UCF Veterans Legacy Program

William Walden (c.1866-1898)

https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BA-0-130-F.html

William Walden was born around 1866 in Indiana. He was the second oldest of five brothers and sisters. When William was as young as thirteen years old, he began working, helping his father on the farm. After moving to another city in Indiana, Richmond, he married Mary Cook in 1884.

In 1892, when he was twenty six years old, Walden joined the US Army and served in the calvary. Because he was African American, he served in a segregated black regiment, or group of soldiers. His group fought on the western frontier against Native Americans and was one of which was called the “Buffalo Soldiers.” This name seems to have come from the Native Americans and might have been from their connection of the dark curly hair of the black soldiers to the fur of the buffalo, or maybe because the soldiers fought fiercely like the strong buffalo the natives respected so much.

Walden was honorably discharged, or released on good terms, from service in January of 1896, but he rejoined the Army in Kansas that same year, in September. Here, he served as a blacksmith forging new horseshoes for the Calvary. When the Spanish American War began in 1898, Walden was sent to Lakeland, FL where he was trained for battle against Cuba.

In Florida, Walden and his fellow black soldiers faced discrimination, and a riot even broke out when black soldiers fought back against violence towards a young black child. The Buffalo Soldiers still battled bravely despite the mistreatment and unfairness they experienced. In Cuba, they served alongside Theodore Roosevelt, who would later become president. Roosevelt and his white “Rough Riders” received most of the credit for victory, even though the black soldiers played a huge role in this success.

After the war, Walden remained in Lakeland to take care of the horses and military equipment. There seemed to have been poor environmental conditions at that time, and an injury Walden received on his chest became infected, leading to his death on July 17, 1898.

Though there is not a specific record of Walden’s children, a guardian applied for a pension based on Walden’s service, to support a minor. It can be assumed that this was Walden’s son or daughter. Walden was originally interred, or buried, in a cemetery in Lakeland, but was relocated to the Saint Augustine National Cemetery, Section A, Grave Number 130. He is remembered for his bravery and drive to defend the US while overcoming discrimination.

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