

The United Tribes Educational Technical Center: Historical Perspective

Editors Note: This is the first in a series of articles on the history and projections of the United Tribes Educational Technical Center.

The Historical Significance of Fort Lincoln, ND

Fort Lincoln, North Dakota has several claims to historic significance. The first of these rests on the fact that it was part of the area wherein ranged both the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians. There are no recognizable Indian sites within the confines of the military post, but the tribes hunted and ranged all across the area.

The Mandans, Hidatsas, and later the Arikaras, lived in the vicinity until forced further up the Missouri River by the pressure of the Sioux who continued the harassment of these tribes. By the middle of the 19th century, it is quite apparent that the land was controlled by members of the northern branches of the Teton and Yanktonnai Sioux. (Joseph Cash and Gerald Wolff, *The Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa*

sion of the area after Sibley was forced to move for lack of provisions. (The Record, February and March, 1897, page 8.)

The territory which was to encompass Fort Lincoln was largely unoccupied although portions of it were eventually purchased by private individuals including members of the famed Mellon family of Pittsburgh.

Military life in central North Dakota revolved around Fort Abraham Lincoln which was across the river and became one of the most famous of the frontier military posts. It was from there that George Custer and the Seventh Cavalry left for their unhappy rendezvous on the Little Big Horn.

a considerable asset. Some time between the abandonment of Fort Abraham Lincoln and the establishment of Fort Lincoln by act of Congress on March 2, 1895, a great deal of intensive and successful lobbying was done.

The new fort was established by Congressional act on March 2, 1895, and the first funding came in the Sundry Civil Act of 1896 which appropriated \$40,000 for the construction of permanent buildings.

The site was selected by the famed cavalry commander, General Wesley Merritt, and was accepted on March 1, 1897. It was named officially by Secretary of War Elihu Root on April 12, 1900.

commissioned officer's quarters, one workshop, one bakery, one quarter master's stable and wagon room, one frame wagon shed, one frame coal shed, one quartermaster office and storehouse, one construction quartermaster's office and coal house of frame construction, one pump house, one engineer's quarters, one post exchange, one purification plant of frame construction, one fire apparatus building, one shooting gallery, one temporary coal shed, one ice house, one root house, one civilian employees quarters, and one gymnasium and bowling alley were built, for the most part, around the parade ground.

Company M of the 21st Infantry Regiment was the first military unit to be garrisoned at Fort Lincoln. They came from

Yanktonnai Sioux. (Joseph Cash and Gerald Wolff, *The Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa People, Indian Tribal Series, Phoenix, 1974.*)

In 1862, the eastern, or Santee, Sioux of Minnesota rebelled and broke out in one of the major wars of the 19th century Indian frontier. Numbers of these left Minnesota following several defeats and moved into what is now North Dakota pursued by the troops under the command of General A. Sibley.

Sibley, in pursuit of the Sioux, followed them all the way to the Missouri River and camped on the present site of Fort Lincoln. On July 29, 1863, a battle was fought. General Sibley constructed rifle pits approximately two miles to the south of the present site of the fort.

There men of the Sixth and Seventh Minnesota with portions of the Ninth and Tenth Regiments, nine companies of the Minnesota Rangers, and the Third Minnesota battery of artillery fought off the Sioux who retreated across the river to the later site of Fort Abraham Lincoln.

For three days after their defeat, Indians prowled around Sibley's camp and engaged in sniping. They later took posses-

Big Horn. 1900.



Fort Abraham Lincoln was abandoned in 1894 along with nearly all of the forts along the Missouri River that had been so key in the subjugation of the Teton Sioux. Their usefulness had ended and the government, more interested in efficiency than sentiment, let them go.

The citizens in the area felt a great need to re-establish a post. Army establishments provided a steady source of income for the area and were usually regarded as

In 1906, the post was enlarged in order to house an entire battalion.

It was occupied from August 19, 1902, until January 4, 1913, when the last of the original contingents of troops left. In the first period of construction and occupation five double officer's quarters, two single officer's quarters, three barracks, one administration building, one guardhouse, one hospital stewards quarter, one post hospital, two double non-

try Regiment was the first military unit to be garrisoned at Fort Lincoln. They came from Fort Yates, North Dakota on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation which was being abandoned as a military post.

On September 1903, Company I of the 21st Infantry arrived. Both units were replaced in November, 1904, by companies L and M of the 28th Infantry which in turn left in 1906.

The Second Battalion of the Sixth Infantry arrived and remained until December 30, 1909. On March 22, 1910, the First Battalion of the 14th Infantry arrived and remained until the deactivation of the post on January 4, 1913.

Although the citizens of North Dakota, in their petition to the Secretary of War saw many good reasons for maintaining Fort Lincoln, the Army apparently disagreed.

The people in North Dakota pointed out that Fort Lincoln was the only military post on the Missouri River north of Omaha and commanded the only bridge across the Missouri in North Dakota. They further pointed out the fine rail connections and came up with the remarkable statement

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that it was almost impossible to conceive that American troops would be in demand for foreign service this one year before the outbreak of World War I.

They did, however, conceive of the fort as a place where inland service of the Army might well be needed in order for "enforcing law, protecting property, and in maintaining open channels of trade and interstate commerce for the people."

Fort Lincoln was de-activated as a military post on January 4, 1913. The troops all departed and left the facility in the hands of caretakers.

This situation continued until troubles broke out along the Mexican border that were triggered by Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico.

The United States reacted strongly and the army was sent to the border and soon invaded Mexico. The National Guards in the various states were quickly mobilized. Newton Baker, Secretary of War, ordered the governor of North Dakota, Louis B. Hannah, to mobilize the Guard at the state mobilization point at Fort Lincoln on June 18, 1916.

The regiment gathered at the fort and according to the state adjutant general, would be ready to move by the 26th of June.

It took longer than that to get a National Guard outfit ready to go. The community of Bismarck went to work raising money and even recruiting a cook to help the boys. By the 27th of June every company of the Guard was in camp. The commander, Colonel

John H. Fraine, was somewhat discomfited because he was campaigning for governor at the time. However, he expressed his optimism over both the coming election and the military campaign.

The troops paraded and were concerned because other state troops were getting off before them. By the second of July, the mustering-in ceremonies for the federal service began and a near mutiny over the failure to provide funds for a chaplain was averted.

The ladies in town baked cakes for the soldiers and by the Fourth of July all troops were mustered in although many of them were hospitalized because of the vaccinations that they had taken.

By the eleventh of July, the troops were still at Fort Lincoln and the colonel was most concerned

because they had not as yet left for the Mexican border.

The local newspaper quoted members of the medical staff as stating that "the Mexican climate is just what they are in need of."

Finally on July 22, 1916, two battalions left for the Mexican border, leaving behind several boys who had the measles.

The soldiers went off in the futile chase of Pancho Villa, whom they never caught, and for idyllic conditions in sunny Mexico.

The day after the troops left, the Bismarck Daily Tribune, starting pushing for reactivation of Fort Lincoln as a permanent regimental post and quoted the men who had been there as stating that it was ideal. They also suggested that it would be ideal as a post for an aviation school.