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## Buffalo Soldiers

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By [TONY SCOTT](#)

**Sharp account of the post-Civil War black cavalry troops known as the Buffalo Soldiers bursts with energy, tension and drive under Charles Haid's vigorous direction. Assembled from denizens of cities' alleys and byways and from Deep South Negroes only recently slaves, the Buffalo Soldiers were fierce fighters trained and ready for anything. Teleplay by Frank Military and Susan Rhinehart is rich in fictional characters and storytelling about the American West.**

Telefilm spares no one's bad actions. The Apaches torture whites they can catch; whites kill off Native Americans in their desperate search for Indian war chief Victorio (Harrison Lowe); white troops shun their black comrades, the fearless Buffalo Soldiers. The evidence is pretty graphic.

With the exception of the four-part "The Buffalo Soldiers" on PBS in 1970 and a 1979 NBC pilot, "The Buffalo Soldiers," with Stan Shaw (and including Carl Lumbly, of the current project), TV accounts of the Buffalo Soldiers have been inexplicably and unconscionably scarce. Military and Rhinehart have written a direct, active vidpic in the traditional Western form, and it works.

Serving under ex-slave Sgt. Wyatt (Danny Glover) in the New Mexico Territory, the tight-knit Buffalo troops arrest Texas Rangers and their leader, Capt. Draper (Robert Knott), who will all quietly be set free when the incident fades. Politics is the name of the war games, and bigotry points in every direction.

A good example of conflict of interest: Lone scout Horse (Lumbly), half-Indian, half-black, enigmatic and wise, scouts for the white forces that enslaved his forebears and are now torturing and killing off his fellow Indians.

Headquartered back at New Mexico's Fort Craig, Wyatt and his H Company, a part of the 10th Cavalry, report ultimately to anti-black Gen. Pike (Tom Bower) and to more sympathetic white Col. Grierson (Bob Gunton), who in real life built the regiment and

courageously saw to the interests of the black cavalry.

Touches of Indian mysticism crop up. Indian prophet-visionary Nana (Chesley Wilson) has been tortured and threatened with his captured daughter's death if he won't talk about Victorio's destination; just as necessity breeds necessity, cruelty breeds cruelty.

The indomitable Wyatt sets out with his men after ascertaining the wily Victorio's at Rattlesnake Springs. There are plenty of well-done battle scenes and dramatic deaths before there's much progress against the Indi-ans, who melt into the rock-bound landscape and, waiting motionless among the bushes, rise up in unison when it's time.

At the Springs, Wyatt sees the unsuspecting Apache women and children charmingly bathing in the cool pool of spring water, but resists an order to fire. Instead, he and his men meet with the elusive, mighty Victorio. Faced with a dreadful decision, Wyatt orders the only thing that he can live with in good conscience.

Haid's intelligent direction ably reflects the passions of the various sides. Michael Baugh's design for the production is stunning, with the weather-worn boulders and desert scenery of Arizona's Cochise County supplying handsome backgrounds for the action.

**William Wages' clean, revelatory photography captures the essence of the remarkable, dedicated Buffalo men. An-drew Doerfer's editing creates good pace and moods, while Joel McNeely's compelling score gives the whole work solidity.**

Glover's commanding perf as Wyatt stands like a beacon. He displays steely strength, moments of sadness and ten-derness, a reflective personality and a man of lifelong discipline. His is a touching, confident study of a complex man restraining himself.

Lumbly's Horse suggests a strong spiritual center, and Bower's Gen. Pike is a well-delineated study. Timothy Bus-field plays what there is of the role of an anti-black officer assigned to handle the black troops, while Gunton's con-cerned, profoundly affected Col. Grierson is handled with finesse.

Telefilm, with its strong accumulative effect, may displease advocates of political correctness. But the story's too close to truths about the Indian Wars in the Southwest to be denied. Thanks to the scripters' insightful writing and to Glover's fine perf, Sgt. Wyatt conveys moral and physical courage.

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