

Fort Davis

National Historic Site
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The Tenth U.S. Cavalry at Fort Davis 1875-1885

The Tenth U. S. Cavalry has earned a respected place in the pageant of American military history. Formed in the mid-19th century, the Tenth Cavalry has been retired, reactivated, and redesignated numerous times.

The regiment found its origins at Fort Leavenworth in 1866. Its commander, Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, set very high standards of recruitment, which delayed the organization of the regiment for a year. By July of 1867, eight companies of enlisted men recruited from the Departments of Missouri, Arkansas, and the Platte made up the unit. At approximately the same time, orders were received calling for the transfer of the Tenth Cavalry to Fort Riley, Kansas. Two months after the regiment's arrival in Kansas, four more companies were added to its ranks.

For the next eight years the regiment was stationed at different forts throughout Indian Territory (present Oklahoma), Kansas, Colorado Territory, and Texas. During this period, the men of the Tenth provided guards for work parties of the Union Pacific Railroad and assisted in the building of Fort Sill. In 1867-1868, they participated in General Philip Sheridan's winter campaigns against the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Comanches.

In 1875, the regiment's headquarters was moved to Fort Concho, Texas. Company H was detailed to Fort Davis, arriving for duty in May 1875. From 1875 until April of 1885, units of the Tenth Cavalry served at Fort Davis, which became the regiment's headquarters in 1882.

The regiment's mission in western Texas was to protect the mail and travel routes, control Indian movements, and gain knowledge of the terrain. The regiment proved successful in carrying out its orders. It is recorded that the Tenth Cavalry scouted approximately 34,420 miles, opened 300 miles of new roads, and built 200 miles of telegraph lines. The scouting activities took the troopers through some of the most desolate and harsh land of the southwestern United States. The men compiled excellent maps detailing water holes, mountain passes, and grazing areas. The long scouting and patrolling marches produced tough soldiers who became accustomed to an area that offered few comforts and no luxuries. They became thoroughly familiar with the land and the unconventional hit-and-run tactics of Apaches.

One highlight in the history of the Tenth Cavalry was the 1879-1880 campaign against a renegade band of Apaches and their leader Victorio. The elusive Victorio and his band escaped from the reservation in New Mexico and caused havoc as they pillaged the area of west Texas on their way to Mexico. Learning that Victorio was in Mexico, Colonel Grierson attempted to prevent him from re-entering Texas and especially from reaching New Mexico where he could find more supporters. Grierson knew that this could be accomplished by controlling the springs and waterholes.

The campaign called for the biggest military concentration ever assembled in the Trans-Pecos area. Six troops of the Tenth Cavalry and Company H of the Twenty-fourth Infantry patrolled the area from the Van Horn Mountains, west to the Quitman Mountains and north to the Sierra Diablo and Delaware Mountains. Encounters with the Apaches usually resulted in skirmishes, however, major confrontations occurred at Tinaja de las Palmas (a waterhole south of Sierra Blanca) and at Rattlesnake Springs (north of Van Horn). These two engagements halted Victorio and forced him to retreat to Mexico. Victorio and his band were not captured, but the campaign conducted by the Tenth was successful in preventing them from reaching New Mexico. The regiment's efforts of containment exhausted Victorio's band and the Apache leader and many of his warriors were killed by Mexican troops in northeastern Mexico in October of 1880.

One of the few enlisted men mentioned by name in the reports of the Victorio campaign was Corporal Asa Weaver. In command of a small detachment stationed at Alamo Springs in the Eagle Mountains on August 3, 1880, he discovered a band of Victorio's followers. Weaver and his men, pursued by the warriors, were in a running fight that extended over fifteen miles. For his bravery at Alamo Springs, Weaver was awarded a field promotion.

Fort Davis remained the headquarters for the Tenth Cavalry until the spring of 1885, when the regiment transferred to the Department of Arizona. Once again the regiment was involved in the arduous pursuit of Apaches, this time under department commanders Generals George Crook and Nelson Miles in the campaigns against Geronimo.

In the history of Fort Davis, the Tenth U. S. Cavalry amassed a notable record of accomplishments. They arrived at the fort in the mid-1870s when western Texas was still open to attacks by American Indians. By the time they left in 1885, peaceful travel and settlement prevailed in the region.