

Fort Davis

National Historic Site
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U.S. Department of the Interior



The Twenty-fifth U.S. Infantry at Fort Davis 1870-1880

As with the Twenty-fourth U. S. Infantry, the Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry evolved from units originally authorized by the 1866 Act of Congress. The Twenty-fifth, formed during the army's reduction-in-force of 1869, was composed of personnel from the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Infantry Regiments. Enlisted men of the two parent units had been drawn from southern Louisiana and northern Virginia. Many had seen limited service as Union volunteers during the Civil War.

Several distinguished officers were selected to command the new regiment, including Colonel Joseph A. Mower, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Hinks and Major Zenas R. Bliss. All were seasoned veterans of the Civil War. The first headquarters of the regiment was established at Jackson Barracks, Louisiana in April 1869. The Twenty-fifth did not enjoy this peaceful home for long, however, as it was soon moved to the Texas frontier.

Proceeding by official order to San Antonio in May and June of 1870, the regiment's ten companies went into bivouac together for the last time for many years to come. They were soon to be scattered far and wide to posts in western Texas –Forts Davis, Clark, Bliss and Stockton.

In the course of the June 20, 1870 regimental inspection conducted by Department of Texas Commander James H. Carleton, the troops of the Twenty-fifth were found to be well trained and disciplined. A drill demonstration scheduled for the same review was cancelled due to the extreme heat of the afternoon. The first sergeant of Company A collapsed on the San Antonio parade ground that day from the effects of heat exhaustion. This experience was just a taste of what he and the men of his company were to endure as part of their upcoming duty at Fort Davis.

On July 31, 1870, after a march of about 350 miles through the summer heat of Texas, Companies A and G arrived at Fort Davis. These miles were the forerunners of thousands more to be covered by the foot soldiers of the regiment as they performed a variety of duties in and around Fort Davis. The duty would take the men to the border country along the Rio Grande, to the Mescalero Apache Reservation in southern New Mexico, and to numerous mail stations and army camps on the trails crisscrossing the Trans-Pecos region of Texas.

Life at Fort Davis for the soldiers of Companies A and G began with inglorious, but essential assignments. Company A was split into smaller detachments that were detailed to guard nearby stage stations from Apache or Comanche attacks. Company G was ordered to a forested area 16 miles west of the fort to establish and operate a lumber camp and sawmill, one of several known over the years as the "Pineries." In the succeeding months and years, from the fall of 1870 to the spring of 1880, various other companies of the Twenty-fifth Infantry served at Fort Davis.

A new and highly respected commander, Colonel George L. Andrews, was assigned to the Twenty-fifth in June 1871. Early in 1872, Andrews with the regiment's field staff and band were transferred to Fort Davis. The post served as the headquarters for the regiment until May of 1880.

Besides the construction and maintenance of buildings on post and other routine garrison duties, the enlisted men and officers of the Twenty-fifth participated in many off-post projects. Company E accomplished the construction of new roads through Wild Rose Pass and Musquiz Canyon, under the command of Captain David Schooley. When government trains were detailed to Tularosa, New Mexico to pick up lumber for the fort, a

detachment from the regiment often served as the protective escort. In December 1876, a large contingent was ordered to "Presidio del Norte, Texas for the purpose of protecting American citizens from aggression by Mexican marauders and bandits." Part of the contingent remained in Presidio for more than two months before peace was finally restored to the settlement.

Perhaps the most important field-labor detail for the regiment was that completed by Second Lieutenant George Andrews and the men of Company I in February of 1879. They constructed 91-1/2 miles of telegraph line west from Fort Davis to Eagle Springs (near present-day Sierra Blanca, Texas), connecting with a recently finished section from Fort Bliss. This telegraph line, in conjunction with another from Fort Concho to Fort Davis, was the vital communications link used by Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, Tenth U. S. Cavalry, and his command during a subsequent campaign against Apaches in western Texas.

While Colonel Grierson was planning strategies during the Victorio Campaign, Colonel George L. Andrews (father of the aforementioned lieutenant) received orders for the transfer of his regiment to what was in 1880 known as the Dakota Territory. By the end of the summer of 1880, the entire command relocated to the Northern Plains. Duties for the companies of the Twenty-fifth at their new stations were very similar to those performed in Texas.

The Twenty-fifth U. S. Infantry compiled an impressive history on the frontier. Surmounting the obstacles of harsh living conditions, difficult duty, low pay, and racial prejudice, the men of the regiment gained a reputation for dedication and bravery. The words of Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, in a General Order issued by him in 1881, may best reflect this reputation: "It is a pleasant duty for me to thank the officers and enlisted men for the zeal and alacrity with which they responded to every demand . . . for the fortitude with which they braved dangers, and the intelligent activity and efficiency manifested in the discharge of the duties assigned them."