Professor Gives Paper On Army

The enviable record of black U.S. Army troops created by Congress in the late 1860s is the topic of a paper presented by Dr. Lawrence D. Rice, head of the University of Southwestern Louisiana Department of History, to the Southwestern Social Science Association meeting in Dallas March 29.

The four regiments designated as black units — two cavalry and two infantry — were assigned almost immediately to frontier duty.

“They served in an army which doubled their soldiering abilities and under white officers, some of whom frequently succumbed to the prejudice and discriminatory practices of that day,” Rice observes.

Frontier Posts

“At the frontier posts, quarters and food were generally poor, opportunity of diversion lacking, and the general isolation from civilization disturbing. Normally the response to such conditions should have been a loss of pride, a breakdown in morale, mass desertions, low rates of re-enlistment, high rates of alcoholism and an unimpressive record,” Rice writes.

Instead, he reports, “These black soldiers were motivated by a sense of pride, a desire for social status and economic advantages which the United State Army offered.”

The individual reactions of the black troops were also unusual, according to Rice. “Several individuals won first-class military honors in campaigns against hostile Indians, Comancheros, bandits, and marauding revolutionaries and Indians from Mexico.”