

FIRST DRAFT

Buffalo Soldier made Junction home

Buffalo Soldier James E. Harris helped halt illegal homesteading in Oklahoma, contained Ute Indians in Utah, survived freezing winters in Wyoming and Kansas and kept shoes on the Army's horses and mules.

And he spent the last four decades of his life in Grand Junction, working primarily as a railroad porter and a janitor in public buildings.

Harris married Eva Baylor in Grand Junction in 1900. The couple had no children, but they led a quiet and apparently comfortable life in Grand Junction. Not all troopers who served in all-black cavalry regiments in the post-Civil War Army — those nicknamed "Buffalo Soldiers" — were so fortunate.

Sgt. Henry Johnson was a hero of the battle of Milk Creek in northwestern Colorado in 1879, for which he received the Medal of Honor. The battle with Ute Indians occurred simultaneously with the killings of Nathan Meeker and his male employees at the White River Indian Agency about 20 miles from Milk Creek.

After the Buffalo Soldiers of Company D, Ninth Cavalry rode to the assistance of besieged white soldiers at Milk Creek, Johnson repeatedly displayed his courage.

The citation for his Medal of Honor said Johnson "Voluntarily left fortified shelter and under heavy fire at close range made the rounds of the pits to instruct guards; fought his way to the creek and back to bring water to the wounded."

Johnson remained in the Army until 1898, but he suffered frequent setbacks. He spent time in the stockade and was busted in rank three times. He died in 1904 in Washington, D.C., at a government asylum for the mentally ill.

Other Buffalo Soldiers retired near where they served. For instance, Caleb Benson, who served at Milk Creek along with Sgt. Johnson, retired near Fort Robinson in Nebraska after a long military career.

Grand Junction's James Harris had not yet joined the Army when the Battle of Milk Creek occurred.

Born to slave parents in Missouri in 1860, Harris enlisted in the Ninth Cavalry in 1882.

His first major conflict, as he recalled during a 1938 interview with The Daily Sentinel's Merle M. McClintock, was in 1884 to prevent Sooners from homesteading in Indian Territory in what's now Oklahoma before homesteading was allowed.

The Ninth Cavalry rounded up about 300 Sooners and escorted them out of the territory without violence, Harris said.

In 1886, Harris was part of



Members of the Ninth Cavalry regiment of Buffalo Soldiers are shown circa 1889 in formation at Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

the first group of soldiers — white infantry and two companies of the Ninth Cavalry — assigned to establish a new military post on the Ute Indian reservation in northeastern Utah.

The creation of Fort Duchesne angered the Utes on the reservation, especially when they learned African-American troops would be among the soldiers posted there.

But if Harris experienced any of that anger from the Utes, he didn't mention it to McClintock, and the Utes eventually accepted the Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Duchesne.

For Harris, the initial time at Fort Duchesne was marked by limited rations and inadequate supplies.

"We had no shoes for our mounts or the mules that pulled the wagons," he recalled. "General Hatch came over from Fort McKinney and ordered everybody that had any kind of horseshoes to bring them to the quartermaster's blacksmith shop."

Hatch also ordered all blacksmiths and farriers — those who worked the forges to make metal items, and those who put shoes on horses and mules — to begin working immediately.

"I was both a farrier and a blacksmith, so I was kept pretty busy," Harris said. "We managed to fit out our mules, and finally our supplies came."

After leaving the Army in 1887, Harris visited Grand Junction in 1888. But he lived in Glenwood Springs, Aspen and Denver before moving to Grand Junction in 1900.

He and Eva apparently farmed near Whitewater for a time. Property records show Harris homesteaded 52 acres near the Gunnison River in 1910.

Later that year, he granted an easement across his land to a man named Henry Lopas so that Lopas could install a ferry across the Gunnison River to his land.

In 1912, Harris received official approval for an irriga-



This stone marks James E. Harris' grave in Orchard Mesa Cemetery.

tion ditch, called the J.E. Harris Ditch, that took a small amount of water from the Gunnison River.

He and Eva also bought and sold other properties in the city of Grand Junction.

Additionally, they were likely involved with the African-American community here. When Harris died, one of his pallbearers was John Dickey, husband of Josephine Dickey, who was long involved with the Handy Chapel in Grand Junction.

McClintock wrote that Harris showed her his Army discharge papers when she visited him at his home on Pitkin Avenue in 1938. He also displayed a photo of himself in his military uniform, complete with horseshoe insignias showing he was a farrier.

Eva Harris showed Harris' old military sword to McClintock, while James Harris dismissed it as unimportant.

Harris said he worked as a blacksmith in Grand Junction until he was forced to abandon the trade because unions began taking it over and he wasn't a union member.

He then worked as a porter for the railroad and at various public buildings in Grand Junction.

He became "well-known to many in this community when he worked at the Mesa County Courthouse for seven years," McClintock wrote.

Harris died in 1943. He is buried at the Orchard Mesa Cemetery.

Although he is the only Buffalo Soldier known to have lived in Grand Junction, there are stories that troops of Buffalo Soldiers worked near White-water and on the Battlements above Plateau Valley shortly after most Utes were removed from Colorado.

Information from *The Daily Sentinel*, April 24, 1938; the *Museums of Western Colorado*; *Orchard Mesa Cemetery, Grand Junction*; "African American Recipients of the Medal of Honor," by Charles W. Hanna; "Buffalo Soldiers: Guardians of the Uintah Frontier 1886-1901," by Ronald G. Coleman, *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Fall 1979; "One Soldier's Service: Caleb Benson in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, 1875-1908," by Thomas R. Buecker, *Nebraska History*, Summer 1993.

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IN BRIEF

SENTINEL STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Study underway on recreation center

Grand Junction residents can expect to be asked about their vision for a possible community recreation center in the coming months.

People for Local Activities and Community Enrichment (PLACE), a grassroots organization, and the city of Grand Junction have partnered to pursue a feasibility study for the project. The \$50,000 study is funded by grants.

"It's an opportunity for Grand Junction to tell us what they want in a community recreation center," said Marty McDaneld, a member of PLACE.

Ballard King is the consulting firm, and Sink Combs Dethlefs is the architecture company conducting the study.

The seven-month process should provide insight into several potential locations, a market analysis and opportunities for residents to weigh in with their ideas about a facility.

"This would put prices on different things, and also get a feel of what kind of costs people are comfortable with," McDaneld said.

The study should outline the scope of a facility and determine how to place it on an upcoming ballot for voter approval.

McDaneld said PLACE members are excited to be working with the city on the study and taking the next step.

"Teamwork will produce the best results," she said.

650,000 trees at risk in reservoir expansion

BOULDER — More than half a million trees in Colorado could disappear if the final federal permit for Denver Water's proposed reservoir expansion is approved.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is expected to rule early next year on what would be the biggest public works project in Boulder County history, exceeding the original construction of the Gross Reservoir Dam, which was completed in 1954.

Denver Water's Federal Energy Regulatory Commission application states all trees and their associated debris will have to be removed during the expansion, which is expected to be completed by 2025. Denver Water spokeswoman Stacy Chesney says the agency has estimated "up to 650,000 trees will need to be removed in the area surrounding Gross Reservoir."

2 drivers sought in pedestrian fatality

GREELEY — Law enforcement officers in northeastern Colorado are looking for the drivers of two vehicles that are believed to have struck a 21-year-old man on a Weld County road early Saturday.

The Colorado State Patrol believes the man was struck and killed by a 1999 or 2000 purple Honda Accord. The patrol says that car's driver's side mirror was likely damaged.

Authorities also believe a second vehicle — a gray VW Golf GTI — also struck the man near the town of Evans. Both vehicles left the scene. Someone reported seeing a body in the road at 4:45 a.m. Saturday. The victim's name has not been released.

Missionary in Samoa fatally hit by vehicle

SALT LAKE CITY — Authorities say a Mormon missionary serving in Samoa is dead after being struck by a vehicle.

A spokesman for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Salt Lake City says 21-year-old Aaron Ahkau Matapa Patiole was walking with a companion in Upolu when he was fatally struck Sunday. Patiole was a native of Australia and had been serving in the Samoa Apia Mission since December 2016.

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Car crash survivor credits seat belt

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — A man who survived a serious car accident thanks to a reminder note from his wife to wear his seat belt is making stops at schools alongside her to share their story as a reminder of why seat belts are important.

Before his wife, Alyson, placed the photo of herself and the couple's 5-year-old in his

car, Michael Simkins hardly wore his seat belt.

The photo, surrounded by doodled hearts, came with a message asking Michael Simkins to buckle up for their sake.

Although his car was wrecked Sept. 28 in a large, multicar pile-up on Interstate 15, a Utah Highway Patrol trooper managed to recover the photo and returned it to Michael Simkins while he was in the hospital.

The trooper told Alyson Simkins that had he not been wearing the seat belt, her husband might have gone through the windshield.

Thinking of what could have happened if he hadn't followed his wife's advice that day brought tears to his eyes.

"Ever since then I have always worn my seat belt because I knew it was important to my family. I almost died that day,"

Michael Simkins said.

The couple shared their experience with a group of fifth-graders at James E. Moss Elementary School as part of a preview for the "Click It or Ticket" campaign by the Utah Highway Patrol. After hearing Simkins' story, Alyson Simkins took photos of the students.

Each wrote a message for a loved one on their images, similar to what she wrote to her husband.

BLOTTER

COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Suspect sought in theft

Law enforcement is seeking help with a case involving a theft from Walmart on Sept. 17.

A woman is suspected of taking an American Classic Airsoft gun from the store that afternoon and leaving the store without paying for it.

The suspect is described as a white female in her 30s, wearing a black hoodie and blue jeans who is 5 feet 7 inches tall.

The woman was last seen in a silver Toyota four-door sedan. Surveillance photos are posted at www.241stop.com.

Anyone with information leading to an arrest can earn up to \$1,000 cash reward and the reporter can remain anonymous. Anyone with information is asked to call 241-7867.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

■ Tasha Foushi, 38, was arrested on Friday night in the 500 block of Cone Court and

booked into the Mesa County Jail for three outstanding warrants and alleged possession of a schedule I/II controlled substance.

Jail records show the possible charges pending against Foushi include aggravated robbery, first-degree aggravated motor vehicle theft of more than \$20,000, felony menacing, false reporting, criminal impersonation, harassment and violent crime using a weapon.

The Grand Junction Police Department did not release reports Sunday.

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