

**fort union**





Adapted from an illustration by Frederic Remington

### Fort Union's Past

After New Mexico became U.S. territory, the Army set up its department headquarters and principal supply depot at Fort Marcy in Santa Fe. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory, and in April 1851 Lt. Col. Edwin Sumner was ordered to take command of the defenses of New Mexico and "revise the whole system of defense." One of his first acts was to establish Fort Union to which he moved the headquarters and depot in August. Thus he got the soldiers close to the Indians—one of the main reasons Federal troops were in New Mexico—and away from the Santa Fe, "that sink of vice and extravagance."

The first of the three forts that ultimately occupied the site consisted of shabby log buildings. For a decade it served as the base for military activities in the area and as a key station on the Santa Fe Trail. It became the principal quartermaster depot of the Southwest, receiving supplies from the east and forwarding them to posts throughout the territory. Dragoons and mounted riflemen fought the Indians who attacked the mountain villages to the north and the desert stretches of the Santa Fe Trail to the east. The nomadic tribes of New Mexico had long fought the Spaniards and Mexicans. Now they fought the Americans who were overrunning their lands and killing all the game.

The Jicarilla Apaches struck first. Open war broke out in the spring of 1854 when Apaches ambushed and nearly wiped out a company of dragoons. Lt. Col. Philip St. George Cooke led a determined campaign that drove the Apaches into the mountains west of the Rio Grande. On April 8 the command routed Chief Chacon and his warriors. The conflict ended inconclusively, however, and many Jicarillas took refuge with the Utes who began raiding Colorado and New Mexico settlements late that year.

With 500 men, including a large contingent of volunteers, Col. Thomas Fauntleroy rode north in February 1855. Minor skirmishing climaxed on April 28 when the troops surprised a Ute camp and attacked. Forty Indians were slain and their lodges burned. Ute resistance collapsed.

Less successful was the campaign of 1860 against Kiowas and Comanches who raided the eastern borders of New Mexico. After five months of marching, the soldiers returned to Fort Union without firing a shot at an Indian. Early in Janu-

ary 1861, however, Lt. Col. George B. Crittenden attacked a Kiowa camp, killed 10 Indians, destroyed the village and its contents, and captured 40 horses. Such as it was, this was the Army's success against the Indians.



Frederic Remington

In April 1861, South Carolinians fired upon Fort Sumter and the problems with the Indians suddenly became less important. Confederate invasion of New Mexico was expected imminently. Col. Edward S. Canby, commanding Federal troops in the territory, ordered construction of an earthwork fortification designed for defense. The ditches, parapets, and bombproofs of the second Fort Union were completed late in 1861.

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 Confederate offensive. By January 1862 he had concentrated about 2,500 men at El Paso for the march up the Rio Grande toward Fort Union's supplies and Colorado's gold fields. Colonel Canby and his troops met the advancing Texans on the middle stretches of the Rio Grande. Sibley's army brushed them aside and pushed on to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Only Fort Union lay between them and Denver.

News of the invasion had reached Colorado and a hastily raised regiment of volunteers marched southward. Deciding to attack first, Col. John P. Slough led his men toward Santa Fe. On March 26 the advance guards of the two armies collided in the narrows of Apache Canyon, 24 kilometers (15 miles) east of Santa Fe, and the Southerners were thrown back. Two days later, the main armies clashed at Pigeon's Ranch in Glorieta Pass. After heavy fighting, the Federals began

to give ground. But with victory in his grasp, Col. William R. Scurry, the Confederate commander, learned that his supply depot had been destroyed by a Federal detachment. This loss forced the Confederates to withdraw.

With New Mexico securely in Union hands, work got underway on the third and final fort. The plans provided for a depot with warehouses, corals, shops, offices, and quarters. The supply installation overshadowed the adjacent post and housed far more men, largely civilian employees.

In the meantime the troops, at first the volunteers from California and New Mexico and after the Civil War the men of the regular army, turned their attention to the Indians. Kit Carson, whose name was well known in his own day, led units from Fort Union against the Mescalero Apaches, the Navajos, the Kiowas, and Comanches. The campaign against the Navajos penetrated Canyon de Chelly, a century-old stronghold. All Navajo resistance collapsed and 8,000 members of the tribe were removed to a reservation—an experiment that failed.

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 the several columns ordered to converge on the Indians' homeland came from New Mexico posts commanded by Maj. A. W. Evans. On Christmas Day Evans' cavalry charged a Comanche camp at Soldier Spring, 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 revolted again in 1874. Again Fort Union and other New Mexico posts furnished several columns of troops. Throughout the fall, winter, and spring of 1874-75, the columns skirmished with the Indians and kept them constantly on the move until, one after another, they made their way eastward to surrender at Fort Sill. These small battles and engagements on the Staked Plains were known as the Red River War. The final result was peace for the southern Plains, albeit on the white man's terms.

The end of the Indian Wars and the arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad were the death knell for Fort Union; it had ceased to be of much use and was abandoned in February 1891.

### Santa Fe Trail

American traders began the trek to Santa Fe after William Becknell blazed the way in 1821. The profits were enormous, sometimes exceeding 400 percent, and within a short time many traders were willing to risk the dangers of the trail for the monetary rewards.

Originally the trail began in Franklin, Mo., but a change in the Missouri River course washed the town away and Independence became the jumping-off place. The trail led west through Council Grove, the spring rendezvous site, to Fort Dodge, Kans., where it forked, one route going southwest through the Cimarron Desert and the other continuing west into Colorado and then turning south.



Artist unknown

Both branches merged just beyond Fort Union, 121 kilometers (75 miles) from Santa Fe. The Cimarron route was the shorter and more dangerous because of infrequent water and hostile Kiowas and Comanches who had been friendly until the white traders had shown them they had no reason to be. But if a wagon train could make it through the desert and avoid the Indians, a trader could beat his rivals to Santa Fe and reap the first and biggest profits.

In 1844 the Mexican government, fearing that the Americans had more than just an economic interest in their province, closed the trail. But it had played too big a role in the opening of the West and within four years Santa Fe was U.S. territory. With the southwest in American hands and with the goldrush in California, traffic on the trail boomed once again. Its success, however, increased the demands for better, faster transportation. In 1863 the first rails were laid west of the Missouri, and 17 years later the first train pulled into Santa Fe. The trail was then just a memory and some ruts on the plains.

## A Walking Tour

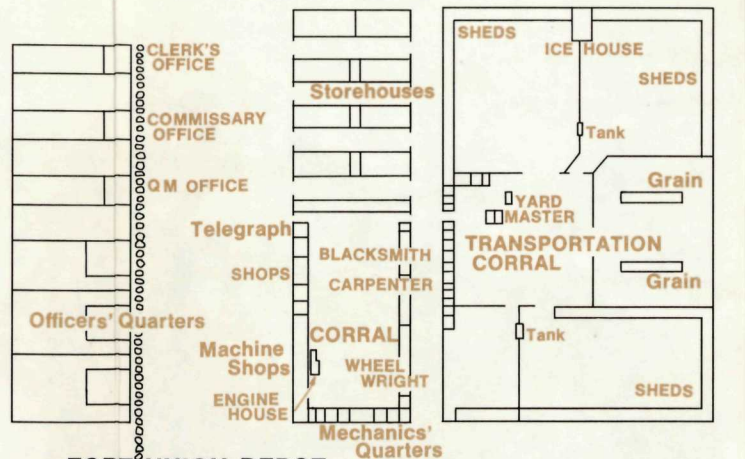
No set trail or sequence need be followed in viewing the fort. You need only know that the fort consisted of the post, the depot, and the arsenal across the valley to the southwest. The post housed the purely military activities, the administrative functions, and the mundane business that kept daily life going. The depot dealt with the supply trains, transportation matters, and the supply of the other southwestern forts. The arsenal stored and distributed arms and ammunition. Together all 3 made Fort Union. No stockade or wall surrounded the fort; indeed, few southwestern forts had one. Feel free to examine the artifacts along the trail. And then, of course, please put them back so that those who come later may discover them too.

Abandoned over 80 years ago, the building of Fort Union soon began to fall into disrepair. How to preserve the ruins at Fort Union was and is a perplexing problem, for no completely adequate solution has been found.

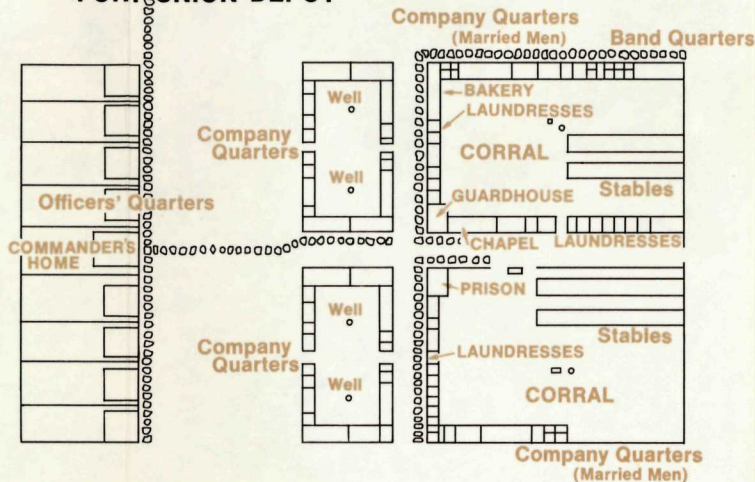
At Fort Union all chimneys rest on and are filled with reinforced concrete. Missing rocks in the foundations have been replaced and walls repointed. Adobe walls have been sprayed with silicone which makes them water resistant and lets them "breathe" so that any moisture coming up from the ground can evaporate. But the silicone treatment lasts only 1 to 5 years—just one of a host of problems.

The National Park Service is now working with the Archeological Center of the University of Arizona on finding a lasting means of halting deterioration of adobe ruins. Chemical sprays, epoxies, and other materials are being studied, as well as "soft" applications of adobe mud.

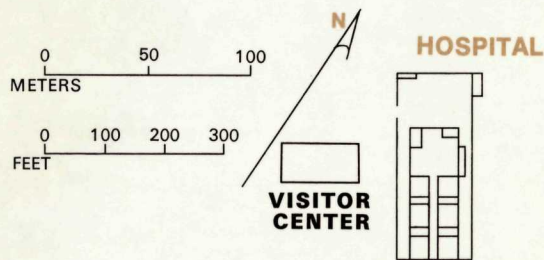
**Though stabilized, the ruins would fall if climbed on. While every effort is made to provide for your safety in these surroundings, you must remain alert and exercise caution.**



**FORT UNION DEPOT**



**POST OF FORT UNION**



Rank has its privileges, and for the commanding officer this meant an eight-room POST COMMANDER'S HOME with a cellar in a walled backyard. When the floor of the center hallway was covered with stretched canvas and suitably decorated, it became a perfect dancing floor, at least according to one woman. Walk through the rooms and imagine how it would have been to have this house to yourself compared to the junior officers' quarters which were smaller and shared by two officers and their families.

As supply trains arrived from the north over the Santa Fe Trail the tons of material necessary to an army were unloaded, stored, repacked, and ultimately shipped to other southwestern forts from the FORT UNION DEPOT. Besides the military assigned here, hundreds of civilians were on the payroll. During February 1868, for example, 396 men were employed here in a variety of professions. They were paid a total of \$18,047 each month, just over \$45 per man.

Although the quartermaster, who often outranked the post commander, commanded only the depot, he was responsible for all of the construction in the fort. Thus, the depot was built first, and then the post. The QUARTERMASTER OFFICER'S QUARTERS was also the finest residence at Fort Union. Walk around and inspect it. Notice especially the workmanship in the foundation stones, the arched fireplaces, the brick cellars, patio, and sidewalk leading to the privy in the rear. Here, too, you have a good example of the adobe wall that enclosed three sides of the backyards along officers' row, affording privacy and a place to plant tomatoes where the mules wouldn't step on them.

For about 60 years the SANTA FE TRAIL was the main link between New Mexico and the States. It was primarily a freight route although some travelers came over it too. The trail bore many loads of military supplies bound for Fort Union; commercial goods went on to Santa Fe. You may walk a portion of the trail and see the ruts made by thousands of wagons years ago.

Hungry? If you had been a soldier here a hundred years ago with a little change in your pockets, you could have purchased some canned fruit, imported crackers, or most any other delicacy you wanted at the COMMISSARY STOREHOUSE. The large, cool basement held perishable

goods such as bacon and potatoes. The other four warehouses held all sorts of supplies—clothing, building materials, tools—everything needed by the soldiers. The large freight wagons which carried the supplies pulled in between the warehouses to unload. Here also wagons bound for other posts in the southwest were loaded. At night, the large wooden gates at the ends of the buildings were locked. Bars on the windows and a posted guard kept the goods safe—usually.

The SERVICE AREA contained the privies, bakery, married enlisted men's quarters, laundresses' quarters, corrals, and the company barracks. The bakery oven has been in its present location since 1877. From each man's individual flour ration, soft bread was baked daily and issued to the companies. A private was paid \$12 a month compared to a captain who received \$150. If the private were married, his wife more than likely worked to help support the family. Laundress, hospital matron, officers' servant, schoolteacher, and postmistress were about the only careers open to an enlisted man's wife. To be a laundress at Fort Union, a woman had to be lawfully married to a soldier, and she had to show her marriage license to prove it. Some laundresses and their husbands lived in the laundresses' quarters which became known as "Suds Row."

From the GUARDHOUSE sentries were posted throughout Fort Union with much formal ceremony. Their main job was to protect the fort against theft and fire. Petty offenders served time in the guardhouse. The MILITARY PRISON was for murderers, deserters, and other criminals, civilian as well as military. What you see is the cell block itself, once surrounded by an adobe building with one entrance on the north side. Each of the cells had a wooden or steel door; one has been reconstructed. Prisoners, unless in solitary confinement, were worked from dawn to dusk, usually in irons. Often two or more would be crowded into each cell, sleeping on straw mats on the cold floor. One of the last buildings constructed, the prison was finished in June 1886. About 10 days later, the first escape occurred; two men got away in the dead of night and haven't been heard from since.

Six wards, 36 beds and a maximum capacity of 60 or more, a surgeon and assistant surgeon with a staff of eight made the POST HOSPITAL one of the best in the west.

**About the Park**

Fort Union is 13 kilometers (8 miles) north of I-25, at the end of N. Mex. 477. Watrous, N. Mex., is 1 kilometer (one-half mile) south of the intersection of these two highways. The nearest large community is Las Vegas, N. Mex., 42 kilometers (26 miles) south where there are restaurants, overnight accommodations, and auto services. No camping facilities exist at the park, but there are picnic tables. The park is open during daylight hours only and every day except Jan. 1 and Dec. 25.

Fort Union National Monument was established April 5, 1956, and contains 291 hectares (720 acres). The National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior administers the park through a superintendent. His address is Watrous, NM 87753.

**We're Joining the Metric World**

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to make interpretation more meaningful for park visitors from other nations.

**Administration**

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

**National Park Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

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