

= Mark Matthews =

Mark Matthews (August 7 , 1894 ? ? September 6 , 2005) was an American veteran of the Second World War and a Buffalo Soldier . Born in Alabama and growing up in Ohio , Matthews joined the 10th Cavalry Regiment when he was only 15 years old , after having been recruited at a Lexington , Kentucky racetrack and having documents forged so that he appeared to meet the minimum age of 17 . While stationed in Arizona , he joined General John J. Pershing 's Mexico expedition to hunt down Mexican general Pancho Villa . He was later transferred to Virginia , where he took care of President Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor 's horses and was a member of the Buffalo Soldiers ' drum and bugle corps . In his late 40s , he served in combat operations in the South Pacific during World War II and achieved the rank of First Sergeant . He was noted as an excellent marksman and horse showman .

Leaving the United States Army a few years before it was integrated , Matthews then took a job as a security guard in Maryland , rising to the rank of chief of the guards and then retiring in 1970 . After the war , he told stories of military experiences and grew to become a symbol of the Buffalo Soldiers . He met with Bill Clinton and Colin Powell in his later years , and dedicated a barracks in Virginia in honor of the Buffalo Soldiers . Having experienced excellent health for most of his life , Matthews died of pneumonia at the age of 111 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery . At the time of his death , he was recognized as the oldest living Buffalo Soldier as well as the oldest man , and the second @-@ oldest person , in the District of Columbia .

= = Early life = =

Matthews was born in Greenville , Alabama and grew up in Mansfield , Ohio . His horse riding career began early , when he would deliver newspapers on the back of a pony . When he was only 15 years old , he met members of the 10th Cavalry , the original Buffalo Soldier unit , while tending to horses on a racetrack in Lexington , Kentucky . Although there is disagreement as to the origins of the name " Buffalo Soldiers , " it referred to several segregated units within the United States army . Although the legal age of recruitment was 17 at the time , documents were forged and Matthews signed up to join the army in Columbus , Ohio .

= = Military career = =

After his training , Matthews was first stationed in Fort Huachuca in Arizona . At the time , the army was still using Native Americans as guides in the western United States . During his tenure in the state , he was regarded as an excellent marksman . Next , he joined General John J. Pershing 's campaign into Mexico in 1916 to hunt for Pancho Villa . Although Matthews admitted to never having met Villa , he would claim that " I knew where he was at . " When the United States turned its attention to World War I , Europe had no use for American cavalry , therefore Matthews and the 10th Regiment remained in the United States for the duration of the conflict .

In 1931 , he was transferred to Fort Myer in Virginia . While stationed there , Matthews and some of his troops were escorts for King George VI and his wife Queen Elizabeth when they came to visit President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House . He earned acclaim for his horse shows , which helped sell war bonds during World War II and he tended to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt 's personal horses . He also played on the polo team while stationed in the state .

He was also a member of the Buffalo Soldiers ' drum and bugle corps , and performed at funerals in Arlington National Cemetery , where he himself would later be buried . Since the Army would not allow colored soldiers to be seen at white funerals at this time , he was forced to hide in the woods while playing " Taps " . A decade later , he fought in World War II and saw combat action at the Battle of Saipan in the South Pacific . During the conflict , he rose to the rank of First Sergeant . He had originally been sent to train with the Tuskegee Airmen , but was deemed to be too old at the time .

= = Later life = =

Although there were conflicting reports on whether he retired from the Army in 1947 , 1949 or 1950 , he left the army only shortly before the Buffalo Soldiers were disbanded as part of President Harry S. Truman 's initiative to integrate the Army . His next job was at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda where he worked as a security guard . By the time he retired for a second time , in 1970 , he had become the chief of the guards at the institution . He spent much of his spare time fishing , reading the Bible , and recounting tales of his extensive military experiences , which made him a popular and respected figure within the community . His wife of 57 years , Genevieve Hill Matthews , died in 1986 and one of his daughters , Shirley Ann , died two years later .

In his old age , he became a symbol for the Buffalo Soldiers . In 1994 , he met with President Bill Clinton at the White House . In 1997 , at the age of 103 , Matthews was present at Arlington National Cemetery for a service honoring the Buffalo Soldiers , where he unveiled a plaque that dedicated his former barracks in honor of the soldiers . For his 108th birthday in 2002 , he met with then @-@ United States Secretary of State Colin Powell , where Powell was presented with a portrait of Matthews . He was a member of his local church , a Prince Hall Masonic Temple and the Washington chapter of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Association until his death .

Although partially blind from glaucoma by the age of 109 and completely blind from cataracts by 111 , he nevertheless retained his memory and good health until his final days ; his medical history showed no signs of high blood pressure , heart or kidney trouble or diabetes . He was able to walk without a cane or walker , preferring not to use one , and was able to feed himself , including Cheerios for breakfast , his favorite vanilla ice cream with his other meals and a daily can of Ensure for energy . While he enjoyed recounting tales from his military experience , he never complained about the segregated nature of his unit , preferring instead to focus on his own exploits on the job .

Matthews died at the claimed age of 111 of pneumonia in Washington , D.C. At the time of his death , he was recognized as the oldest living former Buffalo Soldier , the oldest man in Washington and the second oldest person in Washington overall behind then oldest American Corinne Dixon Taylor . He was survived by three of his four daughters , his son , nine grandchildren and seventeen great @-@ grandchildren . He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in September 2005 and Washington , D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams spoke at his funeral , which was also attended by councilman and future mayor Adrian Fenty .