

University of North Carolina at Asheville

Wheels of Modernity: The Twenty-Fifth Bicycle Corps

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As the sun began its ascent into the summer sky on July 23, 1897, a group of bedraggled men mounted on bicycles slowly made their way into the township of Oregon, Missouri. The residents of the town expected the group but were still caught off guard by the men they saw. A journalist from the *Holt County Sentinel* wrote that “A regular army soldier is rarely ever seen in our midst, and to see a colored man as such is a still greater novelty- and to see them mounted wheels, with gun strapped over back is an unusually strange sight.”<sup>1</sup> The group of men belonged to the Twenty-Fifth Bicycle Corps, an all black outfit that was on the verge of completing a 1,900 mile trip from Fort Missoula, Montana, to St. Louis, Missouri. The long distance ride was concocted by Lieutenant James A. Moss, a white officer who had recently graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point, as a means to test the bicycle’s efficiency and reliability as a new form of transportation for the United States Army and as a possible replacement for horse mounted soldiers.

As the nineteenth century came to a close the U.S. Army faced a number of changes as did the black soldiers who were a part of it. Change, when viewed through the lens of modernity meant technological advances for the military and a chance of increased freedom for African-American soldiers. The bicycle was viewed as the vehicle with which the army could move itself forward. Across the United States, particularly in feminist circles, the bicycle was viewed as just the tool to move mankind into the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> General Nelson A. Miles, the individual behind the movement for a military bicycle corps, saw the need for the army to employ modern technology and lamented in a letter to the Secretary of War that “Our Army is

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, *Holt County Sentinel*, July 23, 1897. Alexandra V. Koelle, “Pedaling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-Fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps and the Roads of American Expansion,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (2010) 41, 321.

<sup>2</sup> Frances E. Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel* (Chicago: Women’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1895), 39.

far behind other Nations now in availing itself of the advantages of the bicycle...’’<sup>3</sup> Others in the army, such as Sergeant Hugh J. Barron, had grand visions for the future of the bicycle and declared at a New York City bicycle convention that “The bicycle in the next war between civilized powers will demonstrate that a new feature has been added to the already complex array that constitutes the modern army.”<sup>4</sup> The bicycle was a symbol of modernity for the army and was seen by the men of the Twenty-Fifth as a potential way to gain equality among their fellow soldiers.

While there is little written on the exploits of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps there is an abundance of information on black soldiers in the West. The typical view of black soldiers stationed in the West by contemporary historians focuses primarily on three subjects: their relationships with white superiors, how they came to be in the West in the first place and the individual accomplishments and failures of the men. There is a general lack of firsthand accounts of black soldier’s lives that were stationed in the West. Some of the only sources where their thoughts can be heard come from court martial records and reports written by their white counterparts. The opposite can be said for white members of the military, especially those that held officer rankings. With an abundance of diaries and written records of behavior it is easy for one to understand the atmosphere in which they operated and lived. This is important because scholars have defined the black attitude of soldiers mainly from reports written by white superiors, and at best, from the negative attributes of a court martial.

In *Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry: 1867-1898*, Charles Kenner focuses on the relationships between black and white soldiers. The actions of the white

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<sup>3</sup> Miles, Nelson to Secretary of War, May 1, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial, “The Future of the Bicycle in the Army, and the Coming Convention,” October 6, 1895, *New York Times*, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9A07E3D8123BEE33A25752C1A96F9C94679ED7CF> (accessed June 20, 2011).

commanding officers varied tremendously as did the men under their authority. Kenner centers his book on individual officers and how their treatment of black soldiers differed from officers in the East.<sup>5</sup> Bernard C. Nalty's *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* covers the broad history of African-Americans and their inclusion in the armed forces.<sup>6</sup> Focusing more on individual units is Quintard Taylor's *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*. The author's review the events that led to the development of all black units in the west, and in more general terms, how the move westward was facilitated by black soldiers. Within this work it is difficult to pick out the voices of black soldiers as much of the commentary is given by white commanders.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be the case with many of the secondary sources on black soldiers in the west.

Of the few sources that directly pertain to the Twenty-Fifth Bicycle Corps, an article by Bruce Glasrud and Michael Searles, *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers Anthology*, covers the controversy of getting the unit off the ground in the first place and the rides that followed.<sup>8</sup> George Sorensen is credited with writing the only book on the subject, *Iron Riders*, that tells the story of how the unit came to be and details the exploits of the men, the terrain and people they encountered while pedaling.<sup>9</sup> Alexandra V. Koelle wrote about the impact of the Twenty-fifth on Westward expansion and the racial component of Lieutenant Moss's writing in *Pedalling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-Fifth Bicycle Corps and the Roads of*

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<sup>5</sup> Charles L. Kenner, *Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry: 1867-1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: The Freed Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles, *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers Anthology* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> George N. Sorensen, *Iron Riders* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 2000).

*American Expansion*.<sup>10</sup> The sources directly related to the Twenty-fifth, with the exception of Koelle's piece, only cover the actual events and not the symbolism of the bicycle.

The relations between black and white soldiers is important, but so too is the other purpose of my thesis, the bicycle. David V. Herlihy's *Bicycle: The History*, examines the origins of the machine and its introduction to mainstream America in the late nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Military cycling plays a large role in the history of bicycling as well. Jim Fitzpatrick's *The Bicycle in Wartime* covers the tests and trials of bicycle frames and the numerous units around the globe that were using the bicycle for military purposes.<sup>12</sup> The social impact of the bicycle is also an important component in the history of the machine, and is described in detail in Robert Smith's *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America*.<sup>13</sup> Within the same timeframe of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps was Major Taylor, the first African-American national bicycle champion. Andrew Ritchie describes Taylor's life and the role that racism played in his many winning titles in *Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer*.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century bicycling had become a cultural phenomenon across many parts of the globe and was seen as a symbol of personal freedom and modernity. On both the east coast and western frontier of the U.S. cycling quickly took over as the main form of personal transportation and became increasingly affordable for all members of society. For the members of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps, many of whom were already avid cyclists, the bicycle was not seen as a new and impressive piece of technology, although their government

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<sup>10</sup> Alexandra V. Koelle, "Pedalling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-Fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps and the Roads of American Expansion" *Western Historical Quarterly* (2010), 4.

<sup>11</sup> David Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Jim Fitzpatrick, *The Bicycle in Wartime* (Dulles: Brassey Inc., 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Ritchie, *Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988).

issued bicycles were at the time, but as a tool that gave them a greater sense of mobility and one that allowed them to be on an even playing field with their white counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

Bicycles, or contraptions similar to what we now call bicycles, were in existence well before the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps was sanctioned. From the beginning the bicycle was always seen as a way to supplant animal power. A British journalist in 1819 wrote that “The proudest triumph of mechanics will be the completion of a machine or carriage for travelling, without horses or other animals to drag it.”<sup>16</sup> Ironically, seventy-seven years later Lieutenant James A. Moss was still trying to prove the same thing to the United States Army.

The advent of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps was only one part in a long chain of experiments that eventually led to black individuals serving in the armed forces. In July of 1866 Congress accepted the fact that the Union’s victory was partly due to the two hundred thousand black soldiers who fought on its side. Of the ten cavalry units currently in operation in 1866, two were to become all black and four of the forty-five infantry units were to do the same.<sup>17</sup> The majority of all-black units were stationed in the West, or locales that tended to be far from predominantly white areas. This was a government policy enacted by the War Department who “rationalized that decision by arguing that their presence in eastern states and particularly in the South would prompt racial violence.”<sup>18</sup> The relationship between black soldiers and their white commanding officers was ever changing on the Western front. Major Guy V. Henry, an officer with the ninth cavalry unit stationed at Fort Sill during the 1880’s, was one of the few officers who outspokenly protested for more black units. Guy was fond of his men, calling them

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<sup>15</sup> Smith, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Herlihy, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kenner, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, 165.

“cheerful, willing and obedient...as honest as others.”<sup>19</sup> The major was so upbeat about his men that he wrote numerous anonymous letters to the *Army and Navy Journal* praising their behavior and valor while on patrol, all as an effort to persuade those on the East Coast that black soldiers were the answer to the army’s manpower needs. Even so, Guy was as prone as any other white officer to fall in to the stereotypes of the day. He asserted “If properly led, they will fight well: without such, they have not the staying power of the white man... as a result of slavery,...they are like children. They do not feel the importance of responsibility for property, and in this respect are neglectful, causing loss to the government.”<sup>20</sup>

The use of bicycles for military purposes in the United States started well before the Twenty-fifth although no units were officially sanctioned by the U.S. Army. A number of bicycle detachments were scattered throughout the country, comprised of local militiamen who used their own wheels for a number of different tasks. 1891 saw the first use of a bicycling unit within the U.S. as the Second Company of the District of Columbia National Guard organized a bicycle squad as did detachments in Illinois and Colorado.<sup>21</sup> Of the more notable uses of bicycle detachments in action, or attempted action, was the D.C. unit’s involvement with Jacob Coxey and his “army” of a few hundred unemployed individuals who demanded that Congress provide them with relief. The unit was activated and pedaled to the armory, yet were never given direct orders as to what they were supposed to do with their bicycles.<sup>22</sup> Although there were a number of bicycle units mobilized in the late nineteenth century their use was infrequent and sporadic.

There are no recorded incidents of militiamen on bicycles being involved in direct action confrontations; instead they were mainly used as couriers and scouts. In the summer of 1895

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<sup>19</sup> Kenner, 121.

<sup>20</sup> Kenner, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, 228-230.

two young soldiers from Madison Barracks on Lake Ontario delivered a message to Governors Island, New York. The soldiers crossed 397 miles in eighty-eight hours. Upon handing over the message Private Arthur Weed remounted his bicycle and set back towards Madison Barracks. He finished the return trip in ninety-six hours for a total ride of 794 miles in just over seven and a half days. Upon hearing of the event General Frederick Maurice conceded that there was “no cavalry in the world which can touch that.”<sup>23</sup> Considering the weight of bicycles at the end of the nineteenth century and the woolen clothing worn by soldiers, the feats of endurance shown by bicycling soldiers across the U.S. were very likely a factor in pushing the U.S. Army to back a bicycle corps, and certainly enough to convince those higher in the chain of command that bicycles were far more useful than horses at covering long distances in short periods of time.

General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the Department of Missouri stationed in Chicago, Illinois, began turning the spokes of the Army bureaucracy towards a bicycle corps in the fall of 1891. Miles, himself an avid cyclist, attended a six-day bicycle race at Madison Square Garden and announced his intentions of exploring how the bicycle could fit into the Army’s future plans. Miles told an engaged crowd that it was time for the Army to replace horses and move towards a more modern transportation method: the bicycle. He stated that a cavalryman must “stop to water, feed and rest his horse; sickness may attack him, or he may become restive at streams and cause disaster...” In addition, a horse has a “proneness to neighing, thus discovering the courier’s whereabouts to the enemy...”<sup>24</sup> Miles quickly switched gears and noted that “the bicycle is less tiresome to the rider. Its pedal motion rests the knees. It

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<sup>23</sup> Smith, 229-230.

<sup>24</sup> Editorial, “Bicycles for the Army,” 21 October, 1891, *New York Times*, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/html?res=9403E1D8153EE333A25756C0A9679C94679ED7CF&scp=1&sq=bicycles+for+the+army&st=p> (accessed June 18, 2011).



requires neither water, feed, nor rest...It is small and it is noiseless.”<sup>25</sup> Miles mentioned that he could use the platform of the six-day race as a way in which he might test his own soldiers to see if they were capable of the endurance required to cover such long distances. One of the key players in the race was Major Taylor, a black man who was soon to be labeled the “fastest bicycle rider on earth.”<sup>26</sup> It would be hard to dismiss the influence that Taylor had on General Miles as he was on the verge of commissioning an all black bicycle corps.

In an effort to make a point to the Army Central Command about the efficiency of bicycles, General Miles organized a 975 mile messenger relay from Chicago to New York City in the spring of 1892. In front of a crowd of thousands, the riders embarked upon their journey from the Pullman building in downtown Chicago after General Miles yelled to the men “Carry this dispatch to General Howard at New York through rain or shine. It is important, Go!”<sup>27</sup> Riding in pairs, the men raced towards New York City for distances of up to thirty miles cheered along by crowds in each town they passed. Eighty-one hours later the silk pouch containing the message was delivered to General Howard.<sup>28</sup> The speed of the journey cemented General Miles’ view that the days of travel by horse for the U.S. Army were coming to a close, a point he made clear during a speech given at a meeting of National Guard delegates in Denver in 1894. He and others in attendance came to the conclusion that as many as fifty-thousand cyclist soldiers could be raised by the end of the nineteenth century. Miles envisioned a dedicated force of men that was “practically invincible.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Bicycles for the Army.”

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Ritchie, *Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 111.

<sup>27</sup> “Bicycles for the Army.”

<sup>28</sup> “Bicycles for the Army.”

<sup>29</sup> Smith, 229.

Within a few months of Miles's speech, James A. Moss graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and put the U. S. Army on its way towards having its first bicycle corps. James A. Moss took the oath of office on July 26, 1894 in his hometown, Lafayette, Louisiana after completing his service at West Point.<sup>30</sup> Moss graduated at the bottom of his class and was therefore given the last choice of assignment which happened to be Fort Missoula, Montana and to an all black unit. Within weeks of returning home, Moss was on his way to Fort Missoula, a desolate outpost that was home to the all black Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment.<sup>31</sup> Moss arrived in Missoula in the fall of 1894 and performed basic duties over his first year at the station. During the winter of 1895 Moss came into contact with a book written by a fellow soldier, Lieutenant William T. May, who was a part of the first attempted bicycle corps, called *Cyclist's Drill Regulations of the United States Army*. The book gave practical advice on how to command a bicycle regiment of gear laden soldiers. After reading the book, Moss claimed to have come up with the idea to form the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps.<sup>32</sup> Within the same year the *Daily Missoulan* ran a report about the fort and noted that "Like in Missoula, half of the people at the fort are on bicycles and a person without a wheel is out of the times as it were."<sup>33</sup> The bicycle had established itself as an effective mode of personal transportation for soldiers, but not yet for the army.

It is clear that both Miles and Colonel A. S. Burt, commander of Fort Missoula, Montana, advocated pushing the Army into a more modernized state, and both men saw the bicycle as the

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<sup>30</sup> Moss, James A., "Oath of Office Certificate," July 26, 1894, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

<sup>31</sup> George N. Sorensen, *Iron Riders* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 2000), 12.

<sup>32</sup> Moss, James A., *Military Cycling in the Rocky Mountains* (New York: Spalding Athletic Library, American Sports Publishing Co., 1897), 12, [http://books.google.com/books?id=e3MZAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA6&dq=james+a+moss&hl=en&ei=2YOHTtCYEISXtwe7o6Uv&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=e3MZAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA6&dq=james+a+moss&hl=en&ei=2YOHTtCYEISXtwe7o6Uv&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 21 June, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> *The Daily Missoulan*, April 16, 1894, found in Glasrud and Searles, 244.

tool to do so. Fortunately for Moss the man at the top of his chain of command in 1896 was General Miles, who by that point was one of the highest ranking generals in the Army. Burt was also particularly fond of bicycles and encouraged Moss to use what resources were available within the compound. The lieutenant put together a proposal that stated his objective and reasoning on why the Army needed a bicycle unit. By April of 1896 Moss requested that he be sent to Washington, D.C. to speak directly with the Commanding General of the Army “about matters pertaining to Military Cycling...”<sup>34</sup> There is no correspondence from General Miles after Moss wrote the letter, but it is obvious that his project was approved as his next report was a detailed journal of his experimental trip to Lake McDonald.

Moss chose eight soldiers for his initial foray into the wilderness: Sergeant Dalbert P. Green, Corporal John G. Williams, Musician William W. Brown, and Privates Frank L. Johnson, William Proctor, William Haynes, John Findley and Elwood Forman.<sup>35</sup> Moss admitted from the start that all of the men who would partake in the expedition to Lake McDonald were “good ordinary riders, excepting Pvt. Findley who is quite an expert cyclist and a good cyclist mechanic. His technical knowledge of bicycles was very valuable to us.”<sup>36</sup> Of all the primary sources related to Moss, this is one of the few compliments that he paid any of his men, on or off the bicycle.

Lieutenant Moss and the eight men of the bicycle corps left Fort Missoula on August 6, 1896 at 6:05 a.m. and headed east towards Lake McDonald, sixty-three miles away. Each man, the lieutenant included, carried a rather large amount of food, battle gear and extra parts, with the average bicycle weighing well over eighty pounds, not including rifles, ammunition or the

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<sup>34</sup> Moss, James A. to General Samuel Breck, April 22, 1896, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>35</sup> Moss, James A, *Lake McDonald Report*, August 10, 1896, File Number 46408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>36</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

rucksack that contained all of their personal clothing and toiletries. Moss kept detailed accounts of the men's personal weights throughout the trip, often weighing them multiple times in an effort to ease a struggling man's load or to make sure that everyone was taking in enough food. The majority of the food stuffs that were consumed on the trip were of the dried and salted variety, which, given the environment they were in and the amount of salt they lost through pedaling each day was a wise, although not intentional choice. By the end of the first day the military cyclists had covered fifty-one miles in a little less than twelve hours.<sup>37</sup>

The bicycle, as a vehicle of modernity, was starting to pry its way into the far west. Although the men travelled through remote areas, they still encountered a great number of homesteaders in between towns. It must have been quite the spectacle to see two lines of black men on bicycles, carrying weapons and enough gear to make their two wheeled vehicles look like pack animals. As Moss retired to his tent after the first day of riding, he wrote "We attracted a great deal of attention all along the route. Horses and cows ran from us and dogs ran after us, while the inhabitants stopped their work and gazed at us in astonishment."<sup>38</sup> It can be assumed, due to the geographic location and the lack of well built roads, that the majority of the individuals the Twenty-fifth crossed on their journey had only horses with which to travel. This is not to say that they had never seen a bicycle before, but it must have looked like the future was changing before their very eyes.

The second day of the expedition proved to be equally challenging as road conditions worsened. Parts repeatedly broke on all points of the bicycles as the cycles they used were not made specifically for off road use. Moss was prepared though and had spares for just about every moving part. Within the first three miles of leaving camp a seat spring broke but was

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<sup>37</sup> Moss, "Lake McDonald."

<sup>38</sup> Moss, "Lake McDonald."

quickly repaired. By noon the men had been riding on a “rough, stony and little travelled road”<sup>39</sup> and had already patched five tire punctures. The riding was laborious and fraught with mechanical issues, often when the weather was at its worst and as the men approached their physical limits. Nearing the end of the second day a heavy rain began to create unfavorable riding conditions and the soldiers had no choice but to push their eighty pound machines uphill for two miles. Reaching the apex of the hill the men remounted and made considerable ground before reaching a section of “hammock mud.”<sup>40</sup> The mud was so thick that it completely stopped their wheels. They were forced to stop for thirty minutes and help one another clean and lubricate the wheels before they could get them moving again. Moss began to see that the bicycle had its limitations, as did the human body. He lamented that “By this time we were drenched to the skin, our wheels were covered with mud and our shoes filled with water.”<sup>41</sup> They finally reached Lake McDonald late in the afternoon on August 8.<sup>42</sup>

Early the next morning the men repacked their bicycles and did an about face, heading back towards Fort Missoula. Heavy rain still fell when the men reached a swollen river that was only a minor stream the previous day. Moss consulted the drill book written by W. T. May and decided that “In nearly 3 feet of swift water, every wheel should be carried across by two soldiers.” The drill book suggested that the “wheel was rested on a strong stick, either end of which was placed on the shoulder of a soldier, one being on either side of the wheel, the soldiers steadying the wheels with their hands.”<sup>43</sup> The men were completely exhausted by the time they reached Fort Missoula. Moss was well aware of the suffering that had taken place and wrote “Had the devil himself conspired against us we would have had but little more to contend

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<sup>39</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

<sup>40</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

<sup>41</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

<sup>42</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

<sup>43</sup> May, 24.

with.”<sup>44</sup> As the last bicycle crossed through the gates of the Fort on August 9, Moss calculated that the corps had ridden 126 miles in twenty-four hours of actual travel time, with the whole trip taking three days.<sup>45</sup> The bicycle was well suited to long distance travel, but Moss realized that the machine needed a number of tweaks if he was going to push for future expeditions and longer cross country travel, something he would be unable to do before his next expedition began in less than one week.

Lieutenant Moss had already received permission from his commander, Colonel A. S. Burt, to proceed with a second trip to Yellowstone National Park and quickly began preparing. Moss planned to leave August 15, but first had a group of tired men and broken equipment to contend with. He realized the limitations of the bicycle, but with so little time to find alternate wheels Moss had his men repair what was broken and reconfigure weight loads to make movement more efficient, as the cycles would be roughly ten pounds heavier on this trip. By the morning of August 15 the soldiers faced west and readied to depart Fort Missoula for what was to be an 800 mile round trip. Before they even made it through the town of Missoula Lieutenant Moss had already punctured both of his tires and broke his seat spring.<sup>46</sup>

As the first day drew to a close, the corps had covered forty-two miles under considerably windy conditions and retired to their tents early. They expected heat the next day, so the cooks were up by 4:15 a.m. preparing breakfast. The men mounted their bicycles a few hours later and began pedaling towards a series of looming hills. At the base of the first climb Musician Brown began to complain of cramps and was forced off his bicycle as his stomach began to violently churn. After an hour of waiting and watching Brown’s body spasm with convulsions, Moss

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<sup>44</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

<sup>45</sup> Moss, “Lake McDonald.”

<sup>46</sup> Moss, James A., Yellowstone Trip Report, August 15, 1896, File Number 46408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

made the decision to let Brown rest and send him ahead of the group via train. The corps slowly made their way to New Chicago where Moss gave Brown six dollars for fare, board and food. Moss instructed Brown to go to the next major town and wait for the corps. If Brown felt that he was still too ill upon reaching his destination he was to take the next train back to Fort Missoula and recuperate.<sup>47</sup> As Moss was from the south and was forced to go to Fort Missoula, it could be assumed that he had a negative view of black soldiers, which is why his reaction to the situation was interesting. The fact that Moss gave Brown a choice speaks to the fact that black soldiers, at least those under Moss, were no longer viewed with contempt and were given the ability to make their own decisions.

As the corps drew nearer to Yellowstone National Park they approached Rocky Canyon and fought their way through boulder filled roads stopping to fix flat tires every few hours. In the late afternoon, Proctor and Haynes' wheels had had enough and stopped working all together. The wheels had become so lopsided that riding on them was impossible. Coupled with dual flats and a center axle that was warped the men had to walk the last thirty miles to Yellowstone, pushing their eighty pound bicycles up and down hills. Lieutenant Moss left the men with one dollar and enough food stuffs for two days of foot travel. He instructed them to walk fifteen miles that evening and then resume their pushing in the morning. The rest of the men found their ordeal hilarious and joked, as Moss reported, "de coyotes are going ter eat you up ter night!"<sup>48</sup> The men had other intentions though. As Moss and the rest of the corps slept through the night Proctor and Haynes moved quickly and passed their fellow soldiers. They stopped just short of the barn their teammates slept in and asked the owner of Yankee Jim's, a ranch near the park, not

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<sup>47</sup> Moss, "Yellowstone Trip Report."

<sup>48</sup> Moss, "Yellowstone Trip Report."

to say anything to the rest of the Twenty-fifth as they wanted to reach Yellowstone first and surprise Lieutenant Moss.<sup>49</sup>

After a long night's sleep in the barn that Moss had commandeered the men gathered their belongings and set off for the park entrance. Moss was dumbfounded by a pair of bicycle tracks that were headed in the same direction. He thought that "some energetic 'cit' bicyclists had been along very early that morning."<sup>50</sup> As they approached the final town before Yellowstone Moss was astonished by what he saw: "Lo and behold! The first persons to greet us were Haynes and Proctor..."<sup>51</sup> The interaction between Moss and two of his subordinates highlights the somewhat casual relationship the men shared. Moss seemed to be far removed from the rigid conformity of the military, as his men were able to pull off a joke on their commander and Moss did not react in a negative manner. This is not to say that Moss looked fondly upon the men, but that the constraints of the black and white relationship were starting to become undone in the military setting.

The corps spent a few days taking in the sights of Yellowstone and encountered a number of tourists with whom they had their pictures taken. Moss found that the soldiers were "delighted with the trip," and were "treated royally everywhere..."<sup>52</sup> They were able to watch the eruption of Old Faithful and walk upon the limestone terraces, and even saw a bear riding a bicycle. As the men took a break in Yellowstone he wrote "The faith colored soldiers have in their officers was well illustrated by an incident that happened...A member of the corps upon whose face the map of Africa is most unquestionably stamped, was lazily sitting against a tree... A tourist... asked him, 'Where do you expect to go to-day?' To which he answered, 'De lawd

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<sup>49</sup> Moss, "Yellowstone Trip Report."

<sup>50</sup> Moss, "Yellowstone Trip Report."

<sup>51</sup> Moss, "Yellowstone Trip Report."

<sup>52</sup> Moss, "Yellowstone Trip Report."



only knows, we're follering de lutenant!’<sup>53</sup> Although this view of black soldiers was typical for the timeframe Moss still fell prey to the stereotypical view, even as his men showed him their diligence and trustworthiness. The way in which he records his men's speech gives one the impression that he viewed them as lesser persons than himself. The viewpoint was one that slowed the progress and modernization of the army, and would take decades to shake.

By the morning of September 1, the men were back on their bicycles and headed to Fort Missoula. The monotony of the ride home was broken up by the crossing of the continental divide and an episode that Moss captured in his trip report. As the corps approached a sign announcing the divide, the men dismounted and took turns straddling the imaginary line. Lieutenant Moss wrote that he “gave the command Fall-out!” and “one-half the squad lined up on one side...and the other half on the other side, while they were all leaning over and shaking hands and crying out, ‘Well, ole man, how’s eberyting wid you way down dah on de Pacific slope?’ ‘Oh eberyting is fine wid us!’ ‘How’s tings getting long wid you fellers way down dah on de Atlantic slope?’”<sup>54</sup> Moss seemed to be delighted by the men's exchanges, even if they were viewed in a paternalistic manner.

The Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps finally arrived back at Fort Missoula on September 8, 1896. The group completed the 790 mile ride in sixteen days, with a total riding time of 126 hours and an average speed of just over six miles per hour.<sup>55</sup> The staying power of the cyclists was quite an achievement, given the conditions and extra weight they carried. As was Moss's persona, he gave the men three days of rest and had them back in action by the September 13. Moss envisioned a series of bicycle relays between his men and those under the command of Colonel Burt, and wanted to act quickly because he knew his men were in exceptional physical

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<sup>53</sup> Moss quoted in Sorensen, *Iron Riders*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Moss quoted in Sorensen, *Iron Riders*, 47.

<sup>55</sup> Moss, “Yellowstone Trip Report.”

shape, which would allow the Colonel to see the full potential of the bicycle. Moss gathered his men and laid out a simulated war plan that would allow the bicycle corps to act as scouts and messengers.<sup>56</sup> It was somewhat of a game between two units, as Colonel Burt had enlisted the help of the Tenth Cavalry, a mounted unit, to act as the aggressor. Burt coordinated the staged assault plans with Moss and had the cyclists covering as much as seventy-two miles per day while relaying messages and scouting out lines of attack. On the first day of the maneuvers a wagon train carrying supplies was bogged down in deep mud. Moss sent out a message to the command post via a series of relay riders that more men were needed to dislodge the wagon. Within hours, a relatively short period of time given the terrain, a crew of men arrived to get the wagon back on track. Frederic Remington, a member of the Tenth Cavalry, observed the Twenty-fifth in action and admitted that the cyclists “manage far better than one would anticipate.”<sup>57</sup> Moss was emboldened by the progress that his men were able to make and wrote to Colonel Burt that “the work on the practice march, have, I think, fully demonstrated the practicability of the bicycle for military purposes in a mountainous country.” He added that “The bicycle is now about perfect,” noting that the only problem facing the cycle was punctured tires. Moss was well aware of the fragility of the tire and concluded that cyclist soldiers “during times of actual warfare, dread the enemy’s tacks nearly as much as his bullets.”<sup>58</sup> The simulation, as it involved a number of units, was a sign that the army saw the usefulness of the bicycle but was still a ways off in giving it unconditional support.

Upon finishing the bicycle relays Lieutenant Moss combined the letters that he had previously written to Colonel Burt and wrote a summary report that detailed the Twenty-fifth’s

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<sup>56</sup> Moss, James A. to Colonel A.S. Burt, September 14, 1896, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>57</sup> Glasrud and Searles, 247.

<sup>58</sup> Moss, James A. to Colonel A.S. Burt, September 19, 1896, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

journeys. Moss's and Burt's intentions were to receive a green light from the Secretary of War to continue bicycle testing. Burt was well aware of the bicycle's potential and typed an endorsement letter to the Adjutant General's office asking that they review Moss's data and consider further experiments. Burt regarded Moss's work as "valuable data concerning the use of bicycles by the army, particularly under trying conditions of bad roads, inclement weather, and in a mountainous country."<sup>59</sup> The Colonel was a firm believer that the bicycle would soon overtake the horse as a scouting platform. He stated "I believe a bicycle corps used as scouts in many ways would be more efficient than cavalry... I am convinced that... a wheeler is a more rapid messenger than a cavalryman."<sup>60</sup> Burt was certain that a bicycle rider could "be ready for duty rapidly- excepting perhaps the horse is kept continually saddled."<sup>61</sup> Being a commander in the West for years at that point, Burt saw the need to move beyond the age old tradition of mounted cavalry. Horses were expensive to care for and it required a number of the animals to cover the same distance that one bicycle could.

As the winter of 1896 approached Moss requested that he be sent back to Washington, D.C. for a second round of talks with the commanding general. Moss had a threefold plan that included visiting all of the "leading bicycle and tire factories in the East," "Be in Washington where I can have easy access to all bicycle literature in the Bureau of Information," and "organize a bicycle corps of twenty soldiers and one surgeon."<sup>62</sup> Moss did not wait for a reply and boarded a train for the East coast. He stationed himself at Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, at the Spalding Bicycle Factory as the company had offered Moss a fleet of free military bicycles.

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<sup>59</sup>Burt A. S. to Adjutant General's Office, October 14, 1896, File Number 6408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>60</sup> Burt.

<sup>61</sup> Burt.

<sup>62</sup> Moss, James A. to General Nelson Miles, January 22, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

In the first week of March he wrote a letter to Colonel Samuel Breck of the War Department in Washington, D.C. Moss was presumably worried that his letter had gone unanswered and asked Colonel Breck to talk to General Miles about extending his leave as he still had much work to complete.<sup>63</sup> Going behind the back of the Office of the Secretary of War, General Miles approved Moss's leave extension and even went as far as to give him quarters at Fort Columbus, New York so that he could "continue the duty on which he is now engaged."<sup>64</sup> Moss's project had still not been approved by the Secretary of War, yet he had secured bicycles for his next expedition and used government funds to support his findings. Moss was intent on moving the bicycle project forward while the U.S. Army was not so sure.

Within one week of asking for permission to meet with the Commanding General of the Army, Moss received a rather blunt reply from the Adjutant General's Office. He was told that "In view of the failure of the Secretary of War to approve the project...Moss be...ordered, by letter, to rejoin his station."<sup>65</sup> The Office of the Secretary of War had figured out that Moss had been working without their permission and sent a memorandum to General Miles, outlining Moss's failure to follow procedure and citing that they had told Moss to stop his work until a non-puncturable tire could be found. The army command was aware of the technological shortcomings that plagued the corps. The office wrote that "There is no record in this office of any authority for the assignment of Lieutenant Moss to duty pertaining to military cycling..."<sup>66</sup> General Miles disregarded the letter and angrily wrote back that the U.S. Army was falling

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<sup>63</sup> Moss, James A. to Colonel Samuel Breck, March 9, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>64</sup> Miles, Nelson to Lieutenant James A. Moss, March 11, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>65</sup> Adjutant General's Office to Lieutenant James A. Moss, April 23, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

<sup>66</sup> Secretary of War to General Nelson Miles, April 30, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

behind the rest of the world in technology.<sup>67</sup> The Secretary of War had little grounds with which to dismiss General Miles' case, and reluctantly approved the project. Miles knew the value of the bicycle on the battlefield and felt that the Secretary of War was out of touch with what was happening on the ground. Reviewing Moss's data, General Miles came to the conclusion that bicycles could be a modernizing force in the Army.

Having finally received permission to continue with his project, Moss settled on the next destination for the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps, St. Louis, Missouri. By the first week of June Moss had received twenty-two Spalding Military Bicycles.<sup>68</sup> The bicycles came at no cost to the government, with the exception of shipping, as Moss had worked out an agreement with Spalding to promote their bicycles and write an in-depth review of the machine upon his return.<sup>69</sup> Moss wrote to Colonel Samuel Breck that with "the great interest the soldiers are taking in the matter, I have no doubt but what the trip will be a decided success in every way."<sup>70</sup> With a cadre of new military specific bicycles, the Twenty-fifth became somewhat of a legitimate entity. The Secretary of War was finally on their side and they had two high ranking officers looking after their needs. The military bicycle corps was on the verge of breaking into the mainstream army.<sup>71</sup>

The expedition to St. Louis was on a much larger scale than the two prior rides. Moss enlisted a total of twenty soldiers, five of them from the prior trip to Yellowstone, one surgeon, Dr. James M. Kennedy, and one news reporter, Edward H. Boos of *The Daily Missoulan*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Miles, Nelson to Secretary of War, May 1, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

<sup>68</sup> Moss, James A. to Colonel Samuel Breck, June 4, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

<sup>69</sup> Moss, James A. to Quartermaster General, June 11, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

<sup>70</sup> Moss, James A. to Colonel Samuel Breck, June 4, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

<sup>71</sup> Moss.

<sup>72</sup> Moss, James A. to Adjutant General, September 1, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

Moss selected the soldiers based on their “reliability, general physical condition and knowledge of cycling...”<sup>73</sup> With more than 1,900 miles of riding in front of them, the corps set off on June 17, 1897 at 5:30 a.m. amidst much fare. Newspapers from across the country covered the ride as it signaled a potential turn towards modernization for the Army. Moss viewed the trip as more of a campaign than as another test ride. He was adamant that “thoroughness was to be a leading feature, the experiment was made under all possible conditions, except that of being under actual fire—the command made and broke camp in the rain, traveled through mud, water, sand, snow...forded streams and crossed mountain ranges; suffered from heat, cold, hunger, the loss of sleep, the ill-effects of alkali water.”<sup>74</sup> As the corps rolled through Missoula and onto the open road, clouds formed and a heavy storm began to batter the riders. As had happened on previous rides the earth turned into “gumbo mud” and was impassable by bicycle. The cyclists became strung out over miles and had difficulty communicating. The corps eventually regrouped and stumbled upon an old cabin where they took refuge for the night.<sup>75</sup> Moss was aware of the scrutiny under which his test was viewed, and after a hard first day was somewhat doubtful that the corps would make it to the finish in St. Louis.

The first week came and went with the usual problems that Moss had anticipated: punctured tires, bad weather, horrible food and rough roads. But the scenery that they encountered while heading east was something entirely different. Massive granite mountains gave way to alpine meadows, expansive plains, and historical sites presented themselves every few days. On Friday, June 27, the Twenty-fifth encountered Custer’s Battlefield. Moss was overwhelmed as they approached the monument: “there appeared amid the hills in the distance, a

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<sup>73</sup> Moss to Adjutant General.

<sup>74</sup> James A. Moss, “The Army A-Wheel,” November 7, 1897, *LA Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/Los%20Angeles%20Times%20Archives.htm> (accessed August 2, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Moss, “The Army A-Wheel.”

number of small, white tombstones—the silent resting place of Custer’s glorious band!”<sup>76</sup> The bicycle corps admired the vista but reflected on the terror that would have gripped Custer’s men as they knew they were trapped. Moss was keen to note the advancement of the Army and wrote “What a change has time wrought! On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1876, Custer and his men were massacred on a field of which civilized man knew nothing; on 25<sup>th</sup> of June, twenty-two soldiers of the regular army are on the same ground with bicycles! In the valley below, where savages and buffaloes were wont to roam...a railroad passes and civilization prevails!”<sup>77</sup> The modernization of the army was there for Moss to see. His reflection on the forward progress of man, and the military, was a signal that the army had begun to see itself as a modernizing force.

At the same time though, Moss expressed a longing for the past. He and his men were traversing parts of the west that had not seen much, if any human traffic. He lamented that “passing by the wayside relics of bygone days, we could but feel a pang of regret at the advance of civilization—the old stage coaches have crumbled into ruins, the mountain teamsters and the buffaloes have disappeared: the Indians are passing away—the ‘wild and woolly West’ is no more!”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, they were riding through an era that had been pushed aside by the mechanical advances of mankind. The bicycle was at once a segue to the modern century, but at the same, at least by viewed by Moss, as something that contributed to the end of an era.

The men pushed eastward and continued to be battered by rain one day and intense heat the next. Their interactions with locals were as varied as the weather. On the edge of Montana they encountered a large wagon being driven by three old women, and perhaps one of the only negative encounters of the trip. Edward H. Boos, the trip reporter, asked if they would mind being passed by the corps as the wagon was moving quite slowly. The woman laughed at Boos

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<sup>76</sup> Moss, “The Army A-Wheel.”

<sup>77</sup> Moss, “The Army A-Wheel.”

<sup>78</sup> Moss, “The Army A-Wheel.”

and ignored his request. Boos wrote that “The country people in this part of Montana have little regard for a wheelman.”<sup>79</sup> On the opposite end of the spectrum the men of the Twenty-fifth also received generous donations and kindness from complete strangers. After a particularly difficult day of riding through scorching sand hills, the cyclists were greeted by a German couple who welcomed them into their home. Not only did the couple feed them bread and milk, but they also insisted that every cake and cookie within the house be taken by the men. Boos was impressed by their act and stated that “It is needless to say that a lasting impression was made on the minds of the men and many thanks were expressed as the corps started on its uphill climb.”<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the mindset of the west was becoming modernized as well as attitudes towards the Twenty-fifth seemed to be predominantly positive, or at least indifferent.

Forty-one days and 1,900.2 miles after they started the men of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps rolled into St. Louis, Missouri. The corps received a grand welcome as hundreds of fellow wheelmen and numerous reporters greeted them as they neared the finish. Moss felt that the trip affirmed what he knew all along; the bicycle had the potential to be an indispensable piece of equipment for the modern army. He wrote that the expedition “fully demonstrated the practicability of the bicycle as a means of transportation.”<sup>81</sup> The *Galveston Daily News* wrote “The place the bicycle will have in military affairs and plans is a question now engaging the attention of officers of the United States army.”<sup>82</sup> In the same article Moss celebrated the corps’ success and asserted “The trip has proven beyond peradventure the contention that the bicycle has a place in modern warfare... The practical result of the trip shows that an army bicycle corps

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<sup>79</sup> Edward H. Boos, “From Fort to Fort,” *The Daily Missoulan*, July 10, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/> (accessed August 19, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Edward H. Boos, “The Sand Abundant,” *The Daily Missoulan*, July 31, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/> (accessed August 22, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> Moss, James A., to the Adjutant General, July 29, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

<sup>82</sup> Editorial, *Galveston Daily News*, July 28, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/1997/07/epilouge-after-trip.html> (accessed August 23, 2011).



can travel twice as fast as cavalry or infantry under any conditions and at one-third the cost and effort.”<sup>83</sup>

As the winter of 1897 began to take hold Moss created a longer, more grueling route that would take the men to the West coast. Moss was sure that he would receive approval for another trip as he had reams of data to back his claim that the bicycle would end the army’s transportation problems. The lieutenant submitted a formal request to take his men, the following spring, on a journey from Missoula to San Francisco, California.<sup>84</sup> Moss made sure to cover his ambitions with an added amendment from Colonel Burt, which was used to endorse the trip. The Secretary of War, along with the Adjutant General, denied the trip on the grounds that “sufficient experiments to meet all knowledge of its merits have been made with the bicycle at present.”<sup>85</sup> With no warning the first U.S. Army bicycle corps came to a grinding halt.

There is no doubt that the coming of the Spanish-American War played an important role in cancelling out the bicycle corps, as the army attempted to pull resources from all corners of the country and had to put experimental projects on hold. In the fall of 1898 Lieutenant Moss was shipped off to Cuba to join the Twenty-fourth Infantry and the men of the Twenty-fifth were among the first units to reach the island nation.<sup>86</sup> Moss proposed that a bicycle corps be raised to patrol Havana after the U.S. had firmly gained control. He argued that the speed and maneuverability of the bicycle would be a great advantage in the narrow streets of the capitol, and that for eight thousand dollars he could fully equip a corps of one hundred men.<sup>87</sup> The

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<sup>83</sup> *Galveston Daily News*.

<sup>84</sup> Moss, James A. to the Adjutant General, February 7, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

<sup>85</sup> R.F. Broussard, House of Representatives to James A. Moss, March 3, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group National Archives Building, Washington, D. C. and Headquarters Department of Dakota to James A. Moss, March 3, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

<sup>86</sup> Alexandra V. Koelle, “Pedalling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-Fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps and the Roads of American Expansion” *Western Historical Quarterly* (2010) 41, 325.

<sup>87</sup> Glasrud and Searles, 253-254.

Secretary of War denied his plan and the hopes of the bicycle being a modern fixture in the arsenal of the U.S. Army disappeared.<sup>88</sup>

Lieutenant Moss and the men of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps had proven without a doubt that the bicycle was capable of handling the rigors of a sustained campaign, yet never fully had the support of the Secretary of War. Without the help of General Miles it is likely that the program would have never gotten off the ground. With the exception of Miles, top Army leadership had been against bicycles from the beginning as many were rooted in the traditions of the cavalry. The Army had a long tradition of mounted cavalry and refused, even on the brink of the twentieth century, to move forward with a more modern approach. Being in charge of an all black regiment did not help Lieutenant Moss's cause either as many black units were not taken seriously by central command. The bicycle, viewed by the Twenty-fifth as a move towards modernity, was deemed successful in the field but ultimately failed because of preconceived notions of the higher command.

Shortly after the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps finished its journey to St. Louis, Lieutenant Moss was interviewed by the *New York Times* and asked what he thought of the bicycle replacing the horse to which he replied "Each has peculiar functions of its own, a particular field in which, under certain conditions, the one is superior to the other. The question, therefore, which confronts us is: 'Should not a modern, up-to-date army have both, that it might avail itself of the advantages of the one or the other as the proper conditions present themselves?'"<sup>89</sup> Moss,

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<sup>88</sup> R.F. Broussard, House of Representatives to James A. Moss, March 3, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group National Archives Building, Washington, D. C. and Headquarters Department of Dakota to James A. Moss, March 3, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

<sup>89</sup> Editorial, "Bicycle Useful to an Army," September 21, 1897, *New York Times*, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D0DE0DD1039E433A25752C2A96F9C94669ED7CF> (accessed September 2, 2011).

albeit a believer in the bicycle as a move toward the future, was not intent on replacing the horse as General Miles was.

Perhaps more interesting though is the social experiment that Moss had conducted. Moss's relationships with his subordinates and the interactions of those they encountered as a group showed that the mentality in the West was far different from that in the East. Colonel A.S. Burt, commander of Fort Missoula and home of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps, realized the potential of the bicycle corps and its effect of the modernization of the army:

It is well known there is prejudice against the colored man and when he appears in uniform it is like shaking a red flag against a bull. It is a wise policy to educate the people to become familiar with the colored man as a soldier... Is it not better- is it not fairer to the colored soldier as well as to the people that the masses should be familiarized with the sight of a 'nigger' in uniform? The expedition proposed by Lieutenant Moss would be a fine educator. The one he made last year to St. Louis (think of it- a 'nigger soldier' in 'sesesh' Missouri!!) had a very happy effect. The men by their behavior won the respect of everybody.<sup>90</sup>

Even though the experiments of the Twenty-Fifth never fully materialized into an army wide program of cyclist soldiers, the bicycle was still seen as a symbol of modernity by the few men who advocated for it in the beginning, yet the move towards more independence for black soldiers fell short. In the end, the army was not ready for the new technology or the advancement of black soldiers as it rejected both the bicycle and equality.

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<sup>90</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles, *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers Anthology* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007), 253.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Archived Letters

Adjutant General's Office to Colonel A.S. Burt. November 21, 1896, File Number 6408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

The Adjutant General sent a letter to Burt explaining that because of the bicycles numerous malfunctions on the Yellowstone trip, Moss should hold off on planning another trip until a more reliable tire was produced.

Adjutant General's Office to Lieutenant James A. Moss. April 23, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

After Moss had been on leave for two months without permission from higher headquarters, the AG requested that he abort his trip to Washington and return to Fort Missoula immediately.

Adjutant General's Office to James A. Moss. March 3, 1898. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Lieutenant Moss is informed by the Adjutant General's Office that his time commanding the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps has come to an end, and that he is to suspend all further bicycle related testing.

Broussard, R.F. to James A. Moss. March 3 1898. File Number 70545, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Broussard, a member of the House of Representatives, informed Lieutenant Moss of the final decision to cancel any endeavors related to the bicycle corps. Moss had requested that another trip to San Francisco be approved with the same number of troops and support. In the letter, Broussard writes that the secretary of war decided that sufficient time had been given to the bicycle corps.

Burt A. S. to Adjutant General's Office. October 14, 1896, File Number 6408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

Burt endorsed Moss's letter to the Secretary of War, claiming that his bicycle data was indeed helpful, and that he should be given permission to plan another trip in the summer. He also states the reliability of bicycles over horses.

Headquarters Department of Dakota to James A. Moss. March 3, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

This letter, dated the same as the letter from Broussard, delivers the information to Moss that his experiments are no longer needed and that he should cease bicycle activity until further notice.

Miles, Nelson A. to James A. Moss. March 11, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

Nelson is quick to respond to Moss's request and approves his leave extension. He places Moss at Fort Columbus, New York, for two extra weeks.

Miles, Nelson to Secretary of War. May 1, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

Miles wrote an angry letter to the Secretary of War after they had denied another test run of Moss's. He stated that the U.S. military was behind the rest of the world in its use of military cycling.

Moss, James A. *Oath of Office Certificate*. July 26, 1894, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

This certificate was issued to Lieutenant Moss after he enlisted in the United States Army as a second lieutenant. The date is significant because he was shipped out to Fort Missoula within one week of graduating from WestPoint Academy.

Moss, James A. "Lake McDonald Report." October 10, 1896. File Number 46408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

The Lake McDonald Report is eleven pages long and contains descriptions of the first practice trip that the Twenty-fifth embarked up. Detailed descriptions of the men and their kit are coupled with encounters of local inhabitants and route descriptions.

Moss, James A. to General Samuel Breck. April 22, 1896. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

Moss asks for permission to take a leave of absence in order to study bicycle literature found in Washington D.C. He also asks for time to meet with a number of bicycle manufacturers in order to find the bicycle that would be most suited to his task.

Moss, James A. "Yellowstone Trip Report." August 15, 1896. File Number 46408, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

The trip report compiled by Moss covers the nearly three weeks that the men were travelling from Fort Missoula to Yellowstone National Park. Moss gives day by day accounts of whom and what the corps encountered, and the equipment they were carrying. There are a number of instances in which Moss comments on the interactions of his men and local villagers.

Moss, James A. to Colonel A.S. Burt. September 14, 1896, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

After returning from Yellowstone, Moss and Burt collaborate to create a simulated war scenario, involving bicycle messengers and mounted cavalry from the Tenth.

Moss, James A. to Colonel A.S. Burt. September 19, 1896, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D.C.

After the simulated maneuvers, Moss wrote of the limitations of the bicycle, and how the enemy could easily stop a force of military cyclists.

Moss, James A. to Adjutant General. November 21, 1896. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

As Moss was trying to gather resources to build the foundation of the Twenty-fifth bicycle Corps he wrote back and forth to the AG. Moss stated in this letter his faith in the bicycle as a machine that would someday surpass travel by horse for the military. The response from the AG,

documented in the same letter was that although bicycles did have a purpose, they were not as practical as Moss made them out to be.

Moss, James A. to General Nelson A. Miles. January 22, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

Lieutenant Moss asks permission to formally organize another bicycle corps, this time consisting of twenty enlisted soldiers and one surgeon. He advises General Miles that the bicycles will cost the government nothing, as he will be able to secure a sponsor for the trip.

Moss, James A. to Colonel Samuel Breck. March 9, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

Lieutenant Moss contact Colonel Breck to ask for special permission to have his leave extended as he needs more time to inspect bicycle manufacturers and the parts that he sees as specific and relevant to his trip.

Moss, James A. to Colonel Samuel Breck and General Nelson A. Miles. May 1, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

Moss received a letter from the Adjutant General advising him that he is unable to proceed with bicycle corps training. Moss had assumed that because he had General Miles on his side that the secretary of war would not hesitate in granting him permission. Moss discusses his plans with the Spalding Bicycle Company and how he has convinced them to give the government free bicycles. In the same correspondence, General Miles shows his anger at the lack of backing for the project.

Moss James, A. to General Nelson A. Miles. April 16, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Moss substitutes the AG for General Nelson and sends the same response as stated above, asking for permission to rejoin his group.

Moss James, A. to Colonel Samuel Breck. June 4, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Moss informs Colonel Breck that the shipment of bicycles from Spalding had arrived and that he and his men had taken the bicycles on their first ride. He wrote that his company may need more gear, not from the government, from the supplier, something he could arrange at no extra cost.

Moss James, A. to Colonel Samuel Breck. June 4, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

In the second letter on the same day, Moss informs Colonel Breck that the 25<sup>th</sup> Bicycle Corp is getting into shape quickly. He also notes that the majority of the enlisted men are very interested in the bicycles and the trip they are about to undertake.

Moss, James A. to Quartermaster General. June 11, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

Moss asks the Quartermaster to pay for the delivery of the bicycles from Spalding, as they have been kind enough to furnish the government with the machines for free.

Moss James, A. to Adjutant General. July 29, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Moss writes to the AG that the Twenty-fifth had reached St. Louis at 1800 on 24 July 1897. He gives a general breakdown of the trip in terms of time pedaled, average speed and where the Twenty-fifth is currently residing. He asks permission to continue the trip to St. Paul, MN.

Moss James, A. to Adjutant General. September 1, 1897. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Moss continued his trip analysis and gave a rundown of logistics. He described the men and their prowess on the bicycle, as well as the training regimen they undertook to prepare themselves for their trip to St. Louis. There are a number of lists in the report that cover equipment used and overall timing.

Moss, James A. to the Adjutant General. February 7, 1898, File Number 70545, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D. C.

Moss submitted a formal request to the AG, requesting permission to go on an expedition to San Francisco, California, the following summer.

Secretary of War Office to Adjutant General. November 12, 1896. File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

The secretary of war advises Lieutenant Moss, via the AG, that he should stop all bicycle maneuvers until a puncture proof tire is available. In Moss's prior letter he asks for more time to do research for his trip. The secretary of war denies his request and orders him to rejoin his unit at Fort Missoula.

Secretary of War to General Nelson Miles. April 30, 1897, File Number 50038, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington D. C.

The Secretary of War informs General Miles that he, and Lieutenant Moss, have not been following the proper procedure for obtaining permission to gather information on bicycles. They instruct Moss to remain at Fort Missoula and warn General Miles of further obstructions.

Willard, Frances E. *A Wheel Within a Wheel*. Chicago: Women's Temperance Publishing Association, 1895.

The personal memoir by Willard covers her journeys on a bicycle and how the contraption helped to give women mobility and personal freedom.

### **Newspaper Articles**

Editorial, "Bicycles for the Army," *New York Times*, October 21, 1891,

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D0DE0DD1039E433A25752C2A96F9C94669ED7CF> (accessed June 18, 2011).

The article covers General Miles on his trip the Madison Square Garden six-day race. In the article, he unveils his plan to incorporate bicycles into the U.S. Army. He compares their effectiveness to that of a horse, and states that overall, they would be a much better form of transportation.

Editorial, "Couriers on the Wheel," May 19, 1892, *New York Times*, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D0CE2DC173BEE33A2575AC1A9639C94639ED7CF> (accessed July 12, 2011).

The article contains a quote from General Miles about his speech in New York City and the relay he organized to draw attention to the cause of bicycles in the military.

*The Daily Missoulan*, April 16, 1894, found in Glasrud and Searles, 244.

The paper ran an article about how popular bicycles had become in and around Missoula, and particularly the soldiers who resided at Fort Missoula.

Editorial, "The Future of the Bicycle in the Army, and the Coming Convention," October 6, 1895, *New York Times*, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9A07E3D8123BEE33A25752C1A96F9C94679ED7CF> (accessed June 20, 2011).

A group of military enlisted men and officers gathered in New York to discuss the future possibilities of the bicycle in the military. They spoke of how the bicycle would ultimately take over as the main form of transportation and be an unstoppable force.

Editorial, *Holt County Sentinel*, July 23, 1897 found in Alexandra V. Koelle, "Pedaling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-Fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps and the Roads of American Expansion," *Western Historical Quarterly* (2010) 41, 321.

A journalist describes the look and demeanor of the men of the Twenty-fifth Bicycle Corps as they roll through the township of Oregon, Missouri.

Editorial, *Galveston Daily News*, July 28, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/1997/07/epilogue-after-trip.html> (accessed August 23, 2011).

Moss is interviewed by a reporter and talks about how successful the corps has been, and will continue to be.

Editorial, "Bicycles Useful to an Army," *New York Times*, September 21, 1897, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D0DE0DD1039E433A25752C2A96F9C94669ED7CF> (accessed February 20, 2011).

An overview of the trip to St. Louis is given as are a number of quotes by Moss as to why he thinks the bicycle is a useful edition to a military force.

Editorial, "Bicycles in the Army," *New York Times*, Septemeber 26, 1897, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E00E6DA1E39E433A25755C2A96F9C94669ED7CF> (accessed February 20, 2011).

After his reports had been sent off to the AG and his commanding officers, Moss wrote a piece for the NYT that outlined, in fourteen steps, how to efficiently command a unit of bicyclists.



Boos, Edward H. "From Fort to Fort." *The Daily Missoulan*. July 10, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/> (accessed August 19, 2011).

Boos wrote a number of columns on the Twenty-Fifth's travels. He sent home weekly, and sometimes daily accounts of what was happening on the road. In this article he discusses individual encounters with locals.

Edward H. Boos, "The Sand Abundant," *The Daily Missoulan*, July 31, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/> (accessed August 22, 2011).

Boos wrote this article after a day of pushing the bicycles through sandy terrain for nearly thirty miles. He expresses gratitude towards the number of individuals that helped them along their way.

Moss, James A. "The Army A-Wheel." *Los Angeles Times*. November 7, 1897, <http://bicyclecorps.blogspot.com/1997/06/> (accessed February 6, 2011).

Moss wrote an in-depth article for the L.A. Times a few months after his return from St. Louis. The article gives a complete recount of the trip and a number of personal accounts of his experiences with locals and his men.

### **Bicycling Drill Books**

May, William T. *Cyclist's Drill Regulations, United States Army*. Boston: Pope Manufacturing Co., 1892. [http://books.google.com/books?id=j5hUAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA1-PA114&dq=cyclist+drill+regulations,+william+may&hl=en&ei=RoSHTtmvItSftweS37Q1&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CEUQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=cyclist%20drill%20regulations%2C%20william%20may&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=j5hUAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA1-PA114&dq=cyclist+drill+regulations,+william+may&hl=en&ei=RoSHTtmvItSftweS37Q1&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CEUQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=cyclist%20drill%20regulations%2C%20william%20may&f=false) (accessed June 24, 2011).

May wrote from a perspective that included commanding an actual bicycle unit. His book describes the use of the bicycle as it pertains to the military, and gives detailed instructions as to how the bicycle is to be used in a proper military fashion. Descriptions include how to dismount and overcome obstacles.

Moss, James A. *Military Cycling in the Rocky Mountains*. New York: Spalding's Athletic Library, American Sports Publishing Co., 1897. [http://books.google.com/books?id=e3MZAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA6&dq=james+a+moss&hl=en&ei=2YOHTtCYEISXtwe7o6Uv&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=e3MZAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA6&dq=james+a+moss&hl=en&ei=2YOHTtCYEISXtwe7o6Uv&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 21 June, 2011).

Moss wrote this pamphlet specifically for the Spalding Bicycle Company, as somewhat of a promotional piece. The pamphlet describes his experiences of cycling across mountainous terrain and how he commanded the group of twenty-one men across such trying landscapes.

### **Annotated Secondary Sources**

Fitzpatrick, Jim. *The Bicycle in Wartime* (Dulles: Brassey Inc., 1998).

This book contains valuable information on the bicycle and its use in military campaigns across the world. In particular, Fitzpatrick describes the usefulness of the bicycle to a number of militia units across the U.S. and their involvement in military operations.

Glasrud, Bruce A. and Michael N. Searles. *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black Soldiers*

*Anthology*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007.

This book contains a number of primary sources as well as articles about the Buffalo Soldiers. In particular, I want to use the piece on the bicycle corps. The author discusses the men's role in the west and how they overcame racial tensions.

Herlihy, David. *Bicycle: The History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Herlihy recounts the long history of the bicycle and what made it the main mode of transportation in the late nineteenth century. He also looks at the military history of bicycles and how they became adapted into various militaries across the world

Kenner, Charles L. *Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry: 1867-1898*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

The premise of the book covers the attitudes and relationships of black enlisted men and their white officers. I want to use this piece as a foundation of how Lt. Moss may have treated and dealt with his men, and to give an overall view of how black enlisted men were looked upon by their white counterparts.

Koelle, Alexandria V. "Pedaling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps and the Roads of American Expansion." *Western Historical Quarterly* 41 (2010): 305-326.

This journal article examines the paternalistic relationship between Moss and his men. Koeller gives many examples of how the men of the Twenty-Fifth were used to foster relations between Moss and the individuals they encountered along their journey. I will specifically be using her piece on the Brownsville Affray, and how the officers at Fort Missoula viewed their black soldiers as expendable.

Nalty, Bernard C. *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*. New York: The Free Press, 1986.

This book moves away from individual accounts and instead recounts the history of race relations within the U.S. military. As part of my paper, I want to look at how black soldiers came into being the predominant force in the west, and how why they were chosen over white soldiers for assignments that were deemed difficult.

Ritchie, Andrew. *Major Taylor*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

*Major Taylor* is the story of, at that time, the world's fastest man on a bicycle. Taylor, who was black, heavily influenced General Miles, and quite possibly, his decision to start a bicycle corps for the U.S. Army. The book describes Jim Crow laws and how they hindered black cycling progress, as well as the six-day race that Miles attended.

Smith, Robert A. *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America*. New York: American Heritage Press, 1972.

Smith's book is a sound piece on bicycle culture in the late nineteenth century and how it shaped the American landscape. In my paper I will be using his writings on the military aspect of the bicycle, as well as what the bicycle represented to the lower class.

Sorensen, George N. *Iron Riders* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 2000).

Sorensen is credited with writing the only book on the Twenty-fifth. The book covers the buildup of the corps and the men that were responsible for bringing it into existence.

Taylor, Quintard. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1998).

Taylor focuses his book on the individual units in the West. For this paper I have used information from his book on why units were stationed primarily in the West.