



The Army Post on the Northern Plains, 1865-1885

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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Article Summary: Frontier garrisons played a significant role in the development of the West even though their military effectiveness has been questioned. The author describes daily life on the posts, which provided protection to the emigrants heading west and kept the roads open.

Note: A list of military posts in the Northern Plains follows the article.

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: map of Army posts in the Northern Plains states, 1860-1895; Fort Laramie c. 1884; Fort Totten, Dakota Territory, c. 1867

THE ARMY POST ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS, 1865-1885

BY RAY H. MATTISON

THE opening of the Oregon Trail, together with the discovery of gold in California and the cession of the Mexican Territory to the United States in 1848, resulted in a great migration to the trans-Mississippi West. As a result, a new line of military posts was needed to guard the emigrant and supply trains as well as to furnish protection for the Overland Mail and the new settlements.¹ The wiping out of Lt. J. L. Grattan and his detachment in 1854 near Fort Laramie, Wyoming, by the Sioux set off a series of reprisals and counter-reprisals by both races which, with several interruptions, were not to end until the power of the Indians was crushed in the late 1870's and early 1880's. With the building of Fort Randall in 1856, the military occupation of the Upper Missouri was begun. By 1860 two military posts of a permanent character had been established in the present state of Wyoming, one in Nebraska, and one in South Dakota.²

¹Averam B. Bender, *The March of Empire* (Lawrence, 1952), pp. 32-50.

²These included the following: Fort Kearny, near the present Kearney, Nebraska; Fort Laramie, Wyoming, acquired by the United States in 1849; Fort Bridger, Wyoming, occupied as a military post in June, 1858; Fort Randall, South Dakota, near the present dam by the same name, was established in 1856.

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Relations with most of the Indian tribes deteriorated rather than improved during the Civil War. Following the Sioux uprising in Minnesota in 1862, the white man struck back. About fifteen hundred Indians were rounded up by Gen. Henry H. Sibley and placed in prisons at Fort Snelling and Mankato, Minnesota, while the rest scattered over the Plains carrying their grievances with them to other tribes.³ As the result of his expedition in 1863, Gen. Alfred Sully routed the hostile Sioux near Whitestone Hill, not far from the present Ellendale, North Dakota, and founded Fort Sully several miles below old Fort Pierre.⁴ After establishing Fort Rice, about forty miles below the present Bismarck in July of the following year, he engaged the Sioux in western Dakota. He then proceeded to the Yellowstone River and descended it to the Missouri. Sully then garrisoned the fur trading posts at Forts Union and Berthold and returned to Fort Rice.⁵ The massacre of the Black Kettle band of Cheyennes at Sand Creek, Colorado, in 1864 by Col. J. M. Chivington brought that tribe on the side of the hostile Sioux.⁶ The end of 1864 found the Northern Plains aflame. At that time the region had twenty-eight military establishments compared to three in 1860.⁷

Several other developments made it necessary in the following decade and a half to increase further the number of troops. In some places, particularly in the Dakotas and Montana, additional military posts were built. The discovery of gold in Montana and Idaho in the early 1860's made it necessary to keep the Missouri River open to navigation

³Paul I. Wellman, *Death on Horseback* (Philadelphia, 1937), pp. 25-42.

⁴George W. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory* (Chicago, 1915). 2 vols. I, 287-298; Steven Hoekman, "The History of Fort Sully," Ms., M.A. thesis, University of South Dakota (Vermillion, 1951), pp. 10-13.

⁵Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, I, 353-367; Ray H. Mattison, "Fort Rice—North Dakota's First Missouri River Military Post," *North Dakota History*, XX (April, 1953), 87-91.

⁶Wellman, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-80.

⁷Raymond L. Welty, "The Army Fort on the Frontier," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, II, (April, 1928), 156. The term "Northern Plains" in this article includes the present states of Nebraska, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and Montana.

to the new mines.⁸ The establishment of new Indian agencies along the Upper Missouri following the signing of the Treaty of 1868 necessitated more garrisons.⁹ Additional troops were required as the result of the opening of the Bozeman Trail and the construction of the Union and Northern Pacific railroads.¹⁰ Finally, the relentless campaign against the Indians following the Battle of the Little Bighorn brought new demands for troops and military posts.¹¹ By 1878, the number of posts and cantonments in the Northern Plains region had increased to thirty-eight.¹²

The role of the military posts in the conquest of the Northern Plains is a familiar story. Little, however, has been written about the personnel who comprised the scores of garrisons which dotted the region. In spite of the varied locations of these outposts and the diverse backgrounds of the individuals who inhabited them, the pattern of life in all was strikingly similar. This study is primarily designed to give the reader an insight into the day-by-day life in the frontier posts of the region.

Several factors were usually considered in the selection of sites for garrisons. These were water for drinking purposes, grass for forage, timber for building material and fuel, and a sufficient tract of level land for a parade

⁸Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier* (Helena, 1942), *passim*. The posts created primarily to keep the Missouri River open for navigation to Montana were Fort Stevenson, located about ten miles above the present Garrison Dam; Fort Buford, near the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri; Camp Cooke, Montana, near the mouth of the Judith River; Fort Shaw, Montana; and the garrison at Fort Benton, Montana.

⁹These include the military posts at Whetstone Agency, Lower Brule Agency, Cheyenne River Agency, later known as Fort Bennett, and Grand River Agency. All of these posts were in the present South Dakota.

¹⁰Among these were Fort Philip Kearny, Wyoming; Fort C. F. Smith, Montana; Fort Reno, Wyoming; Fort Frances E. Warren, Wyoming; Fort Fred Steele, Wyoming; Fort Sidney, Nebraska; North Platte Station, Nebraska; Fort Seward, North Dakota; and Fort Abraham Lincoln, North Dakota.

¹¹The more important were Forts Assiniboine, Custer, Keogh, Maginnis, and Missoula, all in Montana; Fort McKinney, Wyoming; Fort Meade, South Dakota. Well-known posts erected for police purposes were Forts Ellis and Logan, both of Montana; Forts McPherson and Robinson, in Nebraska; and Forts Fetterman and Sanders, both in Wyoming.

¹²*Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1878*, pp. 14-16.

ground, barracks, officers' quarters, storehouses, stables, and other buildings.¹³ In the Missouri River posts, it was necessary also to choose a site which was near a good steamboat landing, one which would be out of danger of floods, and one which would not be affected by the changing of the river channel. Some of the early selections, however, proved to be poor ones. At the Cheyenne River Agency in South Dakota, it was necessary to move the post in 1872 and again in 1876 because of the encroachments of the Missouri.¹⁴ Partly because of the distance from wood and good drinking water, Fort Sully in 1866 was moved thirty miles up the river and rebuilt.¹⁵

Most of the earlier establishments were made of material of local origin, and the labor was performed by the troops. In some instances, such as at Cheyenne River Agency, Fort Rice, Grand River Agency, Fort Totten, Lower Brule Agency, and the original Fort Sully, the posts were built of logs.¹⁶ Others, such as Forts Robinson, Stevenson, Niobrara, Buford, and Shaw, were built partly or entirely of adobe.¹⁷

The classic description of an average early frontier post on the Plains is given by Gen. George A. Forsyth:

... The officers' line of quarters is on one side of the parade ground, as the inclosed space is named. It consists of a row of small cottages containing from three to four rooms. On the opposite side are the enlisted men's barracks, several long, low, one-storied, solid-looking log buildings with porches in front, and behind them are the mess houses, similar in design, but

¹³Welty, *op cit.*, p. 158.

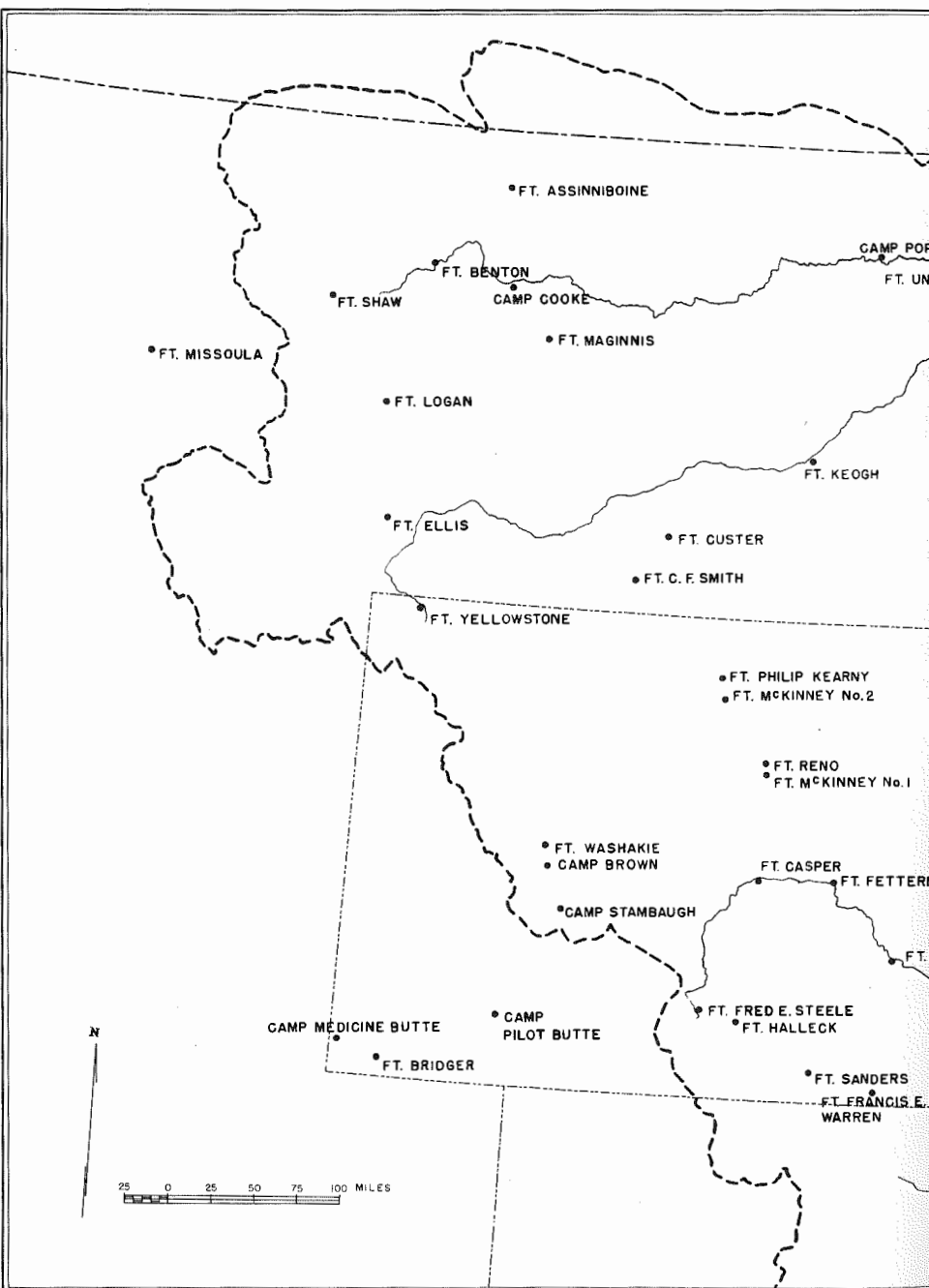
¹⁴Post Records, Fort Bennett, National Archives, Letters Sent, Boyd to Asst. Adj. Gen., Dept. of Dak., July 7, 14, Sept. 22, 1872, Aug. 10, 24, 1873; Greene to Asst. Adj. Gen., Dept. of Dak., June 12, 16, Sept. 13, Dec. 1, 1876. National Archives are hereafter cited as NA.

¹⁵Hoekman, *op cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁶War Department, Surgeon General's Office, *Report on Barracks and Hospitals with Descriptions of Military Posts, Circular No. 4* (Washington, 1870), pp. 386-387, 389, 391; War Department, Surgeon General's Office, *A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army with Description of Military Posts, Circular No. 8* (Washington, 1875), pp. 402-403, 408-409, 410-412, 445; Hoekman, *op cit.*, pp. 21-22.

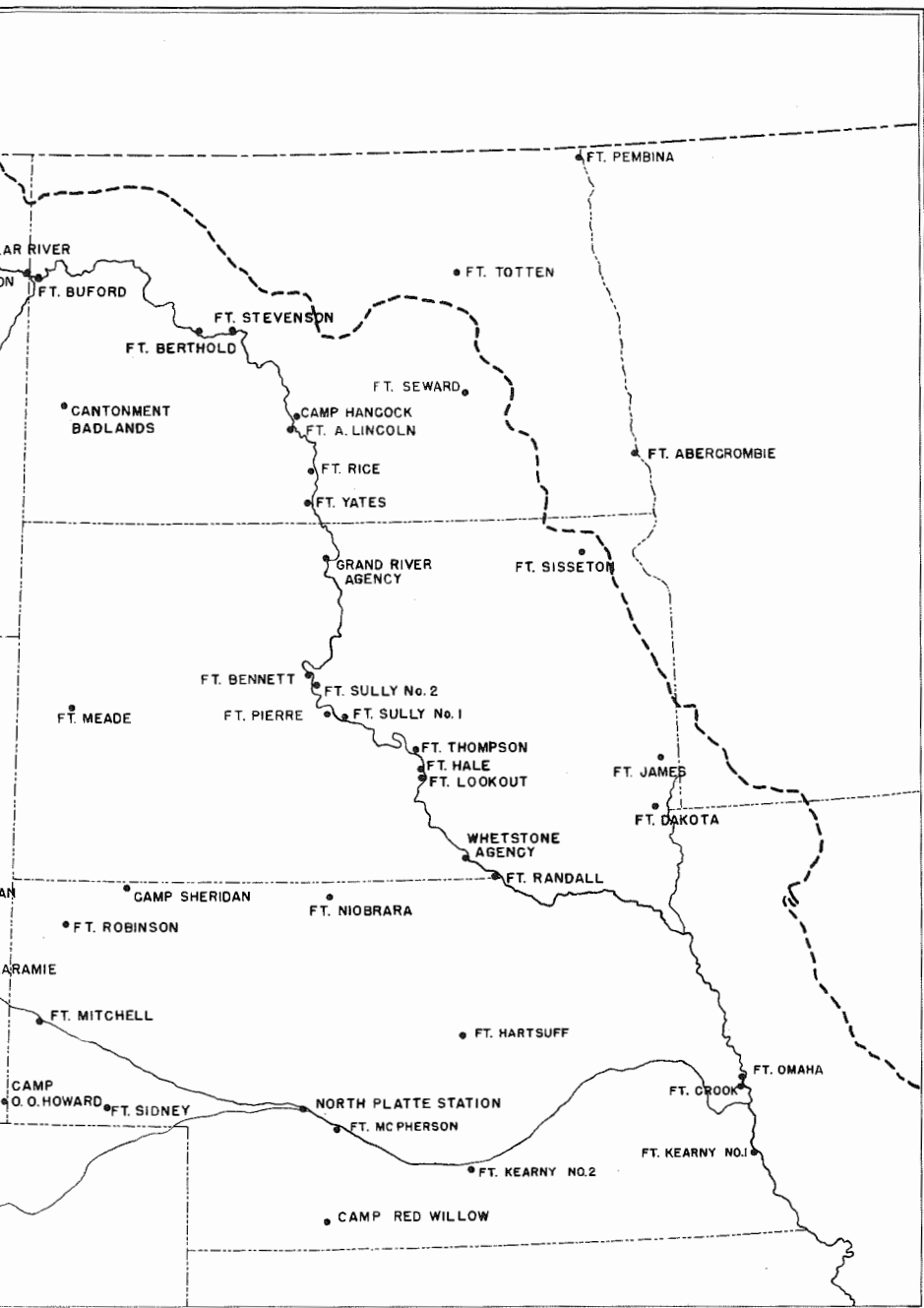
¹⁷Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8*, pp. 366-367, 400-401, 432-434, 439-440; Office of the Quartermaster General, NA, Consolidated Correspondence File and File of Historical Sketches, Record Group 92, Ms., Fort Niobrara.

Army posts in the Northern



Redrawn from base map supplied by the U. S. Department of
Dashed line indicates the limits of the Missouri River Basin.

Plains States, 1860-1895.



smaller. In the centre of the parade ground a somewhat imposing structure is known as the post commander's house. On the third side is the neat little administration building containing the various administrative offices, flanked by warehouses in which are stored quartermaster and subsistence stores. On the fourth is the sombre-looking guardhouse, small but strong. On an open space between the guardhouse and the end of the officers' row an old field piece or two, rotting with rust and dust, point at the horizon.

A little distance off on the plateau, standing by itself, is the hospital; and likewise apart, in an unobtrusive manner, is the trader's or sutler's store, which, until the establishment of the canteen a few years ago, was the soldier's lounging place. Down under the bank near to the water's edge the cavalry and quartermaster's stables stand in a row, and not far from them are the wagon sheds and the various shops where the manual labour of the garrison is performed...¹⁸

The earlier military posts were equipped with both bastions and stockades. However, some of the officers during the late 1860's and the 1870's were skeptical of their value. This view is expressed by Gen. Philippe Regis de Trobriand, Commander of the Military District, Department of Dakota:

...General Stanley [Fort Sully] believes that in dealing with such a contemptible enemy as the Indian, it is better for troop morale to depend on vigilance and breechloaders for protection than to hide behind palisades. I think the general is quite right.¹⁹

The surgeon at Fort Totten boasted that that post had no heavy stockade "which tends to obstruct ventilation and demoralize the troops."²⁰ As the temporary buildings were torn down and replaced by new ones, the stockades and bastions disappeared. Many of the posts built after 1870 had neither.²¹

¹⁸George A. Forsyth, *The Story of a Soldier* (New York, 1900), pp. 102-103.

¹⁹Lucile M. Kane, ed., *Military Life in Dakota: The Journal of Philippe Regis De Trobriand* (St. Paul, 1951), p. 33.

²⁰Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8*, p. 384.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 399-402. The stockade at Fort Buford was torn down in 1871. Medical History of Fort Sully, Ms., NA, II, 294, indicates the last remains of the stockade at that post were removed in June, 1881. Two of the old octagonal blockhouse bastions were still in use, but for a place to store laths, lime, and iron bunks.

Fort Abraham Lincoln (cavalry post), erected in 1873, had neither bastions nor stockades.

The ground plans of Fort Yates indicate that the bastions disappeared between 1876 and 1880. Cf. Plan of Post of Standing Rock,

The living quarters of many of the earlier establishments were very primitive. General De Trobriand described his quarters at Fort Stevenson during the winter of 1867-1868 as follows:

The building is composed of seven rooms, on the same floor, of course; it is built entirely of logs eight to ten inches in diameter, laid one on the other and chinked with mud and large chips of wood, the whole forming the thick wall. The roof is composed of split poles, one end of which rests on a big log forming the roof tree and the other on the walls, since there are walls. Over these split poles, a layer of hay; over the layer of hay, a layer of earth; over the earth, the frozen snow...²²

The mud chinking, which had not dried, froze, leaving crevices through which the snow sifted on the floor, forming drifts. When the snow melted, the chinking was restored to mud which fell to the floor. Mrs. A. N. Canfield, a lieutenant's wife who had formerly been an Iowa school teacher, described the quarters she and her husband occupied at Fort Berthold in 1867 as being two "very neat and cozy rooms." The sitting room was equipped with a center table, an army cot covered with a buffalo robe decorated on the flesh side with bright colors, a shelf of books, three chairs, and a writing desk. The other was a "neatly and plainly furnished" bedroom. Both were carpeted.²³ Mrs. Fayette W. Roe, another lieutenant's wife, bitterly complained of the living quarters at Camp Supply, Indian Territory:

This country itself is bad enough and the location of the post is most unfortunate, but to compel officers and men to live in these old huts of decaying, moldy wood, which are reeking with malaria and alive with bugs, and perhaps snakes, is wicked...²⁴

D. T., Dec. 19, 1876, with (Plan of) Fort Yates, D. T., 1880. Records of the War Department, Office of the Chief Engineer, NA.

The military post at Cheyenne River Agency, which was built in 1872, had a bastion and stockades. The post established in 1876 had neither. Cf. (Ground Plan) Military Station, Cheyenne Agency, D. T., Aug. 1, 1874, with Ground Plan of Garrison, Cheyenne Agency, D. T., Dec. 16, 1876. Records of the War Department, Office of the Chief Engineer, NA.

²²Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

²³Copy of Diary of Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Canfield, 1866-1868, Ms., State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck. Entry for May 20, 1867.

²⁴Frances M. A. Roe, *Army Letters from an Officer's Wife* (New York, 1909), p. 81.

As the buildings of the earlier forts deteriorated, they were replaced by new and more permanent ones usually of frame or brick. The later well-planned posts with their long, two-story barracks, two hundred feet or so in length, with their wide porches covering the front, and the neat one or two-story frame officers' quarters, with their well-grassed lawns, are a striking contrast to the log quarters of the 1860's and early 1870's.²⁵

Living was more pleasant for both the officers and men in the later posts. This is reflected in the description of the officers' quarters which the Roes occupied at Fort Shaw, Montana, in 1878:

... There are two companies of the old garrison here still, and this has caused much doubling up among the lieutenants—that is, assigning one set of quarters to two officers—but it has been arranged so we can be by ourselves. Four rooms at one end of the hospital have been cut off from the hospital proper by a heavy partition that has been put up at the end of the long corridor, and these rooms are now being calcimined and painted... We will have our own little porch and entrance hall and a nice back yard back of the kitchen...

It is delightful to be in a nicely furnished, well-regulated house once more. The buildings are all made of adobe, and the officers' quarters have low, broad porches in front and remind me a little of the houses at Fort Lyon, only of course these are larger and have more rooms. There are nice front yards, and on either side of the officers' walk is a row of beautiful cottonwood trees that form a complete arch...²⁶

Housing among the officers was according to rank. The largest and most impressive of their quarters was, of course, occupied by the post commandant. A lowly second lieutenant might be compelled to give up his quarters if any officer of higher rank decided he wanted them. Mrs. Roe, whose husband was only a second lieutenant, complained in 1882 that they were "houseless" for the "second time" as they, after "cleaning their house from top to bottom" and having done "much painting and calcimining," had been "ranked out of quarters" by a major.²⁷

²⁵Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-115. Excellent examples of military posts of the later period may be found at Fort Laramie National Monument and at Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

²⁶Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 305, 314.

The daily routine, with seasonal changes as to time, was much the same in all of the frontier garrisons. Below are the calls for Fort Stevenson, a two-company infantry post, in March, 1868:²⁸

²⁸Ray H. Mattison, "Old Fort Stevenson—A Typical Missouri River Military Post," *North Dakota History*, XVIII, (April-July, 1951), 71-72.

According to Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-125, the first call for reveille was followed 10 minutes later by reveille, at the first note of which the garrison flag was raised by the sergeant of the guard. On this occasion, the trumpeters formed at the foot of the flagstaff, and the post adjutant stood near them to receive the company reports after roll call. When the last notes of reveille died away, the enlisted men, with the exception of those not excused for other duties, formed in two lines and faced to the right of each set of their respective barracks.

After other formalities was the breakfast call which was followed by drill call and an hour of drill. Following the recall from drill, sick or surgeon's call was made, and those ailing in any one of the companies were sent to the post hospital. If the symptoms were serious, the men were sent to the hospital; if not, they were confined to their quarters. At fatigue call, which followed sick call, the men were detailed from each company for cleaning up the post, etc.

The most important detail of the day was the guard mount. Following the first call for guard mount the details of the various companies formed in front of their respective barracks and were inspected by the first sergeant and the senior non-commissioned officer who was on the detail. At the second call, all the details were marched to the place of assembly by the first sergeant of each company and each detail was then formed to the left of the one which preceded it. After other formalities were observed, the guns of the troops were carefully inspected both inside and out by the adjutant. The accoutrements, ammunition, and clothing were then inspected. The neatest and smartest soldier was then selected as the orderly for the day for the commanding officer. Following the choosing of the orderly, the guard was formed and then went to the guardhouse where it, after observing various formalities, relieved the old guard.

1st call for reveille	5:20 a.m.
Reveille	5:30
Breakfast call	5:40
1st call for drill	6:10
Drill	6:15
Recall from drill	7:15
Surgeon's call	7:25
Fatigue call	7:35
1st call for guard mount	8:20
Guard mount	8:30
Recall from fatigue and orderly call	11:45
Dinner	12:00 m.
Fatigue call	1:00 p.m.
1st call for drill	3:25[4:25]
Drill	4:30
Recall from drill	
Recall from fatigue 30 minutes before sunset	

The services performed by the military posts were many and varied. As has been mentioned earlier, many were established at certain points to perform specific major functions. One of the most important duties was to supply escorts. These were furnished emigrant and supply trains, cattle herds for the various agencies and garrisons, for paymasters traveling from one post to another, for exploring and scouting expeditions, for mail carriers, to guard wagon road and railway construction crews, and for the stock herds of the posts. In some of the Missouri River establishments, escorts were supplied the steamboats. One of the chief functions was to protect the settlers and punish raiding parties of Indians. The soldiers in the garrisons also constructed and maintained roads, repaired telegraph lines, and prior to the time the Government bought wood from contractors, they cut wood for their own use. One of the biggest routine tasks for the men in each of the Missouri River posts was keeping the garrison supplied with water which was usually hauled in wagons from the river.²⁹

Most of the officer personnel of the frontier army were veterans of the Civil War. During the period from 1861-1865, the army on the Plains was made up largely of volunteer troops.³⁰ In 1866 it was reorganized. The volunteers were discharged and replaced by regular troops.³¹

Retreat	Sunset
1st call for tattoo	7:55
Tattoo	8:00
Taps	8:15

²⁹Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-167; Mattison, "Old Fort Stevenson," pp. 70-71; Raymond L. Welty, "The Frontier Army on the Missouri River, 1860-1870," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, II No. 2 (January, 1928), 99; Hamilton F. Mitten, "Army Life on the Plains During the Indian Wars," Ms., M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska (Lincoln, 1930), pp. 146-148; Hoekman, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-50; Carleton Kenyon, "History of Fort Randall," Ms., M.A. thesis, University of South Dakota (Vermillion, 1947), pp. 71-93; Mattison, "Fort Rice," pp. 101-103, 107; Raymond L. Welty, "The Policing of the Frontier by the Army," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, VII (August, 1938), 246-257; Edward A. Hummel, "The Story of Fort Sisseton," *South Dakota Historical Review*, II, No. 3 (April, 1937), 138-142.

³⁰*War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, I, XLI¹, Part IV (1893), 989-997.

³¹Theo. F. Rodenbough and William M. Haskin, *The Army of the United States* (New York, 1896), *passim*; Burlingame, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-121; Midden, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.

Many of the officers of the Union army, such as Generals George A. Custer, Nelson A. Miles, George Crook, Alfred Terry, De Trobriand, D. S. Stanley, George A. Forsyth, and others, served with distinction on the frontier after the war.

The army on the Plains comprised men from many different walks of life. From the point of national origin, the United States ranked first, Ireland second, Germany third, England fourth, and Canada fifth.³² The various trades and crafts were well represented. Some of the men were fugitives from justice. On the whole, the frontier army was quite cosmopolitan in character.³³

From the standpoint of pay, the inducements for the enlisted men, particularly if unmarried, were good. From 1865, a private received sixteen dollars per month; the Act of May 15, 1872, lowered the minimum to thirteen dollars a month. According to this law, one dollar was added per month for each year for those serving their third, fourth, and fifth years of enlistment. Additional inducements were made for those who might re-enlist and continue in the army. A liberal clothing allowance was made. For the officers, the salaries ranged in 1865 from \$1,249.50 per annum for a second lieutenant to \$2,544 for a colonel; from 1872, from \$1,400 for the former to \$3,500 for the latter. Additional pay was given those who continued in the service.³⁴ Quarters were provided those officers stationed in military posts.

The problem of maintaining a well-balanced diet was sometimes a serious one. This was particularly true in some of the early Missouri River posts. The river, which

³²House Report No. 354, 44th Cong., 1st Sess. (1876), p. 228. The nativity of the men who enlisted in the United States Army from Jan. 1, 1865, to Dec. 31, 1874, was as follows: United States, 96,066; Ireland, 38,649; Germany, 23,127; England, 9,037; Canada, 4,703.

³³Elizabeth B. Custer, *Boots and Saddles or Life in Dakota with General Custer* (New York, 1885), pp. 102-103; Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-93.

³⁴U. S. Statutes at Large, XVII, 116, 117; Thomas H. S. Hamersly, *Complete Regular Army Register of the United States for One Hundred Years (1779-1879)* (Washington, 1881), subtitle: *A List of Appointments Made in the Volunteer Service, 1861-1865*, p. 19; Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-96, 100-101; Midden, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-106.

was the chief avenue of transportation, was open to navigation only from about mid-April to mid-November. Such items as canned food, salt pork, salt fish, etc., could be stored for indefinite periods. Perishable ones, such as fresh vegetables, which were an essential part of the diet, could not. As a result, scurvy was in some instances serious. During the winter of 1864-1865, thirty-seven men at Fort Rice died of that disease.³⁵ General De Trobriand at Fort Stevenson wrote in April, 1868 that the men at that post had been reduced to a principal diet of salt pork and salt fish, and also that there was a total of fifty-one cases of scurvy, a number equal to one-fourth of the garrison.³⁶ Wild onions, pickles, and vinegar were given to alleviate this malady.³⁷ In order to supply fresh vegetables, many of the forts had gardens.³⁸ The surgeon at Fort Laramie reported in 1868 that that post had one of two and one-half acres under the charge of the chaplain. In October of the following year he wrote that 6,000 strawberry, 250 raspberry, 250 blackberry, 100 currant, 600 asparagus, and 50 rhubarb plants had been transplanted in the hospital garden.³⁹ By 1878 the garden had been increased to five acres.⁴⁰ The surgeon at Fort Rice reported that the daily allowance of fresh vegetables had been increased in 1873 to sixteen ounces a day. As a result, scurvy had entirely disappeared.⁴¹ By 1875, there were few cases in any of the frontier posts.⁴²

Beef seems to have been the principal item of diet in most of the military establishments of this period. Thousands of cattle, driven from the southern ranges and eastern feedlots, were butchered there.⁴³ The surgeon at Fort Buford reported in January, 1875 that seventy-seven cattle, weighing a net average of 650 pounds each, had been

³⁵Mattison, "Fort Rice," p. 92.

³⁶Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 262-263, 364.

³⁸Medical History of Fort Laramie, Ms., NA, Part I.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.* Entry for May, 1878.

⁴¹Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8*, pp. 422-425.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁴³Harold E. Briggs, *Frontiers of the Northwest* (New York, 1950), pp. 211-212; Burlingame, *op. cit.*, p. 267; Hummel, *op. cit.*, p. 133; Garnet M. and Herbert O. Brayer, *American Cattle Trails, 1540-1900* (Bayside, 1952), p. 57.

slaughtered and packed in ice during the past month.⁴⁴ A sample diet for a week in December, 1870 at the Cheyenne River Post shows beef was served there every day of the week.⁴⁵ Mrs. Roe in 1872 complained of the monotonous

⁴⁴Medical History of Fort Buford, Ms., NA, II, 204.

⁴⁵Below is a sample diet for a week in December, 1870, at the Cheyenne River Agency Post:

	BREAKFAST	DINNER	SUPPER
Sunday	Roast beef and gravy or beef steak and turnips or fried pork and potatoes	Bread and coffee, roast beef and gravy, mashed potatoes and onions	Bread pudding, stewed dried apples Pancakes and syrup
Monday	Dry hash or fresh pork or bacon	Vegetable soup or boiled fresh beef and sliced onions	Syrup, bread, and coffee
Tuesday	Pancakes and molasses or roast beef w/gravy and onions	Baked beans or peas and pork or boiled rice and syrup	Warm biscuits, syrup, bread, and coffee
Wednesday	Pork or bacon and fried potatoes or hash	Beef stew w/vegetables	Stewed dried apples and bread and coffee
Thursday	Beef steak w/gravy and onions	Roast beef and potatoes, occasionally coffee	Syrup, bread, and coffee or pancakes and syrup
Friday	Roast beef and gravy (occasionally codfish) and pancakes	Bean soup w/pork or bacon	Bread and coffee
Saturday	Roast beef or beef steak or pancakes and molasses	Roast beef, gravy, potatoes, and coffee or boiled fresh beef	Syrup, bread, coffee, or warm biscuit and syrup

Bread and coffee were served every morning with breakfast. Bread and occasionally coffee were served for every evening meal. Medical History of Cheyenne River Agency, Ms., NA, p. 199.

The daily ration, according to Paragraph 1357, Army Regulations, prevailing in 1890 was as follows: "Twelve ounces of pork or bacon or canned beef (fresh or corned), or one pound and four ounces of fresh beef, or twenty-two ounces of salt beef; eighteen ounces of soft bread or flour, or sixteen ounces of hard bread, or one pound and four ounces of cornmeal; and to have, every one hundred rations, fifteen pounds of peas or beans, or ten pounds of rice or hominy; ten pounds of green coffee, or eight of roasted (or roasted and ground) coffee, or two pounds of tea; fifteen pounds of sugar, four quarts of vinegar; four pounds of soap, four pounds of salt; four ounces of pepper; one pound and eight ounces of adamantine or star candles; and to troops in the field, when necessary, four pounds of yeast-powder to one hundred rations of flour." Elizabeth B. Custer, *Following the Guidon* (New York, 1890), p. 205.



Above: Fort Laramie, view to the west, about 1884.

Below: Sketch of Fort Totten, Dakota Territory, about 1867.



beef diet at Fort Lyons, Colorado: "it is beef every day in the month—not only for one month, but every month."⁴⁶

Both the officers and enlisted men supplemented their regular diet by hunting, fishing, purchases from hucksters, and other means. Near many of the frontier posts there were buffalo, deer, antelope, prairie chicken, and other game in abundance. Hunting was not only a popular sport and pastime for both the officers and enlisted men but was looked upon as a means of altering the regular diet.⁴⁷ At Fort Yates, in September, 1883, a detachment of cavalry went on a hunt 150 miles west of the post and returned with eighty buffalo.⁴⁸ The medical officer at Fort Rice reported in 1874 that the soldiers had caught one thousand pounds of fish by seine in the Missouri.⁴⁹ Hucksters also visited the posts peddling fresh vegetables, eggs, etc.⁵⁰ A few added dairy products to their regular fare. The surgeon at Fort Laramie wrote in 1868 that almost every officer and laundress in the garrison kept a milch cow.⁵¹

Delicacies were shipped in on holidays or other special occasions. At an elaborate dinner held at Fort Rice on July 4, 1865, such items as sardines, lemons, cold salmon, lobsters, raspberries, and strawberries were served, all of which had been shipped thousands of miles.⁵² At holiday time, the sutler at Fort Lyons sent to St. Louis for turkeys, celery, canned oysters, and similar items.⁵³

⁴⁶Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 39; See also Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, p. 109.

⁴⁷Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 129; Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-23, 37-39, 128, 195; Myra E. Hull, ed., "Soldiering on the High Plains: The Diary of Lewis Byram Hull, 1864-1866," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, VII (February, 1938), 45, 50, 51; Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, p. 109; Diary of Mrs. Canfield, Entry for July 30, 1867; Katherine Gibson Fougere, *With Custer's Cavalry* (Caldwell, 1942), pp. 91-92, 144-157; Midden, *op. cit.*, p. 166; Hoekman, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55; Copy of Diary of Andrew Nahum Canfield, Ms., State Historical Society of North Dakota, *passim*.

⁴⁸Medical History of Fort Yates, Ms., NA, Part I:177.

⁴⁹Medical History of Fort Rice, Part II, p. 173.

⁵⁰Medical History of Fort Laramie, Part I; Diary of Mrs. Canfield, Entry for October 1, 1867; Medical History of Fort Sully, Ms., NA, Part II, pp. 139, 142.

⁵¹Medical History of Fort Laramie, Part I; See also Diary of Mrs. Canfield, Entry for October 1, 1867.

⁵²The *Frontier Scout*, published at Fort Rice, D. T., July 6, 1865.

⁵³Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

All of the army posts were provided with a surgeon who was charged with safeguarding the physical well-being of the personnel. Attached to each garrison was a hospital. The surgeon had general supervision of the food and its preparation, sanitation, the hospital, and medical supplies.⁵⁴ From July, 1868, he kept a daily record of the events of the post and at the end of each month he made a report to the commanding officer on the sanitary conditions and made recommendations for their improvement.⁵⁵

The most common diseases were of the respiratory and intestinal organs, and rheumatism. A study was made of the most prevalent diseases in eleven garrisons on the Northern Plains from 1870 to 1874 inclusive. In five of these, catarrh and bronchitis were the most prevalent, while diarrhea and dysentery ranked a close second; in four, diarrhea and dysentery were first, and bronchitis and catarrh were second. In one, rheumatism was first while at ten posts it ranked third.⁵⁶ Fort McPherson, Nebraska, for example, a five-company post which had an average mean strength of 290 officers and men, had a yearly average of 94.5 cases of diarrhea and dysentery, 60 of catarrh and bronchitis, and 27 of rheumatism for the four-year period.⁵⁷ Syphilis ranked fourth at Forts Randall, Buford, and Stevenson.⁵⁸ In the last-named post, this was attributed to the Fort Berthold Indian women. The surgeon at Stevenson recommended that the soldiers not be permitted to visit Berthold except on military duty and that the "squaws," except relatives of the Indian scouts, not be permitted on the military reservation.⁵⁹ At the post at Lower Brule Agency, South Dakota, on the other hand, there was little venereal disease. The medical officer in

⁵⁴Surgeon General's Office, *Circulars Nos. 4 and 8*.

⁵⁵See medical histories of the various military posts, NA.

⁵⁶Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8*, pp. 357, 359-360, 394, 401, 404, 421, 425, 441, 444, 449. The posts studied were Forts Laramie, McPherson, Abraham Lincoln, Buford, Cheyenne River Agency, Forts Randall, Rice, Shaw, Stevenson, Sully, and Totten.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 359-360.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp., 401, 421, 441.

⁵⁹Medical History of Fort Stevenson, Ms., NA, pp. 1-2.

1876 attributed its absence to the high morality of the Brule Indians who lived in the vicinity of the post.⁶⁰

In spite of the alleged hazards of life in the frontier garrisons, the mortality was normally comparatively low. While surgeons' records are scant prior to 1868, those after that date indicate that the medical care was fairly good, and it is doubted if the death rate was any higher than in frontier civilian communities.⁶¹ The records of Fort Laramie, a post having perhaps an average of three hundred officers and men, for example, show seventy-five deaths at that post from September, 1867 to December 17, 1884. Of these deaths, four were from gunshot wounds, eight were by drowning, three from freezing, four from typhoid, and six from smallpox.⁶² The Fort Yates cemetery records to 1893 show a similar low mortality.⁶³

The monotony of garrison life, particularly during the winter months when the men were confined to their quarters, was sometimes a serious problem. Men became very much dissatisfied with the army and their surroundings. In common with his counterpart of the present century, the soldier of the 1870's and 1880's probably did plenty of griping about the army and the way it was run. The feeling of utter hopelessness is well expressed in a letter by a telegraph operator at Camp Brown, Wyoming, in 1878 to a friend asking him to use his influence to get him out of the Signal Corps:

...I want to get out of the Army honorable but if I can't get out otherwise I will give the cursed outfit the "Grand bounce." [Desert] I can not endure them much longer. None but a menial a Cur Could stand the usage of a soldier of the Army of today in America. The Majority of the Officers are "dead-beats" and the soldiers Escaped Convicts and the lowest of Gods Creation. I do not want any thing to do with them at all, I will not scringe at the look of the bigoted fools (the officers) and the man that Considers himself as good as

⁶⁰Medical History of Lower Brule Agency (Fort Hale), Ms., NA, p. 189.

⁶¹Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 4, passim*; Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8, passim*.

⁶²Medical History of Fort Laramie, Part I.

⁶³Post Records, Fort Yates, NA, Records of Interments.

them, they make it pretty hot for him the soldier dare not resent any wrong done to him but must Grin and bear it or suffer financially and physically[sic]...⁶⁴

General De Trobriand, while at Fort Stevenson during the winter of 1867-1868, complained about the monotony of the long winters in Dakota:

... Winter is a deplorable season in Dakota. Its excessive severity keeps us captives in our huts, and there the days go by in monotonous uniformity....

My military duties are reduced to almost nothing... All this does not take me more than a few hours a week...⁶⁵

In some cases, officers and men alike turned to liquor for temporary escape. Holidays and payday were frequently the occasion for over-indulgence.⁶⁶ Surgeon Washington Matthews at Fort Rice recorded for December 25, 1868:

A Christmas celebrated chiefly by the amount of whiskey drank at the post, Soldiers having filed away whiskey orders and stored away the article itself for some time in the post in view of the approaching festival...⁶⁷

Mrs. Fanny McGillicuddy, wife of the surgeon of Camp Robinson, made this cryptic entry in her diary for December 28-31, 1876: "Outfit all drunk."⁶⁸ Apparently holiday inebriation was taken more or less for granted at Fort Buford, for the post surgeon at that place entered the following in his Record of Events for December 25, 1874:

All work suspended... Each company had an excellent dinner. Not as much drunkenness as usual among the men.

⁶⁴Letter from M. L. Kezertter, Camp Brown, Wyoming, to Hon. Samuel M. Chapman, Plattsmouth, Nebraska, December 6, 1878, Ms., Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

⁶⁵Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233.

⁶⁶Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, pp. 250-254; Midden, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-79; Medical History of Fort Buford, II, Entries for November 25, 26, 1874; Part III, 29; Medical History of Fort Rice, I, 104; Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 14; II, 215; Medical History of Fort Randall, II, 201, 297, 303; Diary of A. N. Canfield, Entries for May 25, July 4, 1868.

⁶⁷Medical History of Fort Rice, I, 104.

⁶⁸Exact copy of a Notebook Kept by Dr. V. T. McGillicuddy, M.D. While a member of the Yellowstone and Big Horn Expedition May 26-December 13, 1876 and Notes Kept by his wife, Fanny, at Camp Robinson, December 13, 1876-February 22, 1877 and with the Army on an Expedition to the Black Hills, February 23-April 11, 1877, Ms., Nebraska State Historical Society.

The following Christmas must have passed in much the same manner. He wrote:

Christmas day a very quiet one. The companies had a very nice dinner and were presented with three gallons each of whiskey by the Post Trader.⁶⁹

Excessive drinking appears to have been fairly common in some posts among the officers. General De Trobriand complained about the drunkenness and brawling among the officers at Forts Totten and Buford. He tried to rid the army of some of the worst offenders.⁷⁰ Failing, he concluded:

... Nowhere in the old world (except perhaps in England) would such vices be tolerated and perpetrated in the administration of the Army.⁷¹

At Lower Brule Agency in April, 1877, a captain was found with his neck caught between two pickets of a picket fence and his body suspended. An investigation revealed that the man had been drinking the previous evening. The post surgeon's theory was that the captain, after consuming eight ounces of whiskey, suddenly became nauseated and leaned over the fence to relieve his stomach. Losing consciousness, his head dropped between the pickets and strangulation and death followed.⁷²

It is doubted if much of the drinking at the posts, however, was habitual in character. The cases of alcoholism listed in the sick reports do not appear particularly high.⁷³ At Fort McPherson, for example, the number was considerably higher than average. For the four-year period from 1870 to 1874, there was an average of eleven cases of alcoholism per year.⁷⁴

In the late 1870's and the early 1880's, the army seems to have made an increased effort to curtail the drinking. Some of the officers, such as Capt. J. S. Boland at Fort Rice, attributed much of the bad discipline to indulgence in liquor and recommended that all sales, in-

⁶⁹Medical History of Fort Buford, II, 246.

⁷⁰Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-229, 270, 309, 326, 349-350, 353-354.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁷²Medical History of Lower Brule Agency, pp. 201-203.

⁷³Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8, passim.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 359-360.

cluding beer and light wines, by the post trader be stopped.⁷⁵ Several of the garrisons apparently did this. The result was that considerable hard liquor was smuggled into the posts.⁷⁶ At Fort Yates, the surgeon complained that the soldiers, as a result of the prohibition, were purchasing and drinking extracts of lemon, vanilla, cinnamon, peppermint, ginger, Worcestershire and red pepper sauces, bay rum, cologne, and quack medicines of various descriptions which contained large percentages of alcohol. He recommended that malt liquors and light wines be sold by the trader.⁷⁷ The Surgeons at Forts Sully and Randall made similar recommendations.⁷⁸

During the late 1870's, drinking was on the decline. General Forsyth claimed that the disuse of liquor was greatly accelerated by the steady development of rifle practice in the army.⁷⁹ In several of the posts, temperance societies were formed.⁸⁰ The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was very active at Fort Sully. The surgeon reported in May, 1881 that seventy soldiers there had taken the abstinence pledge and were holding social gatherings.⁸¹

"Hog" or "whiskey ranches" occasionally sprang up outside the military reservations and beyond the jurisdiction of the post commanders. The medical histories do not indicate these were such a problem to the military as to the Indian agencies. One town which was a problem to both was Winona, North Dakota, which was located across the Missouri River from Fort Yates. Winona had its beginning

⁷⁵Post Records, Fort Rice, Ms., NA, Letter from Capt. J. S. Boland to Asst. Adj. Gen., Dept. of Dak., September 25, 1878; Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁷⁶Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 285-287; Medical History of Fort Randall, II, 297; Medical History of Fort Bennett, II, 65; Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 14; Forsyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-143.

⁷⁷Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 14.

⁷⁸Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 285-287; Medical History of Fort Randall, II, 297.

⁷⁹Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 135; See also Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 285-287; R. H. McKay, *Little Pills* (Pittsburg, Kansas, 1918), pp. 124-125.

⁸⁰Medical History of Fort Buford, II, 332; Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 285-287.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

in 1884 and declined after Yates was abandoned in 1903. At its hey-day, Winona had nine saloons and a race track. Soldiers frequently went to this town after payday to taste the night life offered by its brothels and their amiable hostesses.⁸² The Indian agent at the Standing Rock Agency complained he could not control his wards as long as the "blind pigs" at Winona were allowed to run wide open.⁸³

Court martials seem to have been held frequently. Usually the causes were for drunkenness and minor forms of insubordination. At Fort Rice, a one-company post of sixty-one men, there were twenty-four cases, including four for desertion, tried by the General and forty-five cases by the Garrison Court Martial in the first nine months of 1878.⁸⁴

Below are two fairly typical court martial cases: Private Black at Fort Rice was told by a corporal to cease humming tunes in the company quarters. The former told the corporal "to go to Hell or words to that effect." Private Black was fined ten dollars of his monthly pay by the court martial and placed in solitary confinement on a bread and water diet for ten days.⁸⁵ For absenting himself from morning cavalry stables without permission and calling a sergeant, when reprimanded, a "_____ son of a _____," a trumpeter at Fort Rice was fined twelve dollars, sentenced to thirty days of hard labor, and compelled to carry a log weighing thirty pounds every alternate hour from reveille to sunset during the last five days of his confinement, and when not so occupied, to be in solitary confinement on a diet of bread and water.⁸⁶ The sentence imposed in this case was extremely severe.

Desertions appear to have been very high during the period following the Civil War. These reached their peak

⁸²Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 215, 220, 258, 264, 275; II, 2.

⁸³*Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1897*, p. 219.

⁸⁴Post Records, Fort Rice, NA, Ms., Endorsement Book, June-November, 1878, p. 36.

⁸⁵Post Records, Fort Rice, NA, Post Orders, November, 1876-October, 1877.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

in 1867.⁸⁷ Frequently, many occurred following payday.⁸⁸ Perhaps the desertions were due to a combination of causes as suggested in the surgeon's report from Fort Sully in 1881:

Paymaster Reese visited the Post on the 14th inst. bringing with him four months pay for the troops. So large a disbursement of money was a source, as usual of several desertions, nine in all I think. One was recaptured and another returned to the Post, after some two weeks absence, having in that time, probably, experienced a change in heart. A long monotonous winter and the scanty diet of the spring months, together with a natural dread of work, and an undefined desire for a change must be assigned as the cause for their discontent and hasty taking-off. The majority of the deserters were recent enlistments.⁸⁹

Some, perhaps, such as the two musicians at Fort Randall in May, 1875, after becoming demoralized by too much liquor from the trader's store, found the lure of the gold fields in the Black Hills too strong.⁹⁰

The army endeavored to provide for the mental improvement of the individual soldier at the frontier posts and for his moral and religious instruction.⁹¹ Some of the garrisons had fairly good libraries. Fort McPherson had

⁸⁷The number of desertions from the United States Army for a period of nine years was as follows: 1867, 14,068; 1868, 7,893; 1869, 3,239; 1870, 3,253; 1871, 8,321; 1872, 7,852; 1873, 7,271; 1874, 4,606; 1875, 2,526. *House Report No. 354, 44th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 228.*

⁸⁸Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 215; Post Records, Fort Bennett, Letters Sent, May 16, 1876; Medical History of Fort Buford, II, 303; III, 29; Medical History of Fort Randall, II, 10, 11, 12, 163.

⁸⁹Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 288.

⁹⁰Medical History of Fort Randall, II, 217.

⁹¹According to General Orders No. 22, April 7, 1866, of the Adjutant General's Office, when there was a sutler with troops stationed at the post, he (the sutler) was required, for the privilege enjoyed, to pay at the end of every two months or oftener, as might be determined by the council of administration, at a rate not exceeding 10 cents a month into the post fund for every officer and enlisted man serving at the garrison. This post fund was to be used for:

- a. The expenses of a bake house.
- b. The establishment of a post school for uneducated soldiers who might desire schooling and for the children of the soldiers.
- c. The establishment of a library and the purchase of newspapers.
- d. For the purchase of garden seeds and utensils.
- e. To provide for the moral and religious instruction of the troops in those garrisons which are not allowed chaplains as far as the state of the funds might allow. (Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 8, xxxv-xxxvi.*)

no post library. It did, however, have two company libraries, one containing 362 volumes and the other twenty-five volumes.⁹² Fort Sully boasted of a good library of about eight-hundred volumes.⁹³ It supplemented these by current issues of *The London Punch*, *Appleton's Weekly*, *The Galaxy*, *North American Review*, *Colbern's United States Magazine*, and *Blackwood's Magazine*.⁹⁴ Fort Rice had a newspaper, the *Frontier Scout*, during 1865.⁹⁵ A number of the posts had schools for both the enlisted men and their children.⁹⁶

Theatricals and minstrel shows appear to have been one of the chief diversions.⁹⁷ These were usually organized and given by the personnel and, according to some contemporary critics, their performances were of high quality. Major Frank J. North wrote of attending such shows at Fort Kearny, one on January 14 and the other on February 5, 1869. His comment on the first was "it was splendid."⁹⁸ During the winter of 1875-1876, there were apparently three groups, in addition to the regimental band, giving performances at Fort Buford. These called themselves "the Buford Minstrels," "the New Variety troupe," and "German Theatre Comique."⁹⁹ Professional traveling theatrical groups visited some Missouri River posts.¹⁰⁰

The increasing number of women probably raised the moral tone of the posts in the 1870's and 1880's. Living

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁹³Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 4*, p. 389.

⁹⁴Hoekman, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁹⁵Mattison, "Fort Rice," p. 91.

⁹⁶Hoekman, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-65; Kenyon, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Mattison, "Old Fort Stevenson," p. 72; Medical History of Fort Buford, Entry for June 21, 1875; Medical History of Lower Brule Agency, pp. 242, 248; Diary of A. N. Canfield, *passim*.

⁹⁷Hull, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16, 26, 53; Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 218; Medical History of Fort Rice, I, 47; Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, p. 101; Medical History of Fort Sully, I, 139, 162, 190; Mattison, "Old Fort Stevenson," p. 72; Diary of Mrs. Canfield, Entry for December 26, 1867; Kenyon, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Hoekman, *op. cit.*, p. 57; Arnold O. Goplen, "Fort Abraham Lincoln, A Typical Frontier Military Post," *North Dakota History*, XIII (October, 1946), 189; Diary of A. N. Canfield, *passim*.

⁹⁸Diary of Frank M. North, Ms., Nebraska State Historical Society.

⁹⁹Medical History of Fort Buford, II, 246, 249.

¹⁰⁰Medical History of Lower Brule Agency, p. 228; Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 162; Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 284.

conditions in some of the earlier ones discouraged the presence of women and, as a result, most of the officers' wives remained in the East. When Mrs. Canfield arrived at Fort Berthold in May, 1867, she found only two other women there besides herself. One of these was her cook and the other was the laundress. Both were wives of enlisted men. When the Canfields were transferred to Camp Cooke several months later, she had the companionship of four other officers' wives.¹⁰¹ Laundresses, who were frequently the wives of the enlisted men, formed an important part of the female contingent of the garrisons.¹⁰² The surgeon at Fort Laramie in November, 1868 reported that sixteen were living there.¹⁰³ Mrs. Katherine Gibson, whose husband was an officer at Fort Abraham Lincoln, wrote that the officers' quarters at that place had much difficulty in keeping white maids. Some of them had been brought from the East or Midwest at considerable expense to their employers. Within a short time all, according to their degree of beauty, married soldiers. The employment agencies were then instructed to send only the homeliest females obtainable, so a group of knock-kneed, cross-eyed, and crooked-teethed cooks was sent the garrison. The jubilation of the harassed officers' wives, however, was of short duration because these new maids, too, were all married within two months.¹⁰⁴

Various types of group activities were encouraged for the enlisted men. Dances were held by the various companies for them at which the wives, the laundresses, and the officers' maids attended.¹⁰⁵ The music was sometimes supplied by soldier orchestras.¹⁰⁶ Band concerts were held, and

¹⁰¹Diary of Mrs. Canfield, Entries for May 20, July 18, 1867.

¹⁰²*House Report* No. 354, 44th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 143. Army regulations at that time authorized a laundress to every 19 men.

¹⁰³Medical History of Fort Laramie, Part I, Entry for Nov., 1868.

¹⁰⁴Fougera, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁵Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 133; Diary of McGillycuddy; Hoekman, *op. cit.*, p. 57; Medical History of Fort Buford, II, 193, 197, 245, 332; Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 256; Fougera, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, pp. 104-106; Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-37; Medical History of Fort Yates, II, 80; *Yankton Press*, February 28, 1872.

¹⁰⁶Fougera, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

baseball clubs were organized.¹⁰⁷ A roller skating club was organized at Fort Sully.¹⁰⁸ Both Forts Randall and Yates had Odd Fellows lodges and the former garrison had a Good Templars organization.¹⁰⁹ On July 4, 1872, the two lodges held a joint picnic near the post. The enlisted men played baseball and had wheelbarrow races. The surgeon reported that there were no disturbances among the men.¹¹⁰

In spite of their isolation, the officers and their wives had numerous social functions. These included private dances, theatricals, musical performances, and card parties.¹¹¹ Mrs. Roe wrote from Fort Shaw in the autumn of 1878:

...now that everyone is settled, the dining and wining has begun. Almost every day there is a dinner or a card party given in their honor, and several very delicious luncheons have been given.... The dinners are usually quite elegant, formal affairs, beautifully served with dainty china and handsome silver. The officers appear at these in full-dress uniform....

Everyone is happy in the fall, after the return of the companies from their hard and often dangerous summer campaign, and settles down for the winter. It is then that we feel we can feast and dance, and it is then, too, that garrison life at a frontier post becomes so delightful. We are all very fond of dancing....¹¹²

In some of the larger posts, the officers had their own clubs which were equipped with billiard tables.¹¹³

Many of the officers spent considerable time hunting during the winter months. A number of them kept hounds.¹¹⁴ The officers at Fort Sully organized a hunting club and within a few years increased their pack to twenty-five hounds.¹¹⁵ Young Javan Irvine, who spent his early years

¹⁰⁷Hoekman, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57; Kenyon, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 37; Medical History of Fort Sully, II, 256; *Yankton Press*, June 9, 1874; Goplen, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.

¹⁰⁸Hoekman, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹Kenyon, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Medical History of Fort Yates, II, 280.

¹¹⁰Medical History of Fort Randall, I, 271.

¹¹¹Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife* (Philadelphia, 1907), *passim*; Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, pp. 216-224; Fougere, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-143; Diary of McGillicuddy; Diary of Mrs. Canfield; Diary of Javan B. Irvine, Jr., 1873, Ms., State Historical Society of South Dakota, Pierre.

¹¹²Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

¹¹³Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, pp. 98, 143; Hoekman, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹¹⁴Roe, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Fougere, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-101.

¹¹⁵Hoekman, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

at that post, wrote of his numerous hunting expeditions with his father and other officers there.¹¹⁶

Occasionally special celebrations were held. The day most frequently observed, other than Christmas, was the Fourth of July. While generally little more was done than suspending the less essential labor and the observing of the usual military honors of firing salutes, quite elaborate celebrations were occasionally held. Such a one was observed at Fort Rice in 1865, which was probably occasioned by the ending of the Civil War.¹¹⁷ Another such celebration was held at Fort Yates in 1879. The day's events consisted of the following:

- A rifle match between 5 enlisted men and 5 officers
- A baseball game between the officers and the enlisted men
- Foot race of 100 yards
- The catching of a greased pig by the men of the post
- Pony race of 420 yards
- An "American Horse Race" of 420 yards
- A wheelbarrow race by blindfolded men
- Grand display of fireworks by the post and music by the 17th Infantry Band
- Grand ball by the officers of the post¹¹⁸

Efforts to have a similar celebration at Fort Buford in 1881 were unsuccessful because of lack of co-operation among the troops. According to the surgeon, "Calculations had been made for a series of atheletic [*sic*] sports, but the enlisted men not responding to the call for donations... it was a failure." So the observance of the Fourth of July was limited to the "firing of minute guns" at noon and the exhibition of a few fireworks mostly by the sutler.¹¹⁹

The crushing of the power of the Indians in the late 1870's and early 1880's, together with the settlement of the Northern Plains, gradually lessened the need for many of the military establishments. Most of them were abandoned during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. By 1897, just prior to the beginning of the Spanish-American War, there were thirteen posts in the Northern Plains

¹¹⁶Diary of Javan Irvine, Jr.

¹¹⁷Mattison, "Fort Rice," pp. 94-95; See also Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

¹¹⁸Medical History of Fort Yates, I, 62.

¹¹⁹Medical History of Fort Buford, III, 79.

states as compared to thirty-eight in 1880.¹²⁰ A few of them, such as Forts Robinson and Omaha in Nebraska and Fort Warren (formerly known as Fort D. A. Russell) in Wyoming, were continued until after World War II. The recent use of these posts, however, has been for a far different purpose than that for which they were established.

The effectiveness of the military posts was sometimes questioned. General De Trobriand pointed out that the method of fighting used by the Indians made garrisons unnecessary and that the infantry posts, in particular, were utterly useless as offensive agencies.¹²¹ Charles Larpenteur, who spent many years as a fur trader on the upper Missouri, wrote in 1872 that he saw "no use of the military posts on the Missouri."¹²² The instances are extremely rare where the Indians made mass attacks against garrisons. In some instances, all that was necessary to disperse an attacking party was an exploding shell from a field piece.¹²³ The favorite method of attack by the Indians was by stealth. They lay in the thick brush in the neighborhood of the forts to waylay some solitary soldier who might stray from the accustomed paths or go unarmed.¹²⁴ They frequently raided the horse and cattle herds.¹²⁵ The infantry was unable to pursue mounted Indians. Even the cavalry was not particularly effective since by the time a detachment was organized for pursuit, the raiding Indians would usually be far out on the prairie.¹²⁶

Although the frontier garrison may not have been effective as an offensive agency, it played a highly significant role in the development of the West. These posts facilitated the westward movement by giving protection to the emigrants and keeping the roads open. They guarded

¹²⁰*Annual Report of the Secretary of War 1897*, pp. 104-106; *Annual Report 1880*, pp. 12-16.

¹²¹Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-65.

¹²²Elliott Coues, ed., *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872* (New York, 1898), 2 vols., II, 426.

¹²³Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 61; Mattison, "Fort Rice," pp. 92-93.

¹²⁴Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 62, 327, 331-333; Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 53; Mattison, "Fort Rice," pp. 92-93, 102-103; Goplen, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-193; Hoekman, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40, 42.

¹²⁶Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-63; Larpenteur, *op. cit.*, II, 427-429.

the railroad construction crews and hastened the completion of the transcontinental lines. They protected and gave stability to the frontier settlements. In some cases, even after the forts had served their needs, frontier communities were reluctant to see them abandoned. The military post was an essential instrument in our westward expansion.

MILITARY POSTS IN NORTHERN PLAINS STATES

Name	Year of Establish- ment	Year of Abandon- ment
Fort Abercrombie, North Dakota	1858	1878
Fort Abraham Lincoln (Fort McKeen), N. D.	1872	1891
Fort Assinniboine, Montana	1878	1911
Cantonment Bad Lands, N. D.	1879	1883
Fort Bennett (Cheyenne River Agency), S. D.	1870	1891
*Fort Benton, Mont.	1869	1881
*Fort Bridger, Wyoming	1858	1890
*Fort Berthold, N. D.	1864	1867
Fort Buford, N. D.	1866	1895
Fort Casper (Old Platte Bridge), Wyo.	1865	1867
Fort C. F. Smith, Montana	1866	1868
Camp Cooke, Montana	1866	1870
Fort Crook, Nebr.	1891	1948
Fort Custer (Big Horn Post), Mont.	1877	1898
Fort Dakota, S. D.	1865	1869
Fort Ellis, Mont.	1867	1886
Fort Fetterman, Wyo.	1867	1882
Fort Francis E. Warren (Post on Crow Creek, Fort David A. Russell), Wyo.	1867	1948
Grand River Agency, S. D.	1870	1875
Fort Fred Steele, Wyo.	1868	1886
Fort Hale (Lower Brule Indian Agency), S. D.	1870	1884
Camp Hancock, N. D.	1872	1877
Fort Hartsuff (North Loup), Nebr.	1874	1881
Fort James, S. D.	1865	1866
Fort Kearny, No. 1, Nebr.	1846	1848
Fort Kearny, No. 2 (Fort Childs), Nebr.	1848	1871
Fort Keogh (New Post on the Yellowstone, Cantonment on Tongue River, Tongue River Barracks), Mont.	1876	1908
*Fort Laramie, Wyo.	1849	1890
Fort Logan (Camp Baker), Mont.	1869	1880
Fort Lookout, S. D.	1856	1857
Fort McKinney (Cantonment Reno), Wyo.	1876	1894
Fort McPherson (Cantonment McKeen, Post at Cottonwood Springs, Fort Cottonwood), Nebr.	1863	1880
Fort Maginnis, Mont.	1880	1890
Fort Meade (Camp Ruhlen), S. D.	1878	1944
Fort Missoula, Mont.	1877	1918
	1921	1941
	1944	1946
Fort Mitchell, Nebr.	1864	1867

Fort Niobrara, Nebr.	1880	1906
North Platte Station, (Camp Sergeant or Sergeant), Nebr.	1867	1881
Fort Omaha (Post at Omaha, Omaha Barracks), Nebr.	1863	1947
Camp O. O. Howard, Wyo.	1885	1885
Fort Pembina, N. D.	1870	1895
*Fort Pierre, S. D.	1855	1857
Fort Philip Kearny (New Fort Reno), Wyo.	1866	1868
Platte Bridge (Fort Davis, Fort Clay), Wyo.	1855	1859
Plum Creek, Nebr.	1864	1865
Camp Poplar River, Mont.	1880	1893
Pilot Butte, Wyo.	1885	1899
Fort Randall, S. D.	1856	1892
Fort Ransom, N. D.	1867	1872
Camp Red Willow, Nebr.	1872	1872
Fort Reno (Fort Connor), Wyo.	1865	1868
Fort Rice, N. D.	1864	1878
Fort (Camp) Robinson, Nebr.	1874	1948
Fort Sanders (Fort John Buford), Wyo.	1866	1882
Fort Seward (Fort Cross), N. D.	1872	1877
Fort Shaw (Camp Reynolds)	1867	1891
Camp Sheridan, Nebr.	1874	1881
Fort Sidney (Sidney Barracks), Nebr.	1867	1894
Fort Sisseton (Fort Wadsworth), S. D.	1864	1888
Camp Stambaugh, Wyo.	1870	1878
Fort Sully No. 1, S. D.	1863	1866
Fort Sully No. 2, S. D.	1866	1894
Fort Thompson (Crow Creek Agency), S. D.	1870	1871
Fort Totten, N. D.	1867	1890
*Fort Union, N. D.	1864	1865
Fort Washakie (Camp Augur, Camp Brown), Wyo.	1869	1909
Whetstone Agency, S. D.	1870	1872
Fort Yates (Grand River Agency Standing Rock Agency), N. D.	1874	1903
Fort Yellowstone (Camp Sheridan), Wyo.	1886	1918

*Posts originally constructed as fur trading establishments. The dates indicate years in which they were occupied and abandoned as garrisons.