

Officers' Row at Fort Davis. The post hospital is in the left background. NPS, Fort Davis NHS

A key post in the defense system of west Texas, Fort Davis played a major role in the history of the Southwest. From 1854 until 1891, troops stationed at the post protected immigrants, freighters, mail coaches, and travelers on the San Antonio-El Paso Road. Today, Fort Davis is one of the best remaining examples of a frontier military post. It is a vivid reminder of the significant role played by the military in the settlement and development of the western frontier.

Named after Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, the fort was first garrisoned by Lt. Col. Washington Seawell and six companies of the Eighth U.S. Infantry. The post was located on the eastern side of the Davis Mountains, in a box canyon near Limpia Creek, where wood, water, and grass were plentiful. From 1854 to 1861, troops of the Eighth Infantry spent

much of their time in the field pursuing Comanches, Kiowas, and Apaches who attacked travelers and mail stations. With the outbreak of the Civil War and Texas's secession from the Union, the Federal Government evacuated Fort Davis. The original post consisted of primitive structures and was located behind the present day Officers' Row. (The foundations of several buildings from this earlier fort can still be seen today.) The fort was occupied by Confederate troops from the spring of 1861 until the summer of 1862 when Union forces again took possession. They quickly abandoned the post and Fort Davis lay deserted for the next five years.

Few of the fort's structures remained when Lt. Col. Wesley Merritt and four companies of the recently organized Ninth U.S. Cavalry reoccupied Fort Davis in June 1867. The build-

ing of a new post, just east of the original site, began immediately. By the end of 1869, a number of officers' quarters, two enlisted men's barracks, a guardhouse, temporary hospital, and storehouses had been erected. Construction continued through the 1880s. By then Fort Davis had become a major installation with more than 100 structures and quarters for more than 400 soldiers.

Fort Davis's primary role of safeguarding the west Texas frontier against the Comanches and Apaches continued until 1881. Although the Comanches were defeated in the mid-1870s, the Apaches continued to make travel on the San Antonio-El Paso road dangerous. Soldiers from the post reg-

ularly patrolled the road and furnished escorts for wagon trains and coaches. The last major military campaign involving troops from Fort Davis occurred in 1880. In a series of engagements, units from Fort Davis and other posts, under the command of Col. Benjamin Grierson, forced the Apaches and their leader Victorio into Mexico. There Victorio and most of his followers were killed by Mexican soldiers.

With the end of the Indian Wars in west Texas, garrison life at Fort Davis became more routine. Soldiers occasionally escorted railroad survey parties, repaired roads and telegraph lines, and pursued bandits. In June 1891, as a result of the army's efforts to consolidate its frontier garrisons, Fort Davis was ordered abandoned, having "outlived its usefulness." The fort became a national historic site in 1961.

## Buffalo Soldiers

In July 1866, Congress passed an act to increase the size of the Regular Army. The act stipulated that of the new regiments created, two cavalry and four infantry units "shall be composed of colored men." In 1869, the four black infantry units were consolidated into two regiments. Troops of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry

regiments along with the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry regiments served proudly on the southwestern frontier. According to some historians, the term "Buffalo Soldiers" was given to these soldiers by Indians who compared their hair to that of the buffalo and considered them brave and worthy adversaries.

Illustration by Richard Schlecht



U.S. Military Academy

## Second Lt. Henry O. Flipper

Henry O. Flipper, Tenth U.S. Cavalry, was the first black graduate of West Point. He served at Fort Davis in 1880-81 and was tried in a controversial court-martial that led to his

dismissal from the army in 1882. In 1976, after reviewing his case, the army post-humously gave him an honorable discharge. He received a full presidential pardon in 1999.

## Garrison and Field Duty at Fort Davis

Buffalo Soldiers served at Fort Davis from 1867 to 1885. Routine garrison duties included drilling, tending to animals, constructing and repairing buildings, and planting gardens.

In the field, they rode or walked thousands of miles pursuing the elusive Comanches and Apaches. Under officers like Wesley Merritt, Edward Hatch, William Shafter, Zenas

Bliss, George Andrews, and Benjamin Grierson, these troops made notable contributions to the peaceful settlement of western Texas and southeastern New Mexico.

## Troopers from the Ninth U.S. Cavalry on Dress Parade at Fort Davis in 1875.



NPS, Fort Davis NHS

## Officers and Enlisted Men

Both officers and enlisted men at Fort Davis spent far more time in constructing roads, buildings, and telegraph lines than they did in pursuing Apache and Comanche raiders. For the enlisted men, low pay and harsh discipline prevailed, while officers and their families often suffered from monotony. Yet, Fort Davis was regarded by

a majority of the men stationed here as one of the most pleasant posts in the West. A salubrious climate and impressive landscape made living at this somewhat remote fort relatively enjoyable. Hunting, fishing, picnics, and baseball games were some of the more popular pastimes enjoyed by all. Though they were separated profession-



Officers and enlisted men generally wore a less formal uniform both in garrison and on campaign (above) than the full-dress uniform (right) often required for guard mount, formal social occasions, and the evening retreat parade.

Illustration by Richard Schlecht



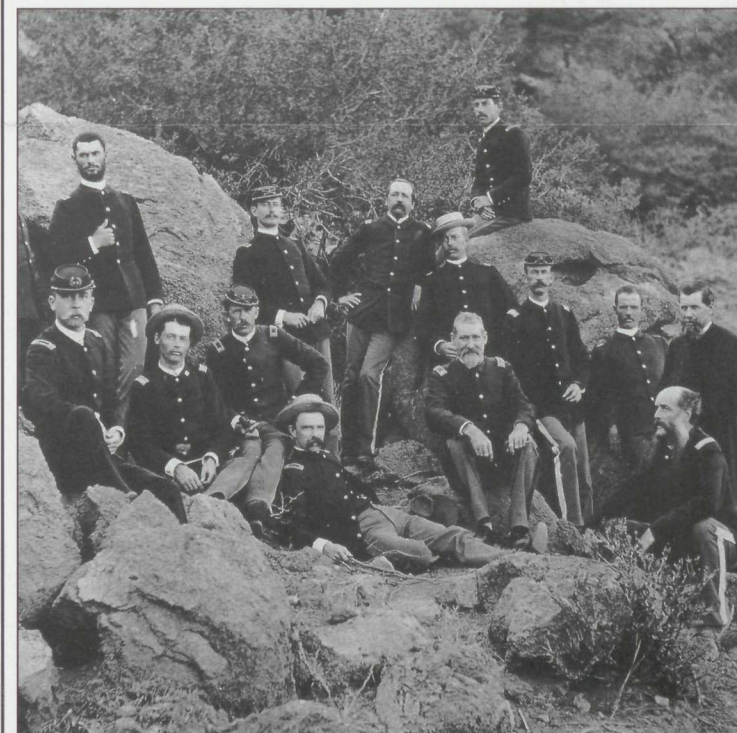
NPS, Little Big Horn Battlefield NWR

ally, socially, and often by race, the officers and enlisted men nevertheless maintained a respectable esprit de corps frequently not found at other posts on the western frontier, and left a proud record of accomplishments.

A group of officers posed on the rocks behind the post hospital for this 1887 photograph. The white-

bearded officer seated on the rock in the center of the group is Lt. Col. David R. Clendenin of the Third Cavalry.

The Third served at Fort Davis from 1885 to 1887 and again in 1890-91.

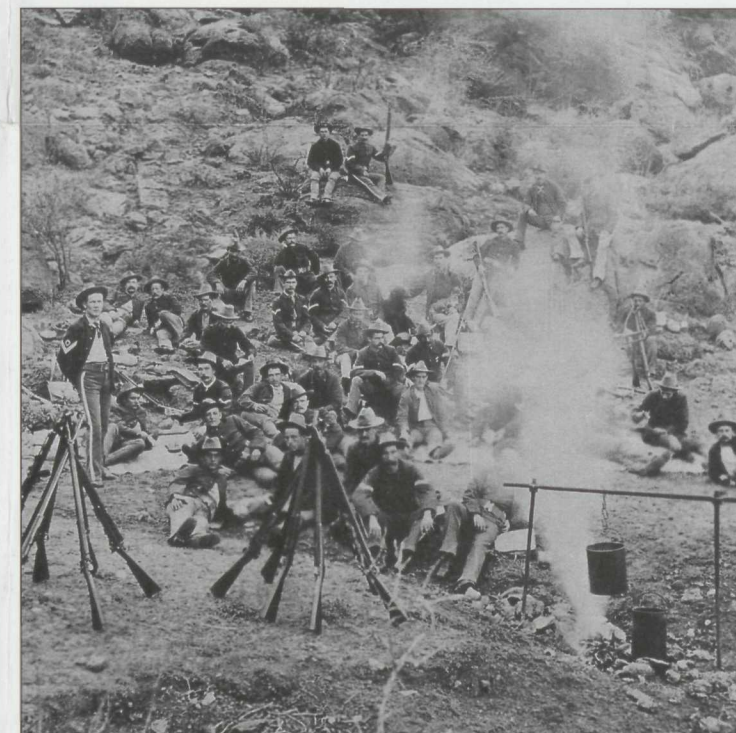


NPS, Fort Davis NHS

Enlisted men of the Sixteenth U.S. Infantry pose for a photograph about 1886-87. Taken on a hillside near Fort

Davis, it depicts life as it was in the field. Units of the Sixteenth were stationed at the fort for most of the 1880s, and

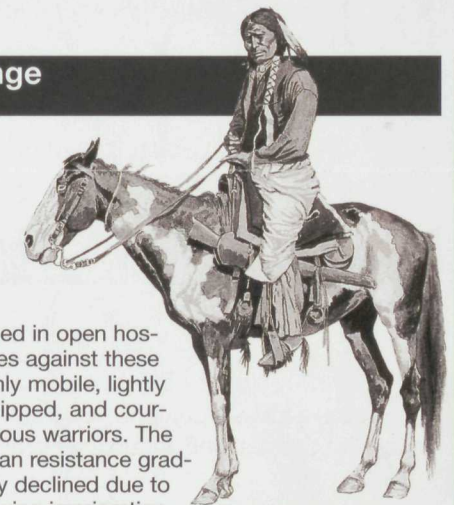
served alongside the First Infantry and the Third, Eighth, and Tenth Cavalry.



NPS, Fort Davis NHS

## The Indian Challenge

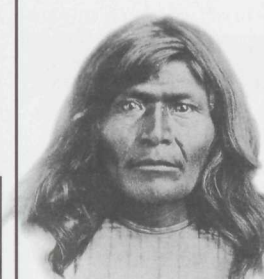
By the 1820s, raiding the villages of northern Mexico had become a way of life for the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches. It provided a source of food and animals and a means of attaining rank and status in the tribe. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican War, the United States pledged to halt these raids. As a result, the U.S. Army en-



Frederic Remington Museum, Ogdensburg, NY

painted by Frederic Remington.

gaged in open hostilities against these highly mobile, lightly equipped, and courageous warriors. The Indian resistance gradually declined due to growing immigration and settlement. The Comanche warrior depicted here was



National Archives

## Victorio

This proud and aggressive leader of the Warm Springs Apaches resisted efforts to confine his people to the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona. His refusal to accept reservation life led to con-

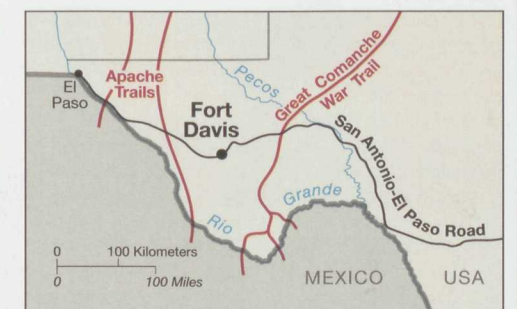
flicts with U.S. and Mexican soldiers in 1879-80 and to his final defeat and death on October 15, 1880, in the Battle of Tres Castillos (or "Three Peaks") in Mexico.

## Fort Davis and the Indian Wars

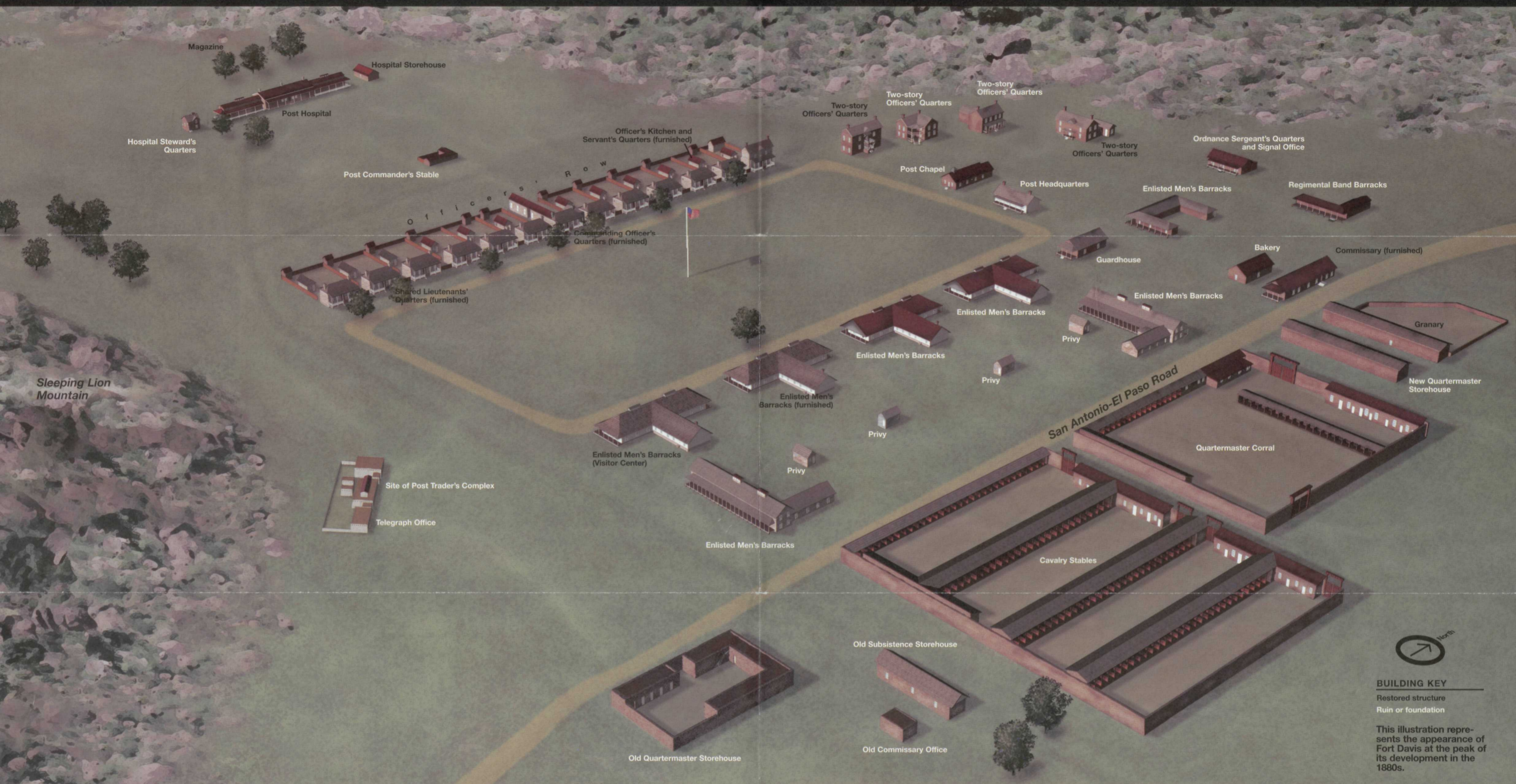
The Trans-Pecos region of western Texas (see map below) was home to relatively few Indians, but many tribes regularly passed through the area. The Kiowas and Comanches came from the Plains to the north and the Apaches from the mountains of southeastern New Mexico. Their raiding lifestyle brought them into conflict with travelers and settlers. Fort Davis soldiers spent much of their time scouting and patrolling, and on escort duty but they

rarely engaged in open hostilities with the various Indian groups. The Indian Wars in west Texas ended shortly after the defeat of Victorio.

In 1885, soldiers of the Tenth Cavalry stationed at Fort Davis were ordered to Arizona to campaign against Geronimo.



# Exploring Fort Davis



## BUILDING KEY

Restored structure  
Ruin or foundation

This illustration represents the appearance of Fort Davis at the peak of its development in the 1880s.

Illustration by Dan Foley

## About Your Visit

Fort Davis National Historic Site lies on the northern edge of the town of Fort Davis and can be reached from the north or south via Texas highways 17 and 118 and from the west via Texas highways 505, 166, and 17. It is open daily 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Labor Day to Memorial Day and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the summer season. The site is closed on December 25. A small entry fee is charged, but persons 16 and under, educational groups, and those presenting a National Parks Pass or a Golden Eagle, Golden Age, or Golden Access passport enter free.

The elevation of Fort Davis is 4,900 feet. Summer is hot with

occasional showers, while fall is mild. Winter is cool and windy, and strong winds prevail in the spring. The 474-acre site has several hiking trails. A picnic area is open year-round to visitors having a permit or pass.

**Accommodations**  
There are no overnight accommodations in the park. Camping is available locally and at the adjacent Davis Mountains State Park. Gasoline, food, and lodging are available in the town of Fort Davis.

**More Information**  
Write to Superintendent, Fort Davis National Historic Site, P.O. Box 1456, Highways 17/118, Fort Davis, TX 79734; call

(915) 426-3224; or visit our website at [www.nps.gov/foda](http://www.nps.gov/foda).

**Preservation**  
Help us preserve Fort Davis for future generations by observing the following:

- Pets are not permitted in public buildings and must be leashed.
- Flash photography is not permitted in the museum or inside the furnished structures.
- Please stay on established paths and do not walk on the parade ground.
- It is illegal to collect artifacts or disturb animals, plants, or rocks.
- Do not walk, stand, or sit on the foundations. Your adherence to these rules will help protect the unique historical and natural resources of the site.



NPS, Fort Davis NHS

When this photo was taken in 1886, looking south toward Sleeping Lion Mountain, Fort Davis was at the peak of its development. The enlisted men's barracks (on the left) and officers' row flank the parade ground. After the post was abandoned, civilians re-

sided in some of the quarters for a number of years. Civilian upkeep, moderate weather, and efforts by a private owner to maintain some of the buildings, spared Fort Davis the rapid deterioration that befell most abandoned frontier posts. Some of the structures

have disappeared, while others have suffered the ravages of time and the elements. Through a continuing program of restoration and preservation, the National Park Service has managed to save many of the original structures.

## Fort Davis Today

Begin your tour at the visitor center, allowing one to two hours to see the fort. During times of peak visitation, park rangers and volunteers dressed in period-type clothing present special programs and interpret some of the restored and refurbished quarters.

### A Word of Caution

Only foundations or ruins remain of many Fort Davis buildings, including the post bakery, guardhouse, headquarters, chapel, several barracks and storehouses, privies, and kitchens. We ask that you respect them. Remember: The foundations and ruins are fragile. Walking or climbing on them is both destructive and hazardous.

### Visitor Center

Located in what was originally an enlisted men's barracks, the visitor center contains a small bookstore and temporary exhibits. Entry permits can be obtained here, along with information on the various buildings, programs, and activities. A museum is adjacent and an auditorium offers an orientation video.

### Enlisted Men's Barracks

The south end of this restored barracks houses cavalry, infantry, artillery, and transportation exhibits. The north end contains a squad room and orderly room and is furnished to offer a glimpse into the summer of 1884 when it was occupied by Buf-

falo Soldiers of Troop H, Tenth Cavalry. Iron bunks, footlockers, carbine racks, clothing, and accoutrements in the squad room help to tell the story of the men who served here. The orderly room served as the office for the troop's first sergeant.

### Commissary

Located on the San Antonio-El Paso Road, this large structure contained food supplies for the garrison. While enlisted men received rations, officers and civilian employees could purchase food products at cost plus transportation. The commissary sergeant's office and the issue room are refurbished. The office occupied by the Acting Commissary of

Subsistence (the officer in charge of the commissary office) contains interpretive exhibits.

### Officer's Kitchen and Servant's Quarters

This two-room refurbished structure was the kitchen and servant's quarters for Officer's Quarters No. 12. The building was separate from the main house primarily because of the danger of fire. Extreme summer heat and unpleasant cooking odors were contributing factors.

### Post Hospital

With the addition of a second ward in 1884, the post hospital could accommodate up to 24 patients. It was normally staffed by a post surgeon,

hospital steward, soldier-nurses, a cook or cooks, and a matron. The post surgeon rarely performed surgery. Soldiers suffered mainly from diseases and accidental injuries, not battle wounds. The building has a central walkway with interpretive signs at each of the rooms.

### Commanding Officer's Quarters

Constructed by 1869, this building served as the residence for post commanders until 1891. Because of the extensive documentation available on Col. Benjamin H. Grierson, Tenth Cavalry, and his family, the quarters are furnished to the period 1882-85 when Grierson served as post commander.

### Shared Lieutenants' Quarters

This structure was built for a captain in May 1882, but because of a shortage of housing, it was soon designated a shared quarters. It is refurbished as if a bachelor lieutenant was living on the north side and a married lieutenant occupied the south half.

### First Fort Davis

The foundations of several structures of the first Fort Davis (1854-62) are located behind Officers' Row and west of the Post Hospital. Many of these buildings were constructed of pine slabs with thatched roofs. Wooden signs identify them.

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