



THE LOST HISTORY



The Long Journey of the 25th Infantry Bicycle Brigade



By Lisa Loving
Of *The Skanner News*

Of all the remarkable stories told about the U.S. Army's all-Black cavalries known as the Buffalo Soldiers, the most remarkable is surely that of the 25th Infantry Brigade Bicycle Corps.

Formed in the late 19th century to test a new military theory that bikes could be an invaluable tool

in war, 19 soldiers rode cross-country from Fort Missoula in Montana to St. Louis, Mo., at the end of the 19th century.

"They were a specialized unit who were able to test the bicycle to see if they could be used in lieu of horses," says Pferron Doss, a former Black Studies professor at the University of Missoula.

"The bike never really took off as a military tool, but the energy that took off from the bike corps

caught attention worldwide."

Improvements in bicycle construction in the 1890s prompted European and Australian armies to start putting their troops on bikes.

By 1896, the U.S. Army jumped on the bandwagon and tapped the Buffalo Soldiers to set up its bicycle corps in Missoula. Like all Black regiments, it was commanded by a White officer, Lt. James Moss.

The 25th infantry, known as the

"Iron Riders," first tested its one-speed Spalding bikes, which were manufactured in Chicago, by going through Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.


Each soldier carried a 10-pound blanket roll with a tent and supplies stuffed into a carrier on the handlebars; a 10-pound rifle with ammunition, and food in hard cases attached to the frame – all in all the bikes weighed some 60 pounds.

"Their roads were wagon trails, game trails and a whole lot of walking along the railroad tracks," Doss says. "And the weather was terrible."

The following year they beefed up the corps with more soldiers and set off on an epic 40-day, 1902 mile bike trip.

See **SOLDIERS** on page 7

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