

The United Tribes Educational Technical Center: Historical Perspective

The Historical Significance of Fort Lincoln, ND

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

In the 1917, Fort Lincoln again served as a staging point or mobilization center for National Guardsmen. Four thousand soldiers were to mobilize at Fort Lincoln where they would be inoculated, issued equipment, and taken into the federal service. The preparations had begun as soon as war was declared and the post was ready. The soldiers who trained and waited were helped by the Y.M.C.A. in organizing baseball teams, stage shows, and the like. Reading material was collected in the city of Bismarck. All of this was occurring before conscription was enacted and before the United States was ready to move them to France. In

and discarded.

In 1913, the citizens of Bismarck had petitioned for the re- of Fort Lincoln. This has been mentioned, it was suggested that it become a flying school during the Mexican fiasco. In 1923, the Senate and the House of the 18th Legislative Assembly of the State of North Dakota passed a concurrent resolution suggesting that the fort be turned over in whole or in part to the state for purposes of establishing a tuberculosis sanitarium. Four days later a concurrent resolution was introduced to petition the government of the United States to make the site, a part of it, available for a state training school. All of this indicates that the state of North Dakota saw the site as a positive asset to the

Frasier and indicated that the regular Army was seriously considering using Fort Lincoln as a permanent military station. The fort was ready to enter its second stage as a true military post.

The efforts of the citizens of Bismarck and the state of North Dakota bore fruit in October of 1927. After a reconditioning of the fort, which had remained in excellent shape by and large, was completed, the soldiers arrived on October 11, 1927. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas W. Brown, nine officers and 215 men of the Third Battalion, Fourth Infantry Regiment moved followed by their horses. The new buildings constructed included latrines, bathhouses, a kitchen and mess hall, storage sheds, and automobile garages. These were

South Dakota and Fort Lincoln at Bismarck. North Dakotans regretted that Fort Lincoln had none of the romance in Indian days attached to it as did the old Fort Abraham Lincoln. Yet, they wanted it kept and pointed out that it had been just recently re-opened in 1927 with troops who had recently returned from the Philippines. Apparently the motive behind the closing of the fort was a move on the part of the Hoover administration to abandon some fifty-three military posts and to save some one hundred and twenty-five million to a hundred and fifty million dollars. The abandonment was conducted by the Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur.

North Dakota did not give in lightly and its representatives in

before the United States was ready to move them to France. In August, numbers of troops were given furloughs to return home and help with the harvest. The war was still far away. At no time does it appear that the federal government planned to expand the post or make it a permanent training site.

Throughout the end of August and into early September troops remained at the fort because of the lack of rail transportation to move them elsewhere. The first train finally left with seven hundred soldiers on the 29th of September and the last were gone by October 1. North Dakota soldiers had left their friendly confines to go to Camp Green in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the post was again deserted. There was continued talk in the city as to what should be done with it. It was suggested that it be made a vocational training school for American soldiers who had been invalided home. The North Dakota Council of Defense was working hard for this, but to no avail. The war ended without a permanent solution found for the problem of what to do with a military post in good condition without any soldiers. This problem would continue to plague the state and the area up to the present time as solutions were tried

the state of North Dakota saw the site as a positive asset to the state and was seeking alternative proposals to its use as a military fort. Yet the Bismarck Daily Tribune on February 9, 1923, reported that the property, which was originally decided to the government definitely abandoned it for all time, indicated that the site would not be available for state usage but would revert to private ownership if the Army did not use it. The Tribune on March 1, 1924, quoted Congressman J. H. Sinclair as stating that the Secretary of War had reported to him that "the advisability of the retention of this reservation has received careful consideration by the War Department and it has been decided to hold it in reserve as a possible station for infantry which is now in temporary quarters on a Mexican border...in view of the prospective military requirements, there is no present intention on the part of the War Department to transfer Fort Lincoln to any other agency." Yet, for all the good intentions nothing was done immediately. The Sioux County Pioneer at Fort Yates reported on January 21, 1926, that Dwight F. Davis, the Secretary of War, had written to U.S. Senator Lynn J.

mess hall, storage sheds, and automobile garages. These were built of frame construction instead of the brick that had characterized the original architecture. The county commissioners agreed to build a new road from Bismarck to the north gate and Colonel Brown stated that he would recommend that part of the grounds be leased to the city for use as a municipal airport. This was the beginning of the present airport in Bismarck. New water lines were built and on November 2 the first formal report was held. During the same year, plans were made to establish a citizen's military training camp for four hundred high school-age students from North Dakota and northern South Dakota who would receive military training. The actual camp began in 1928. The soldiers at Fort Lincoln suffered from severe colds that winter and were issued buffalo fur coats which had been in storage since the time of the Indian wars as well as other winter gear.

The advent of the Great Depression during the administration of President Herbert Hoover brought a strong move to close several posts in the American west. Prominent among these were Fort Meade in

North Dakota did not give in lightly and its representatives in Washington worked very hard to save the facility. They felt that the Secretary of War, Patrick J. Hurley, was friendly to the frontier posts and the Congress might be persuaded to save the Dakota post. The North Dakotans regarded the Army as mounting a campaign of great deviousness against the post and that one of the plans in this was to do away with the C.M.I.C. training in the summer. Indeed, this was abandoned in 1932. The state fought back by the best manner it had--political pressure. The Bismarck Tribune stated that the state "cannot and will not accept with indifference such treatment as it has had from the War Department...it will not submit to an arrogant bureaucracy...as the matter stands now it appears that the only way in which the abandonment of Fort Lincoln can be prevented is by the exercise of political pressure." Political action proved effective and by order of the Secretary of War the planned abandonment was postponed. In addition, the C.M.I.C. camp was re-established for 1932. Money was appropriated for the maintenance

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the fort and the garrison continued indefinitely. In 1933, additional use was found for the camp when it was announced that a Reserve Officer Training Corps. camp would be held at Fort Lincoln.

While the post remained active, most of the troops were transferred out and with the coming of the New Deal it became a regional headquarters for the Civilian Conservation Corps. Its organization was designed to give employment to young men, to aid in conservation projects, and in general to help the economy. Some of its detractors argued that it was a quasi-military organization designed to promote war, but this was patently untrue. Fort Lincoln's capacity for housing and administering the C.C.C. increased

rapidly. In 1933, new buildings were built and it was anticipated that a maximum of 1,000 men would be stationed there. They were housed in barracks and tents, outfitted in Army overalls, and administered by Army officers. Among the new structures built to house the C.C.C. were barracks, warehouses, mess and sanitary facilities and fifty-bed hospital. The C.C.C. continued at Fort Lincoln throughout the 1930's. In December of 1939, the last of the garrisoned troops were moved out leaving only C.C.C. administrators and men. With the outbreak of war in Europe and the strong possibility of American entry, which became a fact on December 7, 1941, the C.C.C. came under strong attack in the halls of Congress as a

necessity for having it appeared to be gone. Full employment was returning and America would shortly go into a labor shortage as men were conscripted into the Army. Although C.C.C. administrators continued at the fort until 1942, it ceased to be a truly functioning organization. Fort Lincoln was again ready for a new and different function. As usual, it would not be a strictly military one nor the type for which the fort was originally designed.

The new function of the old fort was that of an internment site for enemy aliens and certain prisoners of war. Under the Office of the Assistant Commissioner for Alien Control in the Department of Justice, eighteen detention camps were retained for enemy aliens and

administered by the Immigration Border Patrol. Although the Justice Department administered the internees, the title to the fort and military reservation remained with the War Department. Only thirty-three soldiers remained at Fort Lincoln and all were engaged in supply services for the C.C.C. camps. The local citizens in Bismarck disliked the notion of having an internment camp. The American Legion protested against it as did the Chamber of Commerce. Most decided to put up with it as best they could, although one housewife said, "I suppose we'll be pulling Italian fugitives out of the coal bin every morning."