

Officers' Row at Fort Davis. The post hospital is in the left background.  
NPS / TOM GRAY

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 emigrants, 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.

The fort was established on the eastern side of the Davis Mountains, in a box canyon near Limpia Creek, where wood, water, and grass were plentiful. It 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.) Named after Secretary of War

Jefferson Davis, the fort was first garrisoned by Lt. Col. Washington Seawell and six companies of the Eighth US Infantry. 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 onset of the Civil War and Texas's secession from the Union, the federal government evacuated Fort Davis. The fort was occupied by Confederate troops from spring 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 newly organized Ninth US Cavalry reoccupied Fort Davis in June 1867. The building of a new post, just east of the original site, began immedi-

ately. 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 over 100 structures and quarters for over 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 regularly 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."



NPS/RICHARD SCHLECHT

## 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 US Army engaged in open hostilities against these highly mobile, lightly equipped, and courageous warriors. The Indian resistance gradually declined due to growing settlement and development of the region. The Comanche warrior's portrait (right) was painted by Frederic Remington.



FREDERIC REMINGTON MUSEUM  
OGDENSBURG, NY

## Victorio (*Bidúuya*)

This proud and aggressive leader of the Warm Springs Apaches (left) resisted efforts to confine his people to the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona. His refusal to accept reservation life led to conflicts 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 (Three Peaks) in Mexico.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES



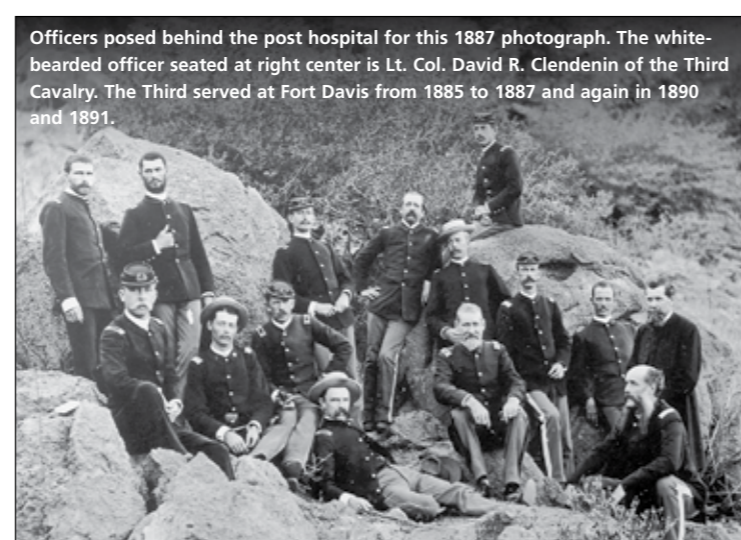
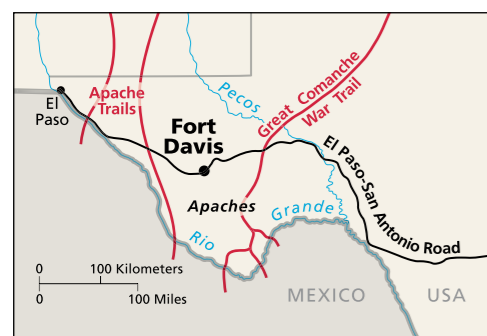
## Fort Davis and the Indian Wars

Few Indians lived in the Trans-Pecos region of western Texas (map), but many tribes regularly passed through it. Kiowas and Comanches came from the Plains to

the north and the Apaches from the mountains of southeastern New Mexico. Their raiding lifestyle led to conflicts 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 Indian groups. The Indian Wars in west Texas ended shortly after the defeat of Victorio in 1880.

By 1885, when soldiers of the Tenth Cavalry serving at Fort Davis were sent to Arizona to campaign against Geronimo, most Indians in the Southwest were living on reservations.



FORT DAVIS NHS

## Officers and Enlisted Men

Both officers and enlisted men at Fort Davis spent far more time 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 temperate 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.

Although they were separated professionally, 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. They left a proud record of accomplishments.

NPS / RICHARD SCHLECHT



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

LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD NMA

## 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 in two regiments. Troops of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry regiments along with the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry regiments served on the southwestern frontier. Some historians think Indians named these troops "Buffalo Soldiers," comparing their hair to buffalo hair and finding them worthy adversaries.

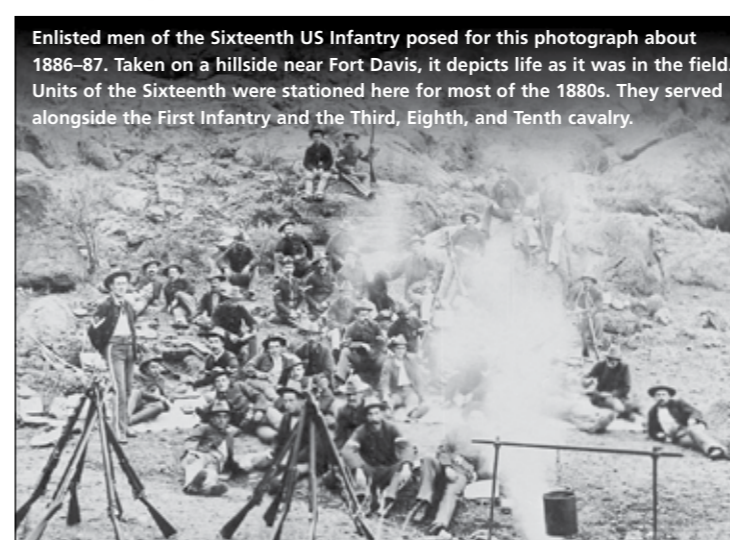
## Garrison and Field Duty at Fort Davis



Troopers of the Ninth US Cavalry on Dress Parade at Fort Davis in 1875.  
FORT DAVIS NHS

Buffalo Soldiers served at Fort Davis from 1867 to 1885. Routine garrison duties included drilling, tending animals, constructing and repairing buildings, and planting gardens. 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, they contributed notably to the settlement of western Texas and southeastern New Mexico.



FORT DAVIS NHS

Enlisted men of the Sixteenth US Infantry posed for this 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 here for most of the 1880s. They served alongside the First Infantry and the Third, Eighth, and Tenth cavalry.

## Second Lt. Henry O. Flipper

Henry O. Flipper of the Tenth US Cavalry was the first black graduate of West Point. He served at Fort Davis in 1880-81. Tried in a controversial court-martial, he was dismissed from the army in 1882.

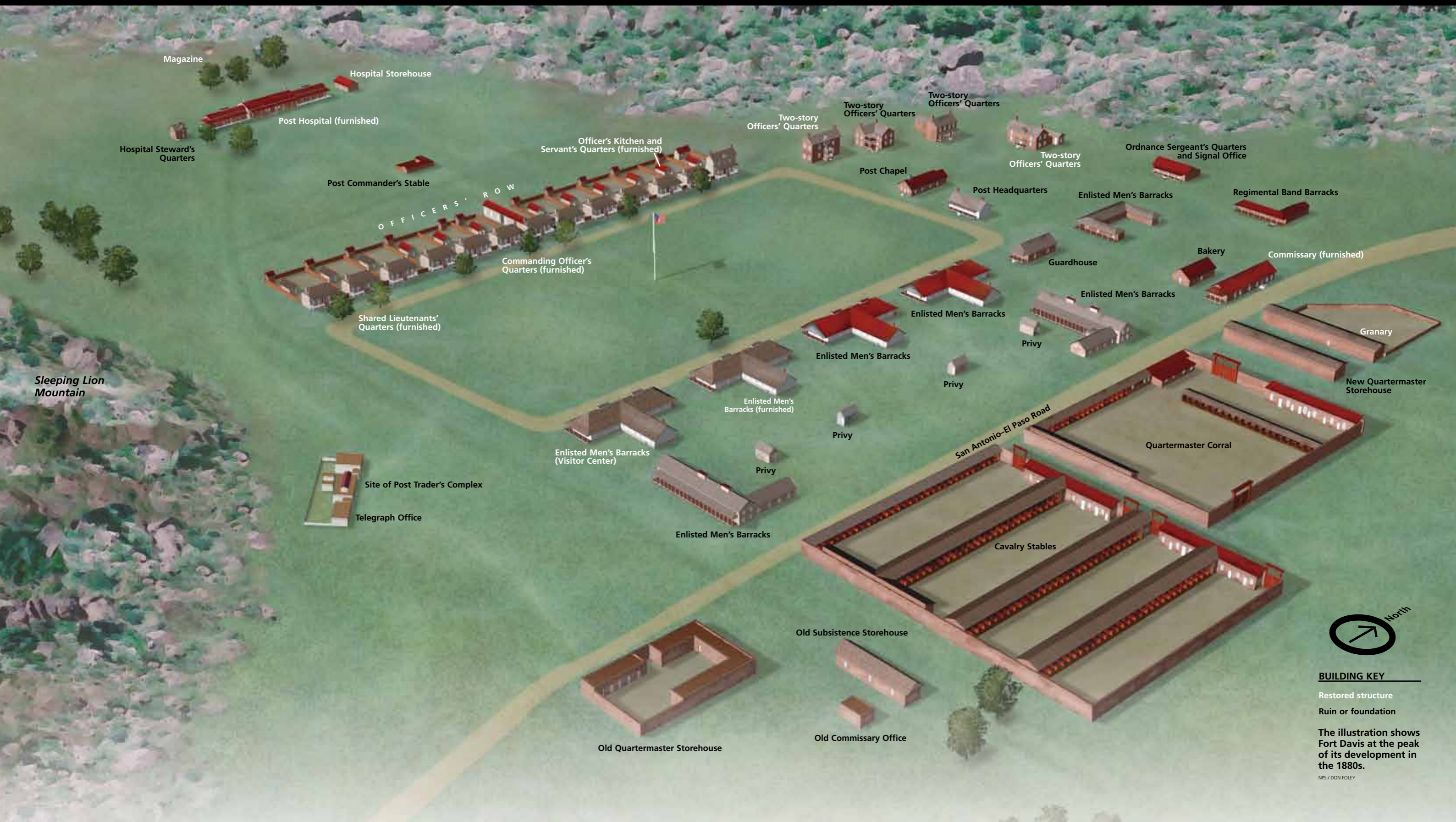
In 1976, after reviewing his case, the army posthumously gave him an honorable discharge. Lt. Flipper received a full presidential pardon in 1999.



US MILITARY ACADEMY



# Exploring Fort Davis



## BUILDING KEY

Restored structure

Ruin or foundation

The illustration shows Fort Davis at the peak of its development in the 1880s.

NPS / DON FOLEY

## About Your Visit

Fort Davis National Historic Site, on the northern edge of the town of Fort Davis, can be reached from north or south via Texas highways 17 and 118 and from the west via Texas highways 505, 166, and 17.

The park is open daily 8 am to 5 pm central time. Check our website or call for holiday closures. A small entry fee is charged, but persons 15 years and under, educational groups, and those presenting approved passes are admitted free.

**Accessibility** We strive to make our facilities and services accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

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 523-acre site has several hiking trails.

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

**Preservation** Help us preserve Fort Davis for future generations by observing the following:  
• Pets are not permitted in public buildings and must be leashed.

- Please stay on the established paths, and do not walk on the parade ground.
- Do not walk, stand, or sit on the foundations. Your adherence to these rules will help protect the historical and natural resources of the site.
- It is illegal to collect anything or to disturb artifacts, animals, plants, or rocks; all are protected by federal law.

**More Information**  
Fort Davis National Historic Site  
P.O. Box 1379  
101 Lt. Henry Flipper Drive  
Fort Davis, TX 79734  
432-426-3224 ext. 220  
[www.nps.gov/foda](http://www.nps.gov/foda)

To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).



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

After the post was abandoned, civilians lived in some of the quarters for several years. Civilian upkeep, moderate weather, and a private owner's work to maintain some buildings spared

this fort the rapid deterioration that befell most other abandoned frontier posts. Some structures have disappeared, while others suffered the ravages of time and the elements.

After the fort became a national historic site in 1963, the National Park Service, through a continuing program of restoration and preservation, managed to save many original structures.

## Touring Fort Davis

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

**A Word of Caution**  
The foundations and ruins are fragile. Walking or climbing on them is destructive, hazardous, and illegal.

**Visitor Center**  
Located in what was originally an enlisted men's barracks, the visitor center has a bookstore and exhibits. Entry permits must be obtained here, along with information on the 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 has cavalry, infantry, artillery, and transportation exhibits.

The north end has a squad room and an orderly room. It offers a glimpse of summer 1884, when it was occupied by Buffalo 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 was the office for the troop's first sergeant.

**Commissary**  
This large building on the San Antonio-El Paso Road held the garrison food supplies. Enlisted men had rations, but officers and civilian workers could buy food products at cost plus the transportation. The commissary sergeant's office and the issue room are refurbished. The office occupied by the Acting Commissary of Subsistence (officer in charge of the commissary office) has interpretive exhibits.

**Officer's Kitchen and Servant's Quarters**  
This two-room refurbished building was the kitchen and servants' quarters for that Officer's Quarters. It was separate from the main house

mostly because of fire danger. Extreme summer heat and unpleasant cooking odors were factors as well.

**Post Hospital**  
With a second ward added 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 and interactive exhibits.

**The 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 is furnished to the period 1882-85, when the colonel was post commander.

**Shared Lieutenants' Quarters**  
This structure was built for a captain in May 1882, but, because of a housing shortage, it was soon designated a shared quarters. It is refurbished as if a bachelor lieutenant lived in the north side and a married lieutenant in the south side.

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