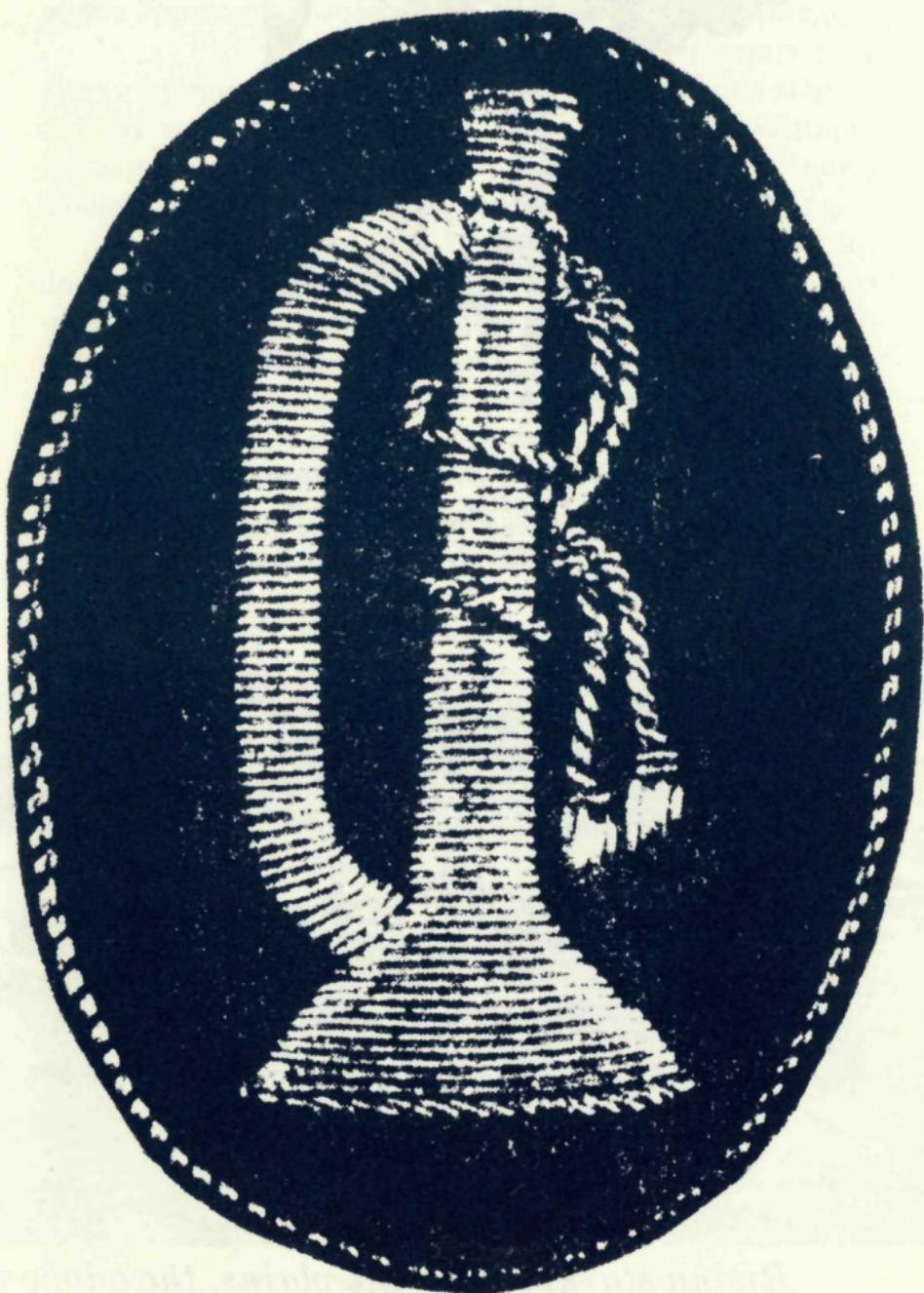


FORT UNION



NATIONAL MONUMENT NEW MEXICO

The ruins of Fort Union provide an impressive memorial to the men who won the West. Located on the route of the Santa Fe Trail where the mountains meet the plains, the fort is centered in a region full of historic events and brimming with the drama of the frontier. As a base of operations for both military and civilian ventures in New Mexico for 40 years, 1851 to 1891, Fort Union played a key role in shaping the destiny of the Southwest. It was the largest United States military post guarding the 19th-century southwestern frontier.

Construction of Fort Union began in 1851, only 5 years after the conquest of New Mexico by the United States in the Mexican War. After Brig. Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny's uncontested occupation of Santa Fe in 1846, the troop garrisons remained in the towns along the Rio Grande. Establishment of the fort was part of a general revision of defenses in the territory undertaken by the department commander, Col. Edwin V. Sumner. It was aimed at removing the soldiers from the temptations of the towns and placing them nearer the ranges of the Indians. Colonel Sumner moved his own headquarters to the eastern frontier and on the west bank of Coyote Creek, where wood, water, and forage were available, began construction of Fort Union.

The first of three forts that ultimately occupied the site consisted of a shabby collection of log buildings, but it served for a decade as the base for military activities in the area and as a key way station on the Santa Fe Trail. Dragoons and mounted riflemen rode forth to fight warlike tribes menacing the mountain villages to the north and infesting the desert stretches of the Santa Fe Trail to the east. Fort Union also became the principal quartermaster depot of the Southwest, receiving supplies from the States and forwarding them to farflung posts throughout the territory.

Outpost on the Trail

Thirty years before the establishment of Fort Union, William Becknell had opened the Santa Fe Trail and launched a lucrative trade between Missouri and the old Spanish capital of Santa Fe. The trail ran westward from the Missouri River to the Arkansas. From there one branch struck southwest across the Cimarron Desert, while the

other continued up the Arkansas River Valley nearly to the Rocky Mountains before turning south across Raton Pass. The Mountain Branch and the Cimarron Cutoff joined at the junction of the Mora and Sapello Rivers, 6 miles south of Fort Union. From here a single trail swung south, crossed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at Glorieta Pass, and entered Santa Fe.

From 1821 to 1846, the strings of white-topped wagons that each summer made their way across the plains to New Mexico bound the Mexican province to the United States with strong commercial ties. After 1846, when New Mexico became part of the American Union, traffic grew to unprecedented proportions as government contract trains and emigrant caravans joined traders in the overland journey. The value of goods hauled over the trail rose from \$15,000 in 1821 to \$5,000,000 in 1855. In the single year of 1858, 1,827 wagons crossed the prairies with nearly 10,000 tons of merchandise, much of it destined for the Army and received at the Fort Union quartermaster depot.

Besides handling vast quantities of trail freight, Fort Union offered travelers a place to rest and refit before continuing their journey. Dragoons from the post patrolled the trail as far east as the Arkansas River in times of Indian danger. The caravans were usually well organized for defense, but the Independence-Santa Fe mail coaches often required a military escort in the dangerous reaches of the Cimarron Desert.

When Colonel Sumner chose a site for Fort Union in 1851, he understandably placed it close to the division point of the trails. The crisscross of wagon ruts visible even today in the surrounding valley gives evidence of the vast traffic past this strategic spot. In some places century-old tracks can be followed for miles across the plain.

Campaigns of the 1850's

In addition to protecting the Santa Fe Trail, the Fort Union garrison was called upon to seek out and punish Indians who had taken the warpath. The nomadic tribes of New Mexico had long fought the Spaniards. Now they fought the Americans who were overrunning their lands and killing off the game.

The first to strike were the Jicarilla Apaches. Occasional skirmishes broke into open war in the spring of 1854 when Apaches ambushed and nearly wiped out a company of dragoons. Lt. Col. Philip St. George Cooke led the Fort Union troops in a determined campaign that drove the Apaches into the mountains west of the Rio Grande. In a stiff action on April 8, the command routed Chief Chacon and his warriors. After a month of rigorous marching, the expedition harried the enemy into calling off the conflict.

The Utes of southern Colorado broke loose in February 1855. With 500 men, including a large contingent of volunteers, Col. Thomas T. Fauntleroy rode north from Fort Union to strike them. Minor skirmishing climaxed on April 28 when the troops surprised a Ute camp and attacked with devastating effect. Forty Indians were slain and their lodges burned. Ute resistance collapsed.

Less successful was the campaign of 1860 against Kiowas and Comanches menacing the eastern borders of the territory. After 5 months of arduous marching, the soldiers returned to Fort Union without firing a shot at an Indian. Early in January 1861, however, Lt. Col. George B. Crittenden, at the head of a column from Fort Union, attacked a Kiowa camp, killed 10 Indians, and destroyed or captured much Indian baggage and stock.



Confederates March on New Mexico

When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, Fort Union took on new importance, for an immediate Confederate invasion of New Mexico was expected. Volunteer regiments reported at the fort to be mustered into the United States service, and huge quantities of supplies rolled over the Santa Fe Trail to equip them.

Col. Edward R. S. Canby, commanding Federal troops in the territory, ordered construction of a second fort across Coyote Creek from the first. It was an earthwork fortification designed for defense, and its ditches, parapets, and bombproofs were completed late in 1861.

The Confederates were already on the way, aiming at the supply stocks at Albuquerque and Fort Union and, beyond, the rich mines of Colorado that would strengthen the shaky finances of the new government in Richmond. Brig. Gen. Henry H. Sibley, who had commanded Fort Union before the war, had resigned from the U.S. Army and hastened to Texas to raise a brigade of mounted riflemen for the offensive, and by January 1862 he had concentrated about 2,500 men at El Paso for the march up the Rio Grande.

Near Fort Craig, on the middle Rio Grande, Colonel Canby met the advancing Texans in the Battle of Valverde, February 21, 1862. Sibley's army brushed aside the defenders and pushed on to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Only Fort Union lay between them and Denver.

Warning of the danger had reached Colorado, and a hastily raised regiment of volunteers marched southward under Col. John P. Slough to strengthen Fort Union. Arriving at the fort on March 11, Slough decided not to wait for the Confederates to strike him. On the 22d he led 1,342 men out on the trail toward Santa Fe. On March 26 the advance guards of the two armies collided in the narrows of Apache Canyon, 15 miles east of Santa Fe, and the Southerners were thrown back. The main armies clashed on the 28th at Pigeon's Ranch in Glorieta Pass. After heavy fighting, the Federals began to give ground.

With victory in his grasp, the Confederate field commander, Col. William R. Scurry, learned that his supply depot had been destroyed. A Federal detachment under Maj. John M. Chivington had marched through the moun-

tains south of the pass and fallen upon the Confederate base camp at Johnson's Ranch, just west of Apache Canyon. This blow left the Confederates no choice but to withdraw, and it so complicated the logistical problem that Sibley decided to call off the offensive and return to Texas. The Colorado Volunteers had saved New Mexico and their own territory for the Union.

Operations of Volunteers

The new Federal commander in New Mexico, Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, turned next to the Indian menace. The tribes had seized the opportunity offered by the Confederate invasion to step up the pace of raiding activity, and for the remainder of the Civil War years New Mexico and California Volunteers warred constantly against them.

Under the famed scout and trapper Kit Carson, now colonel of the 1st New Mexico Cavalry, units from Fort Union participated in successful campaigns against the Mescalero Apaches (1862), the Navajos (1863-64), and the Kiowas and Comanches (1864-65). In the Navajo operations, Carson's columns penetrated the depths of Canyon de Chelly, stronghold of the tribe for generations, and brought about the final collapse of Navajo resistance. In a winter march in November 1864 his command surprised a large Kiowa village at Adobe Walls, in the Texas Panhandle, and dealt these hostiles a damaging blow.

During this period, Carleton ordered a new post, the third and last, constructed at Fort Union. Most of the buildings whose adobe ruins are now seen at the fort were completed between 1863 and 1869.

Quartermaster Depot

Throughout its life Fort Union was the principal supply depot for the Department of New Mexico. Plans for the new fort begun in 1863 provided for a depot made up of commodious warehouses, corrals, shops, offices, and quarters. The supply installation overshadowed the adjacent post of Fort Union and housed far more men, largely civilian employees.

Many items the quartermaster obtained locally, but most of the food, clothing, arms, and ammunition, as well as

tools and building materials, had to be hauled over the Santa Fe Trail from Fort Leavenworth, Kans. Most of this freighting was performed by civilian companies under government contract. At Fort Union the shipments were unpacked and assigned as needed to other posts.

Across the valley from the new fort, the department ordnance depot was built partly on the site of the old log fort. Weapons, ammunitions, and related accouterments arrived here from arsenals in the East for distribution, and old or damaged weapons were returned here for repair or condemnation and disposal.

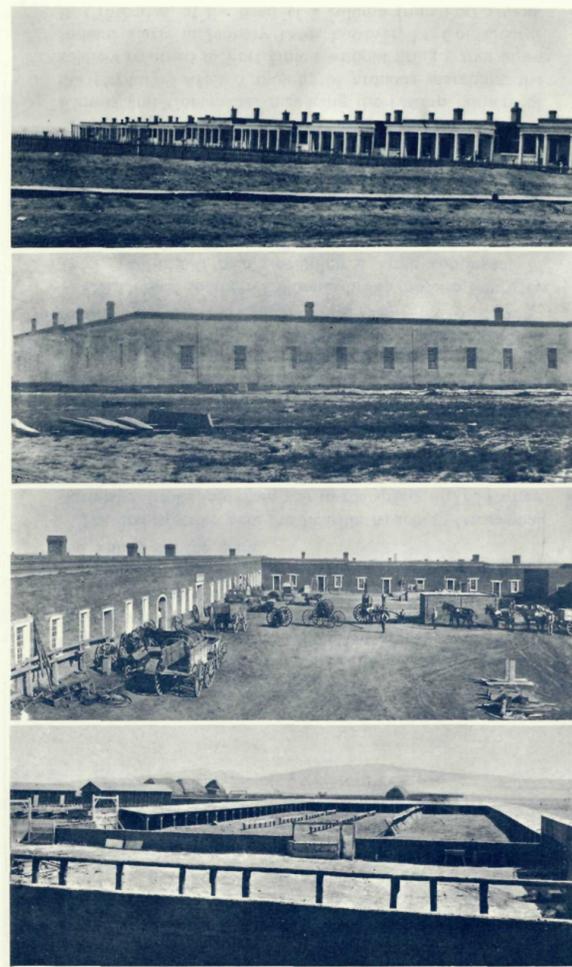
Last Indian Wars

At the close of the Civil War the volunteers were mustered out and regulars returned to the frontier forts. Fort Union troops participated in the final wars with the Plains tribes.

In the winter of 1868 Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan organized a campaign against the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas, and Comanches of the southern Plains. One of several columns ordered to converge on the Indian homeland came from New Mexico under command of Maj. A. W. Evans. On Christmas Day Evans' cavalry charged a Comanche camp at Soldier Spring on the north fork of Red River in eastern Oklahoma, killed 20 to 25 warriors, and destroyed the winter stores of the band.

Although Sheridan's operations in 1868-69 brought the tribes to terms, they broke loose again in 1874. Again Fort Union and other New Mexico posts furnished one of several columns that moved against the hostiles. Maj. William R. Price led the New Mexico command. Throughout the autumn, winter, and spring of 1874-75, the columns lacing the Staked Plains skirmished with fugitive Indians and kept them constantly on the move until, one after another, they made their way eastward to surrender at Fort Sill.

These operations, known as the Red River War, brought peace at last to the southern Plains. For Fort Union, the Indian wars had closed. Moreover, the arrival of the Santa Fe railroad in 1879 largely ended the supply activities of the fort. Like many other frontier posts, it had ceased to be of much use and was abandoned in 1891.

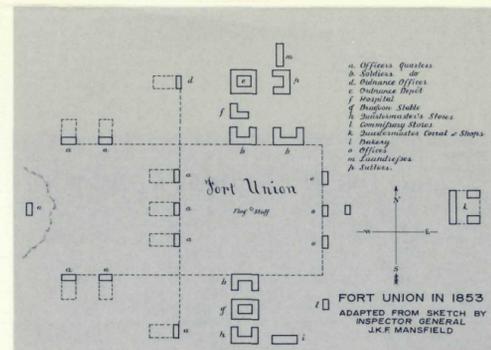


The third and last fort was almost a city in itself. Erected between 1863 and 1869, it consisted of the post of Fort Union and the Fort Union Quartermaster Depot. Above are officers' quarters and barracks of the post, below the mechanics' and herders' corrals of the depot.

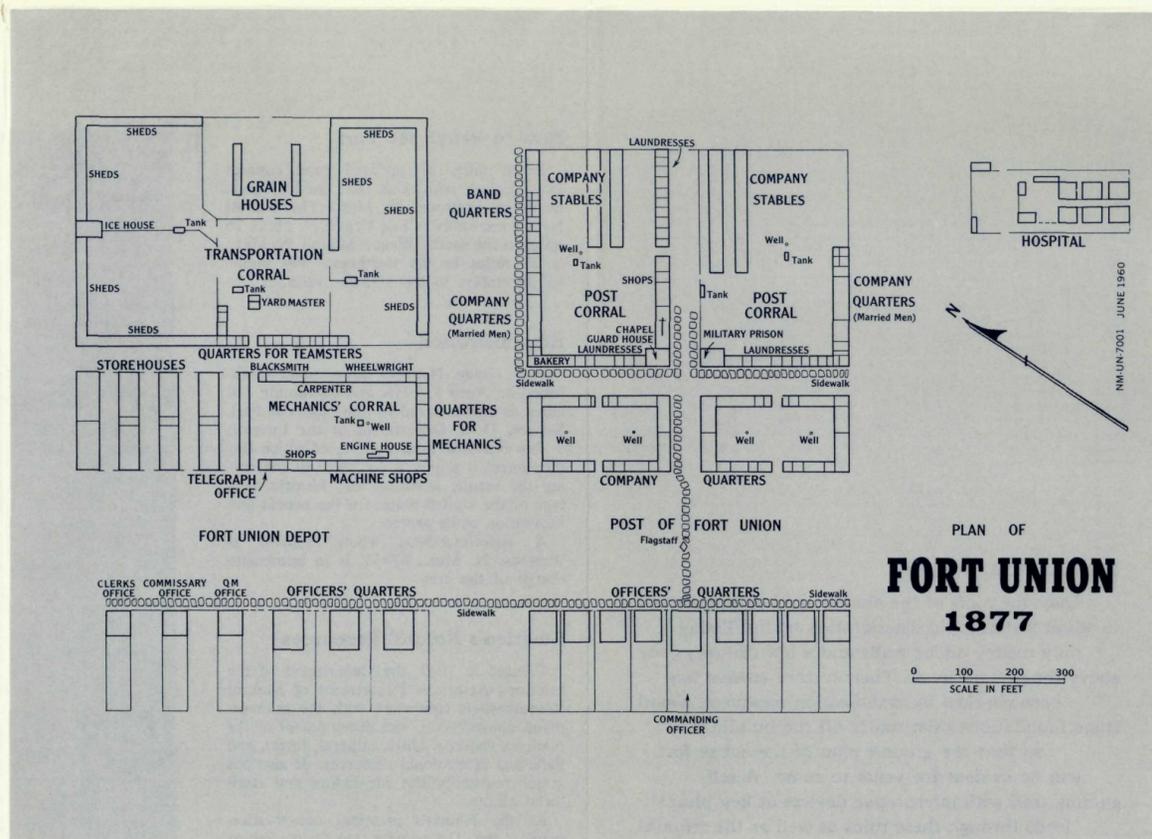
NATIONAL ARCHIVES



So faithfully did Frederic Remington capture the appearance of the typical frontier trooper that for years this sketch adorned the cover of The Cavalry Journal, organ of the U.S. Cavalry Association.



Joseph Heger's 1859 view of the first Fort Union. ARIZONA PIONEERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Fort Union Today

Once the roofs of the abandoned buildings began to admit water, rapid deterioration set in. Today only melted adobe walls and a few chimneys rise above the ground level. Their further erosion has been checked by stabilization measures. Good stone foundations exist under all the buildings, so that the ground plan of the entire fort will be evident for years to come. A self-guiding trail with interpretive devices at key places leads through these ruins as well as the remains of the earthen star fort erected during the Civil War. Across the valley to the west the ruins of the arsenal can be seen near the site of the first fort. The visitor center tells the story of the fort and displays artifacts associated with it.

COVER: Insignia of the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, based at Fort Union from 1856 to 1861. Though created in 1846 to guard the Oregon Trail, it performed this duty only between 1849 and 1851. Thereafter it served in Texas and New Mexico until 1861, when it became the 3d Cavalry.

How to Reach the Fort

Seven miles of surfaced road connect Fort Union with U.S. 85 one-half mile north of Watrous, N. Mex. The nearest large community is Las Vegas, N. Mex., 26 miles to the south. Wagon Mound, N. Mex., is 27 miles to the northeast. No public transportation to the area is available.

Administration

Fort Union National Monument, established on April 5, 1956, and containing 720 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this monument is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.

A superintendent, whose address is Watrous, N. Mex., 87753, is in immediate charge of the area.

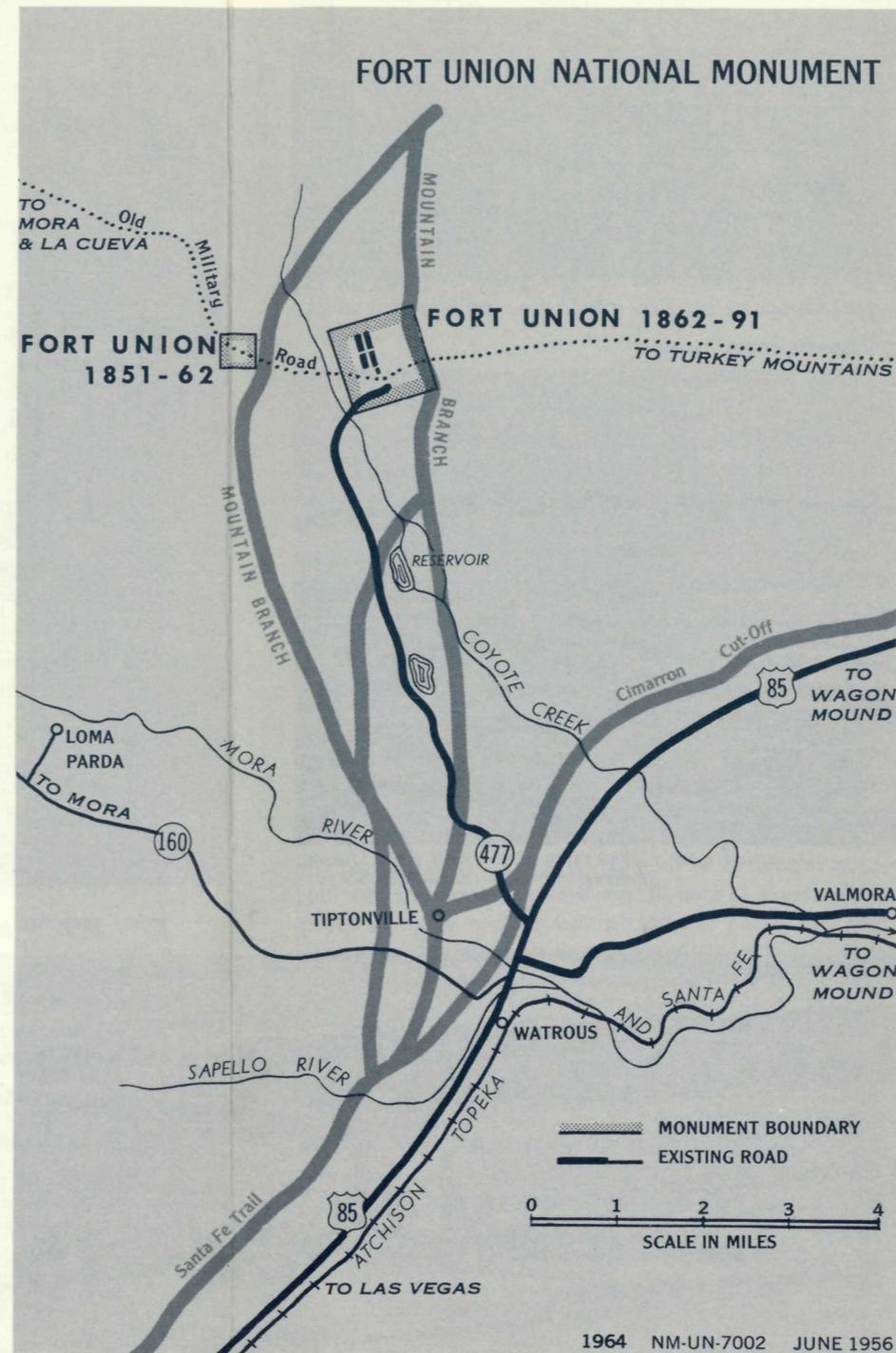
America's Natural Resources

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

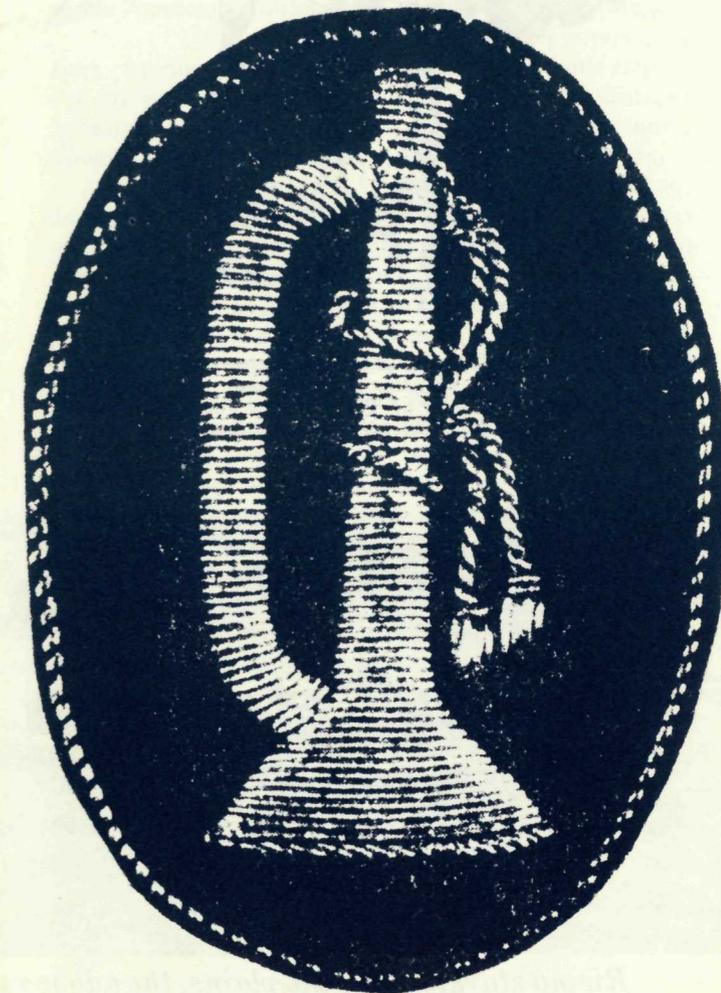
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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