

Brownsville Affair

On this day August 13, 1906, the Brownsville affair of 1906 started. It all started when the Buffalo Soldiers in the first battalion of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry were transferred from Nebraska to Brownsville to replace the all-white unit that provided security from attacks from Mexican forces. There were clashes between soldiers and white civilians from day one of the black unit arriving. There were many accounts of mistreatment by the civilians, from shoving soldiers into a river to local merchants refusing to sell food or items to the unit, one could tell the tense hatred would boil over.

When a local merchant's wife alleged that a soldier attacked and tried to rape her, all hell broke loose. Later that night 10 minutes of gunshots could be heard being exchanged between two unknown parties in the town, when the shooting was over a police officer was injured and a saloon barman was dead. The next morning it didn't take much time for the townspeople to place blame on the soldiers. Many "witnesses" say they saw the Buffalo Soldiers creeping around the town in the dead of night with guns, despite the soldiers, for their own safety, were given a curfew to be on base at night since the alleged attack on the merchant's wife.

In the morning of the 14th the white officer in charge of the Twenty-Fifth inspected the entire battalion's weapons, and reported that no weapon had discharged ammunition. The townspeople and the mayor later that day found bullet casings around the town which was enough evidence to accuse the soldiers of the crime, and surmised that the soldiers and the officer entered a "conspiracy of silence."

President Theodore Roosevelt stepped in and dishonorably discharged all 167 soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry without any hearing or trial, a very controversial move considering that

not only had he overstepped his power, but he won the presidency with a strong black vote. In retaliation, black people all over America voted vehemently against his successor, William Taft, but were unsuccessful. It wasn't until 1972 after the publication of John D. Weaver's "The Brownsville Raid," which argued that the soldiers were innocent, caused the U.S Army to open an investigation. The Army found all the men innocent and reversed the dishonorable discharge, by then all but two of the soldiers in the Twenty-Fifth had already passed away.