

# Fort Craig

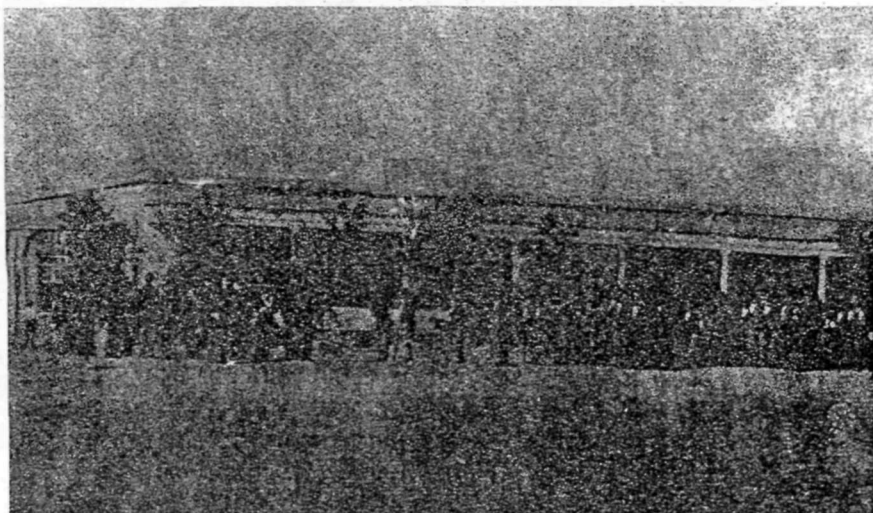


U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management  
Socorro Resource Area

In the mid-1800s the territory of New Mexico was crossed by a large number of trails. Located along the travel routes were numerous military forts, designed to protect travelers and settlers. These outposts played a key role in the settlement of the American frontier.

Fort Craig was one of the largest forts constructed in the West and it played a crucial role in Indian campaigns and the Civil War. Established in 1854, the primary function of the fort was to control Apache and Navajo raiding and to protect the central portion of the Camino Real, which stretched from northern Mexico to Taos, 70 miles north of Santa Fe. Military excursions from the fort pursued such notable Apache leaders as Geronimo, Victorio, and Nana.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Fort Craig remained a Union Army Post manned by regular army troops. In 1862, troops under the command of General H.H. Sibley continued up the Rio Grande after capturing military installations to the south. On February 21, 1862, Sibley's Confederate troops engaged Union troops led by Colonel R.S. Canby. The Battle of Valverde took place upstream from Fort Craig at Valverde Crossing. Although many consider the battle to have been a Confederate victory, Union forces succeeded in holding the fort and half of the Confederate's supply wagons were destroyed. The loss of the remaining supplies at the Battle of Glorieta, east of Santa Fe, on March 28, 1862 forced the Confederates to retreat back to Texas and ended southern aspirations for military conquest in the West.

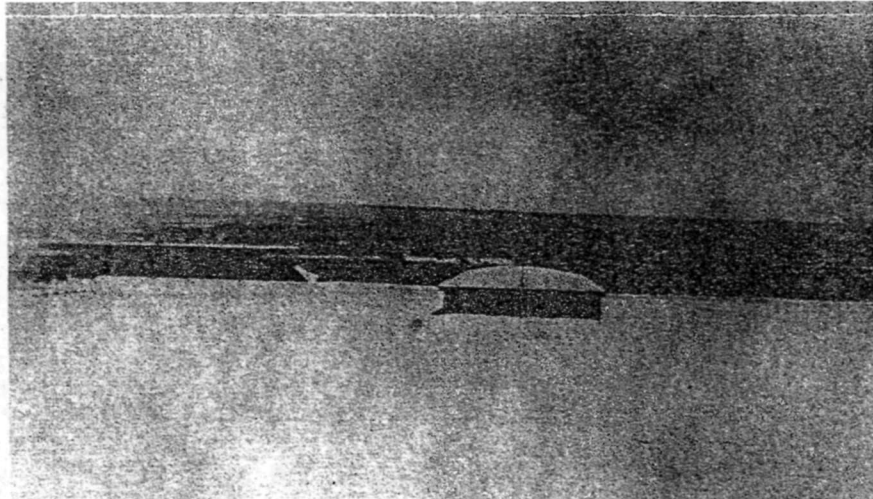


Fort Craig circa 1865 - 1868: Union soldiers in front of the enlisted men's quarters. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

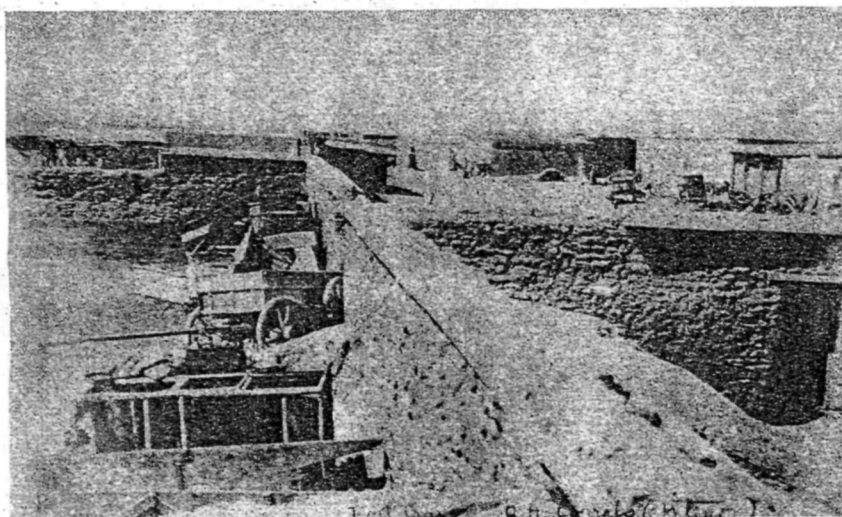


Officers' quarters circa 1865-1868. Photo courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society.

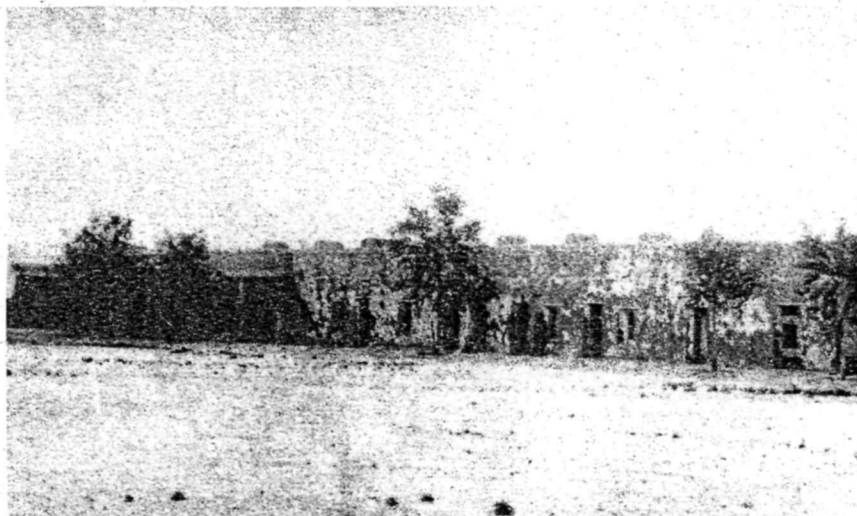
After the Civil War, troops stationed at the fort resumed their attempts to control Indian raiding. By the late 1870s, these efforts began to succeed and the surrounding valley prospered under military protection. The fort was temporarily closed from 1878 to 1880 and, because the fort's military function was no longer necessary, the fort was permanently abandoned in 1885. Nine years later the Fort Craig was sold at auction to the Valverde Land and Irrigation Company, the only bidder. The property was eventually donated to The Archaeological Conservancy by the Oppenheimer family and transferred to the Bureau of Land Management in 1981. The site is a BLM Special Management Area and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Powder magazine located at the fort center with Quartermaster's offices to the southeast. *Photo courtesy of the National Archives.*



Fort Craig circa 1865 - 1868: Interior corrals - all wagons and animals were kept within the fort's walls. *Photo courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico.*



The post hospital (at extreme left) may have discouraged any of the men from becoming ill. *Photo courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society.*

Congress has enacted legislation, known as the Boots and Saddles Tour, to protect historic forts that played a significant role in the Civil War and the Indian campaigns in New Mexico. Studies were prepared on how best to manage the forts and the trails that linked them together and vehicular, hiking, and horseback riding segments along the historic routes are planned for public visitation.

An implementation plan was prepared to aid in developing Fort Craig for public visitation. The plan calls for construction of trails, installation of interpretive signs, and research into the fort's occupation. If you wish to visit Fort Craig, please call the Bureau of Land Management at 505-835-0412 for further information.

It's a crime to steal or destroy cultural resources on Public Land. The Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 makes destruction of sites a criminal offense, with penalties up to \$100,000 and/or 5 years imprisonment.

Join the fight to protect sites and artifacts by reporting acts of theft or vandalism. You can do this by calling the BLM at 835-0412 or the Socorro County Sheriff at 835-0941. Please note the time, place, license plate numbers of vehicles involved, descriptions of individuals, etc. Sometimes a single clue will lead to the arrest and conviction of a thief or vandal. Do not attempt to confront the violator, a law enforcement specialist will do this. The fight to protect New Mexico's heritage is a cooperative effort involving everyone!



Valverde was the scene of the bloodiest Civil War battle in the Southwest. In 1862 the battlefield was a sandy flood plain covered with grasses and cottonwood copses. Sibley's men were poorly equipped, had little winter clothing, and a high incidence of disease. On the Union side, Canby's men included regular troops, untried militia volunteers, and conscripts mustered by force. Canby sought to protect Fort Craig and Fort Union to control the Rio Grande Valley and planned to fight only under favorable conditions. Thus when Sibley tried to lure the Union soldiers out of Fort Craig, Canby refused battle.

This placed the rebels in a quandary. They were not strong enough to assault the fort, but the success of Sibley's campaign was dependent on the capture of Union supplies before continuing their march northward. Eventually, the Confederates crossed the river north of the fort in hopes of cutting off supply lines and luring Union forces into battle. On February 20, Canby sent troops across the river to attack the enemy flank, but his men panicked under fire. The next morning Union forces collided with the Confederates and the battle was on.

The Confederate troops left their supply trains lightly guarded and most of them were destroyed by the Union militia. On the verge of disaster, the Confederates launched a last ditch effort on Captain Alexander McCrae's battery and the poorly trained Volunteers broke and ran. Canby, having more to lose than Sibley, withdrew to the fort.

Though the Confederates possessed the field of battle, it is debatable whether they really won the engagement. The Confederate logistical supplies were insufficient and Sibley's brigade was too lightly equipped to be anything more than a large raiding party. Losses in animals and supply trains made their situation even worse and there were none of the expected fruits of victory. Facing starvation, the Confederates could not invest further efforts in Fort Craig and they abandoned the battlefield and marched north.

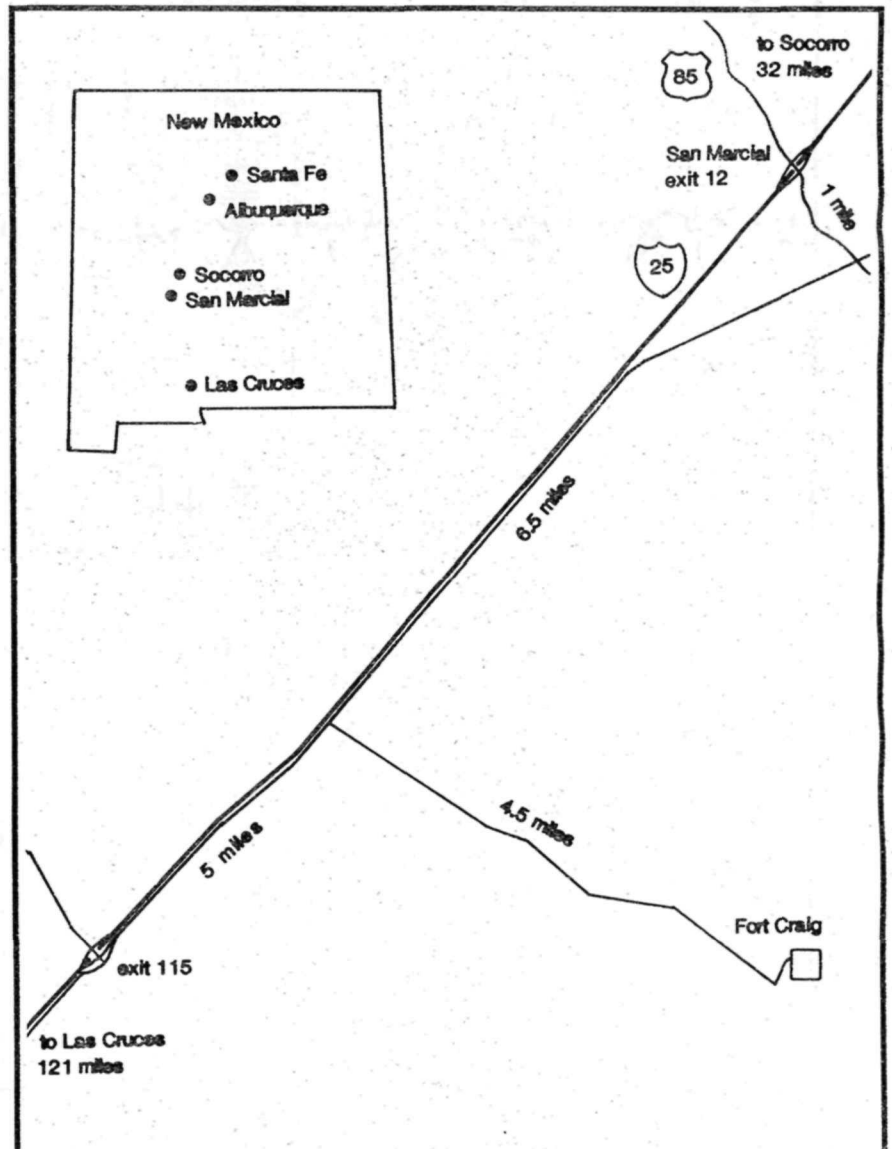
Canby went on to a distinguished military career, and was the only general officer to die in the Indian Wars. Sibley was relieved from his command in 1863 and faded into obscurity.

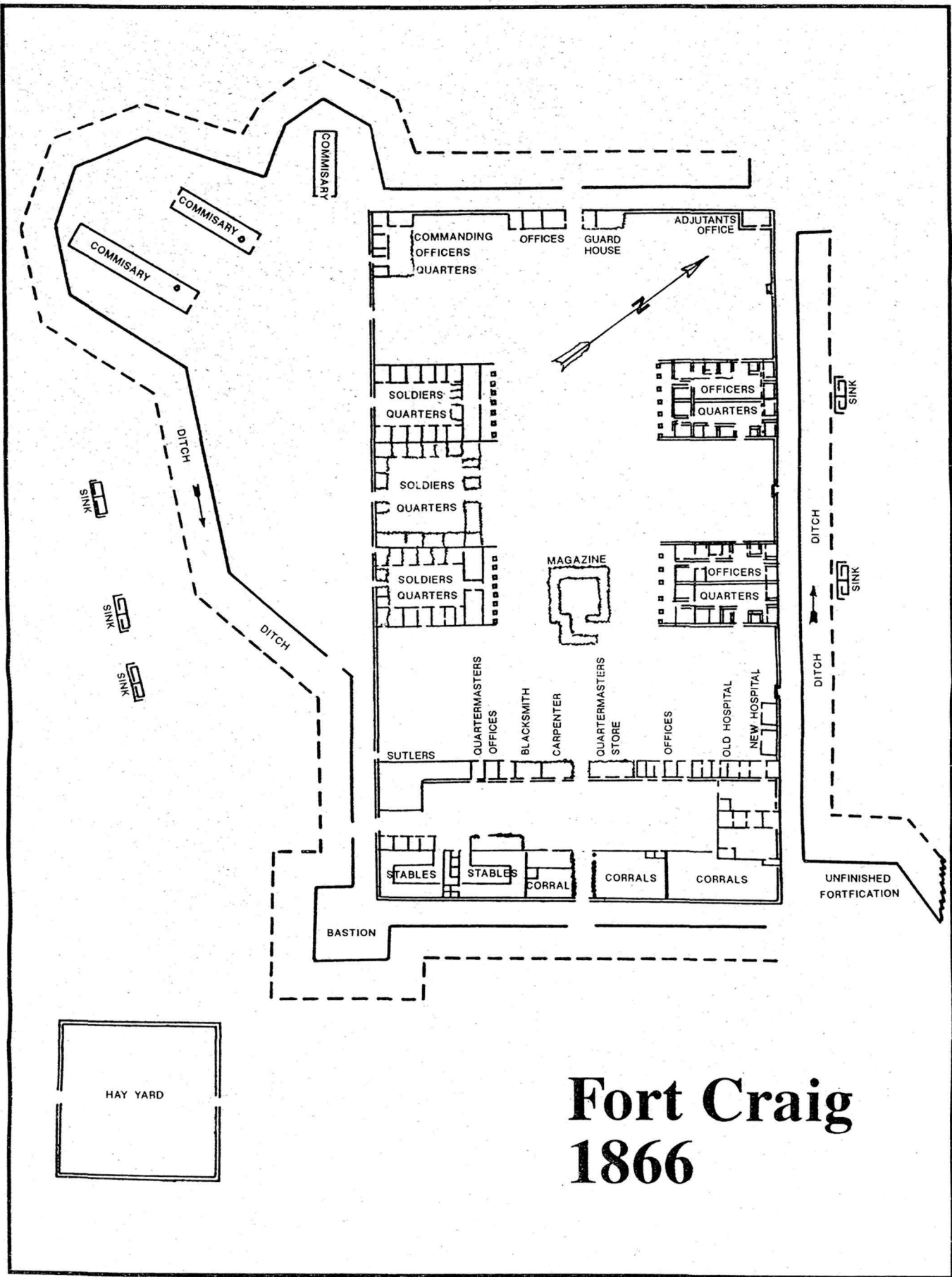


Colonel Edward R. S. Canby

General Henry Hopkins Sibley

*Photos courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico*





# Fort Craig 1866