for his spirited nature and a certain disregard for the rules. During his four years at the academy, he received repeated demerits for chewing

tobacco and spitting on the floor, whistling in quarters at inspection, long hair at inspection, and using “profane exclamations.”³ Despite these and many other demerits, as well as a court martial for being absent overnight without permission, Evans graduated with his class in 1872, ranked 49th out of 57 cadets.⁴

After graduating, Evans received orders from the War Department to report to Ft. Sill, Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), where he began an adventurous military career with the 10th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers in October 1872. When Evans arrived at Ft. Sill, he found a post already showing signs of

the malaise that affected many men on the army frontier. From the 10th Cavalry's arrival several years earlier, the fort's officers laid a foundation lacking in discipline.⁵ While there were occasional skirmishes with local Indians, much of frontier duty was monotonous. Drinking and arguing often filled the troops' time, as did gossip and illicit liaisons with army wives stationed with their husbands. Some officers were also resentful of having to command black troops. Unfortunately, Evans left nothing written on the subject of commanding Negro troops.⁶

In 1864, late in the Civil War, Congress authorized the formation of four infantry regiments and two cavalry regiments whose enlisted personnel were African Americans;

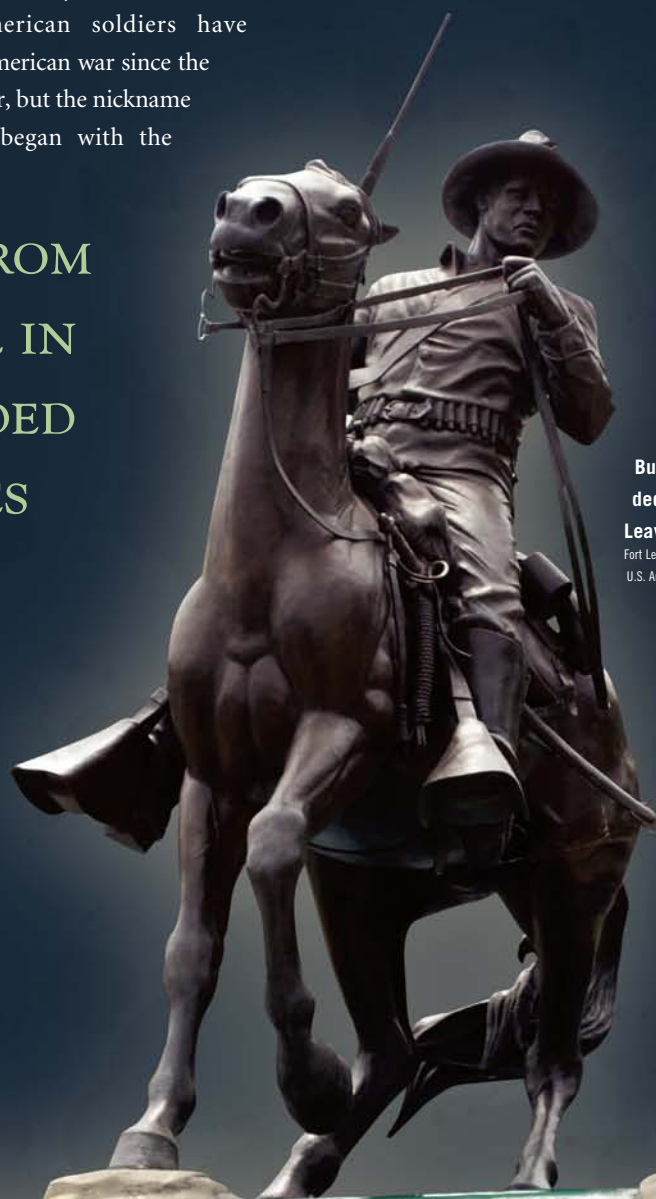
these were known as United States Colored Troops. After the war, Congress recognized these units and authorized the formation of two regiments of black cavalry, with the designations of 9th and 10th Cavalry, and four regiments of black infantry, designated the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry Regiments.⁷ The majority of these troops were newly freed slaves, Northern freedmen, or veterans of all-black regiments who served during the Civil War. This policy of segregated units existed until 1948, when President Truman ended segregation in the military.⁸

African American soldiers have fought in every American war since the Revolutionary War, but the nickname buffalo soldiers began with the

Cheyenne warriors in 1867, who called the members of the 10th cavalry Wild Buffalo, out of respect for their fierce fighting ability. Eventually Buffalo Soldiers became a generic term for all African American soldiers.⁹

Though Buffalo Soldiers were often commended for their skills and bravery, their units were sometimes given substandard equipment, and their officers frequently disliked being assigned to their regiments. Officers in black units had higher dismissal rates than those serving with white troops,

AFTER GRADUATING FROM
CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL IN
JUNE 1868, EVANS HEADED
TO THE UNITED STATES
MILITARY ACADEMY AT
WEST POINT, NEW YORK,
WHERE HE BECAME
KNOWN FOR HIS
SPIRITED NATURE AND
A CERTAIN DISREGARD
FOR THE RULES.



Buffalo Soldier Monument
dedicated 1991 at Fort
Leavenworth, Kansas.
Fort Leavenworth Public Affairs Office,
U.S. Army.



Evans' West Point graduation class, 1872. USMA Archives, West Point, Patricia Finkel collection.

indicating a propensity towards disciplinary issues.¹⁰ Transfer rates of white officers out of black units also implies that they felt their service with the Buffalo Soldiers was merely an unpleasant stepping stone in their military career.¹¹ Those who remained in such regiments were sometimes disparaged by their fellow officers—one such man wrote in 1875 that the 10th Cavalry was “particularly blessed with incompetent commanders.”¹²

This was the atmosphere surrounding Ft. Sill early in 1872, when a green second lieutenant fresh from West Point arrived.

In the latter part of the 19th century, Indian tribes were engaged in protecting their tribal lands from the encroachment

of westward-moving settlers, while the U.S. Army was responsible for making sure that the tribes were confined to their specific reservations. This policy of confinement, for the most part, did not work, as the tribes resented the loss of their nomadic lifestyle and the forced placement of their people on second-rate land.¹³ Such resentment often led to hostilities between local militia and Indian war bands.¹⁴ Unconfined Indians continued to attack settlers, and the war in the West intensified, leading to the establishment of a vast army command area.

The army’s “Military Division of the Missouri” encompassed a massive territory that now includes Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma,

Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. It was one of the biggest theaters of war ever commanded by a single American general. That man was Philip Sheridan, of Civil War fame. Part of his mission was to keep tribes on government-sanctioned land, and battle them when they strayed from those reservations and into conflicts with settlers.¹⁵

With the 10th Cavalry, Lt. George Evans played an important part in the defense of settlers against continued Indian attacks. For 26 years, he was active at a number of posts within the Division of the Missouri, including Ft. Sill, Indian Territory; Ft. Richardson, Ft.

Griffin, and Ft. San Felipe, all in Texas; Ft. Thomas and Ft. Grant, both in Arizona; Ft. Bayard, New Mexico; Ft. Keogh, Montana; and Ft. Buford, North Dakota.¹⁶ His service at these various forts included raids and skirmishes with surrounding Indians, patrols in inclement weather, and building projects meant to tame the land.

In spring of 1876, Lipan and Kickapoo warriors raided Texas settlements and forts, running off thousands of horses and cattle.¹⁷ In May, they taunted the Buffalo Soldiers with quick, offensive thrusts in virtual gunshot of a few army forts. Efforts to overtake these raiders proved futile, for they always had a head start in the inevitable dash for the Rio Grande River on the U.S.-Mexico border.

In July, their commanding officer, a Col. Shafter, ordered Lt. Evans to head south from Ft. Griffin. Lt. John Bullis' company joined Evans' company along with a party of Seminole scouts to cross the Rio Grande into the vicinity

of Saragossa, Mexico, where the Lipan and Kickapoo were known to be staying.¹⁸

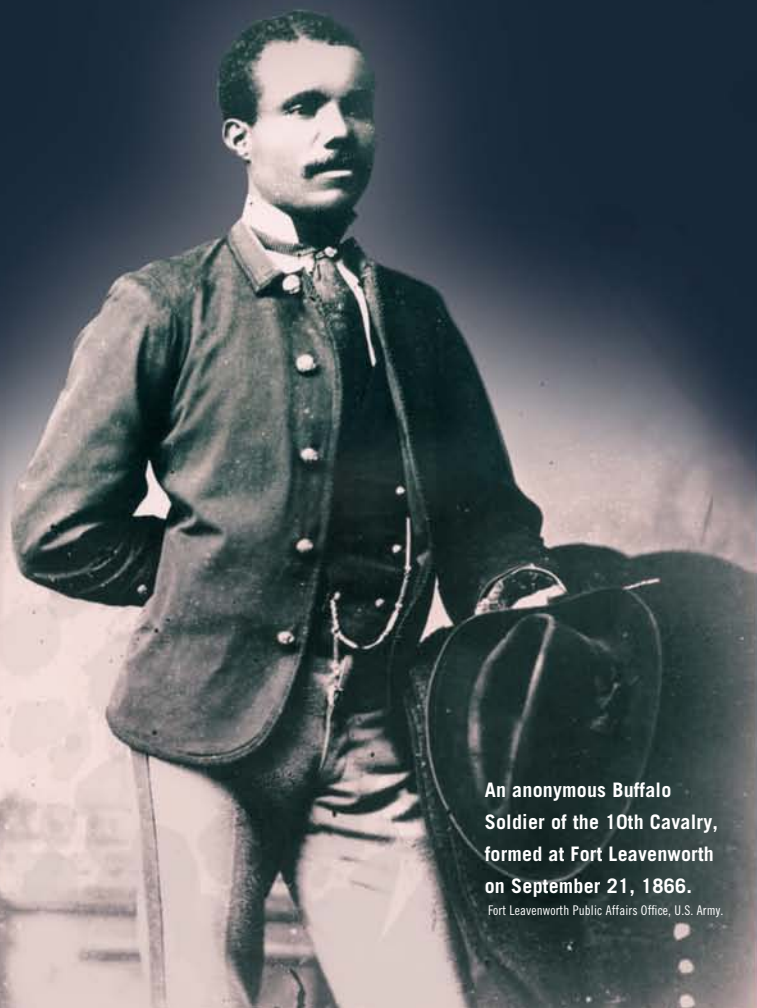
Shafter's column pushed southwest for five days until he called his troops to a halt, fearing that a Mexican force might cut off their return to the river. Shafter proposed that he encamp while Evans, with 20 men, and Bullis, with the scouts, march toward Saragossa. In just 25 hours, this small force covered 110 miles and located an Indian village of 23 lodges. At dawn on July 30, the troops assaulted the village and, after the first volley, began a savage hand-to-hand fight. In a matter of minutes, the Indians fled. According to Evans, "we completely routed them and put them to flight. We killed in all about 10 [I]ndians and captured two women and two children and 116 head of horses and mules and burned all the Indian village. We then returned to the Camp of the day before and marched that day a distance of about 55 miles."¹⁹

After the troops and scouts reunited with Shafter, the column marched back to the Rio Grande and crossed into Texas with their retrieved horses and captured Indians. Evans received a citation for this exploit.²⁰ Of his troops, Evans wrote: "My men did well and I was pleased with their conduct."²¹

Among other major missions in which Evans and the 10th took part was the Geronimo Campaign of 1885-86. Geronimo and his Chiricahua Apaches, after raiding settlers' ranches in Arizona Territory, were pursued by the 10th Cavalry over 200 miles into Mexico. Pursuit missions of this sort eventually led to Geronimo's surrender and the end of the Apache Wars.²²

During Evans' time with the 10th Cavalry's Company B, he and his troops were involved in many other battles. These include engagements with the Apaches in the Pinto Mountains, Mexico (1876), Sierra Cannel, Mexico (1877), Tinaja de las Palmas,

ALCOHOL ABUSE
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COURTS-MARTIAL
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AT THIS PERIOD OF TIME,
SO EVANS WAS NO
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GENERAL TREND.



An anonymous Buffalo
Soldier of the 10th Cavalry,
formed at Fort Leavenworth
on September 21, 1866.

Fort Leavenworth Public Affairs Office, U.S. Army.

Evans as a captain.

USMA Archives, West Point, Patricia Finkel collection.



EVANS, WHO
NEVER MARRIED,
RELOCATED TO
PITTSBURGH'S
OAKLAND
NEIGHBORHOOD,
WHERE HE LIVED
WITH HIS YOUNGER
BROTHER ROBERT
AND HIS FAMILY ON
OPHELIA STREET,
UNTIL HIS DEATH
IN 1905.

Texas (1880), and Rattlesnake Springs, Texas (1880), as well as a battle with the Comanche in Ojo Caliente, Texas (1880).²³

Patrols were an important but often brutal aspect of army life in the West. Dealing with the elements during reconnaissance missions left many soldiers in poor health, and Evans was no exception; he wrote,

While out on one of these occasions I remember to have awakened in the morning after a heavy rain during the night, and found myself wet to the skin up to the waist, my blankets having, with capillary action, absorbed the

water from the ground, as I lay on two logs close together.²⁴

Such exposure to the elements truly wore on the men, and Evans would later attribute his rheumatism to patrols like the one above. Like many other career horsemen, he also struggled with “piles,” or hemorrhoids. The only treatments available for any type of illness were those dispensed by the post physician, though those were often as painful as the ailment itself. After a particularly bad episode, Evans wrote, “Major Carter the Post Surgeon offered to operate [sic] on me, but I

declined to submit to the operation, as I have a great horror of all kinds of anaesthetics [sic], and a very great fear of the surgeons [sic] knife, and in my opinion it would be a dangerous operation.”²⁵

It was not until Evans was nearly retired that he overcame his fears and saw a civilian surgeon while on a recruiting trip in Pittsburgh. Using cocaine as an anesthetic, the doctor operated on Evans and effectively treated his complaint.²⁶

Work to improve living conditions at the forts was perhaps more common to Evans than

raids and patrols. His engineering degree from West Point was an important asset to the non-combat side of army life, especially during his time at Ft. Grant in 1889. Lt. Col. E.P. Pearson, the commanding officer of the fort, expressed anxiety about the water supply for the troops and their animals in the arid Arizona climate. Evans was put in charge of laying pipe to a new water source and re-cementing the reservoir. Pearson was pleased with Evans and the “efficient way he performed the duty.”²⁷

Only two years after laying the water pipe with which his lieutenant colonel was so pleased, Evans was fighting a dishonorable discharge from the army. The court martial stemmed from a military review gone drastically awry.

The incident began when Evans and several other officers met at the officer’s club for a game of billiards before they were to report for review with their platoons. As Evans recalled in a statement on the incident, he suddenly realized the game had gone too long, so he dashed to the stables to mount his horse. He was not quick enough to the parade ground, however, and his platoon was already marching without him. Uniform disheveled and obviously late, chaos ensued when he failed to give his troops the proper orders to turn during their march, throwing off other units as well. Even his horse failed to cooperate, bucking its rider and refusing to follow commands. Evans’ superiors promptly arrested him when the review was over, charging him with drunkenness and conduct unbecoming an officer.²⁸

The much-surprised lieutenant vehemently denied the charges, but at trial he “declined to be sworn as a witness” and instead submitted the written statement to explain his actions. He countered that he was not drunk but merely the victim of several unfortunate circumstances. When it was alleged that alcohol consumed at the club had caused Evans to neglect his duty and impair

his sense of time, he explained, “I had not forgotten about the duty before me.... The time occupied in the [billiards] game was longer than I expected and that was the cause of the lateness in leaving the club room.”²⁹

The prosecution argued that he was out of proper uniform, “but wore a forage cap, and shoes instead of boots, and was without spurs.” One leg of his trousers was slipped or dragged up “almost to the knee.”³⁰ He said it was his haste to mount his horse, not drunkenness, that made his appearance disheveled: “Not being in field uniform and not having time to go to my quarters and change my uniform, I hurriedly put on my gloves and sabre and went to the troop corral.... The trotting of the horse, which is a rough gait for him, caused my trousers to work up my leg.”³¹

As for his failure to give his platoon the proper commands during the review, Evans argued that the officer above him

was required to pass down commands but failed to do so. Finally, he explained that the horse was an upstart, “given to bucking and trying to get into the rank” from being a cavalry horse. Evans said he “knew but little of his ugly habits.”³²

The most serious charge against Evans was that he was intoxicated to the point of drunkenness. The testimony of Col. J.K. Mizner, the post commander who “received” the field review on the day in question,



Evans' saddle blanket has been passed down to the author. Patricia Finkel collection, photo by Paul Roth.

mirrored others: that he was “so much under the influence of liquor as to be stupid and not able to exercise his ordinary intelligence.” Evans admitted that he had been drinking at the club, yet argued that it had not been to the point of rendering him drunk:

Two ... witnesses say I was under the influence of liquor, but they do not use the word drunk at any time, and from the positive manner of their testimony it is plainly evident that they purposely intended the court to see that they did not wish the court to construe their meaning into other words or to substitute any others for them.³⁴

He also had the testimony of a soldier in the stable prior to the review and a superior officer directly after his arrest who gave credence to the claim that he was not intoxicated.³⁵ If, he argued, he was sober before and minutes after the review, how could he have been drunk for the review itself? Testimonies against him, he said, were “the result of self reasoning after the whole thing was over.”³⁶

Alcohol abuse and subsequent courts-martial were unfortunately common in the army at this period of time, so Evans was no exception to the general trend. While occasional skirmishes with Indians and patrol duty kept the men somewhat occupied, there were frequently long periods of time with nothing to do but contemplate the wilderness. Some men deserted; others found comfort in the bottle.³⁷ Those who did, along with other troublemakers, often found themselves arraigned on charges before their superior officers. Informal courts-martial could result in creative punishments, from fines and cleaning duties, to offenders being hanged by their thumbs (in the more extreme cases).³⁸ More formal cases followed military rules in sentencing, which in the case of drunkenness required the guilty party to be dismissed

from service.³⁹

Luckily for Evans, his fellow officers believed in him enough to appeal his case to the War Department. A letter from Acting Judge Advocate General G. Norman Lieber to the Secretary of War found the guilty verdict “fully warranted by the testimony” but in light of Evans’ record of service and testimony as to his value as an officer, advised that the sentence “be commuted to suspension of rank and command for one year on half pay.”⁴⁰ Though he had been found guilty and

discharged, the appeal worked and President Benjamin Harrison eased the sentence to demotion and service for one year at half-pay.⁴¹ Though Evans’ friends in the service attempted to reduce his sentence further, President Harrison refused: “I have already mitigated the sentence and saved this officer



from dismissal. I am glad to know that he has shown a manly disposition to recover himself from a bad habit, but I cannot further interfere with this sentence.”⁴²

While Evans was glad to keep his commission, he bristled at the president’s inference:

To be candid about the matter, I think some one put me up as a bad case with the President, as in his remarks on the petition he says he is glad to know that I have shown a manly disposition to recover myself from a bad habit, etc. How he happens to know anything of my bad habits I leave you to infer.⁴³

Indeed, most of Evans’ reviews were positive. His Efficiency Report later that year was like his others, giving him good marks for habits plus attendance to duty, general conduct, condition and discipline of men under his immediate control, care and attention to their welfare, and capacity for command. Col. Mizner, as reviewing officer, called him “able, zealous and fairly efficient ...


has had a good field record. A man of generous traits and good impulses. Moral and social standing somewhat impaired from frontier associations but a fairly good officer.” Other years his work was even rated as excellent.⁴⁴

Evans’ last assignment in the West was at Ft. Assinniboine, Montana, in 1896. Promoted to the rank of captain through recommendations from friends and superiors, Evans spent his last two years in the army as a recruiting officer, first in Louisville, Kentucky, then in back in his hometown of Pittsburgh.⁴⁵ Finally, after years of patrol and hard riding, Evans’ body had had enough, and he filed a request for discharge.⁴⁶ Army doctors concurred that Evans’ health was too far deteriorated for life on a frontier post. In response to his retirement application, one wrote, “He is certainly not physically fit for field service and I think never will be.”⁴⁷ Evans retired as a captain in 1898.⁴⁸


Evans, who never married, relocated to Pittsburgh’s Oakland neighborhood, where he lived with his younger brother Robert

and his family on Ophelia Street, until his death in 1905. His obituary gave notice to his adventures in the West:

Captain George H. Evans, U.S. Army, retired, aged 57, died in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, on February 13, 1905, of paralysis of the brain. He was a retired Army Officer and had served with distinction in Mexico, in an engagement with the Indians.”⁴⁹

Evans was survived by his three brothers, Professor Edward Evans, Frank Evans, and Robert L. Evans. A squad of regulars from the 9th Infantry, stationed at Allegheny Arsenal, served as an escort for the full military funeral. Capt. Evans was buried in Allegheny Cemetery, Lawrenceville. A simple marker relays only the years he was born and died, far away from the forts and battlefields of the west. 

Pat Finkel and Paul Roth are Heinz History Center volunteers. Pat Finkel is the great-great niece of Capt. George Evans.



A REVIEWING
OFFICER CALLED
EVANS A MAN OF
GENEROUS TRAITS AND
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HIS MORAL AND SOCIAL
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A 35 star swallow tail guidon carried by Buffalo Soldiers of the U.S. Cavalry in Texas during the American Indian Wars.

From collection of Peter J. Keim MD.

¹ George Evans, written statement ("The Court Martial and letter to the President," Lane Papers), 1891; Drunkenness and consequent court martial was a common problem in frontier military life. Bruce J. Dinges, "Scandal in the Tenth Cavalry: A Fort Sill Case History, 1874," *Arizona and the West*, no. 2 (Summer 1986), 125-126.

² Various letters (Lane Papers).

³ "A Select Listing of Delinquencies for George H. Evans, USMA Class of 1872," 1984 (West Point Archives).

⁴ Court Martial Findings and Sentence (Department of Army Archives); "Cadets Arranged in Order of Merit in their Respective Classes, as Determined at the Annual Examination in June, 1872," 18 (West Point Archives).

⁵ Bruce J. Dinges, "Scandal in the Tenth Cavalry: A Fort Sill Case History, 1874," *Arizona and the West* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1986), 125-126.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁷ Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 248.

⁸ National Park Service, *Buffalo Soldiers*, Presidio of San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area Exhibit Panel PDF (December 2007).

⁹ Buffalo Soldiers National Museum website, www.buffalosoldiersmuseum.com, accessed December 2010.

¹⁰ Erwin N. Thompson, "The Negro Soldier and His Officers," in *Black Military Experience in the American West*, ed. John M. Carroll (New York: Liverlight, 1971), 260.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 263.

¹³ Millett and Maslowski, 252.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁶ "Statement of the Military Service of George H. Evans," War Department Adjutant General's Office, February 12, 1898 (Department of Army Archives).

¹⁷ William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 149.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ George Evans, letter c. 1897-98 ("Evans pleads his case," Lane Papers).

²⁰ Major Edward L. N. Glass, *The History of the Tenth Cavalry, 1866-1921* (Fort Collins, Colo.: Old Army Press, 1972; reprint of Tucson: Acme Printing, 1921), 22.

²¹ George Evans, letter c. 1897-98 ("Evans pleads his case," Lane Papers).

²² Ron Field and Alexander Bielabowski, *Buffalo Soldiers: American Troops in the U.S. Forces, 1866-1945* (New York: Osprey Publishing Co., 2008), 72.

²³ Glass, 96.

²⁴ George Evans, letter c. 1897-98 ("Evans pleads his case," Lane Papers).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ E. P. Pearson, letter to War Department, July 7, 1891 (Lane Papers).

²⁸ George Evans, statement ("The Court Martial and letter to the President," Lane Papers), 1891.

²⁹ Letter from Acting Judge Advocate General G. Norman Lieber to the Secretary of War, July 22, 1891, which recounts the trial and Evans' responses to the charges (Lane Papers).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ George Evans, statement ("The Court Martial and letter to the President," Lane Papers), 1891.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Letter from Acting Judge Advocate General G. Norman Lieber to the Secretary of War (Lane Papers).

³⁴ George Evans, statement ("The Court Martial and letter to the President," Lane Papers), 1891.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Raymond A. Mentzer, Jr., "Camp Baker/Fort Logan Microcosm of the Frontier Military Experience," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1977), 40.

³⁸ Edward M. Coffman, "Army Life on the Frontier 1865-1898," *Military Affairs* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1956), 199.

³⁹ George Evans, statement ("The Court Martial and letter to the President," Lane Papers), 1891.

⁴⁰ Letter from Acting Judge Advocate General G. Norman Lieber to the Secretary of War (Lane Papers).

⁴¹ War Department Judge Advocate General's Office letter, December 7, 1891 (Department of Army Archives).

⁴² President Benjamin Harrison, letter to the War Department, December 16, 1898 (Department of Army Archives).

⁴³ George Evans, letter to Senator M.S. Quay, February 19, 1892 ("Court Martial and letter to President," Lane Papers).

⁴⁴ Efficiency Report of 1st Lt. George H. Evans, December 10, 1891. Summary of reports in 1890, 1894, and 1895 all range from good to very good to excellent in the same categories.

⁴⁵ Various letters (Lane Papers).

⁴⁶ Capt. George Evans, letter to War Department Adjutant General, June 17, 1891 (Lane/Finkel Family Archives); Capt. George Evans letter, date unknown (Lane Papers).

⁴⁷ Major Carter, letter, January 14, 1898 ("Request for retirement," Lane Papers).

⁴⁸ Although Evans wrote at times that he was frustrated by his low rank and lack of promotion, slow promotions were common at this time. James P. Tate, *The American Military on the Frontier* (Honolulu, Hawaii, University Press of the Pacific, 1978, reprinted 2002), 91-92.

⁴⁹ West Point Annual Reunion Booklet, June 13, 1905, 99 (Lane Papers).



The rowhouses where Evans lived at 40 (now 42)

10th Street remain on Pittsburgh's South Side. Brian Butko