

The US Army at the Old Fort

The introduction of the US Army into the Los Vegas Rancho between 1867 and 1869 was another point of note.

After the American Civil War, Captain Yard commanded the US army post at Camp El Dorado along the river. He created an outpost at O.D. Gass's rancho on May 28, 1867. He ordered a detachment from Company D, of the 9th US Infantry Regiment to take up a rotating post there in response to a request from the citizens in that area. In an official explanation for this later on, Yard's replacement Shepard said;

"At that time the resident white man became alarmed as to the roving Indians who were well armed were very bold and making many threats to avenge on these men the wrongs and losses sustained by them (the Indians) at the hands of some Mormons who had passed over the road."

Normally between 6 to 10 soldiers made up the garrison, led by a Sergeant and a Corporal - with Officer's only in appearance from the relief columns. The men were uniformed and equiped still as they would have been during the recently ended American Civil War. While the size of the detachment is familiar to us today, at that time it was unique for anything smaller than a Company to be deployed for any length of time.

Generally speaking the Piute Indian threat was quickly ascertained not to be a real issue, however there were season gathering of over 200 Indians that gave some purpose to the outpost. In addition to the Infantry being maintained at the posting to appease the locals - it also was due to the power struggled between the Unit Commanders in the area. Major Price was in command at Camp Mojave, and from from the traditional school that used the Infantry to garrison, and the Cavalry to patrol. By maintaining the three outpost garrisons, Shepard was able to maintain a unique independence for his Infantry Company at Camp El Dorado.

The sporadic, but notable, incidents that occurred at the outpost included:

- September 12, 1867 - A man named Mooney was tracked through Los Vegas, and eventually caught up with at Mesquite.
- September 13, 1867 - The US Army along with several Piute Indians captured a deserter Private Carl Bixby.

In addition to the detachments normal numbers, the sick were moved up to Los Vegas during the summer months due to the better climate and fresh fruit. It was considered the best duty that a soldier in the Company could draw, and also served as a source of income for Gass to sell his fresh fruits and vegetables. Lieutenant Hardenburg detailed these conditions for the outpost in his writings:

"The detachment stations at Los Vagas [sic] are occupying a large roomy building built of adobe with a high mud roof and hard floor with good ventilation. The men keep their quarters very clean and seem to take pride in having a clean place. The men that are there Excepting the sick that went from this camp look well and Keep themselves very clean. They are comfortably fixed."

On May 17, 1868 a new detachment was sent to relieve the garrison from Company K, of the 14th US Infantry Regiment. With this came a reduction in manpower at the outpost, down to 6 Privates and a Corporal. However most of these men had replaced their 3 band rifled muskets with cavalry carbines, which improved their firepower if there had been any trouble.

The most notable incident during their stay was on July 2, 1868 when a drunken brawl commenced between Private Connley and Private Barron. After the brawl was broken up, and the men sent to their quarters, Barron allegedly bit Connley on the ear. As a result Connley grabbed a nearby double barrel shotgun and discharged one barrel at Barron, killing him. Private Barron was 33 years old and the father of two upon his death. Private Connley was immediately moved to Camp Cady for detention and a Courts Martial. Unfortunately that was not to be, as 3 months later in October, he would escape custody and become a fugitive for the rest of his life.

This chapter in the Old Fort's history came to an end on May 25, 1869 the Outpost at the Los Vegas Rancho was discontinued, and the men returned to Camp Cady. These two years would end the US Army's presence at the Old Fort, as the soldiers followed the footsteps of the previous garrison Company west to the more pleasant conditions at the Drum Barracks in southern California. Today in memory of this time a program called "*The Soldiers of the Fort*" was created by local volunteers to provide a "Living History" program of those times.

Extended details and information on the outpost at the Los Vegas Rancho by both regiments can be found in the book "Camp El Dorado, Arizona Territory: Soldiers, Steamboats, and Miners on the Upper Colorado River" by Dennis G. Casebier. Printed by Arizona Monographs, December 1970. Comments on this page may be addressed to Jason Coffey.